

Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Literacy Needs in the Community and Voluntary Sector

An Exploratory Study May 2024

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Section 1

Executive Summary

Background

This report presents the findings of an exploratory research study commissioned by The Wheel and supported by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), undertaken to survey volunteers and staff in the community and voluntary (CV) sector on the level and nature of unmet literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs in the sector. The purpose of this study is to find out what supports individuals need and want, and how organisations could potentially reduce unnecessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy barriers.

We believe that the strength of the community and voluntary sector is in the vast range of skills, knowledge, experience and passion among the more one million people who volunteer and are employed in the sector.¹

“ I wanted to give back to the community as I was so fortunate in the opportunities I had. ”

Survey Respondent

It is important that we find out more about the potential literacy, numeracy and digital literacy barriers facing staff and volunteers in the sector. This will allow organisations, and the sector as a whole, to take proactive action to remove these barriers, while recognising the invaluable support, expertise and services being provided in communities all over Ireland every day.

Key Findings

The study found that there is a broad spectrum of literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs among individuals working in an employed or volunteer capacity in the community and voluntary sector.

It found that:

- A very small number of respondents had not completed primary school (n=2, 1%), had completed primary school only (n=2, 1%), or had completed Junior Cycle/Inter Cert only (n=3, 1%). The vast majority (n=222, 74%) had attended a higher education institution.
- More than 9 out of 10 (n=290, 91%) respondents had completed education courses or learning since they left school, and before they joined the community and voluntary sector as a member of staff or volunteer.

¹ Charities Regulator research indicates that 281,250 staff are employed by charities, accounting for 1 in 8 of all employed people in the State. The latest Census 2022 Volunteering Profiles indicates that more than 711,000 people volunteer regularly, while Volunteer Ireland data on regular and irregular data estimates the real total to be more than 1 million people, 2023, <https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4767/scoeco.pdf>; [Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland-Central Statistics Office](#); [COVID-19 Volunteering: Looking at the numbers](#).

- 3 in 10 (n=97, 30%) indicated that they meet challenges with at least one literacy skill. Among those respondents, the most commonly cited challenge was public speaking (n=49, 53%). Some respondents have difficulty with fundamental skills. For example, reading emails is a challenge for 11% of respondents (n=10).
- More than 1 in 4 (n=87, 27%) indicated that they meet challenges with at least one numeracy skill. Among those respondents, the most commonly cited challenge was time management (n=41, 56%). Some respondents have difficulty with fundamental skills. For example, counting money is a challenge for 14% of respondents (n=10).
- Almost 3 in 10 respondents (n=91, 28%) indicated that they meet challenges with at least one digital skill. Among those respondents, the most commonly cited challenges were using social media (n=31, 39%) and using messaging services (n=31, 39%). Some respondents have difficulty with fundamental skills. For example, accessing and using the internet is a challenge for 6% of respondents (n=5).
- 12% of respondents (n=36) disclosed that they have learning needs such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or other specific learning needs.
- In response to the question “what might help you improve your skills?”, over half of respondents suggested training (n=102, 53%).

Focus group participants discussed their lived experience in the community and voluntary sector in detail. From these discussions, the following barriers have been identified:

- lack of funding for tailored training programmes
- limited access to, or awareness of, suitable educational resources
- lack of suitable technical supports
- stigma, stress and anxiety about literacy needs
- complex and inflexible systems for funding, vetting, recruitment and so on
- policy gaps in some organisations
- lack of literacy awareness in some organisations

The study also found that the most common motivations for working in the community and voluntary sector were that the role matched the respondent’s skills or interests (n=100, 32%) or they wanted to give back (n=91, 29%). Respondents said they were most proud of making a difference (n=100, 32%) or empowering people (n=89, 29%). Literacy initiatives in the sector could tap into these motivating factors.

“ I find it frustrating as, if people have other disabilities which are visible, allowances would be made for them. Because I have dyslexia and people can’t see it, there is no policy to help me when I need it. And I’m just thrown to the wayside. ”

Focus Group Participant

Recommendations

Based on the survey findings and interviews, the report makes a series of recommendations to meet the specific literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs of staff and volunteers in the community and voluntary sector.

- 1. Skill development should be prioritised among staff and volunteers by creating an organisational culture that supports continuous learning and development.** This can be achieved by providing opportunities for staff and volunteers to attend training, workshops, and conferences, and by encouraging them to share their learning with others. Organisations, many of which lack funding to provide training budgets and dedicated learning and development staff, need to be supported to develop cultures of continuous lifelong learning. This could involve offering flexible work arrangements, providing access to online learning resources, and ensuring that staff and volunteers are not overburdened with their workload.
- 2. Policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders must increase their awareness about the importance of addressing literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs among staff and volunteers in the community and voluntary sector.** This could involve increased funding for training and development programmes in Literacy Awareness and Plain English, as well as highlighting the positive impact that skilled staff and volunteers have on the sector.
- 3. Community and voluntary sector organisations need to be resourced and encouraged to reference literacy in their existing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies and embed literacy friendly approaches in their work practices.** This could include recruitment, training, working conditions, communication, and equal opportunities policies. Organisations in the sector will need resourcing and support in order to implement a literacy-friendly first approach.
- 4. There is a need to undertake a more in-depth study into the literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs in the CV sector to support the co-design of key supports.**
- 5. Ensure ease of access to suitable literacy training programmes for CV sector employers and workers.** Raise awareness of and ensure access to initiatives such as Skills for Work which can provide tailored task specific training, including reading, writing and maths skills; local literacy services run by Education and Training Boards (ETBs); and the Learn with NALA distance learning service and elearning platform (www.learnwithnala.ie). These programmes must be supported by adequate funding, be culturally appropriate to the CV sector and designed to be accessible educational resources. The programmes should be designed based on the identified skills gaps among staff and volunteers and rooted in the day-to-day context of CV sector work, to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

Section 2

Introduction

The Wheel is Ireland’s national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises. The Wheel has over 2,400 members and provides support services and representation on behalf of its members relating to matters that reflect their collective interests. As a representative voice, The Wheel provides leadership to the sector and advocates on behalf of our growing community of members. Together with our members, we help to shape and promote conditions in which people and their communities can thrive.

NALA is a registered charity with 1,800 members. They believe literacy is a human right. They are committed to making sure people with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital skills needs can fully take part in society and have access to quality learning opportunities that meet their needs.

We collaborated with NALA on a project called “A Literacy Friendly Sector” that was funded by the Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) Collaboration and Innovation Fund 2023. The project aimed to:

- survey volunteers and staff in the community and voluntary sector throughout Ireland on the level of unmet literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs amongst staff and volunteers in the community and voluntary sector
- deliver a series of bespoke literacy awareness training sessions for staff and volunteers in the community and voluntary sector

This report presents the results of the staff and volunteer survey.

Section 3

Literature Review

The community and voluntary sector relies heavily on staff and volunteers who possess a diverse range of skills. However, while many studies have highlighted significant differences in literacy, numeracy, and digital skills levels among individuals in the community in general, few have concentrated on the literacy skills existing within staff and volunteers working in the community and voluntary sector. What follows is a review of some of the most pertinent publications in this area.

3.1 Policy Context

Adult Literacy for Life Strategy (ALL) (2021)²

The ALL Strategy aims to ensure that everyone has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills to fully participate in society and realise their potential. It highlights that all adults in Ireland should have the literacy skills to enjoy a good quality of life within their families, communities and workplace. Literacy involves listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate, access services, and make informed choices. This whole-of-society strategy aims to equip all adults with the literacy skills they need. It is a key step in achieving Ireland’s goal of a fully inclusive and equitable society and economy.

The strategy complements and reinforces the actions and ambition of cross-government, cross-society initiatives including the Healthy Ireland strategic action plan 2021-2025, Pathways to Work 2021-2025, Ireland’s Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025, and the implementation of the Well-Being Framework for Ireland. The Adult Literacy for Life strategy also enables Ireland to align internationally with sustainable development, and social and economic goals of the EU, UNESCO and the OECD.

Programme for Government

The Programme for Government (2020) contains various commitments to literacy-related actions including to “support digital literacy schemes across the country” (p87), to “publish a new literacy, numeracy, and digital skills strategy to support learners” (p96) and to “introduce a plain language requirement for all public service communication, so that people can understand information the first time they read or hear it” (p121). The new literacy, numeracy and digital skills strategy for children is under development by the Department of Education at the time of writing. Guidance has been provided to public servants in the form of a Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service (DPER & NDA 2023).

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

Since the introduction of the Public Sector Duty in 2014, all public bodies in Ireland and organisations with Public Sector Duty obligations in their service level agreements have a responsibility to “promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans”.³

² Adult Literacy for Life Strategy 2021

³ [https://www.odce.ie/en-gb/abouttheodce/equalityandhumanrightsduty.aspx#:~:text=All%20public%20bodies%20in%20Ireland,Rights%20Duty%20\(the%20Duty\).](https://www.odce.ie/en-gb/abouttheodce/equalityandhumanrightsduty.aspx#:~:text=All%20public%20bodies%20in%20Ireland,Rights%20Duty%20(the%20Duty).)

The public sector duty therefore obliges public bodies and contracted parties to engage in a meaningful way with people with literacy, numeracy and digital literacy difficulties. Moves away from traditional service delivery must therefore be cognisant of the needs of people who may be furthest from education or the digital landscape and provide alternative avenues to ensure that services remain accessible.

Digital for Good: Ireland's Digital Inclusion Roadmap

Ireland's Digital Inclusion Roadmap aims "to make Ireland one of the most digitally inclusive States in the EU"⁴ (p1) and emphasises that no one should be left behind in the transition to digital public services. It discusses access, affordability and ability as key drivers of digital inclusion (p5). "Access" in this context does not just mean access to technical equipment and broadband; it also refers to accessible information and user-friendly interfaces.

The Digital Inclusion Roadmap, which was prepared by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, applies particularly to public bodies and contracted parties, but also sets out a standard to which all organisations may aspire.

