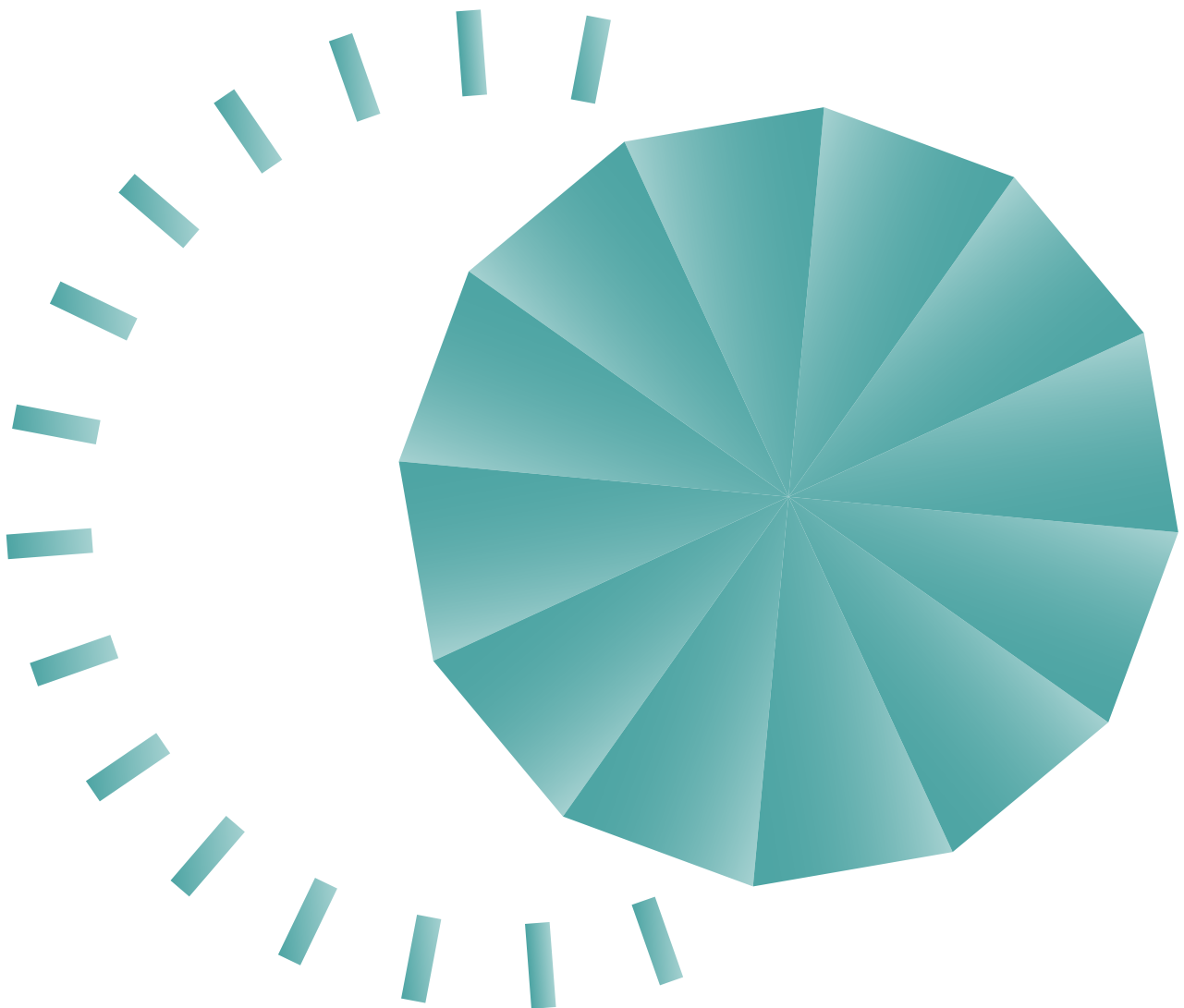


Implementation of Guidelines on the Inclusion of Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in Adult Literacy Services **Background Report**

2021



Implementation of Guidelines on the Inclusion of Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in Adult Literacy Services

Background report prepared for SOLAS by NALA, Bernie Grummell, Meliosa Bracken and Conor Magrath at the Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education, Maynooth University.

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NALA was commissioned to produce these guidelines, case studies and recommendations on the inclusion of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities on behalf of SOLAS and ETBI and engaged the research expertise of Bernie Grummell, Meliosa Bracken and Conor Magrath at the Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education, Maynooth University as partners in delivering the resulting reports.

We are grateful to the Chief Executives, Directors of Further Education and Training, Adult Education Organisers, Adult Literacy Organisers, Tutors, Resource Workers, Coordinators and all other staff in ETBs for facilitating and/or taking part in the research process.

We would like to acknowledge the generosity of all those who participated in this research. Their willingness to engage and rich contributions are a testament to their professionalism and commitment to best practice in the inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities.

In particular, we would like to thank:¹

- the designated ETB respondents who completed our online survey
- the ETB Adult Literacy Services who volunteered as case study sites
- the ETB staff members who attended the regional workshops
- the adult literacy learners who participated in a focus group interview.

NALA and the team at Maynooth University are grateful for the warm welcome received during case study visits from adult literacy learners, tutors, resource workers, coordinators, Adult Literacy Organisers, Adult Education Officers and representatives from various Intellectual Disability Support Services who gave their time generously. We sincerely hope that this report does justice to the many innovative and effective inclusion practices already in place in ETB adult education services and reflects the enthusiasm and commitment shown to establishing and maintaining meaningful inclusion for adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services.

Special thanks to Tamara Byrne and Michael Gannon, co-facilitators of the regional workshops and wonderful advocates for adults with intellectual disabilities.

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¹ All photographs used throughout the research report were taken by the researchers (unless otherwise attributed) with the permission of all research participants.

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that we present this substantial and important piece of research which builds on the 2018 Guidelines on the Inclusion of Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in Adult Literacy Services. The Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024 emphasises inclusion, skills, and pathways for learners. This research, and the accompanying case study report, highlights the ongoing commitment to inclusion, skill-development and learner pathways in the literacy services of ETBs. Not only does adult literacy support access to richer educational experiences for all, it also opens so many other opportunities in further education and training for learners.

The following pages are testament to the immense commitment and skill of all involved in ETB Adult Literacy services. Also emphasised is the need to support this extremely valuable aspect of further education and training into the future. We are conscious that this research was conducted within the context of the previous Further Education and Training Strategy (2014-2019) and is naturally reflective of inclusive practices during this time and their attendant opportunities and challenges.

As we move into the current Further Education and Training Strategy (2020-2024) we are confident the interlocking aims of Learner Pathways, Skill Development and Inclusion will offer even greater support to learners and their tutors as they embark on or continue their learning. In particular, a commitment to implementing consistent support for learners and a framework for Universal Design for Learning in Further Education and Training will ensure that the recommendations from this research are addressed in a manner that is of greatest benefit to the learner and the FET sector more broadly.

As you read through this report and the accompanying case studies, you will see evidence of the many inclusive practices, the strong instructional core and the great support extended to and by learners in ETBs. You will also hear the voices of the many learners who feel valued and included as they build their skills and develop pathways for their future learning through ETB Adult Literacy Services.

It is on this solid foundation that the FET sector will continue to build in this area of work.



Andrew Brownlee

CEO, SOLAS



Paddy Lavelle

General Secretary, ETBI



Colleen Dube

CEO, NALA

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List of acronyms

Acronym	Full title
ABE	Adult Basic Education
AEO	Adult Education Officer
ALO	Adult Literacy Organiser
ALS	Adult Literacy Services
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CEF	Community Education Facilitator
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DE	Department of Education
DES ²	Department of Education and Skills
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Innovation, Research and Science
ETB	Education and Training Board
ETB-AEGS	ETB Adult Education Guidance Service
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
FET	Further Education and Training
FETCH	Further Education and Training Course Hub
FSD	Fund for Students with Disability
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HSE	Health Service Executive
IDSS	Intellectual Disability Support Service
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
ITABE	Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NDA	National Disability Authority
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NLN	National Learning Network
PA	Personal Assistant
PD	Professional Development
PLSS	Programme Learner Support System
QA	Quality Assurance
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna/Further Education and Training Authority
STP	Specialist Training Providers
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning

² Please note: The Department referred to as The Department of Education and Skills is the Government Department that had responsibility for Further Education and Training at time of writing of this report. Responsibility for Further Education and Training now rests with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The Department of Education and Skills has since been renamed the Department of Education.

Acronym	Full title
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
WALK	Walkinstown Association for People with an Intellectual Disability Ltd
WIT	Waterford Institute of Technology

Executive Summary

Overview of project aim and associated research methods

The research about the 'Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services' (SOLAS-ETBI-NALA, 2018) was funded by SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority.

NALA was commissioned to produce these guidelines, case studies and recommendations on the inclusion of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities on behalf of SOLAS and ETBI and engaged the research expertise of Bernie Grummell, Meliosa Bracken and Conor Magrath at the Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education, Maynooth University as partners in delivering the resulting reports.

The aim of the project was to:

- support Adult Literacy Services in using the 'Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services' (we refer to them as the Guidelines in this document);
- provide a contemporary picture of inclusive practices with reference to the Guidelines;
- capture the learning involved to inform relevant developments across the Further Education and Training sector and to further enhance the Guidelines as necessary.

The project uses a mixed methods research design in four phases. These are:

1. a review of national and international literature;
2. an online survey of the inclusive practices and needs of the 16 ETBs nationwide;
3. case studies of inclusive practices and experiences in three ETBs; and
4. three regional workshops offered to ETB staff in the Adult Literacy Services. The workshops were designed to familiarise participants with the Guidelines and to assist ETBs in using them, based on their needs and the needs of their learners.

Summary of background report:

The report presents the findings of this research in six chapters as summarised below.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the structures and provision of Adult Literacy Services in the ETBs, a profile of learner numbers, as well as discussing the use

of key terms of disability rights, intellectual disabilities, inclusion and literacy.

Chapter 2 outlines the research phases and mixed method approach used in the project, as well as discussing the analysis, writing, ethics and limitations of this research.

Chapter 3 reviews the relevant policy and legislative basis governing the provision of adult literacy education for adults with intellectual disabilities in Ireland from equality, education and disability sectors. It discusses international and national policy developments in adult literacy provision in further education and training (FET).

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the research findings of how ETB staff and learners are implementing and experiencing the 2018 Guidelines in the Adult Literacy Services.

Chapter 5 maps the literacy learning journey and discusses how inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities is experienced by staff and learners in the Adult Literacy Services.

Chapter 6 concludes the report with a review of key findings and recommendations.

Context for the project

The valuable role of the Adult Literacy Services in Further Education and Training in Ireland was clearly evident, offering specific literacy learning supports for adult learners with intellectual disabilities. The broad aim of Adult Literacy Services in the ETBs to respond to the needs of all adult learners in the population was highlighted as fundamental. This gives the Adult Literacy Services a unique role in the provision of basic educational programmes for adults – including adults with intellectual disabilities – offering a responsive and learner-centred range of unaccredited and accredited courses of learning, as well as supporting progression to other levels and services.

A review of general profile of the population with intellectual disabilities in Irish society based on national databases reveals ongoing inequalities of education, social and employment outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities. Analysis of the current profile of learner numbers in 2018 from PLSS and the ETBs, as well as the findings of our survey analysed by this research, reveal the challenges of data collection. Extensive variation in the reliability and availability of data collection exist both at national data gathering level and within the ETB system.

A discussion of the key concepts of disability rights, intellectual disabilities and literacy reveals how they have shaped inclusive practices and policies for adults with intellectual disabilities in literacy services, and more broadly in Irish education and society. The development of disability rights and intellectual disabilities within

a human rights approach and the social model of disability leads to an understanding of disability as complex, variable and situational.

Political and societal attitudes about intellectual disabilities have a key influence on shaping thinking and discourses about the capacities of learners with intellectual disabilities and their inclusion in education, employment and community life. This is influenced by the Adult Literacy services in the ETB structures, including how they are shaped by national policies such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy as well as the development of the 2018 Guidelines.

Research Methodology

Chapter 2 reviews the research methods used throughout this project, outlining the mixed method approach through four phases used to achieve its aim of identifying and exploring practices of inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services of the ETBs.

This included desk research to review national policies and existing research on inclusion and provision for learners with intellectual disabilities.

A national online survey was designed and completed by designated representatives of the 16 ETBs nationwide to give a picture of current practices and issues of inclusion within the ETBs.

Case studies were conducted with three ETBs to explore learning from their experiences of inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services.

Professional Development workshops were conducted with ETB staff in Adult Literacy Services to share experiences and discuss professional practice of inclusion.

Engagement with the different phases of the research as well as the analysis, writing and ethical considerations are discussed before reflecting on the limitations of this research.

The legislative and structural context of Adult Literacy Services

Chapter 3 reviews the policy and legislative developments in the equality, disability and education fields in recent decades, which have implications for the inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in literacy services. As discussed, these changes have taken place within a wider context of governance reforms and the rise of managerial cultures during the past two decades. Policy implementation is still in an initial and continually emergent stage, and

therefore needs extensive support by all stakeholders to ensure its successful implementation, as well as data monitoring, consultation, and participative and inclusive communications processes. Supports and funding structures for learners throughout FET remains a significant and complex issue.

An overview of the context of literacy education in the FET sector in Ireland, including its funding structures, profile of learners, programmes and models of provision, sources of support and funding for learners with disabilities reveals the scale of changes in recent years. The analysis notes the key shifts as a consequence of substantial legislative and policy changes across the FET sector. Changes have occurred in:

- FET structure,
- Quality Assurance (QA) procedures,
- accreditation,
- funding structures,
- higher levels of professional training and qualifications for staff, and
- implementation of legislative requirements.

Implementing the 2018 Guidelines in Adult Literacy Services

Chapter 4 presents the results of the online survey with designated ETB staff who completed the survey about the institutional awareness and engagement in ETBs in relation to implementing the Guidelines and other statutory obligations. The chapter also outlines their future plans and the supports needed for the inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities (including opportunities for learners to inform policies and plans). This reveals high levels of communication about statutory responsibilities and confidence about their ETB's capacity to implement the 2018 Guidelines in the majority of ETBs, including future planning.

However, most respondents also name several areas of concerns for which they sought additional clarification, supports and resources.

These centred on issues of:

- staffing and staff development,
- resources,
- partnerships and co-operation,
- learner assessment and progression, and
- strategic planning.

While survey respondents acknowledge the effectiveness of Ireland's equality and human rights legislation, they highlight the need for more clarity and professional development about how to implement inclusion policies in practice. In particular, staff feel

that the recommendation for development of a specific 'Inclusion Development Worker' (IDW) role to support the inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities within and across ETBs as per the 2018 Guidelines is key. Participants seek greater clarity about the funding and place of this IDW role across all relevant programmes and areas in the ETB and in engagements with external support agencies. The work of inclusion development is part of a broader commitment to consistency of learner supports as emphasised in the FET Strategy 2020-2024. Depending on local requirements, ETBs will decide on best to resource such work.

Implementing inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services

Thematic findings relating to adult learners with intellectual disabilities and their engagement with adult literacy provision are presented and discussed in Chapter 5. The findings draw on data collected from all phases of this research study and discuss the accomplishments and challenges of real-life application of inclusive practices in ETB Adult Literacy Services. This research follows the customary pattern of learner engagement in the Adult Literacy Services, with key findings relating to each stage summarised briefly below.

Engagement

All ETBs are aware of their statutory obligations to include learners with intellectual disabilities in FET provision and in the Adult Literacy Services and much is being done to create inclusive learning environments. The majority of ETBs would like to do more to embed inclusive practices in their promotion and outreach work and identified key challenges in relation to clarifying the role and responsibilities of the ETB and making inclusion an institutional practice in the ETBs.

Enrolment

There is a consensus that existing assessment and enrolment procedures need to be adapted to cater for the additional needs of some adults with intellectual disabilities. This could include ring-fenced funding to ensure the learning environment is fully accessible and inclusive, developing collaborative relationships between IDSS and ETBs and supports in using assistive technologies.

Placement

The placement process is recognised as a difficult, but important aspect of inclusion, which needs to recognise

that adults with intellectual disabilities are a diverse group with wide variations in educational experience and attainment. Consequently, assumptions should not be made about literacy skills. Careful planning for placement needs to occur. This could include:

- Drawing on the relevant guidance support, including the ETB Adult Educational Guidance Service (ETB-AEGS).
- Reviewing the placement process to ensure flexibility and changes if required.
- Carefully selecting literacy tutors with the experience, expertise, teaching philosophy and disposition suited to working in adult learners with intellectual disabilities.

Participation

In terms of ensuring learners with intellectual disabilities participate fully in the Adult Literacy Services, inclusion should be modelled at centre and service level to create a learning environment where learner diversity is expected. Learners with intellectual disabilities identify the importance of social inclusion, independence and their enjoyment of social aspects of learning. Additional supports for all tutors and learners with and without intellectual disabilities are needed to support adjustment to the changes which inclusion is bringing to the learning environment of the ETBs. The role of Inclusion Development Worker is identified as important in providing a 'go-to' person for staff and learners.

Evaluation

Qualitative indicators are important to capture and record a broad range of learning outcomes that have a significant value to the individual learner and their quality of life. Many participants feel that such qualitative indicators fall outside the criteria used to gauge impact in existing monitoring and evaluation systems. It includes the need to adapt and adjust assessment methods to meet statutory requirements for reasonable accommodation where needed. It is felt that guidance and professional development training would be beneficial in this regard, along with the development of a 'Community of Practice' where tutors could share resources, materials, ideas and innovative approaches.

Accreditation is a particular area of concern, especially given the increased targets for certification and participation for Adult Literacy Services agreed by SOLAS and DES and which form part of the Strategic Performance Agreements with the ETBs. Many research participants feel that these targets were inappropriate for the Adult Literacy Services and in particular, for adults with intellectual disabilities.

Progression

Identifying the right time for progression and the right progression pathway for learners is a challenging and time-consuming process for Adult Literacy Services

staff. Research participants express concerns about the pressure to progress learners with intellectual disabilities 'upwards' rather than 'sideways' and that linear progression routes do not allow learners to consolidate their learning. There is a consensus that progression plans needed to keep the learners' needs, goals and preferences in a manner which acknowledges the multiple and diverse progression pathways and options.

Recommendations

1. Retaining a learner-centred ethos

- The core aim of Adult Literacy Services in the ETBs to **respond to the unmet literacy needs of all adult learners in the population** should continue to be valued as a fundamental part of an inclusive society. This gives the **Adult Literacy Services a unique role in the provision of basic educational programmes for adults with intellectual disabilities**, offering a responsive range of unaccredited and accredited courses of learning, as well as supporting progression to other levels and services as Guideline 1 indicates.
- Greater recognition of the **distinctive role of Adult Literacy Services** is needed, especially in terms of the implications of how practice varies greatly from one ETB centre to another depending on its history, institutional context and the learning priorities and needs of the local communities it serves. This is a **core part of the responsiveness and learner-centred approach of this service**. Adult Literacy services should be supported in recognising and responding to the ongoing inequalities of education, social and employment outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities evident in national research.
- **The nature of provision for learners in Adult Literacy Services – including learners with intellectual disabilities – should be recognised** and should include options for separate group tuition, mixed group tuition and 1:1 tuition as appropriate (as per Guideline 2). This flexibility is needed to account for the diverse backgrounds and needs of learners and to provide differentiated and multi-modal pedagogies and accredited and unaccredited courses (as required by learners).
- The **role of assistive technology in supporting learning** was highlighted and a need was identified for **ETB staff to receive the necessary training and IT support** to make sure it is applied properly. Other supports, (for example, a Personal Assistant or Special Needs Assistant) were also identified and ETB staff spoke about ensuring these are available before literacy provision commences to maximise successful outcomes and in line with supports available in other education sectors to ensure consistency of supports for learners.
- The **placement of learners with intellectual disabilities should be recognised as a vital but challenging part of the literacy process**, addressing societal assumptions about the diverse and varied learning capacities of adult learners with intellectual disabilities. The placement process needs to remain learner-centred, include the support of the relevant guidance support such as ETB AEGS, key Adult Literacy Services and IDSS staff, have in-built processes of review with flexibility to adapt and adjust placements and careful selection of appropriate tutors to work with learners with intellectual disabilities. This learner-centred support is relevant for Guideline 7 on access procedures for learners and Guideline 8 support for effective participation.
- As per Guideline 9, **Greater support and flexibility in progression rates and levels** (both across and within QQI levels 1, 2 and 3 and higher) is needed to respond to the diverse learning profile of adult learners, and particularly those with intellectual disabilities. **Opportunities for lateral progression should be facilitated** to cater for learners who may not progress 'upwards' but would benefit from 'sideways' progression (at QQI level) to support consolidation, retention and application of learning.
- **Learners' needs, goals and preferences should remain central** to any plans for progression to other programmes and services in education, training, community and employment. This includes a review of existing assessment and enrolment procedures to cater for the needs of learners with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, the need for all literacy students and staff to **become aware and adjust to changes in the learning environment as the Adult Literacy Services becomes more inclusive**, based on a social practice model of literacy.

2. Supporting programme planning, evaluation and policy implementation

- A **review of current data collection and data management system** for learners and provision within the Adult Literacy Services is required. Any review would need to be cognisant of issues of data measurement as they render invisible many qualitative and situated aspects of literacy. Such data measurement should **capture the responsiveness and qualitative capacities of Adult Literacy Services to cater for the diverse needs of learners**.
- Consideration should be given to **publishing data annually about the number of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in FET programmes, including Adult Literacy Services**

(as currently collected on PLSS) and assess how best to gather information which requires disclosure from literacy learners.

- **Existing assessment and enrolment procedures in ETBs should be reviewed to cater for the additional needs of some adults with intellectual disabilities.** ETB staff recommend **ring-fenced funding** be made available so that individual services can continue to make reasonable accommodations (including physical alterations to the built environment) to ensure the learning environment is fully accessible and inclusive.
- A system of **responsive and timely qualitative indicators need to be developed to capture and record a broad range of inclusive learning outcomes**, including the diverse learning pathways and progressions of learners, transversal skills that have significant value for learners and their quality of life to support ETBs to review and evaluate their strategies for inclusion as per Guideline 10.
- The **setting of targets for accreditation for adult literacy learners needs to be reviewed to respect the wide range of individuals' literacy development needs and goals**, and the unique role of the adult literacy service in responding to those. **This is particularly important for learners with intellectual disabilities** due to the unique profile of learners and their atypical progression through timeframes and QQI levels. This review would have wider applicability for inclusion across the board.
- To contextualise and support the development of ETB's policy and plan for inclusion as per Guideline 2, a review of the **national inclusion policies for ETBs** is recommended. This overarching inclusion policy needs to be able to **respond to the distinctive profile of the learners within its different services including Adult Literacy Services**. The willingness of ETB staff to do more to consolidate inclusive practices in their work should continue to be supported.
- Current research highlights how policy implementation needs **extensive support to ensure the successful implementation of policy requirements, as well as data monitoring, consultation, and participative and inclusive communications processes**.

3. Ongoing staff support and professional development

- The recommendation for development of a specific 'Inclusion Development Worker' role in ETBs in Guideline 3 is not widely practiced yet. **The inclusion development worker role should continue to be supported and greater clarity provided about the funding and remit of the role in ETB structures** and in developing

partnerships with external disability support agencies.

- As per Guideline 5, **ETB literacy tutors should be supported with dedicated time and professional development** in inclusive pedagogies, working with adult learners with intellectual disabilities, inclusive pedagogical and assessment strategies and assistive technologies. **Existing professional development opportunities in this area need to be promoted more widely** as there appears to be a lack of awareness around what is available.
- Research participants highlighted the need for **guidance and professional development training in how to adapt and adjust assessment methods to meet statutory requirements for reasonable accommodation** where needed, along with the development of a **community of practice** where tutors could share resources, materials, ideas and innovative approaches.

4. Sustainable interagency collaboration

- The excellent partnerships and responsive collaborations between ETBs and other agencies to support learners with intellectual disabilities are to be commended, as per Guideline 4. **Greater clarity is needed about the relationships and responsibilities of the ETB and other agencies** in supporting inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services, especially in light of concerns about duplication of funding, communication between interagency services and maintaining safe and accessible learning environments for learners and staff.

The page is decorated with various teal-colored geometric shapes, including rectangles and triangles, scattered across the background. Some are thin and elongated, while others are larger and more solid. They are positioned in a way that creates a sense of movement and depth, with some appearing to float or fall from the top right towards the bottom left.

Chapter 1:

Introduction and context of research

1.1 Introduction

The research about the 'Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services' (SOLAS-ETBI-NALA, 2018) was funded by SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority. NALA was commissioned to produce these guidelines, case studies and recommendations on behalf of SOLAS and ETBI and engaged the research expertise of Bernie Grummell, Meliosa Bracken and Conor Magrath at the Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education, Maynooth University as partners in delivering the resulting reports.

The aim of the project was to:

- support Adult Literacy Services in using the 'Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services' (hereafter referred to as the Guidelines);
- provide a contemporary picture of inclusive practices with reference to the Guidelines;
- capture the learning involved in order to inform relevant developments across the further education and training sector and to further enhance the Guidelines as necessary.

The project included regional workshops with Education and Training Board (ETB) Adult Literacy Services, designed to familiarise participants with the Guidelines and to assist ETBs in using them, based on their needs and the needs of their learners. To build a contemporary picture of inclusive practice, the research team gathered data from:

- the regional workshops;
- three case studies, a survey completed by a designated respondent in each of the 16 ETBs; and
- a review of national and international literature on inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities.

This research report presents the findings of this research in the following way:

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the structure of Adult Literacy Services in ETBs and a profile of the numbers of learners with intellectual disabilities in Ireland in order to set the context for this research. This is followed by a review of the key terms of disability rights, inclusion and literacy, with a discussion of the role and rationale of the Guidelines concluding the chapter.

Chapter 2 outlines the methodology used throughout

this research.

Chapter 3 presents and discusses the policy and legislative basis governing the provision of adult literacy education for adults with intellectual disabilities in Ireland. It reviews international and national policy developments in adult literacy provision in Further Education and Training (FET).

Chapter 4 outlines and discusses the findings of how ETB staff and students are implementing and experiencing these policies and legislation in the Adult Literacy Services.

Chapter 5 maps and discusses the learning journey of how inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities is experienced in the Adult Literacy Services.

Chapter 6 concludes the report.

1.2 Overview of Adult Literacy Services

While later sections of this chapter document the structures of the Adult Literacy Services in greater detail, it is useful to begin with a brief contextual overview of literacy provision in Ireland. The government-funded Adult Literacy Services were established to respond to the literacy needs of adult learners and have a long and varied history. Previously under the auspices of the Vocational Education Committees (VECs), Adult Literacy Services now operate in each of the 16 ETBs under the umbrella of Further Education and Training (FET). ETBs run the Adult Literacy Services under the operational guidelines issued to them by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). 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, 2013a:3).

The DES Guidelines describe literacy as "fundamental to personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability" (2013a:3). They locate adult literacy programmes as "primarily focussed on learning outcomes at Levels 1-3 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)" for "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, 2013a:3).

The profile of practice varies from one ETB to another depending on when the Adult Literacy Service was established, its locality, its 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 history, profile and partnerships with adults with intellectual disabilities, their families and their support services. Adult Literacy Services aim to respond to the needs of all adult learners, as appropriate, offering a range of unaccredited and accredited courses of learning.

The management structure of each Adult Literacy Services is headed by the Chief Executive, who has overall responsibility for all ETB activities, and the Director of FET who has special responsibility in this area. The role of Director of FET was established in 2016 to oversee the implementation of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019 (SOLAS, 2014). The Directors of FET work closely with the Senior Management Team in each Adult Education Service. While the management structures of the Adult Literacy Services are described later in this chapter in greater detail, two roles are pivotal in the management of the Adult Literacy Services:

- 1) The Adult Education Officer (AEO) who is the line manager for the managers and coordinators of each service, including the Adult Literacy Service, and
- 2) The Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO) who plans, develops and manages the Adult Literacy Service, supported by and reporting to the AEO. The role of an ALO is multifaceted and involves supporting and managing students, volunteer and paid tutors, developing and implementing programmes, as well as managing finance, resources, premises and non-academic staff (DES, 2001).

1.3 Numbers of people with intellectual disabilities in Ireland

Existing research and knowledge about the numbers of people with intellectual disabilities in Ireland gives us some insight into the profile of learners with intellectual disabilities availing of Adult Literacy Services. The following section reviews and discusses what we know from existing data and from information provided by the respondents to the online survey conducted for this research project.

1.3.1. Measuring learners' profiles

This section presents a general profile of the population with intellectual disabilities in Ireland, discussing how this data is gathered and analysing the implications for Adult Literacy Services. This analysis is followed by a discussion of data profiling of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services of the ETBs. The learner profile is based on the survey findings which were completed by designated respondents in the 16 ETBs to provide a snapshot of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in the Adult

Literacy Services.

