Inclusion of Adult Literacy Support in Further Education and Training in Ireland:

A Research Report

Written by Dr. Bernie Grummell

Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) take rightful pride in the work they do. They manage local adult literacy services across the country. They liaise with other statutory bodies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), community groups and with individual people who come to them looking to improve their literacy, numeracy and/or digital literacy. ALOs offer literacy classes in a wide variety of settings including, family resource centres, community hubs, libraries, addiction rehabilitation centres, homeless support services, disability services, Health Service Executive (HSE) buildings, Tusla, Traveller advocacy centres and in their own ETB centres. In all of the work that they do, they hold central the learners' needs, within competing policy and institutional demands.

In addition, they work with colleagues across Further Education and Training (FET) contexts to support learners on FET programmes including Post-Leaving Cert (PLC) programmes, apprenticeship courses, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), English for Speakers of Other Languages courses (ESOL), and Vocation Training Opportunities Schemes (VTOS). That collaborative, supportive work across FET, currently not universally understood, is the subject of this research.

In June 2021, the Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA) commissioned Dr Bernie Grummell of Maynooth University to conduct the research. We created a research advisory team comprising four ALOs and two tutors representing all six ALOA regions. It was important to ALOA that there should be a tutor perspective advising the research, as they do much of the frontline work with learners. In the report, we hear the experiences, frustrations and recommendations of our colleagues across FET at various levels of management, from ALOs to FET Directors as well as tutors, teachers and instructors. The Adult Education Guidance Service is also represented. We hope that these voices will help us to better understand the work that we do. All of our FET colleagues who gave of their time did so in the first term of the academic year, when that particular commodity is in short supply. For that we are profoundly grateful.

This report is the first nationwide study of the supports offered by Adult Literacy Services to learners and colleagues in other areas of FET provision. It considers that support work in its policy and legislative contexts, and interacts extensively with the both national and international scholarship in the field.

ALOA hopes that this report and its recommendations will come to represent the beginning of an important conversation among FET staff about the existing valuable collaborations we have. We also hope that this research will enable us to improve upon our endeavours to afford FET learners the best teaching and learning experience we can offer, by ensuring that unmet literacy needs are met at all stages of learning.

Siobhán Condron (Chair of ALOA's research advisory committee)

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Figures

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ABE	Adult Basic Education
AEGI	Adult Education Guidance Initiative
AEGS	Adult Education Guidance Service
AEO	Adult Education Officer
AONTAS	Aos Oideachais Náisiúnta Trí Aontú Saorálach / Irish National Adult Education Association
ALND	Adult Literacy Numeracy and Digital Literacy
ALO	Adult Literacy Organiser
ALOA	Adult Literacy Organisers Association
ALS	Adult Literacy Services
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CDETB	City of Dublin Education and Training Board
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEASP	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
FET	Further Education and Training
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
FETCH	Further Education and Training Course Hub
GRETB	Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board

Acronym	Definition
HSE	Health Service Executive
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
ITABE	Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education
NAC	National Advisory Committee
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NDA	National Disability Authority
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
PESP	Programme for Economic and Social Progress
PIAAC	Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate College
PLD	Professional Learning and Development
PLSS	Programme Learner Support System
QA	Quality Assurance
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna / Further Education and Training Authority
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
VEC	Vocational Education Committees
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
WALK	Walkinstown Association for People with an Intellectual Disability ltd

Executive Summary

Overview of research

This research explores the current landscape, practices and capacity of the Adult Literacy Services (ALS) to support literacy, numeracy and digital literacy development across the Further Education and Training (FET) sector in the Republic of Ireland.

The project aims are:

1. To map the current landscape, practices and capacity of the Adult Literacy Services (ALS) to support literacy, numeracy and digital literacy development across the FET sector

2. To identify examples of inclusive practice, possibilities and key issues in developing a more inclusive approach to supporting literacy, numeracy and digital literacy development across the FET sector

A review of national and international literature about inclusive practices and supports for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy across FET services was completed. Research interviews, focus groups, workshops and an online survey were conducted with a range of FET staff nationally during Autumn and Winter 2021.

This research intends to support ALOA as an association to identify key issues in the practice, possibilities, policies, strategies to enhance their support of literacy development across the FET sector, in line with the inclusive objectives of the current FET strategy 2020-2024.

Context of Adult Literacy Services in Ireland

The Adult Literacy Services (ALS) in the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in the Republic of Ireland work to respond to the unmet literacy and numeracy needs of these adult learners. The Adult Literacy Services design and deliver a wide range of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy tuition to adults in Ireland. They work across different areas, centres and platforms, with multiple partners in the statutory, charitable and community spheres.

The ETBs are the largest provider of Further Education and Training (FET) services in the country, offering a range of unaccredited and accredited courses of learning. They have responsibility for providing education and training, youth work and other statutory functions in the Republic of Ireland.

A key feature of FET provision is its unique learning and support-based approach which is in contrast to mainstream education. One-to-one supports from tutors, smaller class sizes and a welcoming and accepting environment all contribute to supporting learners to positively engage in education and progress to further education and training and employment. (ETBI, 2021, p. 79)

The research adopts the definition of literacy used by ALOA as literacies, including "reading, writing, spelling, speaking and listening, numeracy and an ability to navigate the digital world, as well as a critical competence in all of those spheres". (ALOA, 2021, p. 3). Literacy is used throughout this report as a general term and is intended to encompass literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, unless otherwise indicated.

Active inclusion is defined in this research as "giving all learners the opportunities and supports to actively participate in society in a way that increases personal, social, educational, community and employment benefits and outcomes." (ETBI, 2021, p. 78)

Review of literature and policy context

Chapter 2 outlines the context for adult literacy in Ireland, reviewing the role and concerns of Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) and their representative body, the Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA). It is based on an analysis of relevant policies, literature and research from recent years within Ireland and internationally. This review outlines the policy context for the Adult Literacy Services in the Republic of Ireland. This is followed by an overview of the organisational structure of adult literacy

service provision, ALOA and the work of Adult Literacy Organisers. Key themes emerging from this review of existing literature informed the analysis and discussion of findings discussed in later chapters.

Chapter 3 discusses the key themes emerging from the literature review, which are specific to the context of inclusive practices in adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. It draws on a wide range of national and international literature across different sectors of education to focus on inclusive practices of adult literacy in FET. Some material illustrates current practices and policies, whilst other sectors discuss key values and themes informing contemporary thinking about adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. This review is orientated towards the interests and perspective of literacy practitioners.

Research design and methodology

Chapter 4 gives an overview of the mixed-methods research design, research methods and analysis used to conduct this research, as well as considering the ethical implications of this research. It presents the different stages of the research and discusses key issues.

This is followed by the findings chapter, which presents a general profile of research participants before discussing the key findings of this research under five key themes.

1. Learner-centred ethos of literacy support and development
2. Recognition of care and relationships in literacy
3. Distinctive pedagogy and learning of literacy
4. Responsive organisations and measurement systems
5. Resources and professional development needs

This executive summary discusses the implications of this research, presenting a series of recommendations under these five headings presented below.

Recommendations

This research demonstrates the many ways in which the Adult Literacy Services are responding in supportive and learner-centred ways to the diverse and context-specific needs of learners. This clearly supports literacy, numeracy and digital literacy development across FET. The research findings highlight specific features of how literacy supports occur and identifies key issues and challenges.

The research supports the continued recognition and support for the unique role of Adult Literacy Services in the provision of basic education programmes for adults in Ireland, as well as supporting progression to other levels and services in FET and elsewhere (which is the focus of this research study).

Maintain a learner-centred ethos of literacy support and development

A learner-centred ethos is core to the development of literacy support across FET. This understands adult learning as occurring in different ways, contexts and times of learners' lives.

We recommend that literacy support development should continue to be cognisant of the **learner-centred** adult literacy and numeracy approach in its **ethos, values and pedagogy**, with adult learners actively collaborating in the decision-making about their learning.

Recognition of the **socially-situated nature of literacies** is vital in grounding experiences of literacy and learning in the realities of people's everyday context and is embedded in real-life situations that have relevance and importance to the learner.

The **provision of individual and small group tuition** is important in providing a supportive structure to respond to learners' unique needs, to enhance confidence and to build trusting relationships of learning.

Recognition of the **specific nature** and characteristics **of adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy** is needed, both in terms of their unique features but also intersecting nature.

Numeracy is acknowledged as a crucial issue for trades and apprenticeships in particular but also for the **daily use of numeracy** in life, and the ongoing impact of maths anxiety and fear from school.

Digital literacy has become increasingly important in everyday life generally and as a consequence of Covid 19. It is also highly significant for learning with a key link between digital literacy and study skills recognised by participants due to both being required in FET course work and assignments.

Recognition of the **different approaches to supporting literacy, numeracy and digital literacy** across FET is needed, with three main ways evident in this research:

1. Referring learners to specific literacy or other supports in other FET services or external agencies
2. Literacy supports that are embedded into FET provision
3. Literacy supports that are informally provided by FET tutors within existing provision

Creating conditions for FET staff and management to develop their awareness of these approaches and how staff can support inclusive literacy practices in these contexts is key.

While there are both clear policy support and exemplars of the inclusion of literacy support development, research participants highlighted the **complexities of the inclusion of literacy supports in FET in organisational systems and practice**, and note how it can be under-recognised in the current structure of QQI levels and the reporting systems for FET more widely.

Recognition of care, relationships and partnerships

Care and relational aspects of learner support emerged as vital elements in the development of literacy support across FET. Recognising that the supportive relationship that FET staff create with their learners runs through all elements of the pedagogical process is central for literacy support.

Figure 1. Care and Relationships in Literacy

This approach involves a **careful listening** to learners, an appreciation of the **diverse backgrounds and capacities** of learners, realising the **challenges** learners may have due to previous negative encounters in school and wider social contexts, and building **trusting relationships** with learners.

The **capacity to create conditions that support a joy of learning** is a vital element of literacy support, given the negative encounters, fears and lack of confidence that many learners can hold about their learning capacities.

Like all relationships, much of what happens is **emergent** and staff need to be responsive in cumulatively building relationships with learners. Staff need to get know and to work with students on a **personal level as well as working on the subject knowledge** in order to support their personal development. The key role of Adult Education Guidance Service is recognised.

Developing caring relationships are core to the daily practices of an inclusive FET environment and is **evident in the actions of staff at all levels** in supporting learners at every stage of their journey from the outset to progression.

Developing and **supporting a wider network of internal and external partnerships** is a crucial part of coordination work of literacy support development. These partnerships are key to raising awareness about literacy supports, identifying and linking with learners with unmet literacy needs and providing supports to learners.

Awareness of the different types of partnership relationships is important, with literacy support staff identifying partners with whom they worked in close collaboration (such as disability support services, community centres etc.). Forming strong working relationships with these staff is key.

A **network of partners in community, employment and wider society** is an integral part of some areas of FET, and more formal structures and agreements have developed to support this. For example, in some centres, FET staff, literacy services and employers work together in more formal structures and processes of partnerships for apprenticeships.

Other **partnerships are more diffused and secondary** in nature. Raising awareness about literacy amongst staff in these organisations is important as they are key in referring learners with unmet literacy needs to the literacy services.

Working in partnerships is a process which can be complex in nature. **Establishing clear and shared objectives, processes and ways of working** needs to be negotiated between all partners and established in formal and working agreements.

Support the distinctive pedagogy and learning of literacy supports

Recognising **the distinctive pedagogy of adult literacy** is essential in supporting literacy development across FET. **Learning from experiences** based in people's real-life context is central to an adult education pedagogy. It is congruent with the **role of practical experience and skills** in the vocational FET subjects where, for example, abstract mathematical concepts can be placed in a real-life context with which learners can connect.

One of the strengths of the literacy services is its **responsive pedagogical approach**, with staff tailoring their inputs and **using multi-modal ways of approaching teaching** according to learners' needs.

The uneven learning skills and knowledge-base of many learners needs to be recognised. This is described as a '**spiky learning profile'** in adult literacy, where learners may have strong capacities in some areas and require supports and capacity-building in other areas of learning. This is also a feature of many FET learners which needs to be acknowledged and can occur in any course and at any QQI level.

Respondents describe how **language and literacy needs** are associated with learners' profiles. Some FET courses, due to their vocational basis and employment opportunities, attract learners from specific backgrounds. For example, areas of construction, childcare and culinary areas currently attract many learners for whom English is a second language, due to their practical nature and job opportunities. FET staff in these areas need **PLD supports to develop awareness** of the types of literacy and learning challenges that learners can face and the inclusive responses they can offer in the daily context of their pedagogy.
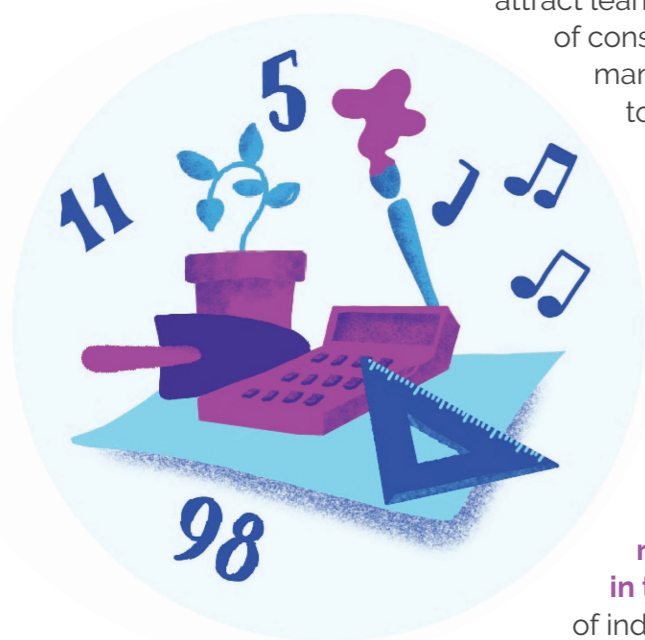

Figure 2. Distinctive pedagogy and learning of literacy

FET staff described that spiky learner profiles require **responsive and highly differentiated methodologies in their teaching**. This has to be attuned to the needs of individual learners as well as the diverse needs across a learning group.

FET staff need to be conscious and responsive to the emergent nature of literacy needs amongst learners. This means that supports and **differentiated approaches may**

be needed at any stage or level throughout the learning journey. Learners may not be aware or may choose not to disclose unmet literacy or other learning needs initially.

Attention to literacy supports is required at **key phases of the learning journey**, with particular emphasis drawn in the findings to the initial assessment, ongoing supports, assignments.

Where appropriate, **initial assessments** of literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and study skills are recommended. This should be conducted in a means that is **literacy-friendly and supportive** of learners.

PLD to support the development of an **inclusive teaching approach or pedagogy to adult literacy** is required. The findings of this report reveal key characteristics of careful listening to learners, breaking learning activities into manageable tasks, continuous formative feedback, using accessible formats, flexible and responsive approaches, use of adult-orientated resources.

Cognisance of the **lengthy and incremental time periods** required to support literacy development is needed on the part of FET staff and learners, as well as the system.

The format of literacy supports needs to considered and **tailored towards learners' needs**. As the research findings illustrate, this may be through integrated supports, fully inclusive approaches, or supports provided external to the FET course learners are completing. These supports may be offered in 1:1 or small group formats.

Assignments are recognised as a key stage where unmet literacy needs many come to the fore. This causes challenges for staff to **support learners in a timely manner** where assignment deadlines are pressing. Where assignments occur is also crucial to consider, with phase 2 of apprenticeships noted in the findings as a key phase where unmet literacy needs emerge. While initial assessment processes have identified these needs earlier now in the apprenticeship course, it remains a pressurised period for staff and learners alike.

Greater consideration of **UDL approaches in all learning, including assignments** is recommended across the board. The research report discusses examples of where a full literacy audit of programmes has been completed (GRETB apprenticeship programmes and beauty course on page 73). This is very costly and time-intensive to complete. Greater sharing of capacity about how to **complete a literacy audit** is recommended. The **allocation of staff time** to complete this for all programmes where literacy needs are apparent is recommended in line with UDL policies.

PLD is key in supporting FET staff to consider diverse literacy and numeracy capacities needed for assignments and to recognise the **relevance of multi-modal and creative ways** of communication and presentation.

The **intersection of literacy and study skills** requires careful attention and differentiation to ensure that each is addressed and supported in its own right.

The findings of this research support the **development of a UDL inclusive approach across FET** as all learners benefit from the development of inclusive approaches.

As the research findings reveal, many examples of this highly responsive, supportive and creative mode of pedagogy are evident across FET practices. These **inclusive pedagogical practices need to be recognised and supported at a systems level**.

Creating inclusive organisations and measurement systems

Respondents identify and support many aspects of organisational culture, processes and culture which support literacy, numeracy and digital literacy inclusion across FET services. They acknowledged the diversity of organisational structures, contexts and provision across the FET system.

Embedding a collaborative approach across the organisation was acknowledged as essential in establishing a culture of sharing between practitioners within the organisation and in collaborations with staff from other centres. Vital in this is **the sharing of practices and resources** which are specific to

each programme and tailor-made for learners.

The **learning spaces and environments** were recognised as impacting on inclusion, with diversity evident across older and new FET centres, larger and smaller centres, urban and rural contexts. Ensuring fully inclusive learning environments was challenging given these diverse contexts.

Technology can offer supports for creating more inclusive learning environments and this is evident in the **expansion of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) supports** across FET.

Learning support staff need to be more visible and present for learners, with recommendations for **dedicated space and time for open access learning and literacy support services for all learners**. This may also require broader social supports for learners, as well as enabling access to other support and guidance services.

In developing an inclusive culture, literacy coordinators described the importance of a process of **identifying and initially working with a small number of FET staff** who were open to literacy approaches. These people can act as animateurs, bringing inclusive literacy practices amongst their colleagues. This is key to embedding inclusive literacy developments.

Clear lines of communication are vital across and between levels of the organisation, especially in diffused and complex organisations like FET institutions. In cases where communication problems arise, staff with expertise in literacy and inclusion have been key in clarifying differing perceptions of staff about literacy and supporting new approaches.

The findings reveal **challenges to creating inclusive learning organisations**, especially due to space and timing issues, staffing, the pressures of work, the lack of people focusing on these issues in individual centres, silos and the lack of connectivity between different areas, and responding to new support needs.

The research findings demonstrate **variation in literacy supports offered across different FET settings**. This variation in literacy supports offered needs to be addressed at an organisational and systems level to ensure consistent provision.

Participants highlight the **variation between QQI course levels** and call for a **systems-wide literacy audit towards more inclusive modes of accreditation**. The findings highlighted gaps between levels, which need to be reviewed in terms of inclusive literacy considerations, in particular between Level 2 to Level 3 and Part Time Level 4 to Full Time Level 5. These gaps become particularly evident during assessment periods.

There is a need for **consistent and timely availability of education psychology assessments** and reports for learners with unmet learning needs to ensure that all FET services have access to appropriate education psychology assessment as required by learners.

Having an **evidence base to demonstrate capacity building and progression of learners** is key, with examples of good practice cited in the research findings. Respondents highlighted that this evidence base needs to capture learning progression in **qualitative measure of transversal skills and quantifiable examination and progression rates** in a manner that is **cognisant of the variable lengths of time** needed to support literacy capacity-building. The need to re-engage and re-building learning relationships for those who have previous negative or unmet literacy needs should be taken into account, **allowing varied times for completion**.

Some respondents highlighted the useful insights and planning that data management systems gave about learners. **Key issues about measurement** were raised by many respondents about **gaps** in data collection, the **pressures on staff time** due to demands for measurement and reporting, and the **pressure to achieve quicker and higher numbers** of students, accreditation and progression rates.

The initial learner registration form, **Programme Learner Support System** (PLSS) poses difficulties for some learners with unmet literacy needs as they are met with a time- consuming and challenging form

during their initial engagement with FET. Many staff cited how they spent extensive time supporting learners to complete this form. We recommend that the PLSS process is **considered from an UDL and literacy audit perspective**.

Providing resources and professional development

Respondents in the research described extensive practice supporting staff, offering ongoing and responsive Professional Learning and Development (PLD) training and resources for FET staff in relation to literacy, numeracy and digital literacy supports.

Respondents identified the need for more resources, space, time, and staff for developing literacy support. They highlighted the **need for PLD support for the FET tutors and instructors in the classroom with learners on a daily basis**. This should be available to full and part-time staff. This should include a focus on the fluid, multiple and responsive pedagogical approaches of literacy provision.

PLD is needed in particular areas including the **emergent and growing areas** of inclusive literacy supports such as **ESOL** learners enrolled on FET courses. The research findings also highlight the growing demand for training and support in Universal Design for Learning (**UDL**) principles and practice across FET, as well as Technology Enhanced Learning (**TEL**).

The **wider staffing body of FET** also require opportunities for **capacity building in literacy awareness and inclusion** to provide consistent professional development at different levels and stages of FET.

The building and continual support **for communities of practice about inclusive approaches to literacy** is crucial and needs to be encouraged at a systems level and in people's duties to support staff to identify and develop their own PLD needs. This includes support for internal spaces for PLD and professional discussions, including with part-time staff.

We welcome the **development of PLD and protocols and the promotion of awareness raising** for all stakeholders by senior management across FET. We recommend increased **ongoing flows of dialogue between all partners and stakeholders** in FET.

PLD training and awareness raising should be offered and developed with **partners and stakeholders** to support them in identifying literacy needs and to know what services and supports to access to support FET learners.

The staffing implications of emergent as well as growing areas of inclusive literacy supports across FET have become increasingly important. Respondents discuss how the **recognition of inclusive support tasks and roles across FET** is key, as many inclusive activities are not named or recognised as part of current FET posts, career paths or representative groups.

The call for **additional staff resourcing** occurs also for specific **literacy support and coordination roles,** which are emerging with the prioritising of literacy and inclusion in FET Strategies and the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy (SOLAS 2021b).

> There is a need for **specific roles in FET to clearly coordinate and hold a brief for inclusive support and development**. ALOs recount numerous examples of inclusive practice in different FET settings and identify elements that they feel are crucial. There is an identified need for the recruitment of **maths and numeracy-specific** tutors in some sectors.

Inclusion of the development of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy supports needs to be developed and **embedded across the culture of FET organisations** in order for professional conversations not only to begin but also to expand and be sustained across the organisation.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The research explores the current landscape, practices and capacity of the Adult Literacy Services (ALS) to support literacy development across the Further Education and Training (FET) sector in the Republic of Ireland. It is funded by the Adult Literacy Organisers Association (ALOA) who commissioned the Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education, Maynooth University, to complete the research. It was conducted between July and December 2021.

The project aims are:

1. To map the current landscape, practices and capacity of the Adult Literacy Services (ALS) to support literacy, numeracy and digital literacy development across the FET sector

2. To identify examples of inclusive practice, possibilities and key issues in developing a more inclusive approach to supporting literacy, numeracy and digital literacy development across the FET sector

In order to build a picture of current inclusive practices and supports across FET, the researcher conducted research interviews, focus groups, workshops, and an online survey with a range of FET staff nationally. A review of national and international literature about inclusive practices and supports for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy across FET services was also completed.

This exploratory research intends to support ALOA as an association to identify key issues in the practice, possibilities, policies, strategies to enhance their support of literacy development across the FET sector in line with the inclusive objectives of the current FET strategy 2020-2024.

The research adopts a definition of literacy given by ALOA as literacies, including "reading, writing, spelling, speaking and listening, numeracy and an ability to navigate the digital world, as well as a critical competence in all of those spheres". (ALOA, 2021, p. 3)

Adult Literacy Services in Ireland

The Adult Literacy Services (ALS) in the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in the Republic of Ireland work to respond to the unmet literacy and numeracy needs of these adult learners. The Adult Literacy Services design and deliver a wide range of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy tuition to adults in Ireland. They work across different areas, centres and platforms, with multiple partners in the statutory, charitable and community spheres.

The ETBs are the largest provider of Further Education and Training (FET) services in the country, offering a range of unaccredited and accredited courses of learning. ETBs are statutory authorities that have responsibility for education and training, youth work and other statutory functions in the Republic of Ireland. Each ETB operates an integrated Adult Education Service, which can include Literacy and Community Education, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE), Family Literacy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Skills for Work, the Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI), Youthreach, Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), and the Prison Education Service.

A key factor of FET highlighted by the ETBI active inclusion position paper is

> its unique learning and support-based approach which is in contrast to mainstream education. One-to-one supports from tutors, smaller class sizes and a welcoming and accepting environment all contribute to supporting learners to positively engage in education and progress to further education and training and employment. (ETBI, 2021, p. 79)

Report Structure

Chapter 2 outlines the context for adult literacy in Ireland, reviewing the role and concerns of Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) and their representative body, the Adult Literacy Organisers Association (ALOA). It is based on an analysis of relevant policies, literature and research from recent years within Ireland and internationally. This review begins by outlining the policy context for the Adult Literacy Services in the Republic of Ireland. This is followed by an overview of the organisational structure of adult literacy service provision, ALOA and the work of Adult Literacy Organisers. Key themes emerged from this review of existing literature are discussed in light of their implications for the work of Adult Literacy Organisers.

Chapter 3 discusses the key themes emerging from the literature review which are specific to inclusive practices in adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. It draws on a wide range of national and international literature across different sectors of education to focus on inclusive practices of adult literacy in FET. Some material illustrates current practices and policies, whilst other sectors discuss key values and themes informing contemporary thinking about adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. This review is orientated towards the interests and perspective of literacy practitioners.

Chapter 4 reviews the research design which was used to conduct this research, giving an overview of its research design, research methods and analysis, as well as considering the ethical implications of this research. It presents the different stages of the research and discusses key issues.

Chapter 5 reviews the general profile of research participants before discussing the key findings of this research under five key themes.

1. Learner-centred ethos of literacy support and development
2. Recognition of care and relationships in literacy
3. Distinctive pedagogy and learning of literacy
4. Responsive organisations and measurement systems
5. Resources and professional development needs

Chapter 6 discusses the implications of this research, presenting a series of conclusions and recommendations.

Context and organisational structure of adult literacy provision in Ireland

This chapter sets the context and position of adult literacies in Ireland, discussing the role and key concerns of Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) and their representative body, the Adult Literacy Organisers Association (ALOA). It is based on a review of relevant policies, literature and research from recent years within Ireland and internationally. This review begins by setting out the policy context for the Adult Literacy Services (ALS) in the Republic of Ireland. This is followed by an overview of the organisational structure of adult literacy service provision, ALOA and the work of Adult Literacy Organisers. Key themes which emerged from this review of existing literature are discussed in light of their implications for the work of Adult Literacy Organisers.

Following the approach taken by ALOA, this research uses the term 'literacy' to mean 'literacies' in the broadest sense, including "reading, writing, spelling, speaking and listening, numeracy and an ability to navigate the digital world, as well as a critical competence in all of those spheres". (ALOA, 2021, p. 3). This echoes NALA's definition as well as international research on adult literacies, all of which acknowledge the socially situated nature and multiple forms in which literacies are experienced. Active inclusion is defined as "giving all learners the opportunities and supports to actively participate in society in a way that increases personal, social, educational, community and employment benefits and outcomes." (ETBI, 2021, p. 78)

This research project is set within the broader societal and economic context of the past decades that were marked initially by the global financial crisis of 2008 and decade of national austerity and rebuilding, before the global impact of the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020. This had a disproportionate impact on people who already living with poverty and disadvantage, including those with disabilities, from ethnic minorities, lone-parents, those from immigrant backgrounds and other vulnerable groups (Skalecka, 2014; IHREC, 2015; Houses of Oireachtas, 2019; O'Reilly, 2021). Unmet literacy needs are also evident amongst older people and workers who may have limited previous levels of formal education. Many people in Irish society are and continue to be impacted by these multi-faceted and intersecting inequalities.

These inequalities have been exacerbated by the continued impact of Covid 19 (O'Reilly, 2021). The unprecedented scale of the emergency remote learning delivery for education organisations required extraordinary efforts and adaptation by learners and staff alike who had to develop digital learning skills and competencies immediately, often without resources, conditions or training. City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB) review of its Covid response identified access to technology - hardware and software - and digital literacy skills as the primary obstacles to be overcome for both staff and learners (2020, p. 16). The FET sector continues to respond to the ongoing challenges and changing contexts of the pandemic on society. This context marks part of the backdrop for the analysis conducted in this research report.

Adult Literacy Services in Ireland

PIAAC research on unmet literacy needs in Ireland estimates that almost 1 in 5 (18%) of the adult population struggled with reading and understanding everyday text, 1 in 4 adults (25%) had difficulties using maths in everyday life and almost 1 in 2 (42%) lacked basic digital skills. (Government of Ireland, 2021, p. 22; CSO, 2013). The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) reveal that 55 per cent of the adult population in Ireland has low digital skills. (CEDEFOP, 2020). These percentages are higher again in communities that are further marginalised or disadvantaged, such as those learning in prisons (Morgan and Kett, 2003), amongst the Traveller community (ITM, 2019), early school leavers (Eivers et al., 2000; CEC, 2008) and amongst people with disabilities (WALK, 2015). Cross-European research shows that age and native language background of learners are more significant than the average of EU-17 countries (ELINET, 2016, p. 6). The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) describe how unmet adult literacy and numeracy needs have devastating consequences for individuals, communities and the economy. People at the lowest literacy and numeracy levels earn less

income, have poorer health and are more likely to be unemployed (2020, p. 5)

The Adult Literacy Services in the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in the Republic of Ireland work to respond to the unmet literacy and numeracy needs of these adult learners. The Adult Literacy Services design and deliver a wide range of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy tuition to adults in Ireland. They work across different areas, centres and platforms, with multiple partners in the statutory, charitable and community spheres. 65,000 adults accessed local adult literacy services in ETBs nationally in 2019. This includes adult literacy groups (including family literacy), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE), Skills for Work (basic skills programme for employees) and one-to-one voluntary literacy tuition. (NALA, 2020, p. 49)

The ETBs, formerly the Vocational Education Committees (VECs), are the largest provider of adult literacy services in the country, offering a range of unaccredited and accredited courses of learning. ETBs are statutory, local education authorities governed by the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 that have responsibility for education and training, youth work and other statutory functions in the Republic of Ireland[1]. ETBs have responsibility for the planning and provision of education for second-level schools, further education colleges, community national schools and a range of further education and training centres.

Each ETB operates an integrated Adult Education Service, which can include Literacy and Community Education, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE), Family Literacy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Skills for Work, the Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI), Youthreach, Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), and the Prison Education Service.

