



NATIONAL FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING (FET) LEARNER FORUM 2020/2021 LEARNER REPORT

The National FET Learner Forum 2020-2021 : A Year in Numbers

2050

Learners



8



Regional Reports

1



Purpose-Specific Report

20



Virtual Events

8



Education
and Training
Boards

63



Focus Groups

1750



Survey
Responses

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ORGANISATIONS

AONTAS

AONTAS is the Irish National Adult Learning Organisation, a membership organisation representing adult education educators, providers, learners, and other stakeholders. AONTAS is committed to advocating for the right of all adults in Ireland to a quality service throughout their lives and promoting the value and benefits of lifelong learning. AONTAS supports learners, particularly those most educationally disadvantaged, to engage in lifelong learning, and advocates for more inclusive and accessible national education policy. AONTAS achieves these goals through research, communications, advocacy and capacity building. Our work is aimed at building an inclusive, learner-centred lifelong learning system that enables adults to have a transformative learning experience.



SOLAS

Established in 2013, SOLAS (The Further Education and Training Authority, An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna), is the State Organisation responsible for the funding, coordinating, and monitoring of Further Education and Training provision in Ireland. Its mission is to support the development of a sector that is innovative, flexible and responsive to the needs of learners and employers. Its vision is to create a Further Education and Training sector that delivers quality education, training and skills to enable learners to succeed in the labour market and thrive in society. The core principles of SOLAS are to:



- ensure there is robust intelligence to inform the planning, funding and design of new and existing FET provision;
- maintain a central focus on standards and quality in FET, including excellence in programme development and the on-going professional development of the FET workforce.

- promote innovation and fund provision that meets identified needs;
- add value by fostering collaboration across the FET sector, sharing learning and empowering delivery organisations; and
- be open to new ideas, proactive in seeking out evidence of ‘what works’ in FET and ensure that the learner experience is at the centre of decision-making

EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS

Education and Training Boards are the 16 statutory authorities for FET in Ireland. Along with other responsibilities, such as youth work and a range of statutory functions, Education and Training Boards manage and oversee secondary schools, further education learning institutions, multi-faith community national schools and a range of adult and further education centres delivering education and training programmes. Education and Training Boards are active in local communities through the provision of training and education programmes delivered in training centres, colleges and other educational settings. In this way, Education and Training Boards seek to make a real difference to the lives of the people they serve. Such responsiveness continues to be the hallmark of the Education and Training Boards sector, looking outward nationally and internationally, while servicing education and training locally and individually.



etbi

Education and Training
Boards Ireland
*Boird Oideachais agus
Oiliúna Éireann*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LEARNERS

We would like to thank all the learners who took part in the National FET Learner Forum in the academic year 2020-2021. It is your voice that is at the centre of this project. Each adult learner generously offered their time and shared their voice during an unprecedented year due to the advent of COVID-19. Your feedback will further the aim of creating a more inclusive, improved and democratic FET sector in the future. For this, we appreciate and thank you for your efforts.

SOLAS

The National FET Learner Forum is funded by SOLAS. The National FET Learner Forum is borne out of SOLAS' commitment to listening to and responding to the needs of learners through a key action in the 2014-2019 FET strategy (SOLAS, 2014), and remains relevant in the 2020-2024 FET Strategy, which states, "we must continue the work of the FET learner forum in securing qualitative feedback at national and regional level on FET" (SOLAS, 2020, p.57). Since 2016, they have funded AONTAS to host Forum events and publish reports. This project would not exist without their continued support, and we thank them for their collaboration throughout this year.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS

The National FET Learner Forum is a collaborative project between AONTAS and Education and Training Boards across Ireland. The Forum could not take place without Education and Training Boards recruiting and supporting learners to participate in the events that AONTAS hosts. It is also them who consider and take on board the feedback of learners presented in the AONTAS reports. To the Education and Training Boards who hosted events in the academic year 2020-2021, your cooperation was crucial to the success of the Forum project. We thank you for your continued support and your commitment to listening to and acting upon learners' recommendations.

THE NATIONAL FET LEARNER FORUM ADVISORY GROUP

We would like to thank the National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group. This is a group of stakeholders consisting of two learner representatives, a FET Director, and representatives from SOLAS, Education and Training Boards Ireland, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the National Adult Literacy Agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Their guidance and recommendations to continue the successful expansion of the Forum is invaluable, and we are particularly grateful for their counsel on the adaptation of the Forum to continue throughout the COVID-19 restrictions. They remain a vital part of the success of this project.