In the analysis of these datasets used in the following subsections, variation in data collection and scope exist. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is one of the limitations of this research, which is noted throughout relevant sections, and requires that data in this report is read carefully and in context. As Carvalho and Costa (2015), Hamilton (2017) and others highlight, variations in systemic data collection about learners leads to a misrecognition of their learning characteristics and needs. Large data gathering is often based on a functional or technological discourse about literacy dominated by measurable technological skills. While profiles of learners and their literacy skills are important, they can neglect and render invisible many other aspects of literacy and learning. Hamilton (2012, 2014) contends that the use of numbers and quantification to measure literacy significantly contributes to the high credibility of the technological and functional narrative of literacy as individual skill. Equally, it silences the socially situated nature of literacy as people learn and use literacy to navigate their worlds that is evident in the adult literacy learner pathway described in Chapter 5.

1.3.2. National profile of adult population with intellectual disabilities

In the 2016 national census, 643,131 people – or 13.5 per cent of the Irish population – stated that they had a disability. The 2016 figure represented an increase of 47,796 persons (eight per cent) on the figures returned in 2011 (CSO, 2017a).

Table 1. Population with a disability in Ireland, drawing on different data sets (Source: CSO, 2017a; National Intellectual Disability Database (NIDD), 2017)

Category	Statistics	Data Set
Population with disability	643,131 persons (13.5% of population)	CSO 2017a
Population with intellectual disability	66,611 persons (1.4% of population)	CSO 2017a
Population with intellectual disability registered with NIDD	28,388 persons	NIDD 2017

Of these, 66,611 people (1.4 per cent of the total population) reported having an intellectual disability in the 2016 Census. This represented an increase of 8,902 people (or 15.4 per cent) on the equivalent figure in 2011. The National Disability Authority (NDA) do note that there were differences between the 2011 and 2016 censuses in terms of how disability was measured and analysed, so some of the variation in figures may be attributable to that change (NDA, 2018:22-24). Data

that may have implications for educational services in general and for the Adult Literacy Service in particular, include:

- The proportion of males with intellectual disabilities between the ages of 6 and 18 is double that of females of equivalent age (CSO, 2017b).
- The number of people with intellectual disabilities entering adulthood is set to increase significantly over the next decade (CSO, 2017b).

1.3.3. Education and employment

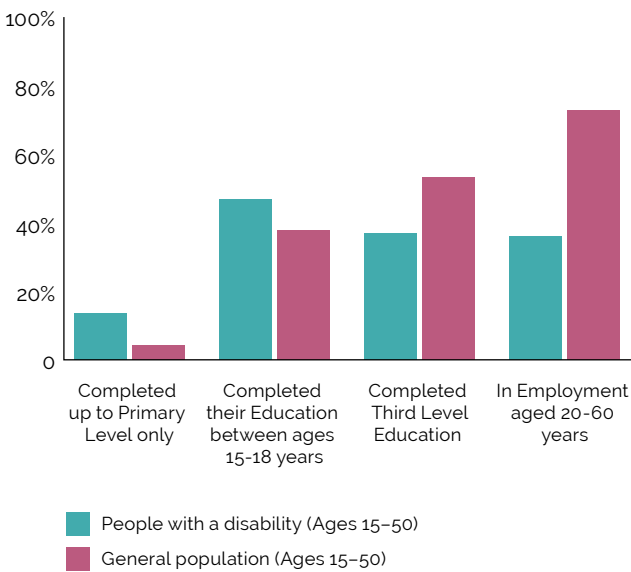
Census figures for 2016 show that the labour market participation rate for people with an intellectual disability is 21.4 per cent, compared to 73 per cent of the general population. The unemployment rate for this group is 42.8 per cent compared to 12.9 per cent of the general population (CSO, 2017a), indicating a possible need for support in gaining and retaining employment and a potential role for Adult Literacy Services and the FET sector.

The census data reveals that people with a physical and/or intellectual disability were:

- Less likely to complete third level education: 37 per cent compared with 53.4 per cent of the general population aged 15 to 50 years.
- Less likely to be in employment: Only 36 per cent of people with a disability were working in stark contrast to the 73 per cent of people without a disability who were in employment/who are employed.
- Less likely to be classified in a similar background to the general population; half as likely to be classified as 'professional or managerial' and twice as likely to be classified as 'unskilled/other/unknown' (CSO, 2017a).

It is useful to locate this education profile of people with intellectual disabilities within the broader profile of people with disability in Irish society. The highest level of education completed by people with a disability was substantially lower than that in the general population aged between 15 and 50 years with 13.7 per cent having completed primary level as the highest level of education, compared with only 4.2 per cent of the general population (see figure 1 below). Almost 47 per cent of people with a disability had finished their education between the ages of 15 and 18, compared with 37.7 per cent of the general population.

Figure 1. Education and employment of persons with a disability in 2016 (Source: CSO, 2017a)



Although people with a disability participated in more education and at higher levels in 2016 than in 2011, their participation and achievement rates remained at considerably lower rates than people without a disability. SOLAS collects data relating to learners with intellectual disabilities in FET through the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) system, which was made available to the researchers.³

In 2018, 8,644 learners, enrolled on a FET course, declared that they had a long-lasting condition or illness, some indicating having multiple conditions. This self-declared figure represents 5% of all learners enrolled in the same year.

Table 2. Learners with Declared Disabilities, 2018 (Source: SOLAS, Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, PLSS, 2019).

Learners with Declared Disabilities 2018	
Total number of learners who declared a long-lasting condition or illness	8,644
Total number of learners who declared Intellectual Disability (ID)	2,136
Total number of learners with ID who declared enrolled in Adult Literacy Groups	852

These figures are based on the disabilities disclosed by learners, and so the actual figures may differ. It is the decision of the learner whether or not they choose to disclose a long-lasting condition or illness when they enrol in FET and complete the PLSS form.

3 The 2017 version of the PLSS form has, for learners who choose to disclose, two relevant categories within "Long lasting condition" of 1. "Intellectual Disability" and 2. "A difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating". These categories are consistent with CSO categories.

The other key data source about people with intellectual disabilities is the National Intellectual Disability Database (NIDD). There were 28,388 people registered on the National Intellectual Disability Database at the end of December 2017, with 69% of those over 18 years of age (NIDD, 2018). This refers to those learners requiring day service provision in third level education and vocational training. It is worth noting that this does not specify the number of people who require further education and training.

According to NIDD, of the 689 young people aged 16–19 years who were in an education setting in 2016:

- 216 (31 per cent) require rehabilitative training,
- 146 (21 per cent) require vocational training, and
- 125 (18 per cent) require activation programmes in the next five years (2018–2022) (NIDD, 2018: 17).

In terms of future service requirements, NIDD reported that the following future day services would be needed by those registered between 2108 and 2022. Generic training here means training in domestic skills or general work skills. While NIDD figures differ considerably to the general census profile (due to the purpose and criteria used by NIDD), they are indicative of the continued education and training needs of people with intellectual disabilities into the future.

Table 3. Future service requirements 2018–2022

Day Service Required	Number of people
Education Service	1,333
Employment Services	1,121
Generic Training	440
Source: NIDD (2018)	

1.3.4. Communications and digital media

It is useful to review the profile of people with a disability accessing and using different forms of social and digital communications, given the centrality of information communication technology (ICT) and social media in our society and the role Adult Literacy Services play in developing technological literacy skills. The third wave of the 'Intellectual Disability Supplement to the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing' (ILSA) by McCarron et al. (2017) recorded similar findings to earlier studies in terms of communication, noting that over three quarters of adults with an intellectual disability did not write, text, email, or use social media to contact their family or friends. One third of adults with an intellectual disability owned a mobile phone, with some of these reporting that they never used it. Just over one third reported that they had access to a computer, tablet or smartphone, but again a significant proportion (38 per cent) reported that they used their device infrequently or never. Three quarters of participants reported that they had difficulty in using technology which assumedly was one of the

reasons for this lack of engagement with technology. This is a significant gap in digital literacy, given the pervasive nature of digital technology in contemporary life.

What is striking about the profile presented above from CSO, NIDD and ILSA databases is the limited publicly accessible knowledge we have about people with intellectual disabilities in Irish society. While this is reflective of historical evolution of disability rights discussed in Section 1.3, it does highlight the challenges for the sector. However as Chapter 3 reveals, the whole of government approach that has been implemented through the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021 is illustrative of changing societal discourses, with its 2018 report referring to positive developments in further education and training:

We note the recent establishment of a unit to consider social inclusion within SOLAS for example, and welcome the information this can provide on numbers of persons with disabilities requiring and accessing further education opportunities. (NDA, 2019:6).

1.4 ETB survey on the inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services in Ireland

To build a more complete picture of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services of the ETBs, an online survey was conducted with the 16 ETBs in April 2019. As outlined in Chapter 2 on research methods, a designated representative, usually the AEO, completed the survey on behalf of their ETB. This survey attempted to build a profile of learners with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services, as well as presenting evidence of the policies, processes and structures in the ETB (presented in Chapter 4). This is discussed in the following paragraphs and contextualised within the general learner profile of the Adult Literacy Services.

Although data is collected about learners with intellectual disabilities through the national PLSS system (see section 1.3.3), specific details about the number of adult learners with intellectual disabilities is not currently publicly available. The total number of learners in the Adult Literacy Service of the ETBs during 2018 was projected at 37,876 (see Appendix A). The number of learners who declared an intellectual disability recorded on the PLSS system in 2018 was 2,136 (see figure 2).

As mentioned earlier, ETBs proposed designated respondents to address the survey questions. As this particular question was conceptualised in different ways across ETBs, responses taken together do not provide a cohesive account (over and above what can be gleaned from the PLSS) of the number of learners with an intellectual disability across ETBs. This outcome in itself provides an insight into the challenges of designing quantifiable measures that capture the nature and meaning of disability in people's identities and learning.

Respondents also noted that many learners choose not to disclose whether they have a disability, and so the reported numbers differ from actual numbers. Hence the figures provided to us give more of an insight into the difficulty of gathering data rather than a sense of the numbers of learners with intellectual disabilities currently in the Adult Literacy Services. This will issue will be explored more fully within the period of the FET Strategy 2020-2024.

1.5 Changing discourses of key terms

The following section defines and contextualises the use of key terms such as disability rights, intellectual disabilities, inclusion and literacy. It then continues to review how these terms have been formulated in policy and implemented in practice in Irish adult and further education contexts. This discussion intends to give an overview of how disability rights, inclusion, literacy and intellectual disabilities have been framed in Irish discourses. The discussion also gives us some understanding of the thinking which has shaped the evolution of inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in our literacy services and the broader education system and society.

1.5.1. Disability rights

Disability rights emerged in the context of key political debates and activism within the field of disability studies. Disability studies theorists including Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer (2003) highlight the negative impact of medicalised discourses about disability as an individual and undesirable state of difference and deficit, which has stigmatised, segregated and marginalised persons with disabilities for centuries. The dominant medical model of disability posits that the disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities is a medical condition, and as such, is an individual, limiting and undesirable state of being (Oliver, 2004). Disability Rights activists argue that the expanded reach of the medical and healthcare professions, through the medicalisation of society in the twentieth century maintains these negative and limiting conceptions of disability (Oliver, 1996; Barnes and Mercer, 2003). Historically, the medical model is evident in many interventions in our health and education services, such as the provision of segregated schooling and

institutional living.

Disability rights activists began to challenge deficit conceptualisations in the 1960s and 1970s through the Independent Living Movement (ILM) in the United States of America, and through the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in the United Kingdom. The latter developed the social model of disability which contends that structural inequalities prevent people with disabilities from fully accessing society (Barton, 1996; Barnes and Mercer, 2003; Oliver, 2004). The social model of disability is a term first coined by Mike Oliver in 1983, making the distinction between impairment and disability, with disability positioned as a societal construct that sets social limits and constraints. Viewed from the perspective of Oliver's social model, disability is diagnosed and treated by a wide range of medical, health, psychology, welfare and other professions.

Following international example, the Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) was established by and for disabled people as the Centre for Independent Living (CIL) in 1992. Its aim was to ensure that disabled people achieved independent living, choice and control over their lives and as well as full participation in society as equal citizens. The ILMI operate as a campaigning, national representative organisation that promotes the philosophy of independent living in an inclusive society. They adopt a participative approach, which ensures that policy decisions that impact on the lives of disabled people are directly influenced by those whose lives are affected, as encapsulated by their philosophy: "Nothing about us without us!", and "Rights Not Charity" (ILMI, 2019:3).

Public discourses about disability rights have been further expanded in recent years in response to criticisms of the social model and the influence of other traditions of human rights, civil rights, equality studies, critical theory, and postmodernism. Contemporary approaches to disability are informed by human rights frameworks and discourses, with the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (United Nations, 2006; ratified in Ireland in 2018) defining persons with disabilities as:

[Those] who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (UN, 2006: Article 1).

A review of national and international literature in the following subsections highlights how these human rights-based definitions have been expanded through transnational and international global agencies and agreements (Freeman, 2002). While contemporary commentators acknowledge many of the arguments made by disability activists about social discrimination and exclusion, they also note the limitations of the social

model of disability. Shakespeare and Watson (2002) highlight how the social model of disability diminishes the significance of impairment, giving the impression that it is primarily social barriers that cause restrictions that people with disabilities experience. Shakespeare and Watson contend that macro-approaches, like the social model of disability, treat all people with disabilities as a singular homogenous group, when instead:

disability is the quintessential post-modern concept, because it is so complex, so variable, so contingent, so situated. It sits at the intersection of biology and society and of agency and structure. Disability cannot be reduced to a singular identity; it is a multiplicity, a plurality (2002:19).

This 'multiplicity' of identities is evident in discussions about intellectual disabilities in the next sub-section and again in the findings in Chapters 4 and 5.

1.5.2. Intellectual disabilities

Public discourses about disability have changed over time with different definitions of disability used in various contexts. There is no definitive list of conditions that constitute a disability and there is a wide range of difference between how individuals with a particular condition are affected. A person's environment – which includes the supports they have and the physical, social or environmental barriers they face – also varies. Hence, these factors influence the type and scale of challenges that people may face in their everyday lives. Definitions of intellectual disability also span across the medical and social discourses of disabilities discussed previously; elements of both discourses co-exist and intermingle in contemporary policies and practices.

In the Irish context, the Disability Act (2005) defines disability, in relation to a person, to mean:

[a] substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment (Government of Ireland, 2005:6).

This legislative definition of intellectual disability in the Disability Act is crucial in the Irish context as it has shaped many of the current policies, initiatives and provision for people with intellectual disabilities. Definitions in the Irish context have been influenced by the international discourses on disability rights. The

World Health Organisation (WHO) defines intellectual disability as:

a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information and to learn and apply new skills (impaired intelligence). This results in a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning), and begins before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development. Disability depends not only on a child's health conditions or impairments but also and crucially on the extent to which environmental factors support the child's full participation and inclusion in society (WHO, 2019).

Inclusion Ireland, a non-government umbrella group for individuals and organisations in the intellectual disability sector advocates for improvements in the quality of life and participation of people with intellectual disabilities and uses the following definition of:

a greater than average difficulty in learning. A person is considered to have an intellectual disability when the following factors are present: general intellectual functioning is significantly below average; significant deficits exist in adaptive skills⁴ and the condition is present from childhood (eighteen years or less) (Inclusion Ireland, 2019).

These differing definitions of intellectual disability echo changing public discourses and shifts in understanding of what it means to have an intellectual disability. The American Association for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) track the shift in definition of intellectual disabilities from the medical approach which emphasised testing and measurement (such as IQ tests) to diagnose people with disabilities, leading to their segregation and support in institutional settings. By the early 1960s, AAIDD began to move away from a deficit-orientated diagnostic process based on IQ scores towards a broader process that considers social and environmental factors as well as intellectual functioning, adaptive behaviour and age of onset (AAIDD, 2019).

⁴ Adaptive skills are skills needed for everyday living and work in the community, such as communication, self-care, home living, social skills, health and safety. They also include literacy capacities of basic reading and writing, and mathematical skills. Available at: <https://www.inclusionireland.ie/sites/default/files/attach/basic-page/512/causesandpreventionbooklet.pdf> (accessed 13 March 2019).

1.5.2.1. Attitudes and Influences

The changing definitions of intellectual disabilities reflect broader shifts in societal attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities. In relation to adult learners with intellectual disabilities in mainstream FET provision in Ireland, research carried out by Walkinstown Association for People with an Intellectual Disability highlights prejudice and negative attitudes to disability, particularly around education for people with intellectual disabilities (WALK, 2015). These 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, 2015:16). Similarly, Moni et al. (2018), in the Australian context, note that educators hold strong perceptions around limitations in ability to learn and consequently believe that encouraging young adults with intellectual disabilities in education is "setting them up for failure" (Moni et al. 2018:156).

WALK also highlighted the hierarchy of disabilities that, their research found, made it more difficult for those with intellectual disabilities (as distinct from physical disabilities) to access FET. One participant described it as a situation where "there are 'acceptable' intellectual disabilities and not acceptable ones" (2015:5). Klotz (2004) notes the need to challenge the very social and cultural foundations of such thinking, including the perception of what "normal" personhood is, if people with intellectual disabilities are to be accepted and engaged with as inherently social and cultural beings (Klotz, 2004).

The significance of these broader socio-cultural influences is acknowledged in research in the school sector where Bossaert et al. (2015:45) identify participation in the local school community as key to implementing inclusive schooling. The history of institutionalisation, stigma and marginalisation experienced by people with disabilities has left a legacy of doubt that stifles educational growth and provides "legitimacy to practices which seek to 'support' people but through exclusionary practices, such as the 'specialisation of intellectual disability'" (Burke, 2018:12).

The National Disability Authority (NDA) Survey on Public Attitudes to Disability in Ireland (2017:39-40) found that almost half the respondents (46 per cent) believe that people with disabilities do not receive equal opportunities in terms of education. Over half of respondents to the NDA survey (2017) support children with intellectual disabilities attending the same schools as those without disabilities. NDA figures in 2017 mark an increased level of support compared to the 37 per cent figure which they found in their 2011 survey. However, 28 per cent of respondents in 2017 disagreed or strongly disagreed that children with intellectual disabilities should attend the same schools as those without disabilities, while 15 per cent were unsure, an indication of the ongoing challenges for recognition and inclusion at a societal level.

These changing definitions of intellectual disability mark a notable shift towards a more nuanced understanding of disability as a "quintessential post-modern concept" (Shakespeare and Watson, 2002:19). The complexity in more recent definitions contrast sharply with the functionally-orientated quantifiable measures used in national and international databases (Hamilton, 2017), including the Central Statistics Office's (CSO) measurements of intellectual disability. As the National Disability Authority (NDA) acknowledge, there are many sources of data on people with disabilities and the definition of disability varies considerably from one source of data to another, with different measures used to capture different aspects of disability (NDA, 2014).

More recent discourses acknowledge that people with intellectual disabilities are not a homogeneous group and have "complex and individual needs" (O'Brien et al., 2011:11). The study by O'Brien et al. for the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID) in 2011 also reveals how people with intellectual disabilities face varying challenges when it comes to participating in everyday life activities, including literacy challenges and accessing Adult Literacy Services.

1.5.3. Inclusion

Reflecting the broader context of increased recognition and rights, policies of inclusion have become increasingly important. UNESCO (2005) 'Guidelines for Inclusion: Access for All' is informed by a human rights approach that:

emphasizes providing opportunities for equal participation of persons with disabilities (physical, social and/or emotional) whenever possible into general education but leaves open the possibility of personal choice and options for special assistance and facilities for those who need it (UNESCO, 2005:15).

Acknowledging the social model of disability, UNESCO contend that, in terms of education, inclusion is about:

how to transform education systems and other learning environments in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It aims towards enabling teachers and learners both to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment of the learning environment, rather than a problem (UNESCO, 2005:15).

This has resulted in an emphasis on principles of inclusion underpinning education as a developmental approach, seeking to address the diverse learning needs of all children, youth and adults. Principles of inclusive education were first adopted in the 'Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education' at the World Conference on Special Needs

Education: Access and Equality (UNESCO, 1994) and restated at the World Education Forum, Dakar 2000. 'The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (UNCRPD) includes the right to education as a major article, with Article 24 identifying that it involves "providing effective individualized support measures ...in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion" (United Nations, 2006). The concept of 'full inclusion' in an educational context generally advocates a removal of all segregated and specialised instruction for learners with an intellectual disability in favour of full participation in mainstream settings with the support of appropriate adaptations and accommodations (Zigmond, Kloo and Volonino, 2009).

In an international context, models of fully inclusive education systems are rare with most provision being a mix of specialised and mainstream provision. While mainstreaming and inclusive approaches are prevalent in primary and second level schools, in higher education models of full inclusion tend to be limited to specific initiatives. These include initiatives in Alberta University in Canada, Flinders University in South Australia, Kampus programme in Kuhankoski School, Finland and Trinity College in Vermont, USA, as well as in the Irish examples of the Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice in Trinity College Dublin and the Inclusive Learning Initiative in Maynooth University. Within the USA, inclusive education from kindergarten to grade 12 is influenced by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which promotes full inclusion to the same curriculum framework and standards as the general education programme. Typically, students in the disabled population attend high school until they are 21 years old before transitioning into a variety of adult services where the provisions of IDEA do not extend (Doyle, 2003:308 in O'Brien et al., 2008:8).

Noteworthy amongst these international models of inclusive education is the emphasis on the whole-institution approach, the development of individual learning plans, and supported pathways. A whole-institution approach involves all aspects of educational life including teaching, learning, student support, built environment and technological infrastructure (Kelly and Padden, 2018). For example, Flinders University in South Australia developed an inclusive education programme which sought to provide "opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to increase their range of experiences, exercise their rights for continuing education, enhance their vocational opportunities and develop their social networks" (O'Brien, 2008:10). However, the timescales of these examples are also noteworthy, with several initiatives funded for a certain period by the institution or funding agency but not continued beyond that time period. This time-limited initiative approach potentially limits their beneficial

effect, especially when inclusion is, as Winter and O'Raw describe, 'a process'.

[Inclusion] has to be seen as a never-ending search to find better ways of responding to diversity. It is about learning how to live with difference and learning how to learn from difference (Winter and O'Raw, 2010:132).

In Ireland, the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3) sets out a strong commitment to active inclusion and equality (SOLAS, 2014:91). The FET strategy refers to active inclusion as "enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society".⁵ The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) views inclusive education as a concept that "means that all persons, including those with special educational needs, have equal rights to participate in, benefit from and achieve outcomes from educational opportunity as the norm" (NCSE, 2006:6). They recognise the diversity of learners' needs and seek to enable participation in learning, cultures and communities by "removing barriers within and from education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance" (Winter and O'Raw, 2010:39).

1.5.4. Literacy

The shift to more nuanced understandings of disability which acknowledge differences in context, relations and practices is also evident in discussions of literacy. Definitions of literacy range from functional, behavioural and cognitive and cognitive approaches as well as situational and relational definitions that acknowledge the social context of literacy. The functional approach to literacy emphasises the technical achievement of literacy as task and skill-based. Functional literacy is defined by the US National Reading Centre as:

A person is functionally literate when he [sic] has command of reading skills that permit him to go about his daily activities successfully on the job or move about society normally and with comprehension of the usual printed expressions and messages he encounters (cited in Hamilton and Pitt, 2011:599).

⁵ EU Commission Recommendation of 3 October 2008 on the 'Active Inclusion of People Excluded from the Labour Market' (notified under document number C (2008) (5737) (2008/867/EC).

This approach to functional literacy has been widely criticised, not least for its assumptions about what is normal, and its positioning of literacy learners in a deficit status that is apart from normality. Functional literacy is also criticised for reducing literacy to vocational competencies and removing any sense of how we use and learn literacy in social contexts (Hamilton and Pitt, 2011).

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) defines literacy 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, 2012:6).

We use this definition by NALA throughout the research as it highlights adult literacy's basis in a philosophy of adult education that is concerned with social action, participative learning and learner-centred emancipation. These values are based in broader principles of inclusion and equality, which encompass affective equality in literacy (Feeley, 2015). This socially situated understanding of literacy acknowledges the active, ethical and expressive process of literacy where learners have the right to explore their needs and interests, set their own goals and decide how, where and when they learn. It 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).

Theorists in the New Literacy Studies approach have been central in defining literacy as a set of diverse social practices or "literacies" that are locally defined in the lived context of people's lives (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Street, 2001). This approach to literacy can be contrasted with 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.⁶ As noted above, these approaches decontextualise literacy skills from their social context and have a simplified focus on the acquisition of mechanical skills by individuals who are viewed as responsible for their literacy development. Interpretation of the survey findings of these datasets has become increasingly influential in shaping media discourses, policy decisions, and expenditure (Hamilton, 2017). New Literacy Studies argue that these 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. The selection of the criteria and measures of data are unclear and seem to be 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. In particular, how these statistical measures frame literacy is key as:

Unmet literacy needs are frequently a by-product of what Katherine Zappone calls this systemic 'weighty disrespect' for otherness (NICF, 2002; Zappone, 2003:133) that persists throughout societies; impacts negatively on certain individuals and social groupings; and is reflected in the culture and power structures of our schools (Feeley, 2009:19).

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).

Even given the limits of datasets discussed earlier, research on unmet literacy needs in Ireland estimates that as many as 1 in 6 of the adult population have unmet literacy needs, while 1 in 4 have numeracy difficulties (CSO 2013:3-5). This percentage is higher in communities that have been further marginalised or disadvantaged, such as those learning in prisons (Morgan and Kett, 2003), amongst the Traveller community (ITM, 2019), for early school leavers (Eivers et al., 2000; CEC, 2008) and amongst people with disabilities.

6 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/> (accessed 13 March 2019).

1.6 Landscape of literacy education in the FET sector

Reflecting some of these broader societal shifts discussed in the previous section, the landscape of literacy education in the FET sector in Ireland has also changed extensively in recent years. The broader changes, which are reviewed in the following sections, are crucial to understanding the dynamics of the current literacy provision for learners with intellectual disabilities. Key developments since the original guidelines on the Inclusion of Adults with Learning Disabilities in Adult Literacy Schemes were published in 1999 include:

- the reorganisation and updating of Quality Assurance (QA) procedures in FET;
- greater accreditation processes for learning, and an increased range of QQI awards at various levels;
- specific requirements for education providers to develop and implement equality policies;
- higher levels of accredited professional training and qualifications for adult education tutors and organisers, including those working in the literacy sector.

A greater emphasis on disability rights in and through education is evident, especially through the work of Inclusion Ireland, The National Disability Authority and other disability rights groups. As noted in the previous section, this effort shifts the focus to a participative and rights-based approach in education that is inclusive of people with disabilities.

Adult Literacy Services managed by ETBs, in partnership with SOLAS, ETBI and NALA, have been important in developing guidelines and frameworks to anchor adult literacy provision in learner-centred and equality-based principles and approaches. These approaches have been informed and developed in light of practices in the field. Frameworks include 'Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work' (1985; 2012), 'Mapping the Learning Journey' (2005), 'Evolving Quality Framework' (2006) and the 'Evolving Model of Curriculum Development' (2009).

In the legislative sphere, the Further Education and Training Act 2013 led to the restructuring of the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) into 16 regional Education and Training Boards and established SOLAS as the statutory Further Education and Training Authority in Ireland. SOLAS has responsibility to develop and implement the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 (2013) and all subsequent Further Education and Training Strategies. The implementation of a national adult literacy and numeracy strategy is part of this FET strategy. The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 commits to active inclusion and equality, seeking to:

increase levels of active inclusion through the provision of high quality, more accessible and flexible education, training and skill development interventions and supports suited to the individual (SOLAS, 2014:91).

This support for the active inclusion of people of all abilities in FET includes "special reference to literacy and numeracy", with SOLAS agreeing to sustain funding for literacy and numeracy on an annual basis until "an agreed strategic inputs/outcomes-based funding model has been trialled and tested on other types of FET provision" (SOLAS, 2017a:39).

1.6.1. Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

In accordance with the Further Education and Training Act (2013), an Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy was developed and published in the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019. Twelve key areas of development with associated aims and targets are identified in the Strategy (SOLAS, 2014:100-101). Specific aims that are pertinent to the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities include the following:

- improved screening and assessment;
- broadening access and range of provision;
- encouraging increased participation, completion and attainment of major awards at Levels 1-3 with regard to priority target groups;
- targeting better outcomes through accredited provision;
- facilitating literacy provision for personal, family, social and community context;
- providing continued funding for non-accredited group provision with emphasis on the recruitment of specific priority target groups;
- focusing on data collection and analysis with intensive feedback to providers to support evaluation and programme review;
- supporting staff through Continuing Professional Development (SOLAS, 2014:100-101).

Additional elements also include awareness-raising, recognition of prior learning (RPL) and research (2014: 100-101).

