

Opening Statement from Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills on Adult Literacy

Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) welcomes the invitation by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills to contribute to the Committee's examination on Adult Literacy this input is provided by Crona Gallagher Director of Further Education and Training with Donegal Education and Training Board, Vice-Chair of the Director of Further Education and Training Forum and Co Chair of the Director of Further Education and Training Forum Social Inclusion Sub Group.

Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) is the national representative body for the 16 ETBs. Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are statutory authorities which have responsibility for education and training, youth work and a range of other statutory functions. ETBs manage and operate second-level schools, further education colleges, multi-belief community national schools and a range of adult and further education centres delivering education and training programmes.

The delivery of programmes by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) is guided by SOLAS FET Strategy which presents a roadmap and implementation plan to support economic development, increase social inclusion and meet the needs of all learners, communities and employers who engage with FET. Goal 2 of the current Further Education and Training Strategy relates specifically to active and social inclusion and supports the inclusion of all individuals to participate in Further Education and Training Programmes to enable every individual to fully participate in society.

Programme delivery ranges from NFQ Level 1-6 to a spectrum of learners which including adult literacy learners. In addition, ETBs provide a range of supports for learners to ensure that programmes and services are accessible to all including customised learning supports on an individual/group basis, literacy and numeracy support, language support and supportive learning technologies to accommodate learners with disabilities.

Defining Literacy

Literacy or being 'literate' is defined in a number of ways, and these definitions are continually evolving. Historically the term literacy was a measurement of reading and writing. The definition of literacy has changed and evolved over time and is now considered in a much broader context to reflect skills, knowledge and competence required by individuals to participate fully in family, community, work and society. Literacy has been defined as the skills, knowledge and competence required by individuals to participate fully in family, community, work and society and is fundamental to personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability. Literacy not only enriches an individual's life, but it creates opportunities for people to develop skills that will help them provide for themselves and their family.

1. Benefits of Improving Literacy

In addition to improved reading, writing, numeracy and ICT skills there is substantial Irish and international research evidence that participation in adult literacy provision has a positive personal and social impact on individuals and communities. These wider benefits include improved confidence and self-esteem, assertiveness, active citizenship, improved health, greater community involvement, preparation for work and a better sense of personal wellbeing.

Learners from Education and Training Board (ETB) programmes have provided a wealth of evidence on the benefits they have experienced by participating in adult literacy programmes. The ETBI-SOLAS-NALA National Adult Literacy Awareness campaign which takes place in September each year have developed video clips based on these stories to promote engagement and are available on www.takethefirststep.ie The awareness campaign has proven to be one of the most successful methods of promoting the benefits of returning to education for those with low levels of literacy.

2. Barriers and Challenges of adults in becoming more literate

Barriers to participation in Further Education and Training have been found to include:

- Low Confidence and self-esteem
- Negative experience of education
- Childcare
- Transport
- Loss or reduction in benefits
- Suitability of courses
- Lack of awareness of Further Education and Training

3. ETB Provision

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) offer a range of supports for learners to ensure all adults have the opportunity to improve their employment prospects and enrich their lives. For some people, difficulties with literacy or numeracy can present a real obstacle to further learning. Core skills are a crucial enabler of full participation in work and society. Gaps in reading, writing or mathematical skills may hamper learners' progress in working towards qualifications, which in turn puts them at a disadvantage in the job market. Such challenges can also present practical constraints in negotiating daily life and may discourage people from participating in their communities and developing their personal potential.

Adult literacy programmes are primarily focused on learning outcomes at NFQ Levels 1-3. The priority target cohort for adult literacy programmes are those adults with primary education or less and whose literacy and numeracy skills do not match Level 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). It is recognised that there some adults with upper second level education whose literacy and numeracy skills are less than or equivalent to NFQ Level 3 and this cohort are included in the target priority for programmes.