The National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy

The National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy⁵ is a strategy for the development of further education and training (FET) in Ireland from 2020 to 2024. It aims to transform FET to meet the changing needs of the economy, society and learners.

'Fostering Inclusion' is one of the three strategic pillars of the strategy, along with Building Skills and Creating Pathways. It focuses on ensuring that FET is accessible, supportive and responsive to the diverse needs of learners, especially those who are marginalised or disadvantaged. Literacy and Numeracy Support is one of the strategic priorities under the Fostering Inclusion pillar. It recognises that literacy and numeracy are essential skills for personal, social and economic development and that many FET learners have low levels of these skills or face barriers to developing them.

People with learning difficulties are identified as one of the priority cohorts for FET provision, along with early school leavers, people with disabilities, migrants, Travellers Roma, and others. The strategy commits to providing consistent and tailored learner support, rooting FET in the community, and linking community education to wider learning pathways for these groups.

4 Digital for Good: Ireland's Digital Inclusion Roadmap, Government of Ireland, 2023 <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/267401/a898d78c-e234-465f-bedd-7ccd0655b7d2.pdf#page=null>

5 Future FET: Transforming Learning The National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy, SOLAS, 2020

3.2 Irish Evidence

Literacy and Numeracy Difficulties in the Irish Workplace: Impact on Earnings and Training Expenditures

This report commissioned by NALA in 2012, and completed by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)⁶, examined literacy and numeracy levels in the workplace in Ireland. It revealed a small percentage of employees and employers reporting literacy and numeracy training needs. It found that:

- 1.5 per cent of employees indicated that they had a literacy difficulty, while 2 per cent reported a numeracy difficulty. The rates for both were higher among males than females.
- Similar proportions of public and private sector employees reported having a literacy difficulty, while a slightly higher percentage of private sector workers indicated that they had a numeracy difficulty.

Learning for Work

This research shows the benefits to adults of taking part in adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills learning, and the benefit of this learning for their work and personal life. This cohort study, commissioned by the National Adult Literacy Agency in 2019, involving adults taking part in various NALA adult learning programmes⁷, found that:

- nearly 60% of the learners reported that their literacy or numeracy needs had stopped them going for a job they wanted.
- 85% of learners reported that they had turned down a promotion or training opportunity due to their literacy or numeracy needs.
- The biggest reported benefit to returning to education was an increase in confidence, particularly in the workplace.

Disability and Discrimination in Ireland

This report by Banks et al⁸ examined the experience of discrimination for people with disabilities in Ireland across different domains of life, such as employment, education, health, and public and private services, using data from the Equality modules of the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS).

The report finds that people with disabilities experience higher rates of discrimination than people without disabilities in all domains, especially in health services and private services and, in the context of people with learning/intellectual disability, found that they have a higher risk of experiencing discrimination than people without disabilities, but a lower risk than people with blindness or psychological/emotional conditions. The report also highlights the importance of inclusive education and retention of students with special educational needs and disabilities in school.

⁶ Literacy and Numeracy Difficulties in the Irish Workplace: Impact on Earnings and Training Expenditures, Kelly et al, September 2012

⁷ Learning for work The benefits of improving literacy, numeracy and digital skills for work, NALA, June 2021

⁸ Disability and Discrimination in Ireland: Evidence from the QNHS Equality Modules 2004, 2010, 2014; October 2018, Banks et al.

3.3 International Comparison

Indecon

An investment appraisal on the upskilling of employees in the Irish non-profit sector completed by Indecon in 2020⁹ examined the international evidence and found that skills gaps were identified in the non-profit sector in the UK, Australia, Canada and other OECD countries. The Australian research reviewed identified higher skills gaps in the non-profit sector than in sectors such as retail and manufacturing. Training was identified in the Canadian study as a key response to low skills in the sector, meanwhile the OECD study noted the lack of training for the sector in Ireland.

OECD Adult Skills Survey

The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) is an OECD programme of assessment and analysis of adult skills, including literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving in technology-rich environments¹⁰. The survey is conducted across 40 countries, of which Ireland is one. The most recent OECD Adult Skills Survey with published results for Ireland was conducted in 2012 and indicated that 18% of Irish adults were at or below Level 1 on a five-level literacy scale, at which level, a person may be unable to understand basic written information. The 2012 study also found that a quarter of Irish adults scored at or below Level 1 for numeracy, with 42% of Irish adults scoring at or below Level 1 on using technology to solve problems and accomplish tasks.

The date of this study must be acknowledged, and we await the next iteration due for publication in 2024.

Digital Skills

According to the European Commission's 2022 Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) Report – Ireland Profile¹¹, notwithstanding that Ireland now ranks 5th out of the 27 EU Member States, just 40% of Irish people have above-basic digital skills, while 30% have below basic skills.

The Full DESI European Analysis further indicates that, at a European level, socio-economic factors impact digital skills levels, with age, access to the labour force, rural location, and educational attainment all correlating with lower digital skills attainment. This is supported in an Irish context by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) Internet Coverage and Usage in Ireland 2023 Report¹² which indicates that people on 'home duties' and those 'retired from employment' were least likely to use the internet.

9 Investment Appraisal of Upskilling- Indecon.pdf- <https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2020-12/Investment%20Appraisal%20of%20Upskilling%20-%20Indecon.pdf>

10 <https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/>

11 Ireland in the Digital Economy and Society Index | Shaping Europe's digital future (europa.eu)- <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/desi-ireland>

12 Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022 | Shaping Europe's digital future (europa.eu)- <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/redirection/document/88707>

That report also found that internet use declines with age (with a significant decrease from age 60) and with deprivation status, with people recorded as 'very disadvantaged' least likely to regularly use the internet.

3.4. Summary

This review of the literature highlights the importance of literacy in Irish government policy, as a specific area of policy focus and also as part of a broader human rights, equality and inclusion agenda. It shows that literacy needs affect various aspects of working and everyday life for individuals, and that skills needs in society are a concern for national governments around the world.

Reviewing the literature has also highlighted a lack of research into literacy needs among community and voluntary workers as a specific sector. This exploratory study, while modest in scope, may inform future studies, training or other initiatives.

Section 4

Survey and Focus Groups: Methodology and Findings

4.1 Methodology

The research was conducted using mixed methods, involving an online survey and focus group discussions.

The online survey was designed by a steering group consisting of staff from The Wheel and NALA, a literacy learner, and a consultant from Straightforward Research. The survey focused on several areas, including motivation for working and/or volunteering in the community and voluntary sector, and the experience of numeracy/literacy/digital literacy issues.¹³

The survey was hosted on an online survey platform in a fully encrypted environment to ensure complete confidentiality for respondents. Survey responses were analysed for frequency and cross-tabulations. The survey was designed to be short, simple and in plain language.

A potential limitation of the survey design is that respondents were asked to self-report whether they have challenges with literacy, numeracy or digital literacy. The study does not purport to objectively assess skill levels of respondents.

Another potential limitation is the fact that the survey sample is non-representative. Completion was voluntary and people who have experienced challenges may have been more motivated to respond.

In furtherance of the data protection obligations of The Wheel, a written privacy statement was provided at the beginning of the survey, referring survey respondents to the privacy policy of the Wheel.¹⁴ The number of responses to some survey questions were too low and provided such qualitative data as to potentially identify respondents. These have not been included in this report.

At all times, participants had the option to skip or choose not to answer questions in the online survey. They could also close the survey should they wish not to participate beyond any particular point.

Survey respondents were given an option to participate in further discussions, and only those who expressed an interest in doing so were contacted. At that point, participants could again choose not to participate in focus groups or one on one interviews.

The external consultant who conducted the interviews provided his contact details should there be any queries when completing the survey, and details of both The Wheel and NALA were available at the end of the survey should they be required. All respondents who expressed a willingness to attend the focus group were invited to do so, whether or not they had personally experienced literacy, numeracy, or digital literacy difficulties.

13 Appendix 1

14 <https://www.wheel.ie/privacy>

In addition to the two focus groups, participants from a learner cohort who had previously completed training on adopting a literacy-friendly approach in the workplace, were also invited to participate. One such participant agreed to partake in interviews.

While the number of interviewees/focus group members was small, the interviews garnered rich insight into the experience of working in the community and voluntary sector and engaging with literacy difficulties. They further supplemented the qualitative survey evidence to provide a more rounded picture for this exploratory study.

4.2 Findings

A total of 320 responses were received to the online survey, while three participants agreed to take part in further focus group/one-to-one interviews.

4.2.1 Respondent Profile

More than 2 in 5 of all respondents (43%, n=125) were based in Dublin, with a relatively even split across the rest of the country (Figure 1). Almost two thirds of respondents (62%, n =199) were staff, 16% (n=52) were volunteers, while a further 16% (n=52) were both staff and volunteers. 6% of respondents responded that they were “Other”, but provided insufficient detail to determine the role (Figure 2).