The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy was informed by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) 'Review of Adult Literacy and Numeracy Provision', carried out in 2012 and published in 2013. The review concluded with the following key findings and recommendations relevant for adult literacy provision for people with learning disabilities (DES, 2013b:40):

- Providers highlighted "the complexity of this issue" (in relation to adult literacy provision for people with learning disabilities).
- Some VECs offered "very limited provision".

- Some VECs had a service contract with disability service agencies, with limited timelines, along with support and training for the service organisation to continue literacy provision “in house” when the contract had expired.
- There was a need for better communication and coordination between the Adult Literacy Programme and other programmes, to avoid “difficulties [that] may arise because of pressure exerted by [Learning Disability] Service Organisations on the Adult Literacy programme to offer provision on an ongoing basis to the client”.
- “Accreditation at Level 1 was offered only in some cases”.
- There was a need for “specialist training to work with adults with learning disabilities”.
- There was a need for clearer guidelines for literacy providers in relation to adult literacy provision for people with learning disabilities (DES, 2013b:40).

In line with this final point of developing clearer guidelines for literacy providers, the 2013 report recommended that two existing sets of guidelines would be reviewed and updated:

- ‘Guidelines on the Inclusion of Adults with Learning Disabilities in Adult Literacy Schemes’ (NALA, 1999), and
- ‘Guidelines for Facilitating the Successful Delivery of Back to Education Initiative Funded Programmes to Learners with Disabilities’ (DES, 2010).

1.6.2. Overview of 2018 Guidelines on inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services

The revised ‘Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services’ are intended for providers of adult literacy and numeracy services. They suggest broad elements of a strategy following 10 Guidelines, which each literacy service can adapt to their particular situation (SOLAS-ETBI-NALA, 2018:3).

Figure 2. Overview of 2018 Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services (Source: SOLAS-ETBI-NALA, 2018:16)

Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services

- Guideline 1:** Develop shared understanding of and commitment to inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities.
- Guideline 2:** Develop a policy and plan.
- Guideline 3:** Designate an inclusion development worker.
- Guideline 4:** Build and maintain partnerships to support inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities.
- Guideline 5:** Provide continuing professional development to support inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities.
- Guideline 6:** Build inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities into promotion and outreach.
- Guideline 7:** Build inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities into the access procedures.
- Guideline 8:** Support effective participation.
- Guideline 9:** Support progression.
- Guideline 10:** Review and evaluate the strategy for inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities.

1.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the aims and background of this research on the 'Guidelines on the Inclusion of People with Intellectual Disabilities in Adult Literacy Services' (SOLAS-ETBI-NALA, 2018). An overview of the Adult Literacy Services outlined their role within the FET sphere, and specific learning supports they can offer adult learners. As discussed, the profile of practice varies greatly from one ETB to another depending on its history, institutional context and the learning priorities and needs of the local communities it serves. The role of Adult Literacy Services to respond to the literacy needs of all adult learners in the population was highlighted as fundamental. They are central in the provision of basic adult education programmes, both accredited and unaccredited, as well as supporting progression to other levels and services.

A general profile of the population with intellectual disabilities in Irish society based on CSO and the NIDD data was presented. We discuss the implications of this population profile for FET and Adult Literacy Services in Ireland which reveals ongoing inequalities of education, social and employment outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities. Analysis of the current profile of learner numbers in 2018 from PLSS as well as the findings of the online survey completed for this research are also discussed. As noted throughout the analysis, extensive variation in data collection, reliability and availability existed, both at national data gathering level and within the ETB system. This highlighted issues with data measurement as they can render invisible many qualitative and situated aspects of literacy and lend high credibility to the technological and functional narrative of literacy as individual skill. It also raises the issue of the accessibility of data on the profile of learners that is being collected through PLSS but is not currently publicly available.

The broader context within which this evolution of the Adult Literacy Services occurred is significant as the discussion of the development of the key concepts of disability rights, intellectual disabilities, inclusion and literacy demonstrated. Human rights approaches, the social model of disability and New Literacy Studies have been significant in shifting public discourses to acknowledge the complex, variable and situational nature of these concepts.

Definitions of literacy range from functional, behavioural and cognitive approaches to situated and relational definitions that acknowledge the social context of literacy. The tension between these models are noted in terms of emphasis in data monitoring on large scale comparable datasets and limited quantitative measures. This stands in contrast to situated understandings of literacy that call for more nuanced considerations of how learners learn within their social, political and economic settings and where learners themselves are valued, integral partners in the learning process.



Chapter 2:

Research methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology used throughout the research project. It reviews the purpose and aim of the research before discussing the mixed methods research approach used in the project. The design and four phases of the research process is then outlined before discussing ethical issues and the analysis process for this research.

2.2 Purpose and aims of the research

This research was designed and conducted by researchers in the Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education (CRALE), Maynooth University, on behalf of SOLAS, NALA and ETBI. The aims of the project were to:

- support Adult Literacy Services in using the 'Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities' (SOLAS-ETBI-NALA, 2018),
- build a picture of current practices and experiences in the inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in the Adult literacy Services to inform relevant developments across the FET sector, and
- further enhance the Guidelines as necessary.

2.3 Methodology

To capture the current context of inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the ETB Adult Literacy Services, a mixed methods research process was used incorporating the following four phases:

1. Desk research of relevant national and international literature, including policies, research and legislation.
2. Online survey completed by a designated respondent in each of the 16 ETBs.
3. Case studies conducted with three ETBs to capture the learning from experiences in the inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services. The case studies elicited the experience and perspectives of staff and learners in the participating ETBs.
4. Professional Development workshops for ETB staff, designed to enable staff to share

experiences and discuss professional practice about the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services.

The research process and methods used in each phase are outlined in the following sections, followed by a discussion of the ethical issues and a description of the analysis process of the research project.

2.4 Phase one – desk research

The current context, approaches and practices for the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the adult and further education sector – including adult literacy – were reviewed using desk research. 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 adult education, disability and social sciences. The findings of this desk research are integrated throughout the remaining sections.

2.5 Phase two – online survey

The design of the online survey followed best practice in social science research design (Cohen et al., 2011). It was designed by the researchers in consultation with NALA and with advice from the ETBI Basic Skills Advisory Network. They identified a designated AEO in each ETB to complete the survey as the person who would be best positioned to access the information needed to complete the survey on behalf of their ETB. The survey was first piloted with three ETBs and pilot respondents asked for clarifications to some question wording, and for a timescale to be placed on the question about the number of learners with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services (the survey was subsequently amended to ask for the 2018 figures). Once these amendments had been made, the survey was then distributed to each of the remaining 13 respondents in April 2019 (a copy of the survey is available on request from SOLAS). We checked with the three respondents to the pilot version of the survey to ensure that their responses were consistent with the new version of the survey to ensure consistency in data collection.

Each respondent completed the survey on behalf of their ETB, liaising with colleagues where necessary. Survey questions were based on the 2018 Guidelines and included questions relating to:

- the extent of current provision for and participation by adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services;
- understanding and awareness (of intellectual disability, inclusion and relevant legislation);
- operational procedures and practices for inclusion;
- interagency partnerships;
- professional development;
- evaluation and outcomes;
- issues and opportunities for inclusion.

Respondents were requested to complete the online survey with all **answers relating to the Adult Literacy Services within their ETB**. The survey questions acknowledged that approaches to inclusion varied across and within ETBs. The survey included options for comments which gave space for respondents to highlight other key activities and settings where learners with intellectual disabilities are engaged. The results of the online survey were analysed using SPSS⁷ and Excel software. Survey findings are integrated into Chapters 4 and 5 of the report.

2.6 Phase three – case studies

Case study research is “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016:37). It is a research approach that uses a variety of methods to study a phenomenon in its real-life context. It is a useful approach to explore the interconnected and embedded nature of the phenomenon being studied. The intention of this research was to map and document the work of the Adult Literacy Services who provide literacy education to a diversity of adult learners, including those with intellectual disabilities. The case study phase of the research was developed in consultation with NALA and with advice from the ETBI Basic Skills Advisory Network. The case studies explored the experiences and perceptions of students and staff in ETBs and disability support services regarding the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services. Qualitative research approaches drew on methods of observation, interviews and documentary analysis.

All 16 ETBs were invited to volunteer as a case study site in April-May 2019. Three ETBs agreed to participate. A generalised overview of the three ETBs who agreed to participate in this stage of the research is outlined in this paragraph. This is generalised in order to preserve the anonymity of the individuals who participated in this research. These ETBs who volunteered represent a cross section of ETBs in Ireland. Each is located in a different region of the country, with significant variations within and between them in terms of population, size,

location and socio-economic makeup of learners. Therefore, they give voice to the different geographical and demographic profiles in which ETBs operate.

The AEOs and ALOs in each volunteer ETB worked in consultation with the Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education (CRALE) and with their own staff and learners to organise day-long consultative visits to their centres. These visits enabled us to meet and discuss what experiences of inclusion were like for staff and for learners in the Adult Literacy Services. The ALOs in each ETB worked with us to identify and recruit key staff, primarily those involved in management, support and tutoring, in addition to learners to meet with CRALE researchers and to take part in a recorded interview. Personnel from local Intellectual Disability Support Services (IDSS) were also invited to participate.

Although each case study visit varied, they all included a consultation period to plan and schedule individual and group meetings and to ensure a robust consent and information process took place. Two members of the research team visited each ETB and intellectual disability support centre used by the learners in the research locations. Pre- and post-visit consultations involved emails and telephone calls, including telephone interviews with staff who were unavailable on the day of our visit. Learners in existing literacy groups were asked to participate in a workshop activity (described below) that explored their experiences of being a learner in the Adult Literacy Service of their respective ETB.

2.6.1. Case study interviews with ETB staff

Individual and group interviews were carried out with 19 staff from the ETB and intellectual disability support services (IDSS). Depending on the time available, interviews took between thirty minutes and one hour. Interviews were semi-structured and flexible but guided by a set of key questions aimed at eliciting discussion on the following areas:

- the extent of current provision for, and participation by, learners with intellectual disabilities in the literacy services;
- staff and learners' understanding and awareness of intellectual disability, inclusion and relevant legislation (where appropriate);
- staff knowledge of operational procedures and practices for inclusion, interagency partnerships, professional development, evaluation and outcomes;
- broader issues, opportunities and challenges for active inclusion.

Additional documentary analysis was completed to review relevant policies, literature and course material in

⁷ Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences

each of the three ETBs. Interviews were audio-recorded, in addition to notes taken by researchers. As per the research ethical approval from Maynooth University and GDPR agreement with SOLAS, all information from case studies was securely stored and anonymised in transcripts and notes to ensure no individual or centre was identifiable in the research reports. For this reason, only the general role of staff or student is identified throughout the report.

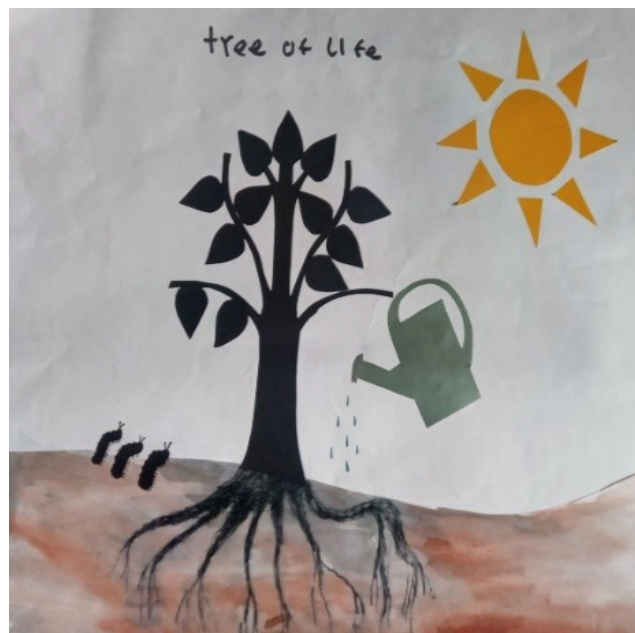
2.6.2. Case study interviews with adult literacy learners

Each ETB was asked to identify a learner group whom they felt were typical of their provision for learners with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services. In all three case studies, the ETBs selected literacy groups comprised solely of learners with intellectual disabilities rather than blended groups. The implications of this are discussed later in Chapters 4 and 5, including the decision to recruit an additional focus group of learners (described below). In some cases, these learners came from a single intellectual disability support centre, whereas in other cases they came from a variety of centres or came independently to the Adult Literacy Service. A total of 29 learners were interviewed in six different contexts, with the average group size being four to six people. These learners ranged in age from early twenties to fifties. Most were in mixed gender groups of male and female learners, while one group were all female and one group comprised of male learners. The group locations were generally in an urban setting (town or city) but learners came from a range of urban and rural areas.

A workshop activity was designed to elicit learners' reflections on their experience of learning with the Adult Literacy Services. Prior to the meeting, tutors of each group were consulted to ensure that the activity was appropriate for their learners. The activity comprised of a visual aid and coded post-it notes and was designed to allow learners identify supports, challenges and benefits of attending adult literacy classes. As illustrated in Figure 4, a theme of "growth" was used to represent learners' engagement with literacy provision:

- Tree – individual learner
- Roots – personal strengths and qualities that helped them
- Water – internal supports (that are inside the classroom)
- Sun – external supports (that are outside the classroom)
- Bugs – factors that make learning difficult for them

Figure 3. "Growth" workshop activity with learners (Source: case study research)



This activity was introduced and facilitated in a structured way by the researchers and with the assistance of the tutor to enable group discussion about their experiences of learning in the literacy service. Supported by tutors, Personal Assistants (PA) and researchers, learners recorded their comments on colour coded notes that were reviewed and discussed by the whole group afterwards. Field notes were taken to supplement the information gathered.

2.6.3 Focus group with adult literacy learners without intellectual disabilities

As all of the literacy learners interviewed during the case studies were learners with intellectual disabilities, we were cognisant that we had not included the voices of literacy learners who do not have intellectual disabilities. As Chapter 5 reveals, some research participants highlighted concerns that these learners may have about the inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities in the literacy services. There was also evidence that learners without intellectual disabilities benefitted from inclusive practice, so it was important to capture their unique perspective and experiences. In consultation with NALA, a focus group interview was conducted with five adult literacy learners without intellectual disabilities in June 2019. These learners were involved in learner representative fora in NALA and were asked to represent the general views of adult learners in the literacy services about the Guidelines, as well as their own experiences of inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services. With the consent of group members, the focus group interview was audio-recorded and transcribed later for analysis. In addition, the interviewer took field notes and created a visual map of key themes, which was discussed with participants at the end of the interview. All participants agreed that the visual map captured their thoughts, experiences and concerns.

2.7 Phase four – professional development workshops for ETB staff

The CRALE research team conducted three regional workshops open to staff in all 16 ETBs involved in the inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services. The professional development workshops facilitated staff in sharing their experiences of, and barriers to, good practice in inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities in their services. The workshops also aimed to familiarise participants with the Guidelines and assist ETBs in using them based on the needs of each ETB and their learners. The workshops took place in regional locations across Ireland during May 2019.

The workshops were designed, using a collaborative approach, by the CRALE research team, NALA staff members, and two co-facilitators who are adults with an intellectual disability, Tamara Byrne and Michael Gannon. Both Tamara and Michael are graduates of the Inclusive Learning Initiative (ILI)⁸ programme in Maynooth University and have experience of the primary, post-primary, further education and higher education sectors.

Figure 4. Workshop participants with facilitator Michael Gannon (Source: workshop research)



Using participative methodologies, the workshops aimed to explore ETB staff members' experiences of inclusion in Further Education and Training and identify the pedagogical, institutional and attitudinal issues and challenges relating to these experiences. Workshop activities were developed to ensure participants were given opportunities to critically reflect on existing inclusive practices. An adult education methodology was used to create a participative and learner-centred experience and the workshops were co-facilitated by the CRALE team, NALA staff and Tamara and Michael, who were able to bring a learners' perspective to the process. The activities and engagements throughout the workshops were captured by the research team using photographs, field notes and written recordings of reflective activities completed by the workshop

participants.

This report draws on this data to provide a contemporary picture of existing inclusive practices, ETB staff perspectives on the Guidelines and an overview of challenges and concerns in implementing them. The workshops also facilitated collaborative networking and a sharing of ideas, best practice and innovative initiatives in inclusion happening across the 16 ETBs. To do this, the workshops introduced participants to a range of activities, introduced and facilitated by the CRALE researchers and co-facilitators to provide opportunities for participants to:

- explore their own and others' experiences of inclusion in FET;
- identify the pedagogical and institutional issues and challenges related to these experiences in the ETB context;
- identify best practice in establishing inclusive learning environments;
- explore inclusive teaching and learning strategies;
- explore inclusive assessment and evaluation strategies;
- identify opportunities for learner progression.

Each four-hour workshop session included brief inputs on the history, context and purpose of the guidelines, on models of inclusion and on inclusive approaches to teaching, learning and evaluation (see Table 4 overleaf). In keeping with an inclusive approach, the workshop was designed to accommodate learning preferences with the use of different media such as:

- visual aids (handouts and PowerPoint slides),
- aural aids (oral recordings, a range of presentation styles), and
- kinaesthetic aids (hands on activities and physical movement).

8 The Inclusive Learning Initiative facilitated the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in higher education at Maynooth University.

Table 4. Workshop outline (Source: workshop research)

Workshop Activity	Description
Introduction	Welcome to the workshop Aim: Introduce facilitators, provide brief overview of the workshop.
Icebreaker	Hopes and expectations Aim: Ensure that everyone in room has opportunity to speak and give a sense of their hopes and expectations for the day.
Small Group/Feedback	Examples and benefits of good inclusive practice Aim: Allow everyone to identify and share positive experiences of inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy/FET.
Input/Discussion	Development and purpose of Guidelines Aim: Familiarise participants with Guidelines for inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services.
World Café Exercise	Identifying barriers Aim: Identify barriers to the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services/FET under three themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Institutional/Organisational — Teaching and Learning — Attitudinal and Cultural
Paired Reflection	Inclusive Practice Tree Aim: Allow everyone the chance to reflect on where we are now in implementing the Guidelines, where we would like to be, and how we get there.
Roadmap Activity & Discussion	Establishing and maintaining inclusive learning environments Aim: Identify supports and strategies needed at different stages of the learning journey.
Input and Discussion	Inclusive evaluation and assessment Aim: Explore different modes of evaluation and assessment.
Caterpillar Activity & Discussion	Hopes and plans for the future Aim: Encourage participants to reflect on their learning and any recommendations for future workshops.
Whole Group	Evaluation and close Aim: To map learning and allow the group to debrief and check out.

The photographs, field notes and written recordings of reflective activities completed by the workshop participants were then analysed by the research team and their findings are integrated into Chapter 5 of this report.

2.7.1. Workshop Participants

Each ETB was invited to nominate five staff members to attend a workshop. The research team suggested that the Adult Education Officer attend along with three staff members from the Adult Literacy Service and one staff member from another relevant FET programme or service (e.g. the ETB Adult Education Guidance Service). A total of sixty-nine participants attended the three regional workshops, representing all sixteen ETBs and a broad range of positions, services and programmes (see Figure 6 and 7).

Figure 5. Workshop Participants by ETB (Source: workshop research)



Participants in all three workshops were more likely to occupy management or administrative roles within the ETB. However, many resource workers present also worked, or currently work, as tutors and so could bring a teaching and learning perspective to the process. Two of the sixty-nine participants reported having specific responsibility for inclusion and disability support in their ETB.

Figure 6. Workshop participants by role (Source: workshop research)



Without exception, the workshop participants demonstrated a strong commitment to creating an inclusive adult learning experience in the ETB. They were generous and enthusiastic in their engagement with workshop activities. Data gathered from workshop participants, and presented in this report, highlights the range of innovative and effective approaches to inclusive practice already in place. The wealth of this information speaks to the Adult Literacy Sector's expertise, professionalism and support for inclusion.

2.8 Ethical considerations

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 GDPR agreement with SOLAS.

Key ethical issues to consider were the power relations which different people had with each other throughout this research – for example, ETB management, ETB staff, IDSS staff and learners were all in very different and sometimes intersecting power relations with each other. Consequently, there was a risk that any participants – staff or learners – might feel reluctant to share challenging or negative experiences or views about their experiences of inclusion or literacy learning provision in the ETB. Each focus group began with a discussion of key criteria of respect and confidentiality and all participants were offered the option of an individual interview in person or by telephone at a later point in order to mitigate this risk. The researchers also managed the data collection and fully anonymised or generalised data to create a buffer between what research participants told us and what is published in the research report (the only exception is the inclusion of photographs from the ETB workshops for which participants gave their permission). 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. We monitored these responses throughout the transcripts and analysis to ensure that we anonymised and/or removed any identifiable details from the data.

As researchers, we have tried to be sensitive to the positions, perspectives and feelings of all participants throughout the research. We have worked as adult education tutors previously in different organisations and so have some familiarity with the processes and cultures of adult literacy groups and learners, including learners with intellectual disabilities. We drew on this knowledge and experience to create a safe and supportive atmosphere for all learners and staff involved in this research.

All interviews and meetings occurred within education settings that were familiar to the learners and staff (apart from one workshop, attended by ETB staff only, which took place in a conference venue). Key staff were on hand if learners wanted any supports during the meetings (their tutors, their key worker or personal assistant as relevant). Throughout the process, we used adult education and literacy pedagogies to structure the meetings and confirm data with participants. Communications about the research used easy-to-read formats as appropriate for the learner groups. We spent time preparing for and debriefing at the end of each meeting and maintained contact with the ALO in each case study centre to ensure that all participants know they can contact us at any point and that they are kept up to date with the research outcomes.

2.9 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 and notes from the case studies 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). Each phase of the research was initially written in an interim research report and reviewed by key personnel in NALA, SOLAS, the ETBI Basic Skills Advisory Network. These interim reports contained our initial descriptions and analysis of the findings of each phase of the research (see Case Studies Report). Findings from all four phases were then integrated in this final research report to present a rich and detailed depiction of the context and key issues in the inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services.

2.10 Limitations of 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 and learners in the Adult Literacy Services as well as providing, where useful, some broader insights on inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities across programmes in ETBs. This resulted in different phases of the research ranging from the international and national scope of the policy and literature review and the online survey to the more focused in-depth analysis of local and individual experiences through the case studies and workshops. These ranges were combined together through the analysis process into this final report.

The online survey was completed by one designated officer in the ETB, selected for their knowledge of the Adult Literacy Services. This means the survey gives a picture of each ETB from the perspective and knowledge of this key individual and so is partial.

As discussed earlier, limitations in availability of data means that it is difficult to give accurate numbers of learners with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services. Issues of disclosure of information are pertinent as well as differences in how different datasets recorded information. Recording of disability is based on disclosure by the learner and, as such, disability is an often under-reported category in data collection. As noted earlier, it was not possible to provide a more cohesive account of participation by learners with intellectual disabilities in the adult literacy services – outside of that which is provided through the PLSS. The survey respondents in the online survey conducted for this research noted that the use of different proxies to estimate numbers of learners in their ETB, would lead only to provisional and partial estimations of learners with intellectual disabilities in each Adult Literacy Services.

The three case study ETBs self-selected to be involved in the research, and key personnel in the ETB, the AEOs and ALOs, selected staff and learner groups for us to meet (in line with criteria provided and in consultation with the research team). While this facilitated an in-depth qualitative insight into the experiences of ETB staff and learners on the literacy journey, it resulted in certain limitations. Voluntary literacy tutors were not involved in the case studies and so their views are not directly represented. Literacy groups with learners with intellectual disabilities were selected in all three case study ETBs, so inclusive literacy groups with a mix of learners with and without intellectual disabilities were not originally represented in the research. For this reason, an additional literacy learners group was held with literacy learners without intellectual disabilities to gain some insight to their experiences of inclusion. The

implications of these limitations on who was involved in the research are discussed throughout this research report.

The research was originally designed to occur in four staged phases which would inform each other, beginning with the literature and policy review in Spring 2019, followed by the online survey (Feb 2019), case study research (March 2019) and workshops (April 2019). Due to delays in gaining GDPR clearance, the online survey did not occur until April 2019, with the case study research visits and regional workshops both occurring in May 2019. Hence, the different phases occurred at the same time period rather than informing each other as originally intended. Different research team members led each phase to ensure that the aims and intentions of each phases were achieved, with ongoing team meetings and communications enabling some initial learnings from each phase to be shared between us. The collaborative analysis and writing process allowed us to deepen this learning and connectivity between the different research phases to bring them together in this final research report.

The mixed methods research approach, the different phases of the research process and ongoing research collaborative relationships were designed to address these concerns, as well as discussing the implications of these limitations throughout relevant sections of this research report.

2.11 Chapter summary

This chapter reviewed the research purpose and methods used throughout the project, outlining the four phases used to achieve its aim of identifying and exploring practices of inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services of the ETBs.

A mixed methods approach was used through the four phases of the research. Desk research was used to review national policies and existing research on inclusion and provision for learners with intellectual disabilities. Concurrently a national online survey was designed and completed by the 16 ETBs nationwide which gave a picture of current practices and issues of inclusion within the ETBs. Case studies were conducted with three ETBs to explore learning from their experiences of inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services. We designed and conducted participative professional development workshops for ETB staff to share experiences and discuss professional practice of inclusion. This was followed by a discussion of the ethical issues and the analysis process of the research project.





Chapter 3:

The legislative and structural context of the Adult Literacy Services

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the policy and legislative basis that underpins the inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in the ETB Adult Literacy Services. Significant legislative changes have occurred in the education, disability and equality spheres in recent decades on international and national stages. The implementation of these policies and legislative changes in Adult Literacy Services is discussed throughout this chapter, assessing the implications for the inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities.

This is followed by an overview of the structural context of the ETBs in which the Adult Literacy Services are located. The management structures, numbers of learners, funding and expenditure and types of programmes provided by the ETBs is reviewed, in order to understand how the Adult Literacy Services are positioned in the Further Education and Training sector in Ireland. The socio-political and legislative context of FET is also explored in order to consider the consequences for Adult Literacy Services and more specifically learners with intellectual disabilities.

3.2 International policy influences from the UN and EU

The influence of the transnational bodies, such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), have been central to Irish government policy development regarding disability issues in general including intellectual disabilities. The 'UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (UNCRPD, 2006) recognises disability as a human rights issue, assuring the right to equal treatment and to freedom from discrimination, as well as social and economic rights in areas including education, health, employment, communication and transport. States that ratify the convention commit to delivering civil and political rights to people with disabilities, and to the progressive realisation of social and economic rights.

States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006, Article 24).

Ireland signed the convention in 2007 and ratified it in 2018. As Article 24 outlines, it requires states to recognise the right of persons with disabilities to an inclusive education system at all levels and in lifelong learning. Persons with disabilities should not be discriminated against or excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability. This inclusive approach, based in fundamental human rights, is supported by international policy and legislation from bodies including the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, European Convention on Human Rights, and European Disability Strategy 2010-2020. This has ensured that most EU member countries, including Ireland, are developing strategic frameworks for deinstitutionalisation of the services for people with disabilities.

The 'Upskilling Pathways: new opportunities for adults' initiative is a key building block of the European Pillar of Social Rights. 'Upskilling Pathways' is the main legislative proposal and key policy priority of the New Skills Agenda for Europe since 2016. 'Upskilling Pathways' 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). Member states have to develop implementation plans that can define priority target groups for this initiative, depending on their national circumstances.⁹ The Department of Education and Skills is currently developing plans for this initiative in the Republic of Ireland. An inter-agency steering group has been established to collaborate on the development of an implementation plan.¹⁰

3.3 National equality legislation in the Republic of Ireland

In Ireland, an inclusive approach to disability is also supported by national equality legislation that gives a clear legal framework to combat direct and indirect discrimination. The Employment Equality Acts (1998–2011) prohibit discrimination in employment

⁹ Further details about the 'Upskilling Pathways' initiative is available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224> (accessed 8 March 2019).

¹⁰ Further information about the inter-agency steering group established to develop this implementation plan is available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2018-02-20/205/> (accessed 8 March 2019).

and in vocational training and work experience on nine grounds, including disability. The Equal Status Acts (2000–2012) prohibits discrimination in goods, facilities and services (including discrimination against anyone with a condition that results in the person learning differently to a person without that condition, or which affects their thought processes or behaviours).¹¹ The equality and education legislation requires all public bodies to provide "Reasonable Accommodation" for people with disability and allows for a broad range of positive action measures.¹²

According to the QQI 'Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria' with FET, "access" is to be viewed in terms of the ability to participate successfully in a programme without the hindrance of unnecessary barriers. Hence, providers comply with national policy in relation to equality and non-discrimination, with particular regard to the relevant provisions of Equality legislation (QQI, 2013:15). Providers must implement and monitor reasonable accommodations to facilitate people with disabilities to participate in programmes and services. The Equal Status Act (2000), Section 4 (2) qualifies the obligation to do "all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability" by stating that "a refusal or failure to provide the special treatment or facilities to which subsection (1) refers shall not be deemed reasonable unless such provision would give rise to a cost, other than a nominal cost, to the provider of the service in question".¹³ Hence, in accordance with the relevant legislation, all FET providers offer reasonable accommodation to learners with disabilities. The nature of those accommodations varies depending on the identified needs of individual learners.

