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

Case Studies

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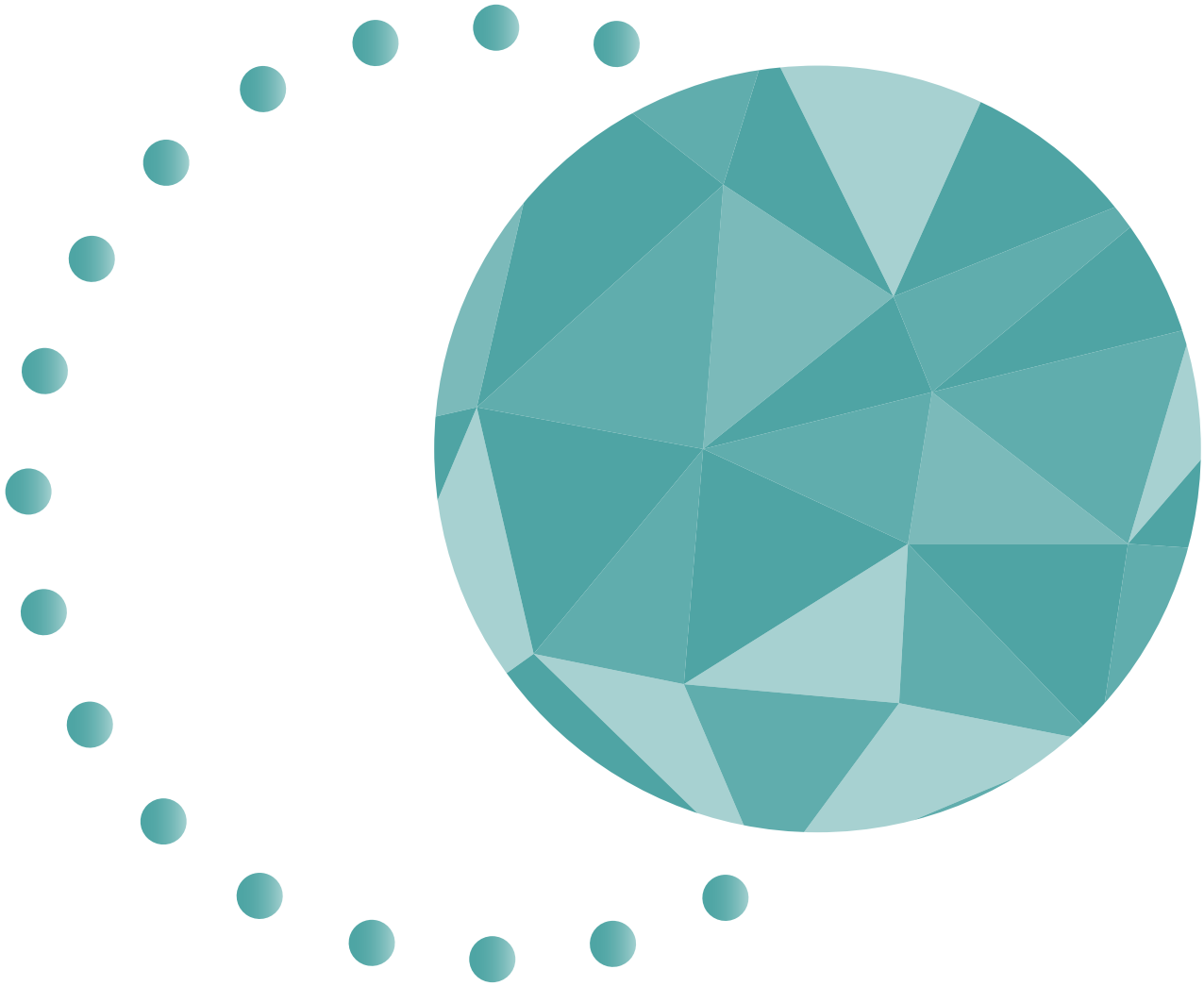

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Implementation of Guidelines on the Inclusion of Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in Adult Literacy Services

Case studies 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.

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- the ETB staff members who attended the regional workshops
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Acronyms

Acronym	Full title
ABE	Adult Basic Education
AEO	Adult Education Officer
ALO	Adult Literacy Organiser
ALOA	Adult Literacy Organiser Association
ALS	Adult Literacy Service
BSAN	Basic Skills Advisory Network
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CRALE	Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DE	Department of Education
DES	Department of Education and Skills*[1]
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation 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 Courses 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

1 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
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna/*Further Education and Training Authority*
STP	Specialist Training Providers
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

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1. Introduction

'Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services' (SOLAS-ETBI-NALA, 2018) was funded by SOLAS. Arising from these Guidelines, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) was commissioned to produce these case studies and the accompanying research report and recommendations on the inclusion of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities on behalf of SOLAS and ETBI. NALA 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' (hereafter referred to as the Guidelines).
- Provide a contemporary picture of inclusive practices with reference to the Guidelines for the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services.
- Capture the learning involved in order to inform relevant developments across the Further Education and Training (FET) sector and to further enhance the Guidelines as necessary.

The research project involved a review of national and international literature, a survey completed by designated respondents in each of the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and case studies in three ETBs. Regional workshops were conducted with staff from the ETB Adult Literacy Services, designed to familiarise participants with the 'Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services' and to assist ETBs in using them based on the needs of each ETB and their learners.

This report sets out findings from the case studies and documents existing practices and experiences for inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services (ALS) of the Education and Training Boards (ETB).

2. Methodology

In consultation with NALA and with input from the National Advisory Committee of the Basic Skills Advisory Network (BSAN), we designed and implemented case study research to explore the experiences and perceptions of students and staff in ETBs, as well as disability support services regarding the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services. 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 research methods to study a phenomenon in its real-life context. Case studies are useful for exploring the interconnected and embedded nature of the phenomenon being studied.

This stage of the research drew on qualitative research methods of observation, interviews and documentary analysis in three ETBs to capture experiences of inclusion for learners with intellectual disabilities within their Adult Literacy Service. The intention of this research was to map and document the work of the Adult Literacy Services who provide literacy education to a wide range of adult learners, including those with intellectual disabilities.

ETBs were invited to volunteer as a case study site in April-May 2019 and three ETBs agreed to participate. In each ETB, an Adult Education Officer (AEO) and Adult Literacy Organisers (ALO) worked in consultation with CRALE and with their own staff and learners to organise day-long, consultative visits to their centres to meet with staff and learners and discuss their experiences of inclusion. The ALOs identified and recruited key staff involved in the management, support and tutoring of adult learners with intellectual disabilities to meet with CRALE researchers and to take part in a recorded interview. Literacy learners and 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 information and consent process took place. Two members of the research team visited selected education centres and

disability support centres used by the learners in each location. Pre-and post-visit consultations involved emails and telephone calls. Some telephone interviews took place afterwards with staff who were not available on the day of the visit. Learners in existing literacy groups were asked to participate in a workshop activity (described below) to explore their experiences of being a learner in an adult literacy programme.

2.1 Staff interviews

Individual and group interviews were carried out with staff from each ETB and IDSS. Depending on their availability, 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 Adult Literacy Services;
- their understanding and awareness of intellectual disability, inclusion and relevant legislation;
- their knowledge of operational procedures and practices for inclusion, interagency partnerships, professional development, evaluation and outcomes; and
- broader issues, opportunities and challenges for active inclusion.

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

2.2 Learner interviews

The research team met with groups of learners – along with their literacy tutors and Personal Assistants (PAs) – and used a workshop activity to elicit learners' thoughts and observations on their experience of learning with the Adult Literacy Service. Prior to the meeting, tutors were consulted to ensure that the activity was appropriate for the 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 1, a theme of "growth" was used to represent learners' engagement with literacy provision:

Figure 1. "Growth" workshop activity with learners

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

This activity was introduced and facilitated in a structured way by the researchers to support group discussion about their learning. Learners, assisted by tutors, PAs and researchers, recorded their comments on coded notes that were reviewed and discussed by the whole group afterwards. (These coded notes are recorded on Figures 4–8 on pages 17–18). Field notes were taken by researchers to supplement the information gathered.

2.3 Analysis

The transcripts and notes from the case studies were analysed through a process of qualitative analysis using 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). This report contains our analysis of the findings and was used in the final research report about the inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities in the Adult Literacy Services.

2.4 Context for case studies

Three ETBs volunteered to participate in this stage of the research. A generalised overview is described in this section in order to preserve the anonymity of the individuals who participated in this research. The three ETBs represent a cross section of national provision, each located in a different region of the country, with significant variations within and between case study sites in terms of population, size, location and socio-economic makeup of learners. Therefore, they give voice to the very different geographical and demographic profiles in which ETBs operate.

The type of services offered by ETBs also differed, as did the type of provision and historical evolution of their respective engagements with learners with intellectual disabilities. While this is described in more detail in the following sections, generally ETBs had built up local relationships, often through their ALOs (as well as tutors and coordinators), and arrangements with local disability support services. These arrangements were typically with local day centres with literacy tuition offered to service users in the local ETB centre. Where issues of accessibility arose (for example, issues with space and/or ability to travel), the tutor travelled to the IDSS centre – for approximately two hours per week.