> ETBs seek to make a real difference to the lives of the people they serve and continue to respond in a proactive and dynamic way to the needs of the communities that it serves … Active Inclusion is a central tenet of the work of ETBs … with an extensive reach into and across local communities. (ETBI, 2021, p. 10)

The Adult Literacy Services operate under the guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Skills, under the auspices of the national statutory agency for further education and training, An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS). The most recent guidelines were issued in 2013 and define adult literacy as:

> the provision of basic education, including reading, writing and numeracy skills, and ICT for adults who wish to improve their literacy and numeracy competencies to enhance their participation in personal, social and economic life (DES, 2013, p. 3).

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) Guidelines describe literacy as "fundamental to personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability" (2013, p. 3).

Adult literacy programmes are positioned primarily at Levels 1-3 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) where "the priority target cohort are adults with primary education or less and whose literacy and numeracy skills do not match Level 3 on the NFQ" (DES, 2013, p 3).

Each ETB, and the Adult Literacy Service within it, has developed within the context of its specific locality, institutional context, and the learning priorities and needs of the local communities it serves. These different aspects have resulted in each Adult Literacy Service having its own distinct historical, geographical and social profile and set of partnerships.

The management structure of each Adult Literacy Service is headed by the Chief Executive, who has overall responsibility for all ETB activities, and the Director(s) of FET who has/have special responsibility in each ETB. The Directors of FET work with the Management Team in each Adult Education Service. Adult Education Officers (AEOs) are responsible for relevant adult education service managers and coordinators in each ETB, including the Adult Literacy Service.

---

[1] The role of the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) is available at: https://www.etbi.ie/etbs/what-is-an-etb

Nationally, Adult Literacy Services support inclusive education by providing literacy, numeracy and digital skills support to individuals across FET centres, providing a wide range of in-house, tailored educational support to different programmes (ALOA, 2021, p. 7). They offer educational opportunities to adults in community settings, family resource centres, community hubs, libraries, addiction rehabilitation centres, homeless support services, disability services, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), Health Service Executive (HSE), Tusla, Traveller advocacy groups, migrant support groups, accommodation centres, and across Further Education and Training (FET) settings (ALOA, 2021, p. 6).

Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) manage the delivery of adult literacy programmes in consultation and co-operation with the AEO and co-ordinators from the other ETB adult and further education services.

The role of Adult Literacy Organisers

Adult Literacy Organisers are managers of the local ETB literacy services who ensure that a wide range of high-quality learning options are available to adults who wish to become more literate, numerate and/or more digitally skilled. ALOs play a key role in reaching those who need support through creating informal and welcoming spaces for learners. Much of this work involves raising awareness of the Adult Literacy Services and supporting learners wherever they are at on their learning path.

The role of an ALO is multifaceted and involves maintaining an ethos appropriate to adult learning; promoting the literacy service through networking, raising awareness, and publicity, recruiting and supporting students, volunteer and paid tutors (including one's own development and networking); developing the adult literacy service and implementing programmes, liaising with relevant voluntary and statutory bodies; managing finance, resources, premises and non-academic staff, maintaining records, reports and submissions (DES, 2001). The ALO oversees the delivery of adult literacy programmes, including the Family Literacy programme and the ITABE programme. ALOs are, in some instances, supported in their work by Resource Workers, Project Support Workers, programme coordinators and administrative staff. As will become evident throughout this research, they are identified as pivotal figures in the Adult Literacy Services for staff and literacy learners alike.

The role of ALOA

Adult Literacy Organisers Association (ALOA) is the professional representative body for Adult Literacy Organisers throughout the Republic of Ireland. ALOA was founded in 1998 as a grassroots national organisation comprising six regions, each with two regional representatives who sit on the national executive. It responds to the need for recognition of the work of ALOs, emerging through a series of national conferences, regional workshops and engagements with key allies (ALOA, 2013, p. 7-8). The Permanent Adult Literacy Organiser Post was recognised in 2001 and ALOA continued to grow as a representative body. ALOA has currently 68 members from all regions of the country in 2021, who cater to the literacy needs of tens of thousands of adults. (ALOA, 2021, p. 3). The organisation

> provides professional development to its members

> organises and hosts conferences with inputs from academic researchers and SOLAS about the current state of literacy around the country and future policy developments

> provides practical training and sharing of our own expertise and innovations in praxis

> affords an opportunity for ALOs to review and discuss international research and practice. (ALOA 2021, p. 3)

ALOA collaborates with a diverse range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in order to reach a wide array of adults as possible and appropriate. This occurs within current budgetary and staffing restrictions and with the current protocols governing the Adult Literacy Services (ALOA, 2021, p. 11). Currently budgets are allocated by SOLAS to each ETB and co-funded by national government and

the European Social Fund[2], which are then distributed across the services in the ETB (including adult literacy) as discretionary budgets. Consequently, the levels and processes of financing ALS varies considerably across ETBs.

From a policy and governance perspective, the chair and vice-chair of ALOA occupy two seats on the 10-person National Advisory Committee (NAC), which was set up as part of the SOLAS Further Education and Training Strategy (FET) Strategy 2014-2019. The NAC, now ETBI Basic Skills Advisory Network, informs and oversees the implementation of the FET Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. ALOA contributes to this committee (referred to its more commonly known title of NAC throughout this report) by responding to and providing feedback for draft guidelines and reports submitted to the NAC. In addition to responding to and contributing to policy papers and reports, ALOs have also led and presented initiatives to the NAC (ALOA, 2021, p. 4-5).

The role of practitioner and professional organisations in education

Groups who represent practitioners such as ALOA, play a particular role in the education organisations and policy landscape. They act in multiple roles as representatives of their members' interests and giving recognition to their professional identity. They provide key networking, resource-sharing and professional learning and development opportunities. They collectively advocate on behalf of their members' interests and liaise with different government, policy, media and stakeholder groups. They are a membership-based, voluntary, representative group which places them in particular power dynamics, positions and capacities. This section reviews some of the key learning from organisational studies and policy analysis to identify potential considerations and developments for ALOA as a representative organisation.

Clarke and Newman (1997) describe professionalism as an occupational and organizational strategy. As an occupational strategy, processes of professionalism delineate entry and scope of the profession through its organisational structures, entry requirements and working conditions. The flows and patterns of power, position and relationships surrounding the organisations are part of its organisational strategy. Organisations need to identify who and what exerts explicit power and implicit power over their discourses, relationships and actions. They need to consider what conduits are used to express their influence and the levels and extent of power that they exert throughout these networks of power.

The broader landscape and network within which they are set is key to consider. As Sachs reminds us, how professions are defined, constituted and recognised "have been sites of academic and ideological struggle between union leaders, bureaucrats and academics played out in a variety of settings" (2003, p. 25).

Power and autonomy are key elements of professional identity. Furlong et al (2000) identify three interlined aspects of knowledge, autonomy and responsibility, contending that

It is because professionals face complex and unpredictable situations that they need a specialized body of knowledge; if they are to apply that knowledge, it is argued that they need the autonomy to make their own judgements. Given that they have autonomy, it is essential that they act with responsibility – collectively they need to develop appropriate professional values (p. 5).

ALOA represents one form of collective professional autonomy and agency.

Esterhuizen and van Rensburg describe how professional organisations encourage professional development, socialisation and ethical frames amongst its members in the interests of the public good. "Such activities confirm the professional status of a vocational group … and explain a group's unique bond with society and responsibility for society" (2021, p. 1). This is key for an organisation like ALOA, which has strong learner-centred values.

Esterhuizen and van Rensburg describe the professional, education and political function of professional associations. The struggles of nursing, social work and other allied practitioner-based

---

2   https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2017-02-28/298/

professional associations are instructive to consider given ALOA's position in education as a public service. Research highlights the complex political forces and tension that representative organisations negotiate in representing their members' interests and negotiation within the broader political and social context. It is vital to develop a "collective political strategy that determines the role that each organisation can play in advancing the profession and developing its members" (Esterhuizen and van Rensburg, 2021, p. 6). Combined with this is the development of clear communications plan to achieve this strategy.

The policy context for the Adult Literacy Services

The Murphy Report in 1973 provided the "first official recognition that a significant number of adults in Ireland experienced difficulty with reading and writing, but this led to "no real change in terms of funding or education policy" (NALA, 2011, p. 14). However locally organised literacy and adult education continued to emerge during the 1970s and 1980s. Public awareness about literacy was also facilitated by BBC *On the Move* literacy series, which raised the visibility of adult literacy services. Much of the emergent, locally-organised adult literacy was based in community development efforts inspired by feminism and a Freirean community literacy approach (Bassett *et al.,* 1989; Connolly, 2014; NALA, 2011). This grassroots community education ensured that adult education and literacy was actively responding to public needs throughout this period.

These voluntary efforts supported the groundwork that led to the foundation of NALA as the representative organisation for adult literacy. The national adult education organisation, AONTAS was a key driver in the establishment of a subcommittee on literacy and ongoing support for networking amongst literacy staff, which supported the subsequent emergence of NALA.

NALA (2011) and Ward and Ayton (2019) document this history, highlighting the gradual development of literacy provision and structures since then, including the extensive voluntary efforts in local communities and the establishment of Adult Literacy Services in the VECs. They also note the seminal publication of the results of International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in 1997. The subsequent recognition and consolidation of adult literacy and numeracy occurred within ETBs and through community education groups over the following decades (NALA, 2011; Ward and Ayton, 2019).

From the mid-1980s onwards, the government finally began to acknowledge and provide more funding for adult literacy. The Department of Education introduced the first Community and Adult Education Budget in 1985, committing one million to fund literacy programmes over the next two years (NALA, 2011, p. 35-36). The Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP) in 1990 gave a continued commitment to resourcing and tackling adult literacy. Key drivers included the international recognition of 1996 as the European Year of Lifelong Learning. The 1998 Green Paper on Adult Education included a definition of adult literacy, and the White Paper on Adult Education in 2000 identified adult literacy and numeracy as a key priority. It established the National Adult Literacy Programme, aimed at improving adult literacy levels, funded under the National Development Plan (NALA, 2011, p. 60).

In the midst of this, the publication of the IALS survey in 1997 was very significant, recording that 25 per cent of the Irish population had very low levels of basic literacy skills. This sparked government attention and investment in addressing these issues over the following decades, with the formal recognition of adult literacy as a priority in the White Paper (2000) and extensive work by NALA and other agencies. It also included national media campaigns on adult literacy, the establishment of NALA's website, ongoing collaboration with VECs, continued development of research and guidelines on adult literacy, professional development for staff and development of quality assurance frameworks during this time.

The National Adult Literacy Programme during the 2000s continued to draw together a wider network of stakeholders, identifying target groups (such as Travellers, Refugees and Asylum seekers and people who are unemployed) and activities (including programmes like family literacy, Return to Education and ESOL). Budgets for literacy, numeracy and IT/digital literacy expanded as the Adult Literacy Services grew exponentially during this time and expanded to include new groups and programmes throughout the 2000s. Concurrently, a Quality Framework was developed as a system of self-evaluation in adult basic education by NALA following extensive consultation with stakeholders, followed by the Mapping the Learning Journey. Formal accreditation was offered by National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) initially. This has been reformulated into The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) as it emerged in 2001 and more recently Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) established in 2012. A Reference Group was established in 2018 to review the award standards at Levels 1-4.

This consolidation of the Adult Literacy Services is reflected in the continued national policy focus, which has culminated in the publication of the first 10-year Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) Strategy for Ireland in September 2021. This 10-year adult literacy strategy is a cross-Government, cross-economy and cross-society approach that positions literacy, numeracy and digital literacy as key competences to help "create a more equal, inclusive Ireland for all where everyone feels they can participate and belong" (Government of Ireland, 2021, p. 33). This reflects the move across government and international policy development towards integrated holistic policy models based in the wider social, economic and political context, as is also evident in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion and the National Economic Plan. It is allied with the inclusive focus of the 'fostering inclusion' pillars in the FET Strategy 2020-2024.

This chapter is written with this policy backdrop in mind, exploring the distinctive contribution that adult literacy staff bring to the Adult Literacy Services.

International policies for inclusive adult literacy practices

Developments in the Irish Adult Literacy Services reflect international trends. International policies developed by United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)[3], Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)[4] are echoed by European policies. The broader framework of European legislation promotes the values of equality and inclusion through education across public services in European member states.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)[5] aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". It is enacted through the *Education 2030 Framework for Action* which recognises "inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and …commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes." (UNESCO, 2016, p. 7). The UNESCO *4th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* (GRALE) report gives a global picture from 159 countries of participation and provision of adult learning and education (ALE). It reveals persistent and deep inequalities in ALE participation, with groups, such as adults with disabilities, older adults, minority groups and adults living in conflict-affected countries particularly under-represented in adult education and deprived of key access to lifelong learning opportunities.

In the European context, the *Upskilling Pathways: new opportunities for adults* has become the key building block of the European Pillar of Social Rights since 2016[6]. It promotes equal rights to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. This initiative targets adults with a low level of skills, e.g. those without upper secondary education who need to strengthen their basic skills (to European Qualifications Framework (EQF) or NFQ level 3 or 4). The *European Social Charter* guarantees a broad range of everyday human rights related to employment, housing, health, education (including literacy), social protection and welfare for EU citizens[7]. Key European strategies emphasise digital capacities including

3   https://en.unesco.org/themes/inclusion-in-education

4   The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is a human rights treaty adopted by the United Nations in 2006, which exists to protect and reaffirm the human rights of disabled people. The Irish Government signed the Convention in 2007 and in March 2018 the Convention was ratified. Available at: https://www.ihrec.ie/crpd/

5   https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259784

6   https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224

7   https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter

the *2030 Digital Compass* policy's goal of ensuring that 80 per cent of adults have basic digital skills.

Inclusive and equality policies in Irish education

These international policies have been crucial in guiding the development of legislation , which has placed equality and inclusion principles at the heart of public policy-making in the Republic of Ireland in recent decades. Equality legislation gives a clear legal framework to combat direct and indirect discrimination and to support inclusion through the Employment Equality Acts (1998 – 2011)[8], Equal Status Acts (2000 – 2012)[9] and the Disability Act (2005)[10]. This has had significant implications for enhancing inclusion in education as well as in other public bodies over recent decades.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality (IHREC) Act (2014)[11] requires public bodies, including education and training organisations, to report annually on their progress in embedding equality in their service provision and employment. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act (2014) places greater onus on large public bodies, including ETBs, to take a proactive approach that puts human rights and equality at the centre of how public bodies deliver and monitor their functions (ETBI, 2017).

Consequently, the integration of literacy into broader adult and further education programmes has been a key theme of national policy reports in recent years. These reports include the new Common Awards System published by FETAC, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, the OECD's review of VET in Ireland and the Report of the ETBI/NALA Integrating Literacy Working Group. (DES, 2013, p.13). To differing degrees, these policies recognise the extensive and ongoing inclusion work that has been a feature of the Adult Literacy Services.

Ireland's implementation of key European policies is also evident in the lifelong learning and inclusion goals in the *National Skills Strategy 2025*[12] as part of Ireland's delivery of its commitments in the *Social Pillar of Rights*[13]. Lifelong learning is positioned as the governing principle of adult education policy in Ireland, with inclusion as a central element. The *Upskilling Pathways* initiative promotes equal rights to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. This initiative echoes European policy emphasis of targeting adults with a low level of skills, e.g. those without upper secondary education who need to strengthen their basic skills (to European Qualifications Framework (EQF) or NFQ level 3 or 4). In the Irish context, its implementation plans focus on the needs of "employees whose skills level are below Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications, in jobs with a low skill requirement, 50+ years, in sectors/occupations at risk of economic displacement" (Lyons, 2021[14]).

The structures and processes of the Adult Literacy Services

This section discusses the structures and processes of the Adult Literacy Services to give an overview of key features of the Adult Literacy Services that are relevant for this review, and to discuss the key issues emerging from these organisational structures and processes. This includes a discussion of

> type of literacy tuition offered

> distinctive nature of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy

> key stages along learning pathway for literacy learners

---

8   http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/21/enacted/en/html
9   http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/enacted/en/html
10   http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2005/act/14/enacted/en/html
11   http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2014/act/25/enacted/en/html
12   https://www.education.ie/en/publications/policy-reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf
13   https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights_en
14   Lyons, M. (2021) Upskilling Pathways presentation to Cedefop, Nov 2021 https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/plf_upskilling_pathways_2020_ireland.pdf

Type of Tuition

Generally, literacy and numeracy tuition are offered through the following range of programmes for adult learners in ETBs:

Family literacy

BTEI (Back to Education Initiative)

ESOL (English for speakers of other languages)

ITABE (Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education)

Skills for Work

Adult literacy small-group tuition

Voluntary one-to-one tuition (limited)

These include the range of different programmes outlined below, as well as voluntary literacy tuition and group literacy tuition modes of delivery. As discussed in a later section, literacy tuition is also integrated as an element in other programmes, including ESOL, work-based learning programmes and across other FET programmes.

Family Literacy and Family Learning is delivered through the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) strategy (2005). Family Literacy initiatives support families in enhancing their skills in reading, writing, numeracy and foundational ICT skills in recognition of the vital role that family members play in a child's educational development. NALA describe family literacy as "literacy development work that focuses on how literacy is developed at home, and education courses that support and develop this dimension of literacy development" (2011, p. 3).

Programmes are offered in various community-based settings and include opportunities for intergenerational learning and, wherever possible, lead both adults and children to pursue further learning. They build on literacy practices within families or communities and aim to develop literacy skills and confidence across generations.[15] This approach acknowledges that the "literacy learned at home and in local communities is rich in the use of local language and the expression of the experience and history of families, communities and cultures" (NALA, 2011, p. 2). Family literacy is the subject of the SOLAS (2020) *Enabling Intergenerational Learning report* by SOLAS in 2020.

Literacy support is offered to participants in the **Back to Education Initiative (BTEI).** BTEI provides part-time courses for learners over 16 years and is aimed principally at those who have not completed the Leaving Certificate (or equivalent NFQ Level 5) qualification. Anyone who has left full-time education can take part in a course, with priority given to those with less than upper second-level education.[16] Guidelines on Effective Planning and Delivery of BTEI Outreach Provision was published along with a series of reports on widening participation through BTEI for male participation, adult literacy and learners with disabilities during the 2000s. This noted the "clear benefits to students when BTEI programmes are supported by embedded literacy, or additional literacy support tailored to subject areas as well as access to general literacy support within the Adult Literacy Service". (DES, n.d., p. 25)

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision focuses on learners who are at risk of social exclusion because of very poor English language skills and who may also have literacy needs. Priority target groups include asylum seekers and low-income EU immigrant or migrant workers and unemployed EU migrants. ESOL provision is assessed formally with the allocation of hours for ESOL provision taking account of the learning needs of the wider local community. This tries to balance between literacy provision and English language provision, reflecting the local population (DES, 2013, p. 12). The recent review of ESOL (SOLAS, 2018) examines current ESOL practice at QQI levels

---

15   Details about DEIS family literacy available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Further-Education-and-Training/Adult-Literacy/DEIS-Family-Literacy-Guidelines-2010.pdf
16   Further Information about the BTEI programme is available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Further-Education-and-Training/Back-to-Education-Initiative-BTEI-/

1-3, including Adult Literacy and Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) programmes. It notes how ESOL provision developed organically in Ireland in the absence of national strategy or policies. Consequently, there is considerable variation across services in the amount of resources, hours and supports offered to learners. This review calls for ESOL to be given recognition, guidelines, funding and policies specific to it as a specialised area of provision (SOLAS, 2018, p. 10). ESOL Guidelines and toolkit have been developed and can be accessed via the SOLAS website[17] and the ETBI Digital Library[18].

Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) project is an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills to deliver intensive adult basic education through the ETB Adult Literacy Services. It is a model of tuition in adult literacy and basic education for those who are educationally disadvantaged, including those with learning difficulties. The aim of the programme is to provide participants, in groups of six – eight students, with six hours of tuition per week over an intensive 10-to-14-week period, as opposed to the average of two hours per week often provided. A number of these projects have been allocated to each of the 16 ETBs (ETBI, 2015). Courses include Communication Skills, Learning to Learn, and Introduction to Information Technology. There is an option to work towards accreditation at Levels 1, 2 or 3 on the NFQ.

Skills for Work programme is a part-time education and training initiative. It is aimed at people who are in employment and who may have left school early or whose skills may be out of date. The project aims to upgrade the skills and enhance the career and/ or education development of adult workers who have minimum levels of formal education. It also aims to promote awareness of the value of lifelong learning throughout adult life. This initiative is funded by the Department of Education and Skills. The programme is offered on company premises where possible, the local Education and Training Board, Adult Education Service, or an alternative convenient location, and may include a variety of subjects which support the educational needs of the employee.

Volunteer literacy tuition occurs where voluntary tutors working on a 1:1 basis with individuals seeking to enhance their skill base in all or some of the following: reading, writing, numeracy and IT. 1:1 tuition is seen as very valuable in building confidence and relationships of trust (Tett and Maclachlan, 2008, p. 668). 1:1 tuition provides an opportunity for bespoke learning for the student for a period of time, before they move to a group or more subject-based programme. 1:1 provision is more feasible for some learners who may have difficulties accessing group provision due to work, family or transport issues. For learners with specific learning difficulties, individual attention for at least part of their literacy learning process may be valuable. (ALOA, 2021, p.10)

1:1 tuition is often delivered by volunteer tutors, but also by resource workers, paid tutors and occasionally by the ALO. Volunteer tutors complete an initial tutor training course prior to working with a student, which in some instances is accredited by Waterford Institute of Technology. Additionally, all tutors are Garda vetted. Many adult literacy services have a volunteer protocol outlining the rights and responsibilities of one-to-one tutors, learners and the organisation (Bailey in ELINET, 2016, p. 18). After training, the literacy tutor volunteer usually gives one to three hours of their time per week.

Challenges were noted around the recruitment of volunteers, attrition rates with volunteer tutors and the resources needed for initial training and on-going support of tutors. ALOA note that 1:1 provision would "benefit from better resourcing, perhaps a resource worker" role either to deliver 1:1 tuition or to supervise those who are doing it. (ALOA, 2021, p. 10)

In line with the greater "emphasis placed on supporting group tuition" (DES, 2013, p. 5), the level of 1:1 tuition is reported as having decreased significantly in recent years with 1,338 learners in 1:1 tuition in 2017, down from 3,141 learners in 2015 (SOLAS, 2017a, p. 31). There is still evidence of extensive provision of 1:1 tuition as needed by learners which may or not be formally recorded (SOLAS, 2021c). The move towards more inclusive models of literacy provision has led to increased emphasis on group rather than individual provision. Consequently, each ETB has to balance learner demands for 1:1 and group literacy provision with their own capacity and resources to recruit and support tutors for 1:1 and small group

literacy provision.

Group Literacy Tuition occurs where tutors work with small groups of six to eight learners to enhance basic literacy skills in reading, writing, numeracy and ICT. Where literacy tuition is organised in groups, or if students are working towards accreditation in a group setting, paid literacy tutors are used rather than voluntary tutors.

Research including ELINET (2016) notes the preference for group-based provision of adult literacy. Tett and Maclachlan describe "the mutuality of learning that characterises the process of becoming part of a learning group. These social communities shift the emphasis from learning as transmission to learning as doing, as a social activity" (2008, p. 668). In a Freirean sense, group tuition provides the mutual conditions for "collective consciousness-raising that can enable people to talk back to the power that has constructed them as wanting." (Tett and Maclachlan, 2008, p. 668)

ALOA contend that they need to be able to continue offer a choice of 1:1 or group interaction for literacy learners as is appropriate at different stages in people's learning journeys and circumstances (ALOA, 2021, p. 22). The diverse learning profile and capacities of learners can mean that 1:1 or group provision may be more suitable at different stages for learners. Continual reviews of student's progress throughout this process helps to assess, with the learner, their readiness or relevance of moving to group tuition. (ALOA, 2021, p. 10).

Distinct nature of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy

While literacy, numeracy and digital literacy hold many commonalities discussed throughout this report, they are distinctive areas which are worth considering in their own specificity, as discussed in the following subsections.

Literacy

Following national and international practices, literacy is increasingly understood as 'literacies' in the broadest sense, as a set of diverse social practices that are locally defined in the lived context of people's lives (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Street, 2001). The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) define literacies as social practices involving

listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. But it includes more than the technical skills of communications: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals, families and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change (NALA, 2012, p. 6).

This definition emphasises the centrality of learners' experience and knowledge in the literacy process and their right to be involved in all aspects of provision (NALA, 2012). This is echoed by ALOA's definition of literacies outlined earlier.

This approach to literacies can be contrasted with traditional approaches to literacy which positions it in functional terms, emphasising the technical achievement of literacy as skills and task-based. Functional literacy approaches have been widely criticised for their normative assumptions about literacy standards, and their positioning of literacy learners in a deficit status that is apart from normality. Functional literacy approaches tend to reduce literacy to vocational competencies, removing any sense of how we use and learn literacy in social contexts (Hamilton and Pitt, 2011). As explored later, elements of technical or functional approaches are still evident, especially through the large-scale international data gathering exercises of PISA and PIAAC, with significant impact on public and policy discourses about adult literacy and numeracy.

Numeracy

Numeracy has its roots in mathematics, with a distinctive origin and basis from literacy. Conceptions of numeracy have developed from a limited understanding of numeracy as basic arithmetic skills to

being equated with mathematics and more recently to being placed in a socially-situated and multi-dimensional approach to numeracy (Goos et al., 2014). SOLAS' Numeracy report emphasises a socially-situated approach to numeracy as embedded in everyday life – with most people continually using numeracy in the home, at work, and in community settings. Numeracy involves

> critical thinking, working with representations and tools, and applying mathematical knowledge confidently in a range of contexts. In an increasingly complex and information-drenched society, numerate citizens need to decide how to evaluate quantitative, spatial or probabilistic information used to support claims made in the media or other contexts. They also need to recognise how mathematical information and practices can be used to persuade, manipulate, disadvantage or shape opinions about social or political issues (SOLAS 2021a, p. 19)

Oughton (2018) contends that a social practice approach to numeracy locates it as social practice embedded in people's daily lives, in the workplace, at home, at school, and in different cultural and political contexts. Maguire and O'Donoghue (2004) note how this incorporates "mathematics, communication, cultural, social, emotional and personal aspects of each individual in a particular context" (Maguire and O'Donoghue, 2004, cited in NALA, 2013a, p. 14).

This embedded nature of numeracy in contemporary life highlights how people need to be able to evaluate "quantitative, spatial or probabilistic information used to support claims made in the media or other contexts…. Almost every public issue depends on data, projections, and the kind of systematic thinking that is at the heart of numeracy". They highlight how numeracy today "involves critical thinking, working with representations and tools, and applying mathematical knowledge confidently in a range of contexts" (SOLAS, 2021a, p. 79) This requires that numeracy tuition includes critical analysis of the purpose, social context and methods in numeracy as well as the capacity to apply this in real-life calculations (SOLAS 2020a, p. 14).

ALOA highlight how numeracy can integrate well with other literacies, e.g., online banking or comparing products such as mobile phone data packages, or practical maths for everyday life, e.g., money, decimals, measuring, timing, etc. Integrated approaches are well suited for use in targeted supports for apprentices and other programmes in FET with the use of numeracy tutors working with other FET staff in a team approach (ALOA 2021, p. 16).

Given the specificity of numeracy as a specialised area in its own right, standards need to be developed, including revising QQI modules in numeracy and maths at levels 4 and 5 and bridging the gap between levels. A numeracy PLD programme for tutors is needed to meet the demands of integration of numeracy into existing courses and to fulfil unmet demands.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is a "life skill that involves the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to use a range of digital devices and technology such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers and the confidence to use these skills in everyday situations" (NALA, 2020).

The European Commission acknowledges that Europe is facing a large digital skills gap, with CEDEDOF (2020) documenting how most jobs in the EU today require at least a basic digital or moderate skills level of information and communications technology (ICT) skills. DigComp, the European Digital Competence Framework supports a comprehensive understanding of digital competence, including information storage, digital identity, developing digital content and behaviour online in everyday life such as working, shopping, and participating in society. The new European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) (2021 – 2027)[19] focuses on key areas including the development of the digital skills and education levels of people in response to changing social and economic conditions. This is particularly pertinent for communities who were already disadvantaged, with research demonstrating the growing digital divide.

Issues of digital literacy have come more to the fore in the global pandemic of Covid 19, where digital and online capacities have become essential. CDETB's research in 2020 revealed that the lockdown

"disproportionately affected more disadvantaged learners and those in need of additional support… learners in second chance and adult basic and community education found remote teaching and learning harder" (2020:17). Pavee Point note that "Traveller students were particularly left at an extreme disadvantage given the issue of access to IT facilities, high costs of broadband, lack of access to devices, resources, books, libraries, and private quiet spaces to study" (2021, p. 3). AONTAS's research during 2021 tracked a "drop in further education participation levels of approximately 25 per cent across Travellers and Roma and a drop of 15 per cent for people with disabilities, the over-50s and people in direct provision" (O'Reilly, 2021).

CDETB review of its Covid response in 2020 outlines the three areas which had to be adapted

1. Alternative assessments and identifying 'core', 'regulatory' and 'essential' learning outcomes in line with QQI guidelines.
2. Developing class content to prepare learners for a changed third-level life and changed industry, in areas like childcare, hairdressing, construction and even office-based roles as more and more staff will be expected to work from home into the future
3. Developing soft skills, life skills and employability skills remotely, noting that this was particularly difficult to do remotely for learners near the beginning of their courses or learners in need of additional support including learners in specialist programmes (CDETB, 2020, p. 17-18)

The digital divide also highlights other constraints such as limited access to broadband in some geographical areas, conditions in the home and other living environments not having conducive conditions for digital learning.

The development of digitally-accessible learning opportunities is required to build learning confidence and digital capacity amongst learners. This includes providing funding and resourcing for education such as ongoing TEL funding and the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund[20]. It also involves creating learning environments and supports such as 'Bring Your Own Device' policies to facilitate learners using their own devices and drop-in digital skills hubs in ETB and outreach centres to support incremental and practical digital capacity-building. A consideration of ethical, information literacy and privacy issues in IT is also relevant across all areas of FET (ALOA, 2021, p. 17).