This legislation has been further developed by ongoing court rulings, including the Cahill case Supreme Court rulings in 2017. This clarifies the State's duty to provide reasonable accommodation requiring a service provider – including the Minister for Education – to take positive steps to ensure that students with a disability can fully participate in education and other benefits, facilities and services provided for students.¹⁴ In this case, Mr Justice MacMenamin notes that "what is in question is the right of everyone to be treated equally as human persons and not to be subject to these forms of discrimination" (IHREC 2017). This ruling clarifies that the

Minister for Education is subject to the requirement to provide reasonable accommodations in the delivery of educational services under The Education Act (1998).

3.3.1. Implications of national legislative developments for public bodies

Legislative developments have led to renewed considerations and strategies from the education services, including Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) as the representative body of the ETBs in the further education sector. ETBI (2017) acknowledge that the Equal Status Act and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) Act (2014) places greater onus on large public bodies.¹⁵ For public bodies such as ETBs they have 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).

ETBI (2017) is cognisant of the potential of future cases through the European Court of Human Rights, noting that:

potential human rights considerations might arise in terms of access to State-funded adult education in terms of where there is limited or no access to education services for individuals with disabilities or with a type of disability. It should be noted, however, that this is not an absolute right, and the State can justify difference in treatment where it can show that it is pursuing a legitimate aim, and the means to achieving that aim is proportionate and necessary (ETBI, 2017: 8).

IHREC provide assistance to ensure that education providers, in the performance of their functions, comply with their positive duties to:

- have due regard to human rights and equality; and
- eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and treatment.¹⁶

The Disability Act (2005) is integral to Ireland's legislative equality basis, providing for an integrated provision of access "where practical and appropriate".¹⁷ This includes independent assessment of individual

11 Further details about the Equal Status Acts (2000–2012) is available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/section/2/enacted/en/html> (accessed 6 March 2019).

12 For more information relating to Reasonable Accommodations in education, visit the State Examinations Commission's website at: <https://www.examinations.ie/?l=en&mc-ca&sc-ra> (accessed 8 August 2019).

13 Further Details about Section 4(2) is available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/section/4/enacted/en/html#sec4> (accessed 8 August 2019).

14 Kim Cahill, who sat her Leaving Certificate in 2001, had obtained an exemption solely on the assessment of spelling and grammar elements of language subjects due to her dyslexia. However, when her Leaving Certificate was issued, it carried an explanatory note stating that certain parts of the exam had not been assessed, therefore revealing her disability to future employers. She appealed this as discriminatory behaviour and a failure to make reasonable accommodation. The Supreme Court clarified that the duty to provide reasonable accommodation requires a service provider – including the Minister for Education – to take positive steps to ensure that students with a disability can fully participate in education and other benefits, facilities and services provided for students. Available at: <https://www.ihrec.ie/supreme-court-clarifies-duties-towards-students-disability-discrimination-case/> (accessed 6 March 2019).

15 Further details about the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 is available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2014/act/25/enacted/en/html> (accessed 6 March 2019).

16 Further information about IHREC is available at: <https://www.ihrec.ie/about/functions/> (Accessed 7 March 2019).

17 Further information about The Disability Act (2005) is available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2005/act/14/enacted/en/html> (Accessed 7 March 2019).

needs, a related service statement, and independent redress and enforcement for people with disabilities. The Disability Act places an obligation on public bodies to make their buildings, information and services accessible to people with disabilities, and to integrate disability service provision within mainstream services. The Act also establishes a Centre for Excellence in Universal Design to promote standards and principles, as well as the development of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS, Department of Justice & Equality, 2017). The 2017-2021 NDIS gives a clear commitment to actions to removing barriers and improving access to employment, transport and other supports for persons with disabilities. However, the requirement to provide reasonable accommodations and supports "where practical and appropriate" gives a qualified obligation. This continues to raise uncertainties, although the Cahill case and the IHREC Act 2014 highlight more clearly the responsibilities of public sector organisations.

Employment is noted as a crucial issue for people with disabilities in terms of ensuring economic welfare and social participation. Watson et al., (2017) found that people with a disability are less likely to get a job and more likely to leave employment, even when their disability does not create difficulties with everyday activities. People with intellectual disabilities were amongst the group to have the lowest entry rates in employment. The authors point to the importance of government supports and initiatives to address the systemic inequalities of employment experienced by people with disabilities (Watson et al., 2017). Key strategies to achieve this include the 'Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities'¹⁸ and the 'Transforming Lives'¹⁹ programme, as well as the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) actions on employment, community and universal design.

The NDIS details 114 recommendations which includes a commitment to greater interagency co-ordination and smooth transitions into, within, and out of education for children with disabilities (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017:20), and to actively engage with people with disabilities and their representatives throughout this process. Action 41 commits that "SOLAS will develop a social inclusion resource to enhance the capacity to support active inclusion of all people in further education and training, including people with a disability" (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017:23). Community-based actions also emphasise greater inclusion and support, such as Action 74 which commits to build and sustain competent and welcoming communities that are inclusive of people with disabilities (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017:34).

3.3.2. Education legislation: statutory rights to inclusion of special education needs

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 provides for a right to inclusive education with statutory rights to assessment, preparation and review of individual education plans and an independent complaints and appeals mechanism. The Act was to be implemented over a number of years with several sections, including actions relating to the needs of students aged 18 years in the further education and training sector yet to be realised.

The EPSEN Act allowed for the establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). While the NCSE's remit relates primarily to the school context, the Council also has functions relating to transitions from school that are relevant to the adult education sector. The NCSE is required to ensure that a continuum of special educational provision is available, as required, for each type of disability, to review the on-wards provision for adults with disabilities to avail of higher education and of adult and continuing education, rehabilitation and training, and to publish reports on the results of such reviews. The NCSE has an advisory role for all educational institutions on best practice for the education of learners with disabilities.

In light of this role, the NCSE commissioned a research review in 2013 to support the transition of students with Special Education needs from school to further education, as well as mapping the further education and training supports available to people with disabilities within the sector. Duggan and Byrne's review (2013: 3-8) notes the lack of transfer of good practice or learning across educational sectors, or between the arenas of secondary education and vocational training. Such transfer of good practice, they argue, has the potential to enable greater learning across sectors. They acknowledge the limits of legislation alone, and emphasise the empowerment and self-advocacy of students. Staff training is noted as important, not just for training in appropriate pedagogies or universal design, but also in legislative requirements; a point that is echoed in the findings of the research. Policy and practice implications include changes in administration and governance, development and deployment of personnel, institutional factors, and the involvement of people with disabilities. The involvement of people with disabilities includes the design and delivery of measures to support access to, participation in, and progression from, higher and further education, adult and continuing education, vocational training and vocational rehabilitation.

¹⁸ Further information about the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities is available at: <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Comprehensive%20Employment%20Strategy%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities%20-%20FINAL.pdf/Files/Comprehensive%20Employment%20Strategy%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities%20-%20FINAL.pdf> (Accessed 7 March 2019).

¹⁹ Further information about the Transforming Lives initiative is available at: <http://nda.ie/Publications/Disability-Supports/Transforming-Lives.pdf> (Accessed 7 March 2019).

3.3.3. New Directions: personal support services for adults with disabilities

The National Disability Authority (NDA) Strategy 2019-2021 involves greater focus on community inclusion, mainstreaming, and person-centred planning in disability support services, as promoted by the 'New Directions: Personal Support Services for Adults with Disabilities' (Health Service Executive, 2012). NDA principles "underpin the provision of services to people with disabilities as equality, maximising participation, and enabling choice and independence" (2012:28). The increased focus on inclusion is evident in the support for people "to access mainstream activities (including, education, training, social and cultural activities) rather than segregated, centre-based programmes." (NDA, 2010:39). The NDA strategy is crucial for the ETB services, especially in terms of increased requests for adult literacy and other education services from learners and Intellectual Disability Support Services (IDSS) which is evident in later sections. The New Directions strategy specifies key supports that should be provided to people with intellectual disabilities in state-funded day services (Health Services Executive, 2012:21). These provisions include accessing formal learning, vocational training and work opportunities. This has impelled greater engagement between adult and community education services and disability support services, with learners accessing adult education, as well as adult educators providing supports and learning in disability support centres. The New Directions strategy identifies:

change processes needed to embed a person-centred approach to service provision [...] a strong national vision, cultural change among providers and funders, support for innovation, funding systems that facilitate individual choice, and an expanded array of demand-led, individualised services that let service users exercise choice and control over decision-making about their service. (Health Services Executive, 2012:16).

3.3.4. Legislation relating to employment and transitions within and between education and employment

Other background policy documents significant for the education sector include the current emphasis on employment strategies for people with disabilities. The employment orientation is evidenced in the reforms of disability allowance in February 2019; these reforms open up greater employment opportunities and earning potential for people with disabilities without impacting on medical cards or related allowances. However, the implications of how this reform intersects with existing disability and related benefits for people with disabilities are still being worked out. The uncertainty is reflective of the culture of continual reform and change described in Section 3.4 as part of the new managerial reforms in

Irish public life (Dukelow and Murphy, 2016; Lynch and Grummell, 2018).

In line with the National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan 2013-2015, the Irish Government has published the 'Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024'. The strategy takes a cross-departmental approach, combining actions by different departments and state agencies to address the barriers impacting on the employment of people with disabilities. The strategy's priority is to ensure "that people with disabilities, who are able to, and want to work, are supported and enabled to do so" (p. 5).

Under 'Strategic Priority 1: Build Skills Capacity and Independence', the specified actions include many that affect FET and adult literacy provision, including action line 1.5 (p. 49) concerning transition planning, with measures to support the effective transition from school to further and higher education for students with special education needs. Action line 1.8a (p. 50) includes specific actions for the further education and training sector, including to develop a specific action plan with targets for people with disabilities. These themes of active supports including the involvement of the Guidance Services in the transitions between education sector and into work is also a theme in the recommendations of the 2018 Houses of the Oireachtas report (2018:22).

3.4 Learning from existing research on inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in FET

As noted at the outset of this report, much of the existing research about the inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities in education focuses on formal schooling and the higher education system. As Slee (2001), Tomlinson (2013), Riddell (2015), Allan (2015) and Gorard (2016) point out, provision in these sectors has been structured into a special education needs system largely driven and shaped by targeted initiatives and interventions designed and implemented by multi-disciplinary teams of professional bodies. The FET sector, by contrast, has not have the same level or extent of strategic policy development, initiatives, resource allocation, or professional bodies involved in its provision until recently (Grummell and Murray, 2014; Murray et al. 2015). This has resulted in a very different context, which is reflected in the type of research conducted in further education as is discussed in the following sections.

3.4.1. The intersectional nature of legislation change and policy implementation

Policy imperatives from the fields of disability, equality and education intersect to promote greater educational supports for people with intellectual disabilities. As discussed previously, policies such as 'New Directions: Personal Support Services for Adults with Disabilities' advocate for educational supports to be provided to people with intellectual disabilities (2012:21). Key Action 41 of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy recommends that SOLAS develops a social inclusion resource to enhance the capacity to support active inclusion of all people in FET including people with a disability (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017:23).

The NDA (2018:15) highlight the complexity of the task of implementing policies and strategies such as UNCRPD, the 'Comprehensive Employment Strategy', 'Time to Move on From Congregated Settings', the 'Review of Vision for Change', 'New Directions: Personal Support Services for Adults with Disabilities', the 'Task Force on Personalised Budgets' and the 'National Disability Inclusion Strategy'. All of these policies and strategies are all at early and different stages of implementation, placing challenges to balance this diversity and scale of implementation. The execution of policy developments are still emergent, not only in terms of the policy implementation but the consequences of how policies intersect with each other within and across the sectors. A whole of government approach to improving the lives of persons with disabilities has been implemented in the 'National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021' (NDA, 2018) in order to develop a coherent approach.

3.4.2. The impact of legislative and structural changes in the FET sector for Adult Literacy Services

Adult Literacy Services have been impacted by the broader structural reforms and legislative changes within the FET sector over the past decade. This includes the legislative re-designation of key statutory and governance bodies such as ETBs, SOLAS and QQI. All of these legislative changes have occurred during a tumultuous economic and political period: the global financial crisis of 2008 and consequent decade of austerity and cutbacks. This has key implications for funding and resourcing in the FET sector including Adult Literacy Services. It also has consequences for the organisational structure and coherence between and across sectors, and most significantly for the lives of learners (Murray et al., 2014; Fitzsimons, 2017).

While there is limited research engaging with structural and systemic issues for the experiences of adults with intellectual disabilities in FET, broader research demonstrates that adults with learning disabilities continue to experience a range of barriers to inclusion in many areas. WALK (2015) describe how FET providers

highlight "the lack of coherent policies and specific goals and targets for the participation of those with an intellectual disability" (2015:25).

For learners:

administrative barriers relating to age, duration of unemployment, welfare status, educational attainment and so on can obstruct participation. Removing these is a necessary prerequisite to ensuring that the objective of mainstreaming is achieved (Duggan and Byrne, 2013:175).

Those working and studying in FET describe being overwhelmed in recent years by a sense of continual and continuous reform, where the benefits of transparency and accountability are countered by the continual pressures of policy changes and performance measurement (Murray et al., 2015). Public sectors – including those in equality, disability and education – struggle under this performativity gaze, where the social and developmental outcomes of learning at the heart of their work are often difficult to visualise and measure (Clarke et al., 2000; Lynch et al., 2015; Grummell and Lynch, 2018). This impact of reform and performativity occurred during an era of austerity and public sector cutbacks over the past decade and has had a disproportionate impact on people with disabilities (Skalecka, 2014; IHREC, 2015; Flynn, 2018).

3.4.3. Diversity of student supports and funding in FET

The unique status and position of FET is also evident when we look at the supports and resources open to students with disabilities in FET. While the specific scope of this report is on the Adult Literacy Services within the FET sector, it is useful to look across education sectors from the perspective of learners with disabilities who traverse these education sectors. There is significant disparity between the levels of supports offered in the primary and second level schooling and higher education sectors, on the one hand, and the FET sector, on the other hand. There has been substantial state investment in special education in Irish schools; the state's annual expenditure on special education in the primary and post primary sectors increased by 38 per cent between 2011 and 2017, up to €1.7 million, which amounts to 19 per cent of the Department of Education and Skill's gross current funding allocation for this year (Campbell et al., 2017). While variability of levels of school support between education sectors – and even between and within schools – is a constant theme in research on the subject (see Kitchin and Mulcahy, 1999; Squires et al., 2016), overall there has been a sustained effort to support and provide resources for greater inclusion and mainstreaming for students with disabilities in schools.

At higher education level, students with disabilities have designated support structures through which they can apply to Higher Education Institutes (HEI) using the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE). This includes the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD), which was established by the Irish Government and the EU in 1994. This fund covers the cost of academic supports for students with disabilities. Students who register with disability services in their respective HEIs can access transition/orientation supports, individual needs assessments, assistive technology, learning support, dedicated specialised supports, and examination accommodations according to specified categories of disabilities. All HEIs have support offices with Access and Disability Officers who coordinate the provision of academic supports for students with disabilities (McGuckin et al., 2013).

The FSD is open to students with disabilities in FET who are enrolled in full-time courses at NFQ level 5 and above. As discussed previously, other supports (such as reasonable accommodation) are available to learners at levels 1-4 in FET and those on part-time programmes²⁰. From a student perspective, the structure of the funding and grants model for FET presents challenges for learners. Research with FET practitioners points to the challenges faced by adult learners with intellectual disabilities due to lack of information about student loans and funding for FET, impacts on entitlements for disability allowance, travel and other supports, the linear structure of the funding and grants models, the impact of interruptions in study on progression (Doody, 2015; Scanlon and Kemp, 2015; Scanlon and Taylor, 2018).

Funding is often linked to continual progression to higher levels, rather than enabling horizontal progression across levels or mixing levels as desired by many learners. These inconsistencies and gaps in how learners can engage with the further education system combine to impact inequitably on people with intellectual disabilities as the findings presented in this report reveal. Additionally, funding restricts the capacity of FET institutions and practitioners to offer supports in very practical ways relating to transport and logistics, especially for those based in rural areas as later findings highlight.

The challenges which this poses for the entire sector are acknowledged by SOLAS in the 2017 SOLAS report on barriers for vulnerable groups accessing FET and are being considered in their current strategic planning for 2020-2024. Similar awareness is expressed in the 'Review of supports available to people with disabilities transitioning from education or training into employment' report to the Houses of the Oireachas, where Mr Jim Mulkerrins on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

recognised that there are still access difficulties in some FET settings. Scope to address these up to now has been limited as no specific capital budget was allocated for FET. Enhanced allocations of capital funds for the sector over the period of the National Development Plan will give greater capacity to address these issues (Houses of the Oireachas, 2018:22).

3.5 Adult Literacy Services in context of Further Education and Training

Given the legislative and socio-political backdrop of FET, the following section reviews the structures and types of provision offered by the ETBs in the FET sector. This intends to provide detail on the context within which the Adult Literacy Services operate. The management structures, numbers of learners, funding and expenditure and types of programmes provided by the ETBs are outlined, drawing out the implications for the Adult Literacy Services.

3.5.1. Institutional structures of ETBs and the Adult Literacy Services

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are statutory authorities that have responsibility for education and training, youth work and other statutory functions in the Republic of Ireland²¹. ETBs manage and operate second-level schools, further education colleges, multi-faith community national schools, and adult and further education and training centres that deliver education and training programmes. Adult Literacy Services operate in ETB-managed Adult Education Services under the remit of further education and training provision.

Within the management structure of ETBs, the 16 Directors of FET are responsible for FET policies within their respective ETBs as part of an integrated Adult Education Service. This may 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, ETB Adult Education Guidance Service (ETB-AEGS), Youthreach, Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), and the Prison Education Service.

As outlined briefly in opening chapter, the Directors of FET work with the Adult Education Officers (AEOs) who are responsible for relevant adult education service managers and coordinators. Within this service, Adult

20 The FSD supported 1,350 FET students with disabilities on full-time courses (or 13.4 per cent of all FSD beneficiaries) in 2014/2015 (HEA 2017: 24).

21 The role of the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) is described on the following webpage. Available at: <https://www.etbi.ie/etbs/what-is-an-etb/> (accessed 22 May 2019).

Literacy Service (ALOs) manage the delivery of adult literacy programmes in consultation and co-operation with co-ordinators from the other ETB adult and further education services. The role of an ALO is multifaceted and involves supporting and managing students, volunteer and paid tutors, developing and implementing programmes, as well as managing finance, resources, premises and non-academic staff. The ALO manages the adult literacy budget and oversees the delivery of adult literacy programmes, such as the Family Literacy programme and the ITABE programme. ALOs are supported in their work by Resource Workers, Project Support Workers, programme coordinators and administrative staff and were identified as pivotal informants in this study. As discussed in Chapter 2, the AEOs and ALOs were key figures in giving us access and information for the survey and case study aspects of this research due to their pivotal positions in the Adult Literacy Services.

3.5.2. Funding in adult literacy provision

Adult literacy is co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020. Funding for adult literacy is allocated to ETBs on an annual basis under the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES). Adult Literacy Services manage budgets for adult literacy, ITABE and the DEIS Family Literacy Initiative. The following programmes also have provision for adult literacy and collaborate with the Adult Literacy Services to put in place literacy supports for their learners:

- Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)
- Refugee Resettlement
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Skills for Work

According to SOLAS Annual Report 2018, the overall programme budget to the ETBs in 2018 was €570 million (2018c:30). Within the programme funding allocation for ETBs, the Adult Literacy Service received €26.3 million to deliver general adult literacy provision (including family literacy). This figure of €26 million does not include funding allocated to specific programmes such as ITABE (€1.6 million) ESOL (€2.3 million), Skills for Work (€2.5 million) and Refugee Resettlement (€2.9 million) (SOLAS, 2018c:31)

3.5.3. Number of learners and programme expenditure in adult literacy provision

Between 2015 and 2017, there were 121,536 reported beneficiaries of the Adult Literacy Service with additional beneficiaries receiving literacy education in ESOL, ITABE and Skills for Work programmes (see Table 2 for 2017 figures). Available information does not aggregate the data on different groups of learners, including learners with intellectual disabilities. Not all

learners with intellectual disabilities choose to disclose their disability, so absolute enumeration is not possible.

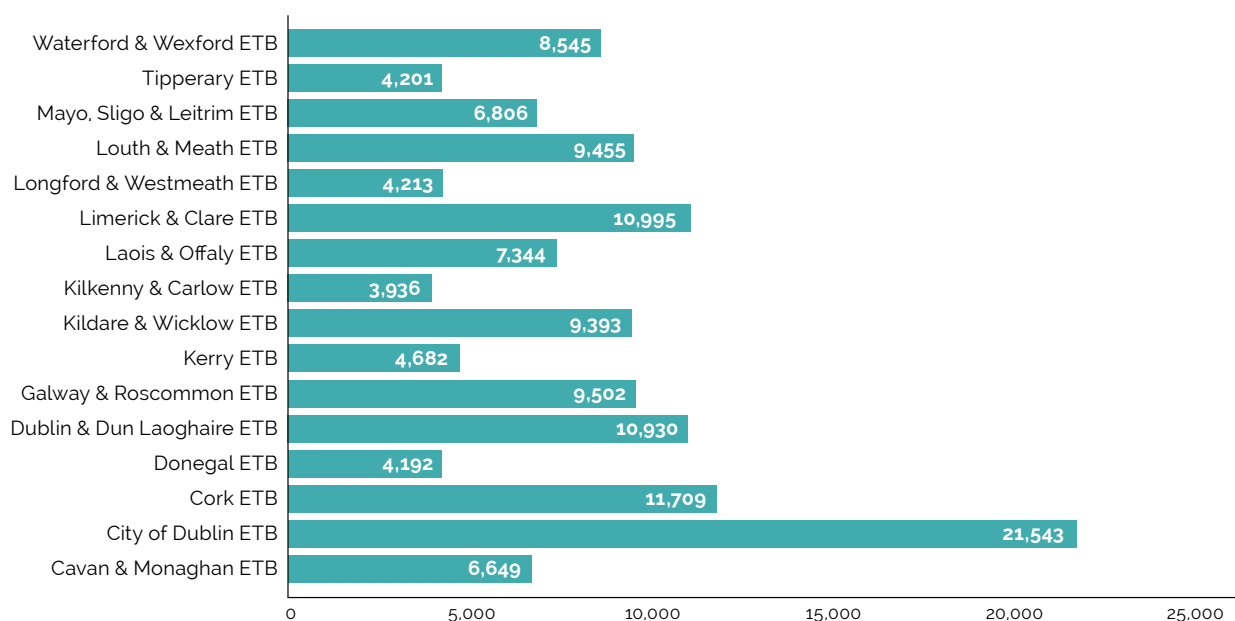
The reported expenditure for 2017 gives an insight into the costs of programme provision for adult literacy. These budget lines have to be read with caution though, as some expenditure falls into other budget categories. For example, the costs of voluntary literacy tuition is comprehended in the overall literacy budget, including premises, materials, resources, training and support for volunteer tutors.

Table 5. 2017 ETB beneficiary numbers and 2018 funding allocation per programme

Programme Type	Reported Beneficiaries 2017	Funding Allocation 2018
Adult Literacy (including Family Literacy)	39,591	€26,312,079
ESOL	14,794	€2,341,231
Refugee Resettlement	1,316	€2,991,243
ITABE	2,329	€1,569,483
Skills for Work	3,435	€2,532,281
Voluntary Literacy Tuition	1,271	€0
Total	62,736	€35,746,317
Source: SOLAS (2018) <i>Further Education and Training Services Plan</i>		

As mentioned previously, each ETB has a unique demographic and geographic profile as evidenced by diverse learner numbers in the 16 ETBs (see Figure 7). This encompasses part-time programme provision in the ETBs for Adult Literacy, including Family Literacy, ESOL, ITABE, Refugee Resettlement, Skills for Work and Voluntary Literacy Provision.

Figure 7. Learner beneficiaries in part-time programmes in ETBs in 2018 (Source: SOLAS (2018) Further Education and Training Services Plan)



3.5.4. Programmes and Projects in Adult Literacy Services

The learner beneficiaries listed in the preceding section participate in the following range of programmes and projects for adult literacy learners in ETBs. These include voluntary literacy tuition, Small Group Literacy Tuition, Family Literacy, BTEI and ITABE programmes and projects.

3.5.4.1. Volunteer literacy tuition

Literacy tuition is offered by 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 ICT. While the adult literacy service is free to everyone, additional supports such as childcare and financial support are limited. Volunteers complete literacy tutor training within the ETBs, which can be accredited by Waterford Institute of Technology. Additionally, all tutors are Garda vetted. After training, the literacy tutor volunteer usually gives one to three hours of their time per week. In line with the greater "emphasis placed on supporting group tuition" (DES, 2013:5), the level of 1:1 tuition has decreased significantly in recent years with 1,338 learners in 1:1 tuition in 2017, down from 3,141 learners in 2015 (SOLAS, 2017a:31). As discussed in Chapter 5, the shift 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.

3.5.4.2. Small Group Literacy Tuition

Paid tutors work with small groups of learners (usually six–eight learners per group) to enhance basic literacy skills in reading, writing, numeracy and ICT. All learners in adult literacy have access to accredited programmes with SOLAS figures indicating that approximately 30% of beneficiaries annually achieve accreditation up to Level 4 on the NFAQ (SOLAS, 2017a:31). As noted in Chapter 1, inclusive literacy models encourage learning in these small group tuition contexts.

3.5.4.3. DEIS Family Literacy

The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) strategy (2005) provides the structure for the delivery of Family Literacy and Family Learning through ETB Adult Literacy Services. Family Literacy initiatives support families in enhancing their skills in reading, writing, numeracy and foundational ICT skills in recognition of the vital role 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" (2011:3). Programmes include opportunities for intergenerational learning and, wherever possible, lead both adults and children to pursue further learning. They are education programmes that help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context. They build on literacy practices within families or communities and aim to develop literacy skills and confidence across

generations.²² 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, 2011:2).

3.5.4.4. Literacy Support (for BTEI participants)

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 NQF 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.²³ Funding for literacy and numeracy provision includes promotion, screening and assessment systems, as well as broader access and provision for learners with basic skills needs at NQF levels 1–3 (SOLAS, 2017a:39).

3.5.4.5. Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education

The ITABE project is an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills to deliver, through ETB Adult Literacy Services, 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 a 10–14 week period, as opposed to the average of two hours per week currently provided. A number of these projects have been allocated to each of the 16 ETBs.

Those eligible for ITABE must be over 18 years, experiencing severe difficulties in literacy or numeracy, and have a literacy standard below QQI Level 3 (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 NQF.

In summary, adult learners with intellectual disabilities can be offered literacy tuition in any of the following models of provision:

- 1:1 tuition.
- Separate group tuition (all learners have an intellectual disability).
- Mixed group tuition (learners with and without an intellectual disability).

Learners in separate group tuition and 1:1 tuition still have a level of social interaction with other adult literacy students, such as at break times or at whole centre events (NALA, 2015). Groups of literacy learners in the Adult Literacy Services can include persons with intellectual disabilities and this can be within any of the Adult Literacy, BTEI, ESOL and ITABE programmes described above (Duggan and Byrne, 2013:43). In some cases, adult literacy service tutors also work part-time with the local disability service itself, providing direct tuition or supporting disability service staff to integrate literacy support into their other courses and activities with the learner (NALA, 2015).

3.6 Chapter summary

The chapter reviewed the implications of key policy and legislative context in equality, disability and education fields for the inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in literacy services. As discussed throughout this section, there has been significant legislative changes that have occurred in recent years. This has taken place within a wider context of governance reforms and the rise of managerial cultures (Lynch et al. 2015) which has resulted in greater levels of policy change and systemic reforms. Policy implementation is still in an initial and continually emergent stage, and therefore needs extensive support by all stakeholders to ensure its successful implementation, as well as data monitoring, consultation, and participative and inclusive communications processes. Supports and funding structures for learners throughout FET remains a significant and complex issue.

This was followed by an overview of the context of literacy education in the further education sector in Ireland, including its funding structures, profile of learners, programmes and models of provision, sources of support and funding for learners with disabilities. The analysis noted the key shifts in recent years as a consequence of legislative and policy changes across the FET sector. Changes included structural reforms in FET, changes in Quality Assurance (QA) procedures, greater accreditation, funding structures, higher levels of professional training and qualifications for staff and legislative requirements to fulfil the adult literacy and numeracy strategy, as well as the influence of reforms and the impact of new managerialism across public sectors.

²² For further details about DEIS family literacy, see the following webpage: Available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Further-Education-and-Training/Adult-Literacy/DEIS-Family-Literacy-Guidelines-2010.pdf> (accessed 5 June 2019).

²³ 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/> (accessed 5 June 2019).