In other cases, individual learners with intellectual disabilities and/or their families approached the ETB directly; ETB staff designate these as "self-referred learners". Those 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. The main provision for learners with intellectual disabilities is in literacy groups with other learners with intellectual disabilities. This provision is often unaccredited to begin with and then moving to accreditation at QQI Level 1, 2 and 3 where appropriate. Learners suited to, and wanting to, progress beyond Level 3 are generally integrated into existing programmes in a phased way, for example within the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) programme.

2.5 Adult Literacy Services

As outlined in the research report, government-funded Adult Literacy Services were established in response to the documented 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 sixteen ETBs. The profile of practice varies greatly from one ETB to another depending on a number of factors including when the service was established, its locality, institutional context, and the learning priorities and needs of the local communities it serves. As a result, each Adult Literacy Service has its own distinct history, profile and partnerships with adults with intellectual disabilities, their families, and their local support services.

Adult Literacy Services aim to respond to the needs of all adult learners as appropriate and are central in the provision of basic education programmes for adults with intellectual disabilities, offering unaccredited and accredited courses of learning. Accredited courses are certified by minor or major awards at Levels 1, 2 and 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Adult Literacy Services operate in ETB-managed Adult Education Services under the umbrella of Further Education and Training (FET) provision.

Each Adult Literacy Service is part of an integrated Adult Education Service comprising services in Literacy and Community Education, Adult Literacy services, BTEI, Skills for Work, Adult Education Guidance Initiative, Youthreach, Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (VTOS), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and the Prison Education Scheme.

3. Findings

The data from these case studies were analysed using qualitative research methods with the following themes emerging from the findings:

Figure 2. Themes emerging from case studies

Each theme is discussed here in detail, presenting the unique perspectives of multiple stakeholders involved in the case study.

3.1 Management, structure and culture of Adult Literacy Services

The management structure of each Adult Literacy Service is headed by the Chief Executive, who has overall responsibility for all ETB activities, and the Director 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) and Directors of FET work closely with the Senior Management Team in each Adult Education Service.

Two roles are crucial in the management of the Adult Literacy Services. The role of Adult Education Officer (AEO) is key in the management structures of the ETBs as they manage and coordinate literacy as part of an integrated Adult Education Service. The AEO is the line manager for the managers and coordinators of each service, including the Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO). The AEO has the oversight role especially in terms of coordinating provision across services, creating and/or implementing policies and strategies, monitoring, evaluating and reporting outcomes, and managing and distributing allocated budgets and resources.

The ALOs manage the Adult Literacy Service in the ETB, supported by and reporting to the Adult Education Officer. 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 is responsible for the quality of a diverse range of service provision and is also involved in drawing up policies with regard to Adult Basic Education at local level as part of integrated services within ETBs. The ALO ensures that the educational needs of the learner are met; from initial consultation, to organising appropriate tuition and identifying progression options, to the point of exit. Importantly, by working with colleagues from across the FET sector and linking with internal and external stakeholders, the ALO continues to ensure that options are available for adult learners with literacy difficulties who wish to return to education.

The ALOs are considered key figures by all research participants and play a vital ongoing role in the development of appropriate services and supports for learners with intellectual disabilities. Staff working in IDSS centres described their relationship with the ALO as crucial because they know what is available in terms of provision and respond to identified needs of learners with intellectual disabilities:

> *[S/he knows] what was really out there and what was available to us... The good thing about [the ALO] is that you can say "I'm thinking of this, I'm thinking of that" and it might be off the wall or sound like it's a long way away from where we are, but there is an openness to listening to the organisation and the needs of the organisation and where we might need to go in the future or what needs tweaking. So, it is that opening to listening and understanding that things may need to be done differently or may need to be changed.*
>
> *(IDSS manager, Case study C).*

In most cases, the ALOs are highly experienced staff who have formerly worked as adult literacy tutors. Many of the ALOs had extensive experience in literacy or cognate areas, which had enabled them to build up high levels of capacity and knowledge. Their capacity is evident when there is pressure to achieve sustainable group size (in areas where numbers are low or there is a wide geographical area with poor transport links). In these cases, ALOs must be strategic in their planning.

Groups require a minimum of six so we try to get that and you have to play with the numbers, you have 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)

Many ALOs were involved in setting up innovative practices and elements of the literacy or other educational services and were highly respected individuals who had strong networks of practice in the sector. They work closely with coordinators in the literacy services, described by the ALOs as essential personnel who must balance the needs and demands of multiple stakeholders in the delivery of effective and inclusive literacy services. In one case study, the AEO and ALO spoke about the challenges facing their literacy coordinator when they set up adult literacy provision for adults with intellectual disabilities.

[I]t is very challenging for the coordinators and it can be difficult for the tutors if it's so different. It's difficult to be responsive from a management perspective because nothing is fixed. It impacts on the coordinators hugely as they are the ones who have to move everything around all the time and of course it impacts on the resource workers so I see the coordinators as the meat in the sandwich as they are trying to mind the needs of the learners and the tutors and they are probably getting it from both angles sometimes so it can be very challenging for them.

(AEO, Case study B)

Without the [coordinator], it, [the inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in Adult Literacy Services] would not have happened. There would have been some tutor hours going towards it but there is not a dedicated post without the foresight to see this work. I have started a similar structure in [X location] but I was encouraged to do it from seeing it work here. The coordinator is very familiar with the programmes and can see if we do this and do that, it would work.

(ALO, Case study B)

The role of ALOs, programme coordinators within the Adult Literacy Services and literacy tutors is very diverse, as it also involves promoting the service and recruiting learners across the board as well as teaching and coordination. Networks and knowledge of the community are vital and AEOs and ALOs describe how they are reliant on staff capacity for networking.

The networking within the community is key, that when you have three or four learners you know people, so you can get another one or two people to start with and there is a strength in that within the staff. We have developed our social media and marketing over the past few years, but for us the notes read from the Parish newsletter are probably reaching more people than social media... Our staff are very good at reaching out to people. You have to be, otherwise you'd constantly be keeping people waiting to fill a group.

(ALO, Case study A)

3.2 The impact of relevant policies and strategies

ETB staff described a range of policies relevant to learners with intellectual disabilities and those that impact on the day-to-day operation of literacy services. These include policies and procedures on equality and diversity, life-long learning, social inclusion, and accessibility. Concerns were raised about the absence of a specific policy for learners with intellectual disabilities, a matter which had been raised through the Adult Literacy Organisers Association (ALOA), with several staff members from adult literacy services highlighting a perceived lack of clarity around the function, role, obligations and overall liability of Adult Literacy Services in meeting inclusive requirements.

These concerns coalesced 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.

In relation to concerns about 'double funding' and duplication of work, AEOs and ALOs spoke about the difficulty in ensuring resources were allocated fairly without a clear idea of what other agencies were providing:

> *For me the question then is, and 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)*

> *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 it's a bit murky at the moment and it's hard to decide who goes where and does what.*
>
> *(AEO, Case study A)*

ETB staff also spoke about challenges in meeting the sometimes multiple and complex needs of learners with intellectual disabilities and indeed the differing needs of those with physical disabilities. There was also a desire for more clarification on 'who should be doing what' in terms of the care of people with intellectual disabilities:

> *What should you be doing? And if you don't, are you putting yourself in some position in relation to infringing on the Equality Acts?*
>
> *(ALO, Case study B)*

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)*

Specific roles in the ETB staffing structure are assigned responsibility for policy implementation and hence, were more knowledgeable of this area. AEOs described a key element of the role as responding to and implementing policy and strategy changes and gathering data, a challenging task for management staff to achieve without disrupting core learning:

> *[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, senior managers felt it was particularly difficult for those managing adult literacy provision for three reasons. Firstly, the challenge of fitting the unique profile of ALS into the broader requirements and strategic targets set out in the current FET Strategic Plan:

> *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)*

Retaining learners and sustaining the required number of learners registered in each class was another challenge identified in relation to meeting numerical targets. Diminishing class sizes generally meant 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 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 three people in a group doing Level 1 and three people who are doing Level 2 because otherwise it is hard to sustain the group.*
>
> *(ALO, Case study A)*

Secondly, it was noted that the FET sector is at the forefront of a large number of policy reviews and strategy changes. ETB management and staff listed 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 4 and 5. These reviews bring welcome attention and recognition of the role of ALS in FET but equally they place pressure on them as they 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). This applies across the literacy sectors with ETB staff describing increased interactions with those in employment, especially through the Skills for Work programme 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)*

Most ETB staff were very aware and cognisant of the 2018 'Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services' and, from the ALOs' perspective, the guidelines are perceived as impactful. Many of those interviewed pointed out that the 2018 Guidelines acknowledge the work and inclusive approaches currently in place across services. This was considered particularly true of the ALOs because of their role in raising awareness about the adult literacy services in the community and in keeping the needs of the learners at the heart of their activities.

Queries and suggestions were made about some aspects of the Guidelines, including:

- That learners with intellectual disabilities are not asked to speak as intellectual disabilities advocates within their own centres as it differentiates them in a way that some staff feel is problematic.
- That the role of the inclusion development worker should be centrally resourced, and ideally positioned at the ETB level to facilitate networking and exchanges across centres.
- That the guidelines are extended to include examples of educational strategies and best practice in teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation.

3.2.1. Collaborative partnerships with intellectual disabilities support services

IDSS staff described how, in the past, they had not engaged with adult education services, instead seeing their role as providers of occupational and training programmes. Typical activities within their services included woodwork, sewing, horticulture and catering. In some instances, IDSS centres entered into small contracts with local companies to provide them with products made by service users, for example constructing wooden pallets or sewing ribbons. Crucially, all of this occurred within the centre.