Within this target cohort noted previously, there are individuals and groups² that experience particular and acute barriers to participation which include:

¹ SOLAS (2017) Barriers to Participation in FET

² the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion

- The unemployed and in particular, the long term unemployed
- Lone Parents
- Travellers
- Migrants
- Older people
- People with a disability
- Disadvantaged women and men, particularly those living in rural isolation
- The homeless
- Ex-offenders

ETB Adult Literacy Programmes provide a core service of group literacy and numeracy and ICT tuition, available during the daytime and evenings, as well as Family Literacy, English as a Second or Other Language and Skills for Work provision. Tuition is provided to groups ranging between 4 and 8 learners for up to 8 hours per week, including intensive tuition options. ETBs offer skills assessment on all literacy and numeracy programmes (accredited and unaccredited), Skills for Work and ESOL programmes. Tuition is offered to individuals based on the outcome of the skills assessment.

More recently ETBs have provided tailored literacy support to Apprenticeship programmes. Evidence from ETBs indicated that many apprentices struggled with the maths and literacy elements of their respective apprenticeship programme - for example with electrical apprentices this includes equations, fractions, algebra, for plumbing it includes volume, capacity, calculations. Apprentices are assessed at Phase 1 induction to highlight the numeracy and literacy requirements of their apprenticeships and to inform them of ETB literacy and numeracy supports. They are assessed again on entry to Phase 2 where study skills and maths supports are delivered either as an integrated part of the programme, one to one or in small groups. The demand for these supports has grown rapidly with 960 apprentices applying for this support from January to August 2019. Tailored literacy supports have been designed and shared across ETBs. These literacy supports include comprehensions skills, literacy, numeracy study skills and IT.

The Breacadh initiative supports the teaching of the Irish language by developing literacy resources for use in the broad FET provision. Breacadh recently launched Mar a Déarfá, a phonics programme which is transforming the teaching of Irish not only in FET but at primary

level as it has been welcomed by the primary sector. Breacadh is chaired by GRETB with representatives from all Gaeltacht areas.

Tuition is offered on a full-time or part-time basis with flexible options in relation to time, duration and location. Typically, programmes take place in education and training centres and community settings. Programmes are delivered by highly skilled experienced staff, who have access to on-going Professional Development, nationally and locally, which includes Diversity Training.

Provision for adult literacy is delivered through several programmes;

- Adult Literacy groups (small groups)
- Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE)
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Skills for Work - workplace literacy courses
- Voluntary Literacy provision (one-to-one tuition)
- Family Learning Programmes

In 2018 there were 59,027 beneficiaries of Adult Literacy provision in ETBs. For 2019 to the end of October, there were 58,107 beneficiaries of Adult Literacy provision in ETB³s.

Conclusion

Education and Training Boards offer an extensive range of programme options (accredited and unaccredited) and a range of support services within the adult literacy programme. ETBs recognise the need for accessible, clear information as a driver for increasing participation numbers in FET programmes. Information materials which have been ‘Plain English’ reviewed by their literacy service are available; in addition open days, information sessions, radio interviews with existing learners and social media usage are just some of the methods employed to attract hard- to- reach learners. FETCH Courses is the national database of all courses delivered by ETBs where prospective learners can access information, express interest or register for courses.

Childcare support is not currently available to participants on adult literacy programmes. In recent years access to transport has become a major issue for unemployed, low income and disadvantaged learners to accessing programmes in rural areas. ETBs offer programmes in a

³ See appendix 1

range of settings, including Education and Training Centres, Community Centres, local halls, Family Resource Centres, and libraries, at flexible times which facilitate the needs of learners. Accessing these programmes can be prohibited by transport costs. Lack of clarity on retention of DEASP and other benefits may result in non-participation in education programmes as learners fear their benefits will be reduced. An increase in allowances may be an incentive to those in receipt of social welfare benefits.

By addressing some of these issues participation and retention rates could be increased which in turn would address some of the other barriers to participation, for example confidence and self-esteem.