Chapter 4:

Implementing the 2018 Guidelines in the Adult Literacy Services

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of an online survey completed by the respondents in each of the 16 ETBs in order to give an insight into the level of awareness and engagement in ETBs with the 2018 Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services. The responses presented are those of the staff designated to complete the survey on behalf of their ETB about the ETB's awareness and engagement with the 2018 Guidelines. The survey asked respondents about the type of provision, their sense of ETB staff awareness of the Guidelines and relevant inclusion issues, operational procedures and practices for inclusion in their ETB, interagency partnerships, professional development support and needs, and to identify key inclusive practices, opportunities and challenges. Where appropriate, this chapter also draws on the interviews with ETB staff conducted during the case study research where staff are discussing the implementation of the Guidelines. A more detailed qualitative map of ETB staff and learner experiences of the literacy learning journey will follow in Chapter 5, which draws on the case study and survey research.

As each ETB put forward a designated person to respond to questions on behalf of their ETB, each ETB response is unique and reflects the perspectives of the personnel consulted to address the various survey questions. Some ETBs will have consulted across all levels of the organisations while others will have focused their survey responses on those with most immediate and ongoing interaction with the delivery of literacy and numeracy tuition. As noted earlier, this means the survey gives a partial picture of each ETB from the perspective and knowledge of these key individuals. These respondents also highlighted the limitations in availability of data about learners with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services, due to issues of disclosure, data organisation and the use of different proxies for disability.

4.2 Models of literacy tuition provision in ETBs

The survey respondents indicate that learners with intellectual disabilities attend different models of provision in the Adult Literacy Services. In five ETBs, learners are placed solely in group tuition (with no 1:1 provision) and in 11 ETBs they are placed in either groups or in 1:1 tuition. One ETB reports that their learners are only placed in mixed groups comprised of learners with and without intellectual disabilities (a fully inclusive learning model, as discussed in section 1.3.3). Fifteen ETBs report providing both separate group tuition and mixed group tuition for learners with intellectual disabilities.

4.3 Awareness of legislation and obligations by ETB staff

The range of legislation and statutory policies discussed in Chapter 3 place a clear obligation on service providers to make their services accessible to people with disabilities, including to people with intellectual disabilities. Survey respondents were asked to indicate how effectively these obligations are communicated to relevant staff working in the ETB.

All survey respondents report that these statutory requirements had been communicated very effectively or somewhat effectively to ETB staff. Four ETBs are confident that staff are 'fully aware' and 12 ETBs are confident that staff are 'somewhat aware' of their obligations. In additional comments, survey respondents note that their "ETB integrates learners with intellectual disabilities into mainstream provision, provides dedicated classes and manages the Specific Training Provision [delivered by other agencies]". They describe that the 2018 Guidelines are issued to all staff, are circulated to literacy centres and staff, and are discussed at centre meetings and through local community network meetings.

Ten survey respondents report staff in their ETB having participated in professional development (PD) including the following activities listed in Table 6. In two instances, respondents describe how their ETB had developed training courses and resources "specifically for learners with intellectual disability".

Table 6. Professional Development relevant to the inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities completed by ETB staff (Source: online survey)

Professional Development relevant to the inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities completed by ETB staff
In-service for tutors on supporting learners with an intellectual disability to gain QQI accreditation and training aimed at tutors working with learners with ID
Half-day workshops for Adult Literacy tutors tutoring adults with disabilities.
Assistive Technology
NALA Conferences
Dyslexia Assessment training
Autism training
Challenging Behaviour in the classroom
Ahead (Association for Higher Access & Disability) training
Individual Learning Plan training
National Learning Network training

4.4. Implementing the Guidelines

When asked about specific concerns relating to implementing the 2018 Guidelines, three of the respondents to the survey have no specific concerns. The remaining 13 survey respondents highlight the areas of concern presented in Table 7 below. In some cases, respondents noted more than one area of concern.

Table 7. Areas of concern about implementing the Guidelines (Source: online survey)

Areas of concern about implementing the Guidelines	No. of Respondents
Staffing and staff development	7
Resources	3
Partnerships and cooperation	3
Learners' assessment and progress	3
Strategic outlook and clear planning	3

In the survey responses and in the case studies, interviewees point out that the Guidelines acknowledge the work and inclusive approaches currently in place across Adult Literacy Services. This is considered particularly true of the ALOs because of their role in

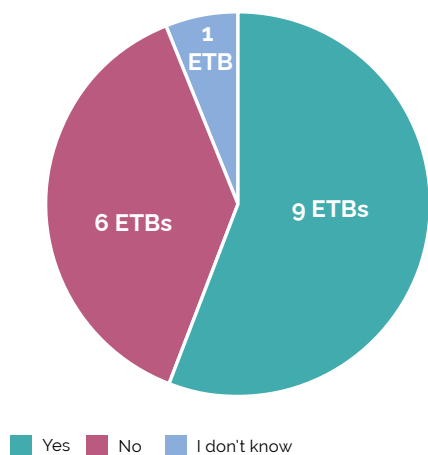
raising awareness about the Adult Literacy Services in the community and keeping the needs of the learners at the heart of their activities.

More generally, there are calls from survey respondents for more "practical guidelines to be provided", especially around certification and progression and "clearer programme objectives". Similarly, interviewees in the case studies requested that the Guidelines be extended to include examples of education strategies and best practice in teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation. Survey respondents highlight current issues around "education/literacy versus social skills and training" and "formal versus informal learning" and suggest that clarification in these areas is needed in the Guidelines especially in terms of what is best for learners with intellectual disabilities. Some interviewees feel that learners with intellectual disabilities should not be asked to speak as intellectual disabilities advocates within their own centres as it differentiates them in a way they consider problematic.

4.5. Institutional statements of commitment to support inclusion

In line with Guideline 1 and 2 survey respondents were asked if their ETBs have an explicit statement of commitment to support the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Service in any of its current policies and plans (such as admission policy, quality assurance procedures). Nine respondents reported that their ETB has an explicit statement of commitment, six respondents said that they do not have one and one respondent did not know.

Figure 8. Statement of commitment to support inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities (Source: online survey)



Eight of the nine respondents who answered “yes” to having an explicit statement of commitment, provided details of the policy and plans they were using. What emerges is a picture of the various policies and plans that survey respondents are aware of in their ETB. Three respondents stated that their ETBs use an admissions policy, with one saying that “we do not specify people with intellectual disabilities, they fall under the category of disabilities”. Another respondent commented that their ETB has a “designated Access Person”. Five ETBs have two policies and/or plans with explicit commitments to inclusion, listed in Table 8 below. The breadth of policies and plans in use demonstrate the ETBs commitment to inclusion across a range of practices and procedures.

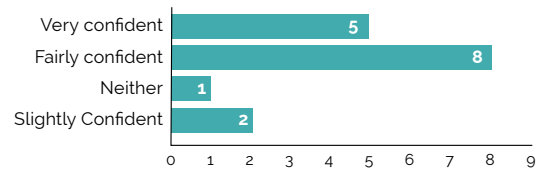
Table 8. List of policies and plans in use (Source: online survey)

Policies and plans in use
Access Policy
Admissions Policy
Adult Basic Education Development Plan
Adult Literacy Operational Guidelines 2013
ETB Service Plan 2019 and the Vulnerable Adult Policy
Quality Assurance Policy
Reasonable Accommodation Policy
Specific Training Provisions and Access Policy
Strategic Performance Agreement and ABE Development Plan
Vulnerable Adult Policy

4.6 Confidence in capacity of ETBs to fulfil their statutory obligations

Over 80% of the survey respondents were “fairly confident” or “very confident” about their ETB’s capacity to fulfil its statutory obligations to facilitate the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy provision.

Figure 9. Level of confidence about ETB’s capacity to fulfil its statutory obligations (Source: online survey).



Survey respondents were then asked to explain their level of confidence in relation to inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services. Below is a selection of one answer from each category to illustrate their responses.

Very Confident:

“We are already facilitating the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy provision.”

Fairly confident:

“Every effort is made to include learners with intellectual disability in the context of allocated resources and assigned targets by SOLAS.”

Slightly confident:

“More resources needed for PD, Assistive Technologies and to support learners in their attendance at integrated classes in ETB literacy centres.”

Neither confident nor unconfident:

"I think the challenges facing the ETBs currently are daunting. There are obligations to be adhered to at many levels but staffing and resources to meet these are not forthcoming. I think the commitment from the ETB is strong but the ability to deliver on the ground may be challenging."

4.7 Measuring transversal learning indicators and outcomes

One of the key challenges is the identification and measurement of learning indicators and outcomes. More pertinent, defining what qualitative learning indicators should and can be captured about learners' progress presents particular challenges for the Adult Literacy Services. Transversal skills or soft skills are measured and accounted for in the Strategic Performance Agreements of each ETB. Goal 2 of SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019 aims to ensure "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 2 is a "10 percent increase in the rate of certification on courses primarily focused on social mobility-skills development that is transversal in nature" (2017:16). This has been translated into the goals of the Strategic Performance Agreements between SOLAS and each ETB (SOLAS, 2018c:6).

Finding qualitative indicators that can capture the breadth of transversal or soft skills is particularly pertinent for adult learners with intellectual disabilities where the development of greater independent living and lifelong learning skills are crucial. Survey respondents note the challenges of providing an appropriate range and balance of unaccredited and accredited programmes for learners as needed. They argue for greater recognition of the role of unaccredited programmes, not only in leading learners to an accredited phase, but also for their value in supporting inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities in their general learning and development. Survey respondents expressed a sense that this developmental role of unaccredited programmes was acknowledged at policy level, but do not feel it is not recognised in how reporting and funding requirements operate reporting

and funding requirements operate.

ETB staff in the case study research express similar concerns about the challenge of recognising developmental outcomes in current reporting indicators, arguing that:

The skills that they [learners with ID] might learn which may not fit into that [QQI] component but 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.

(ALO, Case study C)

QQI established a Reference Group to review the award standards at Levels 1-4 in 2018.²⁴ They published a report summarising feedback on awards standards at Levels 1-3 which highlighted similar issues and encouraged consistency across providers, coherence of learners 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, 2018:4).

Specific personnel in the ETB staffing structure are assigned responsibility for policy implementation and reporting and hence, are more knowledgeable of this area. AEOs describe a key element of their role as responding to and implementing policy and strategy changes and reporting, a challenging task to achieve without disrupting core learning. An ALO describes this role as how:

[You have to] work smart, you manage your time well, get the information in a way that doesn't take you away from your learners too long, that they are always the focus... the core work is always the learners and the groups and getting results for them rather than getting inputs and outputs for statistics.

(ALO, Case study A)

Whilst monitoring and reporting are core elements of their role, AEOs and ALOs feel it is particularly difficult for those managing adult literacy provision for three reasons. Firstly, there is the challenge of fitting the unique profile of Adult Literacy Services into the broader requirements and strategic targets for growth set out in the current FET Strategic Plan. Arising from performance delivery targets agreed with SOLAS and DES, each ETB has a Strategic Performance Agreement with specific

24 Details of QQI review of awards standards is available at: <https://www.qqi.ie/News/Pages/QQI-publishes-feedback-on-review-of-award-standards.aspx>

targets to be achieved by each of its services.²⁵ In the case of the Adult Literacy Services, this is typically a 10 per cent increase in certification (target 3) and/or participation/lifelong learning (target 4) to be achieved over 3 years.

There is a pressure from SOLAS in terms that we have to get 10% more learners overall and we have to get 10% increase in certification and that is specific to literacy. So, that is challenging because literacy isn't really about certification and we have had to re-look at our model of how we certify and that does put pressure on us from an organisational point of view as our numbers are quite low between both centres because of the nature of literacy. We are going in the right direction as numbers are growing but definitely not at 10%. From a management point of view, I'm very mindful of what literacy is about and I don't want to lose what literacy is about. So, we've been meeting to review what we're offering and ensure that the learners' needs are being met without too much pressure being put on them.

(AEO, Case study B)

Sustaining the required number of learners registered in each class was a second challenge identified in relation to meeting numerical targets. Diminishing class sizes generally means amalgamating groups of learners with mixed ability – a necessity but not without implications for teaching and learning.

Groups require a minimum of six, so we try to get that and you have to play with the numbers. You have to be imaginative and that is where differentiation can come in and you need to have someone who can work with two levels as you could have 3 people in a group doing Level 1 and 3 people who are doing Level 2 because otherwise it is hard to sustain the group.

(ALO, Case study A)

Thirdly, participants note that the FET sector is at the forefront of a large number of policy reviews and strategy changes. ETB management and staff list multiple and concurrent consultations currently taking place, including inter alia, this research on inclusive practices and the 2018 Guidelines, a review of Universal

Design for Learning, a review of ESOL provision, and a review of QQI Levels 1–4. These reviews bring welcome attention and recognition to the role of Adult Literacy across Further Education and Training. It should be noted however that the requirement for participation in such reviews and consultations puts additional pressure on the ETB Adult Literacy Service – a service that currently lacks the resources and budgets available to other services in the education system. (e.g. in primary and post-primary education and Higher Education Institutes). This applies across the literacy service with ETB staff describing increased interactions with those in employment especially through Skills for Work and Apprenticeships. This has implications for the ongoing inclusive remit of ETBs given that:

FET is all about the learners and trying to be inclusive, but it can be challenging if we don't have the services, the accessibility, the supports, all those kinds of things.

(AEO, Case study B)

4.8 Resources and supports needed to implement inclusion

Survey respondents identify supports that they feel ETBs need to achieve full inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy provision. Many of the supports identified below echo those suggested by case study interviewees and are discussed further in Chapter 5. The supports centred on human and economic resources, dedicated staff, training and policy, and are presented in the following infographic.

25 SOLAS 2018 FET Services Plan outlines the "establishment of Strategic Performance Agreements with ETBs that reflect the key national targets of the FET Sector, which are as follows:

- 10 percent more learners will secure employment from provision which primarily serves the labour market.
- 10 percent more learners will progress to other further or higher education courses from provision which is primarily focused on this purpose.
- 10 percent increase in the rate of certification on courses primarily focused on transversal (social mobility) skills development.
- 10 percent increase of adults, who are seeking FET level provision, engaging in lifelong learning interventions.
- From 2018, for three years to 2020, an average increase of 10,000 learners per annum securing relevant qualifications in sectors where employment growth/skills needs have been identified.
- 30,500 new apprentice and trainee registrations in the period 2017 to 2019 which will represent an increase in registrations from circa 6,000 in 2016 to circa 12,400 in 2019" (SOLAS 2018c:6).

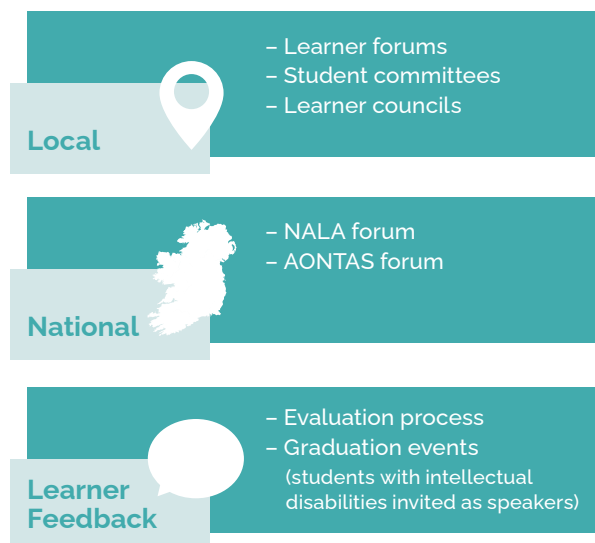
Figure 10. Supports to achieve full inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy provision (Source: case study research)



4.9 Opportunities for learners with intellectual disabilities to inform policies and procedures

Survey respondents were also asked about whether opportunities are made available for adult learners with intellectual disabilities to inform policies and procedures in ETB centres and/or share their experiences and expertise with fellow learners and tutors. The response is very positive, with 14 survey respondents, between them, naming the following local and national opportunities:

Figure 11. Opportunities for learners to inform policy and share their experience (Source: survey research)



The other two respondents highlighted this issue of having opportunities to inform policy and share experience as a future need for their ETB, and as something they wish to address in the coming year.

4.10 Future plans to support inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities

We asked survey respondents to share their plans to develop policies to support the inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities in their ETB. Given the variety of policies and plans that are currently in use across the ETBs (see Table 7), it is to be expected that plans are similarly diverse. Many survey respondents talk about the development and updating of current policies, "We are currently writing a policy on the inclusion of adults with intellectual disability". Another survey respondent states "we have plans to formalise our current practices of inclusion of individuals with intellectual and other disabilities". Another respondent makes the point that "While inclusion is mentioned in many of our policies/strategies e.g. QA, SOLAS agreements, ETB Strategy etc. they do not explicitly reference inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities". While another survey respondent notes that their "adult education staff regularly meet with staff from these other organisations. At present there are no plans to develop any further inclusion policies".

4.11 Chapter summary

This chapter reviewed the results of the online survey, with designated ETB staff, about the institutional awareness and engagement in ETBs in relation to implementing the 2018 Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services and other statutory obligations, as well as their future plans and resources needed to support inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities (including opportunities for learners to inform policies and plans). The chapter reveals high levels of engagement by ETBs with the 2018 Guidelines. The survey also highlighted a high level of awareness about statutory responsibilities and confidence about their ETB's capacity to implement the 2018 Guidelines in the majority of ETBs, including future planning.

However, most respondents also named several areas of concerns, centring on issues of staffing and staff development, resources, partnerships and cooperation, learner assessment and progression and strategic planning.

While survey respondents acknowledge the effectiveness of Ireland's equality and human rights legislation, they highlight the need for more clarity and professional development about how to implement inclusion policies in practice. In particular, staff felt that the recommendation for development of a specific 'Inclusion Development Worker' (IDW) role in ETBs in the 2018 Guidelines was key. There is widespread support for this role from research participants to support the inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities within and across ETBs. Participants sought greater clarity about the funding and place of this role across all relevant programmes and areas in the ETB and in engagements with external support agencies.

Chapter 5:

Implementing inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services



5.1 Introduction

This chapter of the report provides a comprehensive and nuanced account of the real-life application of inclusive practices in ETB Adult Literacy Services across the Republic of Ireland. Thematic findings relating to adult learners with intellectual disabilities and their engagement with adult literacy provision are presented and discussed here. The findings draw on data collected from all phases of this research study (desk research, literature review, case studies, professional development workshops and survey, see Chapter 2 for further information). The section is structured to follow the customary pattern of learner engagement with further education and Adult Literacy Services, involving overlapping stages and multiple stakeholders. Each stage is viewed through the lens of inclusion to identify key accomplishments and challenges.

Figure 12. The adult literacy learner pathway (Source: case study research)



While each stage on the pathway represents a step in the learner's journey and a key point of engagement between the Adult Literacy Services and the learner, it should be noted that adult learners' pathways are seldom linear or predictable. In addition, individual ETBs have developed procedures and practices uniquely suited to their location, local community, learner cohort and staff expertise and experience. The intention here is not to homogenise a diverse set of practices but to explore all aspects of learner engagement, drawing on the perspective and experiences of learners with and without an intellectual disability, ETB adult literacy staff and management, ETB adult education staff and management and staff from external IDSS agencies.

Engagement

This stage refers to explicit practices that encourage and support potential learners' initial engagement with Adult Literacy Services. Inclusive engagement requires specific, in-house policies and plans to embed inclusion throughout the service and clarity on the role of the Adult Literacy Services in meeting the educational needs of learners with intellectual disabilities. It begins with the building of networks and partnerships with the intellectual disability community and associated support services, inclusive practices in promotion and outreach and the establishment of a welcoming, supportive and accessible environment for a learner's first contact with Adult Literacy Services.

Enrolment

This stage begins when an adult with an intellectual disability decides to register with the Adult Literacy Services and enrol in literacy learning. It involves assessment of key skills, recognition of prior learning and current ability, identification of learner style and goals, development of individual learning plans and identification of required supports.

Placement

The placement stage matches the learner with an appropriate course, class and tutor. To ensure the placement of the learner is successful, there is a need for preliminary development work that will support tutors and learners without an intellectual disability in accommodating and including diversity in the classroom.

Participation

This stage is about ensuring full inclusion in the learning environment and that adult learners with and without intellectual disabilities socialise together and develop a sense of belonging. Successful participation is 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 support for the learner and for ETB staff and access to external or other supports when needed.

Evaluation

The evaluation stage assesses progress in the learner's journey, examines teaching and learning approaches and identifies effective strategies that work well with each learner. It includes opportunities for tutors to develop and share pedagogical practice, the development of a learner-centred assessment and evaluation process, and the measurement and reporting of attainments of indicators and targets.

Progression

The progression stage focuses on when the learner encounters a point of completion in their learning journey and is ready to progress to another stage of learning or employment or personal development. It requires identifying flexible and appropriate progression routes, balancing learner's progression needs with the needs of the service and funding requirements.

5.2 Engagement

Interviews with ETB staff and survey responses indicate that a service-wide commitment to inclusion begins with the initial "reaching out" to potential learners, ensuring that adults with intellectual disabilities encounter a welcoming and inclusive environment from their first engagement with the Adult Literacy Services. The first time a learner comes in contact with an Adult Literacy Services is a crucial step. Learners – with and without intellectual disabilities – seeking literacy support can be nervous and unsure about what to expect. ETB Adult Literacy Services staff understand the importance of creating a welcoming environment for potential and new learners. There was strong agreement amongst research participants that inclusive practice is very much in keeping with the ethos and principles of adult education and adult literacy provision and that Adult Literacy Services are already meeting many inclusive requirements.

Because we're [Adult] Literacy, it's like we already do that.

(Tutor 2, Case study B)

5.2.1. Clarity on the role of ETB and other agencies

Research participants agreed that an inclusive engagement process requires clarity around the ETB's role in the overall context of supporting adults with intellectual disabilities access education. The specific functions and responsibilities of the ETB and other agencies (e.g. state agencies, such as the HSE and non-governmental agencies, such as Rehab) was not always clear to research participants.

I would love to have a clear picture of all the provision, on the ground, for adults with intellectual disabilities. To have that clear picture and then we would all know that we're providing the best of services. For me, the barrier is that's a bit murky at the moment and it's hard to decide who goes where and does what.

(AEO, Case study A)

Several Adult Literacy Services staff members highlighted an uncertainty around the function, role, obligations and overall liability of Adult Literacy Services in meeting inclusive requirements.

We need to decide: where does each organisation come in? Where does each funding stream sit? Because the HSE funds keyworkers and instructors in their centres and then we are there as educational providers...I think there's a piece there that needs to be teased out. Where does SOLAS and the HSE meet in terms of 'should we give more?' And I would say yes but how does this get worked out in the bigger sphere where I don't have a whole lot of say. Where is the clarity? Where is our role defined as an ETB and a service provider? Because it's difficult.

(ALO 1, Case study C)

In line with Guideline 3, that time and resources are allocated to a designated Inclusion Development Worker; many ETB staff participants in our research agree that there is a need for such a role. Many agree that an Inclusion Development Worker in each ETB, working across services and in partnership with external agencies, would help significantly to clarify these issues of responsibility and synergy, allowing each ETB and Adult Literacy Services to plan provision accordingly.

Some research participants felt this ongoing lack of clarity leads to misperceptions in external agencies around what the ETBs can offer adult learners with intellectual disabilities.

Sometimes we get calls from agencies about people who would benefit from being in here, but we mightn't have the right programme for them and they may have issues beyond what we can deal with. But maybe they are coming from an organisation who cares for them but hasn't got the resources they need, or they might be experiencing budget cuts and that is where we are mindful that we are delivering to the individuals to meet the needs that we can, but not be a replacement service, a filler for another agency.

(ALO, Case study A)

These concerns echo findings from the DES Review of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Provision (discussed in Chapter 1), which recommended "better communication and coordination" between ETBs and IDSS to avoid difficulties arising around external pressures on Adult Literacy Services to provide literacy provision to IDSS clients (DES, 2013:40). Again, the role of a designated Inclusion Development Worker was perceived as important here; having a dedicated person to liaise with IDSS and other advocates, to manage the expectations of all stakeholders and to keep the adult learners' needs at the centre of the process.

I would love to see that development worker be a multi-agency development worker and that person would actually know what the HSE is doing, what the ETBs are doing, what any other agencies which support people with ID are doing. That it would be coordinated properly and the best service for the person then. Rather than worrying about duplication.

(AEO, Case study A)

5.2.2. Recruiting learners with intellectual disabilities

Staff research participants agree that including adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services means that ETBs are fulfilling their obligations as a community-based provider of education for **all** community members. However, to increase the number of adults with intellectual disabilities engaging in Adult Literacy Services, concrete actions are needed to target, attract and recruit those learners. Concerns coalesce around three specific areas:

1. 'Double funding' and duplication of work.
2. Inadequate communication between interagency services.
3. Maintaining safe and accessible learning environments for learners and staff (which is addressed later in Chapter 5).

We don't want to seem to poach students from a HSE centre who are also looking for numbers. We probably could fill a lot of our places with HSE centre students, but we don't want to. We want to be clear about roles and not overlap.

(AEO, Case study A)

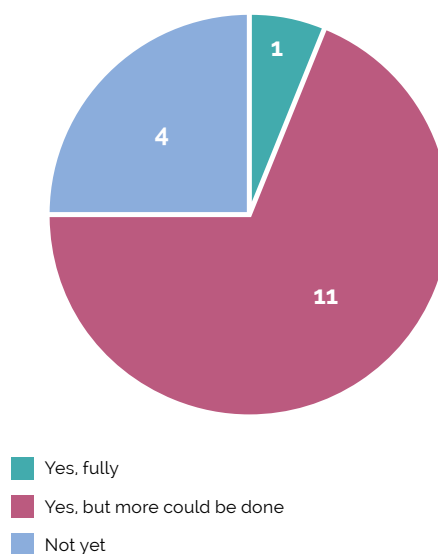
Better communication is required between a range of agencies, e.g. ETBs, National Learning Networks, Rehab and private companies dealing with people with disabilities. The same people seem to access a range of services – huge duplication and double funding probably! This needs to be identified, acknowledged, addressed and a more strategic outlook formed.

(Survey respondent)

5.2.3. Inclusive Promotion and Outreach

Public awareness of adult literacy provision is generated through promotion and outreach work carried out nationally and locally by ETBs and the SOLAS funded NALA national awareness campaign. When survey respondents were asked if their ETB currently builds inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities into existing promotion and outreach work, the majority of ETBs (15 out of 16 survey respondents) reported that either more could be done or that they had yet to start doing this (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Inclusive Promotion and Outreach
(source: online survey)



Case study interviews and workshop activities yielded rich and practical advice on promoting Adult Literacy Services courses in an inclusive manner. Effective actions carried out by those with responsibility for outreach and promotion work include:

- Providing information about courses in accessible formats, e.g. Plain English brochures, audio-visual recordings of available options, social media campaigns, open days and taster events.
- Liaising with key workers and centre managers to disseminate information about services and upcoming courses.
- Involving the ETB Adult Educational Guidance Service (ETB-AEGS) to ensure potential learners are welcomed and fully briefed on available services.

- Ensuring promotion materials reflect the diversity of the local community and include images and testimonials from adults with physical and intellectual disabilities.
- Involving learners with intellectual disabilities to talk about their experiences and highlight the benefits of literacy learning.

It is important to note that not all adults with an intellectual disability present with or through their IDSS. Some individual learners with intellectual disabilities and/or their families approached the ETB directly; ETB staff designate these as “self-referred learners”. Initial meetings usually take place with the ALO and/or with a literacy resource worker who, working with the learner and their family member or support person, complete an individual assessment and create an individualised learning plan. Learners are then placed; sometimes with existing literacy groups, other times with a group solely for learners with intellectual disabilities.

Some research participants noted that learners who are self-referred lack the support structures of the disability support services and would find the Adult Literacy Services a lot more inaccessible. In these situations, family members or personal assistants can step in where possible, but transport can be a key issue for self-referred students who are often reliant on family and community supports to make initial contact with the Adult Literacy Services. This is particularly true in rural and small-town locations where there are large distances between adult literacy centres and little or no public transport available. Adults not engaged with IDSS are possibly the most hard-to-reach cohorts of the intellectual disability community and one AEO spoke about the need to include individuals as well as groups of learners, noting:

if everyone has a group, there are individuals who are being excluded because they're not part of a group [...] We wanted people who were not currently being catered for and to me, that was more inclusive than taking a cohort from the local centre and bringing them in. Because then you could say 'oh look, we're being inclusive, we have a group in'. But we gave it more time and I thought we were being more inclusive in the way we did it.

(AEO, Case study A)

5.2.4. Barriers to inclusive engagement

FET is all about the learners and trying to be inclusive, but it can be challenging if we don't have the services, the accessibility, the supports, all those kinds of things.