The shift towards rights-based services for people with disabilities, including independent living and de-congregated settings, was a driving factor in IDSS staff reaching out to existing community-based services, including the ALS. This shift from in-house training to engagement with external FET providers was critical in linking adults with intellectual disabilities with services and people in their local community.

> *Our first introduction to the ETB was back in 2002. We completed an assessment of needs of our service users and that's how we determined that people wanted to live and use services in their own community. So, we looked at accommodation that was available and we found a house. We moved some local people, who had been travelling to use our services, into the house, back in their community. And at that stage, I linked with the ALO and we accessed education services in [the local ETB centre] and that was the first time we accessed education for our people. And that went really, really well.*
>
> *(IDSS manager, Case study C)*

The IDSS continued to build on these partnerships with ETBs, especially through strengthening relationships with local ALOs, literacy coordinators and tutors. Staff described how the commitment to learner-centred

education and the strategic imagination of these individuals resulted in nuanced literacy provision tailored to the specific needs of learners with intellectual disabilities. Many described how this way of working had evolved organically and that they had not been aware of how it had developed from the different perspectives of the intellectual disability support services and the ETBs before the case study interviews took place. This gap in the information regarding the origin of such practices is indicative of as yet unheard and undocumented stories, conversations, and perspectives from all those involved.

In many cases, IDSS and ETB staff meet regularly to evaluate the programmes and learning occurring and to plan future initiatives. These practices expanded responsively as more community-based settings were established and more adults with intellectual disabilities engaged with existing community services. As learners progressed in the literacy services, they also began to look at different strands of ETB services (as described in later sections) and develop fruitful, long-term and service-wide relationships.

Staff highlighted the extent to which supporting learners with intellectual disabilities is dependent on collaborative partnerships and networks between staff within and between the different education and IDSS centres. When these relationships work – as they do in many of the instances evident across these case studies – they create a deeply learner-centred and responsive culture.

This proactive and positive relationship between IDSS centres and ETBs is not evident in all cases, and ALOs describe how IDSS centres respond in diverse ways to the shift towards mainstreaming of literacy provision in the ETB. As one ALO points out:

> *So, if you have people who don't get on or don't see it as that important, that's hugely difficult. But equally it is very difficult to structurally replace the human aspect of this. Because you can write it into policy but if those two people don't see it the same way, nothing is going to happen, they are going to take it off the shelf once a year and say, "yeah, we did it, tick, tick, tick".*
>
> *(ALO 2, Case study B)*

There was a perception that some IDSS centres view literacy tuition hours as a way of assisting their staffing or activities within their centres for their service users, (as they are referred to by IDSS).

> *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)*

Some challenges were identified by Adult Literacy Services staff in managing the relationship between the IDSS, the learner, and literacy service, in addition to ensuring that the needs and wants of the learners were kept central:

> *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, Case study B)*

The case studies reveal many proactive and productive relationships between IDSS centres and the respective Adult Literacy Services, with IDSS staff and ETB staff meeting regularly to evaluate the programmes and learning occurring and to plan future initiatives. This partnership approach expanded responsively as intellectual disabilities support services began to establish more community-based residential settings and engage more with existing community services.

Through these meetings, ALOs and other adult literacy staff establish functional and collaborative relationships with local IDSSs. Typically, the ALO will meet on regular occasions with IDSS staff and service users to assess and profile the needs of each person before learners commence adult literacy classes. This is to assess whether staff from both organisations feel that the Adult Literacy Services can meet service users' learning needs and to ensure that they are able to match them with an appropriate placement and put in place any accessibility and resource requirements. Having experienced staff to conduct these initial meetings and ongoing consultations is key as it means that the Adult Literacy Services do not promise what they cannot deliver. In addition, it also means that they do not tend to have difficulties supporting learners with intellectual disabilities as they have carefully assessed

and prepared their supports. These meetings continue to review, match and plan for future education services for learners.

In one instance, an ALS had provided literacy training to IDSS staff so that they could support their service-users between classes and help them with reinforcement and retention of learning. In another instance, an IDSS offered to provide professional development training to ETB staff:

> *That was a really good move forward and [the IDSS] suggested it, in fact, as opposed to buying-in training. This is an organisation with whom we have ongoing contact and they are really aware of our context and organisation as opposed to buying in a private company. So, they are developing a training schedule with us to discuss 'is this relevant for your staff?'*
>
> *(ALO, Case study B)*

3.3 Appropriate enrolment, initial assessment and placement procedures

In all case study sites, we found a clear consensus that there is no such thing as a typical literacy learner or learner with intellectual disability. Consequently, the initial meetings and assessments with learners and their support staff are a key part of developing an appropriate and effective individual learning plan for each person. This is conducted through a gradual and supportive process, with ETB staff often meeting with disability support staff in the first instance to ensure a broad match with their services, before meeting the person with the intellectual disability to create their individual learning plan. The person may also be accompanied by family members and/or an advocate or support worker. ETB staff then consult with the intellectual disability support staff in terms of scheduling what days might suit the learner, identify any transport and other resources required, as well as consideration of any of the learner's particular issues or needs. The initial meeting with learners usually occurs in the disability support centre because the learners are more comfortable within a familiar setting for that initial meeting. From there on, the relationship is primarily between the ETB and the learner. This is described by AEOs and ALOs as a "holistic approach", one that ensures the learner is matched appropriately with provision. Matching or placing a learner is often carried out by a placement committee (or equivalent) of relevant ETB staff and other appropriate agencies (e.g. the local IDSS).

The ETB-Adult Education Guidance Service (ETB-AEGS) often have an input on the placement committee, making certain that the learner's short and long-term needs are at the heart of the decision-making process. The ETB-AEGS's broad knowledge of ETB services means that they play an important role in ensuring learners' needs can be catered for; that they are placed with the appropriate adult education service, and that they have any necessary supports in place.

IDSS staff have also developed assessment models to plan individual development pathways and described using a range of person–centred planning tools to determine learners' needs, wants, abilities and goals for the future. The assessment process can include consultation with learners' families or significant others (where possible and desirable) and is reviewed at an annual meeting with each learner. Once a pathway is agreed, IDSS staff consult with the ETBs to see how they can support learning goals.

> *So, things like horticulture, cooking, arts and crafts, reading, writing, they would be the key skills that most people need in their lives and for their learning. So, from their person-centred plans, we would try to link them to the courses on offer to ensure that they are achieving their goals.*
>
> *(IDSS manager, Case study C)*

These learning plans assess learners' current literacy attainment and consequently provide material for planning how they could further enhance their literacy capacity. This 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 assessment process reveals the uniqueness of each learner's literacy profile:

> *Sometimes we would find that we have students who have real spikiness [in their literacy skills] where maybe their reading is at Level 3 but their writing is at Level 1.*
>
> *(ALO 2, Case study B)*

ETB staff put a similar process in place for learners who self-refer to meet and draw up individual learning plans for each learner in consultation with their families and advocates where appropriate. Developing collaborative partnerships between services had significant advantages for learners, as the following examples illustrate:

I link mainly with an instructor in the IDSS centre and [they] 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)

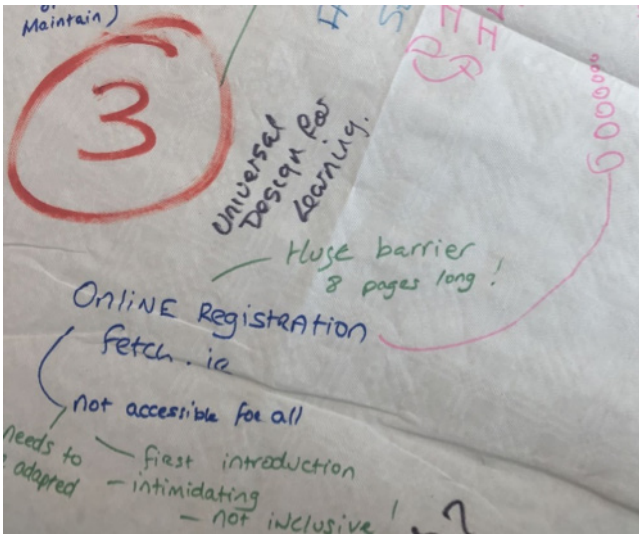
Flexibility in the placement process was also considered essential. ETB tutors and management both spoke about the importance of preliminary planning and post-placement flexibility:

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. Because tutors would be familiar with the choices of modules.

(ALO, Case study C)

In cases of self-referral, i.e. when an adult with intellectual disabilities and/or a family member approaches adult education services independently, the online information and application system was identified, particularly by ALS staff, as a potential barrier.

Figure 3. Workshop participants reflections on institutional barriers



Research participants felt that completing the Further Education and Training Course Hub (FETCH) form without support or guidance can be a complicated process. One workshop participant described the online process as 'intimidating' to complete in the introductory stages and others agreed that relatively high literacy skills are needed to complete the form due to the personal information required and the overall complexity of the information required.

ETB staff, especially those in the literacy service, described broader challenges linked to new developments in monitoring and evaluating procedures in FET provision. The Learner Database, a component of the SOLAS/ETBI Programme for Learning Support Services (PLSS), was designed to provide a set of data to inform decisions on priorities for planning and investment. This records the enrolment, progression and outcomes of learners within the ETB on an ongoing basis. It was described as "complicated" for ETB management and beyond the literacy capabilities of some students:

PLSS form doesn't make for informed consent very easily. There is an easy-to-read guide which they did, but for some of the students we have, it is miles away from what they are able for. And again, it applies to the GDPR thing as well.