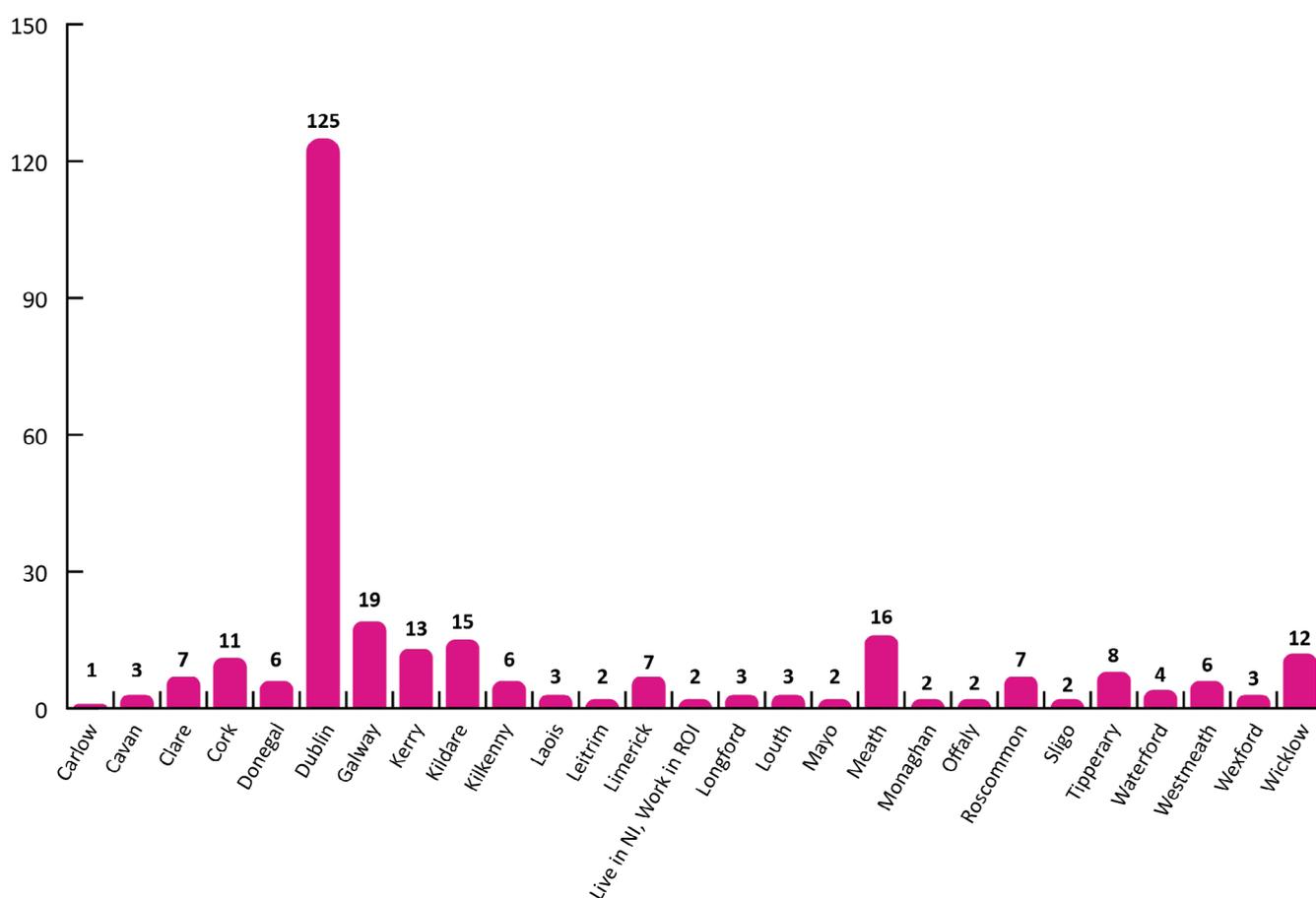


Figure 1: Respondents By County, n=290

Literacy, Numeracy, And Digital Literacy Needs In The Community And Voluntary Sector

While the majority (57%, n=178) of the 314 respondents to this question had worked or volunteered in the sector for 5 years or less, it is notable that more than 2 in 5 have been engaged in the sector for 6 years or more (Figure 3). The reasons for this are teased out further in the responses to the qualitative responses detailed later in this report, however there is a high level of pride among respondents in the work that they do and the opportunity to make a difference.

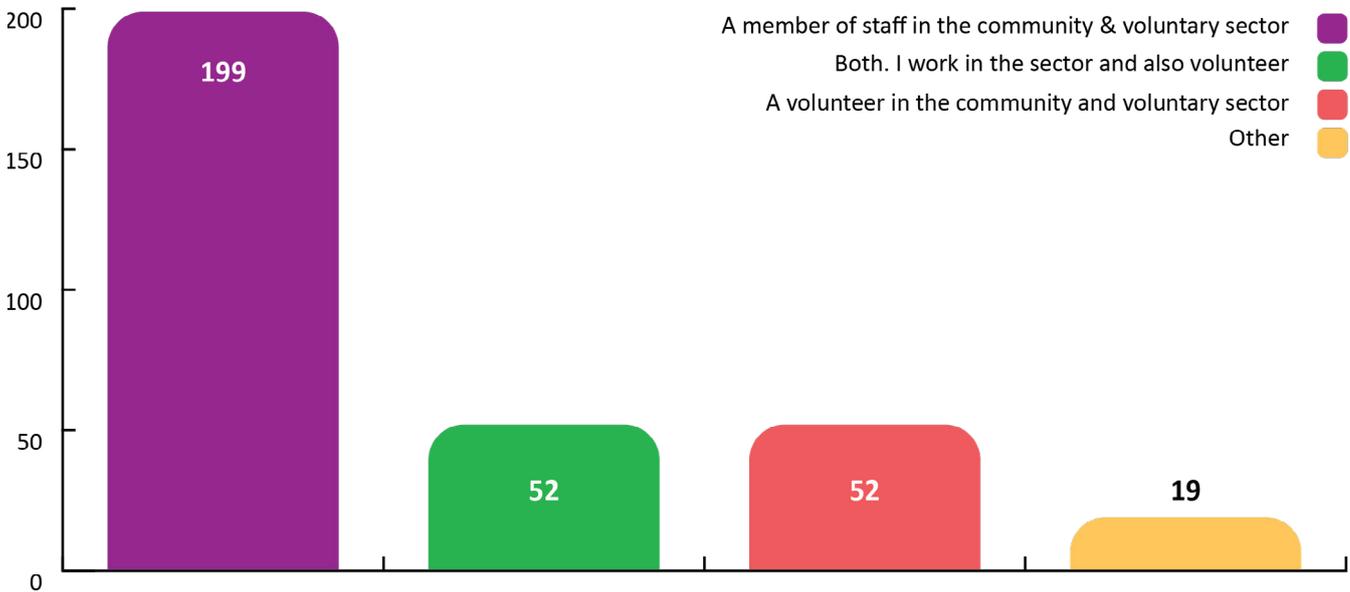


Figure 2: Respondents By Role, n=320

Almost half (48%, n=91) of staff in the sector were more likely be engaged for 6 or more years, compared to 38% (n=14) of respondent volunteers, and 45% (n=23) of respondents who were both staff and volunteers (Table 1).

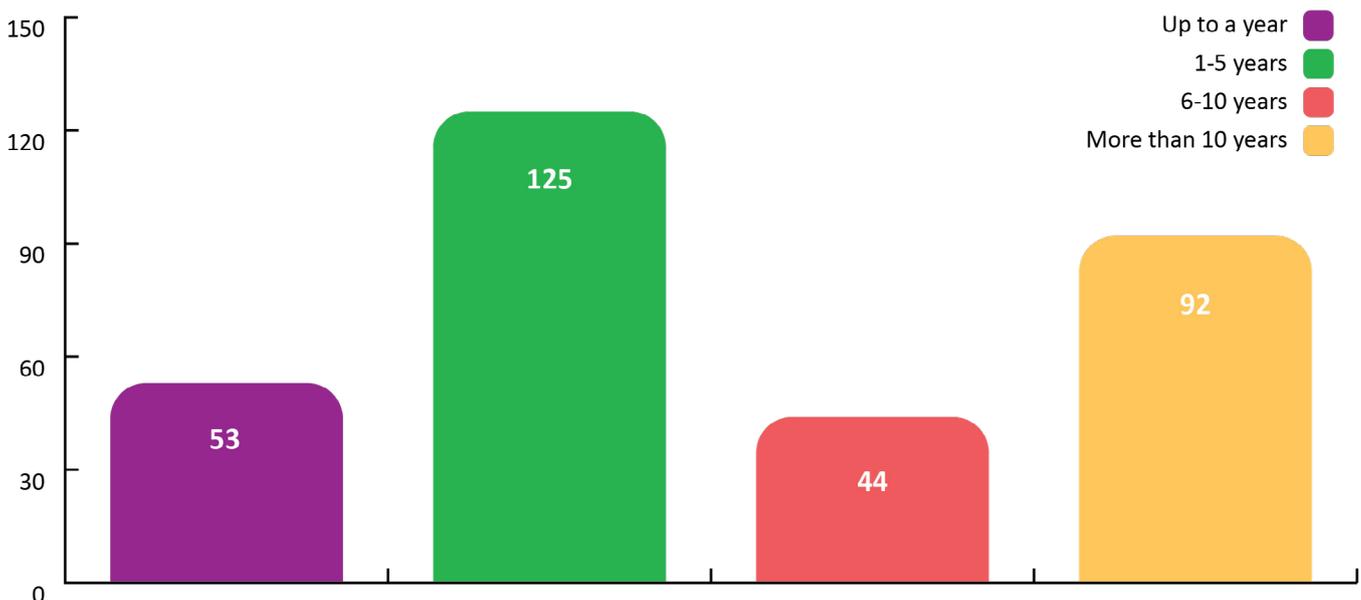


Figure 3: Length Of Time In Sector, n=314

	All		Staff		Volunteer		Both	
	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%
Up to a Year	53	17%	26	13%	13	27%	5	10%
1-5 years	125	40%	76	39%	22	45%	23	45%
6-10 Years	44	14%	28	15%	6	12%	7	14%
More than 10 Years	92	29%	63	33%	8	16%	16	31%
Total	314		193		49		51	

Table 1: Length of Time in Sector By Role, n=314

Note: Some respondents did not specify their role in the sector, therefore the sum of the breakdown by role does not equate to the figure for All.

4.2.2 Organisation Type

Survey respondents were also asked to identify the type of organisation with which they were engaged. According to the Charities Regulator¹⁵, there were 11,506 charities on the Register of Charities at the end of 2022. These charities cover areas such as education (31.9%), poverty or economic hardship (11.4%), integration of disadvantaged (8.3%), religion (7.6%), health (6.6%), community development (6.6%), civic responsibility or voluntary work (5.3%), and arts, culture, heritage or sciences (5.2%) among others.

Of the 305 respondents to this question, 38% (n=116) responded that they were involved with a charity, but did not specify the type of charity involved.

Of those who did specify (n=189), almost 3 in 10 (29%, n=55) worked in the health sector; almost 1 in 4 (22%, n=42) worked in the community sector; and 17% (n=33) were in education (Table 2).