THE NATIONAL FET LEARNER FORUM ACADEMIC EXPERT GROUP

We would also like to thank the Academic Expert group. The group consists of experts in learner voice from Ireland and further afield. Their expertise provides the academic bedrock to the project. We thank them for their support and commitment to this project. It is their guidance that allows this research to develop and expand in a rigorous and meaningful way.

INTRODUCTION

What is the Forum?

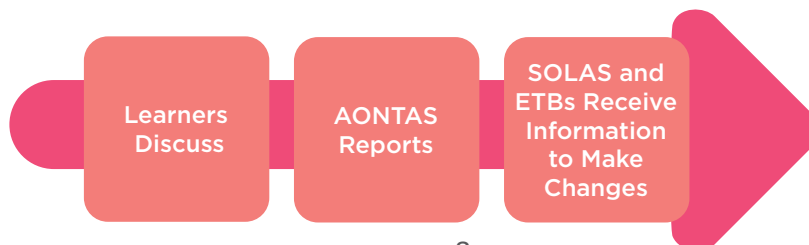
The National Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Forum is a nationwide learner voice project aimed at ensuring learner voice remains central to FET. AONTAS delivers this project in collaboration with SOLAS and local Education and Training Boards. The project began in 2016 with a one-day national event, and has grown into a series of regional events and a national event each year, reaching over 1000 learners annually. This year, the Forum moved online due to the COVID-19 restrictions, with Education and Training Boards hosting multiple events over a few days.

Between September 2020 and May 2021, AONTAS hosted 18 events with eight Education and Training Boards:

- Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim Education and Training Board, 23rd and 28th October 2020
- Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board, 8th, 9th, and 10th December 2020
- Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board, 12th January 2021 (morning and afternoon events)
- Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board, 9th and 10th February 2021
- Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board, 25th and 26th February 2021
- Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board, 2nd and 3rd March 2021
- Cork Education and Training Board, 9th and 11th March 2021
- Louth and Meath Education and Training Board, 18th and 20th May 2021

How does the National Further Education and Training Forum work?

For both online and in-person events, there are three simple steps to the Forum:



STEP 1: LEARNERS DISCUSS

At each Forum event, learners are divided into small groups and are asked to answer three questions:

- Question 1:* What has been working well in the move to remote or classroom-based learning during the COVID-19 restrictions?
- Question 2:* What has not been working well in the move to remote or classroom-based learning during the COVID-19 restrictions?
- Question 3:* What recommendations do you have to improve services for learners for next year?

A facilitator takes notes in these discussions and gives them to AONTAS to develop the report. An online survey is also shared with learners at the end of each event. This survey is open to all learners from their Education and Training Board, not just the learners who were at the event. The survey has questions on the following subjects:

- Course and Programme
- Recruitment, Registration and Induction
- Facilities and Services
- Teaching and Learning
- COVID-19 and Remote Learning
- Voluntary Demographic Information

STEP 2: AONTAS REPORTS

After each event, AONTAS brings the information provided in discussions and through the survey together, and creates a report that is sent to both SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards. This report is a summary of all the findings shared in each of these regional event reports. Topics raised by learners are presented by the frequency of which they were featured in these reports. To provide context, a series of learner quotations then follows this summary.

STEP 3: SOLAS AND ETBS RECEIVE INFORMATION TO MAKE CHANGES

SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards use these reports to better understand learners' experiences and to improve the experiences of learners entering FET. They use these reports to help ensure learner needs remain at the heart of future FET policy, and to help with future planning for the next year.

CHANGES TO THE FORUM DURING COVID-19

This year, the Forum has moved online due to COVID-19 restrictions. Learners take part in online discussion groups held on Zoom, and fill out a learner survey online. Each Education and Training Board has more than one event, to give learners a choice of when they take part. Discussion groups are smaller, and learners are provided with support to register for an event and attend the event online. AONTAS also offers a paper copy of the survey for learners, and offers one-to-one phone calls for learners who are not able to take part in a virtual event.