(ALO 2, Case study B)

While ETB staff acknowledged the need for a streamlined and effective database of adult learning, it was felt that the existing 'one-size-fits-all' approach was a significant barrier in recruiting adults with intellectual disabilities and in capturing and reporting their achievements in learning. ETB staff described literacy as a "deeply personal journey for learners", with timeframes, levels of engagement and capacity varying hugely between learners. Literacy is the entry point for many adult learners and 'a learner's confidence levels can be low'.

3.4 Learning identities, relationships and cultures

We met several adult literacy learners with intellectual disabilities in a range of group settings and sizes in each of the three case study sites. The majority of these groups were solely for learners with intellectual disabilities at Level 1 or 2. While formal, recorded interviews were pre-arranged, the research team met informally with learners from an integrated Level 3 group who were receiving literacy tuition at the time of the visit. All the learners that completed the workshop activity were in group tuition comprised solely of learners with intellectual disabilities.

The learner groups provided keen insight 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. As evidenced from figures 4-8, learners cited many benefits to participating in learning. 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 4. Learners' reflections on what they like about literacy classes

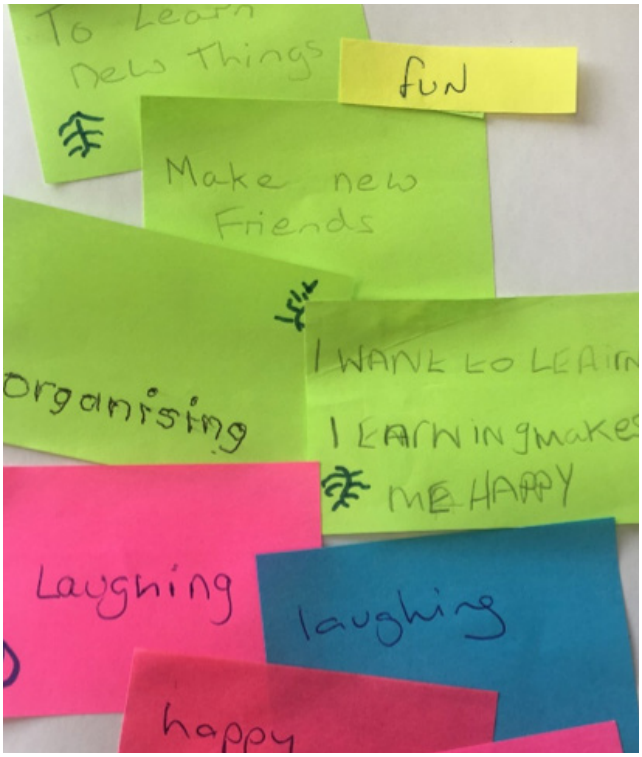
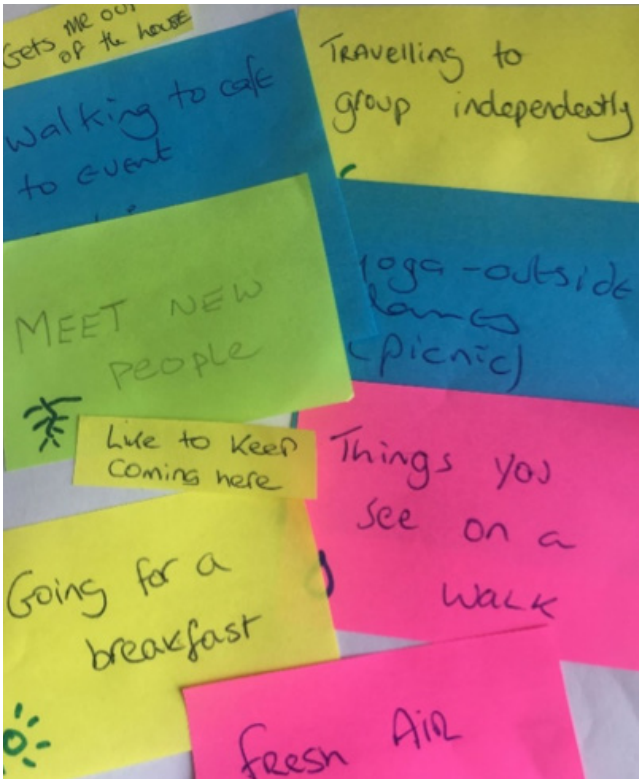
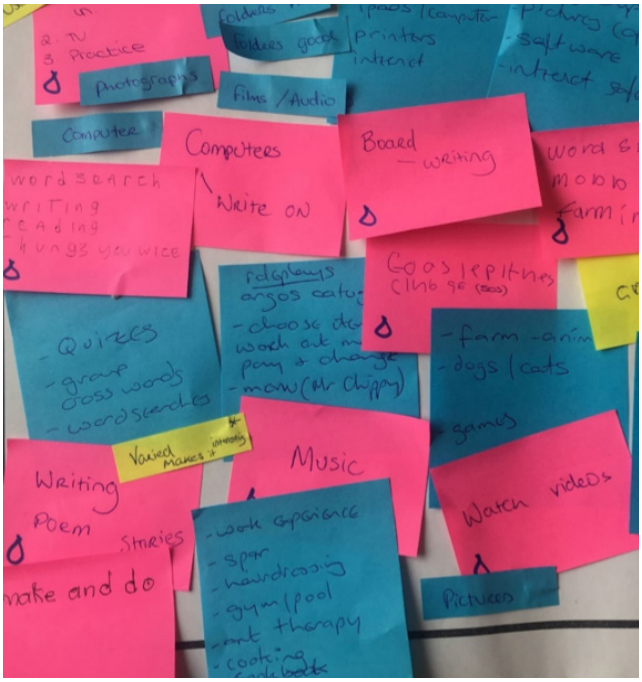


Figure 5. Learners' reflections on what they like about literacy classes



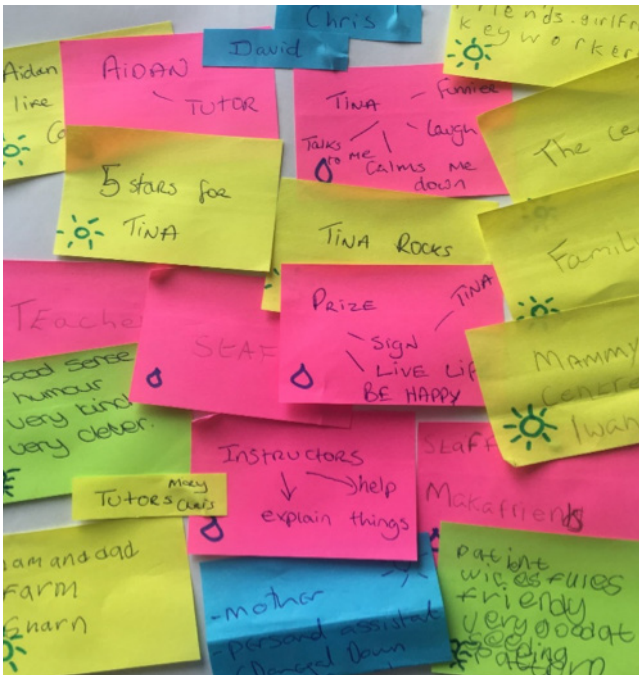
Social interaction was also mentioned by IDSS and ETB staff and acknowledged as a key element of literacy learning, social inclusion and personal development. Tutors regularly built activities into their teaching practice that would get learners out of the classroom and into the community, for example, 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 6. Learners reflections on learning activities they enjoy



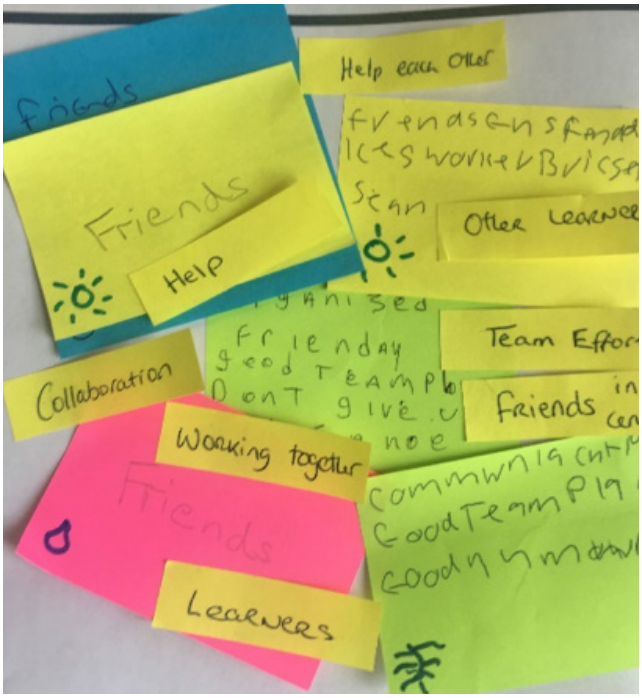
Learners were very clear about the affective element of learning in terms of how they enjoyed learning and liked learning new things as well as meeting friends and new people. For some learners, the sense of independence achieved by travelling to the ETB on their own was important, while others spoke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

Figure 7. Learners' reflections on who helps them learn



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 8. Learners' reflections on who helps them learn



Learners spoke of their enjoyment of having folders (for assessment) and putting things in them with the help of their tutor. 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)*

IDSS staff were also clear about the benefits of literacy learning for their service-users, especially as this was often the learner's first formal introduction to learning, perhaps having only engaged in occupational work up to that point. As one IDSS staff member explained, the decision to move away from institutionalised care towards de-congregated settings and independent living, created the need for greater engagement with existing community-based services, including the Adult Literacy Services. This staff member described the benefit this transition brought to their service-users:

[It] was our first introduction to education for our people and that went really well. They achieved FETAC [now QQI] level 1 and 2 and they really enjoyed it and got a lot from it, they really enjoyed going out and that was the highlight of their week, they loved the interactive nature of the learning. The tutor made it very enjoyable for them, very easy for them to interact and to understand it. It was at their own pace all the time and our own staff were available on site to support our learners, so for everyone it was a really great experience.