There are several specific actions that need to be taken to promote and encourage digital literacy for adults. Bespoke IT classes for adults on use of digital technology which is unaccredited and responsive to learner needs, as well as accredited programmes and components (ALOA, 2021). Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) is needed to support the integration of technology into a variety of learning settings to give learners and staff confidence in using technology both as a tool and as a learning goal in itself. This includes peer support[21], peer mentoring initiatives[22] and a panel of TEL champions across FET centres[23] to support on-line TEL based education and training.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the context and position of the Adult Literacy Services in Ireland. This is followed by an overview of the organisational structure of adult literacy service provision, ALOA and the work of Adult Literacy Organisers. Key themes emerging from this review of existing literature are discussed in light of their implications for the work of Adult Literacy Organisers. This is followed by a review of relevant policies, literature and research on inclusion and literacy from recent years within Ireland and internationally, before considering the specific nature of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

---

19   ESF news - EU budget: a new European Social Fund Plus (europa.eu)

20   https://www.solas.ie/mitigating-against-educational-disadvantage-fund-2021/
21   http://kilkennycarlow.etb.ie/further-education-and-training/technology-enhanced-learning-tel/
22   https://cityofdublin.etb.ie/latest-news/technology-enhanced-learning-mentoring-support-telms/
23   https://gretb.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Service-Plan-2020.pdf

The inclusion of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in FET

This chapter reviews the key themes emerging from a review of literature which is relevant to inclusive practices in adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. It draws on a wide range of national and international literature across different sectors of education and related areas. Some of this material discusses current practices and policies, whilst later sectors discuss key values and themes informing contemporary thinking about adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

Given the purpose of this research, this review is orientated towards the interests and perspective of literacy practitioners. The following sections identify key aspects and capacities which are identified as important for supporting inclusion in adult literacy. Allatt describes how literacy "practitioners' perceptions included a variety of issues, such as "social participation, empowerment, independence, personal confidence, the development of identity and benefits to family life and children's life chances." (2020, p. 41). The capacities displayed by literacy staff can be considered as part of the 'ecologies of practice' that Stronach *et al*., (2002) describe as the "accumulation of individual and collective experiences" of work. Ecologies of practice are evident in the personal experiences, beliefs and commitments that people use to describe as constituting 'good practice' in their profession (Stronach *et al*., 2002, p. 122). These are evident throughout the following sections.

Learner-centred approaches

ALOA embraces a holistic approach to literacy that is learner-centred, voluntary and respectful of the adult status of the learners (ALOA, 2021, p. 15). This approach reflects an adult education philosophy, which acknowledges people's diverse goals, interests and needs (NALA, 2012). The Adult Literacy Services have a unique role in the provision of basic education programmes for adults in Ireland, as well as supporting progression to other levels and services in FET and elsewhere.

The Adult Literacy Services create a supportive and welcoming ethos using an adult education approach of lifelong and lifewide education centred on the learner, provided in locally-based services. This is embedded in a learner-centred adult literacy and numeracy approach in its ethos, values and pedagogical approaches, with adult learners actively collaborating in the decision-making about their learning.

This approach is rooted in a practice-based approach centred on the relevance of people's life experiences in their learning. Tett and Maclachlan highlight how "literacies learning arises directly out of, and connects specifically with, the issues that the groups are exploring. It is therefore embedded in real-life situations that have relevance and importance to the learner" (2008, p. 670). This echoes the socially situated approaches to literacies which ground experiences of literacy and learning in the realities of people's everyday context (Barton and Hamilton, 1998).

Literacy education often uses a learner-based and experience-based approach to pedagogy rather than the subject and curriculum-centred emphasis of other forms of education (such as primary or second-level curriculum). NALA describe how adult literacy in Ireland as based on a "student centred approach where the needs, concerns and experience of the students are the focus of learning, rather than an externally structured and enforced curriculum" (2020, p. 51). Similarly, Bailey describes a learning-centred curriculum where "everyone involved learns through taking part in the process of curriculum development." (In ELINET 2016, p. 18). Learner-centredness is at the heart of adult education with its specific intention of placing the learner and their experiences at the heart of education practice. This is distinctive to adult literacy, locating it clearly within adult education. The role of the tutor is to facilitate and support this learner-centred ethos with a responsive learner-centred pedagogy.

Using this pedagogy, the integration of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in everyday activities is seen as a way to learn a number of skills in an inclusive manner (Tett *et al*., 2012). For example, a course on gardening can become "a natural context for numeracy learning about measurement (length, perimeter, area, volume) and shapes (different-shaped garden beds)." (SOLAS, 2021a, p. 63). Activities

such as sewing can fluidly introduce numeracy, literacy and digital literacy to learners "as an integral part of the creative process" (SOLAS, 2020, p. 88). Transversal skills, such as communications skills, study skills, time management, project planning, group work are all part of the learning process for literacy and all FET learners (SOLAS, 2021c).

A learner-centred approach recognises that learners may have unmet literacy needs and people will seek information and support for literacy, numeracy or digital literacy in different ways, contexts and times in their lives. This means the Adult Literacy Services need to maintain responsiveness and flexibility in how they offer their services to learners. ALOA calls for options of accredited and unaccredited provision to be maintained to enable ALOs to focus on and meet the particular and diverse literacy needs that present in each student. (ALOA, 2021, p.14)

The legacy of previous education experiences and societal assumptions

In many cases, learners may have negative experiences and associations from previous school experiences and a lack of confidence from lengthy absences from learning. This often leads to feelings of a lack of confidence about their capacity to learn, with profound consequences for their livelihoods, opportunities and sense of self (Feeley and Hegarty, 2013). Coffield et al. (2007) in the UK context recounts how "students talk of being neglected and even insulted in schools and they have ended up, after…years of formal schooling, as damaged learners with serious gaps in their basic skills." (2007, p. 724). Research literature on adult numeracy similarly documents feelings of anxiety, shame, and lack of confidence experienced by adults with poor numeracy skills (Carpentieri *et al*., 2010). In the Irish context, the Numeracy Report documents "accounts given by these adults of being told by school teachers that they were stupid, or of being left to sit at the back of the classroom." (SOLAS, 2021a). This is echoed through numerous accounts of damaging experiences of schooling across records of Irish cultural and social life as well as in research literature.

This is often deeply embedded in structural and cultural inequalities of class, gender, ethnicity and disability. Lodge and Lynch (2004), Lynch (2018) and others have traced the long history of discrimination and neglect experienced by many groups including, those from working class backgrounds, Travellers, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and other minority backgrounds. Burke (2018) reminds us of the history of institutionalisation, stigma and marginalisation experienced by people with disabilities which has left a legacy of doubt that stifles educational growth (2018: 12). These are echoed in societal assumptions about people's capacity to learn. For example, negative attitudes are often based on subjective judgements, stigma or presumptions, such as "the idea that people cannot achieve something is a blanket presumption" (WALK, 2015, p. 16).

Transformative learning and a capability approach

Current thinking in literacy studies emphasises a transformative learning approach which is rooted in an adult education approach. This is evident in NALA's understanding of literacy as "increas[ing] the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change" (2012, p. 6). This approach understands that literacy has socio-cultural, economic, political, cognitive and affective dimensions, and is deeply connected with the rights of individuals and communities – to have their voice, to learn, to read and to be read (NALA, 2012: 6-7). This rights-based approach shifts attention from a deficit approach of what learners might (be assumed to) lack to foreground people's interests and active realisation of their capabilities to learn (Sen, 1999).

The experience-based approach in relevant practices from people's lives and the democratic relationships of learning associated with adult education enable learners to engage with a different learning approach. This is often based in transformative learning which actively intends to reflect upon and change the conditions of people's lives through learning. Mezirow's seminal work on perspective transformation (1991) positions learning as a process of negotiating, adjusting and transforming the way we make meaning and how we use meaning to act in the world.

Critical reflectivity is a key element of transformative learning which enables learners to reflect on and

question the broader social and political structures that lead to marginalisation and exclusion. Personal transformation is an important element of adult learning; however, empowering students to challenge the political, economic and social conditions of their lives is core to what adult literacy services offer. This basis in social justice and critical reflectivity has been evident in adult literacy in Ireland since its origins. NALA has been central in representing adult literacy staff's view of "literacy as a right placed the responsibility squarely at the feet of the state and made failure in educational achievement a failure of the system, rather than a failure by the individual learner" (NALA, 2011, p. 8). This is also evident in the values and ethos of ALOA in their policy submissions. (ALOA, 2021).

Duckworth and Smith (2018) talk about the 'ripple effect' in transformative learning which rolls out beyond the individual learner to their family and wider network. They describe this as "a counter metric… an unmeasured and therefore widely unrecognised social benefit that …has a significant positive economic impact beyond the achievement of a qualification by a single individual." (2018, p. 164). They describe this "transformative process as a collective phenomenon and as having social as well as individual origins" (2018, p. 172). This is a key element of transformative education.

The centrality of caring and trusting relationships in literacy learning

The building and nurturing of ongoing relationships of trust between tutors and learners, and within learner groups is a core part of adult literacy. It requires that literacy staff create a deeply interpersonal and affective bond in their pedagogy - what Duckworth and Smith (2016) call the relational ties through which transformative learning takes place.

The SOLAS literacy research reports acknowledge this as a vital part of literacy pedagogy, with literacy tutors very conscious of the impact of these learning relationships as part of their pedagogical practice.

> Irrespective of the curriculum content almost, if I'd built a relationship with the learners, and you often will, they were more likely to come back for future classes. (SOLAS, 2020, p. 79)

Research on adult literacy identifies the considerable work and time that is necessary to build trust and maintain these relationships (Crowther *et al.*, 2010). Adult Literacy Organisers play a key role in ensuring that there is good match of literacy tutors to the learner groups. In the SOLAS literacy research reports, ALOs describe carefully assigning tutors who have the responsiveness, range and flexibility to work with specific literacy groups "If you get the right tutor to work with them, they can nurture partnerships with them." (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 65)

> it's what literacy tutors are good at is just creating that trust in the room. That's what it's about really. And then, you know, letting people kind of come forward themselves. (SOLAS, 2020, p. 74)

Duckworth and Smith describe the significance of tutors getting "to know the students as people and be part of their journey" (2018, p. 172). Central in this relational work is the capacity for communication skills and the ability to relate to learners which tutors do as a core of their practice in literacy sessions (SOLAS, 2021c). Many tutors were conscious that this relational work was not solely within the literacy session but is also in the social and learning life of the literacy or FET centre, which involves nurturing awareness and relationships with other students and staff.

However, this type of relational work with learners as well as other staff tends to be an invisible and unrecognised part of the teaching process. The skills and time involved in making good connections with colleagues and learners are taken for granted rather than forming part of PLD (Professional Learning and Development). This lack of recognition means that the considerable skills, work and time devoted to building and maintaining relationships is not resourced and left very much to the good will of those involved (SOLAS, 2020, p. 79).

SOLAS literacy research reports highlight the importance of "carefully selecting literacy tutors with the experience, expertise, [and a] teaching philosophy and disposition suited to working with adult learners with intellectual disabilities" (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 79). Staff work empathetically in relating and

communicating with students, to build capacity and independence amongst learners, and to use creative and responsive pedagogies is key.

Much of this relational work is done by women who make up the majority of those working as literacy tutors, reflecting the wider concern about the gendered cost of this type of relational and care work in education (Lynch et al., 2007, Feeley, 2013).

Recognition of holistic nature and benefits of literacy learning

There is strong evidence in the academic literature on adult education for wider benefits of learning, beyond the immediate acquisition of literacy, numeracy and digital skills. NALA (2020) document the long-term impact that education has on the health, wellbeing, health behaviours and health literacy of adults and how low levels of education presents ongoing challenges for the health system and adults engaging with it. They call for increased investment in raising the level of literacy and education among the adult population will contribute to achieving the goals of Healthy Ireland[24] and other linked strategies. (NALA, 2020, p. 27). The Adult Literacy for Life Strategy sets out its vision of an "Ireland where every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully engage in society and realise their potential." (2021, p. 33)

Vorhaus *et al.* (2008) found that adult education courses can have positive effects for people, including behavioural and attitudinal changes which translated into more civic engagement and healthier living. Ó Riain and Byrne (2019) describe the range of different spaces and systems where literacy provision is offered that also involve social and community development, including schools, training, public spaces (such as libraries, media), and community spaces including partnerships among community organisations, service providers and other institutions, regional agencies (Pobal, Local Area Partnerships) and regional developments such as UNESCO's Learning City (cited in NALA, 2020, p. 37)

Tett and Maclachlan (2007) found that learners who participated in adult literacy education experienced an increase in self-confidence interwoven with an improvement in social and communicative skills and that adult literacy education increased social participation and social capital. Adult literacy learners in Ireland attest that their experiences in adult literacy services have improved their family life as well as their own personal development (NALA, 2020).

Diverse ways and pathways of learning

Diverse and varied capacities amongst literacy learners is a feature of literacy, where "learners in a group can differ enormously both in terms of diversity in learning skills and across and between learners" (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 69). Many learners demonstrate strengths in particular areas of literacy and numeracy while finding other areas challenging (SOLAS, 2021a). This has been described as the spiky profile of literacy learning.[25] This diversity in literacy skills has to be positioned in terms of the specific learning motivations, backgrounds and contexts of the learners.

Learners' ongoing engagement with the Adult Literacy Services is often linked to key life events, such as children's progression in school or people's employment context. Progression through education can be interrupted for many people due to other events in their personal, family, employment or social lives. The demand for literacy learning can be a lifelong and lifewide need for some learners. This raises key challenges for a learning system that is primarily focused on linear and timely progression through QQI levels.

---

24   Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013 – 2025. https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/hienglish.pdf

25   Further details about spiky literacy profile is available at: https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/glossary/spiky-profile

Figure 3. Awareness of diverse learning profiles

Figure 3. Awareness of diverse learning profiles
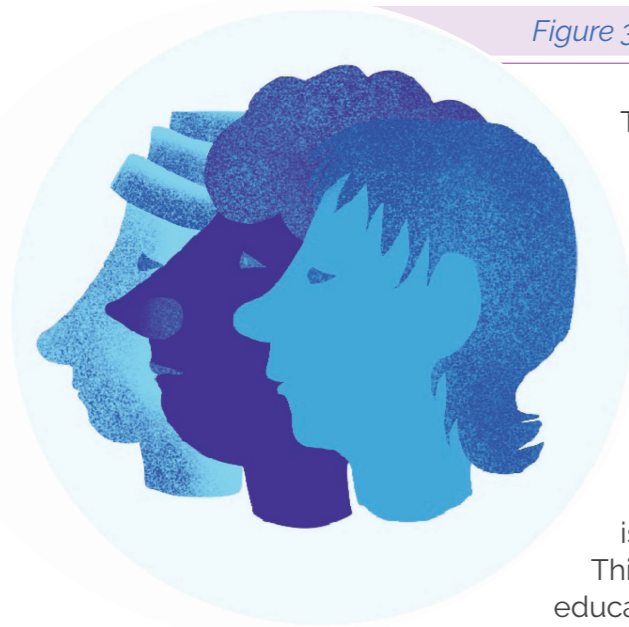
The Family Literacy Report also highlight the "interrupted learning trajectory" that many learners have throughout their life (SOLAS, 2020a, p. 56). This journey requires a lengthy period of supported engagement before someone is ready to tackle their unmet literacy needs (Family Literacy Report, 2020, p. 57). The Numeracy Report highlights how numeracy issues arise for adults throughout many different contexts and times in their lives (SOLAS 2021a). Hence, the assumptions of learners engaging in a programme of study and then progressing upwards through predefined levels is often not relevant or suited for many literacy learners. This is widely evidenced in international studies of adult education and adult literacy (Barton et al. 2007, Crowther et al. 2010). Carpentieri acknowledges "that learners may be 'dipping out' [of learning] for a while, generally because of other responsibilities… Inconsistent does not necessarily mean non-persistent." (2007: 20)

The Inclusion of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services Report describes lateral progression where learners move in and out of the literacy service, "needing varying amounts of time to complete courses at the same level and taking several courses at the same level rather than progressing 'upwards'" (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 75). Some learners take several years to complete courses or re-engage with levels they have already completed previously to maintain learning. This also occurs in a context where learners may have diverse communication capacities, social skills, and ability to retain and apply new knowledge.

This creates many opportunities and challenges for the Adult Literacy Services in both responding to learners' needs as well as in creating inclusive learning processes and cultures. It requires literacy staff to be highly skilled and responsive in their pedagogical responses to this wide range of interests and learning capacities within and across groups. This calls for responsive interpersonal and communication skills on the part of staff.

Literacy education also requires different focus and approaches during the various stages of the learning journey from initial assessment, engagement, assessment and progression. ALOA highlights how the initial assessment of literacy capacities requires a sensitive approach, during engagement, immediately after, and in the longer-term. (2021, p. 46). Research on access and widening participation in adult and higher education sectors also documents an extensive period of confidence raising, time and supported engagement required before someone is ready to tackle their unmet learning needs (Riddell, 2012; Fleming et al., 2017; Ryan, 2019).
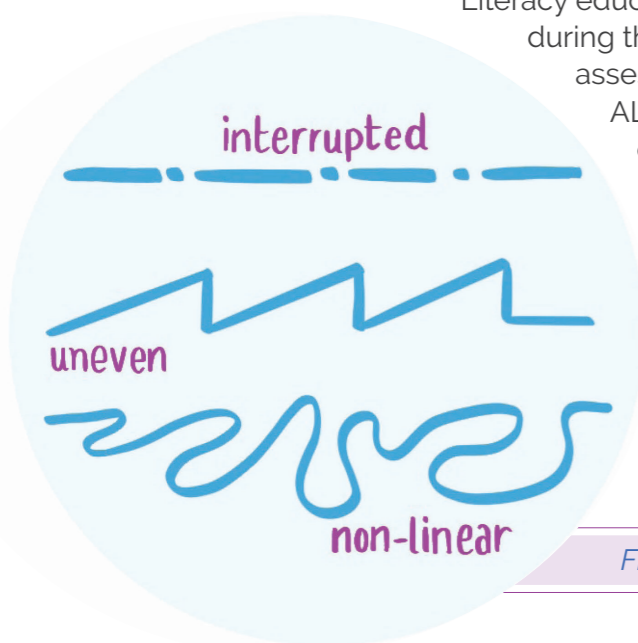

Figure 4. Appreciating varied timelines needed by learners

These diverse learning rhythms do not easily map onto existing learner assessment, engagement or accreditation processes. ALOA recommend the "phased development of literacy skills in adult literacy services – e.g. engagement,

Figure 5. The adult literacy learner pathway (Source: Intellectual Disabilities Report SOLAS 2021c)
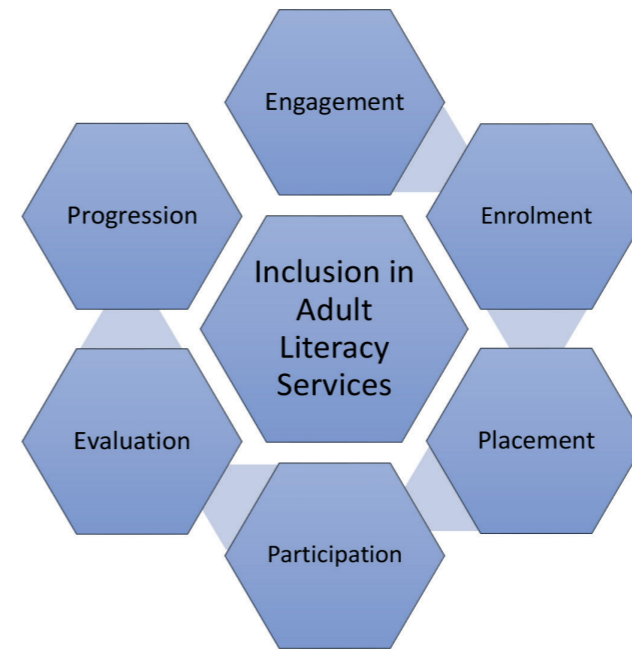
development and progression in which placement is matched to the learners' skill set and current needs with accreditation offered from development stage onward and non-accredited offered in engagement stage" (2021, p. 32).

Recognition of the different aspects needed to support literacy learners at key stages is key. This is outlined below in terms of the customary pattern of learner engagement with the Adult Literacy Services (following the framework outlined in the Inclusion of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities Report (SOLAS, 2021c)).

Each stage represents a step in the learner's journey and a key point of engagement between the Adult Literacy Services and the learner. While these are outlined below as discrete stages, these stages in the learning pathway are not necessarily linear or unconnected but intermingle and overlap as discussed throughout this review.

Promotion and Engagement

This stage supports potential learners' initial communications and engagement with Adult Literacy Services. It requires staff to practice inclusive practices in awareness raising, communications and promotion, building outreach, collaborative networks and partnerships, and the establishment of a welcoming, supportive and accessible environment and relationships during a learner's first contact with Adult Literacy Services.

Enrolment

This stage involves the initial learning engagement with learners to assess their skills, recognition of prior learning and capabilities. It also involves identifying people's learning goals and preferences in order to develop an individual learning plan and put in place the required supports.

Placement

The placement stage matches the learner with an appropriate programme, group and tutor. It requires a nuanced capacity from adult literacy staff to build an initial relationship that enables them to explore people's existing knowledge, experiences and capacities and to match them with an appropriate service and level. The placement process is recognised as a challenging aspect of inclusion, which needs to recognise that adult learners are a diverse group with wide variations in educational experiences, backgrounds and skills. Careful planning for placement needs to occur which includes the guidance of the Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS).

Participation

This stage is about ensuring full inclusion in the learning environment so adult learners can develop a sense of identity as learners and a sense of collective belonging in the learning community. Successful participation occurs when the learner is achieving their learning goals. It requires a supportive and inclusive service-wide environment, the implementation of appropriate teaching and learning

methodologies, ongoing relationship-building and support for the learner, group and the adult literacy staff, as well as access to other supports and external agencies when needed.

Evaluation

The evaluation stage assesses learners' progression towards their learning goals. It re- examines teaching and learning approaches to assess effective strategies that work well with each learner. It includes the development of a learner-centred assessment and evaluation process, and the measurement and reporting of attainments of indicators and targets used in the Adult Literacy Service.

Progression

The progression stage focuses on when the learner encounters a point of completion in their current learning journey and is ready to progress to another stage of learning, employment or other form of personal development. It requires identifying appropriate progression routes, balancing learner's progression needs with the needs of the service and funding requirements in a way that is learner-centred. The role of other supports and agencies is key in progression. There is a key role for the adult guidance and information service, as well as associated support agencies and partners in supporting and linking people to the supports needed in a whole-of-government approach.

While the other stages above are discussed as part of the pedagogical section below, specific issues that come to light during the progression stage are discussed below, as these have wider implications across the FET sector. In particular, the impact of annual targets requirements on learners' progression in the Adult Literacy Services is key, as discussed below.

Tensions arise when the learner-centred nature of placement and progression can mean that learners choose to complete unaccredited programmes or move at a different pace and rhythm through accreditation. Targets for a 10 per cent increase in the number of literacy learners achieving accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 are set in each ETB's Strategic Performance Agreements as part of the raised targets for transversal skills. An AEO spoke about their concerns about learners not achieving the expected rate of certification,

We will get lambasted around it when they come back around this year as they were very interested in it last year, in our strategic [performance agreement] dialogue with them last year about the literacy figures. Why there was such a disconnect between the certification and the volume of learners we have (2021c, p. 75)

AEOs felt that a 10 per cent participation increase in the number of learners was achievable, but that the 10 per cent increased accreditation in literacy will always be challenging, if not unfeasible, given the unique biographies of its learners. (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 75)

They also highlighted how learning indicators need to be able to record engagement and progression time in more fluid ways than the current focus on annual attainment and progression rates. Qualitative indicators are recommended which can better record different paces of learning. Learning trajectories may occur during a person's life in a series of interruptions, pauses and re-engagements.

In light of these concerns, ALOA call for a review of the DEASP/ETB protocol to include a recognition that those whose literacy is at or below level 2 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) are not labour-market ready and need time and space to engage in and consolidate their learning. They contend that any protocol between statutory agencies and the ETBs should allow learners to take time before they engage, or engage in a non-accredited programmes as a way to begin work on their literacies. Similar to the learning journeys described earlier, progression needs to be considered as horizontal as well as vertical in nature and may occur across different time trajectories. (ALOA, 2021, p. 7)

The qualities and capacities of adult literacy staff

Personal qualities of tutors

The capacity to support these types and stages of learning requires particular qualities on the part of literacy staff. The capacity to work empathetically in creating positive learning relationships and environments is considered vital, with the Family Literacy report identifying "personal qualities such as patience, communication skills, and understanding of the previous learning difficulties experienced by adult learners". (SOLAS, 2020, p. 8). This requires literacy staff to have highly-developed affective capabilities, with personal qualities of empathy and patience identified as essential qualities for addressing the negative emotions about poor literacy and numeracy skills. (SOLAS, 2021a, p. 50). ALOs spoke about the need for flexibility and innovation on the part of literacy staff, describing how

> There is a huge amount of flexibility required in adult literacy, a huge capacity to multitask, to be an octopus and do at least 8 things at the one time while keeping everyone happy. It is hard on the [tutors] with that level of flexibility as nothing is fixed, the learners' needs are not fixed, the class is not fixed, the centre is not fixed… they need to keep all these balls in the air and keep the learner at the heart of it. (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 65)

The personal and empathic qualities of literacy tutors are cited as core in supporting learners to regaining confidence in their learning and literacy capacities (Crowther *et al.*, 2010; Allatt, 2020). These personal qualities give tutors the capacity to use teaching approaches or pedagogy vital for literacy learning are explored below.

Pedagogical capacities

The learner-centred, relational and responsive approach to literacy discussed in the literature is echoed through the types of pedagogy or teaching approaches being used by literacy staff. It is based in perspectives of literacy as having "differing meanings, purposes and benefits according to context" (Allatt, 2020: 42). These pedagogical practices are evident throughout the various stages of the design, delivery and assessment of literacy programmes as outlined previously.

Literacy staff need to be adept at course development and adaptation to fulfil learning objectives. Given the unique and personalised nature of the literacy learning for each learner, staff need to be reflexive in programme design and spend a lot of time in developing content specifically adapted to each learner's needs. The capacity for reflexivity and flexibility during learning is key. Schön (1983) describes this as 'reflection in action' or the capacity to think on our feet, which is vital for adult literacy tutors. It requires that tutors are well prepared and planned for their sessions in order to be able to responsive in this way.

Creativity is a core element of this responsive pedagogy in order to support learners. Creative responses to support literacy learning include the use of mosaics, art work, craft, music, role plays, quizzes, word searches, cooking, photographs, internet searches and historical archiving. They are characterised by different forms and multi-modal ways to support learning, to allow learners to experience the text of a novel in an interactive way that is not dependent solely on reading or writing capacities (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 70).

Sewing classes provide a practical way of encountering literacy and numeracy, where it is ever-present in discussions about

> cutting things neatly and incorporating seam allowances… So they really have to think of the conscious cut. And … metric measures - millimetres and centimetres and so on measuring, and adding seam allowances … things like symmetry, and parallel lines, and how to spell them properly. (SOLAS, 2020, p. 88)

Numeracy is explored in embodied and spatial ways during walks around the locality, learning about linear structures and proportions through photographing and studying local buildings and bridges. A literacy group described doing a role play of buying something from a shopping catalogue in class

and the following week going out to a café to order from a menu and independently paying their bills as part of numeracy and budgeting (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 69). These different media and pedagogies are carefully and responsively designed by staff to support literacy learning in multi-modal ways that resonate with learners' capacities, experiences and life contexts. This learner-centred approach is core to adult literacy pedagogy (Duckworth and Tett, 2019)

Supporting peer networking and sharing of resources

Networking and sharing resources is acknowledged as a core part of consolidating a collective sense of professional identity and building professional capacities. This is key to the formation of a professional sense of identity and the ecologies of practice to which Stronach *et al*. (2002) refer. Existing research describes how literacy staff express a strong desire to network and to create stronger communities of practice to share practices and resources, as is evident in groups and networks across Irish adult education such as AONTAS, NALA, ETBI and Community Education Network (CEN), trade unions and professional associations in FET such as ALOA.

The Family Literacy Report calls for tutor solidary networks to be encouraged and promoted, so that all staff have a sense of belonging and sharing in the local literacy strategy. (SOLAS, 2020, p. 114). Building communities of practice provides spaces for discussion about literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and adult learning pedagogies, as well as the sharing of resources and information about inclusive practices.

Communities of practice to address specific needs and develop resources are needed where there is a lack of specific resources, such as for adults with intellectual disabilities and for adult numeracy. Existing communities of practice are evident in apprenticeships as discussed later in section on current inclusive practices in FET. Adult literacy staff suggest 'communities of practice' to support and develop expertise and skills.

PLD programmes also need to be coordinated more widely to increase awareness about them and to create conditions to support the emergence of communities of practice across FET centres which are accessible for all staff. (SOLAS, 2021a, p. 56)

Staffing conditions and issues

Part of the professional identity formation and recognition of a profession is the conditions of its staff. This is a core issue across FET and for the adult literacy services. ALOA call for the terms and conditions for literacy staff to be brought into line with equivalent staff in other FET programmes. They argue that there needs to be parity of structures and supports for the Adult Literacy staffing in the following roles in all ETBs: ALOs, resource workers, tutors, ancillary staff. Posts of responsibility are needed to recognise and support the additional duties that staff undertake beyond the normal adult literacy tutoring work. Tett and Maclachlan describe how adult literacy and numeracy tutors in the Scottish context "are amongst the most over-stretched group of educational providers who often are on hourly-paid contracts with little access to staff development" (2008, 665). Hodkinson et al. (2005) describes the "'large amounts of 'underground' working, whereby tutors routinely engaged in working well beyond their job descriptions'." (2005, p. 2 cited in Coffield et al. 2007).

Recruitment to these roles needs to stretch beyond to 'entry-level' posts to allow for career progression in response to the increased workload associated with reporting and with the expansion of inclusion goals across FET (Murray *et al*., 2014; SOLAS, 2021).

As a consequence, literacy tutor availability was a challenge and coordinators struggled to find an appropriate tutor for shorter courses or at short notice. (Family Literacy Report, 2020, p. 102). This has obvious impacts for planning and staffing across FET sector. The changing nature of the work is also significant. An increase in administration and support staffing is evident in the Adult Literacy Services and FET though the provision of more ALOs and Literacy Resource Workers nationally is needed to manage the increased administrative burden associated with the role (ALOA, 2021, p. 47-48).
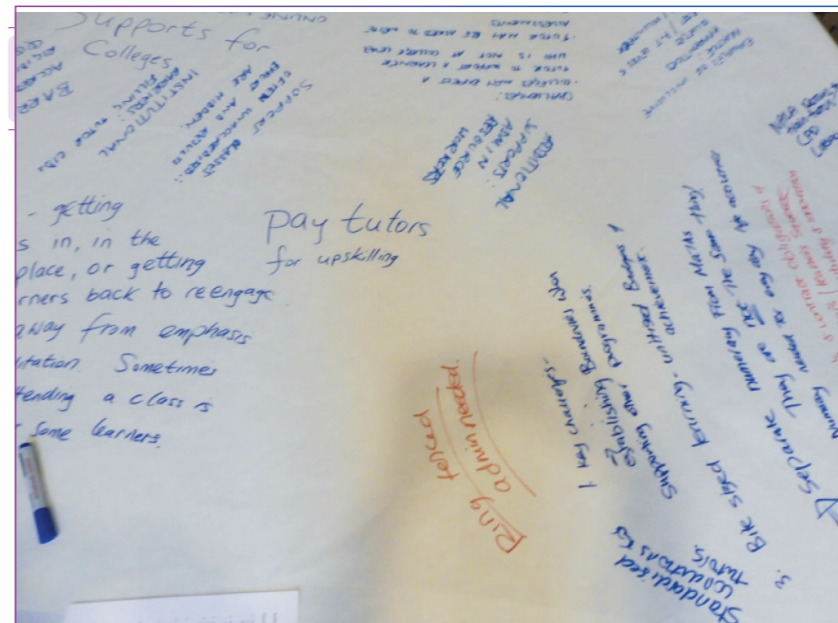

Figure 6. staffing conditions and supports

The current recruitment and progression for staff do not encourage experienced literacy staff to stay, nor do they encourage experienced people from other roles to bring their expertise to the adult literacy service. As a consequence of these conditions, there is a high turnover of literacy staff and the services have to continually train new people, thereby stretching the capacity of the service further. (ALOA, 2021, p. 47).