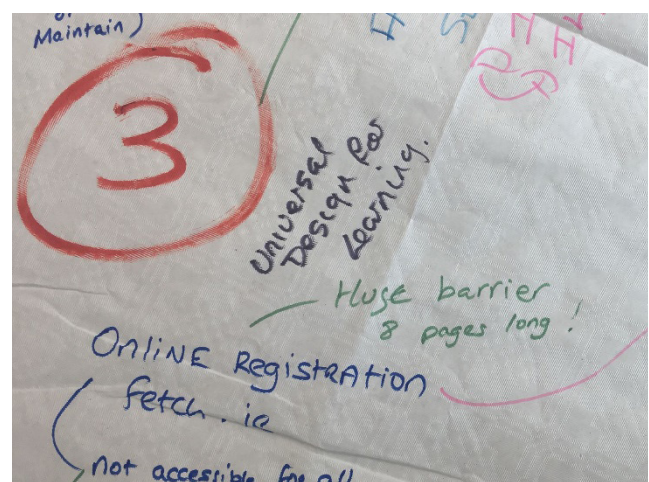
(AEO, Case study B)

Data gathered from surveys, case studies and workshops in this research indicate that respondents felt that more explicit statements of commitment for the inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities would have significant benefits for Adult Literacy Services. There was a lack of clarity and guidance expressed by participants about the implementation of the reasonable accommodation policy amongst research participants. This is not surprising given the legal complexity of the interpretation of this requirement (see Section 3.3); but it is a disquieting finding, given that the involvement of these research participants at the heart of Adult Literacy Services of the ETBs.

Some concerns were also voiced about the newly-developed online information site and application process with some research participants describing it as “a barrier” which can be “intimidating” for adults with intellectual disabilities as they engage firstly with the Adult Literacy Service (see Figure 14). The Further Education and Training Courses Hub (FETCH) portal was developed by SOLAS, ETBI and other FET providers and is an online database of over 4,000 FET courses. The website – www.fetchcourses.ie – allows prospective learners to access information on each course and apply for a course place by registering and completing an online application form. Whilst it is a valuable resource for people with adequate reading and writing skills, it was not considered sufficiently inclusive by many of the workshop participants. They highlighted that, as a first point of contact, the FETCH portal could present accessibility issues for those with literacy or cognitive difficulties.

In addition, they noted that completing the online form without support or guidance could be an intimidating experience due to the literacy level needed, the personal information required and the overall complexity of the questions. Some Adult Literacy

Figure 14. Workshop participants' feedback on institutional barriers (Source: workshop research)



Services had already put in place supports to help people use the FETCH portal, offering plain English and abridged versions of the form and/or helping them to complete it online. Although these supports are working

well, many feel that creating a more accessible portal is preferable. This would have the added advantage of showing high-level support and commitment to inclusive practice.

5.2.5. Collaborative partnerships and networks

When successful collaborative partnerships are established between local IDSS centres and local Adult Literacy Services, there are significant advantages for adult learners with intellectual disabilities who benefit from a holistic approach to their learning needs and a smoother transition into the literacy service. The case studies reveal many proactive and productive relationships between IDSS centres and the Adult Literacy Services, with staff from both meeting regularly to plan and prepare to engage new learners in literacy tuition. For example, this IDSS staff member spoke highly of their local ETB's inclusive practice and the "choice" it gave to their service users.

We are very lucky, that through our local ETB, to have that education available to us. To have that choice and to have tutors that are so knowledgeable and have so much to offer and can align themselves so well to working with people with disabilities. I mean, that's really to be commended.

(IDSS Manager, Case study B)

These partnerships are often the first point of contact for learners with intellectual disabilities, as Adult Literacy Services and IDSS staff meet separately and then with the prospective learner to determine the learning goals and needs of each person and whether the Adult Literacy Services has something appropriate to offer them and meet their learning needs. ETB staff spoke about many successful partnerships with local IDSS and how they result in a more strategic development of literacy services and a more tailored response to the education needs of adults with intellectual disabilities. Many of those we interviewed described how this had evolved organically and that they had not been aware of how it had developed from the different perspectives of the IDSS and the ETBs before the case study visits took place. This is indicative of as yet unheard and undocumented stories, conversations and perspectives from all those involved.

Our research found that the responsibility for these initial meetings and for developing collaborative partnerships between IDSS and the ETB typically falls onto the ALO. The ALO can bring a wealth of information and expertise to the table, but also has to manage multiple aspects of the entire literacy service. An Inclusion Development Worker was seen as means of extending collaborative

networking and partnerships.

Overall, there was a consensus that having experienced staff members, like the ALO, conduct these initial meetings is key as it means that the Adult Literacy Services do not promise what they cannot deliver. Such staff will be experienced in initial and ongoing assessment of literacy and numeracy and will be aware of the principles and conditions underpinning initial and ongoing assessment as contained in national guidelines.²⁶ In addition, it also means that they do not tend to have difficulties supporting learners with intellectual disabilities as they have assessed and prepared their supports beforehand. This careful and considered approach paves the way for meaningful and inclusive engagement in the Adult Literacy Services and avoids the pitfalls of tokenistic 'add and stir' approaches to inclusion (May, 2015).

26 SOLAS (2018). Initial and Ongoing Assessment of Adult Literacy and Numeracy at NQF levels 1-3. Guidelines, Toolkit and Research Report

5.3 Enrolment

Once adults with intellectual disabilities are aware of the literacy services available to them and express an interest in enrolling in literacy classes, collaborative partnerships between the learner, their IDSS and the Adult Literacy Services play an important role in the next step. The enrolment or registration process comprises:

- an assessment of key skills,
- recognition of prior learning,
- an understanding of the learner's current abilities,
- identification of learner style and goals,
- identification of required supports,
- and the development of an appropriate individual learning plan (ILP).

Whilst this is standard procedure for all adults entering the adult literacy service, there are specific and additional considerations when the learner has an intellectual disability.

Another challenge, noted by multiple stakeholders, lies in ensuring adults with intellectual disabilities are voluntarily choosing to engage with the Adult Literacy Services to access literacy provision. Research participants expressed concern that IDSS or other external agencies and/or family members were the ones pushing for enrolment and not the individual concerned. The traditional criteria for eligibility for adult literacy tuition often did not apply to adults with intellectual disabilities, creating difficulties in maintaining a learner-centred ethos.

When I started tuition at the beginning, the general guidelines were that an adult would be able to walk into the centre and ask for a literacy or a numeracy class. That was the criteria for giving somebody classes. The lines became blurry because then agencies started to come.

(Tutor 2, Case study C)

This distinction or difference was also noted by an adult literacy learner without an intellectual disability with this comparison.

Looking at it from the adult literacy point of view: the view of the student. Any of us that are here, we had to pluck up courage to go back to education. I know it took me a long time, I went to the door of the education centre and I walked away again, wondering who is going to be inside and who is going to know me. We all did it, but the people [with intellectual disabilities], I won't say they were forced but they were brought there.

(Learner 3, Adult Literacy Focus Group)

Adult Literacy staff with responsibility for enrolment and placement of students are conscious of this potential conflict of interest and strive to place the learner at the centre of the process.

What we try to do is to ensure that the students themselves are central to that relationship, so that our relationship is with the student and the centre is a support to the student. That is how we conceptualise that relationship. Because centres for one reason or another may decide that it would be really good for Mary to do X but in our experience, Mary doesn't want to be doing X at all. So, the student really needs to be at the centre of that relationship.

(ALO 2, Case study B)

5.3.1. Assessment of existing skills and learning needs

Initial meetings and assessments with learners and those who support them play an important role in developing an appropriate and effective individual learning plan for each person. Assessments are conducted using a gradual and supportive process that places each learner's needs at the centre. Alongside learning needs, ETB staff determine practicalities such as what days might suit the learners, what transport is needed, and what individual resource requirements must be put in place. The additional time and resources needed for this process was noted by many research participants and a dedicated Inclusion Development Worker was identified as a crucial element in supporting this work.

As discussed in Chapter 1, there has been a transition from a deficit-oriented model of disability towards a model that recognises and acknowledges the capacities, skills and achievements of adults with disabilities. This has necessitated changes to the assessment process, as described by this ALO:

I prefer to look at [the assessment process] in less of a deficit model, but it is about that wealth of literacy skills they have already and I know it is a subtle difference but it is an important one for me. So, what we can do is look at what their attainment is because sometimes people assume that people with intellectual disabilities have bad literacy skills or they don't love reading and they do.

(ALO 1, Case study B)

The initial assessment process examines learners' current literacy attainment and consequently provides material for planning how they could further enhance their literacy capacity. This assessment process is based on a capabilities or critical literacy approach that

emphasises the wealth of literacy skills learners already have and directs attention to where they can further enhance their capabilities. This reveals the uniqueness of each learner's literacy profile.

Sometimes we would find that we have students who have real spikiness where maybe their reading is at level 3 but their writing is at level 1.

(ALO 2, Case study B)

5.3.2. Partnerships and Individual Learning Plans

In terms of developing an individual learning plan (ILP) with the learner, ETB staff spoke about drawing on support from the Guidance Service, Resource Worker, ALO, tutor as well as external stakeholders, such as IDSS staff, disability advocates, personal assistants, key workers and family members. In this way, the Adult Literacy Services facilitates the learner in setting realistic goals; taking into account the individual learner's existing skills, educational experience, interests, preferred learning style and external supports. The development of an ILP is also core to the national guidelines for good practice in initial and ongoing assessment of literacy and numeracy in ETBs (SOLAS, 2018d).

During the enrolment and assessment phase, some research participants highlighted the benefits of collaborative partnerships and networks between staff within and between the different education and intellectual disabilities support centres. When these relationships work, as they do in many of the instances evident across the research fields, they create a deeply learner-centred, responsive culture.

Each of the three case studies demonstrated how Adult Literacy Services staff meet with disability support staff to ensure a customised match for learners with intellectual disabilities with the Adult Literacy Services. Subsequently, Adult Literacy Services staff meet the person with intellectual disability and their family members, advocate and/or support worker to discuss their individual learning plan. This initial meeting with the learner usually occurs in their disability support centre where the learner is more comfortable within a familiar setting and where there are no concerns about accessibility. From there on the relationship is primarily between the ETB and the learner, although, ongoing contact between the IDSS and Adult Literacy Services ensures learners are supported throughout the learning journey.

Developing such collaborative partnerships between services had significant advantages for learners and helped Adult Literacy Services identify, assess and enrol new learners.

I link mainly with an instructor in the IDSS centre and s/he would identify the new people to me and when the new people came in, we would get a feel for them and find out their strong points and where they would fit in. What we could deliver to meet their needs.

(Resource Worker, Case study C)

And we would also have some planning at our end, we would know what people would want, generally, and we would look at the courses that are available. So it's a two-fold approach.

(IDSS Manager, Case study C)

Individual learning plans are also developed for and with self-referred learners. Whilst these learners do not have the support of an IDSS, ILPs are created by drawing on information from the learner and from key support figures (generally family members) and ETB staff also spoke about the partnerships they had developed with learners' family members, personal assistants, etc.

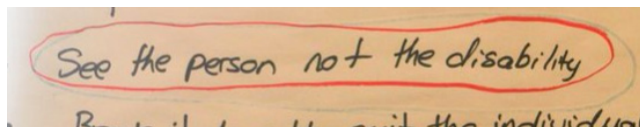
Some research participants mentioned some concerns they have in involving external agencies and/or family members. Sharing information with people other than the learner to develop ILPs is unfamiliar practice for Adult Literacy Services staff as they are an adult service and would view a learner's ILP as confidential and private. Information sharing has also been complicated by recent developments in General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Adult Literacy Services staff are conscious that while a holistic approach is beneficial, care needs to be taken around issues of privacy, informed consent and personal autonomy, indicating this as an area where professional development training would be helpful.

5.3.3. Challenges in assessing key skills

Inclusive practices in the assessment of key skills can be challenging with adult literacy staff pointing out that the literacy skills of adults with intellectual disabilities vary greatly and can be complicated by greater than average difficulties in communication skills, social skills, and the ability to retain and apply new knowledge. Many participants reported a need for professional development (PD) and put forward the benefits of having guidelines on an inclusive initial assessment process, given that the mainstreaming of inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities is relatively recent. The national guidelines on initial and ongoing assessment of literacy and numeracy at levels 1-3 in ETBs are a key resource for inclusive initial assessment of all learners. In terms of current practices, research participants spoke about the importance of retaining a learner-centred approach throughout the assessment process and recommended:

- seeing the person, not the disability,
- providing learners with choice and opportunities for their voice to be heard, and
- taking small steps and letting the learner set the pace.

Figure 15. Reflection from Workshop Participants (source: workshop research)



5.3.4. Identifying learner needs and supports

The final piece of the enrolment process lies in identifying and putting in place specific resources and supports that the learner will need on their learning journey.

Accommodations for adults with intellectual disability tended to fall into three categories:

1. Physical access to centres and classes.
2. Assistive technology for learning.
3. One-to-one/personal assistance.

5.3.4.1. Physical Access

Respondents acknowledge that ETB centres have put in place reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, including those with mobility issues and/or using wheelchairs. Several respondents pointed out that clear streams of dedicated funding for increasing accessibility for learners with intellectual disabilities are not available and that alterations to the physical environment draw on limited budgets. In some cases, this means Adult Literacy Services tutors travel to IDSS centres to deliver adult literacy classes rather than the learners coming into the centre. For example, when lack of facilities means that:

Sometimes we have no choice. Like, to run the cookery class, if we didn't do it here, we would have had to cancel it. It's a catch 22.

(Tutor 2, Case study B)

And I know with the horticulture class, they [IDSS] did request that the horticulture class take place here because of a couple of learners who couldn't leave the centre.

(Tutor 5, Case study B)

This goes against best practice identified by both Adult Literacy Services staff and adults with intellectual disability who expressed a clear preference for learning in an ETB setting.

5.3.4.2. Assistive technology

Technological resources can be extremely effective in supporting learning as illustrated by one tutor speaking about the supports his adult literacy learners used in class. "We do use assistive technology as well. Text to Speech, we have enlarged keyboards and the enlarged screen" (Tutor 3, Case study C). However, there was a strong consensus that many Adult Literacy Services staff, especially tutors, needed PD training around the kinds of assistive technologies available and how they can apply them to their teaching practice. This points to the need to expand the professional development on Technology Enhanced Learning at levels 5–7 which has been available since 2018 for this purpose to levels 1–4. ICT support was also identified as a need here so that tutors and learners had expert assistance to draw on when difficulties with software or hardware arose. Once again, funding was cited as an ongoing issue in making available expensive technology to those that needed it.

5.3.4.3. One-to-one or personal assistance

In learners with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities, there was often a need for one-to-one or personal assistance. ETB staff spoke about challenges in meeting the sometimes multiple and complex needs of learners with both intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities. There was a desire for more clarification on 'who should be doing what' in terms of the care of people with intellectual disabilities.

One group of tutors highlighted their lack of specialised training and their perception that more clarification was needed on what the tutor was expected to do:

We need more training. About five years ago, there was a Special Needs Assistant [course] and that was for assistants but if you don't have something like that done, I think, you wonder where are you and why are you with these groups? That would be one thing I would have to question.

(Tutor 1, Case study C)

We had to say that person's carer has to be on site, at all times, because there were varying needs as well, like bathroom needs and the lines were getting blurry on what was the role of the tutor.

(Tutor 2, Case study C)

A survey respondent also noted that integrating adults with intellectual disabilities into "mainstream" classes

required: "One-to-one personal assistance support and technical support for those with intellectual disabilities to ensure integration into more mainstream classes. In the absence of this, integration is quite difficult".

5.3.5. Challenges in meeting learner needs and supports

It should be noted that learners with intellectual disabilities are not a homogenous group and, similar to other learners in adult literacy, needs will vary greatly from one individual to the next. The point here is that some adults with intellectual disabilities will need the above-mentioned supports already in place before they enter an adult literacy classroom, or as one workshop participant remarked, "we will be setting them up to fail".

In general, research participants pointed out that Adult Literacy Services lack the additional resources and budgets available to other education sectors for special education needs and disability supports (e.g. in primary and post-primary education and Higher Education Institutes). They also commented on the different expectations of new and upcoming learners. For example, those transitioning from secondary schools will now typically expect a continuation in access to a range of support services, including assistive technology, special needs assistants and other resources, that are may not be as accessible in the FET sector. One AEO spoke about a conference they had attended and how it was a topic of discussion there:

[We had a] discussion about supporting learners with intellectual disabilities and learners with autism who are used to a certain level of support in school and they come to FET or come to do an apprenticeship or an LTI and the same level of support is not there. How do we respond to those learners? So it is something that we are very mindful of, and something that is part of our QA procedures and we are looking at how we can be inclusive for all learners, but it is very challenging.

(AEO, Case study B)

It's hugely, hugely important to us to have that access to that level of education available to the people we support. Especially now, with the younger population coming on stream, they just want it. They see it as part of their normal routine and part of their life, so they want to be able to access it.

(IDSS Manager, Case study C)

Whilst there was widespread agreement that the Adult Literacy Services is committed to including adults with intellectual disabilities, concerns were raised about a

number of barriers including:

- a perceived lack of specific, ring-fenced funding and resources and inter alia, the absence of a dedicated inclusion development worker,
- limited access to assistive technologies with ICT support,
- a need for adaptations to improve accessibility in the built environment,
- access to specialised literacy and other educational resources,
- professional development training for tutors and staff, and
- funding for Special Needs Assistants within the classroom.

Figure 16. Workshop activity to identify institutional barriers to inclusion (Source: workshop research)



While many of these supports are in place, respondents felt that they were not systemically or easily accessible on the ground.

I think the challenges facing the ETBs currently are daunting. There are obligations to be adhered to at many levels but staffing and resources to meet these are not forthcoming. I think the commitment from the ETB is strong but the ability to deliver on the ground may be challenging.

(Survey respondent)

5.4 Placement of learner

All research participants identified as a critical factor in successful inclusion the importance of matching a learner with an intellectual disability with an appropriate programme of learning, class type and tutor. The placement process is generally carried out by the ALO working informally with Adult Literacy Services and ETB staff. In some ETBs, more formal arrangements exist with placement committees (or their equivalent) comprising staff from the ETB-Adult Education Guidance Service (ETB-AEGS), Adult Literacy Services resource workers, co-ordinators and tutors and, in some places, IDSS staff.

ETB staff, and in particular ALOs, consider the ETB-AEGS extremely useful to the placement process. Their broad knowledge of ETB services means that members of the ETB 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. Many research participants advocated an enhanced role for the ETB-AEGS in advancing inclusive practice, in particular during the initial assessment and placement stages.

5.4.1. Placement with appropriate adult education service

Although this research focuses on the inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services, it was noted by learners, tutors and ETB management that there should not be an expectation that learners with intellectual disabilities need literacy support. Feedback from the regional workshops showed an awareness that preconceptions could lead to incorrect assumptions around the capacity of learners with intellectual disabilities. It was felt that adult literacy and/or basic education should not be the 'default destination', especially as learners with intellectual disabilities were now transitioning from mainstream post-primary schools with literacy skills above QQI Level 3. These findings relate to earlier comments in section 1.5.2 about the prevalence of stereotypical thinking in relation to the skills and capacities of adults with intellectual disabilities and the need for a shift in public attitudes.

In a focus group of adult literacy learners without an intellectual disability, one learner spoke about the negative impact of what she perceived as inappropriate placement of a group of learners with intellectual disabilities.

The ETB needs to assess their clients, where they should go, and the adult literacy class could be the worst place for them. I think it's because it's the lower class, they think 'oh, we'll start them off there'. They're not thinking, well they're actually educated in that they can read and write, they're smart phone savvy, they're computer savvy. So, why would you put them [into a literacy class]? It's not fair on them to be bringing them into an adult literacy class.

(Learner 4, Adult Literacy Focus Group)

5.4.2. Placement with appropriate model of provision

As outlined in Section 3.5.1, adult literacy learners can avail of 1:1 tuition or small group tuition. 1:1 provision is, almost exclusively, facilitated by volunteers, who complete a short literacy volunteer tutor training course within the ETBs. After training, the literacy volunteer tutor usually gives one to three hours of their time per week. As outlined in Section 3.5, the overall number of learners placed with volunteer tutors for 1:1 tuition has decreased significantly over the last three years, dropping from 2,997 learners in 2015 (SOLAS, 2015) to 1,271 learners in 2017 (SOLAS, 2018c).

Research participants varied in their thinking about the suitability of placing adults with intellectual disabilities with volunteer tutors. Some participants felt that volunteers should not be expected to deal with the complex learning needs of an individual with an intellectual disability and that they did not have the specialised training or experience needed. Survey responses showed five ETBs do not place their learners in 1:1 tuition, preferring placements in group settings. Other participants felt that 1:1 placements with volunteer tutors were a 'gentle' introduction to the adult literacy service, supporting the learner in becoming familiar with the environment and supporting the service in getting to know the learner. Eleven ETBs reported adults with intellectual disabilities are currently placed in both 1:1 tuition and in small learning groups, with learners transitioning to larger, 'mainstream' groups, when ready to do so. Flexibility and patience in the placement process are also considered essential. ETB tutors and management both spoke about the importance of preliminary planning, supporting the learner in getting 'settled', and allowing post-placement flexibility if needed.

We start off with key skills, just seeing if something like a themed approach – can they engage? Get them settled and see if they like what they do and if they've gelled as a group and gelled with the tutor. And then see, after a while, do you think as a tutor that they can do it.

(ALO, Case study C)

Decisions must also be made about whether to integrate individuals with intellectual disabilities into mainstream classes or to keep learners with intellectual disabilities in separate classes. Full inclusion implies groups with adults with and without intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities and of different ethnicity, gender, age, etc. Segregation (including placement in 1:1 tuition) or partial inclusion seem counterintuitive to best practice, but Adult Literacy Services tutors and management felt that each learner and learning group should be catered for individually and that a one-size-fits-all approach, although good in theory, did not always work in practice. Some workshop participants expressed concern about the 'vulnerable' nature of adults with intellectual disabilities and that integrating those with moderate to profound disabilities into mainstream classes, without adequate support, was unfair on everyone involved but particularly on the learner. Other research participants pointed out that adult literacy learners without intellectual disabilities could feel "threatened" by integrated classes.

The cohorts we work with, the people [who] experience difficulty with literacy and numeracy, they can feel and have had experiences that make them feel stigmatised and embarrassed and all those kinds of things. And, for some students, not all, it can be very difficult for them to be in a class with someone with ID, particularly if that involved a more visible syndrome. They are alright if someone looks like me, talks like me, it's fine. But where there is more obvious differences, that can be very difficult and managing the impacts upon people who oftentimes have low self-esteem already where they would perceive that as a threat to their esteem a bit more, that can be very, very difficult and needs to be managed very carefully and may not always be appropriate for everybody.

(ALO 2, Case study B)

The main provision for learners with intellectual disabilities is in literacy groups with other learners with intellectual disabilities, often unaccredited to begin with and then moving to accreditation at QQI Level 1 or 2 where appropriate. Learners suited to, and wanting to, progress beyond Level 2 are generally integrated into existing programmes in a phased way, for example, within the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) programme or Community Education programme.

Ultimately, the decision to place a student in a separate class or in an integrated class is made, on a case-by-case basis, by the ALO or placement committee. Although underpinned with a commitment to learner-centredness, the decision-making process must balance the needs and goals of the learner with more pragmatic concerns, such as the availability of suitably skilled tutors and the appropriateness of courses, models of provision and classroom environments.

5.4.3. Placement with suitably skilled tutors

Selecting and supporting suitable tutors to work with adults with intellectual disabilities in mainstream or non-mainstream classes is one of the most important considerations for many of our research participants. There is evidence of a strong culture of good adult learning practice delivered by dedicated, skilled and inspirational tutors, who have demonstrated strong commitment to an adult education, learner-centred approach to literacy. ALOs described how matching tutors to the learner groups was crucial in terms of assigning tutors who had the responsiveness, range and flexibility to work with learners with intellectual disabilities.

If you get the right tutor to work with them, they can nurture partnerships with them.

(ALO, Case study A)

The evidence suggests that the capacity to work empathetically is considered vital for tutors in this context. Other tutor skills and qualities identified during the research included communication skills, the ability to relate to students and the ability to creatively negotiate programme and assessment briefs to suit the needs of individual students in groups with diverse levels. A commitment to a learner-centred approach was also identified as essential to the role.

I don't see their intellectual disability, to me they are just people who I respect and who I am going to assist as much as I can to get them through their course.

(Tutor C, Case study B)

When discussing tutors who are particularly well suited to working with adults with diverse needs, ALOs spoke about the need for flexibility and innovation.

I rang a tutor at 6pm on Tuesday evening to see if she could teach something else completely different at 9am on Wednesday morning and she was fine with it... That module didn't suit the learners, so we needed to change the content... 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.

(AEO, Case study B)

5.4.4. Supporting tutors in developing inclusive practice

AEOs and ALOs were conscious that the development of specialised tutor knowledge and skills is essential for tutors working with learners with intellectual disabilities. They were aware of the need for professional development and supports for tutors, given the additional challenges and specific skills and knowledge required.

Professional development, within the FET sector is underpinned by the Professional Development Strategy (2017-2019) and is managed by ETBs, based on local identified professional development needs of staff.

You are constantly looking for flexibility within your staff and more and more, we are providing CPD for them in terms of learners with issues that need supports [...] for the staff to have resilience and not to have an answer for everything, but to be able to signpost if people are having problems.

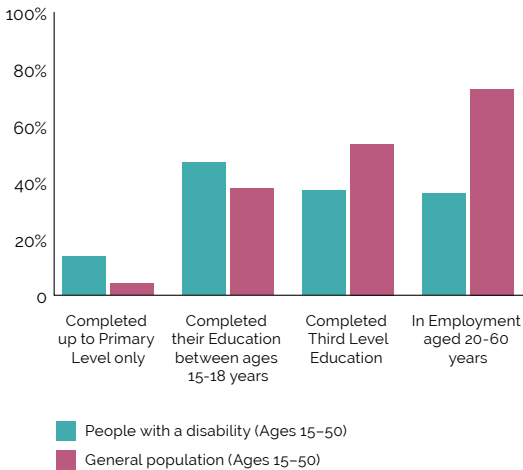
(ALO, Case study A)

For tutors who did not normally work in this context, it was acknowledged that their concerns could be allayed through relevant training. We have provided broad equality and diversity training which was not specific and now we are following that up with training for [tutors] working with individuals with intellectual disabilities. There is a small amount of anxiety for some staff, born out of the best place, they don't want to say or do anything wrong, so that's where the specific training came in. While the broad equality and diversity training is good, it is like whitewashing your canvas to make sure your canvas is good, but we need to do a little more to allay fears and to feel adequately support in relation to it.

(ALO 2, Case study B)

Professional development (PD) opportunities for tutors and other Adult Literacy Services staff is key to building capacity in tutors to meet the needs of adult literacy learners with intellectual disabilities. Survey responses showed tutors (group and voluntary tutors) and other staff avail of a range of relevant PD options including:

Figure 17. Survey responses to professional development training opportunities for staff (Source: online survey)

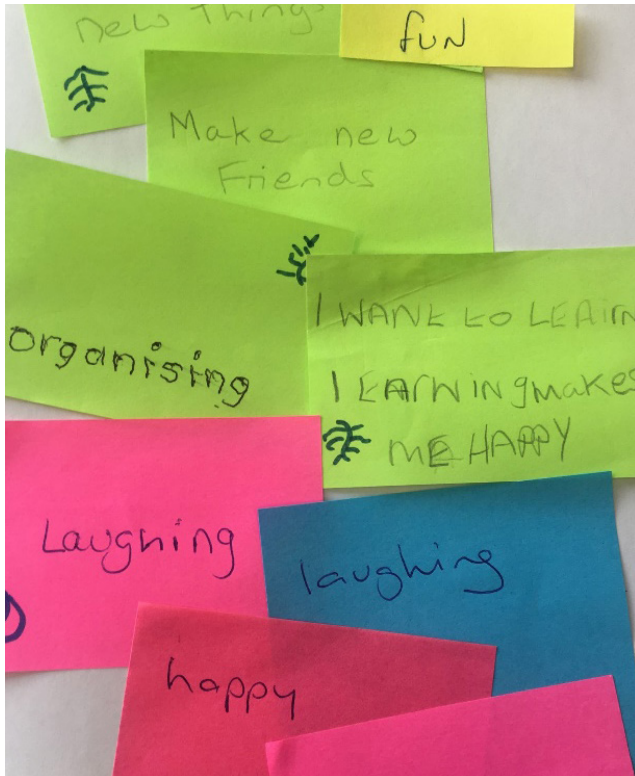


The research did not capture the timing of PD opportunities and whether tutors and staff had access to specialised training before they began working with adults with intellectual disabilities. However, feedback on existing PD was broadly positive and its effectiveness in supporting learners with intellectual disabilities on an ongoing basis is discussed in more detail in Section 5.5.