(IDSS manager, Case study C)

Staff also spoke of the benefits of engagement with the Adult Literacy Services for learners with intellectual disabilities, with one ETB coordinator talking about marked improvements in the learner's personal wellbeing.

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

(Resource Worker, Case study B)

Staff also described how learners with intellectual disabilities developed their own learning identities within the ETB.

They exchange almost one identity for another [when they enter the ETB]. 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)

In some cases, improvements in behaviour were visible.

They lose certain behaviours, you know? Some people would have different behaviours, they act different, but [when they went into the ETB setting], they become completely different people.

(IDSS Manager, Case study C)

In terms of the wider benefits of inclusive practice, learners with intellectual disabilities challenge staff to explore their own assumptions.

And what was also very evident to us as well was not to underestimate what people can learn, that sometimes we might think that Level 3 or 4 is too high and they are not able to learn, but we were pleasantly surprised how much they can learn and how they adjust to the requirements, they were really good.

(Resource Worker, Case study C)

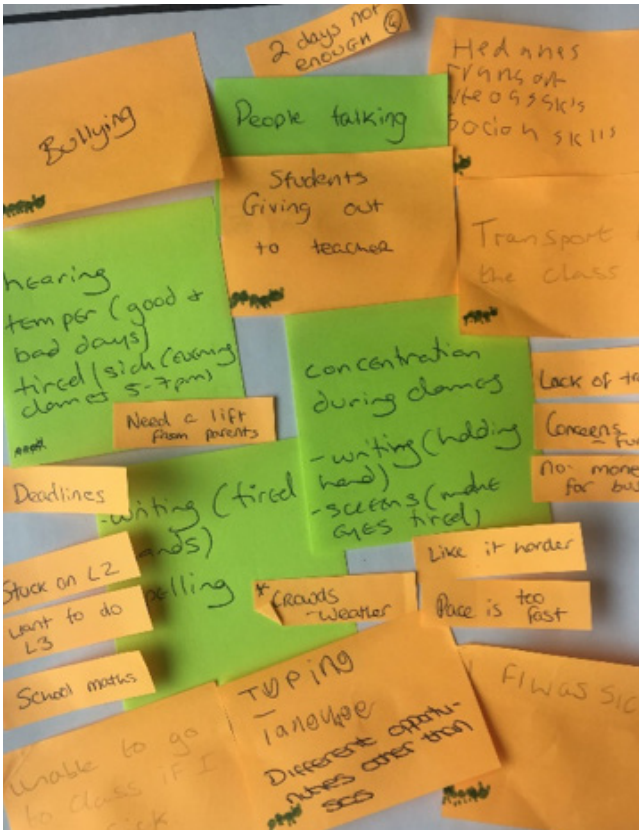
Generally, ETB staff were conscious that there is a tendency to "underestimate people with intellectual disabilities, what their interests are, and what they want to know" (Tutor 1, Case study B). Tutors also acknowledged the strong desire of learners with intellectual disabilities to learn 'what everyone else knows':

[...] I just remember one man with intellectual disabilities saying to me 'I just want to know what everyone else knows so that I can join in a conversation you know'. And that is knowing bits about politics and knowing bits about history and knowing bits about the way the world is. And I found that some of the groups I work with, they are interested in the most amazing things, they really are interested in learning, you know, but solid stuff, not fluff, not occupational therapy, you know, not worksheets, they do really want to learn stuff that the rest of us take for granted.

(Tutor B, Case study B)

3.5 Challenges and limiting factors for learning

Figure 9. Learners' reflections on barriers to learning



Learners spoke about the factors that limit or hinder their learning, including previous experiences of bullying, finding it difficult to concentrate, holding a pen (dependent on mobility), computer screens making their eyes tired, or having a bad day (when they are out of sorts, tired or sick). Some learners found the programme level too difficult, while others in the same group found it too easy. Some expressed a desire to pursue different options and to go into other classes in the future. One group want to keep, and ideally expand, their literacy provision from two hours a week and were conscious of uncertainty around funding for this. Overall, learners were clear about what they like and do not like in their learning.

Learner expectations are key in identifying their interests and aspirations for the future and ALS staff are conscious of the need to learner-centred in their approach. However, this can also be a challenge as some learners struggle to broaden their scope and consider unfamiliar but potentially beneficial learning goals.

> *Some of the more abstract aspects and modules, in terms of planning skills and that type of stuff, are very relevant but they wouldn't be the ones that people would choose if you know what I mean, so they would say 'I want to do maths, I want to do reading' not 'I want to do life planning skills', so we kind of bring that in and say that's the next thing on the subject list for certification.*
>
> *(ALO 2, Case study B)*

One tutor reflected on how a student began with a clear idea of what she wanted to do, but subsequently changed direction as a consequence of a Resource Worker's suggestion:

> *One [learner], all she wanted was hair and beauty and [she] didn't come to us for a year because she had done the hair and beauty classes and the personal care. I thought she has such potential here and I said to her "Why don't you come in to do the IT and we can look at your Level 3 major award?". And when she walked into the computers, it was like "why wasn't I here before?". Whereas before, all that was in her head was 'I only want hair and beauty' and she didn't see the bigger picture until she got into the classroom and now 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)*

ETB staff also commented on the different expectations of students, identifying specific needs from distinctive profiles of learners with intellectual disabilities. Those leaving school in recent years have expectations that they will continue to have access to support services and resources, which are not necessarily or automatically available to FET learners (such as special education needs provision in schools and access supports in higher education).

> *Especially now with the younger people coming in stream, they just want it, they see it as part of their routine and their life so they want to be able access it so we have been very lucky to have an ETB offering their service.*
>
> *(IDSS Manager, Case study C)*

Learners who are self-referred lack the support structures and rhythms of the disability support services and ETB staff described the importance of routine and the need to keep disruptions and changes to class schedules to a minimum to avoid confusing learners with intellectual disabilities.

> *[T]hings like bank holidays can upset their week a little, knowing that you're back today as opposed to a having a two-day lead into the class. For those who don't have additional support, that can be challenging.*
>
> *(ALO, Case study B)*

Transport was a key issue for self-referred students who are often reliant on family and community supports for travel to and from an ETB or training centre. This was particularly true in rural and small-town locations where there is little or no public transport. In one case, the learner's only option was to get a taxi, an expensive barrier to inclusion and identified as 'very costly' with 'limited' options available to 'off-set costs" (ALO 2, Case study B).

Transport was also an issue mentioned by some learners in the workshop group activity, especially relevant to those who were reliant on family members for transport to the ETB centre.

More generally, societal attitudes about disability and capacity can be a hindrance for learners with intellectual disabilities, as demonstrated by one tutor:

> *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)*

But this is something that ETBs attempt to address within the context of the wider ETB, working to ensure an inclusive culture for all students in FET.

> *For the students who don't have intellectual disabilities, the mainstream students if you like, which we have, we would see it and it's one of the reasons why we felt it was important to bring the classes into the centre. It is important for them to add diversity to their world as well and so having individuals with intellectual disabilities, or with syndromes which may be more obvious than others, sitting in the kitchen with others, before and after class and at breaktime, people get to mix in a safe and limited context. That can be challenging for many of our other students… It brings them into them into contact with people with intellectual disabilities and other types of disability who they normally wouldn't meet in the to and fro of their life, and that creates conditions for people to think more about our society and their society and the issues of disability.*
>
> *(ALO 2, Case study B)*

This raises the sensitive issue of supporting all learners to be inclusive, especially where learners are themselves vulnerable. Hence, broad inclusion and mainstreaming can be difficult for services like adult literacy.

> *The cohorts we work with, because people 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 are 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)*

3.6 Importance of tutor selection and tutor supports

This study has collected evidence of a strong culture of good adult learning practice delivered by dedicated, skilled and inspirational tutors, who have demonstrated decades of commitment to adult education using a learner-centred approach to literacy. Many tutors have been consciously embedding literacy and numeracy into broader vocational learning, giving clear examples of integration in practice. They are also very conscious of integrating the learners into the life of the ETB, ensuring that they are mixing with other learners and groups during breaks, before and after sessions, and during social events and activities.