End of Response

Appendix 1

Report on Adult Literacy Data on PLSS - 2018 and 2019 to end October

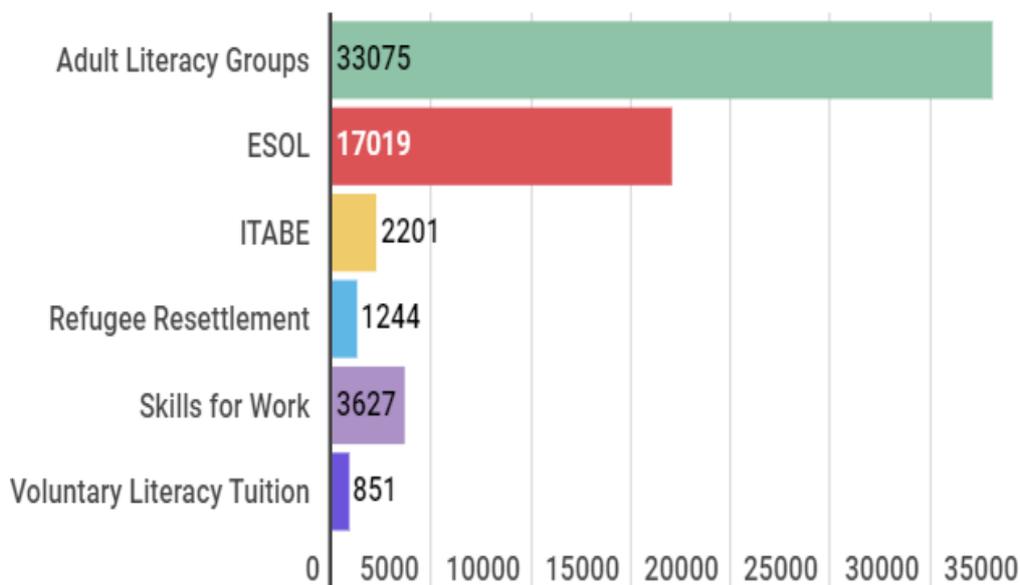
This report gives a data overview of Adult Literacy provision within ETBs for 2018 and for 2019 to end October. This report uses beneficiaries⁴not unique learners.

In 2018, there were 59,027 beneficiaries of Adult Literacy provision in ETBs.

2019 to end October, there were 58,107 beneficiaries of Adult Literacy provision in ETBs.

2019 Activity Data to end October

Programme Category

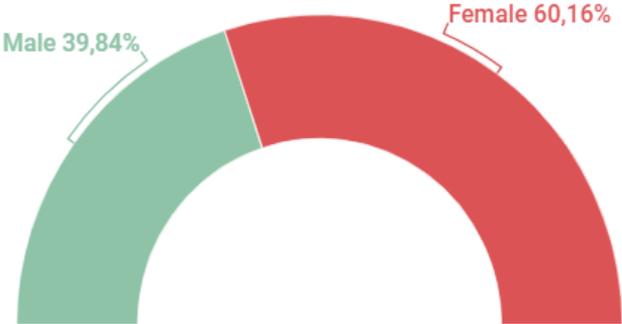


Gender and Age

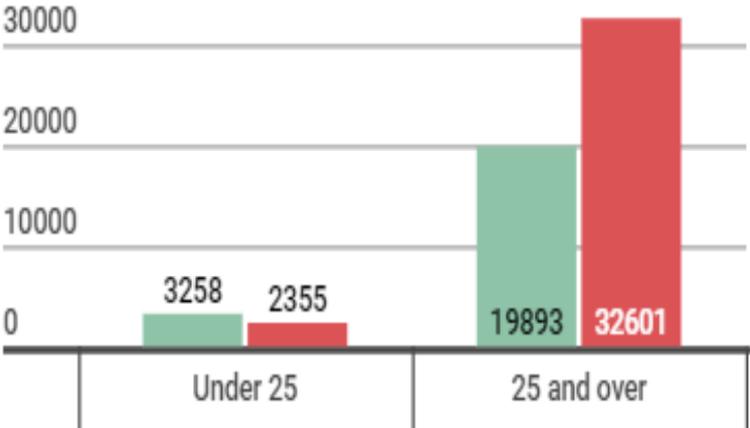
⁴ The learner multiplied by the number of courses which they have attended (or completed) within a programme or across different programmes, or providers.

⁴ Self declared, must be entered within 4 weeks from finish date.