The adult literacy services need to be supported by greater levels of staff training and PLD (SOLAS, 2020, 2021a, 2021c). Upskilling for existing staff and training for newly recruited staff is needed. This needs to be matched by an equivalent need for funding for additional IT equipment, broadband and IT services.

PLD about literacy and inclusion that literacy staff have developed needs to be more widely publicised across the FET sector, with staff supported to attend in terms of time and payment as applicable. The additional literacy, numeracy and digital literacy supports that the Adult Literacy Service provide by supporting adults to get accreditation in other courses and providing FET staff with PLD is currently not recognised in the system and needs to be recognised as part of ALS staff workload. (ALOA: 2021, p. 34-36)

Inclusion, integrated programmes and outreach literacy

Adult literacy provision also occurs in sites other than Adult Literacy Centres, such as work with community groups, Tús, Community Employment Schemes, local partnerships, Trade Unions, Workplaces and NALA's telephone and online Distance Learning Service (NALA, 2020, p. 51). Literacy, numeracy and digital skills are also integrated into other programmes in Community Education and Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), Youthreach and Apprenticeship. The work of Adult Literacy Services in these range of outreach and integrated contexts means its staff work across an enormously varied scale, type and context of delivery which is unique in education. These have placement, engagement and outreach components.

As noted earlier, the integration of literacy across broader adult and further education programmes has been a key discourse of international policy reports in recent years and has come to the fore in national FET policies as well. Consultations for these processes include a strong emphasis on an integrated whole-of-government approach to literacy which involves clearer collaboration between all of relevant agencies. (SOLAS, 2021)

Outreach provision acknowledges the challenging context for many adults to access education, particularly in rural areas, those with disabilities, and those with family or work commitments, who do not have the means - financially or physically - to travel long distances to a FET centre. Outreach is also key for awareness-raising, providing taster courses and local word-of-mouth, which are formative in building learners' confidence and interest in progressing their learning. Like initial access to literacy, outreach is a deeply interpersonal engagement and reliant on emphatic and skilled interpersonal capacities amongst its staff. The creation of a role of a community outreach worker would be an invaluable resource. (ALOA, 2021, p. 6)

The changing landscape of global political, economic and social life faced by the Irish society places a continual demand for lifelong learning including literacy and numeracy as an integrated part of life. Vocational education and work-based training continues to be vital, with continual demands for training, reskilling and changing jobs and careers throughout people's working life. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ERSI) research report on literacy, numeracy and activation among the unemployed reveals that work-specific training for people with literacy and numeracy needs can help to enhance employment prospects by up to three times the average (ESRI, 2012).

Workplace basic education is provided by NALA and the Skills for Work programme, with literacy and numeracy playing a key role. NALA's 2021 report on learning to work describes how 59 per cent of people reported that their literacy or numeracy needs stopped them from going for a job they wanted, or they had turned down jobs or the chance to take part in training offered in the workplace. (NALA, 2021) Pathways to Work 2016-2021[26] sets out the Government's strategy to engage with and support the unemployed to get back into the labour market, including goals for education and literacy that acknowledge that people need to train and retrain in light of their changing work conditions, jobs and careers. Changing skills requirements and regulations within workplaces which workers and management need to learn are highlighted in the National Skills Strategy 2025.

Current inclusive practices in FET

Fostering Inclusion is a core pillar of the current FET strategy 2020-2024, echoing the long history of inclusive practices, which have been a feature of the FET system. In recent strategic plans, this has been framed as active inclusion, with ETBI's position paper on active inclusion, calling for the current definition to be broadened,

> giving all learners the opportunities and supports to actively participate in society in a way that increases personal, social, educational, community and employment benefits and outcomes. (ETBI, 2021, p. 78)

The Adult Literacy for Life Strategy also promotes a "cross-Government, cross-economy and cross-society approach... that can help create a more equal, inclusive Ireland for all where everyone feels they can participate and belong." (SOLAS, 2021, p. 33). This section provides an overview of some current examples of inclusive literacy practices in FET which provide potential learning for future engagement. This seeks to acknowledge not only current practices, but also the long history and extensive range of inclusion that has always been a feature of the Adult Literacy Services, many of which are outlined in the case studies of the active inclusion position paper (ETBI, 2021).

The 'Support to Apprentices' sub-group of the National Advisory Committee (NAC) co-ordinates best practice for literacy and numeracy supports to apprentices. It provides a forum for sharing resources across the country. This subgroup recommended that literacy and numeracy supports be established in every Training Centre, with a resource worker appointed in each centre. A central portal for the Support to Apprentices Group was established on the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) library, with funding available through ETBI to produce materials. It was produced with ETBI and ALOs, Adult Basic Education (ABE) numeracy tutors and resource workers, in collaboration with instructors from the individual trades (ALOA, 2021, p. 5).

ALOA are also providing in-house, tailored educational support to FET training centres. For example, the work that is happening in GRETB to integrate literacy into the Training Centres, which can be explored on ALOA's website, is summarised below (ALOA, 2021, p. 5).

In 2015, an Adult Literacy Organiser was transferred to the GRETB Training Centre to embed Literacy and Numeracy support into the range of apprenticeships in the Training Centre, in line with point 2.2 in FET Strategy 2014-2019, which aimed to "devise and implement a strategy to promote literacy and numeracy across FET." Literacy and Numeracy support is now a core part of the fabric of GRETB Training Centre and is embedded as a natural support in the Apprenticeship services. This was

developed as a whole-centre approach based in a holistic learning approach, with the full support and awareness of all staff in the Centre. Literacy Tutor Training Courses have been attended by GRETB staff from other departments, including Reception, Services to Business (STB) as well as Instructors. An additional booklet, entitled 'Ideas for Integrating Literacy into Craft Apprenticeships' is available to all and Dyslexia testing using the Lads Plus disk is also available. GRETB has also collaborated with other Training Centres around the country to develop this support programme in an ongoing manner and to share resources nationally, such as the Maths Electrical Assessment, induction materials and the Study and Learning Guide (ALOA, 2021, p. 5).

ALOA supports innovation and development of literacy services by providing a forum for colleagues from across the country to network with each other and to exchange ideas. An example of this is evident between Donegal ETB and City of Dublin ETB (CDETB). An Adult Literacy Service in CDETB created an educational magazine posted to students to work on the exercises in this magazine with the support of their tutors. This was shared with ALOA colleagues with Donegal ETB creating a similar document tailored for the Donegal context. In turn, the Donegal ALO shared their comprehensive critical literacy teaching and learning tool with Dublin. (ALOA, 2021, p. 8)

This has continued through the pandemic and is available on ALOA's website. Some ETBs developed websites or adapted websites already in use as a teaching conduit. Several literacy services created YouTube channels to deliver tutorials to their students who had the requisite literacy and digital skills to access them. CMETB literacy service joined with their colleagues in community education to create this channel of short lessons in everything from how to add in Excel 8 to how to make a face mask. Clare Family Learning created an online tutorial of ideas for home-schooling. Most of these resources are available on ALOA's website, which acts, among other things, as a repository for ALOs to share materials and ideas with their colleagues nationwide (ALOA, 2021, p. 7).

Partnerships and interagency relationships in FET

Working in partnerships is key in literacy learning, as it builds sustained and ongoing collaborations that support learners in multi-faceted ways across different spheres and time periods of their learning and lives. These collaborations occur in the formal spaces of the learning environment as well as the informal spaces of learning.

Partnerships between organisations can be defined as "strategic alliances that involve a sharing of resources and responsibility to achieve a common objective" (Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 1998, p 2). They can be seen in terms of shared values such as "joint commitment to long-term interaction, shared responsibility for achievement, reciprocal obligation, equality, mutuality and balance of power" (Fowler, 2000, p. 3). Brehn argues that it is the combination of the "organisational nature of partnership with its intrinsically relational – almost personal – dimension that gives partnership its distinctive characteristics" (2001, p. 14). Partnerships involve organisations with different values and structures who come together with common purpose to produce a synergetic effect and to achieve shared aims (Cardini, 2006). This does not always operate smoothly, especially if there is a lack of clarity or common purpose when confusion can occur about the specific functions and responsibilities of the agencies involved in a partnership.

The FET sector is characterised by its extensive web of partnerships, which are very influential for the inclusive support of its learners. Different scales, responsibilities and nature of arrangements and relationships between partners involved in FET is important to note. Some partnerships involve direct collaborations with ongoing primary relationships and clear collaborative arrangements to develop sustained responsive, needs-based literacy and numeracy strategies, as occurs for example in family literacy or with disability agencies (SOLAS 2020, 2021c). Partnerships with other agencies such as State Departments in the field may be more distant, involving secondary relationships who "participate less frequently and as local circumstances dictate" (SOLAS, 2020, p.105). They are, however, vital in awareness-raising and supporting learners to engage with the Adult Literacy Services.

These connections can also occur in informal social instances, which provide a key feedback mechanism in all literacy contexts where the cup of tea at the start of each class or at end of term is

where a "lot of planning and feedback happens informally" (SOLAS, 2020, p. 90). It can provide key opportunities for community engagement and independent living for those who have been isolated or segregated, including many adults with intellectual disabilities.

The wider support structures and culture of the organisation were also acknowledged as crucial. As noted earlier, the ETB Adult Education Guidance Service (AEGS) is acknowledged as key for the placement and progression processes for literacy learners.

> Their broad knowledge of ETB services means that members of the Guidance team play an important role in ensuring learners' needs can be catered for, that learners are placed with the appropriate adult education service and that learners have the necessary supports in place (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 64).

Relationships with staff in statutory and NGO agencies who are working directly with marginalised groups or individuals are crucial, and ALOA call for increased provision and availability of literacy awareness training for them (ALOA, 2021, p. 6). They highlight how other agencies can support adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy by

> Creating a welcoming, adult-appropriate, modern and professional learning space.

> Ensuring staff are appropriately trained and empathetic to literacy learners accessing the service.

> Providing high-quality classes that people want to attend.

> Using IT classes as a gateway for students to work on other literacies.

> HSCL Coordinator should be encouraged to support families to access digital literacy supports from the local ETB Literacy Service.

> Write critical media literacy into all QQI modules

> Including awareness of gender and disabilities in PLD for staff specific to IT capacity building (ALOA 2021, p. 37-38)

ALOA believe that interagency co-operation needs to be centrally coordinated rather than dependent on ad hoc local relationships. They suggest the creation of a "post of literacy-liaison staff member (a literacy ambassador) to promote literacy awareness training, support agencies/organisations and government departments in relation to literacy issues" (2021, p. 42). This cooperation needs to include an awareness of the time it takes to engage and build relationships (SOLAS 2020, 2021c). The Family Literacy research report highlights the need to recognise the "considerable work and time that is devoted to building and maintaining relationships [which] is not resourced and left very much to the good will of those involved." (SOLAS 2020a, p. 79). Those currently carrying out these roles are doing so as part of wider responsibilities and often feel overstretched and limited in their capacity (SOLAS 2020, p. 12). These research reports also highlight the lack of clarity and the misunderstandings that can occur about the specific functions and responsibilities of the FET centre and its partner agencies (SOLAS 2020, 2021c). Literacy staff in these reports describe uncertainty around the function, role and obligations of its services in relation to those of its partners in meeting inclusive requirements (SOLAS 2020, 2021c). However, the acknowledgement in the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy reminds us of why such partnerships are vital for inclusive education in its call for the Adult Literacy Services

> to be more connected to wider education, health, community development, employment and local government support to make a substantial and sustainable impact. If we can do this, there is a powerful support network available in every corner of the country which can make a real difference in people's lives (SOLAS 2021d, p. 9).

Measurement and performativity in Further Education and Training

Changes in the operational structures and culture of educational organisations has enormous implications for adult literacy. Performativity has become an increasing feature of all education systems in recent decades, in response to demands for greater transparency, accountability and measurement across the public sector (Clarke *et al.*, 2000, Lynch *et al.*, 2012). In this research, performativity is understood as "a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation" that monitors, guides and transforms education in a systemic way (Ball, 2006, p. 144).

Performativity became evident in Irish further education as a mode of regulation when the sector was reformed in the wake of the Further Education and Training Act 2013 (Murray *et al.*, 2014, Lynch and Grummell, 2018). This included the professional registration of FET educators with Higher Diploma in Further Education awards with the Teaching Council in 2013 and reforms of QQI accreditation. It also included the setting of performance targets in SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019 and in annual FET Services Plans. These targets were in line with EU targets of increasing FET lifelong learning participation by 10 per cent to help Ireland reach EU averages (SOLAS, 2017).

This has profound impacts across public sectors in Ireland including education. Ball (2006) and others describe how performativity becomes internalised into the culture and thinking of individuals and organisations. Lynch *et al.* (2015) and Grummell and Lynch (2018) document how it has impacted across Irish education, including FET.

How performativity is presented in the current FET Strategy 2020-2024 gives an insight into current policy understandings and thinking. The FET Strategy 2020-2024 identifies the three pillars of 'building skills', 'fostering inclusion' and 'facilitating pathways' as central. Within in these, the theme of 'learner and performance centred' is positioned as one of the four enabling themes of the strategy, with three priority areas identified within this to be developed in future strategic performance agreements. These three priority areas are

> robust indicators of FET success in generating outcomes of employment, progression, active inclusion, lifelong learning, meeting critical skills needs, and new models of delivery

> more effective means of representation … ensuring a clear learner voice on organisation oversight, planning provision, delivering support services, curriculum development, quality assurance and improvement, and future strategy

> creation of a 'distance travelled' tool which captures and measures 'soft' or 'transversal' skills development of learners" (SOLAS, 2019, p. 57).

A core discourse that is evident in the FET Strategy is responsiveness, with the 'building skills' pillar focusing on how the FET system can develop different types of skills that are responsive to the changing economic, technological and social needs (SOLAS, 2019, p. 32). This echoes a broader emphasis on change and responsiveness in international policy-making analysed by Ball and Exley (2010) in the UK context, Taylor (2004) in Australia and Milana (2012) across Europe.

The 'facilitating pathways' pillar is presented in the FET Strategy in terms of learning pathways, supporting clear transitions and progression into, within and from FET (SOLAS, 2020, p. 51). This has significance for ALS in terms of how inclusion of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy is prioritised as a pathway in the National Adult Literacy for Learning strategy (SOLAS, 2021).

These pillars combine to create an acknowledgement in the FET Strategy 2020-2024 of the need for a clear and agile structured system. How these three qualities of clarity, agility and responsiveness are balanced in the system's imperatives for performativity evidence and how much is left to individual staff or centre's adaptability is crucial. Increasingly, system requirements and measurable indicators and outputs for accountability and performativity squeeze out individual agency, flexibility and responsiveness, especially for the transversal and qualitative aspects which are crucial concerns for education (Lynch *et al.*, 2015). This framing continues the concerns raised by the previous FET strategy 2014-2019, as the concept of 'inclusion' was re-framed to an individualised and employment orientated 'active inclusion' which has to be accounted for and within 'evidence base' discourse in policy resourcing of adult education provision (Shannon, 2019; ETBI, 2021).

Performance measurement tools and indicators in current FET practice

Newman (2017) highlights how evidence-base policy-making creates a 'hierarchy of evidence, which favours some forms of knowledge over equally valid forms' (2017, p. 218). Learners' knowledge and experiences that are so central to how adult literacy comes into tension with evidence-based knowledge and how curriculum-based forms of knowledge dominate the current management systems for education. The research reports commissioned by SOLAS (2020, 2021a, 2021c) raise key concerns about whether current data measurement approaches can capture the responsive and transformative capacities of learning in the Adult Literacy Services. They highlight two key points:

> Challenges posed by current data measurement approaches and the type of information they can record.

> Development of qualitative performance indicators to capture the specific features of learner identities and the rhythms of literacy learning.

The disparity between the reality of people's varied learning rhythms and journeys described in earlier sections and the use of data management systems and performance targets is identified as a continuous source of tension in adult literacy (SOLAS, 2020, 2021a, 2021c). Literacy staff in the research reports describe how the transversal and lifelong learning outcomes, which are significant markers of literacy learning are not easily recognised within formal monitoring and evaluation systems. Critical for adult literacy is the "tension between targets 3 (transversal skills) and 4 (participation/ lifelong learning) and the other goals in the performance agreement strategies of ETBs". (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 74).
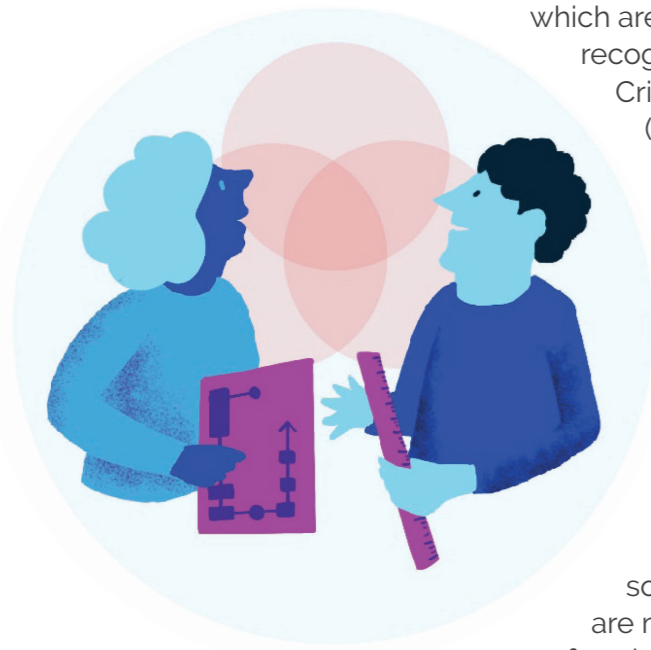

Figure 7. Responsive organisations and measurement systems

Transversal skills (or soft skills) are "core learning outcomes… native language, communications, mathematics, digital media, employability and citizenship competences, critical thinking, problem solving and making arguments" (QQI, 2018, p.6). They are measured in the Strategic Performance Agreements of each ETB, which emerged as part of the first FET Strategy 2014-2019. Goal 2 of SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019 outlined the aim of ensuring that "FET provision is equitable and inclusive, and reflects government policies, leading to enhanced access and participation for individuals who are socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged". Part of this goal was a "10 percent increase in the rate of certification on courses primarily focused on social mobility-skills development that is transversal in nature" (2017, p 16).

Transversal learning outcomes that are important for adult literacy include key personal and interpersonal capacities such as learner confidence, capacity for critical thinking, communications skills, collaboration and group work, relationship building, time management, study skills. As described in earlier sections, they include learning outcomes across the affective, cognitive, socio-cultural, economic and political domains. The holistic, learner-centred approach of the Adult Literacy Services requires a way to recognise and record these "unintended outcomes of the services" that occurred through the caring relationships at the heart of inclusive learning (Redmond, 2015, p. 58).

For systems purposes, the measurement of transversal skills has been translated into the performativity goals of the annual Strategic Performance Agreements between SOLAS and each ETB. Literacy staff argue for greater recognition of the role of unaccredited programmes not only in leading learners to an accredited phase, but also to enhance inclusion though personal and social development (SOLAS, 2020, p. 51).
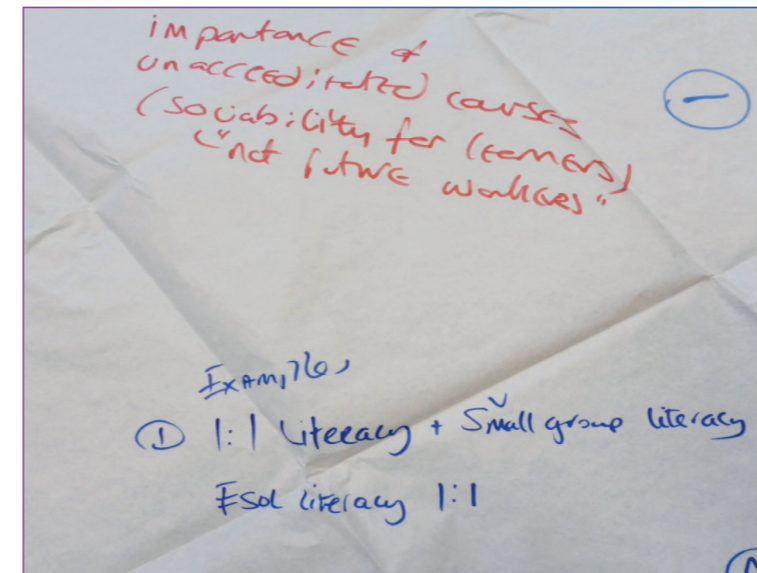
The skills that they [learners] might learn… are on a wider breadth of skills, in many cases soft skills and personal development and confidence and life skills, they don't necessarily fit the boxes of QQI, but they can be the things which can lead to a more independent life and less co-dependency on other people (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 50).

Figure 8: Importance of unaccredited courses

The lack of recognition of such performance metrics not only impacts on the recording and visibility of aspects of literacy learning, but also impacts on how they affect the learning process itself. Of particular concern is the requirement for data collection during the initial stages of learning when learners are often feeling uncertain. The Family Literacy Report calls for the development of means of gathering "data required by funders and national administrative systems in a way that does not also alienate new learners and overburden staff" (2020, p. 73). ALOA call for an ETB-DEASP protocol to be developed which recognises that the Adult Literacy Services and the individual learner are best placed to decide the nature of their literacy engagement and how it should progress. (2021, p. 7).

Broader concerns are raised in the SOLAS literacy research reports about the challenge that the online Further Education and Training Courses Hub (FETCH)[27] information and application processes posed for some literacy learners. they can act as a "barrier" which can be "intimidating" for literacy learners as they engage firstly with the Adult Literacy Services (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 58; Condron, 2018). Timing is key here where, as a first point of contact, the FETCH portal and the Learner Detail Form[28] can present accessibility issues for some learners with literacy, confidence or cognitive difficulties. Completing these online forms without support or guidance can be an intimidating experience for some learners due to the literacy capacity needed, the personal information required and the complexity of some questions (SOLAS, 2020, p. 69).

Many Adult Literacy Services have put in place supports locally to help people use the FETCH portal, offering plain English and abridged versions of the form and supporting learners to complete both FETCH and PLSS processes. Time and resources are needed to be invested locally to train literacy staff to understand the demands of the reporting system, so they, in turn, can explain to learners the reasoning behind and the use of the personal nature of the data being collected (SOLAS, 2020, p. 69). Although these supports work, many staff feel that creating a more accessible portal is preferable and would demonstrate high-level support and commitment to inclusive practice throughout FET (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 58-59). ALOA similarly call for a review of the registration process for students to reduce the barrier to participation presented by the PLSS Form (2021, p. 12)

These factors highlight the broader context and need for an inclusive system based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles for administrative and performance management aspects of the system as well as in the learning processes and structures of FET (SOLAS, 2020b). ETBI convened an Expert Group to develop a tool to capture the Wider Benefits of Learning in FET programmes, with links to PLSS to provide the sector with robust qualitative data on the wider benefits of engaging in learning.

---

27   Further Education and Training Course Hub – see: https://www.fetchcourses.ie/
28   Programme Learner Support System – see: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Programme%20Learner%20Support%20System%20EQU%20VET%20-%20Fiona%20Maloney%20ETBI.pdf

Broader benefits of learning approaches and models

The challenges and limitations of current data metrics are acknowledged by SOLAS and ETBI in their emergent work in developing metrics that can chart the broad benefits of learning in personal development and confidence-building. ETBI are currently working on a distance-travelled tool similar to the My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool[29] created under the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018 – 2022. The tool is intended to capture the broad benefits of learning in the following five areas:

1. Literacy and numeracy confidence
2. Confidence, goal setting and self-efficacy
3. Communication skills
4. Connection with others
5. General work readiness

Generally, research about models measuring social aspects of performativity are increasingly emphasising approaches that position metrics in a broader social and equality context. This social shift is evident globally in equality frameworks and wealth models such as Ul Haq's human development approach[30], Sen's (1999) capability approach and applied models like Pickett and Wilkinson's (2009) *The Spirit Level*. The challenge remains of translating these equality-orientated principles and capabilities into indicators and measurement frameworks that can be used in specific systems. Typically, the quantitative focus that dominates in existing models flattens the qualitative nature of the human development and learning experiences.

As argued in the previous section, models that can recognise and make visible the transversal skills evident in literacies are crucial. These include the personal and social aspects of enhanced self-confidence and learning capacities, greater participation in family and public life, enriched civic engagement and democratic expression, increased digital citizenship capacity, improved levels of health and well-being as a result of inclusion. These models could also capture a broader range of organisational, teamwork, communications and management skills relevant for employment and economic participation. These need to be based in a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach which encourages systems and solutions that are accessible for all persons regardless of their age, size, ability or disability (SOLAS, 2020a).

ALOA call for the wider benefits of learning to be recognised, so ETBs can gather and compile the testimonials and positive feedback from students annually and report on that alongside our Strategic Performance Agreement targets (2021, p. 46). This needs to occur in a manner that considers how some aspects of learning or learner profiles are invisible in current measurement metrics and hence from consideration for decision-making or resource allocation. Understanding how and why data is collected and used in the way that it is across the literacy and FET services is key, and this points to the need for professional development with staff about the purposes and use of data management systems. Such considerations also need to be cognisant that this can also occur for valid reasons such as respecting the rights of each individual over self-disclosure of information. For example, it is the right of the learner to choose – or not - to disclose a long-lasting condition or illness on the PLSS form when they enrol. Literacy staff report in the Family Literacy Report that information in relation to learner characteristics like age, gender and ethnicity was hard to access on PLSS after initial data entry (2020, p. 49). While this is understandable from a disclosure and GDPR rationale, it can have the unintended consequence that these features remain under-reported or invisible in the data collection categories and hence invisible for future planning purposes.

In place of clear and user-friendly data methods, other information is often used as a proxy to estimate numbers and profiles of learners, which can lead to "provisional and partial estimations of learners with disabilities in Adult Literacy Services" (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 34). This is again indicative of the unintended

consequences of how current data management systems are used. There is a need for ongoing dialogue between the education agencies led by SOLAS, and literacy staff and learners to develop, monitor and refine a robust and responsive data measurement system that captures the diversity of literacy learning that occurs in socially-situated contexts.

Performativity and the setting of learning targets

The commitment to inclusion throughout all aspects of the organisation becomes key when we look at another aspect of performativity in FET – the setting of targets through the Strategic Performance Agreements. This raises key issues for the Adult Literacy Services who are:

> expected to show a 10 per cent increase in literacy learner participation numbers and 10 per cent increase in rates of certification over three years in their ETB Strategic Performance Agreements. AEOs felt that the 10 per cent participation increase in the number of learners was achievable but that the 10 per cent increased accreditation in literacy will always be challenging, if not unfeasible, given the unique biographies of learners with intellectual disabilities." (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 75)

This causes tensions with the varied learning trajectories and learning rhythms documented in SOLAS research reports (2020, 2021a, 2021c). There is a fundamental tension within the DES *Adult Literacy Programme - Operational Guidelines for Providers* which notes

> Adult literacy learners' right to attend for personal, family or other reasons without working towards a formal qualification should be respected and it is acknowledged that many learners attend exclusively in order to address specific goals relating to reading, writing and numeracy in everyday life, and not with the objective of gaining qualifications. While accreditation is not a requirement of participation, the Adult Literacy Programme should provide the option of appropriate accreditation to all students and should encourage all students to avail of this option and progress. Progression is one of the cornerstones of further education, along with access and transfer. (DES, 2013, p. 8)

This balance between respecting learners' rights and needs, ensuring that accreditation is not a requirement of participation and giving the option and encouragement towards progression is a multiple and complex balancing act of competing demands.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) established a Reference Group to review the award standards at Levels 1-4 in 2018. The subsequent report highlights a range of similar issues and encourages:

> > consistency across providers,

> > coherence of learner's experience,

> > clarity about progression,

> > greater suitability of standards (in relation to societal, work-related and digital literacy skills), and

> > enhancing flexibility in broader learning outcomes (QQI, 2018, p 4).

This is particularly challenging for services such as adult literacy which has learners from varied backgrounds with diverse capacities and progression levels. The Intellectual Disabilities Report reported that "students count against you when you keep them for literacy maintenance purposes. How does that work in this drive towards progression?" (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 78). The Numeracy Report (2021a) and Family Literacy Report (2020) similarly describe the challenge of matching the unique profile of literacy and numeracy services to the broader requirements and strategic targets of performance measurement. This is the "challenge of embedding both a learner-centred and performance-centred FET system … [which] cannot be recognised within formal 'hard' performance metrics" (SOLAS, 2020: 57). As Lynch reminds us:

---

29   My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool | Pobal
30   http://hdr.undp.org/

Focusing on measurable outputs has the ultimate impact of defining human relationships in [learning] in transactional terms, as the means to an end – the end being high performance and productivity that can be coded and marketed. This reduces first-order social and moral values to second-order principles; trust, integrity, care and solidarity are subordinated to regulation, control and competition. (2015: 16).

Public discourses about adult literacy and numeracy

Part of the drive towards performance measurement targets in literacy has been public concerns about adult literacy and numeracy levels in recent years (Hislop, 2011; Hamilton, 2017). These concerns have been strongly influenced by the findings of large-scale international datasets on educational outcomes such as PIAAC, as well as the use of national datasets collected by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Department of Education and Skills (DES), National Disability Authority and SOLAS. While these quantitative datasets provide a general profile and information about literacy learners, critical reflectivity is needed about the impact and limitations to how such data is collected and used. Hamilton (2012, 2017), O'Keeffe (2020) and others highlight how "large datasets like PIAAC are also persuasive at the level of the public imagination, focusing attention on measurable outcomes rather than broader learning processes and impacts for people's lives" (SOLAS, 2021c, p. 20).