4.2.3 Motivation To Work Or Volunteer In The Sector

Respondents were asked to provide reasons why they chose to work or volunteer in the CV sector. Recent research published in the Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly¹⁶ found that where workers have chosen to contribute to a particular social cause, they outperform their peers who were randomly assigned to a role.

¹⁵ <https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4733/crar2022.pdf>

¹⁶ Jeworrek, S., & Mertins, V. (2022). Mission, Motivation, and the Active Decision to Work for a Social Cause. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 51(2), 260-278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640211007206>

Type	No.	% Overall	% Specified
Charity (General)	116	38%	
Charity (Health and Disability)	55	18%	29%
Charity (Community)	42	14%	22%
Charity (Education)	33	11%	17%
Charity (Housing)	12	4%	6%
Charity (Migration Rights)	11	4%	6%
Charity (Religion)	9	3%	5%
Family Resource Centre	6	2%	3%
Local Development Company	6	2%	3%
Non-profit	3	1%	2%
Social Enterprise	3	1%	2%
Sports Club	3	1%	2%
Charity (Child Poverty)	2	1%	1%
Charity (Arts)	1	0%	1%
Charity (Events)	1	0%	1%
Charity (Older People)	1	0%	1%
Charity (Rights)	1	0%	1%
Total	305		

Table 2: Organisation Type, n=305

Of the 312 respondents to this question, almost one third (32%, n=100) reported that the role matched their skills or interests, almost 3 in 10 (29%, n=91) wanted to give back, and 14% (n=43) reported that the work aligned with their values (Figure 4).

Often people who have experienced inequality and marginalisation are drawn to the work of supporting and helping others, with more than a third of survey respondents engaged in their current role as a way to give back or because a loved one was impacted by a specific cause.

“ the opportunity to assist people to change their lives is a wonderful way to earn your living. ”

Survey Respondent

The variety of reasons for working or volunteering in the sector range from the altruistic to the deeply personal. The qualitative responses provide a wealth of insight into the motivations of people in the sector.

Matched Skills / Interests

With almost 1 in 3 respondents to this question coming within this area, it was clear that using skills and engaging with interests is important to staff and volunteers in the CV sector. Finding a meaningful role also supports staff and volunteer retention as people feel they are using their skills to make a valuable contribution.

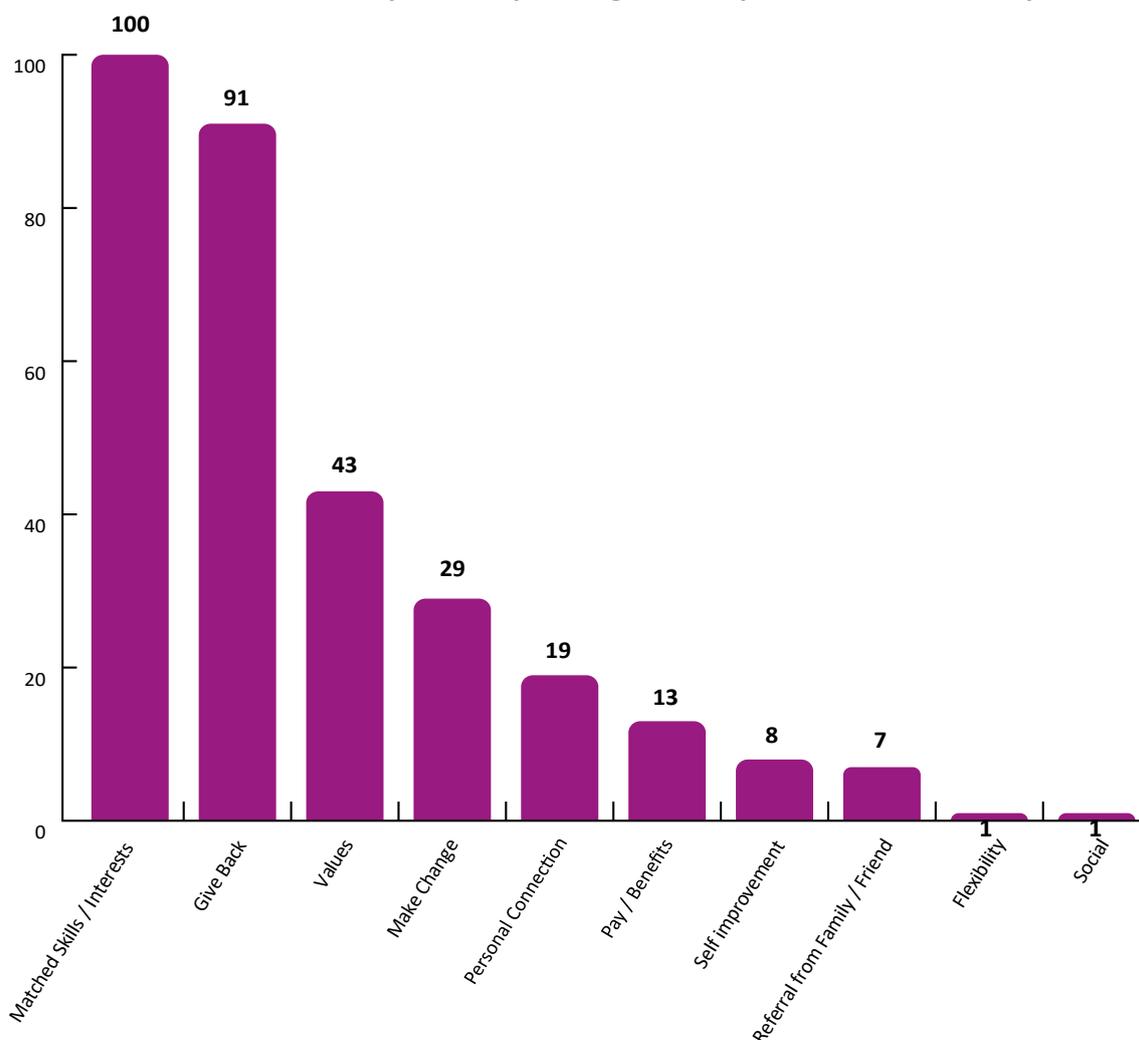


Figure 4: Reasons for working / volunteering in the CV Sector, n=312

- “A passion for the arts and desire to make my career more meaningful”
- “An opportunity came to be part of the CE Scheme and then I realised the area in which I was placed was something I really enjoyed and continue to enjoy it still. It has given me a a [sic] whole different lease on life and made me want to be a better person.”
- “Have always volunteered some way since I was about ten years old!!!!”

Give Back

This is related to the matching of skills and interests, referenced above, and speaks to an altruistic motivation. Almost 3 in 10 respondents to our survey indicated that they had this motivation.

- “As you get to work with those in your community who may need the most help. You are able to become more involved in your local community, meet a variety of people and work in a sector where everyday your job is different.”
- “Because I believe in working to improve my community and the lives of those who live in it, and enabling people to do the same.”
- “I am passionate about people empowerment, inclusion, justice & respect, especially amongst the most vulnerable sectors of society.”

Values

The community, voluntary, charity and social enterprise sector is strongly driven by the core values of those involved in it. These values can be driven by personal experience or by religious beliefs. They can also be influenced by social groups and organisations. Some 14% of survey respondents indicated that their values motivated their decision to engage with the CV sector.

- “I value the work we do here, I am very passionate about young people & mental health and strive to see change in this area. I personally value align [sic] well in my role.”
- “I love the felt sense of community working in this sector and it aligns with my values.”
- “It's important to me to have a job that aligns to my values and has a positive social impact.”

Make Change

Sometimes changing the world can start with changing the community in which you live. Contributing to the common good, advocating for system change, campaigning to change the lives of those you love and others like them can be a powerful motivator. Almost 1 in 10 respondents were motivated to engage in the sector because they wanted to be make some positive change.

- “Interested in working towards the benefit of my local area.”
- “Because I want to change the system to help people who are the most marginalised”
- “I wanted a role that made a difference in the world. It is in line with my values”

Personal Connection

More than 1 in 20 respondents had a personal connection to the organisation, or the mission of the organisation, that they work or volunteer with. Research by the Charities Regulator on Irish Attitudes towards the Charities Sector¹⁷ found that a personal interest or connection was the greatest influence on people when choosing which charity to support, and while further research will be required in this space, based on survey responses for this exploratory study, also provides a key motivator for those who wish to actively engage.

- “Family connection to the specific condition”
- “Have been through rehab programmes and want to give back into the community”

17 <https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4675/public-survey-report-2022.pdf>

4.2.4 Achievements in the sector

We asked respondents what they were most proud of regarding their work or volunteering within the sector. Respondents provided a significant range of input reflecting a diverse array of contributions and impacts they are proud to have made within their community and voluntary work. Responses encompassed achievements in various sectors, from empowering individuals to fostering community growth.

“ It’s not about money but about making a positive difference in people’s lives (and eternity). Learning how to manage with the crazy pace and workload as a charity employee by getting really organised and taking better care of my physical and mental health when it’s particularly intense.

Focus Group Participant

Individuals expressed pride in a multitude of accomplishments, such as facilitating employment, supporting vulnerable groups, improving education accessibility, fostering inclusivity, advocating for marginalised communities, and driving systemic changes. While some participants made the point that their engagement was not about pride, the quotes mostly highlighted the sense of achievement in being able to make a contribution and the fulfilling nature of the role.

Of the 306 respondents to this question, almost a third (n=98, 32%) were most proud of the difference they are making; almost 3 in 10 (n=89, 29%) were most proud of empowering people; and almost 1 in 4 (n=74, 24%) were most proud of providing support to those who need it (Figure 5).

The diversity of what people felt most proud of provides an indication of the breadth of the sector, and both the personal and public benefit of working in it.