Literacy tutors can have an enormous range in their work, with one tutor describing how, in the one afternoon, they work "with a group of apprentices on maths support and then I'm working with a student who doesn't have any words, isn't very verbal" (Tutor B, Case study B). This requires an extensive pedagogical and relational capacity to span this range in the one afternoon, let alone the range of different groups, courses and locations with whom tutors work during the 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 ID are often sent to us because we can respond in that way.*
>
> *(ALO 2, Case study C)*

Tutors described how they enjoyed this variety in their teaching, but also spoke about how it can stretch them, in terms of pedagogical and relational demands. ALOs described how matching tutors to learner groups was vital, in terms of being able to assign tutors with the responsiveness, range, and flexibility required 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 capacity of tutors to work empathetically is vital, drawing on their communication skills, ability to relate to students on a personal level, and to creatively negotiate programme and assessment briefs to suit the needs of individual students, often in groups with learners at diverse levels of educational ability. This is aided by their capacity to be learner-centred, as evidenced by this tutor's approach.

> *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)*

One of the key challenges for tutors includes managing expectations of certification at QQI Level 1 and 2, and AEOs were very mindful of this.

> *And the tutors with whom we work, certification wasn't what they signed up for, if you think of your traditional literacy [course], it was never going to be about QQI certification and ticking all these boxes and filling in portfolios, so there is a bit of CPD for us to do as well with a lot of tutors and that has been a focus of my interactions with them.*
>
> *(AEO, Case study B)*

> *For the tutors this is very difficult, they have been doing this for a long, long time and would see themselves as advocates for their students, which is what you want them to be. And they are very mindful of where the learners are at and are very vocal in making sure I know where the learners are at and that certification is not always the space that they are in, Nevertheless, I have to be in the position that somebody has to get to that level as we have X amount to get so it is very challenging when literacy hasn't been in that space before.*
>
> *(AEO, Case study B)*

Interviews with AEOs and ALOs revealed an awareness of tutors' need for professional development and supports. It was acknowledged that literacy work with learners with intellectual disabilities can require different skillsets and pedagogical devices and that tutors need practical support in developing these. Workshop participants also highlighted tutors' concerns and fears around meeting the challenges of inclusive practice, an issue some linked to a need for more professional development in this area. One ALO spoke about the anxiety some tutors have, arising from their lack of experience, and how specific training on teaching literacy to adults with intellectual disabilities would help allay those fears and provide adequate support to tutors.

For some staff who haven't been working with individuals with ID or special needs, there is a small amount of anxiety in relation to it borne out of the best place as they don't want to do anything wrong or say anything wrong so that's where the specific training [about literacy tutoring with learners with ID] came from. 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)

AEOs try to ensure that tutors are aware of the need for flexibility when they are initially interviewed for the role. One AEO gave the following example as an illustration of the need for tutors to have 'huge flexibility' when meeting the changing needs of learners, centres and services.

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).

Tutors spoke about their commitment to creating inclusive learning environments and that creating lesson plans and materials for adult learners with intellectual disabilities was a time-consuming process. Tutors describe how others support them in their practice, especially their fellow tutors and learners through dialogue and sharing of practice.

Your colleagues support you in your work, but also the learners themselves are a great support because you get such feedback and your colleagues, and my ALO and the other tutors. If you are having issues you go to them and say this is my issue here and what would you suggest. And we have huge breadth of experience here from tutors and they will always talk it through and find a way to support you getting through it.

(Tutor B, Case study B)

Professional Development (PD) to further develop these capacities and support tutors is essential. One ALO spoke about the need for PD for staff to help them meet the challenges of supporting learning.

You are constantly looking for that flexibility within your staff and more and more, we are providing CPD for them in terms of learners with issues that needs supports which can be challenging, for the staff to have resilience and not to have an answer for everything but to be able to signpost it, if people are having problems to talk to them and see if they getting help, and if they are not, you can't fix the problem for them but you can get them to access other supports which are there.

(ALO, Case study A)

ETB staff were cognisant of the additional workload attached to ensuring learning environments were fully inclusive and that this extra work was not reimbursed.

There isn't a way that if you teach a specific group with special needs that you, by default, get an additional two or three hours for preparation or anything like that. If we know there's a specific need we'll try but in general, it's treated the same as any other class.

(ALO, Case study C)

3.7 Challenges and innovations in pedagogical practices

Case studies revealed a strong commitment to working with learners with intellectual disabilities and a willingness to work in innovative ways to achieve this. One ALO described an overall commitment to working with learners with intellectual disabilities and how it required creativity and flexibility from the Adult Literacy Services.

You really do need to think out of the box and come up with Plan A, B, C and see very creative solutions for your portfolios as well and I think we only had one tutor at the time because we were just beginning at that time and we needed to see if it would work and sometimes it was in the [Centre] houses and sometimes it was in the ETB centre and sometimes it was on the soccer pitch, and sometimes it was wherever it would work, so that's how it started. So, the literacy service was always involved.

(ALO, Case study B)

Tutors described a deep commitment and understanding of pedagogy and an openness to their own learning as they continually meet students with issues which they haven't experienced before and have to engage in a process of pedagogical experimentation until they find a unique learning process and relationships that work for the learner:

> *So it's actually fascinating as you have to learn how people are learning and every year you learn something new. It can take a long time, a number of months trying things that are failing until you find an approach that works, and the learners might be perfectly happy with what they are doing but you are aware that you are not making that connection with the learning, because it is about learning as well. It isn't just about the relationship with the learner, it's about establishing a relationship around learning.*
>
> *(Tutor 2, Case study B)*

Tutors employed adult education methodologies by drawing on the prior experience and existing knowledge of students (Fenwick, 2003). One tutor described how previous experience tends to be underestimated in the case of learners with intellectual disabilities:

> *If you ask the [learners with intellectual disabilities] before you cover a topic, how much they know about a topic, you'd be fascinated with what they already know.*
>
> *(Tutor 2, Case study B)*

One ALO spoke about utilising a consultation process with learner groups and IDSS and ETB staff to develop and agree literacy course components in a dialogical and structured approach.

> *[We] talk about what is this component, what is that component and what would you like to do when you come back after the summer … so the decision about each component is the groups. I'll have examples of things that they can do in each one … some photo props to bring those with me just to show them what kinds of things they can do in each of the components to see what they are interested in.*
>
> *(ALO 2, Case study C)*

In their activities, tutors also demonstrated pedagogical creativity to support learners by innovating with an enormous range of creative mediums and activities in order to communicate with learners (especially with those who are non-verbal) and to enhance literacy learning. These mediums and activities include:

- mosaics,
- arts and craft,
- music,
- role playing,
- quizzes,
- word searches,
- cooking,
- photographs and other visual aids,
- internet searches, and
- historical archiving.

Many of these activities were also mentioned earlier by learners as part of what they enjoy in their learning. For example, one group described how they used music to learn numeracy and took photographs of bridges to learn about linear structures. Another group of learners described how they liked ending the class listening to an audio book, joining a wider book club project in the local community, so learners read a selected book concurrently with others in local schools, libraries, and book clubs. 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 pay themselves (as part of numeracy and budgeting module).

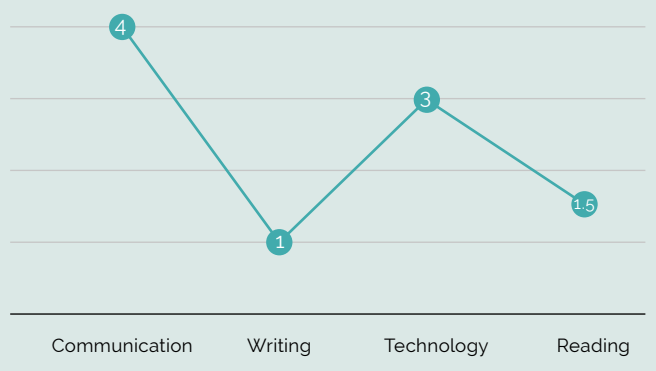
While tutors demonstrated great range and responsiveness in their approaches to teaching and learning, they also highlighted particular features that they feel are distinctive to this cohort of learners and which carry implications for their pedagogical practice. For example, tutors and ALOs agreed that a slower pace and rhythm is needed for learners with intellectual disabilities. They also highlighted the challenges of supporting differentiated learning as learners in a group can differ enormously in terms of diversity in their learning skills, across and between learners. Tutors also described the need for flexibility 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)*

Similar to other literacy learners, learners with intellectual disabilities often achieve different types of learning at different times, ways and levels. Hence, literacy learners and literacy learner groups have what is described as a "spiky" literacy profile (EPALE, 2019).

This spiky profile acknowledges that learners have different levels of skill in diverse areas (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Example of spiky literacy profile



This presents pedagogical challenges for tutors who have to be able to respond to diverse levels and learning profiles within groups, especially in existing programmes with pre-defined learning outcomes and awards structures.

> *There's so much work you have to put into it and then you're trying to find things that are to their level but also that ticks the box on the other side for QQI. And their interests, because the lads won't be long telling you about it [laughs].*
>
> *(Tutor 4, Case study C)*

As described earlier, the Adult Literacy Services develops individual learning and literacy plans for each learner so they can integrate learners with intellectual disabilities into existing programmes at different times to get major awards when students are ready. Tutors described how they enrol learners midway through the year in order to integrate into a new course structure and learning group when learners have become familiar with the learning environment. Learners often complete more practical or vocational courses first before moving onto modules with more challenging requirements in reading, writing and numeracy. Learners with intellectual disabilities tend to be allocated additional time to complete module components. ALOs spoke about developing several modules at QQI Level 1 and 2, for learners with intellectual disabilities to attempt so that they could consolidate their learning (as learning retention was a key challenge for many). Developing educational responses tailored to each learner's literacy needs and capabilities, capacity for group work, memory and concentration levels, and interests requires expert knowledge from ALOs and tutors. It also requires familiarity with, and creativity approaches to, the strategic requirements of different course and awards requirements.