Many elements of the functional literacy approach are still evident in mainstream measurements of literacy, such as the 'Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies' (PIAAC) surveys based on quantifiable measures and functional indicators of literacy[31]. This approach decontextualises literacy skills from their social context to a focus on individual acquisition of technical literacy skills. Individuals are viewed as being responsible for their literacy development. The selection of the criteria and measures of data are primarily driven by economic indicators rather than the social impact of education (Hamilton, 2017). Feeley (2009) argues that such instrumental approaches to education shape meaning about the nature and value of literacy, of who is literate and why. This framing sets on course public assumptions about unmet literacy needs being linked to dysfunctions in individuals, families and groups, rather than a failure on the part of the state and society (Feeley, 2009).

The results of these largescale datasets became very significant in driving national attention on literacy and numeracy. This occurred at school level firstly, with the 10-year Literacy and for Life Strategy emerging from national concern about the decline in Ireland's literacy and numeracy performance in OECD's PISA 2009 tests (Hislop, 2011). Ongoing concern about adult literacy and numeracy levels in PIAAC results (NALA, 2020) has been part of the general drive behind the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy (SOLAS, 2021).

The introduction of international comparative testing of adult literacy and numeracy through PIAAC provides valuable quantitative country-level data on learning performance. However, its data collection methods have also highlighted "concerns about how to effectively assess adults' numeracy skills at the local level, in authentic everyday contexts." (SOLAS, 2021a, p. 52). Large scale standardised measurement tools tend to flatten and render invisible the learning that occurs dynamically in its local context (Cumming and Gal, 2000). Hamilton (2012, 2014) contends that the use of numbers and quantification to measure literacy decontextualises literacy skills from the socially-situated context that learning occurs in. Instead, the "performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as a measure of productivity or output or displays of 'quality'" (Ball, 2006, p. 144).

When the socially-situated context of learning is not considered, "measures cease to reflect real literacy skill and are restricted to being test-based proxy measures of performance on mechanistic aspects of literacy" (SOLAS, 2020, p. 22). Oughton (2018) highlights the consequences for the assessment of adult numeracy as:

the relevance and accuracy of test items used by PIAAC can be challenged since these

items do not assess how individuals solve numerical problems in the authentic contexts they encounter in their everyday lives. Thus, PIAAC test items are likely to underestimate adults' numeracy skills, and the actual levels of adult numeracy may not be as poor as those reported in international studies. (SOLAS, 2021a, p. 19).

Carvalho and Costa (2015) and Ryan (2019) also recount how variations in systemic data collection about learners leads to a neglect or misrecognition of learning characteristics and needs. This is very pertinent when we look at the discussion about the attempts at comparative analysis from different national datasets or the varied proxies used in the absence of clear data in the SOLAS literacy research reports (SOLAS, 2020, 2021c).

Conclusion

This chapter discusses some of the key themes emerging from a review of literature which is relevant to inclusive practices in adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. It drew on a wide range of national and international literature across different sectors of education and related areas to consider current practices and policies relevant for support literacy development across FET, before discussing the key values and themes informing contemporary thinking about adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

---

31   The 'Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies' (PIAAC) is a cyclical, large-scale study that was developed under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Available at: https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/

Research methods

This chapter reviews the research design, which was used to conduct this research, giving an overview of its research design, research methods and analysis, as well as considering the ethical implications of this research.

The initial research design was discussed and agreed with ALOA during summer 2021, before being submitted to Maynooth University's research ethics subcommittee for approval in summer 2021.

The aim of the research was to develop a more inclusive approach to literacy, numeracy & digital literacy supports across the FET sector in line with inclusive objectives of FET strategy 2020-2024

The research objectives were as follows:

> map examples of how the Adult Literacy Service supports inclusive practice and possibilities across FET

> explore key strategies, approaches, issues & possibilities in supporting inclusion of literacy development across FET

The research was conducted in the following stages and timeline.

Research stage	Timing
Desk research to map current research, policy and literature	July- August 2021
Interviews with FET staff involved in literacy support	Sept – Dec 2021
Consultative workshops with ALOs	Nov 2021
Online survey	Nov 2021
Online feedback meeting	Dec 2021
Analysis and write-up	Dec- Jan 2021

Table 1. Research stages and timeline

1. Desk research to map current research, policy and literature

A literature review was conducted to identify the current context, practices and themes of relevance for an inclusive approach to literacy across the FET sector. The review was based on an extensive library search of key research reports, policies, empirical studies, theoretical literature and other relevant sources. It used documentary analysis to identify approaches and practices to inclusion in FET and situated this in the broader domain of social and educational inclusion in Ireland and internationally (McCulloch, 2004). The review ranged across the fields of further and adult education, disability and social sciences. The findings of this desk research shaped the research and are outlined in chapter 2 and 3.

2. Interviews with key literacy staff (Sept – Dec 2021)

Individual interviews with FET staff involved in literacy support was conducted to map the current experiences and issues in supporting literacy development across the FET sector. Interviews were completed with FET staff in positions as programme coordinators, support staff and tutors working in FET services such as PLCs, Apprenticeship, ESOL, VTOS, BTEI, Community Education as well as a focus group with FET Directors. These interviews explored participants' experiences of the current context, discussed key issues and challenges, identified examples of inclusive practice and possibilities, and discussed institutional and pedagogical approaches to supportive inclusive literacy practices across

FET.

These interviews were conducted online, through individual interviews with FET staff and one focus group with FET directors. Depending on the time available, interviews took between 40 minutes and one hour. Interviews were semi-structured and flexible but guided by key questions asking participants to:

- give an overview of your role, describing the adult literacy-related aspects of your work
- discuss the key issues and challenges for the inclusion of literacy in this work
- identify examples of supporting inclusive practice and possibilities in your work Discuss the pedagogical and institutional elements that support the inclusion of literacy
- discuss what you like to see develop in your role to support inclusive adult literacy in the coming 5 years

Interviews were conducted on MS teams with recordings and transcripts created on this platform, in addition to notes taken by researchers. As per the research ethical approval from Maynooth University and GDPR agreement with SOLAS, all information from the interviews were securely stored and anonymised in transcript files and notes to ensure no individual or centre was identifiable in the research reports. For this reason, only the general role/location of staff and centre is identified throughout the report.

3. Consultative workshops with ALOs

Consultative workshops were held with ALOs following their AGM in November 2021 using a blended workshop format to give ALOs an opportunity to discuss their experiences and share their insights about developing inclusive literacy across the FET sector. The design of these workshops was informed by the initial findings of stages 1 and 2. The participative research approach of the workshop gave participants opportunities to discuss their experiences and to engage in shared dialogue through a series of structured activities to identify examples of inclusive practice and possibilities; discuss key issues and challenges of inclusive literacy and discuss institutional and pedagogical approaches to supportive inclusive literacy practices across the FET sector.
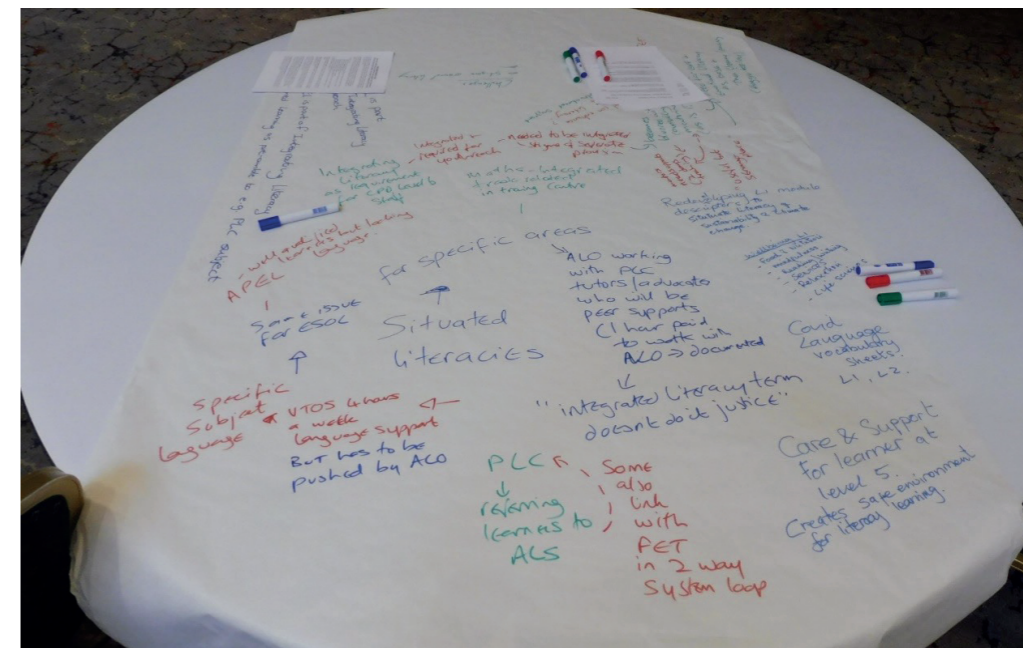
Figure 9: ALOA conference workshop

This was based on our design and facilitation of similar workshops in the recent research on the implementation of *the Guidelines on the inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services* (2018-2020). These workshops with literacy staff were designed as a series of group-based activities to facilitate a sharing of experiences, reflective activities on generative themes and key issues to facilitate group consultation and a constant recording and negotiation of ideas and experiences. 48 ALOs participated in these workshops.

4. Online survey

The findings emerging from stages 2 and 3 were further explored in an online survey circulated across FET services nationally. This is intended to give a wider group of staff across FET an opportunity to give

their insights about literacy needs and support from the perspective of their roles in the service. 43 respondents completed the survey.

The online survey was designed by the researcher in consultation with the research advisory committee, following best practice in social science research design (Cohen et al., 2011). It was first piloted with 6 participants and the wording of some questions was clarified following their suggestions. The survey was then distributed via ALOA executive across FET services nationally and completed in October and November 2021. The results of the online survey were analysed using SPSS[32] and Excel software. Survey findings are integrated into chapters 4 and 5 of the report.

5. Online feedback meeting

Initial findings from stage 1-4 were presented to ALOA members in a national online session which gave ALOA members an opportunity to discuss the findings and their implications for ALOA members and ALS.

6. Analysis and write-up

While the findings from stages 1-4 were analysed on an ongoing basis using mixed-methods analysis, they were drawn together through comparative thematic analysis in this stage. This analysis was presented initially to ALOA in the phase 5 online meeting and is written up in this research report.

Research methodology

This research used a mixed-method social science research approach, which is rooted in participative and inclusive research principles to ensure that the experiences and perspectives of all involved are respected as active participants throughout the research. The different research stages draw on documentary research methods (stage 1), qualitative interviewing (stage 2), participative dialogic methodologies (stage 3 and 5) and quantitative research methods (stage 4)

Thematic analysis accompanied by mixed-methods analysis was used to identify the emergent themes of the research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This occurred through the research stages:

1. Generative stage in the research design, desk research and individual interview stages, guided by the Research Advisory Committee to generate initial research themes and to inform the design and themes of the workshops in stage 3.

2. Confirmatory stage: Confirmatory and in-depth data analysis emerged from the structure of the feedback workshops in stage 3 with its dialogic process designed to deepen insights into, and confirm (or disconfirm), emerging patterns in the data in a systemic way through the structured activities in the workshops and through the online survey in stage 4.

3. Systematic analysis stage: This stage involved a deepening of the analysis from the different stages and discussion of them in the online feedback meeting of stage 5, before the final analysis and writing of the research report.

Research ethics

In line with good research practice (BERA, 2018), careful consideration was given to ethical issues throughout all phases of the design and conduct of this research project. We sought and were granted approval from Maynooth University's Social Science Research Ethics Subcommittee and signed a research contract with ALOA.

Key ethical issues to consider were the power relations which different people had with each other throughout this research – for example, FET directors, coordinators, support staff and tutors are all in very different and sometimes intersecting power relations with each other. Consequently, there was a risk that any participant might feel reluctant to share challenging or negative experiences or views

about their experiences of inclusion or literacy provision in the services. These issues were highlighted in the information sheet and initial invitation and discussion to the interview.

The researcher managed the data collection to fully anonymised or generalised data to create a buffer between what research participants said and what is published in the research report. Participants were given full information in an appropriate manner about all aspects of the research including the ethical process and were provided with the opportunity to withdraw whenever they wanted to, up to the finalising of this research report. Some participants mentioned identifiable features about themselves, local centres or others during the interviews and meetings. All identifiable details were anonymised and/or removed throughout the transcripts and analysis to ensure anonymity.

Throughout the research, the research team and advisory committee have tried to be sensitive to the positions, perspectives and feelings of all participants. We drew on our collective experience and work in further and adult education to create a safe and supportive atmosphere for all participants in the research. We spent time preparing for and debriefing at the end of each meeting and maintained a line of communication with participants to ensure that they know they can contact us at any point and that they are kept up to date with the research outcomes.

Role of research advisory committee

All of the research stages were guided by a research advisory committee to give a clear process and advice for the research process. The advisory committee was constituted of the researcher, ALO and literacy tutor representatives from each of the 6 regions. This committee also linked with its wider network of literacy and FET staff and learner forums to discuss the initial findings before the report is finalised. They met monthly during the project.

The role of the committee was to work together to guide the research and consultative process as outlined in stages 1-5. The research advisory committee also guided the selection process for people to be interviewed in stage 2; they supported the invitation, organisation and promotion of the workshops and survey in stage 3 and 4 amongst their organisations and networks. They also read and commented on the initial findings informing the survey (stage 4) and the online feedback meeting (stage 5). On an ongoing basis, they supported the design, conduct and dissemination of the research.

Research analysis and writing

The desk research was analysed through thematic coding of the main issues emerging from the literature. The online survey was analysed using descriptive statistical methods in SPSS (the statistical software package for social science) and translated into figures and tables using MS Excel software (Cohen et al., 2011). The transcripts from the interviews were analysed through qualitative open coding to identify the key themes of the findings. Axial coding was then used to check the validity of the analysis and to identify the relationships between different codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). A draft literature review chapter was reviewed by the research advisory committee and initial findings were presented to ALOA members in the feedback meeting. These were written into this final research report to present a rich and detailed depiction of the context and key issues in the support of inclusive literacy development across FET.

Limitations of the research

As noted throughout this chapter, the scale and nature of this research means that certain frames and conditions existed for this research and so certain limitations are evident.

The research aimed to represent the experiences and perceptions of staff in Further Education and Training about the support of inclusive literacy development across the sector. Information about the research was circulated through existing ALOA and FET networks. This means that these particular perspectives are given voice within this research and so other perspectives on these issues are not visible. Notable here are the different perspectives that other FET staff at other levels and services may

have had. The absence of the direct contribution and voices of FET learners is also acknowledged. Their views are key to research on FET, and have been considered throughout the literature review, but considered beyond the scope of this research.

The research ranges in scope from the international and national orientation of the policy and literature review and workshops to the more focused in-depth analysis of individual experiences through the interviews and surveys. These ranges married together through the analysis process into this final report.

The mixed methods research approach, the different phases of the research process and ongoing research advisory relationships were designed to address these concerns. The implications of these limitations in the research are discussed throughout this research report.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the research purpose and methods used throughout the project, outlining the five phases used to achieve its aim of identifying and exploring the development of inclusive literacy supports across FET.

A mixed-methods approach was used through the five phases of the research. Desk research was used to review national policies and existing research. This was followed by active research engagement through individual interviews and an online survey with FET staff nationally, workshops with ALOs and a focus group with FET Directors. This was followed by a discussion of the ethical issues and the analysis process of the research project.

Chapter 5

Key themes of adult literacy provision in Ireland

This chapter reviews the general profile of research participants before discussing the five key themes which emerged through the thematic analysis of the research described in the previous chapter. The themes that were identified as central in the data include:

1. Learner-centred ethos of literacy support and development
2. Recognition of care and relationships in literacy
3. Distinctive pedagogy and learning of literacy
4. Responsive organisations and measurement systems
5. Resources and professional development needs

In total, 108 FET staff participated in this research, sharing their experiences of supporting the inclusive of literacy across the FET sector. The staff occupied the following general positions in FET, working in a range of provision including FET management (FET directors, ALOs, programme coordinators) as well as student support roles and tutors/ instructors of provision including PLCs, Apprentice Training, ESOL, VTOS, BTEI and Community Education. These participants engaged in the interviews, focus groups, workshops or online survey.

Learner-centred ethos of literacy development

A learner-centred ethos is core to the development of literacy support across FET. This approach positions and understands learning as occurring in different ways, contexts and times of learners' lives. Within this, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy is understood as situated literacies that occur across all levels of FET. As outlined earlier in the opening chapter, the concepts of literacy, numeracy and digital literature are understood and experienced as distinct but also intersecting in learning encounters. Respondents described the learner-centred and responsive approach that is core in FET services.

> Literacy tutors, in the main, are extremely dedicated to their learners and teach through an ethos that is somewhat unique to the adult literacy services, including meeting the learner where they are at, working in partnership with the learner and being able to offer small classes. (ALOA workshop group R)
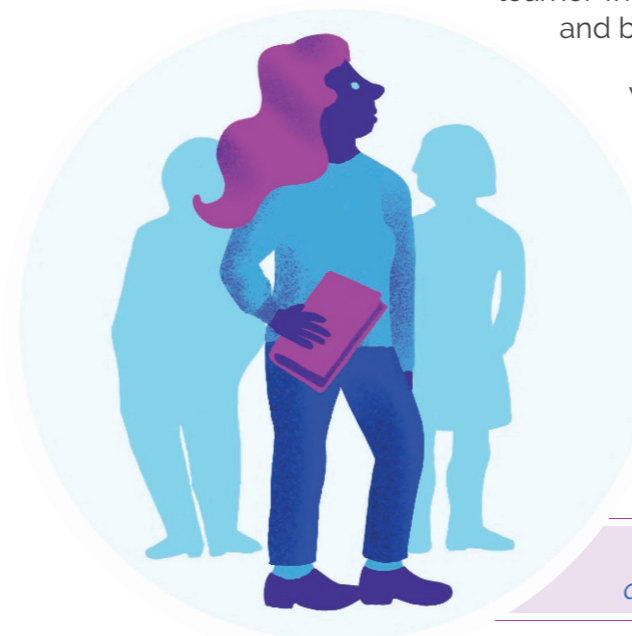
> We are all coming to the space with fantastic good will, learner-centred approach, belief in the person's potential. (Interview, AEGC)

> I do think the learner-centred approach to the small groups. The welcoming environment came up hugely … and talking to people you know, the kind of environment that is created. And I think that's really important in order for people to be seen as an individual. (FET Director)

Figure 10. Learner-centred ethos of literacy support and development

Literacy is discussed by FET staff in this research in terms of an interest in the "day to day application of literacy" by learners which often emerges as being in conflict with course requirements, sometimes

being identified as a need in the initial assessment or interview at the outset of the programme. (FET Survey)

In other cases, literacies emerge as important during the course, often as learners are completing assignments which require literacy numeracy or digital literacy capacities at a certain level. Staff describe how learners have the knowledge of the course or assessment requirement but may struggle with language or literacy to express these.

Numeracy comes to the fore in certain courses, especially those associated with apprenticeships and trades. In these staff emphasise the importance of "everyday knowledge of maths is important" (FET survey). They describe how learners often resist engaging with maths, seeing it initially as theoretical when they'd prefer to be engaged with the vocational aspects of their course.

> But when you tried to go back that stage and work on the basics of maths, you know algebraic stuff and things like that. And there was that that it back to that stage of 'Well what do I need to know this for? I just want to know how to get … past the theory bit and I want to get out to the car right?' So, you do have to manage that (FET Director)

As reflected by the recent numeracy report by SOLAS (2021), participants in this research also note that "people are more likely to be afraid of maths and less likely to want to engage" (FET survey). Many people "have a very negative recollection of school and particularly their maths ability as something they are not good at" (FET survey). Consequently, FET staff describe how maths and numeracy is "an area that I find is very difficult to get people to take off, and it's driven by fear and their previous experiences" (Interview, CFO)

Digital literacy has become increasingly important where "adults need to be able to negotiate IT fluently for social and economic reasons" (FET survey). The "pandemic has hastened the shift to online as the norm" (FET survey). However, access remains a key issue though with a growing divide between those who have digital resources and capacities and those who don't.

> Issues include low skill levels, lack of devices owned by learners, poor rural broadband. The digital divide is real, and some people are losing out because of it (FET survey)

> I know that in our ETB insist on using [MS Teams] all the time. But Teams is a big issue if you have an old phone. If you have an old phone like forget about Teams, it's not gonna work. It is not gonna work. You need strong Wi-Fi connection at home, so if you are a learner who can't afford a new phone and has an old phone and you barely have mobile data. Don't have even Wi-Fi at home. They come from very disadvantaged background. I don't see any point putting them under the pressure. So I use whatever they can have on their phones and I am so blessed to have coordinators who understand that and who supported that we will use whatever they can use. You know we should put people before technology. (Interview, Key Skills)

Respondents highlight the link between digital literacy capacities and study skills, as both are required in most course work and assignment submissions now.

> Many learners who return to education to compete programmes at levels 4- 6 need significant support with IT, particularly learners with lower levels of IT struggle with assignment formation and digital submission in early stages. (FET survey)

This diverse development of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy supports reflects the organic and diverse nature of the FET sector itself which encompasses a wide array of provision at different levels for different learner groups (ETBI 2021). Reflective of this diversity, different approaches to supporting literacy, numeracy and digital literacy are evident throughout the research which can be classified in the following three ways:

6. Referring learners to specific literacy or other supports in other FET services or external agencies
7. Literacy supports that are embedded into FET provision
8. Literacy supports that are informally provided by FET tutors within existing provision

Referring learners to specific literacy or other supports in other FET services or external agencies

> Many services in FET have specific literacy or student support staff who can be contacted and will provide or refer learners with literacy or other support needs to another service in FET (such as Adult Literacy Service or Adult Education Guidance Services) or in external partner agencies.

> If there's a student that has any additional need, [Student support staff] would always contact all the teachers, not just the coordination and linking. (Interview, Key Skills)

> I would have good collaboration with the training advisors and … they would refer people on and we try and fit them in for support (Interview, Apprenticeship)

> Like one really important part of it is having the appropriate learning support staff to come in. It has to be reputable… I have some really good staff now… locally enough that have a literacy language maths and have a trade background in a former life. (Interview, Apprenticeship)

> In other cases, the support provision had been outsourced to a local literacy, ESOL or adult education centre, often resulting in a longer-term partnership being established;

> For a long, long time we didn't actually need to respond to [literacy needs] that because [local ALS], where we refer people to, we provide them with funding and they were providing that kind of service (Interview, ESOL supports)

Literacy supports formally embedded into FET provision

> In some services, literacy supports have been embedded into the FET provision. This can be as an inclusive model, varying in the extent that it is embedded. For example, literacy supports are integrated on a national basis within the Apprenticeship provision in the Training Centres. This inclusive model is discussed in the pedagogy and learning section later.

> So it's that dialogue [is] really important between the different stakeholders … and then like the reaching out for the additional supports, so … it's very flexible and it's very responsive, so if the [learner] is available, you know from 8:00 to 9:00 in the morning or 8:30 or it's embedded during the day … the instructor will allow this to be embedded during the day, which is great. (Interview, Apprenticeship)

> I know other centres have been able to get the supports in embedded in the classes so they have their math support now in in the trade classes (Interview, Apprenticeship)

> Maths support for the apprenticeship typically runs from the beginning of the module so it blends hand-in-hand, and across the board. I think it's key to lock down any of the supports, the additional supports that are required at the time, because otherwise they're lost and you won't get them (Interview, CFO)

Literacy supports informally provided by FET tutors within existing provision

> In other cases, literacy supports are provided by the FET tutors and instructors already working with learners, often informally as an additional support to the existing pedagogy. Most FET staff saw learner support is an integral part of their teaching role, but they highlight how the complex nature of adult learning may mean that additional literacy and other needs emerge organically in the learning context which may need support. This requires an integrated approach to literacies as an integral part of the learning process.

> It tends to be held by tutors, unsupported within the class, and that's very much done within the context of the session, rather than being labelled as a kind of additional support. (Interview, BTEI)

In many instances, staff feel this is a valued part of their role and what they offer FET learners. Many describe how this work is supported by their management and FET support services;

> I have great coordinators really, you know, they are really, really supportive … and it makes a difference to me as a teacher to be working with a supportive team (Interview, Key skills)

However, this support by management was not a given, but tends to differ across FET provision and services, the visibility of literacy support development within the organisation varies, rather than being a fully inclusive element of all services. There are many reasons for these differing levels of visibility, and it is reflective of the diversity of the sector itself. This is discussed further in the later section on organisation systems.

This type of learner support replied on the personal commitment of FET staff to their learners and often stretches them beyond what they feel comfortable or trained to provide, with most respondents calling for more PLD and communities of practice to support FET staff to develop greater inclusive practices in their pedagogy. Given these issues, participants call for greater recognition of this type of support work, but also more continuous professional development and communities of practice as explored later.

FET staff highlight how the scale of these informal supports often emerges during the course of the learning engagement and is fluid in nature, so the extent of support and amount of time it takes can be hard to predict. Consequently, providing these types of support is often not fully visible either in the role description or hours of staff. They can be an invisible and unrecognised aspect of their role, with participants noting that "there is so much good and inspirational work going on, but it's going unnoticed" (FET survey)

In all cases, literacy support staff, coordinators and FET staff work together to design the literacy-related supports that a learner may need. In this, they acknowledge the careful decision-making and balance about how much literacy and study skills they can offer to inclusively support an individual learner in the context of the learning needs across the wider group.

> We don't stop people coming into class if we feel that it's something we can support them with … it's usually the tutor that does the induction. So they're aware of and say yes, I can bring this person along and we'll be able to give them to support. But it's the stage where if somebody has very low levels of literacy, have we don't have the time, the teacher doesn't have to time in the class for 1:1, so you can use all the tools that you know as much as possible, but they don't have the time to give in a class when you were class of eight or nine for one person. (Interview, BTEI)

Recognition of care and relationships

Echoing the learner-centred ethos of literacy outlined in the previous section, care and relationships of trust emerged as vital elements in the development of literacy support across FET. Respondents spoke about how the supportive relationships that FET staff create with their learners run through all elements of the pedagogical process and are central for literacy support. Many learners lack confidence as a result of unmet literacy and numeracy issues, which have a profound impact on their sense of confidence and life.

> There's so many things people are afraid of that it's like improving their social skills, help improve their courage around addressing literacy, so it's generally an improvement in courage and confidence. And confidence has to be the biggest issue of all. And where they came from, who their people were. That has a very big impact on their life. (Interview, AEGC)

Tutors describe how a learner-centred approach is orientated by a careful listening to learners.

> I go into the classroom. Listen to the learners. Look at their needs and this is what I work with (Interview, Key skills)

For many students lacking confidence, being able to access 1:1 tuition initially is key to engaging with learning in a supportive way. This was perceived as less intimidating than a group learning context.

> We find some students start with 1:1 and move on to small groups when they have gained confidence (FET survey)

This is particularly relevant in the current context of the Covid 19 pandemic.

> What we found with the pandemic is that [learners who were] the more vulnerable were more disconnected about it. They needed that support at 1:1 space and the personal, you know, that personal contact really. You know when we talk about further education and the care and the humanism and all of that (Interview Apprenticeship)

The background of learners is a key consideration for staff as they form these learning relationships. Research participants spoke of the necessity to have an appreciation of the challenges that people may have about learning because of previous negative encounters in schools and wider social contexts. One participant describes how:

> I always quote what [Literacy support worker] said in the training when I attended the training first time with family learning. She said some of those people have been disappointed many times in their lives in a school system and their countries bullied, we never know what happens in their lives and when they come to our family learning classes, we are the fairest people doing it in a long time. So it puts me under great responsibilities that I need to make this class particularly friendly, welcoming and to make them feel like 'OK. What happened before is just the past. Now it's a new experience, you know' (Interview, Key skills)

This relational and care aspect of their work is part of what participants identify as part of their passion and enjoyment for the work itself. They spoke passionately with deep commitment about their own and their colleagues' interest and dedication to their work.

> They are brilliant teachers. It's just extraordinary people who are hugely interested and will go to the ends of the Earth. … I have this amazing literacy service and amazing people around me to kind of help. (Interview AEGC)

> We have a fantastic tutor. I think if I was to summarize her main work qualities would just be that she's just unbelievably kind. You know she's a really kind woman and she's spend a huge amount of additional time and working with those students (Interview BTEI)

Part of the qualities that these staff bring is that they ensure that the learning process is fun and creative for learners and staff alike. They talk about the freedom that literacy support sessions offer where they, as educators, are free to be creative and respond deeply to learners' needs.

> I make it fun. Simple, easy. Just to give them [learners] a second chance to learn… I love so many learning classes because I have loads of freedom. You know, I'm not restricted on their tests, exams and all of that so I have lots of freedom to talk, chat, have activities, fun craft … We always bring fun to the room. (Interview, Key skills)

> we're not we're not so enclosed either by what we must teach and how we must teach in literacy. There's very much. It's very much bespoke, and so you can be a bit more creative (Interview, Apprenticeship)

> I suppose that's what I tried to do in my guidance with them is instil that belief, that self-belief that you can do this, and that you go. There are people here to help you, but you can see the depth of mentoring and energy that's required. (Interview, AEGC)

For staff, this stands in contrast to the restrictions of formal curriculum, learning outcomes and assessments. The capacity to create conditions that support a joy of learning is a vital element of literacy support, given the negative encounters, fears and lack of confidence that many learners can hold about their learning capacities (as discussed in later section). This can be particularly effective and empowering when it includes new approaches and modes in teaching, such as embracing the current

potential offered by digital technology.

> I think technology and literacy have always worked well together, and it's new territory and adults feel that they were worth it as well. When you bring technology into the classroom, they like that because you know, it's something maybe they've always been excluded from for certain degree. And so now you're using smart phones in the classroom. This is a very empowering for adult learners (Interview, Apprenticeship)

But equally staff are self-reflective about their own assumptions about digital technology capacities amongst learners, for example,

> I didn't realize how isolating that could be, and maybe people would be scared to click on something and wouldn't know if something didn't work out right. They would be afraid their phone would blow up. (Interview, Key Skills)

Staff spoke of how these caring relationships are core to the daily practices of an inclusive FET environment. They highlight how this permeates across all staff to support learners at every stage of their journey from the outset from the

> excellent porters at the door of the college who recognise new literacy or ESOL students before they identify themselves. They are amazing for gently welcoming them (FET survey)

> But the truth is the teachers do a lot at work when it comes to literacy and they give of their time to help them … because they already are invested in their learners. They want their learners to succeed at what they want to do because in some cases they [learners] have the skills to do the course and to get the job in that area. (Interview, BTEI)

Staff are conscious that supports need to be wide-ranging and encompassing across all aspects of their services, given the range of challenges facing learners.

