

"Learner Voices Across Ireland" 2024-25

Executive Summary

The AONTAS Learner Voices Across Ireland report outlines adult learners' views and satisfaction with their experiences of Further Education and Training (FET) for the academic year 2024 to 2025. The report reflects 2,636 contributions from FET Learners who shared their voice as part of the research.

The National FET Learner Forum emphasises the importance of 'Learner Voice'. This is where the people doing the learning are seen as the experts on what works well for learners and what needs to be improved. It also means that the people making the decisions – course organisers, funders, politicians – can act based on what adult learners communicate.

The main **themes** outlined below are based on what adult learners say are or are not working well. The report also indicates what adult learners would like to see happen next.

Teaching and Learning

94% of learners say that they were satisfied with the opportunity to actively take part in their class. They highlighted how tutors created a welcoming space within the classroom in which they felt safe and encouraged.

Course Provision and Wider Benefits

65% of learners report increased self-confidence after taking a FET course. 52% report having a more positive outlook on the future.

Learners would like to see more class hours for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and an increase in the number of courses for apprenticeship, computers at basic level and community education.

Welcome, Belonging and Inclusion

96% of learners said that they felt respected by tutors and ETB staff.

Learners would like to see the development of clubs, social events and extracurricular activities for people to get to know each other more outside of class. Migrant learners would like to see more English language social activities to support integration in their communities.

Communications

93% of learners expressed satisfaction with communications at their ETB. They praised the good communications with staff and tutors for accessing services and managing course requirements.

Mental Health and Mental Health Support

51% of learners experienced stress, anxiety, or depression, with 31% stating it affected their ability to learn. This increases to 77% for people living with long-term health issues, illness or disability. 52% of this group said it affects their ability to learn.

Learners say that more mental health supports are needed and that counselling services should be more easily available to learners.

Cost of FET Participation and Financial Support

24% of learners state that their financial situation affects their ability to learn or study. This figure increases to 29% for those living with disabilities, 36% for apprentices, and 39% for those living in Direct Provision or IPAS accommodation.

34% of learners are not satisfied with the level of financial support available.

37% of learners are not satisfied with the availability of childcare support. They noted the particular impact this has on migrant learners and lone parents.

Learners say that more financial supports are needed, including increases in meal and travel allowances.

Work Experience Support

A challenge experienced by learners was the lack of work placement positions due to a limited number of local providers.

Learners would like to receive more support in securing work placements. They propose that ETBs create better links with employers to improve learners' work experience opportunities and pathways to future employment.

Transport

32% of learners are not satisfied with the availability of public transport to and from FET centres and work experience. They are also dissatisfied with the current level of financial support for travel.

Learners would like to see better links with local bus services to match class schedules with local bus times or to provide shuttle buses to centres.

Accommodation

20% of learners said their current accommodation or living situation affects their ability to learn or study. 21% also said that their living situation causes them stress, worry, or anxiety.

38% of Learners living in Direct Provision or under the ARPS (Accommodation Recognition Payment Scheme) found their environment had a negative impact on their learning. 44% from this group said that their living situation causes them stress, worry, or anxiety.

Disability Access and Support

26% of learners with long-term health issues, illness or disability were not satisfied with disability services and supports.

Learners would like to see enhanced disability access to ETB buildings and facilities as well as increased SNA support.

About AONTAS

AONTAS are the National Adult Learning Organisation of Ireland, founded in 1969 and passionately working ever since to make education equal and accessible for all.

You can read the full "Learner Voices Across Ireland" report on our website, aontas.com.