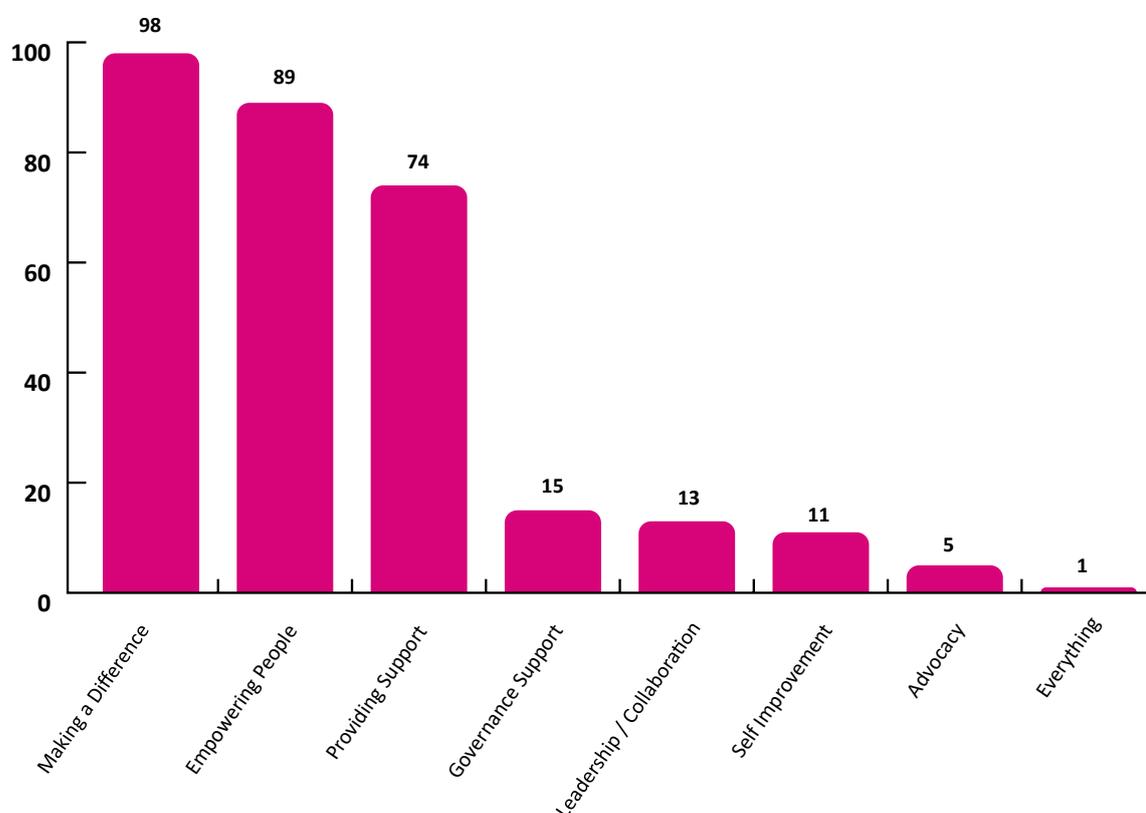


Figure 5: What Are You Most Proud Of? n=306

Making a Difference

Almost one third of respondents to this question felt proud of the difference that they made. This difference could be to an individual, a community (or specific service within a community), or system.

- “Helping to make changes to people's lives”
- “Being able to make a positive difference in my community and provide services/facilities for those who need them and will benefit from them most.”
- “Creating a bursary policy that promotes equality, diversity and inclusion.”

Empowering People

Empowerment is a key aspect of civic engagement and community development work. Often the potential of people from marginalised communities is overlooked as focus is placed on deficit and need. Research from the ESRI¹⁸ details the value of civic engagement by “building social resources, enlarging social networks, providing access to social support, fostering social trust and reciprocity, and fomenting a greater sense of community and belonging”¹⁹. The CV sector is a key resource to all communities, but particularly communities experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation.

- “Helping restore some self belief back into some of my clients who had learned not to have too many expectations on themselves due to how other perceive [sic] them”
- “helping people achieve their goals and supporting them to have a home”
- “Seeing early school leavers return to education and achieving work or further education in their lives.”

Providing Support

There is no official data on the number of people in Ireland who rely on the support of the community, voluntary, charity, and social enterprise sector in Ireland. Research from the We Act Campaign suggests that 15% of the public say that they have been personally impacted by a charity, while 35% say they know someone who has been personally impacted by a charity²⁰.

Most of these people, and more, require the support of staff and volunteers in the CV sector. Responding to this need was a point of pride for almost a quarter of respondents to the survey.

- “The support we are able to provide to people and helping people.”
- “Connections with people with disability, creating a enriching experience for people who might otherwise be marginalised.”
- “Being able to extend a warm Irish welcome to those fleeing war, and oppression...”

18 <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS171.pdf>

19 Ibid, p.101

20 We Act is a campaign to celebrate the impact of Ireland's charities and community groups. www.weact.ie The research referred is, as yet, unpublished.

Governance Support

Governance in the CV sector is critically important. The people the sector supports are among the most marginalised and vulnerable. When things go wrong, it is they who suffer the most. The 2022 Annual Report of the Charities Regulator²¹ indicates that 73% of all charities are fully compliant with the Charities Governance Code. Much of this work is carried out by volunteer trustees, particularly in smaller organisations who do not have the dedicated staff or funding to cover governance costs²².

One in 20 respondents to our survey reported being most proud of the governance supports that they provided in their organisation.

- “enabling our reporting structure to assist our board members”
- “Heling [sic] other organisations become more sustainable”
- “I'm proud of the fact that my work provides help to charity and community organisations”

Leadership / Collaboration

Leadership and collaboration are important for the security and growth of the sector. Strong, agile, ethical leadership which looks to build partnerships for the common good provides a buffer against social isolation and fosters trust in the systems in which they operate²³. Some 4% of survey respondents reported being most proud of their leadership or collaboration in the sector.

- “building consensus and understanding between stakeholder groups”
- “My support; leadership and guidance of the staff teams; being apart [sic] of the People we supports lives”

Self-Improvement

There are many documented benefits of working and volunteering, from improvements to wellbeing and social connection²⁴ to mental, physical, and social health²⁵. 4% of respondents to our survey reported being most proud of the impact their engagement in the sector has had on their own lives.

- “Taking part. Setting an example for my kids”
- “How I have learned to appreciate the vast diversity of human beings and the value each one brings to society”

21 <https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4733/crar2022.pdf>

22 <https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2023-04/The%20Wheel%27s%20Policy%20Survey%20Report%202023.pdf>

23 <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS171.pdf>

24 Amadea Turk, Stephanie Tierney, Geoff Wong, Joy Todd, Helen J. Chatterjee, Kamal R. Mahtani, Self-growth, wellbeing and volunteering- Implications for social prescribing: A qualitative study, SSM- Qualitative Research in Health, Volume 2, 2022, 100061, ISSN 2667-3215, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmqr.2022.100061>. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667321522000233>)

25 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10159229/>

4.2.5 Level of Education

Respondents were asked to provide information on their highest level of educational attainment.

91% of all respondents reported attending university, college or a technological university. Volunteers were somewhat more likely than staff to have gone to university (Table 3).

	All		Staff		Volunteer		Both	
	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%
Attended university	197	66%	125	66%	36	73%	30	67%
Attended College of Education	52	17%	34	18%	6	12%	8	18%
Attended technological university	25	8%	17	9%	3	6%	5	11%
Completed Senior Cycle	16	5%	8	4%	3	6%	2	4%
Completed junior Cycle or Inter Cert	3	1%	1	1%	1	2%		
Completed primary school	2	1%	2	1%				
Did not complete primary school	2	1%						
Completed Apprenticeship	2	1%	1	1%				
Total	299		188		49		45	

Table 3: Highest Level Of Educational Attainment, By Role, n=299

Note: Some respondents did not specify their role in the sector, therefore the sum of the breakdown by role does not equate to the figure for All.

Of the 317 respondents who answered the question, almost 1 in 10 (n=27, 9%) did not undertake any education courses or learning after they left school. Of those who provided further information (n=21), the main reasons provided were that they were not interested in further study (57%, n=12), did not know where to go (24%, n=5), or could not afford it (24%, n=5) (Figure 6).

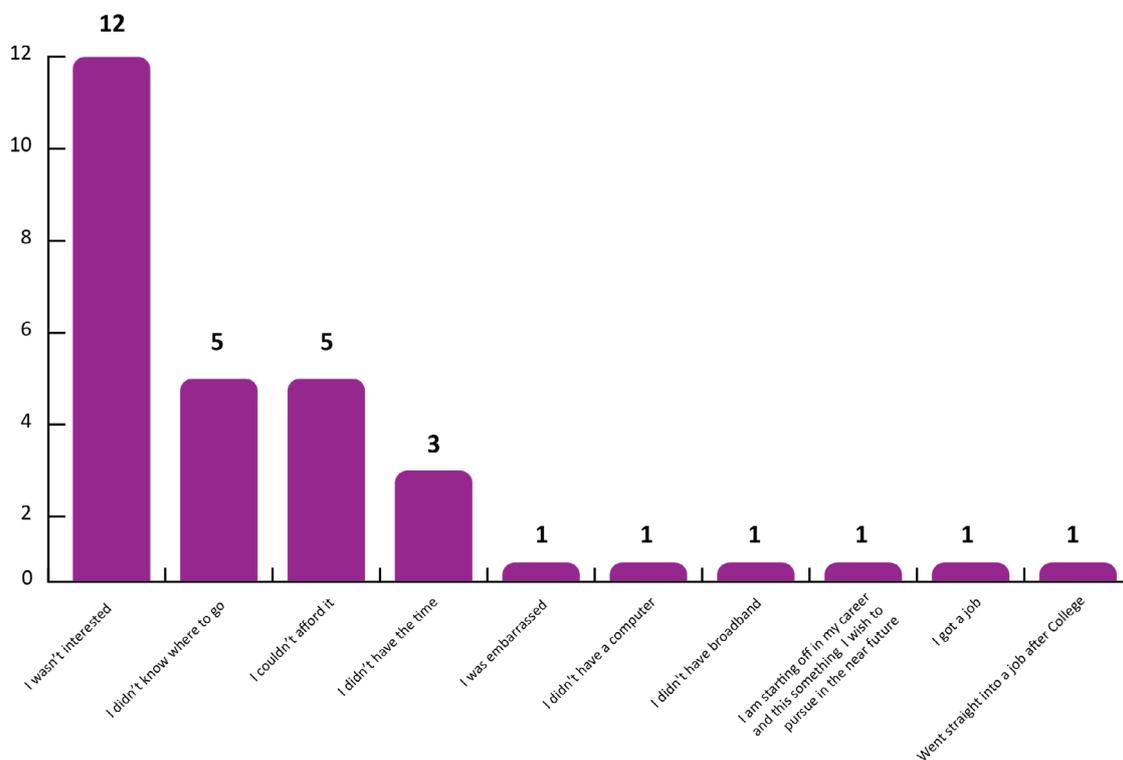


Figure 6: Reasons For Not Pursuing Further Education, n=27

Note: Respondents were permitted multiple choice in answering this question.