> Student support is an issue. You know we've got to be looking at a more systematic approach to what is needed and with the relevant kind of staff provision. And I will be talking about wider student supports like childcare, mental health supports and even things like transport, rural isolation as a problem as well (FET Director)

> Barriers such as child care and travel prove challenging especially for students in rural areas (FET survey)

Like all relationships, much of what happens is emergent, with participants describing how they learn about people's situations;

> You wouldn't necessarily know what's going on, except the tutor tells you where, they might talk to you about a student … and a lot of them just definitely have that kind of kindness and patience that they will work with learners and they will put in that extra time and effort and they definitely will go that extra mile for the learners that they see as having a literacy need. (Interview, BTEI)

> There's a huge amount of a wealth of experience as the only way you can put it among the staff in terms of working with adult students and with students who've had maybe not a great experience the first time round (FET Director)

> Core in the skills which FET staff provide is the in-depth knowledge of students on a personal level as well as their knowledge of the subject area;

> even though we have guidance services, the tutors do provide informal guidance. Uh, they provide that informal guidance on an ongoing basis, and I think that supported space really is that space for the chat face-to-face and as well as trade-related as well as you know mental health related and so (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Peer-to-peer learning is really important as well within FET, so I think every education sector tries that. But I think that [FET] does it well (FET Director)

> Staff in literacy and other support roles acknowledge that they are not the content or subject specialist but they do need to be work closely with the tutors or instructors who are familiar with the content.

> We do closely work with tutors … we won't be subject matter experts, but we'd still have to know the content of the course to be able to help the learner (Interview, BTEI)

> As guidance counsellors …. We encourage [learners] to access the right course for their level and work out a progression plan to achieve what they would like to achieve and plan of additional time/resources in order to prepare themselves. Also support learners with assistive technologies that are available to support them (FET survey)

Many FET staff are very skilled at working with learners who may be initially reluctant or lacking confidence about their literacy and learning capacities.

> I'm thinking of one lad that we had with ADHD and dyslexia, and his feelings about himself within the group of his peers who were well able to work away but he just found the IT was just all of a challenge to him and he was ten steps behind everyone else. And if he missed a day that was detrimental to his progression, you know. I suppose it's having that understanding (Interview, Apprenticeship)

> The tutor was fantastic … she was working with are very reluctant learners and really trying to encourage them to take part in some of the written work that initially they just wouldn't … and you know she was really great at … getting them to write and to do some written work that they wouldn't ordinarily have done. (Interview, BTEI)

Literacy support and coordination staff describe how they support literacy development amongst FET tutors in their services who are directly supporting learners:

> I'm providing the supports for the instructors, because instructors are in the classroom and I suppose to date they have took on the heavy lift really of the difficulties or the challenges that are presented in the classroom… if you have supports for that main person, it does make the role a little bit easier… it was just supporting them in terms of small changes that they could make from maybe from a UDL perspective or in terms of integrating literacy or even just embedding kind of some positive mental health messages (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Partnerships and collaborations

As described earlier - both in literacy support work and as a general part of the diverse FET landscape - staff work with a wide variety of partners and agencies across and external to FET. Research participants speak of the importance of these partnerships in their literacy support work, with a FET director giving a sense of the diverse scale and complexity of the partnerships that different areas may have:

> Our partnership with community groups and other agencies and organizations that has always been a feature of our own work because we could not do our work without them. We would be working at any given time with 60 or 70 community groups around by providing the service locally. Leaving our literacy organizers based locally and you know so, so I suppose that's the biggest thing in terms of addressing the inclusion of people with literacy, numeracy, and digital skills needs that it would be locally based and our relationships with community and with services would be very important to us (FET Director)

This locally based nature of FET which is core to their learner-centred ethos as a sector means that collaboration is key part of their role, especially those involved in coordinator and support roles. They create a web of connections to a diverse range of partners across their local communities to connect

with and support learners throughout all stages of their learning journey.

In the surveys and workshops, literacy staff give numerous examples of different types of external partners with whom they work for literacy supports. This range of partners listed below gives a sense of the extensive and diverse partners with whom they work. As discussed earlier in the literature review, each partnership involves a different set of conditions, relationships and processes.

> Working with a local partnership to engage 'hard-to-reach adults'. The partnership looks after recruitment and the ETB designs course content and provides a tutor.

> In some areas, a large number of community centres already have a long-standing relationship with their local literacy service and run courses there. The ties have been there a long time and the existence of informal links enhances the experience for the service providers and students.

> Creating relationships with local disability services and providing outreach classes, or, as in the case of Covid, where continuing classes onsite with the service was no longer suitable, moving the classes onsite to the Adult Education Service. These classes will continue to be offered onsite in the Ad. Ed. Centre after Covid to support integration into a mainstream setting.

> Working with various community support groups e.g. IWA, local groups supporting adults with intellectual disability: providing literacy, IT or self-advocacy courses. These are held both onsite in the education centre or in outreach centres.

> Creating links with local Roma support services: classes can support literacy that will help with school or medical correspondence as well as English. This works well if you can make a connection with local Roma support personnel.

> Outreach refugee programmes are in existence in some areas, with support continuing after refugee status no longer applies to some students.

> General inclusive practice where Adult Literacy Services assess a wide variety of applicants e.g. early school leaver, long term unemployed, drug rehabilitation services users, students engaging with probation services, CE Scheme participants. A wide variety of both unaccredited courses and QQI accredited courses continue to be made available to try to facilitate all needs (ALOA workshop group A)

The way that each partnership works differs, with partnerships using a variety of referral, integrated and inclusive approaches to literacy supports. In some cases, the partnership agreement will involve support staff such as ESOL or Adult Literacy Service providing literacy staff to come and work with FET students on a particular programme.

Their [ALS] tutors come here so we have them just for us and for our students during those times so [literacy tutor] comes and she delivers [numeracy] support every week Friday … and the digital literacy tutor comes in on a [weekday] afternoon and delivers it to our students. (Interview, Key Skills)

In other instances, FET coordinators and support staff contact their adult literacy partner and refer students to classes in their service.

I would contact [ALO] and [ALO] would tell me what classes were happening in the centre through adult ed … and I'd link in with the students say, well, this is available … assignment support and statistics support. And digital literacy support … that is provided by [adult literacy centre] as well (Interview, Key Skills)

Participants describe how these partnerships are also across different area of FET, recounting how they actively "work at forming relationships with key individual personnel in other areas of FET" (FET survey). They are more diffuse in that there is "regular engagement from businesses and communities" to promote literacy awareness and supports (FET survey).

Partnerships are an integral part of Apprenticeship provision supports. Hence the training centres,

literacy services and employers work together in more formal structures and processes of partnerships as described in the literature review chapter.

They highlight that these supports need to be available across all phases of apprenticeships:

But what you have then is we need to join the dots on that one so that the adult education service and the employers and SOLAS they are all working together to provide those modules at phase one. Then I think you would see it would see even better success in phase two. For those lads, they'd be going in feeling confident rather than going in worried and scared about what's going to happen when their level of maths is discovered you know or their level of literacy is discovered. You don't want to go like that (Interview, Apprenticeship)

The timelines of these supports are key, with literacy needs often emerging in the context of the first written assignments. While the initial assessment process which is integrated into Apprenticeships now picks up on most needs, staff emphasised that there may still be additional literacy, numeracy or digital literacy needs identified at other stages in the programme for which learners may not have considered availing of supports. As such creating fully inclusive environments of learning through UDL is essential. Awareness-raising and PLD for staff is also key as discussed in the final theme below.

Participants discussed the complexities of working in partnerships, which is also highlighted in the earlier literature chapter. It is a process which is intensive in establishing clear and shared objectives, processes and ways of working which need to be negotiated and established in clear agreements;

If you're operating a service as a demand-led service, and the challenges that it presents, it's very much a community development model in terms of deliveries so it's a lot of work in the ground. Working with communities, working with partners, with stakeholders to try and identify where the need is and to put projects or put programs in provision, in place to deal with that. That's very intensive work as well and so then supporting across FET and creating the synergies and the integration across the FET services as a whole and ETB is in the context of this (FET Director)

Now we do work with agencies, but I think it needs to be done more systematically. And so on. I mean, we've always worked, we do literacy awareness training with other agencies and other organizations and so on. So, you know, ETBs have that kind of expertise. I'm not sure that there's any other sector other than the ETB sector that has that kind of level of expertise (FET Director)

Distinctive pedagogy and learning of literacy

The distinctive nature of the learning occurring in FET means that the pedagogical approaches of its staff are very specific. As discussed in the opening section of this chapter, much of what happens in FET and specifically in literacy support is based in a learner-centred responsive and situated approach, grounded in people's experiences. FET staff emphasised the significance of this orientation in how they approach teaching and support their learners.

I think that's one of the strengths of the literacy services that you can tailor your inputs according to the person in front of you… we've got many, many ways of approaching teaching (FET Survey)

They describe the significance of learning by experience, especially for vocational-based subjects, where for example abstract mathematical concepts can be placed in a real-life context that apprentices connect with;

[numeracy] was placed for them in a context of the angles in a roof and what you need for the pitch to work and so on. Then it meant something, but when it's done in school with just a blank triangle (FET Survey)

The significance of learning from experiences based in people's real-life context is central to an adult education pedagogy and is congruent with the vocational basis of many FET subjects. It gives learning a grounding and relevance for adults which they may not have gained during the more

abstract knowledge and subjects of schooling as illustrated by the example above.

The diverse backgrounds and learning experiences of adults mean that their learning profiles are varied. This has been described as a 'spiky profile' in literacy research[33]. Respondents in this research note that this spiky profile is evident for many learners in FET which they respond to in their pedagogical approach. Respondents feel that it is associated with particular FET courses, due to their vocational basis and employment opportunities which attract learners from specific backgrounds, such as@

the culinary arts, you would definitely tend to see more spiky profiles of learners and which is understandable because so many people, they've migrated from lots of contexts. Where can you get a job? You can get a job washing dishes in the kitchen, and then you know, overtime you might go from being a kitchen porter to maybe being a sous chef or commis chef, whatever. And then realizing, 'hang on, I want to upskill in this area' so a lot of the time where they learned their English language and maybe are incredibly fluent and but they've learned everything by ear. And I know when it comes to even get them to write a very basic text, you can really see that the lack of structure and or not even knowing where one word starts and the next one begins, but they can freely communicate with you. But knowing at the same time that the demands of that Level 5 programme or a Level 6 programme is going to be a gap between where they are. So, courses like that … the health care and the child care, there would usually be would be gaps there (Interview, ESOL supports)

Our learners can have spiky profiles, so we can have learners who have completed level 5 and I'm thinking of one person who had completed a level 7 but was coming to us for digital literacy training because she wasn't confident… and needed tailored and individual literacy supports (Interview, AEGC)

FET staff described the challenges that this raises for teaching, both in responding to the specific needs of these students as well as balancing this within the broader context of the group. This is described in the earlier discussion of language and literacy needs.

While initial assessments have been developed for many FET programmes which identify literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs of learners from the outset and enable staff to refer learners to supports, this does not occur in all instances. When it does occur, it is often in the context of programmes where an inclusive or integrated approach has been formally developed, as described earlier.
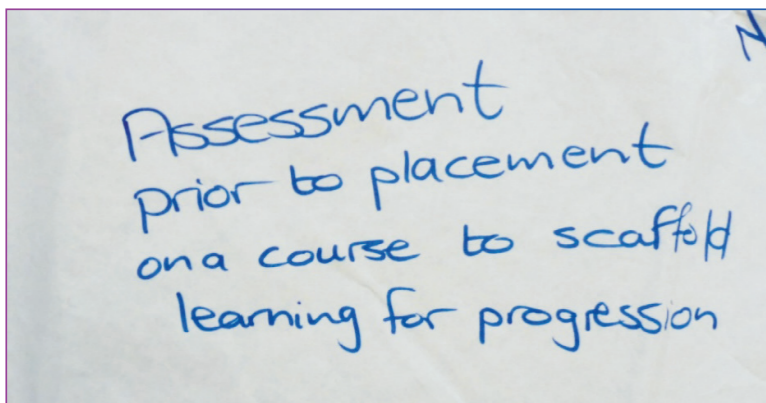
In some cases, the literacy or numeracy needs of learners are not initially apparent. This occurs when the initial assessments are by interview and so written literacy or other needs may not come to the fore. In

other cases, learners may not disclose or be aware of the literacy or numeracy level required for the programme. If this is the case, these literacy and numeracy challenges more typically emerge when learners first engage with their assessment. In both cases, FET staff have to respond to learners' needs as they emerge in an integrated manner or by giving additional supports.

Small groups and 1:1s are working well. Building engagement and connection to the programme (FET Survey)

Literacy tutors assessing and supporting learners on Part-time FET programmes VTOS, LTIs, BTEI etc. (FET Survey)

Between myself and teachers we flag individuals that may need support and organise, we also encourage learners to ask for support if needed (FET Survey)

Tutors highlight the importance of listening in a learner-centred and responsive approach. They recount how, based on their careful listening to learners, they will break learning activities into manageable tasks and accessible formats. They are constantly adapting and creating appropriate resources to use with learners in sessions.

There isn't one curriculum that's designed for ESOL literacy from scratch. I searched everywhere … I couldn't find one curriculum designed for adults (Interview, ESOL Supports)

Staff ensure that they give learners a sense of the extensive time and effort that the literacy tasks will take and then support them throughout this process.

You know, with literacy, time is a key. Saying "you know we need time; you need patience. You know you need to be to divide big tasks into smaller ones." You know it's a big task to be honest. It's a big task, you know and loads of patience from both sides, from me as a teacher and from the learner, and I try to be fair from the very beginning to tell them, look, it's gonna take a bit of time. I'm 'how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time', so we'll take it bit by bit and encourage them, you know (Interview, Key skills)

A lot of the teachers themselves do give extra time because the literacy is not just as we've seen. There's different levels. Someone coming into the class, they're able to understand reading, writing, but the concepts, you know when it comes to paraphrasing or putting in order all these different types. So, the teachers themselves will help a lot and they do give 1:1 [support]. They try and make their terminologies more simple … they break down questions more and [they] will have to break down [assignment briefs] for certain students, so that they can fully understand what's needed from them (Interview, BTEI)

Respondents highlight the progression and benefits that this learner-centred, responsive approach brings, describing the opportunities for learning and progression that building literacy capacity can open up for people.

The capacity to support 1:1 literacy tuition and to spend time with learners was cited as a vital element in building literacy capacities and personal learning capacities amongst learners.

We need to hold on to 1:1 tutors and small spelling/reading groups … Students generally progress to accredited courses when they have gained confidence and improved their skills (FET survey)

Small groups and 1:1s are working well. Building engagement and connection to the programme (FET survey)

More 1:1 supporting individual needs and time (FET survey)

there is huge opportunity for progression for people. If they can get into the literacy service

33   Further details about spiky literacy profile is available at: https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/glossary/spiky-profile

building their literacy skills and their confidence and get the help from the guidance to find their way forward and get the funding and the money (Interview, AEGC)

> our horticulture group … the coordinator that I took over from was working with them to achieve a Level 4 major award and a good few of them, maybe three or four from a relatively small group have progressed and gone on level 5 and since level 6 as well and they would have definitely started off in our service had quite clear literacy needs (Interview, BTEI)

A situated approach to literacy in FET provision is evident in their pedagogical approach.

> if you look at literacy as being on a spectrum or continuum, and people are developing not just their basic language and literacy needs to be able to navigate their daily lives but also about developing the language and academic literacies in order to be able to engage in their studies and or engage in their vocational area, you know and to practice if their language skills are at the level where they can now practice (Interview, Key skills)

Staff spoke about the significance of small steps and changes in supporting learners to build their literacy capacities;

> if they're too stressed to read and it's so difficult, then maybe "if I hear the story, I know all the characters, I know the cast, I know what happens in the end. I love this story now". Go back and read your book and how much easier it is to do it. And I found a lot of feedback says "Oh my goodness it's so much easier to read that book" (Interview, AEGC)

Continual formative feedback is a key part of the literacy process, with staff acknowledging how they give feedback on an ongoing basis to encourage learners.

> [I] try to be very positive even when they have a tiny bit [of] progress. I'll highlight that you know. Because they [learners] can easily get frustrated and say like, OK, we'll stop here and this happened. They just give up easily, you know, so you need keep reminding them all the point you know. (Interview, Key skills)

Clear communication and understanding between the staff and learners about learning preferences and timelines is vital for the different stages of the learning process;

> that openness around the dialogue is really important and around … the timelines for the assessments and then specifically looking forward to the assessments and what are the areas that need focus and embedding …

> how is this information or material presented so that we can have a kind of a more inclusive space. Have you assessed for the learning preferences? Building the relationship with the learner is vital … and having an understanding I suppose of their challenges in advance rather than waiting until they're overwhelmed …

> bridging that gap is the methodology so that it's not more of the same that will help. Can we learn this differently if the preference is more visual? Or do it like how can we represent this differently than for exams or assessments? (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Respondents also spoke of the importance of supporting tutors to develop their own skills to support this type of learning. This is explored in more details in the final section in this chapter on resources and professional development needs, including:

> helping tutors to recognize other methods and creative ways of working and you incorporating more role plays and incorporating more video work or imagery, or as you know, different ways of working so that people who do have literacy can take part in these certified courses (Interview, BTEI)

Literacy and Language capacities - English as a second language

A major issue which many respondents raised was the challenge raised by FET learners for whom English is a second language. Respondents spoke about the significance of whether learners were literate in their own language and of how this impacts on their learning through English. In the main, most FET learners have literacy capacities in their own language, which makes teaching through English as a second language easier;

> For example, if we know how to read and write in Arabic, that's nearly half the battle. To learn English, you know, because we are able to Google to search for words even when you translate for them like this. If the word is 'book', for example, they are able to write book in their own language besides English word (Interview, Key Skills)

For the learners who don't know how to write and read in their own language, it is a huge challenge, and they will be referred to ESOL classes where they begin at the basic level because,

> if you start writing that would be so painful and frustrating for them. So, at the beginning I tried to make it variable, fun, attractive as much as I can because it was, literacy learners they get frustrated, give up easily, you know so you wanna keep them engaged. That's when I teach English as a second language initial classes (Interview, Key skills)

Research participants were cognizant of the different objectives and orientations between adult literacy and language supports for learners. While this is very pertinent to ESOL learners, it is relevant for learners across all areas of FET provision. Some FET learners may have literacy challenges, others may have language issues associated with ESOL, while other learners will have both literacy and language issues. This raises key issues about awareness raising. FET staff need to be aware of the distinctions and overlaps between language and literacy needs of learners and to ensure that they are working collaboratively to support learners in a responsive and relevant way.

Participants describe a similar need for awareness at a systems level where a similar blurring between how language and literacy pedagogies evolved in FET:

> But a lot of ESOL provision and our approach to supports for learners from linguistically diverse background was very much informed by the literacy services' own supports and programmes for native English speakers who were developing literacy and in English, so that would have been something that from the get-go I was a little bit surprised by, when we looked at the time at the profile of our learners, most of whom are very, most of whom would have been literate in their first language. We at the time would have had very few learners who were not literate in any language. They might have been literate in a different script, but many of them would have been writing in several languages, so it seemed to me, but strains that were imposing a tuition model that is from literacy. But I understood as well that it was just because the literacy services responded to the needs of people from linguistically diverse backgrounds who came knocking on the door because they were advertising English classes. You know, so that you know it's slightly different English but that's where when I started with in the role … there are nuances I suppose, between how we look at an ESOL provision and/or the needs of ESOL learners and literacy. (Interview, ESOL supports)

FET staff were also conscious of other overlaps that occurred due to the pedagogical challenges of providing additional literacy support to learners already in FET provision. They identified potential cross-overs between literacy supports and subject-knowledge supports of the existing courses that learners are completing. Some respondents described how, while providing literacy support to their own learners, they were concerned that "it's my words that are going down on paper … or there's a lot of me going into this" and trying to not let that happen. In such instances, they felt that a literacy tutor does not have the subject knowledge and so can support the learner in their own writing and understanding rather than balancing literacy and subject knowledge. Staff are aware of the tricky balance between these aspects, describing regular conversation between literacy support and FET staff
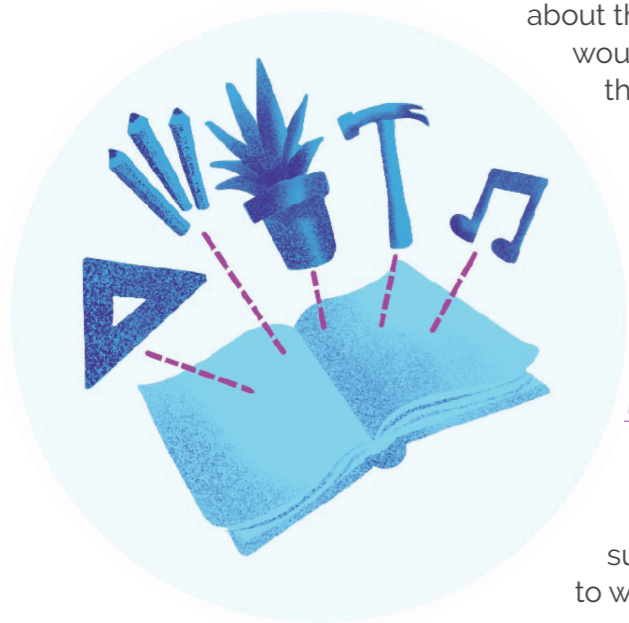
about the fact that there are learners in their classrooms that wouldn't have the vocabulary to come [on the programme], they really do need that extra support and an extra minding to help them through the subjects and again back as I said, primarily comes from the tutors here at the minute which is kinda tricky when they work with everyone else as well (Interview, BTEI)

Figure 13. Diverse and differentiated teaching methodologies

Respondents described how there is extensive diversity in the need for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy supports across different areas of FET provision. Similar to what was described earlier, staff identified patterns where some of the vocational and care-orientated courses tended to have more incidences of learners with literacy needs.

At some of the services on our Level 5 programme, our early childhood education major awards, we would definitely see much more incidences of people with literacy needs and key skills within that awards and structure (Interview, BTEI)

These differences means that different aspects of FET services are responding to very different sets of needs and expectations, so the FET system as a whole needs to be flexible and responsive in its literacy, numeracy and digital literacy supports. This tension between the profile of learners and the standards of the programme is very tricky to navigate, as the example of the early learning care programme illustrates, as the admission criteria are dictated by the award itself.

the ELC programme is going to be this pivotal turning point for us as a sector, because we realized we can't keep enrolling learners who are not quite there, or where there's actually a considerable gap because there's an issue that it's just not on. You know the academic integrity or the reputation of a programme, but actually, there's this real potential risks attached if somebody is deemed competent or is out in the workplace when there's a vocational element linked to the programme ... that speaks to how the wider system has not considered this particular cohort in terms of building in those structures. (Interview, Key skills)

Format and mode of assignments

One core issue, which was mentioned in relation to all provision, is the lack of diversity in the format and mode of assignments. In one instance, a coordinator described how they offer the option to all learners to submit their assignments in varied formats but only one learner has taken up on this offer. This learner had a diagnosis of dyspraxia and was very aware of the writing supports and alternatives that were available of. It raises questions for this coordinator of whether offering an adaptation is enough, where it is up to the individual learner to respond or whether a UDL approach to multiple formats for assessment is a more inclusive or excluding approach as

you could be disadvantaging somebody who's saying "well, I'd like to write. I'm not very good at spoken pieces" so that one has always been interesting to me. I've seen learners struggle ... at level 5 because their literacy is not at that level yet, and their participation in class and their discussion and their work is all you know absolutely at level 5 and they still don't want to take up the those options of, you know you could do at a verbal exam, or you know you'd be asked the question and you'd be recorded saying your answer, so that's interesting one for us to kind of think about it, you know, is it something in how it's presented? Or is it just more about kind of culturally people aren't used to doing that type of assessment work, so they feel I have to write

this ... in terms of that kind of expectation around assignments. (Interview, BTEI)

Respondents note that examination and assessment elements are always a challenging aspect as their criteria are laid down by SOLAS for FET provision and "we don't have the authority to change anything there, whereas we can with QQI, you know, we can be flexible. We can be responsive." (Interview, Apprenticeship).

Intersection of literacy needs and learning difficulties

The intersection of literacy needs and learning difficulties was also a pedagogical challenge for tutors to balance;

I suppose the biggest issue, I suppose, is people with a diagnosis of dyslexia as opposed to just literacy issues, you know, and so we would get quite a high percentage of people with a diagnosis of dyslexia. So it's trying to give them the support alongside their trade class (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Part of the pedagogical challenge for FET staff is to develop awareness of the types of literacy and learning challenges that learners can face and what responses they can offer in the daily context of their pedagogy. An Adult Guidance Officer describes very clearly the impact of learning difficulties for a learner;

It affected her confidence because she knew herself she would be very slow at the reading and it just affected her if you're trying to read a page and you're concentrating on syllable by syllable, you miss the meaning, you missed the story. You missed the comprehension questions will mean nothing to you. (Interview, AEGC)

One coordinator described how they have developed posters around the common challenges that learners face and the small changes that can be made for learners with dyslexia, anxiety and specific learning difficulties. This type of awareness-raising is attempting to connect the common issues which learners face as pedagogical issues.

They're [FET tutors] talking about the difficulties that the learner is having, but they're not relating them to the learning difficulty, maybe so it's just connecting. I suppose it's just connecting the dots (Interview, Apprenticeship)

The availability of psychological assessment is key with FET staff highlighting the lack of availability of access and training in psychological assessment across different FET centres;

a lot of adults don't have diagnosis [of a learning difficulty] and we had a conversation with learners. I mean our courses are 10 weeks long. So, if they were to go to an education psychologist. If they went public, the course would be over by the time they got into somebody. And if they can't afford to go private (Interview, BTEI)

this group of disadvantaged people where there's literacy or other learning difficulties that survived primary school and survived secondary school unnoticed and can't progress to where they could progress ... And then they fall into adult education, looking for help. And what do we tell them? Sorry, we've no psychologists and no assessments. That just makes me feel hopeless (Interview, AEGC)

what you find with the adult learners and a big issue here that is common because they weren't picked up years ago. They maybe had dyslexia or they had some sort of learning need, but it wasn't picked up years ago and they haven't got €500 to be going into private access [for a psychologist assessment] and we don't have the funds here to provide them with it to pay for that. For that we're not allowed to pay ... for psychological reports, so there's a massive gap there, and being able to assess the needs of that student and being able to provide it now. (Interview,

PLC)

Staff try to support learners but describe feeling out of their depth or having to go outside the FET services to find community-based supports for learners.

> students having no educational psychological assessment and I've helped them to go to St Vincent de Paul to access funding so it's such a quagmire for someone to get there (Interview, AEGC)

At an institutional level, policies of reasonable accommodation intended to support learners proved challenging due to the blurring between literacy and learning difficulties and formal requirements for reporting.

> Now we have a reasonable accommodation policy and under reasonable accommodation policy, we have to have paperwork … but a lot of adults don't have education psychologist reports or any reports to state. A doctor's letter doesn't suffice … We don't know if the learner doesn't tell us. We don't know if it's just the literacy problem or learning difficulty (Interview, BTEI)

For some learners, FET offers an opportunity to escape from a sense of being labelled but the consequent lack of access to support can be problematic. This points to the wider need to escape from an individualised approach to one based in UDL and a fully inclusive approach;

> for those with the learning difficulties, those who didn't want to declare that they had learning difficulties, they had enough of that back in their past lives in school. And, you know, they are adults now. So they were like, you know, I don't want to. I don't want it on my form to say that I have a disability, you know, and that's how it's kind of referenced in the initial form, so you know. That's why the importance of that destigmatized message around availing of the supports and there's so many across the [service] that are availing of supports, that it just becomes normalized (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Supporting general learning and study skills

An inclusive approach to literacy also relates to providing general learning supports from which all learners benefit. Respondents highlight the importance of "Skills assessment for students before they start their course to ensure they are at the right level, and support for a student struggling on a course." (FET Survey).

They also note how this shift of emphasis from the perspective from a deficit approach in literacy or numeracy for individual learners to a more inclusive learning support for all learners shifts the discourse and approach to a fully inclusive approach. A FET Director describes the benefits of this inclusive approach of adult literacy for wider practice across FET as a whole.

> we went from having one or two signing up [for study supports] who really did have a need and had a referral to actually having nearly the whole class signing on even the guys who didn't need the help signed up anyway 'cause they don't want to miss out on these extra hours of support over there, which is great, because then you've peer learning going on as well. So, I definitely go with the principle of a tightly integrated piece. You know a lot of the good practice that we embed in adult literacy, bringing that across into the wider practice in the FET service (FET Director)

Figure 14. Flexibility of integrated, inclusive and external supports

While emphasising the benefits and importance of a fully inclusive approach, respondents were conscious of the scale involved in ensuring that a programme is accessible. A fully inclusive UDL approach has been developed in the case of some FET programmes, but as discussed below

> It's huge piece of work, very time consuming. Those apprenticeships were looked at by the tutors and by the instructors in the context of the literacy and numeracy needs … So what did that learner need to have in order to know and be able to do, in the area of literacy and numeracy, to successfully complete that programme? [Then] the assessment was designed, designed around the literacy and numeracy needs foremost. And if that was done across all programs, you know. But as I said, that's a huge, huge piece of work to sit down and look at every programme that is delivered by ETBs are part of the literacy and numeracy and digital skills (FET Director)

Inclusive literacy supports in Apprenticeship provision

An inclusive approach to numeracy supports that has been very influential was developed within Apprenticeship provision in GRETB Training Centre in 2015. As outlined in the literature chapter, an ALO was transferred to the training centre to embed literacy and numeracy support into the apprentice programmes. This was developed as a whole-centre approach, with literacy courses attended by all staff and additional support resources developed, such as assessment guides, induction materials, Maths for Trades, and Study and Learning Guides. These materials were subsequently made available through ETBI library, and GRETB staff collaborate with other ETBs to support inclusive literacy development in their centres and to develop communities of practice (ALOA, 2020). Staff describe how this originated to support learners who were failing their theory exams in phase two of their Apprenticeship programme, not "because of a lack of technical knowledge [but] they were failing because literacy and numeracy." (Interview, Apprenticeship). The literacy staff and instructors worked together to develop resources that were specifically tailored for each trade in the Apprenticeship provision;

> So, what we did for the maths was we initiated an initial assessment for maths based on the maths they'd need in their course. So if they're electricians, it's what do they need for the electrical maths? If they were carpentry, joinery, what did they need for carpentry and joinery and so on. So every single assignment was targeted to their trade and then we put in place support classes to those who needed it (Interview, Apprenticeship)

From this, they developed the Maths for Trades books, literacy and study supports, which are now available through ETBI national library. It has also led to the emergence of the community of practice across FET who share practice and develop additional resources for further support apprentices' learning needs. Other coordinators also mentioned conducting similar literacy audits of their programmes but acknowledged how time-consuming and personnel-intensive it is;
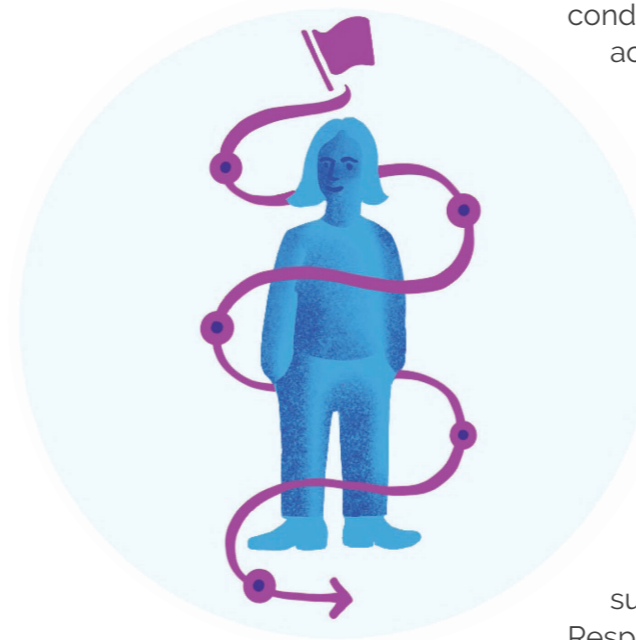
> The course literacy analysis. But when we did that for beauty [module] like that took that took time as well. It takes nearly around the summer time, you know, when people have time (Interview, BTEI)

Figure 15. Literacy audit of all phases of the literacy journey

Respondents mentioned the value of these resources, literacy audits and communities of practice and spoke of the benefits of developing integrated provision of inclusive supports designed for the specific needs of these learners. Respondents in this research described similar dilemmas to those

initially raised by GRETB staff about apprentices, describing how apprentices will have the vocational skills in their trade area but need support with their literacy, numeracy, digital literacy or study skills.