The National FET Learner Forum

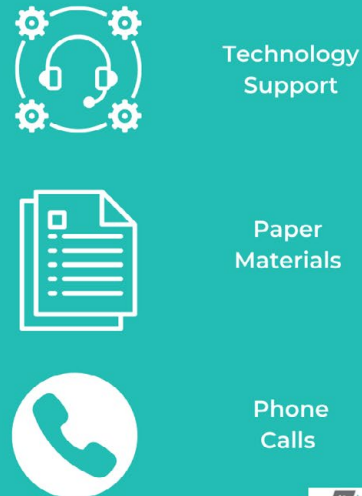
Broadening Learner Engagement



Encouraging Diverse Participation



Alleviating Digital Barriers



LEARNER RECOMMENDATIONS

The table below is a summary of the recommendations raised by learners across the regional events. These are based on learner experiences from focus group discussions with additional information from learner surveys. These recommendations are divided into areas working well and areas for improvement. The highest number of times an issue can be raised is eight, as there were eight Education and Training Boards who hosted an event this year. Topics that were raised the same amount are listed in the table in alphabetical order. This does not represent the number of learners who raised this issue, or the level of importance given to the topic; it refers to the amount of times the recommendation was raised by learners across the eight regional reports. For example, “New Skills” emerged in each of the eight regional reports. Where the topics have been most prevalent among a specific NFQ level, the Detailed Results section of the report indicates this.

Areas Working Well		
TOPIC	FREQUENCY	STATEMENT
New Skills	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Learners were pleased with the new skills, particularly digital skills, they had developed as a result of remote learning
Tutors	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Learners felt tutors were helpful and supportive during the period of remote learning
Communication	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Learners felt that Education and Training Boards made an effort to stay in touch with them during remote learning and appreciated the diverse communication methods used, including email, WhatsApp, Zoom, phone call, and post
Device Access	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Learners benefitted from the provision of laptops by the Education and Training Boards during the transition to remote learning

Flexibility	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners, particularly those at levels 4–6, appreciated the flexibility afforded by online and remote learning and would like to see it continue as part of a hybrid model
Mental Health and Wellbeing	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners, particularly those at levels 4 and 5, felt that Education and Training Board staff prioritised and supported learners’ mental health and wellbeing during remote learning
Increased Confidence	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners developed more confidence as a result of overcoming the challenges of remote learning
Transition to Remote Learning	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners felt that the transition to remote learning was handled well by tutors and that Education and Training Boards adapted well to this sudden change
Blended Learning	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners enjoyed blended learning and wanted to see elements of this maintained after restrictions ease
Peer Support	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer support and contact was important to learners during remote learning
Teaching and Instruction Methods	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners found that diverse and engaging teaching and instruction methods had a positive effect on their online learning experience
Guidance	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners, particularly those at levels 5 and 6, benefitted from the Adult Guidance Services provided by their Education and Training Boards
Learning Materials	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners, particularly those at level 4, were satisfied with the provision of learning materials, including IT devices and hard-copy resources
One-to-One Support	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners, particularly those at level 4, were grateful for the individual support they received during learning remotely

Areas for Improvement		
TOPIC	FREQUENCY	STATEMENT
Digital Skills	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners would like more support with digital skills, specifically how to access and use digital platforms and software
Face-to-Face Learning	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners miss face-to-face learning and would like a return to on-site learning as soon as possible
Internet Connectivity	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internet connectivity remains a barrier for learners
Learning Environment	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners have found the at-home learning environment challenging, particularly learners with limited living space, device access, and home caring or childcare responsibilities
Peer Contact	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners miss peer interaction and would like more opportunities to interact with their peers socially online
Professional Development	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners would like Education and Training Board staff to be supported with continued professional development training in the online platforms used for teaching and learning
Work Placement	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners were concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on work experience placements and would like information on the alternative options in place
Mental Health	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners would like more mental health supports put into place to address the impact of COVID-19 in FET

Assessment	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners would like assessment methods to be diversified given the COVID-19 context • Learners would like clear and timely information on assessment methods and alternative arrangements and would like for assessments to be more evenly spaced out
Peer Learning and Support	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners would like increased opportunity for peer learning as part of their courses • Learners felt that they missed out on peer support during remote learning
Practical learning	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners taking practical coursework, particularly those at level 5, missed the opportunity to practice their skills and would like to see more practical instruction as part of their courses
Class Hours and Scheduling	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners expressed concern about covering course content in the online space, and would like to ensure that they complete coursework at the same pace as in-person learning • Learners found long days in front of a screen tiring and would like course scheduling to accommodate more breaks
Learners with Disabilities	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners with disabilities would like more digital skills support and increased advertisement of the disability supports available