Respondents were asked if they had ever taken part in learning on computers or mobile phones. Of the 313 respondents to this question, 79% (n=246) said that they had. Of those who provided details of the type of learning undertaken (n=238), 2 out of 5 (n=98, 41%) had engaged in some form of IT Training such as ECDL (the European Computer Driver Licence) or basic word processing or numerical packages. Almost 2 out of 5 (n=91, 38%) had engaged in some professional training such as courses funded by their employer, accredited training and continuous professional development courses (Figure 7).

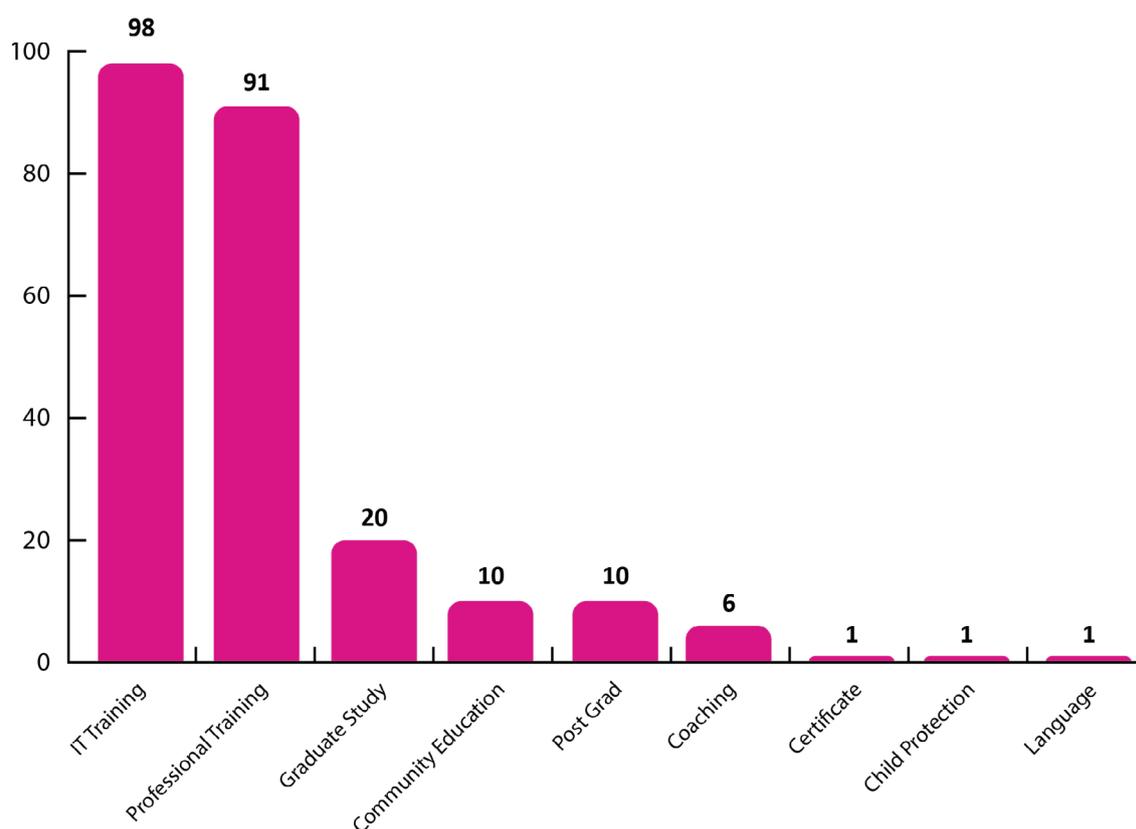


Figure 7: Learning On Computer / Mobile Phone By Type, n=238

4.2.6 Literacy Challenges

Respondents were asked if they had experienced any challenges with literacy. 223 (70%) responded that they had not. Of the 92 respondents who reported detail of the type of difficulty they experienced, more than half (n=49, 53%) had difficulty with public speaking, more than a third (n=33, 36%) had difficulty completing funding applications, more than a quarter (n=25, 27%) had difficulty taking and reading minutes, and 1 in 5 (n=18, 20%) had difficulty being able to understand and follow what people say. While we don't know exactly what individual respondents find difficult about certain tasks, some of these tasks are inherently more difficult than others. Being able to understand and follow what people say (n=18, 20%), reading emails (n=10, 11%) and speaking to others (n=10, 11%) are all foundational skills without which it would be difficult to function in any organisation (Figure 8).

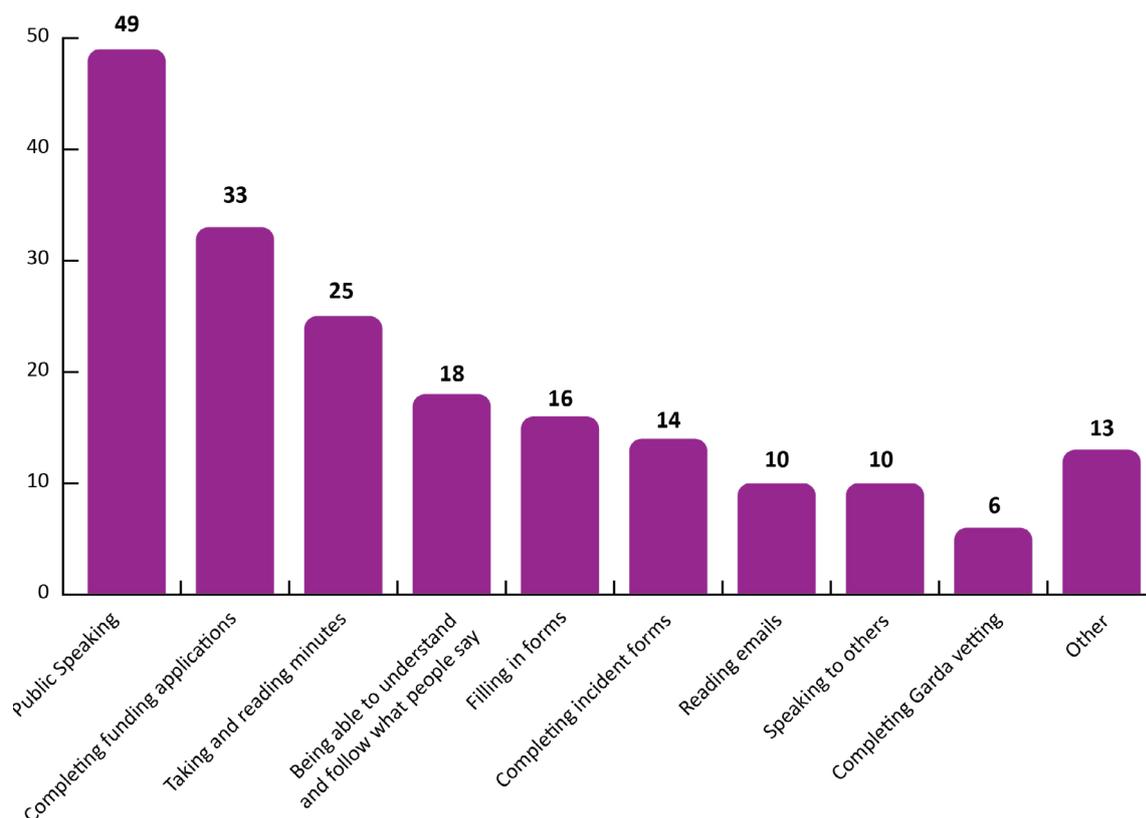


Figure 8: Literacy Challenges By Type, n=92

Note: Respondents were permitted multiple choice in answering this question.

In open-text responses, respondents referred to diverse challenges they face in their roles due to literacy-related issues. Depending on the nature of the role, these issues may have a significant impact on various responsibilities. The difficulty for some respondents (n=6, 7%) in engaging with Garda vetting forms is of particular concern, as these are a statutory obligation (Figure 8). There are, of course, safeguarding protections and policies within organisations and there is no suggestion that these obligations are not being met. In fact, respondents and focus group participants detail the extra work involved for them to ensure that they have fulfilled their obligations, with one participant stating:

- “I’m finding it really hard to do the Garda vetting forms. I was so terrified I would get it wrong, my husband suggested I fill in another one and send it along at the same time to make sure it was all OK and that I was satisfied that I hadn’t got anything wrong on it.”

Other issues identified in the survey responses were also raised in focus groups and interviews:

- “Dyslexia doesn’t define my abilities, but it does impact my written communication while processing spoken information.”
- “For many, reading, writing, and compiling reports are routine tasks, but for me, they present significant challenges due to dyslexia.”
- “Math-related tasks become more challenging when literacy issues intersect, impacting comprehension and problem-solving.”

One participant from the focus group discussions explained how her aspirations to progress in the CV sector were impacted by significant challenges with writing:

- “I’ve always done voluntary work my whole adult life, so I was in and around the sector in different ways. I wanted to be an antenatal teacher and I knew that the only way I would be able to do this was to go back to college and do a course, but I was so used to failure my whole life that this was putting me off. I was so used to not being able to do things and finish courses. That made me not even want to tell people what I wanted to do as I was scared I would fail again. I was so determined as I really enjoy it and I love working with women, their families, births and everything this was my determination and the only thing that kept me going. I had a passion for it but it was such a struggle. There were so many nights I just sat up crying as I couldn’t write. I used Google to help me spell words. I tried using dictation but it couldn’t understand what I was saying. I could never seem to get the right package to support me.”