> A lot of them say 'I wanted to work with my hands. I don't want to do that [maths]' and for some of them, they would say [maths] didn't mean anything to them. They were doing these sums and it doesn't mean anything. You take ratios out of context it means nothing, but when you put a ratio in context and you say 'OK, here's a gear ratio. You know the gears have got to have six cogs for three for the first gear to work'. Then suddenly the light goes on, you know, and it's like, 'ah, so that's what ratios are' and we find this all the time. Maths means more when it's in context and it's when it's just numbers and figures on a page, they can't grasp it (Interview, Apprenticeship)

> some of our Level 5 early childhood students are struggling with the writing, it's putting together assignments. It's expressing themselves. They tend to do very well in the modules that are practice-based … and they tend to do less well in any of the modules where there is things like exams. So, child development is a tough module, an awful lot of them wouldn't have passed their child development [exam] and are at a second go of it now. But again, yeah, typically they've been very difficult to engage with the supports that we can offer us, so that's a real struggle for us at the moment (Interview, BTEI)

The continued expansion of supports across all areas including study skills has been crucial with respondents describing how study skills became key for a UDL approach that was relevant for all learners in the group and at all levels.

Respondents also note the challenge of the timeliness of these interventions. The supports offered when assignments are due and learners are already feeling very tense and staff are pressured to provide intense and rapid support. A similar time pressure was cited in the case of phase two of Apprenticeships when learners come into the centres it is often quite late and pressurised due to "limited time to progress skills within course timeframe (typically 22 weeks)" (FET survey)

> mainly because the phase ones are out of the loop a little bit. They're out of the system. You meet them at induction, and then you may not see them then for another six months. But I have a system where I meet the apprentices at phase one at induction when they very first get their apprenticeships and offer them maths for trades classes, we do an assessment with them. We ask them if there anyone need any literacy support, so we've got our premises at phase one and we work with them and then wherever they go in the country, they arrive in phase two already warmed up already with good skills (Interview, Apprenticeships)

However, for some learners, the initial assessment itself can be part of the challenge.

> I do remember one time where there was [an initial assessment] session set up and a man that had come in to apply for a course. The screening started and immediately he left, you know, 'I have to go. I have to do something' so that's evidence to know that there's a literacy issues there, and I just been putting somebody through a situation where before they even started the course in this really lovely, warm, supportive, very welcoming environment that we have for the first thing to be this screening. I just think is at odds with what we do (Interview BTEI)

Responsive organisations and measurement

> Respondents described how "an integrated approach across the board is what is needed to ensure that literacy is brought into the mainstream education core to everything." (Interview, CFO). A FET director emphasised that

> Literacy is not a standalone service and shouldn't be something that is helicoptered in or whatever it is at the time. Literacy is in the whole of it. It needs a whole of organization approach. It has to have a buy in from everybody (FET Director)

Respondents identified areas and services where they felt this was occurring which are discussed below. However, they also felt that inclusion was not occurring systematically across FET as an organisation or system as there was "huge difference in level of supports offered at different centres" (FET survey). They identify aspects of organisational culture, processes and culture which support inclusion, as well as discussing challenges to creating inclusive learning organisations.

Coordinators described a process of identifying and initially working with FET staff who were open to literacy approaches was key to embedding inclusive literacy developments. They often identified one or two staff who were receptive and began working with them. Those FET staff in turn become animateurs (Smith 2009), bringing these inclusive literacy practices amongst their colleagues.

> There was there was one in particular who was very open to it, and… he already knew what I was about. And so he worked with me a lot in the beginning. Then he brought one of his colleagues along and then after that I had all of them. So it did take a period of time, but I had. I started to just with one instructor. And then afterwards I have we had them all. Now we are completely embedded part of the system and my tutor is highly respected by all of them. And they go to her the minute they want help before. At the beginning, I suppose I was going to them, you know, can I, you know, assist you and they would say maybe, maybe not. But now it it's the other way around. They come to us. (Interview, Apprenticeship)
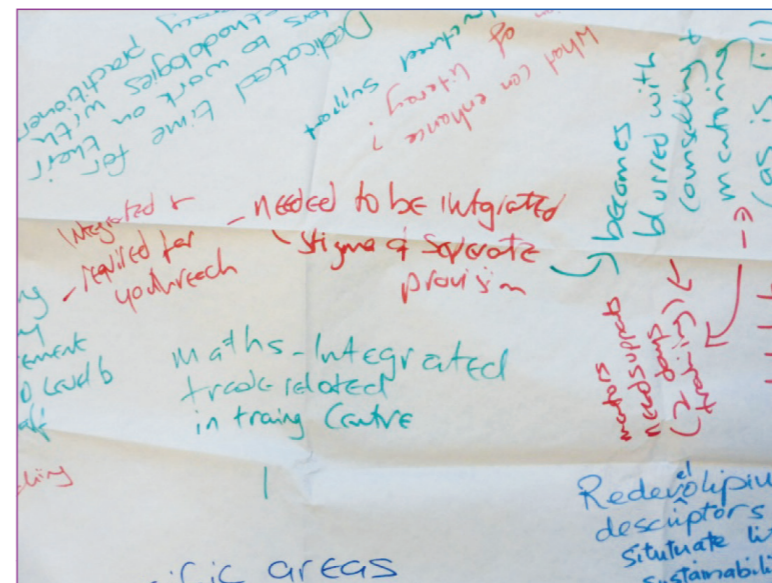

Figure 16. Call for Integrated Provision

The earlier example of GRETB's inclusive supports in their apprenticeships is instructive from an organisational point of view as it identifies the elements that are key for inclusive change to occur across the organisation. Several respondents noted the importance of having an evidence base that revealed the impact of inclusive literacy supports. This was often in the form of the improved rates and levels of examination results.

> The other thing that when everybody saw those stats [of higher numbers passing phase 2 exams], the manager in particular at the staff meeting said 'look at this' and everybody was in awe of how the change had come about. And then of course all the instructors bought in after that (Interview, Apprenticeship)

> They also spoke about the importance of embedding a collaborative approach across the organisation by establishing a culture of sharing between practitioners within the organisation and later in collaborations with staff from other centres. Vital in this is the sharing of practices and resources which is specific to this programme and tailor-made for apprentices.

> We started sharing materials, we had a culture of sharing right from the beginning, and we shared everything you know with down to the initial assessment forms and handouts that made things easier, you know word searches, cahoots, we shared quizlets. We shared everything and it made it easier for all of us. And I think that made a big difference as well at the institutional level. (Interview, Apprenticeship)

> It means that instead of me re-inventing the wheel as we all would have done throughout the years, it means that we can just draw on the expertise across the national base (Interview,

Apprenticeship)

Having that community of practice really is like it was a vital step in moving like 10 steps ahead within a shorter time. (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Inclusive literacy environments

The spaces and environments in which learning occurred was identified as important. These different across the services reflective of the variation of ETBs across the country.

I suppose maybe one of the advantages that we have is that were relatively small ETB. So, within the FET services and anywhere we all typically know one another and we all have those strong relationships and we had classes on site within their [PLC] venues and under their training services (Interview, CFO)

Larger centres especially those based in more populous areas had a larger network of literacy and other supports services to draw on. In other instances, geographical distance was key with services and centres operating in more distanced areas describing how they provided transport themselves between centres, used external community-based centres to have greater reach and other strategies to remain connected and accessible within communities.

This [region] is geographically such a big area that sometimes you feel like you are just scrapping the surface with a lot of groups and that is where the relationships with key staff are so important, the ongoing collaborative relationships and it is about prioritizing who is more ready for [our services], but my door is always open (Interview, AEGC)

Staff described changes within ETBs as new buildings and services come on stream. Newer or renovated FET services are now housed in dedicated buildings and rooms which facilitated a more inclusive service where,

if you come in the door of our centre now, you could be coming in for literacy. It could become now for BTEI. It could be coming in for a traineeship. You know, community education. So, you come in the one door and all the all these services are available to you, which is good. (Interview, BTEI)

We have a new dedicated support space which is a lovely little, small positive space and that the counsellor uses if she's meeting the lads in on site, it's a very private space. 1:1 tuition or small group tuition can happen there. (Interview, Apprenticeship)

we co-run classes within the local libraries or that kind of thing. So like people coming into classes, nobody knows that they're coming in for literacy or numeracy support or in for [other classes] (Interview, CFO)

Technology offers a role within the creation of inclusive environments for learning.

we're looking at how we can embed technology better and offer recommendations for say the lad with autism, the lad with dyslexia, the lad with ADHD, and so it's just analysing what technologies we can recommend for the individual within the group context, that will kind of bring them into the core of the group rather than always sitting on the margins of the education within the classroom setting or within the learning environment. (Interview, Apprenticeship)

However, this is not universal across all FET services, with some staff highlighting the need for more inclusive learning environments and facilities in their service.

But there is an area where they can go to come and ask for help and they know it's here and a dedicated area. It makes it easier if you had a dedicated area, a dedicated room where it was known as supports. Or you know, if you're struggling with your assignment. If you're struggling

with referencing. If you're struggling with IT, skills, anything that they know that this room they just have to walk in there and they will get the help they need without having to say it to anybody and that it is clear. Becomes familiar with them. It becomes a comfortable zone for them to go to. You're going to get people finishing courses more. You know, it just makes it more accessible for people, 'cause sometimes the hardest thing to do is to ask for help. Who do I ask you to seek somebody out? Who do I ask? You know, yes, people would know that I'm here for the academic needs or a special needs coordinator. But it still takes courage to come and ask somebody, you know. If you don't have a diagnosis but you're struggling with your work, do you know it's it can sometimes be very daunting to go and say to somebody (Interview, PLC)

For accessibility, support staff need to be visible and known to learners.

We don't have centres, so it means I'm not really integrated physically. So again, it's another barrier for people to find me easy, to know my face, to know what I looked like. And all these are big issues. A literacy learner's competence isn't high enough for you to approach a total stranger and think she looks OK for me to talk to. So being a friendly presence in the centre helps an awful lot (Interview, AEGC)

FET staff discussed how inclusive environments for learning were also broader than the immediate learning context. They highlight the specific need for social supports and environments for apprentices who often move across the country to complete phase two of their apprenticeship.

I would like to develop supported study spaces as well for the [Apprentices] as they're leaving at 4:00 o'clock. Then maybe staying in the city and having nothing to do doesn't help. They're left with the study to do, but not having the supports and not having a support space to study. I think a supported study space would help and maybe links into sport in some way? Whether that's the remit of the additional support services or are other you know. I feel that that that could help in terms of managing their 22 weeks from the success point of view and from a mental health perspective as well (Interview, Apprenticeship)

But if you had a centre that was manned by somebody forever to drop in when they need it because there's more demand at certain times of year as well. If it was manned between now and Christmas, because for six weeks, then for example, or something like that you would find student will be dropping into all the time to get the help that there (Interview, PLC)

I do think the learner-centred approach to the small groups. The welcoming environment came up hugely … and talking to people you know, the kind of environment that is created. And I think that's really important in order for people to be seen as an individual (FET Director)

Respondents highlight the limitations in some cases where the environment and culture of the organisation is not yet open to thinking about how to inclusively support learners with different experiences and needs. In some instances, this occurs because of the pressures of work, the lack of people focusing on these issues in individual centres, silos and the lack of connectivity between different areas, and responding to growing support needs.

I don't know that there's ever any conversations about that, and I think it's hard to have those conversations when [there's] not even having a space or a place to come to have these bigger conversations that will then inform practice or policy within your own area, in your own section here and across the board, and I sometimes struggle [with that] (Interview, Key skills)

I would see from a quality assurance perspective if I'm in centres around the time that the folders or do in, especially levels 3, but even at level 4. I think the tutors as assessor is something that a lot of teachers struggle with. You know also in the wider FET sector and not just in adult ed, but I think in adult ed in particular and getting that kind of shared understanding of the standard at a particular NFQ level, but also shared in the understanding of, for example, the common European framework of reference for languages which we're trying to use, but I think

it's something that people have notional ideas of, but, but actually could probably benefit from more PLD. (Interview, Coordinator)

Clear lines of communications are vital.

"If the communication is good and everyone's talking and we're understanding from both sides, it's working well" (FET Survey)

However, respondents also spoke about the organisational problems that occur with communication or relational issues.

I was called into a few training centres to sort or troubleshoot a few [issues]. In one of them, I found that really it wasn't clear to the instructors what the support service was. They had one idea of it, so it was just a myth-busting exercise really. They didn't really know what it was in another centre. It was a personality clash between the person who was doing my role and the instructors. They simply didn't get on (Interview, Apprenticeship)

In other cases, a change in mindset and use of resources has a greater impact;

It may not be the additional resources or needs within the ETB. I mean, that's always going to be a challenge, like. I mean, the answer to the problem is not always additional resources, but it might be using resources differently and the upscaling of existing resources around this as much (FET Director)

Data management systems, accreditation and learning indicators

Respondents spoke about the demands of reporting for data management systems, discussing the tensions that these cause for literacy supports in FET. While some respondents cite the useful insights and planning that data management systems gave about learners, others highlight the gaps in data collection, the pressures on staff time due to demands for performance, and the pressure to achieve quicker and higher numbers of students, as well as accreditation and progression rates.

this comes to the data and the type of data that's available to us and I think like that's something that's really challenging for us even in terms of looking at who are learners, being able to look at trends or look at even the language is spoken, in terms of mother tongue and see you know whether if we wanted to put on mother tongue supports or if you were trying to identify or to group learning it's based on. And maybe you know people who might have a similar challenge. That's very difficult for us to access, even though we collect lots of data from learners for the PLSS, which I'm sure you've heard impact but it's really, really difficult for us to kind of actually, say data on nationality. So, then you're making guesses at languages, and you could, for some countries obviously that could be massively different, but we don't. I don't think SOLAS collect data on them on languages of mother tongue or other languages (Interview, ESOL supports)

Respondents call for more qualitative learning indicators that are cognisant of the length of time needed with literacy supports.

Performance is measured by numbers and certification and is not reflective of the actual work/impact that the literacy services has on learners (FET survey)

Respondents cite how they worry about how their work performance will be assessed, given the length of time they may have spent supporting an individual. They describe the pressure this causes them as the interpersonal relational work and confidence-building of adult guidance and support services are essential for learning.

Your learning journey is very slow in this area because you're trying to compensate for all the previous loss and you're also compensating for the continuous learning difficulties and so your journey is slower and people will be with us for years. That's not to say that they won't eventually progress and exit, but they'll be with us for much longer.

I think our organization is interested in quantitative stats … So it's like all of us are now being pushed towards the quantitative and my clients need qualitative help and they take a lot longer. Sometimes I worry 'cause I think they'll come in and look at my database and I've spent hours with this person and it doesn't look like "Boom boom boom job done". It is confidence building and getting someone up and going again and it's a whole pile of private and personal difficulties at home that got in the way and it takes ages to help people. (Interview, AEGC)

Staff described how they feel under increased pressure over the amount of their "time tied up with systems and paperwork". (FET survey). They contend that "literacy needs to remain at the core of our work and there can be pressure to push for accreditation without looking at the needs of the individual." (FET survey).

But we all feel hugely under pressure now that there were being pushed more and more down the route of recording everything we do. And it's all about outcomes and numbers …. we all spend a lot of time on computer now recording work. And I feel that the length of time I spent with that it won't be valued. I worry about that. I think they look at my numbers and say, well, your numbers are down a lot. If they had any idea, the people I have to talk through each piece of their education and sometimes just meet them for a cup of coffee to keep them together … You know, that's time consuming, but if not, I lose that person (Interview, AEGC)

I do the database and all of that and it's great if it can change something. But in the 12 years I've been keeping a database we haven't gotten any more resources so it makes me wonder what was the value of it to me. We see that your numbers are dropping because you need to do far more time with people, so we're going to give you extra resources to do that. (Interview, AEGC)

The initial learner registration form for the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) poses a lot of difficulty for learners as it is "manual, time consuming and difficult for our learners" (FET Survey). A respondent describes how

I had a student in tears on the first day when I handed that [PLSS] form and she said 'I can't cope with this course' and it was only just me giving her the form with me. Hello, how are you? Here's a form at this stage. How is it that we have students who have really difficult poor literacy if they're saying one in four, one in six or whatever have poor literacy and you're giving them this form that I don't think is necessarily written in the right way and that they have to write and read and it is pages. I think there needs to be another option for that. (Interview, Key Skills)

This respondent continues to describe how, in a previous role, she would read the PLSS form to learners and complete it on screen for over 100 students a day, which was enormously time consuming. It was also hard for both learner and tutor as "a lot of the questions can be quite sensitive, so I mean, people probably won't be asked them by a person … I think it's creating a massive hurdle before people have even started." (Interview, Key Skills)

PLSS does provide useful information for staff and describe how it can give them insights into the patterns of learners' backstories;

all the apprentices that avail of the supports are on the PLSS, which is the national database for ETBs. And what it means is that you can take a look, if I have six in a group that are availing of support, I can go in and look for the common threads around prior educational attainment. (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Other staff feel PLSS is missing information which would be useful to them in planning learning supports, in particular information about languages which could inform ESOL supports;

even though we collect lots of data from learners for the PLSS, it's really difficult for us to get data on nationality. So, then you're making guesses at languages. I don't think SOLAS collect data on them on languages of mother tongue or other languages … That's something that's really challenging for us in terms of looking at who are learners, being able to look at trends or look at

even the language is spoken, in terms of mother tongue and see if we wanted to put on mother tongue supports. (Interview, ESOL supports)

The accreditation requirements for programmes were another area which raised literacy concerns for staff. Respondents highlighted the importance of reassessing their accreditation and awards system to ensure that they consider inclusive approaches to literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. While this is discussed later in terms of universal design for learning (UDL), the need for critical consideration of how FET as a system relies on a 'certain baseline literacy' at specific levels. Supporting staff to develop their pedagogical capacities to use learning methodologies which cater for diverse learning styles was considered key by many respondents.

It could be just about looking at some of our major awards at Level 5, looking at how we're pitching them and looking at how we're making sure to capture all in our practical work and helping tutors to recognize other methods and creative ways of working, incorporating more role plays, video work or imagery, or different ways of working so that people who do have literacy can take part in these certified courses. I think we do still rely a lot on people having a certain baseline literacy in order to take part in those certified level 5 classes. (Interview, BTEI)

Respondents highlight how this needs a systems-wide approach to accreditation, which required cognisance of the pressures that current assignment and accreditation formats raised for some learners caused by literacy challenges. They felt that there are gaps between levels which need to be reviewed in terms of inclusive literacy considerations, in particular "Big jumps from L2 to L3 and Part Time L4 to Full Time L5" (FET survey) and called for learners to "be provided with additional literacy support as move through the levels, individual to them." (FET survey). These gaps become particularly evident during assessment periods.

For some of the accredited courses, the main focus is to get folders finished with literacy put to one side (at times only). I also feel that BTEI, PLC and Community Education should build in more literacy into their programmes (FET Survey)

The other challenge in terms of bridging that gap is the methodology so that it's not more of the same that will help. Can we learn this differently if the preference is more visual? (Interview, Apprenticeship)

However, other FET staff felt that learners need to have capacity at a certain literacy level prior to beginning a programme.

Many learners are being accepted onto courses at levels 4, 5, and 6 without the necessary literacy skills to complete adequately. For me, literacy skills need to be at an appropriate level prior to moving up through the QQI framework otherwise education at higher levels becomes too difficult for the learners. Often, learners have had to leave higher level courses and return to adult literacy, this costs the learners time, and affects their confidence in their own abilities (FET Survey)

Resources and professional development needs

Respondents identified the need for more resources, space, time, and staff for developing literacy support. They described extensive practice supporting staff, offering ongoing and responsive Professional Learning and Development (PLD) training and resources for FET staff in relation to literacy, numeracy and digital literacy supports.

And so I see if anything else needing to deal with in my area, making sure that we are that our teachers are equipped. You know that they're fully trained and able to provide the interventions and the supports that, that those learners need (Interview, ESOL supports)

Building up the relationship with the instructors was really important in the first few years and an understanding of the difficulties and challenges that are presenting to them year after year after year (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Figure 17. Resources and professional development needs

Literacy coordinators describe how they build capacity to support literacy development amongst staff in different areas of FET in a cumulative and incremental manner.

The next piece of the picture was the tutors themselves, instructors themselves who didn't who weren't really comfortable with [learners with] literacy or numeracy [needs] in their class. So, then I started helping them as well with ideas of how to approach certain things … it was framed in TEL, technology enhanced learning, but it was all about actually getting the apprentices who had literacy difficulties up to speed. So, it was making an easier way of delivering what they were teaching (Interview, Apprenticeship)

It's done in a supportive way by a tutor who understands what the needs are and has the form of assessment but that has been done in some way. It might be very formal, it might be more informal, but they have some information and they can kind of target some of the key skills (FET Director)

Literacy support staff were conscious that the tutors and instructors were the main people working with learners, so it is key to create a supportive context for them.

Instructors are in the classroom and I suppose to date they have took on the heavy lift really of the difficulties or the challenges that are presented in the classroom… if you have supports for that main person, it does make the role a little bit easier (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Even if in-house within our own organization, if the literacy services maybe give workshops to the two features you know with skills and ideas they have, they could support us. And sometimes it's nice to keep it in house between colleagues as well. We're in the same geographical location so you have an idea of the learners that you're dealing with and they have to give you tips and tricks. Move on the 'how to support them with it within the actual class'. (Interview, BTEI)

Many tutors and coordinators talk about the emergent and growing need for inclusive literacy supports such as ESOL learners enrolled on FET courses, where is a clear need for PLD.

So our language learners who also were at the very early stages of developing their literacy in any language. So, we've been responding to that need with our ESOL tutors who had maybe done literacy tutor training through the volunteer teacher training through the Adult Ed service, but there is currently no literacy for ESOL qualification or training in Ireland (Interview, ESOL supports)

I'm hoping that this week to be confirming the details where we're going to be running for our tutors … So that we would have teachers from each of those services who are properly trained up rather than somebody maybe having an interest in something and only trying to learn by doing and seeing what works well, but actually kind of putting a bit more structure in place to that PLD (Interview, Coordinator)

Others describe how recruitment of staff with literacy and language support capacities is challenging in FET, and so they have concentrated on upskilling existing ESOL staff to work inclusively across FET.

> It's very, very rare that we have teachers applying to work with us who have experience of working with that kind of learner cohort or who have any kind of training. Even for example, the adult literacy tutor training, there's very few people who've had that as there may be having a language background because we need teachers who can teach ESOL as well as teaching the other [subject or programme area]. So, I suppose our approach has been now to look at our qualified and experienced ESOL teachers and give them an opportunity to upskill in the literacy piece (Interview, ESOL supports)

> The next piece will be around, it will necessitate a good bit of PLD is when the broad standards for languages and for all the different vocational areas in core skills at levels one to four when they're published and when we have new standards and then will need new programmes leading to those standards. That's definitely going to necessitate PLD. And that could be delivered at a local level as well as nationally, because I think it'll be the first, it's about getting that kind of shared understanding of what those language levels mean and what those qualifications are (Interview, Coordinator)

They also highlight the growing demand for training and support in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and practice across FET, as well as Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) which they support.

> UDL has come along as well, UDL is the currency at the moment as the universal design for learning, and as a lot of that is TEL, so we're doing a lot of work to try and help tutors put in the UDL principles into their teaching, so that's another big emphasis on us at the moment and inclusion (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Many staff across different roles in FET highlight their own awareness of their need for PLD and capacity building.

> A few years ago, I had a student who had dyslexia and they couldn't copy from the board. And I was reading their stuff and it was amazing and they were like a distinction student and I just didn't understand why he couldn't copy from the board. I thought it was ridiculous and it was like 'why do I have to give them notes in advance? Sure, the board is easy and he's getting distinctions, so there's nothing wrong.' I can't see anything wrong with this spelling or grammar and I just and like he would be really stressed out and I wouldn't understand it. But anyway stressed out. And now that I have it from my own context, I can say, oh God, that poor student, you know. But I'd let him take pictures, you know, but that student wanted to take audio recordings of classes and like I, I wouldn't. I don't know problem with students, technology or recordings of my classes, but I would say I would be one of the few teachers that will be OK with that (Interview, Key Skills)

> The range of abilities you can have even in a small class group and how to pitch your delivery… so I'm trying to bring those Universal Design principles into my work and recognize that people learn in different ways. (Interview, AEGC)

Staff in support and literacy roles were conscious that the wider staffing body of FET have not necessarily had opportunities for capacity building in literacy support and inclusion.

> I know that a lot of the people that I work with and from my service don't know about the key skills service … I wonder whether they have enough training or awareness or knowledge around literacy. I mean, I think from a common-sense point of view they do, and I think they're really great tutors, so they definitely have that. But that might be something that would be good to roll out. (Interview, BTEI)

Respondents from a literacy background were conscious of the need for responsive pedagogical approaches. They describe how some instructors have a single linear way of teaching and struggle to support learners with different ways of learning to theirs. They contrast this with literacy pedagogy, which by its nature adopts fluid, multiple and responsive pedagogical approaches.

> [Instructors] would say if I'm teaching maths, I teach you in my way. If they don't get it in my way, I don't know what to do. So really, they have a linear way of teaching, and so it's that fixed way. But when they needed to [be] divergent in their style or adding new pieces then it was very difficult for them because they weren't comfortable with that. It was a very linear way of teaching I would say, and they didn't have all the tricks and tips that we have in literacy. We've got many, many ways of approaching teaching in a different way. I think that's one of the strengths of the literacy services that you can tailor your inputs according to the person in front of you. You know we can think of many different ways, so really it was about showing them different ways. I would say they would have one way. Very rarely would they have two or three, so they have one good solid way of doing it. But if it didn't work then they were in trouble or they needed another way. So, it was really about, you know, increasing their repertoire of things and approaches (Interview, Apprenticeship)

They have also begun to build communities of practice to support staff and hope to see that expanding in the future so staff can identify and develop their own PLD needs.

> now we have an [online forum] for teachers from across Adult Ed Service [and] FET College teachers who teach ESOL in this community of practice … and what I would really like to see is the teachers themselves identifying their own PLD needs, but also kind of that those Teach Meets and things like that happening within our organization as well as identifying areas where we need to be buying in or bringing in kind of that external expertise. (Interview, ESOL supports)

They speak of the importance of having internal spaces for PLD and professional discussions, including "PLD and regular meetings with all part-time staff" (FET Survey).

> I think even in-house within our own organization, if the literacy services give workshops with skills and ideas they have, they could support us and it pulls up. And sometimes it's nice to keep it in house and between colleagues as well … We're in the same geographical location so you have an idea of the learners that you're dealing with and they have to give you tips and tricks, on how to support them (Interview, BTEI)

Some coordinators also provide training for their partners and stakeholders to support them in identifying literacy needs and to know what services and supports to access.

> There was also training provided for stakeholders, which I think was really good because we have a good relationship with our stakeholders and … to help them to be aware of special education needs. (Interview, CFO)

The staffing implications of emergent as well as growing areas of inclusive literacy supports across FET has become increasingly important. Respondents discuss how the recognition of inclusive support tasks and roles across FET is key, as many inclusive activities are not named or recognised as part of current FET posts. This is linked to the "lack of a career path for tutors" (FET survey). The call for additional staff resourcing occurs also for specific support roles that are emerging with the prioritising of literacy and inclusion in FET Strategies and the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy (SOLAS 2021b). One coordinator describes how her inclusive role description does not fit the traditional tasks of her equivalent FET peers. Consequently, there is little discussion of these issues in representative organisations and in some cases, respondents describe how there is no representative organisations or trade union that they know of who are willing to represent these new inclusive roles.

> I think most of them don't get it, 'cause if you're a teacher in the ETB in a Post Leaving Cert, you have a syllabus, you have a course to get people through and so on. You really realize it in

literacy, in community, in guidance, in BTEI education. That's where you feel the brunt of it and most of our managers did not come up through our services … and they don't get it about the adult learner and what they've been through. They don't get it. So that's the problem. And then they think Sharon is just a bleeding heart there. So, they need to actually have a system to have our voice heard. (Interview, AEGC)

The lack of literacy teaching as a defined career path can make it a very unattractive option for someone to move into (ALOA workshop group R)

Coordinators were conscious of about the pressures on FET staff which prevents them from engaging in PLD. They call for staff to be given more dedicated time to learn as well to be given time at least once at one or two hours a week on PD upskilling to keep updated.