Peer support was also considered important and the Adult Literacy Services integrated learners with varying levels of intellectual disability and differing capacities together in a group, matching learners to support one another in the class. This was corroborated by the learners who mentioned, several times, how their 'friends' supported their learning in class (see Figure 8).

3.8 Challenges and innovations in recognition of learning

The flexibility for learners 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 capabilities when first engaging with the Adult Literacy Services, and in many cases, have negative memories and fears from previous school experiences. Tutors are often reluctant or fearful to engage accredited learning initially and it is often not even mentioned to new learners, instead presented sensitively as an optional pathway that can be taken up at a later stage when learners are ready. Tutors often introduce the idea of accreditation after learners have successfully completed some of the portfolio activities for Level 1. This approach scaffolds literacy and numeracy acquisition so that learning is incremental and measured in an unobtrusive way.

> *While certification isn't the be-all and end-all but the bits that [learners with ID] 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 as well 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)*

AEOs and ALOs were particularly conscious of accreditation as they have to implement and monitor the increased targets of 10% accreditation for Adult Literacy Services. They called for greater awareness from SOLAS in terms of how long the literacy journey takes given these targets of 10% increase in certification. As noted earlier, the individual nature of literacy means that each individual's learning journey is very 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 is 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 engagements with ALS may be along the "wavy line" described later, with learners engaging at different times over different lengths of time and sometimes taking several courses on the same level. Hence, 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" progression is difficult to measure and requires great understanding and awareness of the challenges of bringing learners with intellectual disabilities to accreditation standards. It also requires an acknowledgement that, although a diverse group, learners with intellectual disabilities have specific needs that are unique to their community and may not be commensurate with formal accreditation in every instance. The perceived disconnection between the reality of learners' lives and the setting of appropriate qualitative targets for this cohort is a point of tension. One AEO pointed out that SOLAS needs to be aware of "why there is such a disconnect between certification levels and the volume of learners in their literacy service" (AEO, Case study A). Several research participants highlighted a disparity between actual learning outcomes achieved by learners and those required in QQI certified courses.

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.

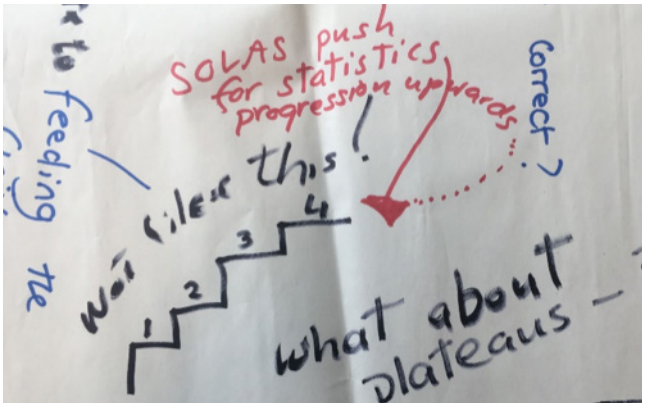
(ALO 2, Case study C)

AEOs, in particular, are very conscious that the number of learners receiving accreditation at Level 1 and 2 did not rise this year as expected and that it will be on the Strategic Performance Agreement agenda again next year. Literacy is one of the transversal skills for which SOLAS has increased targets in conjunction with increased targets for certification in literacy. AEOs feel that the 10% increase in the number of learners is achievable but that the 10% increased accreditation in literacy will always be challenging, if not unfeasible for the Adult Literacy Services; given the unique biographies of learners with intellectual disabilities. ETBs have developed their own qualitative indicators of literacy progression and one ALO suggested that such indicators could be adopted by SOLAS to properly assess and recognise literacy progression, giving the example of how:

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 feels 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)

Figure 11. Workshop participants feedback on barriers



Workshop participants corroborated the need for a more flexible approach to assessment and accreditation. There were requests that targets set for ALS accommodate learners with intellectual disabilities who 'plateau' at a particular level, making upwards progression unattainable.

However, accreditation, where appropriate, was perceived as valuable and important as it recognises and validates the educational achievements of learners with intellectual disabilities. There was a consensus amongst research participants that learners viewed accreditation and certification as a positive goal and experience. Many of those interviewed 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.

We had Youthreach students getting their awards and we had BTEI getting their Level 5 [award] and there would be students [with intellectual disabilities] getting their Level 2 and 3 [award] and it was just very much a community occasion and there was no difference between anybody, everybody was the same.

(ALO, Case study B)

We know from the students who have attended the awards ceremony that they absolutely love it and it is different from getting a certificate of achievement at the end of the year in their centre or here with their group and me. It's a different feeling going to a hotel with the fancy things and all the other people... Not only is it important to the students but it is important to their families and their families are very important in the process of working with people with ID.

(ALO 2, Case study C)

A disability support worker described the impact of this achievement on learners with intellectual disabilities and their sense of belonging:

[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)

3.9 Establishing appropriate progression pathways

ETB staff described progression as very beneficial for the learners with intellectual disabilities as it offers recognition of their capacities. Disability support workers described how the incremental building of learners' capacity and engagements through Level 1 and 2 and onto other education services at Level 3 has been accessed in this planned way with the ALO.

Sometimes what I would do is to refer someone in midway through a level 3 major award so that they will complete that in a BTEI 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)

As a consequence of strategies like this, learners with intellectual disabilities are now achieving Level 3 awards and, in some cases, Level 4 or Level 5 modules.

[The learners] would have done Level 1 and 2 with the ALS and then Level 3 and 4 and they are now accessing mainstream education in [Further Education] colleges. We have students that have gone into third level colleges to do Certificates in Independent Living at Level 4. We've people doing SNA courses at Level 5. There has been a progression path that has been very clear and very evident and really useful and helpful for the learners. They are really happy and integrating well in mainstream settings.

(IDSS manager, Case study C)

However, the unique profile of all literacy learners means that progression occurs in different ways and rates. Integrating this into institutional and system requirements presents key challenges for staff in supporting learners. ETB staff at all levels were very aware of the increased pressure for greater levels of progression of learners with intellectual disabilities as a target for ETBs generally, but felt that this linear approach to progression was not suited to many learners with intellectual disabilities. However, this presents particular challenges for ALS as progression routes in and through literacy tends to take a lot longer than other FET programmes, described by one ALO as a "wavy line" rather than a linear progression through levels and programmes.

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 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 ALS. 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)

ETB staff felt strongly that this type of achievement is not recognised in the current progression targets set by SOLAS, and 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, when measurement by progression rates can "count against you":

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)

4. Conclusion

The case study phase of this research yielded rich, contextualised data and provided an insight into existing practices, procedures, challenges and opportunities generated by increasing commitments to a fully inclusive adult literacy service for all learners. The research team is immensely grateful to the three Education and Training Boards and Intellectual Disability Support Services who volunteered as case study sites, and for their generosity in sharing their experiences, perceptions and thoughts on this issue. Their willingness to spend so much time with us and to be open and honest in their appraisals demonstrates their commitment to ensuring adults with intellectual disabilities experience a valuable and empowering educational environment.

The following themes emerged from our workshops with adult literacy learners and interviews with IDSS and ETB staff.

- Management, structure and culture of adult literacy provision.
- The impact of relevant policies and strategies.
- Establishing collaborative partnerships with intellectual disabilities support services.
- Appropriate enrolment, initial assessment and placement procedures.
- Learning identities, relationships and cultures.
- Importance of tutor selection and tutor supports.
- Challenges and innovation in pedagogical practices.
- Challenges and innovation in recognising achievements in learning.
- Establishing appropriate progression pathways.

Theme 1: Management, structure and culture of adult literacy provision

There was a clear acknowledgement of the pivotal role played by senior management (AEOs and ALOs) in establishing an institutional culture that facilitated inclusive practices and in balancing external demands and strategic targets with the purpose and goal of adult literacy provision.

Senior management are supported in this with the equally valuable role played by coordinators and literacy tutors in creating and maintaining partnerships and collaborative practice within the communities and in establishing a flexible and welcoming learning environment.

The broader structures and staff of the ETBs were key in supporting this work, especially the FET Directors in terms of the management and policy, and the Guidance services and other programme coordinators in terms of facilitating learner progression.

Theme 2: The impact of relevant policies and strategies

Several ALS and ETB staff members highlighted a perceived lack of clarity around the function, role, obligations and overall liability of the ALS in meeting the requirements of inclusivity in terms of policies and strategies.

These concerns coalesced 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.

ETB staff displayed different levels of awareness and involvement in policy depending on their role, with AEOs and ALOs being most involved in policy implementation. They spoke of the challenges of doing this without disrupting the core learning that was occurring in the ALS, in particular in light of targets set out in the current FET strategic plan and the number of policy reviews currently occurring.

ETB staff were aware of and informed by the updated 'Guidelines on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in adult literacy services' published by NALA, in 2018. They appreciated that the 2018 Guidelines acknowledged the great work already happening in this area and welcomed suggestions for improvement. There was a clear consensus that the appointment of a dedicated person to the role of Inclusion Development Worker would be enormously beneficial but that it also needed to be funded and resourced properly and, ideally, with responsibility across all adult education services. Suggestions were made that the role should be similar to that of the ALO or the Community Education Facilitator, both of whom work closely with external agencies and community-based support services.