5.5 Participation

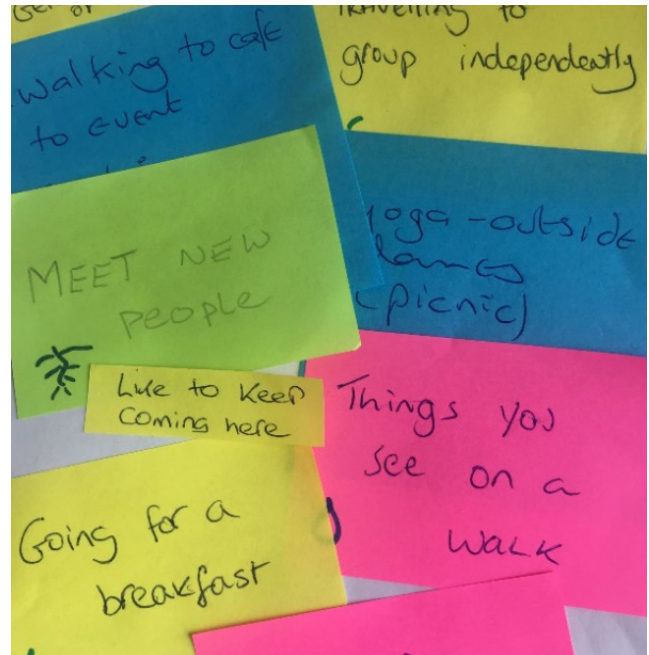
5.5.1. Learners' experiences of participation

Figure 18. Learners' reflections on what they like about literacy classes (1) (Source: case study research)



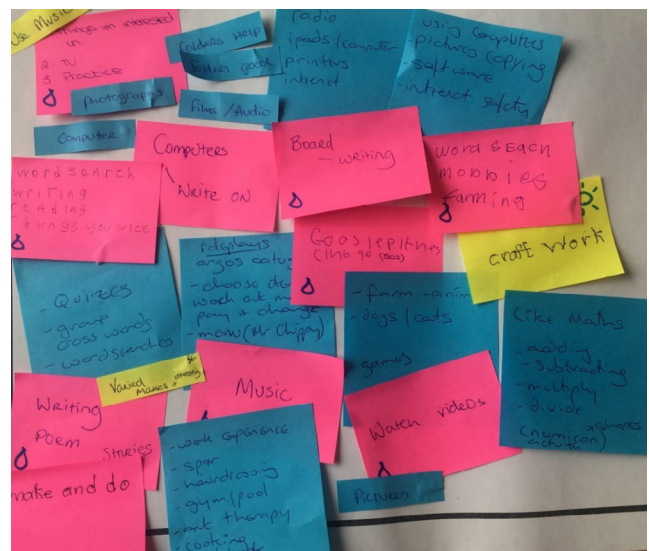
The learner groups provided keen insights into their experiences of being a learner within the Adult Literacy Services. When learners were asked what they liked most about their literacy classes, learners highlighted the social aspects of being in the literacy centre, including having fun, making friends, and interacting with staff and other learners in the centre. One learner liked coming to the centre because 'it gets me out of the house' and another learner mentioned 'fresh air'. Learners also enjoyed routines built around their time in class, for example, going for breakfast or walking to the centre.

Figure 19. Learners' reflections on what they like about literacy classes (2) (Source: case study research)



Social interaction was also mentioned by IDSS and ETB staff and acknowledged as a key element of literacy learning, social inclusion and active participation. Tutors regularly built activities into their teaching practice that would get learners out of the classroom and into the community, for example, going for a picnic or a walk. Echoing earlier comments from staff, learners highlighted how they liked coming to the ETB centre and found the staff very supportive, especially their tutors who were named on several occasions.

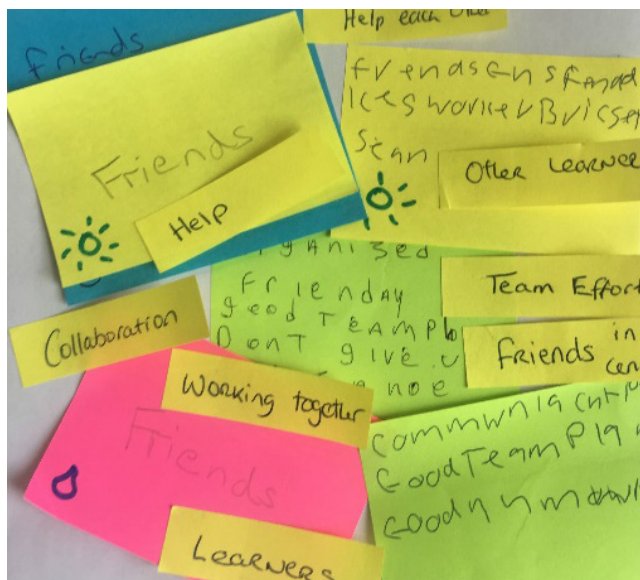
Figure 20. Learners' reflections on learning activities they enjoy (Source: case study research)



Learners were very clear about the affective element of learning in terms of how they enjoyed learning and liked learning new things as well as meeting friends and new people. For some learners, the sense of independence achieved by travelling to the ETB on their own was important, while others spoke about the assistance of

the IDSS centres in providing transport. When asked what kind of learning activities they enjoyed, learners were able to identify diverse formats through which they learned, including computers, art, crafts, writing, listening and telling stories, reading, music, role playing, videos, going out for walks, and attending events as part of a group.

Figure 21. Learners' reflections on working with their peers
(Source: case study research)



When asked who helps them learn, they identified their parents, other family members, IDSS staff (especially key workers and PAs), tutors, the other staff in the ETB centre. Tutors were singled out for particular mention, in terms of the positive environment they created. One learner pointing to the 'be happy' sign in their room to describe their tutor and another learner group using words such as "fun", "patient", and "kind" to describe their tutor.

Learners also talked about learning from their friends in class and how working together helped them learn. They mentioned team effort and team play. This kind of peer support was also mentioned by Adult Literacy Services staff who see it as an important element of learning and encourage it through their placement of learners. ETB staff also spoke about their enjoyment of working with learners with intellectual disabilities, describing how they much they liked working with "positive" learners who "want to learn":

[You are in] an environment where everyone is hungry for learning and it's so pleasant and easy in comparison than trying to motivate someone... [it's] a breath of fresh air here that everyone wants to learn.

(Tutor B, Case study B)

[Learners with intellectual disabilities] have positive attitudes towards education and they are really willing to be engaged.

(ALO 2, Case study B)

Many tutors were conscious of integrating the learners into the life of the ETB centre, ensuring that they were mixing with other learners and groups during breaks, before and after sessions and during social events and activities. There was a strong consensus that being part of the everyday life of the literacy centre is a significant outcome for the learners. A disability support worker described the success of one ETB in achieving an inclusive environment.

It was huge, when you went down there [ETB centre]. There were no labels, our people would see that clearly for themselves, they were the same as everyone else.

(IDSS Manager, Case study C)

Research participants also spoke about the challenges of achieving full inclusion and of avoiding tokenistic or inauthentic inclusion. One adult literacy learner felt that there was no real attempt made to integrate one group of learners who were 'brought in' from an IDSS centre for classes in the literacy centre he attended.

For people with disabilities they're way down [...] they are individuals, and that is what kills me, they are all individuals. But they are seen as that group from [name of IDSS], they are 1,2,3,4, they are individuals, but we don't look at them that way.

(Learner 1, Adult Literacy Focus Group)

When asked to name specific actions that supported the participation of adults with intellectual disabilities, survey respondents identified the following:

Figure 22. Survey responses on pathways to participation
(Source: online survey)



5.5.2. Innovative teaching and learning approaches

The literacy learners we spoke to on our case study visits were clear in their appreciation and enjoyment of the learning activities in which they engaged. There was evidence that tutors demonstrate strong pedagogical creativity to support learners by innovating with an enormous range of creative mediums and activities. These activities included mosaics, art work, craft, music, role plays, quizzes, word searches, cooking, photographs, internet searches, historical archiving both to communicate with learners (especially with those who are non-verbal) and to enhance literacy learning.

Many of these activities were mentioned explicitly by learners with intellectual disabilities as part of what they enjoy most in their learning. For example, one group described how they used music to learn numeracy and took photographs of bridges, which were then used to learn about linear structures. Another group of learners described how they liked ending the class listening to an audio book. This is part of a wider book club project across the community, so they are reading this book along with many others in schools, library and book clubs across their community. Another group described doing a role play of buying something from a shopping catalogue in class and the following week then going out to a café to order from a menu and independently paying their bills (as part of numeracy and budgeting).

While tutors demonstrated great range and responsiveness in their pedagogical practices, they also highlighted features which they felt were distinctive for this cohort of learners. Tutors highlighted specific issues which had implications for pedagogical practices, in particular the slower pace and rhythm to match the needs of learners with intellectual disabilities. They also highlighted the challenges of being able to support differentiated learning as the learners in a group often differ enormously both in terms of diversity in their learning skills and across and between learners. They described how tutors need to be flexible if numbers start to diminish during the year.

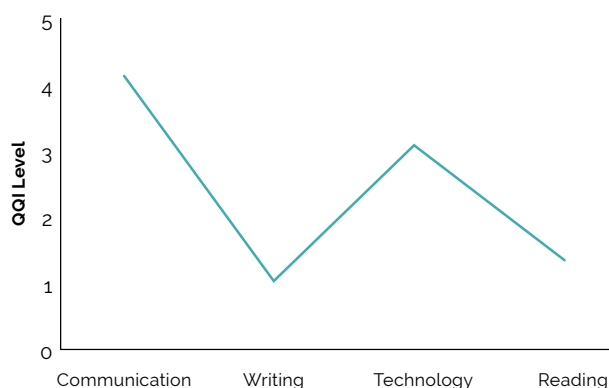
You have to have techniques to accommodate a mixed level group, some want to do a child care focus and other wants a health care focus or tourism focused, it depends on what is available ... Staff [have to] adapt to different subject areas at different levels to maintain groups but draw them all together when they are doing something that is common to the syllabus, that they can take them and show them the focus for learning drawing on the hooks for learning.

(ALO, Case study A)

Like many other literacy learners, learners with intellectual disabilities often achieve learning goals

at different times, ways and levels. Hence, individual literacy learners (as well as groups) can have a 'spiky literacy profile', meaning each learner can have different levels of skill in diverse areas. For example, literacy skills in reading, writing or communication can vary greatly for a single learner (see Figure 23). This presents pedagogical challenges for tutors who must be able to respond to such diversity within programmes with pre-defined learning outcomes and awards structures.

Figure 23. Example of spiky literacy profile (Source: Researchers)



Tutors consequently require an extensive pedagogical and relational capacity to span this range in the one afternoon, let alone across the different groups, courses and locations that tutors work with and in during an average week.

It's quite a task to ensure that everyone is getting what they [need] but it is what literacy tutors can do, that's what we are trained to do and it is different to any other services in that respect, but I think that flexibility is why people with intellectual disabilities are often sent to us. Because we can respond in that way.

(ALO 2, Case study C)

Supporting learning for adults with intellectual disabilities is complicated if accompanied by definitions of learning outcomes based on technical or functional literacy skills. Some of the tutors we spoke to worked hard at developing alternative and creative approaches.

We do different approaches to literacy. A major challenge to those learners is not being able to read or write and, just for example, at the moment I'm doing a multi-media approach to a novel. It's not dependent on them being able to read or write but they still experience the text in an interactive and multi-media way [...] I'm reading a text that's adult appropriate in a learning centre. It works well because its setting and its sense of place is described wonderfully in the text, which allows me to pull out super imagery that I display on the projector. We discuss the images

that come up in the book. It's set in the Caribbean context, so we look up lots of nature clips and find the animals, the birds, the flora and fauna that have been mentioned in the book. In those ways, the experience is not dependent on reading and writing for the learners, but it's definitely developing their listening and speaking skills and they're encountering a text in a different way.

(Tutor 5, Case study C)

As noted, discussions around learner goals and achievements in learning focused heavily on transversal skills and rarely touched on a key feature of FET provision – employability skills and skills for work. Given the isolation and marginalisation many learners with intellectual disability experience, it is understandable that outcomes in independence, self-esteem, sense of belonging and other 'social' outcomes are prioritised. However, the following vignette, shared by an ALO, shows the empowerment of one learner who was being supported in developing transversal skills alongside work-related literacy skills.

Recently, a learner with a mild intellectual disability went from here, and we didn't know it until after the fact, she went to a nursing home, applied for a cleaning and laundry job, got it, came back and told us about it and said "I only did it, because I came here and ye told me I could do anything". These are the types of things we are not asked to measure; student confidence isn't a learning outcome. Improved self-esteem, ability to go independently and seek a job. She also told us she had gone and left her CV in everywhere and told no one, she didn't want to say anything to us because she wasn't getting called back. She wasn't getting anything, but this one employer has called her back and said the job is hers. And her next step is, she has to navigate [because] she is on a payment. So, her next step is to learn 'how do I navigate this? [How] do I do this if I am working part-time and on a payment?' So, she is going to be working on this with her tutor, they are going to go sideways off her programme for a while because that is what's important right now and QOI doesn't really matter when there is a job on the line.

(ALO, Case study C)

5.5.3. Resistance to inclusion

For the most part, this research showed a strong and unambiguous commitment to full inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities and a perception of inclusion as a challenge and enrichment, rather than a problem (UNESCO, 2005). However, in one instance, questions were raised about the suitability of Adult Literacy Services centres for inclusive practice and whether the literacy service was the 'best possible place'. In one of the case study sites, during an interview with experienced tutors they voiced their concerns about including adults with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy provision.

Is this the best possible place for people with intellectual disabilities? Within the scheme?

(Tutor 1, Case study C)

I think, you wonder where are you and why are you with these groups? That would be one thing I would have to question.

(Tutor 2, Case study C)

I just think there are big questions around the provision of literacy and numeracy provision to adults with intellectual disabilities.

(Resource Worker and Tutor, Case study C)

The main reason for these tutors' reservations lay in their perception that progress was not being made in the more technical aspects of literacy learning, especially as learners only received one weekly class of two hours group tuition.

Progress would have been minimal because I was with them for one hour every week so we were back at square one the following week and talking to other tutors, depending on the level, that would be across the board [for learner with intellectual disabilities]. [...] So, it didn't really serve a purpose. The purpose that was intended. Because one of the students was very medicated and I'd say three weeks out of four, there was nothing done. Nothing of value in writing with him, during that hour.

(Resource Worker and Tutor, Case study C)

The [lack of] retention is huge and it can be very, very frustrating because you just feel you're not getting anywhere and you're not getting anywhere. You're not. And you thought you were great at the end of each class, you're saying 'they're getting there'. But I suppose if they're enjoying it when they're there.

(Tutor 1, Case study C)

I suppose the norm is, the idea is that when you're teaching, generally you should be seeing progress. This is the way we think and I think the difficult thing for us is that with groups with adults with intellectual disability, in the main you're not seeing huge progression.

(Tutor 2, Case study C)

When asked to clarify on 'the purpose that was intended', this group of tutors revealed an understanding of literacy provision rooted in the functional model described in Section 1.5 in the discussion about changing discourses and definitions of literacy. Although the tutors recognised that the students "love coming" and received benefits from engaging in literacy provision, they were unsure if that was the intended role of the adult literacy system.

Do you think the students benefit in other ways? Perhaps the social aspect of learning?

Absolutely and I think that would be the general feeling across the board. My question then is, is that the role of the adult literacy system? That we're a social centre? Maybe it is. I'm not saying that it isn't. Maybe it is our role. I don't know. I know from the students and from the three or four agencies that use this centre and I can safely say that the students do love coming.

(Resource Worker and Tutor, Case study C)

In this instance, tutors seemed to be influenced by the functional model of literacy in determining progress and attainment of learning. As mentioned in the discussion on changing discourses of key terms (Section 1.5), functional models of literacy focus on technical, standardised and measurable improvements in traditional literacy skills (reading, writing, numeracy). Although this is a single incident in one of the case study sites, the research that otherwise shows strong support for inclusion, there is a potential need for professional development opportunities where tutors can voice their concerns and find support in navigating the competing demands of pre-determined learning outcomes and learner-centred literacy provision. As discussed in Section 5.3, such professional development

should adopt a social practice model of literacy that encompasses a broad range of literacy skills in all domains of the learner's life.

Resistance to inclusion was also found in a focus group interview with literacy learners without intellectual disabilities. The majority of the focus group were very much in favour of inclusion and spoke at length about the benefits it brought to the centres they attended. However, one learner felt strongly that a learner group she was in "lost out" when learners with intellectual disability were integrated into the class. In this instance, the adults with an intellectual disability all had higher level literacy skills than the other learners, thus making the other learners feel self-conscious about their achievements.

I remember sitting down to do a worksheet and we were all handed a worksheet at the workshop and one of the lads [with an intellectual disability] was sitting beside me and I would still very much have difficulties writing down things from my head and he handed back up his paper well before me [laughs] and he was laughing at me kind of. So, you know, which was great to see that chap had the ability, like he was well advanced from where I was with my literacy, but he was coming in from a safe environment, an environment where he had tutors and had carers and had full-time support and probably had done that from the time he was four years. And on one side, the others were here, coming in for two hours, trying to catch up with their lives what they hadn't got all during their life. And I did feel 'here, what's the point', were they putting us in with that group, more than that group joining us?

I kind of sat back, to be honest, because then you could see the people, the women coming in from the area just not arriving anymore. So, who is getting the benefit and who is losing out? I just really felt that.

We were long enough there being pushed out and with nothing there for us and there's so many that still don't realise that there's adult classes out there and there's help. The ETBs are just "well this is a good idea, inclusion". Well, I just don't buy that.

(Learner 4, Adult Literacy Learner Focus Group)

Again, this viewpoint speaks to a possible need to ensure everyone, staff and learners, are adequately prepared for an integrated and inclusive literacy service.

5.5.4. Modelling and supporting inclusion

Many research participants – learners and staff – pointed out the importance of modelling inclusion across the service and creating an environment where full inclusion was not only possible but also unremarkable and expected. It was acknowledged that societal attitudes about disability and capacity can be a hindrance for learners with intellectual disabilities, with one tutor remarking:

I think there is a terrible patronising attitude towards people with intellectual disabilities. I think we do tend to have this patronising attitude... "oh isn't he great and he does this" and you kind of want to say stop that, he does his thing and that's it.

(Tutor 1, Case study B)

Similarly, members of the adult literacy learners' focus group talked about the need to tackle ingrained prejudice and/or fear and about how inclusion within Adult Literacy Services is linked to attitudinal changes at societal levels:

I think with inclusion comes education, you have to educate society to accept these people with intellectual disabilities. It's not the ones with the difficulties, it's the ordinary people, they don't understand it. It's education for those people that should be provided, to help the people with the disabilities. Society makes a judgement and they see someone with a disability and they make a judgement, there and then and it's completely wrong. They look at these people as being different or a threat to them even. It's all about educating society to accept people.

(Learner 2, Adult Literacy Learner Focus Group)

It would be nice to show people that are in the class what way to act, so they wouldn't be saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing. [...] preparing, so they know what to do and it's not thrown at them.

(Learner 3, Adult Literacy Learner Focus Group)

In terms of supports and/or resources that are necessary to effectively support adult literacy learners with intellectual disabilities, research participants noted the following requirements:

Figure 24. Resources and supports to improve access and participation (Source: case study research)



5.6 Evaluation

5.6.1. Meeting learner needs and achieving learning goals

There was a general agreement that engagement with literacy services brings significant improvements in the life of the adult with an intellectual disability. When talking about successful attainment of learning goals and successfully meeting learner needs, research participants focus on 'soft skills' or transversal skills, i.e. improvements in personal, interpersonal and social skills:

The change in students when they came into us, just their self-confidence, it just blossomed.

(Resource Worker, Case study B)

Staff described how learners with intellectual disabilities develop their learning identities when attending literacy classes.

They are students here. One of the students here, [his Disability Support Worker] said when he's getting ready to go here, he says, "Oh I'm off to College now". Ok, it's not the right word but it indicates for him a change in how he thinks about what he's doing. For those students, they perceive themselves differently. They get a chance to be in a different environment where it is less supported than the centres they come from and they have to manage within that environment. We are there to catch them but it is not as obvious. They get a chance to do different things, study and learning ... They get the opportunity to meet with all the different students and tutors here and that is really important as well.

(ALO 2, Case study B)

Peer support was also beneficial in helping learners achieve their learning goals. One case study described how the Adult Literacy Services integrated learners with varying levels of intellectual disability and differing capacities together in a group, matching learners who could support one another in the class. This level of knowledge about learner's individual capacities in different areas, their capacity for group work, their memory and concentration levels and their interests requires nuanced knowledge from the ALOs, tutors and IDSS staff. From the perspective of ETB staff, it also required familiarity and creativity with strategic requirements of different course and awards requirements.

5.6.2. Recognition of learning

Several staff interviewees, survey respondents and workshop participants noted that adult literacy requires innovation and creativity in assessing achievements in learning. Best practice involves an approach that scaffolds literacy and numeracy acquisition so that learning is incremental and measured in an unobtrusive way.

Certification isn't the be-all and end-all, but the bits that [learners with intellectual disability] do, get offered in an integrated way. There is integrated assessment happening at times as well, they do a fun bit and it can be assessed so they are doing it as well. The focus isn't only accreditation but because we've done the planning, it is a planned outcome.

(ALO, Case study B)

In evaluating learning, ETB staff noted the importance of establishing flexible assessment methods that fulfil requirements for reasonable accommodation, e.g. additional time for completion of assignments, assistive technology and choice of alternative formats such as video or oral recordings instead of written assignments.

One of the main challenges perceived in evaluating non-accredited learning is the lack of opportunities in formal monitoring and evaluation procedures to capture and report the 'softer' learning outcomes. In addition, there is a perception that those learning outcomes, although hugely significant to individual learners, are not particularly valued within formal monitoring and evaluation systems. Participants saw a tension between targets 3 (transversal skills) and 4 (participation/ lifelong learning) and the other goals in the performance agreement strategies of ETBs. This is reflected in the broader discourse evident in the FET Strategy 2014-2019 document which identifies 'real and positive impact' in terms of:

A higher proportion of those who engage in FET, including those with barriers to participation such as persons with a disability, as well as existing and future DSP priority cohorts, stay engaged, complete qualifications, transition successfully into employment or where appropriate, move into higher level qualifications in FET or HET.

(SOLAS, 2013:19)

Some ETBs have developed their own qualitative indicators of literacy progression and one ALO suggested that such indicators could be adopted by SOLAS to fully assess and recognise literacy progression, giving this example:

We might break down progression into something much smaller, so we might ask a student "as a result of my learning, I have done the following ..." and then it might be "I joined a club, I read to my child, passed my driving theory test, filled out an application form by myself". Much more bite-sized outcomes than "Got a job, got a part-time job, went to voluntary work". Those are measured by SOLAS in our reports but they are much bigger outcomes than our students will achieve, maybe eventually they will achieve one of those but it always feel defeating when you are bypassing those every year for so many students, saying "I can't tick any of those for them".

(ALO 2, Case study C)

The way you might measure things doesn't mean anything to them and I think we're being unfair to them in a certain way if we say 'you're not Level 1 or you're not Level 2 or Level 1 and a half. Whatever the measure is. Our measure doesn't fit what they need.

(Tutor 6, Case study C)

5.6.3. Accreditation

The capacity to shift incrementally from unaccredited to accredited courses is very important. Mirroring the experience of the wider population of those with unmet literacy needs, learners with intellectual disabilities often lack confidence in their own learning capacities when first engaging with the Adult Literacy Services and in many cases, have negative experiences and fears from previous school encounters. Tutors are often reluctant or fearful to engage accredited learning initially and it is often not even mentioned at the outset to new learners, but rather it is presented sensitively as an optional pathway, one that can be taken up at a later stage when learners are ready. In many instances, tutors introduce the idea of accreditation retrospectively during sessions when learners have successfully completed some of the portfolio activities for Level 1.

AEOs and ALOs were particularly conscious of accreditation and increased targets of 10 per cent accreditation for Adult Literacy Services. They called for greater awareness in terms of how long it takes to redress the unmet literacy needs of adult literacy learners and in particular, learners with intellectual disabilities.

As noted earlier, the individual nature of literacy means that each learning journey is quite distinctive.

Literacy is something that changes and evolves depending on the situation that a person is in on a given day on a given week. If they are unemployed, if they are working, if they are going to the doctors or have to meet a teacher. So, their needs every time are going to be their needs and regardless of what accreditation we or the Department or SOLAS think they should be doing, if they need something specific for that week or month, that's what we need to work on ... While we will try to aim towards it [QQI award level], if we need to deviate for the learner, then we're learner-centred and that's what we're going to do.

(ALO 2, Case study C)

This is especially true for learners with intellectual disabilities whose engagement and progression with Adult Literacy Services may be along what one tutor describes as a "wavy line", referring to the idea of lateral progression that 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'. From a literacy perspective, ETB staff described how it could take a learner three years or more before any accredited certification takes place. AEOs described how this, ostensibly slow, rate of progression is difficult to measure and requires an understanding and awareness of the challenges of bringing learners with intellectual disabilities to accreditation standards. Moreover, there needs to be an acknowledgement that, although a diverse group, learners with intellectual disabilities had specific needs that are unique to their community and have significant implications in their capacity to retain and apply new knowledge. The perceived disconnection between the reality of learners' lives and the setting of appropriate qualitative targets for this cohort was identified by research participants as a point of tension.

I think there needs to be a mindfulness from SOLAS that literacy is not an area to put high certification targets on as it is a long journey. One of the solutions was that there is no reason why everyone can't get a Level 1, but then the flipside of that is that the Level 1 in QQI doesn't match. In terms of their learning outcomes [they] don't match where people are at or the content may not be right.

(AEO, Case study B)

Measuring progress is one of the hardest areas of working with learners with intellectual disabilities because what seems intangible can be so rich for them. [...] The progression might be that the learner, who had never been in a learning setting now comes in every week, engages fully, participates. There's fundamental personal development for them and they're also developing their literacy skills, literacy in its broadest sense. And this would be the NALA definition including reading, writing, technology, personal development and building social capacity. That's what is really important and there is no QQI for that.

(ALO 1, Case study C)

Different perceptions and roles of accreditation and non-accreditation in the part-time FET provision is recognised as a challenging issue by the differing views of stakeholders described in the FET review conducted by McGuinness et al. (ESRI: 2014:76-79). AEOs are very conscious that the number of learners receiving accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 did not rise this year as expected and that this target will be on the Strategic Performance Agreements agenda again next year. This AEO spoke about their concerns about learners not achieving the expected rate of certification, noting:

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.

(AEO, Case study B)

Literacy is one of the transversal skills for which SOLAS and DES have agreed raised targets, with Adult Literacy Services 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.

5.6.4. Evaluation of teaching practice

An important part of the evaluation process involves reflecting on and evaluating teaching practice. This process allows practitioners identify effective teaching and learning methods, innovative approaches and best practice. Whilst there is a comprehensive repertoire of professional practice available for adult literacy, some research participants highlighted the absence of resources and materials that are tailored to the unique needs of adults with intellectual disabilities.

Others noted that existing adult literacy supports do not work with adults with intellectual disabilities and ETBs spend a lot of time developing new resources and materials. In this regard, some tutors suggested 'communities of practice' to support and develop expertise and skill in this area.

And there's space, definitely, for developing a community of practice among our tutors where I can discover that what is driving me mad, [another tutor] has already done. We should all be linking in more and in the same way I'd share with [other tutors]. To have that community of practice develop, that would be great.

(Tutor 5, Case study B)

In one case study site, the ALO spoke about her effort to help establish a community of practice for tutors and the benefits it brings to practitioners.

I've scheduled small community of practice meetings with tutors over the next month to devise themed activities, assessments and briefs for all 16 components in level 1. So, they will be broken into small groups and share using One Note collaboration space to put up useful website, photos, worksheets and they will catalogue them. Sometimes the tutors will tell me that they are at a loss for appropriate material that are not 'kiddie' resources without having every time to re-invent themselves. So, these little communities of practice are very important to them and they can also share there and moan and get feedback and help each other. Those are the kind of things that help.

(ALO, Case study C)

5.7 Progression

As learners progressed in the literacy services, they also began to look at different strands of the ETB services to build up fruitful, long-term and service-wide relationships.

5.7.1. Progression within the adult literacy service

ETB staff described progression as very beneficial for learners with intellectual disabilities as it offers recognition of their capacities and achievements. Progression in this context is more broadly defined than standard progression routes that involve incremental rises and instead encompasses:

- Learners progressing from one-to-one tuition into a learning group.
- Learners progressing from outreach classes in an IDSS centre to classes in an ETB centre.
- Learners progressing from classes catering solely for adults with intellectual disabilities to 'mainstream' classes.
- Learners progressing from non-accredited provision into courses accredited at QQI Level 1, 2 or 3.
- Learners progressing from component certificates (Minor Awards) to a Major Award.
- Learners' lateral progression, i.e. completing a second award at the same level in a different subject area.
- Learners' horizontal progression, i.e. moving from QQI Level 1 to QQI Level 2.