Staff are very busy, very pressurized and we'd like to see them being given time really to do the training to upskill themselves. And there are so many useful tools out there for literacy, and you know the immersive reader, all of that, but we're training them piecemeal, and I think it would be nice to be able to show all the staff you know it. It just has more time really to do professional development … and then it just has a cascading effect into their learners as well, you know they can then use it in the classes. (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Embedding inclusive practices with the instructors because the instructor initially would have felt that this is not their job. This is the job of the additional supports, but yet they do quite a lot of it, so it's just that clarity around and the impact that they can make in the classroom. Small changes, you know and keeping that dialogue alive, you know, the definitions, common challenges and difficulties, and solutions as well. Change in the methodology or you know it might be incorporating YouTube clips or it might be just presenting different ways of being as a tutor or as an instructor in the classroom. (Interview, Apprenticeship)

Adult literacy organisers have not been employed in [area] in the 12 years I've been here, so all those jobs are going vacant and not being filled and add or guidance vacancy is vacant for a year hasn't been filled so I'm pretty certain they're not being valued (Interview, AEGC)

In other places, there is not a strong culture of professional development or change.

Yeah, so now we do have some instructors that would be upscaling and trying different methodologies and stuff like that, but the vast majority, I think, it just creates that culture of not willing to change or not open to change (Interview, Apprenticeship)

There was a sense of "lack of timetable alleviation, substitution, pay for PLD" (FET survey) in some services and call for "continuity of tutors" and "consistency of resources" across the board (FET survey). Respondents highlighted that the organisational structures in FET need to be developed and embedded into the culture in order for professional conversations not only to begin but also to expand across the organisation and to keep revisiting and refreshing this.

The culture of [literacy inclusion] has to be bedded in first. You know, teachers don't go jumping up and down saying I want this or I need this and maybe we haven't put the structures in place to facilitate those conversations to happen so. So, while we've had a [meetings], sometimes it's the same people you know as opposed to how do you reach, how do you get everybody involved in that? (Interview, Coordinator)

The literacy [services] they have been supporting people with for years and years and got very little recognition. Poor relation, very little resources. You know all of that type of thing to where it is now, which is front and central in FET. Literacy is front and central (FET Director)

Integrating literacy PLD is not a thing that you just do once, you know you have to keep doing it and doing it and doing it. You know you have to keep going back. So, integrating literacy to other

programme provision, is it literacy support or literacy development? And so on. Now not literacy supports but literacy development. We have to do PLD on that (FET Director)

They were clear about the type of professional development they felt is needed in the sector.

I would like every staff member really to have that level 6 Integrating Literacy course. The staff that they did it really found it excellent and I don't have the resources myself to do all this, so I suppose it has to come from higher up. (Interview, BTEI)

[Inclusive literacy awareness] should really be something so normal to teaching staff that were not even thinking about that one learner who comes in, who presents. It's just part and parcel of what I do? To embedded in the very heart, in order to embed something has to be continuous in people's working life, and then they do need training … I supposed to make them more aware or to give them the information and the tips. (Interview, BTEI)

If you had a class of 20 sitting in front of you [it's challenging] to remember all the needs of the students. And that's where UDL comes in. I suppose that it shouldn't just be for the student with the needs, that we meet the needs of all students within the group, so I would have done [training] with a list of all different diagnosis and different teaching techniques that help with that student that somebody just glances at quickly. It's using the UDL approach to bring it into the teacher, and that you know it's accessible for all (Interview, PLC)

They highlight the need for specific roles in FET to clearly coordinate and hold an inclusive support and development. ALOs recount numerous examples of inclusive practice in different FET settings and identify elements that they feel are crucial.

Providing supports to local apprenticeship centres relies heavily on a good working relationship between the ALS and the Apprenticeship service. Patience is required as it can take time to build a trusting relationship while the candidates get used to engaging with a different service and their supports (ALOA workshop group C)

[Working with] tutors to advise them, as how to best support learners, around integrating literacy into their classes. e.g. to retype notes in plain English, encourage that photocopies are clear and glossary of contents are laid out correctly (ALOA workshop group R)

Other areas that arose for discussion in ALO discussion groups were resourcing literacy services with dedicated teams/tutors and that staffing was an issue for inclusion. Investment into services in the form of permanent staff/tutors, support staff and continuing training and PLD for staff was seen as critical. (ALOA workshop R)

FET directors were aware of the need to provide consistent professional development at different levels and stages for all FET staff.

The integration of literacy training for all staff, so that staff are aware of how to identify a literacy issue, whether it's at level 5, level 6, level 4, it doesn't matter whatever it is in a community education programme, BTEI programme, a PLC programme, doesn't matter. Training should be there to recognize the need and that it's integrated as part of the programme. Now, ideally that should be done at the early stages of the programme, so that staff are trained to be able to recognize this [literacy need], because what you do see, particularly in higher levels, sometimes learners can be presenting an assignments coming close to Christmas or November or whatever [when the] first assignments are in and then it's been discovered that actually they require support, and they're well into their programme at this. (FET Director)

we have to find ways maybe upskill the staff who are based in that area then so they have those skills and they're bringing them into the room … I think it's just trying to trying to find ways to do that consistently is the problem now (FET Director)

CPD that people have training in literacy awareness, which is a different thing to integrating literacy. Awareness is a different thing to integrating literacy, we need everybody to be literacy aware, so that even if it's the front line and say our receptionist so that somebody comes in and into in the classroom. It's very much that literacy is not to me. It's not just a separate service, it has to be that literacy is across all provision (FET Director)

Throughout this, they were cognisant of the changing profile of FET learners and the need for more training and support FET staff to engage more effectively with its learners in a fully inclusive manner.

Another issue is ongoing CPD for staff, because the target groups are changing all the time, and as Ireland becomes increasingly more diverse, we have, for example, we've refugees and other groups, you know more marginalized groups … we need to be doing in terms of CPD. We need to be doing a lot more training with our own staff around for example, things like anti-racism training, intercultural training, diversity training, all of that kind of thing, especially as well training around better inclusion of people with disabilities, people with substance misuse issues, there's a whole range of people that we're not really as good as we should be at engaging with effectively. (FET Director)

UDL is a huge thing. And that is where we're doing a lot of training, a new UDL strategy and we're trying to put in structural supports around UDL and having somebody, not quite a full-time person dedicated to that (FET Director)

This also needs to be supported by accessible systems which support easy flows of communications between people.

Tutor mobile phones were introduced in April 2020. These have been instrumental in allowing tutors multiple means of digital engagement with our students (FET Survey)

The majority of content [on our website] is student generated, with student stories in text and audio format, together with interactive exercises. There are also tutor-created lessons. There are no logins necessary, so stories or lessons can be emailed, texted, or WhatsApped directly to students without any need to remember passwords. This is particularly useful for remote teaching and learning, but also provides students with another way to share their work and their stories with friends and families (FET survey).

Chapter 6

Concluding discussion

Overview of research

This chapter presents a brief overview of the key processes and findings of this research before offering a concluding discussion. The recommendations are outlined below, as well as being presented in more detail in the executive summary in the opening pages of the report.

The research explores the current landscape, practices and capacity of the Adult Literacy Services (ALS) to support literacy development across the Further Education and Training (FET) sector in the Republic of Ireland.

The project aims are:

To map the current landscape, practices and capacity of the Adult Literacy Services (ALS) to support literacy, numeracy and digital literacy development across the FET sector

To identify examples of inclusive practice, possibilities and key issues in developing a more inclusive approach to supporting literacy, numeracy and digital literacy development across the FET sector

Research interviews, focus groups, workshops and an online survey were conducted with a range of FET staff nationally in Autumn and Winter 2021. A review of national and international literature about inclusive practices and supports for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy across FET services was also completed.

This research intends to support ALOA as an association to identify key issues in the practice, possibilities, policies, strategies to enhance their support of literacy development across the FET sector in line with the inclusive objectives of the current FET strategy 2020-2024.

Context of Adult Literacy Services in Ireland

The Adult Literacy Services (ALS) in the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in the Republic of Ireland work to respond to the unmet literacy and numeracy needs of these adult learners. The Adult Literacy Services design and deliver a wide range of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy tuition to adults in Ireland. They work across different areas, centres and platforms, with multiple partners in the statutory, charitable and community spheres. The ETBs are the largest provider of Further Education and Training (FET) services in the country, offering a range of unaccredited and accredited courses of learning. ETBs are statutory authorities that have responsibility for education and training, youth work and other statutory functions in the Republic of Ireland.

A key feature of FET is

its unique learning and support-based approach which is in contrast to mainstream education. One-to-one supports from tutors, smaller class sizes and a welcoming and accepting environment all contribute to supporting learners to positively engage in education and progress to further education and training and employment. (ETBI, 2021, p. 79)

Report Summary

Chapter 2 outlined the context for adult literacy in Ireland, reviewing the role and concerns of Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) and their representative body, the Adult Literacy Organisers Association (ALOA). It is based on an analysis of relevant policies, literature and research from

recent years within Ireland and internationally. This review begins by outlining the policy context for the Adult Literacy Services in the Republic of Ireland. This is followed by an overview of the organisational structure of adult literacy service provision, ALOA and the work of Adult Literacy Organisers. Key themes emerged from this review of existing literature are discussed in light of their implications for the work of Adult Literacy Organisers.

Chapter 3 discusses the key themes emerging from the literature review that are specific to inclusive practices in adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. It draws on a wide range of national and international literature across different sectors of education to focus on inclusive practices of adult literacy in FET. Some material illustrates current practices and policies, whilst other sectors discuss key values and themes informing contemporary thinking about adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. This review is orientated towards the interests and perspective of literacy practitioners.

Chapter 4 reviews the research design which was used to conduct this research, giving an overview of its research design, research methods and analysis, as well as considering the ethical implications of this research. It presents the different stages of the research and discusses key issues.

Chapter 5 chapter reviews the general profile of research participants before discussing the key findings of this research under five key themes.

Learner-centred ethos of literacy support and development

Recognition of care and relationships in literacy

Distinctive pedagogy and learning of literacy

Responsive organisations and measurement systems

Resources and professional development needs

This current chapter discusses the implications of this research, presenting a series of conclusions and recommendations.

Recommendations

This research clearly demonstrates that the Adult Literacy Services are currently responding in supportive and learner-centred ways to the diverse and context-specific needs of for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy support development across FET.

The recommendations fall under five strands:

Learner-centred ethos of literacy support and development

Recognition of care and relationships in literacy

Distinctive pedagogy and learning of literacy

Responsive organisations and measurement systems

Resources and professional development needs

Learner-centred ethos of literacy support and development

The learner-centred and responsive ethos that is characteristic of the literacy service forms the first key finding. This ethos is core to supporting literacy development in FET in integrated and inclusive ways that responds to the needs of each learner, group and service is key.
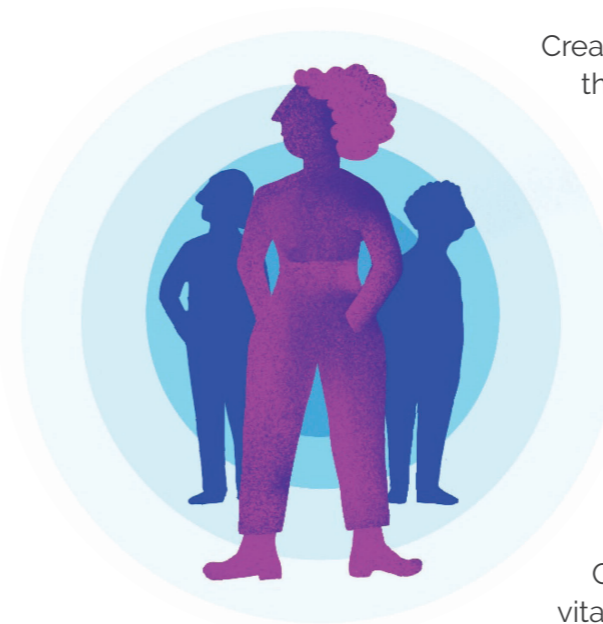
Creating conditions for FET staff and management to develop their awareness of its specific characteristics, and how they can support inclusive literacy practices in each area of FET provision is key. However, it is increasingly felt by participants to be under-valued and under-recognised in the current structure of QQI levels and the reporting systems for FET more widely.

Figure 18. Learner-centred and responsive

Recognition of care and relationships in literacy

Care and relational aspects of learner support emerged as vital elements in the development of literacy support across FET. Recognising the supportive relationship that FET staff create with their learners runs through all elements of the pedagogical process as central for literacy support.

Developing and supporting a wider network of internal and external partnerships is a crucial part of coordination work of literacy support which needs to be supported

Distinctive pedagogy and learning of literacy

The distinctive pedagogy of adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy is essential in support literacy development across FET. The significance of learning from experiences based in people's real-life context is central to an adult education pedagogy and is congruent with the vocational basis of many FET subjects. The highly responsive, supportive and creative mode of pedagogy that is evident across many FET practices needs to be recognised and supported at a systems level. Attention is required at key phases such as initial assessment, ongoing supports, assignments and progression.

Responsive organisations and measurement systems

Respondents identify several aspects of organisational culture, processes and culture which support the inclusion of literacy supports, as well as discussing challenges to creating literacy-inclusive learning organisations.

Inclusion of literacy was not occurring systematically across FET as an organisation or system, with variation evident across the sector in the level of supports. This needs to be addressed at a PLD and FET-system level.

Resources and professional development needs

Clear areas of resources and professional development needs were identified in the research, in areas such as literacy-awareness raising across FET staff, specific literacy areas such as language and ESOL, TEL, UDL and numeracy to be provided systemically in a way that supports staff to participate in PLD and to engage in communities of practice that allow them to share practices and experiences of supporting the inclusion of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy across FET.

References

ALOA (2021) *ALOA's Submission to the Consultation Process for the 10-Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy*.

Baker, J., Lynch, K., Cantillon, S. and J. Walsh (2004) *Equality: From Theory to Action*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Ball, S. (2006) *Education Policy and Social Class*. London: Routledge

Ball, S.J. and S. Exley (2010) Making policy with 'good ideas': policy networks and the 'intellectuals' of New Labour, *Journal of Education Policy*, 25:2, 151-169

Barton, D. and Hamilton, M. (1998) *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*. London: Routledge

Bassett, M., Brady, B., Fleming, T. and Inglis, T. (1989). *For Adults Only: A Case for Adult Education in Ireland*. Dublin: AONTAS

British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. 4th ed. Available at: https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101

Burke, L. (2017) *Fostering Inclusion; Challenging the Illusion Critically Reflective Educational Stories: Facilitated by students and graduates with different learning abilities on a Fully Inclusive Higher Education Initiative in Ireland*. Masters thesis, National University of Ireland Maynooth. Available at: https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/12234/

Brehn, V. (2001) *Promoting effective North – South NGO partnerships: A Comparative Study of 10 European NGOs*. INTRAC The International NGO Training and Research Centre Occasional Papers Series Number 35. Caledon Institute of Social Policy (1998) *Perspectives on Partnership*. Ottawa: Caledon.

Cardini, A. (2006) An analysis of the rhetoric and practice of educational partnerships in the UK: an arena of complexities, tensions and power. *Journal of Education Policy*, 21:4, 393-415.

Carpentieri, J. D., Litster, J., & Frumkin, L. (2010) *Adult Numeracy: A review of research*. London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

Carvalho, L. M. and E. Costa (2015) Seeing education with one's own eyes and through PISA lenses: considerations of the reception of PISA in European countries. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 36:5, 638-646*.

CDETB (2020) *Informing the Future: review of CDETB's responses to the Covid 19 emergency*. Available at: http://cityofdublin.etb.ie/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2020/06/INFORMING-THE-FUTURE-review-of-CDETBs-reponces-to-the-COVID-19-emergency-web-publication.pdf

Clarke, J., Gewirtz, S. and McLaughlin, E. (2000) *New Managerialism, New Welfare?* London: Sage.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (2011) *Research Methods in Education*. 7th ed. Abingdon: Routledge.

Commission of the European Communities (CEC) (2001*). Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*. COM (2001) 678 final. Available at: http://www.viaa.gov.lv/files/free/48/748/pol_10_com_en.pdf

Condron, S. (2018) *A Case Study Investigating the Impact of PLSS and FARR on Planning, Teaching and Learning in Adult Education*. Unpublished MSc Dissertation, Dublin City University.

Connolly, B. (2014) Community Education: exploring formative influences within the maelstrom of conflicting social forces. In Murray, M., Grummell, B. and A. Ryan (eds) *Further Education and training: History, Politics and Practice*. Maynooth: MACE

Crowther, J., K. Maclachan and L. Tett (2010) Adult literacy, learning identities and pedagogic practice. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 29:6, 651-664

CSO (2013) *PIAAC 2012 - Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies: Survey Results from Ireland*

Cumming, J., & Gal, I. (2000). Assessment in adult numeracy education: Issues and principles for good practice. In I. Gal (Ed.), Adult numeracy development: Theory, research, practice (pp. 305-333). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

DES (2001) *Circular M15/2001: Pay and Conditions for Full-time Adult Literacy Organisers*. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/c02120bfb1344f2490074de2a2983f41/

DES (n.d.) *Guidelines to Enhance Cooperation between Back to Education Initiative and Adult Literacy Programmes*. Available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges-Services/Further-Education-and-Training/Back-to-Education-Initiative-BTEI-/btei_adult_literacy.pdf

Duckworth, V. and L. Tett (2019) Transformative and emancipatory literacy to empower. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. 38, 4: 366-378

Eivers, E. and Ryan, E. and Brinkley, A. (2000) *Characteristics of early school leavers: results of the research strand for the 8- to 15- year old early school leavers initiative*. Dublin: Education Research Centre.

ELINET (2016) *Literacy in Ireland: Country Report Adults*. Available at: http://www.eli-net.eu/fileadmin/ELINET/Redaktion/user_upload/Ireland_Adults_Report.pdf

ESRI (2012) Literacy, numeracy and activation among the unemployed Research series Number 25. Available at: https://www.esri.ie/system/files?file=media/file-uploads/2015-07/RS25.pdf

ETBI (2017) Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI) *Meeting the Needs of Learners with Disabilities (comprehends Mental Health and Learning Difficulties) In Further Education and Training (FET)*. Available at: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwjutpnayejhAhWHCjQIHUBTC3kQFjAAegQIARAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.etbi.ie%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2018%2F08%2FMeeting_Needs_Learners_with_Special_Needs_FET-2.docx&usg=AOvVaw3BPz0ekKUmvydO9HYDMKXe

EU Council (2016) *Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults*. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2016_484_R_0001

Esterhuizen, J.M. and G.H. van Rensburg (2021) The historical influence of nursing organisations on the development of the nursing profession in South Africa. In *International Journal of Africa Nursing Sciences1, 4: 1-8*

ETBI (2021) A Study of the role, contribution and impact of Education and Training Board (ETB) Further Education and Training (FET) Services on Active Inclusion in Ireland. Position Paper. Available at: https://www.etbi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ETBI-Active-Inclusion-A4.pdf?x88492

Feeley, M. (2009) Living in Care and Without Love: The Impact of Affective Inequalities on Learning Literacy. In Lynch, K., Baker, J. and Lyons, M. *Affective Equality: Love, Care and Injustice*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Feeley, M., and Hegarty, A. (2013) *Distance literacy: filling the gaps for learners, families and the economy*. Dublin: National Adult Literacy Agency. Available at: https://www.bvekennis.nl/wp-content/uploads/documents/13-0157.pdf

Feeley, M. (2014). *Learning care lessons: Literacy, love, care and solidarity*. London: Tufnell

Fleming, T., Finnegan, F. & Loxley, A. (2017). *Access and Participation in Irish Higher Education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

Fowler, A. (ed) (2000) Questioning Partnership: The Reality of Aid and NGO Relations'. In *IDS Bulletin* No. 31:3, Sussex: Institute of Development Studies.

Furlong, J., Barton, L., Miles, S., Whiting, C., & Whitty, G. (2000), Teacher Education in Transition, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Goos, M., Geiger, V., & Dole, S. (2014). Transforming professional practice in numeracy teaching. In Y. Li, E. Silver, & S. Li (Eds.), *Transforming mathematics instruction: multiple approaches and practices* (pp. 81-102). New York: Springer

Government of Ireland (2020) *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025*. Available from: https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/46558/5cea3d74aa934fe780cc521ddbe477a7.pdf#page=1

Hamilton, M. and K. Pitt (2001) Changing Policy Discourses: Constructing Literacy Inequalities. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31: 6, p. 596-605

Hamilton, M. (2014) Survey literacies. In Duckworth, V. and Ade-Ojo, G. (Eds) *Landscapes of Specific Literacies in Contemporary Society: Exploring a social model of literacy*. Oxon, UK: Abingdo. pp. 61- 74.

Hamilton, M. (2017) How International Large-Scale Skills Assessments engage with national actors: mobilising networks through policy, media and public knowledge. *Critical Studies in Education*, 58:3, 280-294.

Hegarty, A. and M. Feeley (2020) *Enabling Intergenerational Learning: Background Report on Family Literacy Practices in Irish Education and Training Boards (ETBs)*. SOLAS-ETBI-NALA. Available from: https://www.nala.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Enabling-Intergenerational-Learning-Background-report-on-family-literacy-practices-in-Irish-ETBs-2020.pdf

Hislop, H. (2011) 'Teacher Education and Ireland's National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy'. *SCOTENS Annual Conference*. 29 September 2011. Available from: http://scotens.org/docs/2011-Hislop-speech.pdf

Houses of the Oireachas (2018) Joint Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection and Joint Committee on Education and Skills and Joint Committee on Health *Review of supports available to people with disabilities transitioning from education or training into employment.* July 2018, no. JCSP 01/2018. Available at: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_employment_affairs_and_social_protection/reports/2018/2018-07-27_report-on-supports-available-to-people-with-disabilities-transitioning-from-education-or-training-into-employment_en.pdf

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2015) *Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: report to UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's third periodic review*. Available at: https://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/icescr_report.pdf

Irish Travellers Movement (ITM) (2019) *Education*. Available at: https://itmtrav.ie/strategic-priorities/education/

Lodge, A. and K. Lynch (Eds.) (2004) *Diversity in Schools* Dublin: The Equality Authority. Available at: https://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/diversity_at_school.pdf

Lynch, K., Lyons, M. and S. Cantillon (2007) 'Breaking silence: educating citizens for love, care and solidarity'. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 17:1-2, 1-19

Lynch, K., Grummell, B. and Devine, D. (2015) New Managerialism in Education: Commercialization, Carelessness and Gender. 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Lynch, K. and Grummell, B. (2018) New managerialism as an organisational form of neoliberalism. In Sowa, F., Staples, R., Zapfel, S. eds *The Transformation of Work in Welfare State Organizations: New Public Management and the Institutional Diffusion of Ideas*. London: Routledge.

McCarron, M., Haigh, M. and McCallion, P. eds. (2017) *Health, Wellbeing and Social Inclusion: Ageing with an Intellectual Disability in Ireland Evidence from the First Ten Years of The Intellectual Disability Supplement to The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (IDS-TILDA) Wave 3 IDS-TILDA. TILDA: Dublin.* Available at: https://www.tcd.ie/tcaid/assets/pdf/wave3report.pdf

McCulloch, G. (2004) *Documentary Research: In Education, History and the Social Sciences*. Routledge Falmer, London and New York.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions in adult learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Milana, M. (2012) Globalisation, transnational policies and adult education. *International Review of Education*. 58: 6, 777-797

Morgan, M. and Kett, M. (2003) *The Prison Adult Literacy Survey.* Dublin: Department of Justice and Law Reform.

Murray, M., Grummell, B. and A. Ryan eds. (2015) *Further Education and Training: History, Politics, Practice*. Kildare: MACE.

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) (1999) *Guidelines for the inclusion of adults with learning disabilities in literacy schemes*. Available at: https://www.nala.ie/resources/guidelines-inclusion-adults-learning-disabilitiesliteracy-schemes

NALA (2011) *NALA 1980 – 2010 A Living History*. Available from: https://www.nala.ie/publications/nala-1980-2010-a-living-history/

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) (2012) *Guidelines for good adult literacy work*. NALA: Dublin.

NALA (2016) Meeting the challenge: strategies for motivating learners in adult education in Ireland. Available from: https://www.nala.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Meeting-the-challenge-strategies-for-motivating-learners-in-adult-education-in-Ireland.pdf

NALA (2020) *Literacy Now*. Available from https://www.nala.ie/publications/literacy-now/

NALA (2021) *Learning to Work*. Available at: NALA-Learning-for-work-2021.pdf.

Newman, J. (2017) Deconstructing the debate over evidence-based policy. *Critical Policy Studies*, 11: 2, 211-226.

Nussbaum, M. (2011) *Creating capabilities: The human development approach,* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

OECD (2012) *First Results from the Survey of Adults Skills*. Available from: Skills volume 1 (eng)--full v12--eBook (04 11 2013).pdf (oecd.org)

OECD (2018) *The Future of Education and Skills Education 2030 Position Paper*. Available from: https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf

O'Keeffe, C. (2020) Investigating Adult Skills Assessment in Esonline. In Grummell, B. and F. Finnegan. *Doing Critical and Creative Research in Adult Education*. Netherlands: Brill

O'Reilly, N. (2021) Covid-19 has widened the educational divide. We urgently need to tackle it. *The Irish Times*, 13 May 2021. Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/covid-19-has-widened-the-educational-divide-we-urgently-need-to-tackle-it-1.4564036

Ó Tuama, S. (2016) 'Adult education and reflexive activation: prioritising recognition, respect, dignity and capital accumulation'. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 7: 1, 107-118

Pavee Point (2021) *Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Session on Traveller Education, with reference to Inequality, Digital Divide and the Impact of Reduced Timetables June 2021.* Available at: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_education_further_and_higher_education_research_innovation_and_science/submissions/2021/2021-06-29_opening-statement-and-submission-tracey-reilly-pavee-point_en.pdf

Pickett, K. and R.G. Wilkinson (2009) *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. UK: Allen Lane. Available at: https://equalitytrust.org.uk/resources/the-spirit-level

Redmond, G. (2015) *What is counted becomes what counts: Measuring the correct learning outcomes in adult literacy.* Masters thesis, National University of Ireland Maynooth. http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/9610/

Riddell, S. (2012) *Education and Disability/Special Needs – Policies and Practices in Education, Training and Employment for Students with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs in the EU*. NESSE (2012) *Education and Disability/Special Needs: policies and practices in education, training and employment for students with disabilities and special educational needs in the EU*. Available from: https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2012-Education-and-disability-special-needs.pdf

Ryan, R. (2019) *How Inequality in Education in Ireland is Produced, Reproduced, Justified, and Resisted at the Intersection of Disability and Social Class.* PhD thesis, National University of Ireland Maynooth. Available from: http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/11183/

Sachs, J. (2003), *The Activist Teaching Profession*. Buckingham: Open University Press

Schön, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner. How professionals think in action*. London: Temple Smith

Sen, A. (1999) *Development as Freedom*, New York: Knopf

Shannon, D. (2019) A Tale of a Discursive Shift: Analysing EU Policy Discourses in Irish Adult Education Policy -- From the "White Paper" to the "Further Education and Training Strategy". *The Adult Learner*. pp. 98-117

Skalecka, M. (2014) *From boom to bust: How the economic crisis renders disabled people to the bottom shelf: a qualitative study of the views of adults with physical impairments on the economic crisis in Co. Kerry, Ireland*. MA thesis, Gothenburg University. Available at: https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/36134/1/gupea_2077_36134_1.pdf

Smith, Mark K. (1999, 2009) Animateurs, animation and fostering learning and change. In *the encylopaedia of informal education*. [www.infed.org/mobi/animateurs-animation-learning-and-change]

SOLAS (2017) *SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019*. Available at: http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/SOLASCorporatePlan.pdf

SOLAS (2017a) *The 2017 Further Education and Training (FET) Services Plan*. Available at: www.solas.ie/solaspdflibrary/fet%20services%20plan%202017.pdf

SOLAS (2018) *Review of ETB ESOL provision and initial language assessment for low-skilled and unemployed migrants*. Available from: https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/7a61ee6ee9/english-language-provision-and-language-assessment.pdf

SOLAS (2020) *Enabling Intergenerational Learning: Background Report on Family Literacy Practices in Irish Education and Training Boards (ETBs)*. Available from: https://www.nala.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Enabling-Intergenerational-Learning-Background-report-on-family-literacy-practices-in-Irish-ETBs-2020.pdf

SOLAS (2020a) *A Conceptual Framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for the Irish Further Education and Training Sector*. Available from: https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/948bcabcc4/udl-for-fet-framework.pdf

SOLAS (2020b) *Future FET: Transforming Learning. The National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy*. Available from: https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf

SOLAS (2020c) *Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy: Consultation Paper*. Available from: https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/61f272cf8c/consultation-paper-alnd-strategy.pdf

SOLAS (2021a) *Development of Good Practice Guidelines for Integrated and Standalone Numeracy Provision for Adults at Levels 1–3*. https://www.nala.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/15341_SOLAS_Numeracy_Report_Web_07092021.pdf

SOLAS (2021b) *Adult Literacy for Life: A 10–Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy*. Available from: https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/b78324692b/15607_all_strategy_web.pdf

SOLAS (2021c) *Inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services: Research Report*. implementation-of-guidelines-on-the-inclusion-learners-background-research-report-2021.pdf

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Street, B. (2001) *Literacy and Development: Ethnographic Perspectives*. Routledge: London

Swain, J. (2005) Beyond the daily application: motivations for adults attending numeracy classes. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 10:3, 305-324

Taylor, S. (2004) Researching educational policy and change in 'new times': using critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Education Policy*. 19:4, 433-451

Tett, L. and K. Maclachlan (2008) Learners, tutors and power in adult literacies research in Scotland, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 27:6, 659-672

Tett, L., Hamilton, M. and J. Crowther (eds). (2012) *More Powerful Literacies*. Leicester: NIACE

Tett, L. (2019) 'Transforming Learning Identities in Literacy Programmes'. *Journal of Transformative Education*. 17:2, 154-172

UNESCO (2016) *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656

UNESCO (2019) *4th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education: leave no one behind: participation, equity and inclusion*. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372274

Vorhaus, J., Duckworth, K., Budge, D. and L. Feinstein (2008) *The Social and personal benefits of learning: A summary of key research findings*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education, University of London: London

Walkinstown Association for People with an Intellectual Disability Limited (WALK) (2015) *Accessing mainstream training: Barriers for people with Intellectual Disabilities*. Available at: http://www.walk.ie/perch/resources/walk-accessing-mainstream-training-report-2015.pdf

Ward, F and P. Ayton (2019) *A Short History of the Adult Literacy Service sand The Foundation of the Adult Literacy Organisers Association*. Available at: http://www.aloa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/A-Short-History-of-the-Adult-Literacy-Service-and-ALOA-4.pdf