Theme 3: Establishing collaborative partnerships with intellectual disabilities support services

ETBs described very strong and fruitful partnerships that have been established with local intellectual disabilities support services, especially through the networking of ALOs and coordinators. Where these worked well, the relationships had developed organically over a period of time and involved collaboration to create a learner-centred and responsive culture.

Many have evolved into longstanding relationships and processes of assessing and profiling the needs of every learner before they commence a programme and the ongoing assessment, monitoring and supports provided throughout the programme and in planning future progression.

This was not evident in all cases and ETB staff highlighted the importance of building relationships with key staff who have an appreciation of the possibilities, remit and scope of literacy education in people's lives.

Theme 4: Appropriate enrolment, initial assessment and placement procedures

There was clear consensus throughout all of the case studies that there is no such thing as a typical literacy learner or learner with intellectual disability. Consequently, appropriate enrolment, initial assessments and placement procedures for learners and their support staff are key. Through a gradual and supportive process, ETB staff consult with IDSS staff firstly to ensure a broad match between learners' interests and needs and their services in an iterative and organic manner, which has led to the development of new initiatives, supports and programmes.

ETB and IDSS have established assessment processes where they meet with the person with intellectual disability and their family members, advocate and/or support worker to discuss and develop an individual learning plan. This is usually in a twofold process where IDSS will meet to create an individual development plan with and for the service users. The ETB is then consulted for the relevant education components of this plan, with the initial meeting between the learner and ETB facilitated by the IDSS and from there on the relationship is primarily between the ETB and the learner.

The assessment process was described by AEOs and ALOs as a holistic approach to ensure the learner is matched and supported appropriately. This often occurs through a placement committee (or equivalent) of relevant ETB staff (Guidance, ALS, BTEI staff etc) and other appropriate agencies (e.g. the local IDSS).

A similar process is used with learners who are self-referred to meet and draw up an individual learning plan with each learner. However, the online FETCH system was identified as a potential barrier for many self-referred learners at this stage due to its complexity and level of personal information required (as they lack the additional support of IDSS).

ETBs highlighted the importance of this preliminary planning and post-placement assessment to have a holistic sense of a person's learning journey and development. They also emphasised the importance of having flexibility throughout the placement process so they can be responsive to enhance learners' capacities.

Additionally, ETBs highlighted the challenges of the PLSS learner database as the Adult Literacy Services do not have set timeframe or completion times, and the level of personal information required was perceived by some as complicated and very detailed at this early stage in a learner's journey.

Theme 5: Learning identities, relationships and cultures

The learners with intellectual disabilities we met in a range of Adult Literacy Services settings were all very clear about their enjoyment of their literacy sessions. They spoke about the importance of the social aspect of working with their peers and tutors in the session and mixing with other students and staff at break times and between sessions as key to their learning. They spoke about how being a student in the ETB was an important part of their identity.

The affective aspect of enjoying learning, having fun and liking to learn new things was very evident; a point which was also echoed by literacy tutors. Learners identified diverse formats through which they liked to learn, including computers, art, writing, stories, reading, music, roleplays, videos, walks and events. They spoke about the importance of relationships in their learning, identifying the people who supported their learning, and singling out their tutors as key support figures.

The annual awards ceremonies were important events for them recognising their learning as students of the FE college community. These achievements of learning were also acknowledged in the ETB and IDSS interviews, especially the benefits for learners' wellbeing, sense of self-identity and capacities.

Staff also spoke about how learners challenged them to explore their own assumptions and wider societal perceptions of their capacities to learn. They noted how, at times, learners' own lack of self-confidence and bounded expectations can act as barriers to their learning. Self-referred learners also faced additional challenges due to the lack of support systems and routines, as well as the difficulty of transport (especially in areas poorly served by public transport).

Theme 6: Importance of tutor selection and tutor supports

Developing an inclusive learning culture and practice for learners with intellectual disabilities requires specific capacities from adult literacy tutors and support staff. Many tutors, supported by their AEOs and ALOs, were consciously embedding literacy and numeracy into broader vocational learning, drawing on a range of creative and inclusive pedagogies. Tutors work with a variety of different groups, both between different and within various sessions, learners and contexts. This requires an extensive and unique set of pedagogical and relational capacity on the part of adult literacy tutors and coordinators.

Given the diverse nature of literacy capacities and learner interests, tutors have to be highly skilled at using differentiated learning methods, drawing on learners' experiential knowledge and creatively negotiating the programme and assessment requirements for learners. They spoke of their commitment to learners and how they enjoyed working with learners with intellectual disabilities. They were cognisant of the specific pedagogical features of working with this cohort of learners who may require additional support like:

- diverse modes of communications,
- slower pace and rhythms of learning,
- scaffolded peer support,
- creative and differentiated teaching methods within diverse groups, and
- a high level of relational and affective capacity in teaching.

AEOs and ALOs described the importance of tutor selection, ensuring that tutors are aware of the dynamic, responsive and changeable nature of their role and activities. They described how they carefully match tutors who have the pedagogical, affective and relational capacities to nurture learning within individuals and across the literacy groups.

One of the key challenges for tutors is managing expectations of certification at QQI Levels 1 and 2, especially as many tutors are used to working without the pressure of accreditation requirements. Some tutors were concerned about working with learners with intellectual disabilities, feeling that they do not have the necessary equality or pedagogical expertise to support learners.

ETB management was aware of these tensions and were providing professional development for staff, through half or day long training usually. They were also cognisant of the fact that much of the tutor's work in creating an inclusive environment and pedagogy is not recognised nor reimbursed. AEOs and ALOs also acknowledge that tutors' capacity and networks within the community are vital in promoting and recruiting learners. They called for greater recognition of the need to maintain and reinforce literacy capacity for learners with intellectual disabilities on an ongoing manner; which is something that is difficult to marry with the increased targets for progression from SOLAS.

Theme 7: Challenges and innovation in pedagogical practices

Tutors described a deep commitment and understanding of pedagogy and an openness to their own learning as they continually meet students with issues which they haven't experienced before. They have to engage in a process of pedagogical experimentation until they find a unique learning process and relationship which works for the learner. They use adult education approaches of drawing on the prior experience of learners. They highlighted how they felt previous experience tends to be underestimated in the case of learners with intellectual disabilities.

In their pedagogical practices, literacy tutors demonstrated creativity to support learners by innovating with a wide range of creative mediums and activities to communicate with learners (especially with those who are non-verbal) and to enhance literacy learning. Tutors highlighted specific issues which had implication for pedagogical practices, in particular the slower pace and rhythm needed for learners with intellectual disabilities. Supporting differentiated learning within diverse group settings was also seen as a key challenge to meeting the needs of all learners. This presents pedagogical challenges for tutors who have to be able to respond to diverse levels and learning profiles within groups, especially in existing programmes with pre-defined learning outcomes and awarding structures.

The Adult Literacy Services had developed individual learning plans for each learner so they could integrate learners with intellectual disabilities in existing programmes at different times to get major awards as students were ready. In many cases, they had developed several modules at levels 1 and 2 which learners with intellectual disabilities could do to consolidate their learning (as learning retention was a key challenge for many) and used mixed ability peer learning within the group to ensure that learners could support each another in the class.

Theme 8: Challenges and innovation in recognising achievements in learning

The capacity of adult literacy tutors to scaffold literacy and numeracy acquisition so that learning is incremental and measured in an unobtrusive way and their ability to sensitively introduce accreditation options to learners was very evident throughout this research.

The specific profile of learners with intellectual disabilities and their previous educational engagement presents unique issues for enhancing learning capacities. As a consequence of this learning profile, their progression through QQI levels can be described as a 'wavy line' rather than a linear progression, with the apparent slow pace of learning progression difficult to measure and recognise in the current system.

AEOs and ALOs were particularly conscious of this, and called for a greater awareness of the disconnect between certification levels and transversal skills targets and the volume of learners in the literacy service. This occurs as a consequence of the unique learning profile, slower pace and 'wavy' progression of learners with intellectual disabilities through accreditation.

The recognition of learning, especially through the awards ceremonies was very significant for learners and their families, as well as the ETB and IDSS staff.

Theme 9: Establishing appropriate progression pathways

ETB and IDSS staff recognised progression as beneficial for learners with intellectual disabilities as it offers recognition of their capacities. The incremental and scaffolded building of learners' capacities through QQI levels 1 and 2 and onto other education services at level 3 and beyond was key. This was carefully planned and managed by the ETB team, including guidance services to ensure a supportive progression for learners.

However, the unique profile of learners means that progression occurs in different ways and at different rates. ETB staff at all levels were very aware of the increased pressure for greater levels of progression of learners with intellectual disabilities as a target for ETBs generally but felt that this linear approach to progression was not suited to many learners with intellectual disabilities. This presents particular challenges for Adult Literacy Services as progression routes in and through literacy tends to take a lot longer than other FET programmes – the 'wavy line' of progression rather than a linear progression through levels and programmes described earlier.

AEOs and ALOs had designed and offered a suite of modules at QQI levels 1 and 2 for these learners, to address these challenges of the low levels of learner confidence at the outset, the different capacities of learners in their spiky profiles, and the ongoing maintenance of literacy capacity throughout the learning journey.

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