This contribution highlights the stress that people with literacy difficulties can experience; the extra effort they may go to in order to achieve their goals; and the need for appropriate supports.

4.2.7 Numeracy Challenges

Respondents were asked if they had any numeracy challenges. 235 respondents (73%) reported they had no such challenges. Of those who provided information on the type of numeracy challenges they experienced (n=73), more than half (n=41, 56%) had difficulty with time management, more than a quarter (n=20, 27%) had difficulty adding numbers for a report, 1 in 4 (n=18, 25%) had difficulty adding up numbers for funding and filling in timesheets (Figure 9).

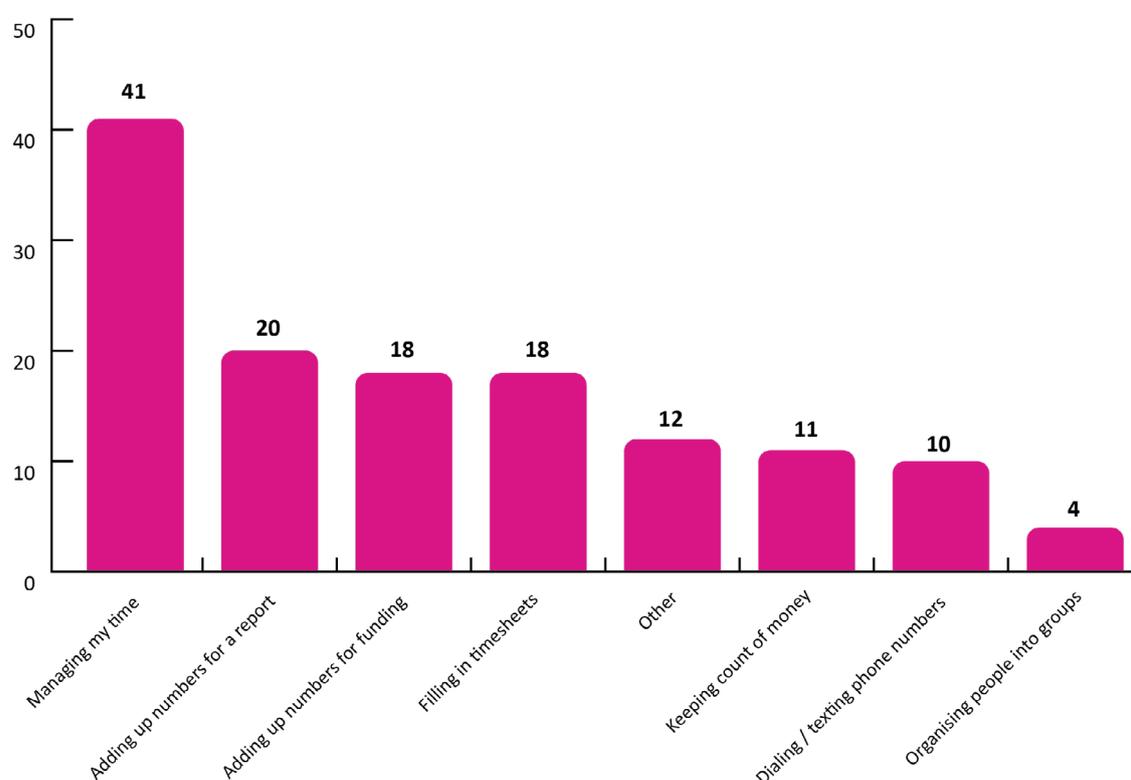


Figure 9: Numeracy Challenges By Type, n=73

Note: Respondents were permitted multiple choice in answering this question.

In open-text responses, respondents elaborated on their challenges with mathematics, including dyscalculia and general difficulty with numerical tasks. They also suggested those who do face difficulties avoid or try not to engage in arithmetic-related activities. For example, some quotes from respondents highlight how numeracy issues impact on their role in the sector:

- “I have big issues with interpretation of stats reports, presentation of stats, report writing where numbers are involved, budget management”
- “Payroll system, but am gradually getting used to it”
- “Keeping track of spending, funding applications, statistics and basic calculations.”

One focus group participant highlighted the very real and potentially harmful impact where organisations don’t have sufficient policies or understanding of the experience of numeracy issues:

- “I had a massive issue with filling in my expenses form for the charity I work with, and I have had to lodge a formal complaint as to how I was treated as a result. I was out expenses and I put the claim in, but filled it in wrong. I had put my name in the wrong place, I put the date in wrong and I didn’t tick the correct boxes. Even having to put my bank details on the form, I messed it up and can’t do it. They were not going to give me the expenses and I had to tell them I am dyslexic, and you are not adapting to me to help me do this, you want me to adapt to your processes and I actually can’t.”

The discussion in the focus group highlighted the frustration experienced by people when the national policies are not translated into organisational practice, with individual staff and volunteers needing to know of and assert their rights to equal treatment and accommodations.

- “I find it frustrating as if people have other disabilities which are visible, allowances would be made for them. Because I have dyslexia and people can’t see it, there is no policy to help me when I need it. And I’m just thrown to the wayside. I now put the onus on others to say what can you do for me with my condition rather than me having to adapt to them. I get so exhausted writing emails that I just don’t care anymore”.

Focus group participants discussed the reasons for not having policies and training in place within organisations, despite policies being in place at a national level. In the opinion of focus group participants, the lack of funding or lack of pressure from individuals with learning difficulties may be preventing the widespread adoption of policies specific to learning needs.

4.2.8 Digital Literacy Challenges

Respondents were then asked if they met any challenges using computers. 229 respondents (71%) reported that they had no such issues. Of those who reported an issue with digital literacy (n=79), almost 2 in 5 (n=31, 39%) reported having difficulty using social media and using messaging services, and almost 3 in 10 (n=23, 29%) reported issues with joining video calls (Figure 10). Smaller numbers have challenges with accessing and using the internet (n=5, 6%) and sending emails (n=4, 5%) but as these skills are fundamental to almost any role in the CV sector, these findings are concerning.

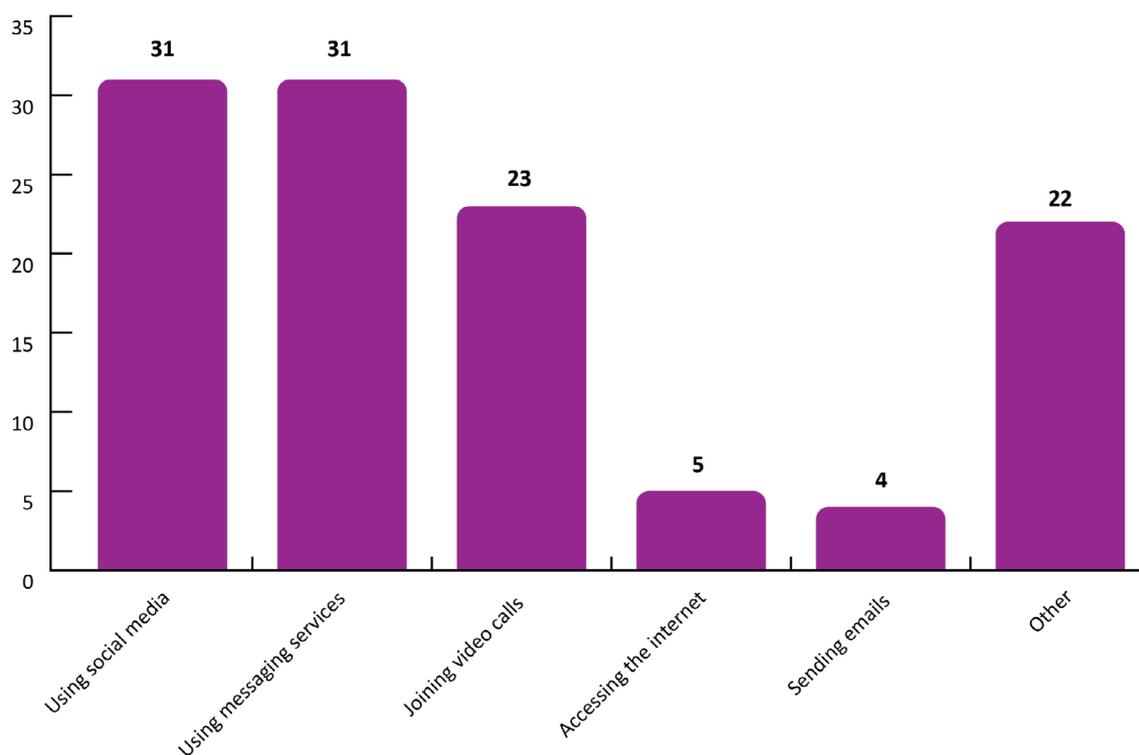


Figure 10: Digital Literacy Challenges By Type, n=79

Note: Respondents were permitted multiple choice in answering this question.

Open-text responses indicated a mixed comfort level with various aspects of technology. While some individuals expressed ease and proficiency in using tools like Excel, PDF editing, web design, and Microsoft packages, others struggled with new technologies, especially those related to social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter/X. One respondent reported that age was a factor in maintaining skills in this area:

- “As I get older I find new tech harder to understand”

4.2.9 Cross-cutting Challenges

It is not uncommon for two or more of these types of literacy challenges to coexist. One focus group participant highlighted a source of particular anxiety where literacy and digital technology through social media interact:

- “I did social media for our organisation and that was a big problem for me as I would get loads of nasty comments about my spelling from people within the sector. I’m strong enough to call them out on it now and tell them I am dyslexic. I tell them they should be looking at the point I’m trying to get across, and not my spelling, but it still happens. It put me off doing social media for my organisation.”