There was evidence of strategic thinking and creative placements to ensure learners with intellectual disabilities have the best chance of managing transitions.

Sometimes what I would do is to refer someone midway through a Level 3 major award so that they will complete that and be really well settled there before moving onto a Level 4. That can be a very good way of progressing people as opposed to landing them into a new environment with a new level of study and with a new course.

(ALO 2, Case study B)

Other examples of this planned and strategic approach are:

- Placing learners in practical modules first before they began modules with more challenging requirements in reading, writing or numeracy.
- Allocating more time to learners with intellectual disabilities to complete modules and learner portfolios.

- Providing additional modules at the same level so learners could consolidate and retain their learning.

5.7.2. Progression to mainstream Further Education and Training

Research participants also discussed progression into other FET programmes, for example, Level 4 and Level 5 courses in BTEI and VTOS programmes. One IDSS manager spoke about learners who had been supported through the Adult Literacy Services are now successfully negotiating mainstream settings.

[Learners are now] accessing mainstream education at further and higher education at Level 5 in childcare and contemporary living. So there has been a progression path which has been very clear and very evident. It has been really useful and helpful for the learners and they are really happy and integrating really well in mainstream settings.

(IDSS Manager, Case study C)

One resource worker spoke about a young woman with an intellectual disability who completed separate classes in the adult literacy service before progressing.

She is in a class with the rest of the students who are community-based. She is the only service user in the class and it's a BTEI class so she's working towards Level 3. And it's great for her as she's fully integrated into the community. So now, in her head, she's now like everyone else. She's not in a Level 2 class with service users, and that means a lot to her, she understands it.

(Resource Worker, Case study C)

Staff described the key role of Adult Guidance in supporting learners to identify and access other services. One AEO spoke about the need for sensitivity when discussing progression pathways.

We are mindful to give people their options about progression but equally not to frighten them, people are on their own journey and we are mindful of where they are on their journey and if people are coming to the end of their literacy journey and ready to move on somewhere. We have learners from literacy who have moved onto to level 4 and 5 and PLCs, but generally it is a much longer route and people are at a different pace.

(AEO, Case study B)

This slower pacing and incremental progression needed by some learners raises the broader pedagogical questions about the role of Adult Literacy Services. ETB staff at all levels highlighted that literacy was about the maintenance of literacy skills as much as progression and further development of capacities.

We are doing a lot of maintenance on skills they've developed but maybe they don't have the cognitive ability to progress to [another] level but that's okay for them because the structure that they have in here and the relationships and the confidence and the personal development that they gained is success for them, success in terms of being able to do things independently.

(ALO 2, Case study C)

One of the key challenges identified by ETB staff in this research is determining when learners should progress from one stage to the next, and in particular, out of the Adult Literacy Services. Some were unequivocal that Adult Literacy Services provision for adults with intellectual disabilities is time-bound and finite.

We are careful in terms of our remit, the pool of funding we have for it, that the group forms and are well supported but we are careful that there is a time when their time with the programme finished. We can't become a permanent fixture for any group of learners.

(ALO, Case study B)

Others voiced concerns about learners who were still benefitting from literacy provision and unsuited to upwards progression, but had been with the service for a considerable length of time.

How long do you run a class for? The class spoken about this morning is in its third year now but we know that some of the learners will not go beyond this, they will not progress from 2 to 3. [...] I know parents are at a loss when a child with an intellectual disability leaves secondary school. They're totally at a loss as to what's next for them. And maybe we're at a loss too, what's next for this group who are finishing now after three years?

(AEO, Case study A)

5.7.3. Capturing and reporting progression

ETB staff felt strongly that many types of learning achievements are not recognised in the current progression targets set by SOLAS, particularly those that are described as 'soft' learning outcomes. As one ALO pointed out "student confidence isn't a learning outcome" (ALO 2, Case study C). More broadly ETB staff questioned how these different roles of literacy could be managed by the ETB service, when measurement by progression rates means that:

Those students count against you when you keep them for literacy maintenance purposes. How does that work in this drive towards progression? It is a difficult, difficult issue.

(ALO 2, Case study B)

Others spoke about the value of going wide as well as deep and allowing learners with intellectual disabilities remain at a particular level, ensuring consolidation and retention at that level, rather than being expected to 'move up'.

I think as well, we need to come up with ways of exposing the consolidation of learning that is happening and their retention of skills. Because some of these people get to a point where new learning, I suppose, might be aspirational. Now, only in certain things and I don't want to limit people, but they might get to a certain point with a certain skill and then I think the focus needs to be on mapping the retention of that and the consolidation of that skill.

(Tutor 3, Case study C)

Accreditation was acknowledged as crucial as it recognises the learning achievements of learners with intellectual disabilities. This is especially important to those learners who had not been given the opportunity to progress to further or higher education after school like their peers. Many of those interviewed also highlighted the significance of the QQI awards ceremony hosted by the ETB centre where learners received their accreditation alongside learners from other groups and services. ALOs described the inclusive nature of the awards ceremony and sense of inclusion and belonging it generated.

It is a big thing and every student is called up individually, gets their photograph taken and the family taken with them and it is a big thing for them.

(Tutor and Resource Worker, Case Study C)

Overall, research participants agreed that embedding the following approaches to progression would be a positive step towards full inclusion:

- Create opportunities for lateral progression for learners who may not have the capacity to progress upwards but would benefit from going 'sideways' or along a 'wavy' line.
- Ensure the learner stays at the centre of any plans for progression and that they reflect the learner's needs and interests.
- Have dedicated and tailored support from the ETB-AEGS to ensure learners receive comprehensive information on available options and progression.

5.8 Chapter Summary

Thematic findings relating to adult learners with intellectual disabilities and their engagement with adult literacy provision are presented and discussed in Chapter 5. The findings draw on data collected from all phases of this research study and discuss the accomplishments and challenges of real-life application of inclusive practices in ETB Adult Literacy Services.

Following the customary pattern of learner engagement in the Adult Literacy Services, the section discusses the following stages of a potential adult literacy learner's pathway, see *Figure 25. Adult Literacy Learner Pathway*.

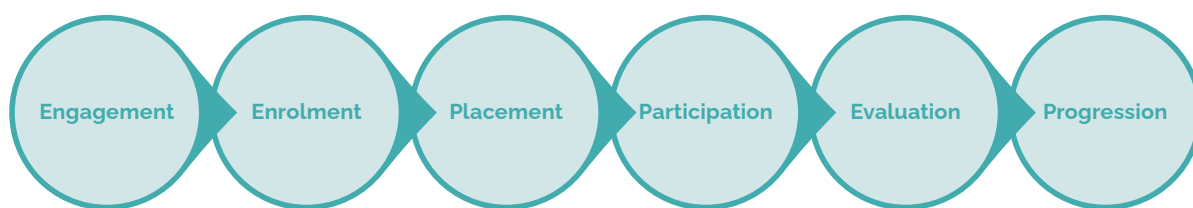
Engagement

All ETBs are aware of their statutory obligations to include learners with intellectual disabilities in FET provision and in the Adult Literacy Services and much is being done to create inclusive learning environments. The majority of ETBs would like to do more to embed inclusive practices in their promotion and outreach work and identified key challenges in relation to clarifying the role and responsibilities of the ETB and making inclusion an institutional practice in the ETBs.

Enrolment

There was a consensus that existing assessment and enrolment procedures need to be adapted to cater for the additional needs of some adults with intellectual disabilities, including ring-fenced funding to ensure the learning environment is fully accessible and inclusive, developing collaborative relationships between IDSS and ETBs and supports in using assistive technologies

Figure 25. Adult Literacy Learner Pathway
(Source: M. Bracken)



Placement

The placement process was recognised as a difficult but important aspect of inclusion which needs to recognise that adults with intellectual disabilities are a diverse group with wide variations in educational experience and attainment. Consequently, assumptions should not be made about low literacy skills. Careful planning for placement needs to occur including drawing on ETB-AEGS support, reviewing the placement process to ensure flexibility and changes if required and carefully selecting literacy tutors with the experience, expertise, teaching philosophy and disposition suited to working in adult learners with intellectual disabilities.

Participation

In terms of ensuring learners with intellectual disabilities participate fully in the Adult Literacy Services, inclusion should be modelled at centre and service level to create a learning environment where learner diversity is expected and unremarkable. Learners with intellectual disabilities identify the importance of social inclusion, independence and their enjoyment of social aspects of learning. Additional supports for all tutors and learners with and without intellectual disabilities are needed to help adjustment to the changes which inclusion is bringing to the learning environment of the ETBs.

The role of Inclusion Development Worker is identified as important in providing a 'go-to' person for staff and learners.

Evaluation

Qualitative indicators are important to capture and record a broad range of learning outcomes that have a significant value to the individual learner and their quality of life. Many participants feel that such qualitative indicators fall outside the criteria used to gauge impact in existing monitoring and evaluation systems. It includes the need to adapt and adjust assessment methods to meet statutory requirements for reasonable accommodation where needed. It is felt that guidance and professional development training would be beneficial in this regard, along with the development of a 'Community of Practice' where tutors could share resources, materials, ideas and innovative approaches.

Accreditation is a particular area of concern, especially given the increased targets for certification and participation for Adult Literacy Services agreed by SOLAS and DES as part of the Strategic Performance Agreements with the ETBs. Many research participants feel that these targets were inappropriate for the Adult Literacy Services and in particular, for adults with intellectual disabilities.

Progression

Identifying the right time for progression and the right progression pathway for learners is a challenging and time-consuming process for Adult Literacy Services staff. Research participants express concerns about the pressure to progress learners with intellectual disabilities 'upwards' rather than 'sideways' and that linear progression routes do not allow learners to consolidate their learning. There is a consensus that progression plans needed to keep the learner's needs, goals and preferences at the centre in a manner which acknowledges the multiple progression pathways and options.

Chapter 6:

Conclusions and recommendations

This research about the Guidelines was carried out by the Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education (CRALE). The aim of the project was to support Adult Literacy Services in using the Guidelines, capturing the learning involved in order to inform relevant developments across the FET sector and to further enhance the Guidelines. The project included regional workshops with ETB Adult Literacy Services, designed to familiarise participants with the Guidelines and to assist ETBs in using them based on the needs of each ETB and their learners. The project also involved survey and case study research to provide a contemporary picture of inclusive practices, with reference to the Guidelines.

The report presented the findings of this research in five chapters which are also used in this concluding chapter. The opening chapter provides an introduction to the Adult Literacy Services in the ETBs, as well as defining and reviewing the use of key terms of disability rights, intellectual disabilities, inclusion and literacy. Chapter 2 outlines the research methods used in the project. Chapter 3 reviews the context and profile of current models of provision and learners with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the implications of policy and legislation governing the provision of education and related services for adults with intellectual disabilities in Ireland. Chapter 5 presents and discusses the findings from learners and staff about the inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services. This is followed by a series of recommendations arising from this research.

6.1 Overview of research aims and methods

The research about the 'Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services' (SOLAS-ETBI-NALA, 2018) was funded by SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority. This research was carried out by the Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education (CRALE).

The aims of the project were to:

- support Adult Literacy Services in using the 'Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services' (hereafter referred to as the Guidelines);

- provide a contemporary picture of inclusive practices with reference to the Guidelines;
- capture the learning involved in order to inform relevant developments across the Further Education and Training sector and to further enhance the Guidelines as necessary.

6.2 Summary of research report:

The report presents the findings of this research in six chapters as summarised below.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the structures and provision of Adult Literacy Services in the ETBs, a profile of learner numbers, as well as discussing the use of key terms of disability rights, intellectual disabilities, inclusion and literacy.

Chapter 2 outlines the research phases and mixed method approach used in the project, as well as discussing the analysis, writing, ethics and limitations of this research.

Chapter 3 reviews the relevant policy and legislative basis governing the provision of adult literacy education for adults with intellectual disabilities in Ireland from equality, education and disability sectors. It discusses international and national policy developments in adult literacy provision in Further Education and Training (FET).

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the research findings of how ETB staff and students are implementing and experiencing the 2018 Guidelines in the Adult Literacy Services.

Chapter 5 maps the literacy learning journey and discusses how inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities is experienced by staff and learners in the Adult Literacy Services.

Chapter 6 concludes the report with a review of key findings and recommendations.

6.3 Context for the research

The valuable role of the Adult Literacy Services in Further Education and Training in Ireland was clearly evident, offering specific literacy learning supports for adult learners with intellectual disabilities. The broad aim of Adult Literacy Services in the ETBs to respond to the needs of all adult learners in the population was highlighted as fundamental. This gives the Adult Literacy Services a unique role in the provision of basic educational programmes for adults – including adults with intellectual disabilities – offering a responsive and learner-centred range of unaccredited and accredited courses of learning, as well as supporting progression to other levels and services.

A review of general profile of the population with intellectual disabilities in Irish society based on national databases reveals ongoing inequalities of education, social and employment outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities. Analysis of the current profile of learner numbers in 2018 from PLSS and the ETBs as well as the findings of our survey analysed by this research reveals the challenges of data collection as extensive variation in data collection, reliability and availability exist, both at national data gathering level and within the ETB system.

A discussion of the key concepts of disability rights, intellectual disabilities and literacy reveals how they have shaped inclusive practices and policies for adults with intellectual disabilities in our literacy services, and more broadly in Irish education and society. The development of disability rights and intellectual disabilities within a human rights approach and the social model of disability leads to an understanding of disability as complex, variable and situational.

Political and societal attitudes about intellectual disabilities have a key influence on shaping thinking and discourses about the capacities of learners with intellectual disabilities and their inclusion in education, employment and community life. An exploration of FET positions the Adult Literacy Services in the ETB structures, influenced by national policies such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy as well as the development of the 2018 Guidelines.

6.4 Research Methodology

Chapter 2 reviews the research methods used throughout this project, outlining the mixed method approach through four phases used to achieve its aim of identifying and exploring practices of inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services of the ETBs.

This included desk research to review national policies and existing research on inclusion and provision for learners with intellectual disabilities.

A national online survey was designed and completed by designated representatives of the 16 ETBs nationwide to give a picture of current practices and issues of inclusion within the ETBs.

Case studies were conducted with three ETBs to explore learning from their experiences of inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services.

Professional development workshops were conducted with ETB staff in Adult Literacy Services to share experiences and discuss professional practice of inclusion.

Engagement with the different phases of the research as well as the analysis, writing and ethical considerations are discussed before reflecting on the limitations of this research.

6.5 The legislative and structural context of the Adult Literacy Services

Chapter 3 reviews the policy and legislative developments in the equality, disability and education fields in recent decades which have implications for the inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in literacy services. As discussed, these changes have taken place within a wider context of governance reforms and the rise of managerial cultures during the past two decades. Policy implementation is still in an initial and continually emergent stage, and therefore needs extensive support by all stakeholders to ensure its successful implementation, as well as data monitoring, consultation, and participative and inclusive communications processes. Supports and funding structures for learners throughout FET remains a significant and complex issue.

An overview of the context of literacy education in the FET sector in Ireland, including its funding structures, profile of learners, programmes and models of provision, sources of support and funding for learners with disabilities reveals the scale of changes in recent years. The analysis noted the key shifts as a consequence of substantial legislative and policy changes across the FET sector. Changes included:

- structural reforms in FET,
- changes in Quality Assurance (QA) procedures,
- greater accreditation,
- funding structures,
- higher levels of professional training and qualifications for staff, and
- implementation of legislative requirements.

6.6 Implementing the 2018 Guidelines in the Adult Literacy Services

Chapter 4 presents the results of the online survey with designated ETB staff who completed the survey about the institutional awareness and engagement in ETBs in relation to implementing the Guidelines and other statutory obligations, as well as their future plans and resources needed to support inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities (including opportunities for learners to inform policies and plans). This reveals high levels of communication about statutory responsibilities and confidence about their ETB's capacity to implement the 2018 Guidelines in the majority of ETBs, including future planning.

However, most respondents also named several areas of concerns for which they sought additional clarification, supports and resources. These centred on issues of:

- staffing and staff development,
- resources,
- partnerships and cooperation,
- learner assessment and progression, and
- strategic planning.

While survey respondents acknowledge the effectiveness of Ireland's equality and human rights legislation, they highlight the need for more clarity and professional development about how to implement inclusion policies in practice. In particular, staff feel that the recommendation for the development of a specific 'Inclusion Development Worker' (IDW) role to support the inclusion of adult learners with intellectual disabilities within and across ETBs (as per the 2018 Guidelines) needs to be addressed. Participants welcome any additional clarity regarding such a role across all relevant programmes and areas in the ETB. They also welcome guidance on optimising engagements with external support agencies.

The work of inclusion development is part of a broader commitment to consistency of learner supports as emphasised in the FET Strategy 2020-2024. Depending on local requirements, ETBs will decide on best to resource such work.

6.7 Implementing inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services

Thematic findings relating to adult learners with intellectual disabilities and their engagement with adult literacy provision are presented and discussed in Chapter 5. The findings draw on data collected from all phases of this research study and discuss the accomplishments and challenges of real-life application of inclusive practices in ETB Adult Literacy Services. This research follows the customary pattern of learner engagement in the Adult Literacy Services, with key findings relating to each stage summarised briefly below.

Engagement

All ETBs are aware of their statutory obligations to include learners with intellectual disabilities in FET provision and in the Adult Literacy Services and much is being done to create inclusive learning environments. The majority of ETBs would like to do more to embed inclusive practices in their promotion and outreach work and identified key challenges in relation to clarifying the role and responsibilities of the ETB and making inclusion

an institutional practice in the ETBs.

Enrolment

There is a consensus that existing assessment and enrolment procedures need to be adapted to cater for the additional needs of some adults with intellectual disabilities, including ring-fenced funding to ensure the learning environment is fully accessible and inclusive, developing collaborative relationships between IDSS and ETBs and supports in using assistive technologies.

Placement

The placement process is recognised as a difficult but important aspect of inclusion which needs to recognise that adults with intellectual disabilities are a diverse group with wide variations in educational experience and attainment; consequently, assumptions should not be made about low literacy skills. Careful planning for placement needs to occur including drawing on the relevant guidance support, including that of the ETB-AEGS, reviewing the placement process to ensure flexibility and changes if required and carefully selecting literacy tutors with the experience, expertise, teaching philosophy and disposition suited to working in adult learners with intellectual disabilities.

Participation

In terms of ensuring learners with intellectual disabilities participate fully in the Adult Literacy Services, inclusion should be modelled at centre and service level to create a learning environment where learner diversity is expected. Learners with intellectual disabilities identify the importance of social inclusion, independence and their enjoyment of social aspects of learning. Additional supports for all tutors and learners with and without intellectual disabilities are needed to support adjustment to the changes which inclusion is bringing to the learning environment of the ETBs. The role of Inclusion Development Worker is identified as important in providing a 'go-to' person for staff and learners.

Evaluation

Qualitative indicators are important to capture and record a broad range of learning outcomes that have a significant value to the individual learner and their quality of life. Many participants feel that such qualitative indicators fall outside the criteria used to gauge impact in existing monitoring and evaluation systems. It includes the need to adapt and adjust assessment methods to meet statutory requirements for reasonable accommodation where needed. It is felt that guidance and professional development training would be beneficial in this regard, along with the development of a 'Community of Practice' where tutors could share resources, materials, ideas and innovative approaches.

Accreditation is a particular area of concern, especially given the increased targets for certification and

participation in programmes such as adult literacy as agreed by DES and SOLAS. These targets form part of the Strategic Performance Agreements with the ETBs. Many research participants feel that these targets were inappropriate for the Adult Literacy Services and in particular, for adults with intellectual disabilities.

Progression

Identifying the right time for progression and the right progression pathway for learners is a challenging and time-consuming process for Adult Literacy Services staff. Research participants express concerns about the pressure to progress learners with intellectual disabilities 'upwards' rather than 'sideways' and that linear progression routes do not allow learners to consolidate their learning. There is a consensus that progression plans needed to keep the learner's needs, goals and preferences in a manner which acknowledges the multiple progression pathways and options.

6.8 Recommendations

This research clearly demonstrates that the Adult Literacy Service is responding in supportive and learner-centred ways to the diverse and context-specific needs of learners with intellectual disabilities in a demanding policy context and with little upward movement in investment in the literacy service over the past number of years.

The learner-centred and responsive ethos which is typical of the literacy service across ETBs is of immense benefit to learners with intellectual disabilities, yet this ethos was increasingly felt by participants to be undervalued and under-recognised in the current structure of QQI levels and the reporting systems for FET more widely.

There is scope for more cohesive planning and responsive delivery of inclusive practices across FET as a sector. This will require all agencies to work more strategically and cohesively in a learner-centred way. ETBs play a central role in this in terms of their capacity to make decisions and allocate resources based on local needs and priorities while being aligned with SOLAS/ETB strategic performance agreements.

The recommendations below provide a means by which ETBs and SOLAS can engage in continued dialogue and strategic planning on arriving at the best solutions for inclusive FET for learners with intellectual disabilities.

The recommendations fall under four strands:

1. Retaining a learner-centred ethos
2. Optimal programme planning and evaluation
3. Ongoing tutor support
4. Sustainable interagency cooperation

1. Retaining a learner-centred ethos

- The core aim of Adult Literacy Services in the ETBs to **respond to the unmet literacy needs of all adult learners in the population** should continue to be valued as a fundamental part of an inclusive society. This gives the **Adult Literacy Services a unique role in the provision of basic educational programmes for adults with intellectual disabilities**, offering a responsive range of unaccredited and accredited courses of learning, as well as supporting progression to other levels and services as Guideline 1 indicates.
- **The nature of provision for learners in Adult Literacy Services – including learners with intellectual disabilities – should be recognised** and should include options for separate group tuition, mixed group tuition and 1:1 tuition as appropriate as per Guideline 2. This flexibility is needed to account for the diverse backgrounds and needs of learners and to provide differentiated and multi-modal pedagogies and accredited and unaccredited courses (as needed by learners).
- The **role of assistive technology in supporting learning** was noted and a need was identified for **ETB staff to receive the necessary training and IT support** to make sure it is applied properly. **Other supports**, (for example, a Personal Assistant or Special Needs Assistant) were also identified and ETB staff spoke about ensuring these are available before literacy provision commences to maximise successful outcomes and in line with supports available in other education sectors to ensure consistency.
- The **placement of learners with intellectual disabilities should be recognised as a vital but challenging part of the process**, addressing societal assumptions about the diverse and varied learning capacities of adult learners with intellectual disabilities. The placement process needs to remain learner-centred, include the support of ETB-AEGS and other key Adult Literacy Services and IDSS staff, have in-built processes of review with flexibility to adapt and adjust placements and careful selection of appropriate tutors to work with learners with intellectual disabilities. This learner-centred support is relevant for Guideline 7 on access procedures for learners and Guideline 8 support for effective participation.
- As per Guideline 9, **greater support and flexibility in progression rates and levels** (both across and within QQI levels 1, 2 and 3 and higher) is needed to respond to the diverse learning profile of adult learners, and particularly those with intellectual disabilities. **Opportunities for lateral progression should be facilitated** to cater for learners who may not progress 'upwards' but would benefit from 'sideways' progression (at QQI level) to support consolidation, retention and

application of learning.

- **Learners' needs, goals and preferences should remain central** to any plans for progression to other programmes and services in education, training, community and employment. This includes a review of existing assessment and enrolment procedures to cater for the needs of learners with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, the need for all literacy students and staff to **become aware and adjust to changes in the learning environment as the Adult Literacy Services becomes more inclusive**, based on a social practice model of literacy.

2. Optimal programme planning and evaluation

- Greater recognition of the **distinctive role of Adult Literacy Services** is needed, especially in terms of the implications of how practice varies greatly from one ETB centre to another depending on its history, institutional context and the learning priorities and needs of the local communities it serves. This is a **core part of the responsiveness and learner-centred approach of this service**. This should recognise and respond to the ongoing inequalities of education, social and employment outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities evident in national research.
- A **review of current data collection and data management system** for learners and provision within the Adult Literacy Services is needed. Any review would need to be cognisant of issues of data measurement as they render invisible many qualitative and situated aspects of literacy. Such data measurement should **capture the responsiveness and qualitative capacities of Adult Literacy Services to cater for the diverse needs of learners**.
- Consideration should be given to **publishing data annually about the number of adult learners with intellectual disabilities in FET programmes, including Adult Literacy Services** (as currently collected on PLSS) and assess how best to gather information which requires disclosure from literacy learners.
- To contextualise and support the development of ETB's policy and plan for inclusion as per Guideline 2, a review of the **national inclusion policies for ETBs** is recommended. This overarching inclusion policy needs to be able to **respond to the distinctive profile of the learners within its different services including Adult Literacy Services**. The willingness of ETB staff to do more to consolidate inclusive practices in their work should continue to be supported.
- Current research highlights how policy implementation needs **extensive support to ensure the successful implementation of policy requirements, as well as data monitoring, consultation, and participative and inclusive communications processes**.
- **Existing assessment and enrolment procedures in ETBs should be reviewed to cater for the additional needs of some adults with intellectual disabilities**. ETB staff recommend ring-fenced funding be made available so that individual services can continue to make reasonable accommodations (including physical alterations to the built environment) to ensure the learning environment is fully accessible and inclusive.
- A system of **responsive and timely qualitative indicators need to be developed to capture and record a broad range of inclusive learning outcomes**, including the diverse learning pathways and progressions of learners, transversal skills that have significant value for learners and their quality of life to support ETBs to review and evaluate their strategies for inclusion as per Guideline 10.
- The **setting of targets for accreditation for adult literacy learners needs to be reviewed, to respect the wide range of individuals' literacy development needs and goals**, and the unique role of the adult literacy service in responding to those. **This is particularly important for learners with intellectual disabilities**, due to the unique profile of learners and their atypical progression through timeframes and QQI levels. This review would have wider applicability for inclusion across the board.

3. Ongoing tutor support

- The recommendation for development of a specific 'Inclusion Development Worker' role in ETBs in Guideline 3 is not widely practiced yet. **There is a stated commitment to consistency of learner support in the FET Strategy 2020-2024. The work of inclusion development is central to this goal and remains key in establishing and maintaining partnerships with external disability support.**
- As per Guideline 5, **ETB literacy tutors should be supported with dedicated time and professional development** in inclusive pedagogies, working with adult learners with intellectual disabilities, inclusive pedagogical and assessment strategies and assistive technologies. **Existing professional development opportunities in this area need to be promoted more widely** as there appears to be a lack of awareness around what is available.
- Research participants highlighted the need to **guidance and professional development**

training in how to adapt and adjust assessment methods to meet statutory requirements for reasonable accommodation where needed, along with the development of a community of practice where tutors could share resources, materials, ideas and innovative approaches.

4. Sustainable interagency collaboration

- The excellent partnerships and responsive collaborations between ETBs and other agencies to support learners with intellectual disabilities are to be commended, as per Guideline 4. **Greater clarity is needed about the relationships and responsibilities of the ETB and other agencies** in supporting inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services, especially in light of concerns about duplication of funding, communication between interagency services and maintaining safe and accessible learning environments for learners and staff.



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Appendices

Appendix	Title
Appendix A	FET Learner Numbers and Funding Provision 2015-2018

Appendix A – FET Learner Numbers and Funding Provision 2015-2018

SUMMARY Adult Literacy Provision		2015
Programme Type	Reported Beneficiaries During 2015	Reported Expenditure
Adult Literacy	41,759	€25,956,502
ESOL	16,136	€876,407
ITABE	3,807	€1,889,278
Refugee Resettlement	105	€0
Skills for Work	3,155	€3,017,511
Voluntary Literacy Tuition	3,141	€0
Total	68,103	€31,739,698

SUMMARY Adult Literacy Provision		2016
Programme Type	Reported Beneficiaries During 2016	Reported Expenditure
Adult Literacy	40,186	€25,616,531
ESOL	15,584	€1,603,955
ITABE	3,327	€1,927,219
Refugee Resettlement	584	€800,687
Skills for Work	2,958	€2,483,377
Voluntary Literacy Tuition	2,160	€0
Total	64,799.00	€32,431,769

SUMMARY Adult Literacy Provision		2017
Programme Type	Reported Beneficiaries During 2017	Reported Expenditure
Adult Literacy	39,591	€27,566,860
ESOL	14,794	€2,077,190
ITABE	2,329	€2,089,430
Refugee Resettlement	1,316	€1,594,063
Skills for Work	3,435	€3,114,910
Voluntary Literacy Tuition	1,271	€0
Total	62,736	€36,442,452

SUMMARY Adult Literacy Provision		2018
Programme Type	Reported Beneficiaries During 2018	Reported Expenditure
Adult Literacy	35,252	€26,312,079
ESOL	15,397	€2,341,231
ITABE	2,754	€1,569,483
Refugee Resettlement	1,196	€2,991,243
Skills for Work	3,289	€2,532,281
Voluntary Literacy Tuition	1,066	€0
Total	61,970	€35,746,317

Notes



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