Isolation	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners, particularly those at level 4, felt isolated from their peers and tutors during remote learning
Motivation	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners, particularly those at level 4, struggled with finding the motivation needed to learn remotely
One-to-One Support	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners felt there is less opportunity to ask questions in the virtual space and asked for more one-to-one support
Physical learning materials	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners, particularly those at level 6, would like access to physical, printed learning materials in addition to digital learning materials
Device Access	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of access to devices was a barrier, particularly for learners living in direct provision
Increased Course Options	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners, particularly those at level 4, would like to see more options for evening and part-time courses
Learner Engagement	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners, particularly those at levels 1–3, felt that learner engagement and class participation had decreased during remote learning
Online platform maintenance	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners would like Education and Training Boards to ensure online platforms were updated and maintained in an organised and timely manner
Progression	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners looking to progress to employment would like more support on future employment and further training opportunities available to them, particularly in light of COVID-19 Learners would like clear and up-to-date information on their progression options

WHAT DID LEARNERS SAY?

All of these categories come from statements provided by learners. Featured below is a sample of some of the quotations used to form each category.

Areas Working Well

NEW SKILLS

“I learned to be more independent. There was no one there to motivate me to do assignments so I learned to be more reliant on myself.”

“[Remote learning has] opened up new opportunities”

“I feel I’ve gained new skills especially around online stuff”

“I’ve learned a lot and have gained experience in using technology, word processing, how to work Teams, Moodle. I’ve learned a lot how to use new skills and tutors encourage us to be creative with our own work and encourage us to add things like photos and emojis to our work”

TUTORS

“Our tutor goes out of her way to ensure that anyone who may be struggling gets one-on-one time as much as possible”

“For me, being out of the workplace for a long time, I found technology difficult at first but my tutors were extremely patient and supportive.”

“It was a shock to make the transition to online learning and the fact that we had been together for those first months of the course did make it easier to go to online teaching – we knew each other and we knew our tutors”

“When I went back to do the course full-time, I wouldn’t have been that computer literate. The tutors and participants knew that this was going to happen and they brought us up to speed very quickly”

“Our teachers have to be commended. They have been so available to us”

COMMUNICATION

“The coordinator assigned a tutor to each class pod to check in with us once a week to see if we need any support. They also created drop-in classes, but they weren’t mandatory”

“[Tutors are] great about keeping in touch with us during lockdown”

“[They told us,] don’t sit in silence – get in touch”

DEVICE ACCESS

“I received a laptop on loan from my centre and it was an absolutely massive help”

“I am glad that I got a loan for a laptop to help me with my course as I was doing everything on the phone”

“We were sent home with laptops that very first day”

“When I applied for the course my laptop was broken. With losing my job, I couldn’t afford to buy a new one”

FLEXIBILITY

"I get more done with theory than I would have done in the classroom. You can pick when you want to do the work, focus and work when it suits you. At home, sitting in front of computer after an online tutorial, I tend to stay and do the work"

"I love the online teaching. It suits my temperament and lifestyle"

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

"If we have had a tough day, we can tell the coordinator, talk to them about life in general. If you're struggling, it doesn't feel like there's a massive pressure to get assignments done"

"[Tutors covered] welfare – not just tutorials"

"[Personal circumstances were] acknowledged and respected – 100%"

"They are constantly checking in and telling us to go out for walks. They tell us: 'Don't be on the screen all day every day'"

INCREASED CONFIDENCE

“The entry level courses have been so valuable for me. They have shown me that I’m not as stupid as I was told”

“What I knew in September and what I know now are completely different. I’m more confident now”

TRANSITION TO REMOTE LEARNING

“The tutors had everything covered due to the preparation they did before hand to get us all up and running”

“If we don’t understand online, they send us a worksheet to our home. It’s good”

BLENDED LEARNING

“While I felt very comfortable in the face-to-face classes as they were more interactive, online has been very successful for me also. It’s great that we can still view things and get advice. I would like combination of both types of class”

“The online lectures have been fantastic and the use of multi- media has been great. It’s been the full package. A mixture of this with some face-to-face classes also would be fantastic”

PEER SUPPORT

“I would have had little interaction or have spoken to anyone for over the last five months if I had not had online classes – online courses are great for people’s wellbeing”