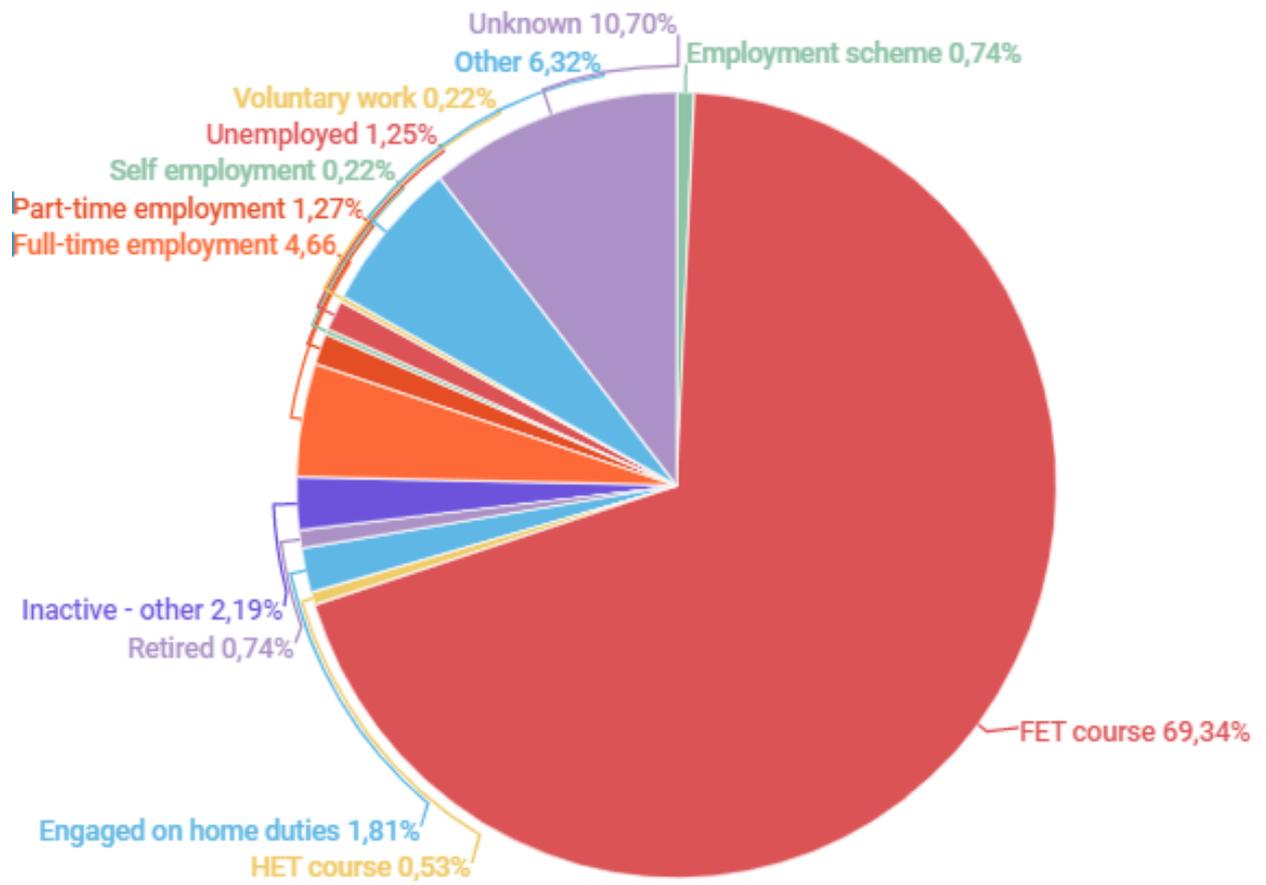
Male: 23,151 | Female: 34,956



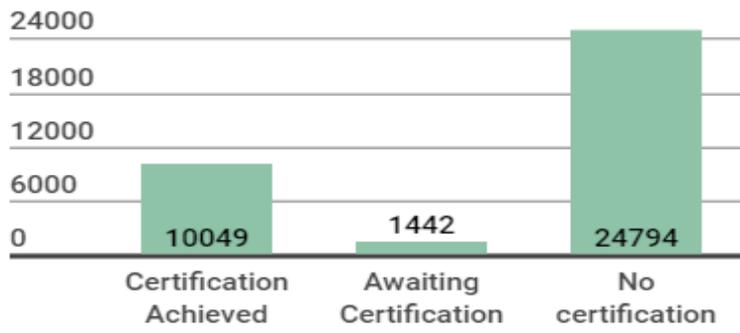
● Male ● Female



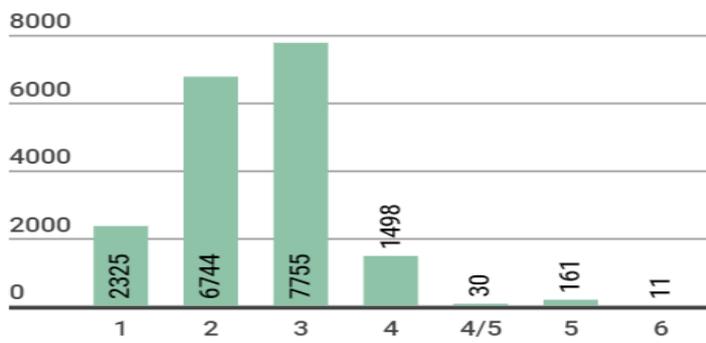
Learner Outcomeⁱ



Learner Certification



Certification Level



	Adult Literacy Groups	ESOL	ITABE	Refugee Resettlement	Skills for Work	Voluntary Literacy Tuition	TOTAL
Cavan and Monaghan ETB	1,769	690	108		343	3	2,913
City of Dublin ETB	5,418	2,244	324	165	102	451	8,704
Cork ETB	4,335	931	235	10	205	62	5,778
Donegal ETB	2,287	273	126	57	161	13	2,917
Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB	2,003	1,076	372		344		3,795
Galway and Roscommon ETB	2,349	1,231	194	51	189	28	4,042
Kerry ETB	1,398	417	53		28	66	1,962
Kildare and Wicklow ETB	1,615	946	201		96	99	2,957
Kilkenny and Carlow ETB	1,335	294	141	84	150	63	2,067
Laois and Offaly ETB	1,072	465	183	133	147	23	2,023
Limerick Clare ETB	2,988	1,419	157	22	283	83	4,952
Longford and Westmeath ETB	1,404	930	100	36	185	18	2,673
Louth and Meath ETB	2,120	1,932	190	184	168	152	4,746
Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB	1,431	998	221	70	294		3,014
Tipperary ETB	1,241	593	109		315		2,258