TEACHING AND INSTRUCTION METHODS

“The Education and Training Board is fairly clued in to the changes being made”

GUIDANCE

“The career guidance has been exceptional. I ring her and she is there. She took so much time to help me come up with a plan for my future. I can’t express how grateful I am. She helped me get on the course. Before I started this course, I had lost my job. It was February, just before COVID-19, and I was so lost, until I spoke to her”

“[The guidance counsellor] would point you in the right direction, give her professional opinion”

“You know you can talk to her, she’s always there in the background”

LEARNING MATERIALS

“I was offered a laptop, but I didn’t take it because I have my own. They gave us art folders, stationery packs. There’s nothing really that the Education and Training Board can do to make things more accessible”

“Personally I’ve found I’ve had everything. When this all started, they gave us a folder with pencils and everything”

ONE-TO-ONE SUPPORT

“You could ask for help if you needed extra classes online. I asked for Maths and the tutor did one to one classes with me.”

“I got a lot of support, and sometimes without even knowing I needed it, a tutor would spot something”

“If you need Maths support you can ask for it,” and “you are given support from day one”

Areas for Improvement

DIGITAL SKILLS

“Getting the necessary software for our course took time and [it] was hard to get my head around the packages”

“I found it hard to use Zoom, I was afraid to ask for help but I found a way”

“A crash course at the start on technology would have helped”

“[Microsoft] Teams was hard to get my head around. I’ve even forgotten about it since Christmas! I find myself constantly searching for emails and notes. It’s not so user friendly. A lot of us found it to be a difficult package”

FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING

“I very much appreciated the opportunity to continue my course online during COVID-19 but I very much missed the social aspect and hands on experience of learning in the classroom as part of a group”

“I miss the smiles and talking without masks”

“Online is good, but I miss the sharing and company of the group”

“I don’t like talking to a series of squares when they don’t turn their cameras on. It makes interaction really difficult when you can’t see their faces”

INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

“Broadband is problematic, and a lot of learners have not got internet. Money towards getting an internet connection, maybe like 20 euro, would help”

“Poor broadband connection can hinder our classes at times”

“If you have bad internet at home, you might fail on attendance”

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

“Being all the time in the house is difficult. I can't wait to be able to travel about freely”

“I have four children and they are all at home, and all studying too. We just have to get on with it. We have to share phones and a computer, and just take turns.”

“I learn more in a quiet classroom than at home with a baby and housework!”

“I had to work in my bedroom and I have a little brother who is really loud”

PEER CONTACT

"[The decision to take my course was] as much for social interaction as it was for learning and moving online hindered that"

"Class interactions are very important. This doesn't happen when we are online"

"Physical contact with each other was something we all missed. We did keep in contact virtually but it's not the same"

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

"You'd be showing up and in the waiting room for Teams, but they'd never admit you, never realise you were waiting, so you'd end up missing class."

"[T]hat is annoying and you get marked absent and you get docked pay."

WORK PLACEMENT

"I'd have to say it was the practical aspect. We all had placements set up and then of course everything closed. Hospitality is so hard hit by this pandemic. That was so disappointing and there was nothing that could be done about that. Cookery is about preparing and sharing food – that is not possible virtually"

"Work experience is a core component of our course. Normally we'd have four days in class and work experience on Fridays, but even back in the autumn it had become very hard to get placement"

MENTAL HEALTH

“We’ve lost out on study time. We don’t have the same motivation”

ASSESSMENT

“The assessment sheets could use a bit of work. They are often left up to interpretation, which can make it difficult for first time learners or teachers of the module when needing to start and complete assessments”

“Each module only giving one assignment at a time and for each assignment to be well explained [would help]”

“I was eventually told that it was up to the learner to figure out what are the compulsory modules at level 4! This makes it so much harder to overcome the barriers of going back to education in the first place”

PEER LEARNING AND SUPPORT

“I do like online classes but I miss seeing people and practicing together. My teacher knows it’s difficult – he tries to make it easier”

“Reciprocal learning is missing”

“I miss learning and talking in the class with other learners, it really helps me to improve”

CLASS HOURS AND SCHEDULING

“Our schedule was originally designed around a hybrid model and then changed to fully online. I feel like the schedule is not fantastic for that. We’ll have some days with three hours in a row, then a little bit of time, then three hours in a row”

“The days online are so long. You’re expected to be on there from nine to four and then on top of that submit assignments, but where do you find the time for the assignments? In the evening, after a whole day at the screen?”

DISABILITY SUPPORTS

“There is a need for improvement with learning supports”

“These supports need to be visible”

“Be mindful of disability and access needs so that classes are at ground floor level where appropriate as lifts aren’t always in order”

ISOLATION

“A big effect is the big amount of time people have during the day. You have all this free time. You’re not going to classes, you’re not chatting with your friends”

“Remote learning has had a negative effect on my mood as I don’t get to leave the house and I don’t speak with many people which leaves me feeling alone”

MOTIVATION

“I find it really hard with online learning to stay interested in it. My attention goes quite quickly”

“The social environment you have around you in a classroom makes you more attentive. With the online classes, you’re kind of just staring at the screen”

ONE-TO-ONE SUPPORT

“More one-to-one time would be great. As adult learners we are all different kinds of learners coming from different backgrounds. We need the extra interaction time and personal feedback”

PHYSICAL LEARNING MATERIALS

“I am easily distracted, and I find reading off a computer so much more difficult than reading from a book”

“There are no printing facilities available. I feel better when I print out my assignments and read them. That is what I am used to”

DEVICE ACCESS

"I'm in Direct Provision and when COVID-19 started I was moved to [a new place] so that really set me back. I couldn't go online with my tutor because I had no laptop. I didn't do much when I left [the previous place] in May. I think I'll have to start again with the ETB in [the new place]"

INCREASED COURSE OPTIONS

"Offer night classes three or four nights a week"

"Offer more part-time courses so you can complete multiple courses. Class time more than 2 times per week"

"Good to have more options for learners and more courses"

LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

"A lot of people muted themselves, turned off the camera and just listened. I would always turn on my camera no matter how I looked. So, breakout rooms could be a problem, they would just sit back and let you do all the talking"

"In the classroom the discussion, it would be different. You can't talk to three people online; it will be too confusing"

ONLINE PLATFORM MAINTENANCE

“Our Moodle is handled badly, it is messy and it’s not used correctly by [their tutor]”

“I’m not so satisfied with how the Moodle was operating, it was not reliable and I had difficulty with assignments”

PROGRESSION

“Hospitality has suffered hugely under COVID-19 and I feel this course cannot be taught successfully remotely. We managed but I feel we did lose out. Now I cannot think of looking for a job. It’s just not happening and that makes me feel a bit dejected by the whole experience”

“[Learners need] more support moving forward. Not quite sure what the college can do about this but maybe help us think about how to continue learning”

THE NEXT STEPS

WHAT NEXT?

2020 and 2021 and the COVID-19 pandemic brought new challenges to the Forum. However, we remain committed to sharing the voices of learners and capturing more learner experiences than ever in 2020 and 2021. The Forum will continue to work directly with learners in Education and Training Boards across the country to collect their perspectives, be that through online or in-person events. We also look forward to sharing and expanding Forum projects, such as the FET Learners as Leaders programme, a training programme aimed at equipping learners to be empowered self-advocates in FET.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Speak Today, Shape Tomorrow

Learners have a crucial perspective on how Further Education and Training services work. They know better than anyone what has worked for them and what has not. The information provided by one learner, when combined with the voices of many learners, can provide valuable insight and recommendations that can help Education and Training Boards ensure they are doing all they can to meet the needs of the people they are trying to serve. Over the past academic year, we have highlighted the immense value of online focus group events for gathering crucial qualitative learner data. Focus groups provide a safe and open space for learners to share their experiences with one another in real time. The information gathered from these events helps to provide key context and additional detail to the survey, enabling us to come up with solutions that are more responsive to FET learners' needs. This feedback has never been more important than during COVID-19 restrictions, when learners are facing new and difficult challenges to learning. Participants in the National Learner Forum, therefore, give valuable insight that must be considered. Each learner should feel they have made an important impact to the improvement of FET for future learners when they take part in a National FET Learner Forum event, or complete a learner survey,

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Get Involved

- Speak to your tutor about participating in the future
- Join our FET Learners as Leaders programme by contacting Kallianne Farren at kfarren@aontas.com

Promote the Forum

- Post on social media at #LearnerVoice or #FETLearnerForum
- Tell a fellow learner about the Forum

Stay Informed

- Sign up to our Learner Newsletter, which provides updates on Forum events- email Kallianne Farren at kfarren@aontas.com to add your name to our list



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