Waterford and Wexford ETB	2,539	964	48	384	286	5	4,226
	35,304	15,403	2,762	1,196	3,296	1,066	59,027

2019 to end October Activity by ETB

	Adult Literacy Groups	ESOL	ITABE	Refugee Resettlement	Skills for Work	Voluntary Literacy Tuition	TOTAL
Cavan and Monaghan ETB	1,826	719	77	77	397	0	3,096
City of Dublin ETB	5,409	2,164	298	0	182	370	8,423
Cork ETB	3,633	710	230	8	176	40	4,797
Donegal ETB	2,322	292	59	135	146	8	2,962
Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB	1,868	3,254	389		383		5,894
Galway and Roscommon ETB	2,057	1,022	127	6	141	28	3,381
Kerry ETB	1,154	484	12		23	75	1,748
Kildare and Wicklow ETB	1,368	924	125		135	75	2,627
Kilkenny and Carlow ETB	913	229	107	199	97	27	1,572
Laois and Offaly ETB	858	626	227	107	115	19	1,952
Limerick Clare ETB	3,051	1,271	148		415	102	4,987
Longford and Westmeath ETB	1,313	804	110	69	220	9	2,525
Louth and Meath ETB	1,769	1,782	105	165	138	93	4,052
Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB	1,553	913	107	48	223		2,844
Tipperary ETB	1,318	526	80		410		2,334
Waterford and Wexford ETB	2,663	1,389		430	426	5	4,913
	33,075	17,109	2,201	1,244	3,627	851	58,107