A lack of practical support from the organisation was also highlighted by a focus group participant:

- “I find that there are no real practical supports for me to help me work in the sector. I have Google Home Assist which is the only thing that helps me. I used dictation on Word. That is OK when you are in the privacy of your own home. But if I am out at a meeting, or out in public, I am not going to be standing asking my phone how to spell something. As a result, I now don’t do anything for my group which means I have to answer right away. Spellcheck only works if you know how to spell half of the word for example. I went on to the Dyslexia Association, but I found it hard to find a package that I could afford. It is really expensive and not really within my budget at all. The last time I looked at it the package was around €800 to €1,000. I just couldn’t afford to do that. It would be so good if the sector could invest in this for people that need it.”

Another participant commented:

- “People should be focussing on the message and not our spelling, it’s a really immature position people take, but one that is very common.”
- “It’s really hurtful. For me to do an email or social media post, I just don’t do it and put it up. It takes me so long to write it and then try to check my spelling and all. As a result, I have really lost my own self-trust that even though I might know how to spell a fairly simple word, I doubt that I do. I have to check it over and over again and I know that I am going to get criticised if I do it wrong. People still know what you are trying to say so that is hurtful. It brings me back to when I was in school and the classroom and you had the red pen out from teachers who weren’t very nice about my literacy issues. It cuts a lot deeper than people just saying you’ve spelt something wrong.”

Discussion at the focus group identified a need for awareness of literacy challenges, both among the sector and across the general public. The Adult Literacy for Life Strategy advocates for the launch of a major national campaign to raise awareness of the importance of literacy and numeracy skills and the supports available to help people with unmet needs. This was further identified by focus group participants:

- “There is an absolute need to raise awareness. For people who don’t have literacy issues, but when we point it out, people can’t comprehend the difficulties someone with literacy issues has in bringing up an email and things like that. Maybe people with literacy issues sometimes feel as if we have to blame ourselves as we don’t point it out. We have to be strong and tell people and empower ourselves. If we went into a doctor’s surgery people are maybe not strong enough to ask a doctor to explain it well enough to us and we just say that’s grand, but we walk away not knowing.”

4.2.10 Disclosure of Learning Needs

Of the 303 respondents who answered the question, 12% (n=36) indicated that they have learning needs such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, or other needs. Not all learning needs affect literacy, numeracy or digital literacy, and not all literacy, numeracy or digital literacy challenges relate to learning needs. However, the two are inter-related in some cases.

Some of the responses to open text questions throughout the survey highlight issues relevant to literacy, numeracy or digital literacy that respondents experience in relation to a learning need or disability:

- “I have a disability that causes issues with writing. The physical act of writing can sometimes be painful.”
- “Am dyslexic, cant [sic] type or write when someone is speaking to me”

One focus group participant provided an example of how dyslexia can have a very real impact on engaging with a typical recruitment process in the community and voluntary sector:

- “I have an interview coming up and I told the people I am dyslexic, and what is their policy for dealing with this. They told me they didn’t have one and I then pushed it back to them to say what can you do for me as I’m not filling in the normal forms for this. I was just blatant about it to them. I’ve got to the stage now where I have accepted that I will either do interviews on my terms or if people cannot accommodate me, then there’s no point in me going ahead with it. In fairness they were very good, they let me send in a video to talk about myself instead of filling in an application form. I’ve found now that I spent my whole life running from it and I’m not doing it anymore, people need to accommodate me. It is very liberating, but to be honest I’m just fed up with it!”

The organisation allowing a video application rather than a written form is an example of good practice which enabled a person with a learning need to compete fairly with others in the recruitment process.

4.2.11 Suggestions for Improvement

Respondents were asked for their views on what might help improve their skills. Of the 193 responses, more than half (n=102, 53%) suggested training, 12% (n=23) suggested IT support, and 1 in 10 (n=20) suggested the provision of supports (Figure 11).

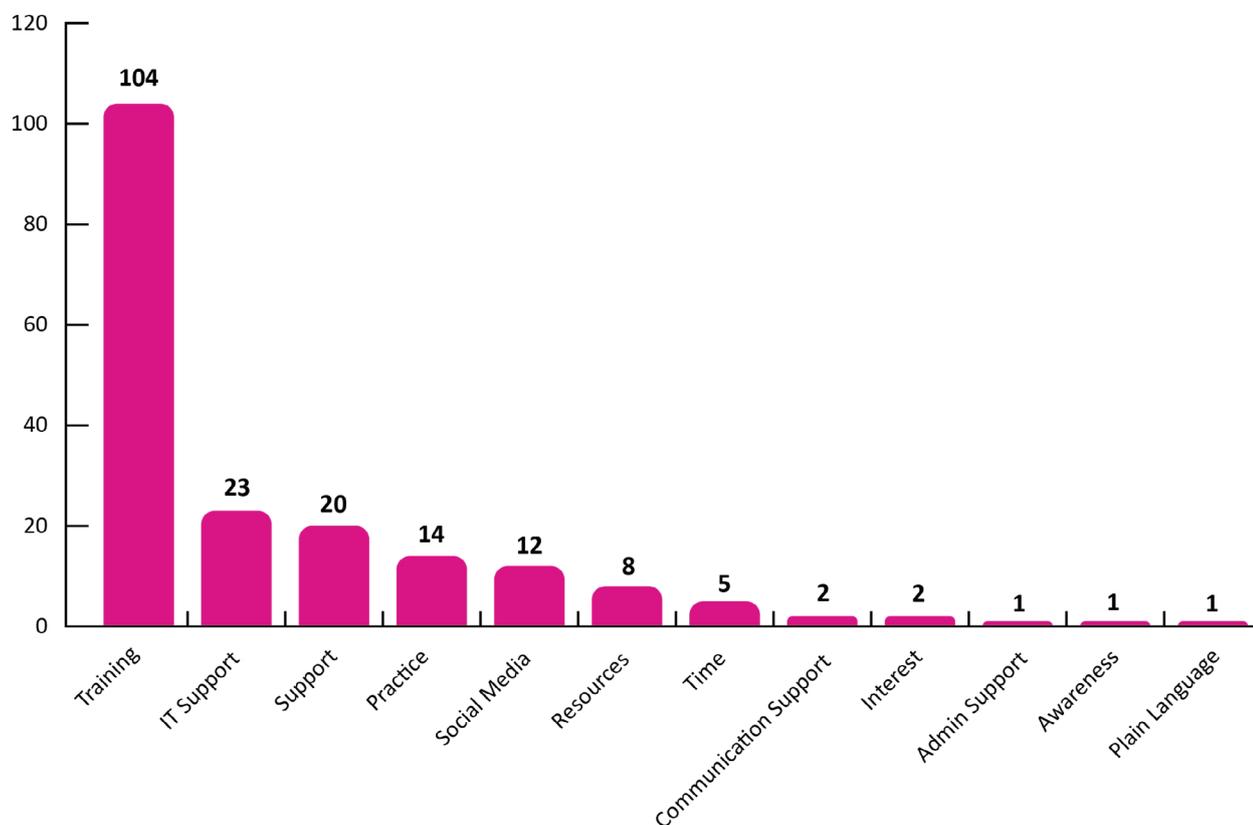


Figure 11: Suggestions for Support by Type, n=193

Note: Respondents were permitted multiple choice in answering this question.

Training

Training was by far the most suggested form of support. The type of training ranged from in-house upskilling to continuous training in IT packages to literacy and numeracy skills training. Training to keep pace with changing technologies and methodologies was also suggested.

- “A range of upskilling courses (in-house) on platforms such a Microsoft 365 for example, as means to enhance and support continuous learning.”
- “As technology is always advancing, training courses are needed to keep up-to-date”
- “Basic digital literacy is fine, but we'll need more than that to keep up with how quickly things are changing.”
- “I myself have done various courses but would like to see an ecdl type qualification for the charities sector”

The accessibility of training was also raised by respondents:

- “Access to learn and practice in my rural community, not having to travel miles”
- “Accessible courses/classes/training (Irish Sign Language)”

IT Support

IT packages can prove difficult to navigate. The specific suggestions made by survey respondents were practical, while also noting the frustration felt by respondents in dealing with operational systems.

- “I’m not the problem! Software is badly designed. ETB timesheet software is a horrible night mare and Teams stinks!”
- “Would like to have broader IT skills and improve immensely with mathematics.”

Support

One in 10 respondents suggested supports outside of training and IT, with specific suggestions including informal and peer to peer support.

- “Encourage public speaking in more informal settings from a young age, and then build confidence to preform [sic] in a more formal environment.”
- “dyslexia supports matched to level of need at work”
- “By asking for help in areas that would help me to grow”

Personal factors

A small number of responses (n=4) indicated that the respondent either blamed themselves or did not believe any supports could help them. Anxiety and stress are evident in some of these responses.

- “From my perspective, it’s my neurodiversity that is an issue, I don’t think there is really any help available to help from a technical point of view”
- “Get rid of the nerves”
- “I avoid anything numerical where possible as I find it stressful”

Section 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The findings of this exploratory study highlight literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs among staff and volunteers working in the community and voluntary sector. While many studies have highlighted these issues in the general population, this study focused specifically on the skills existing within staff and volunteers working in the community and voluntary sector. The report presents evidence that a lack of skills and/or confidence to comprehend written materials, effectively communicate ideas, interpret numerical data, perform basic arithmetic or use digital tools can affect the capacity of staff and volunteers to reach their potential and contribute as much as they would like to the work of the sector.

The vast majority (91%) of respondents have undertaken further or higher education after secondary school, yet 30% indicated literacy challenges, 27% indicated numeracy challenges, and 28% indicated digital literacy challenges. Within the cohort who experience challenges, the specific challenges are on a spectrum of difficulty, from reading emails to completing funding applications.

This study further highlights barriers to staff and volunteers in maximising their contribution to the community and voluntary sector. The barriers identified include:

- lack of funding for tailored training programmes
- limited access to, or awareness of, suitable educational resources
- lack of suitable technical supports
- stigma, stress and anxiety about literacy needs
- complex and inflexible systems for funding, vetting, recruitment and so on
- policy gaps in some organisations
- lack of literacy awareness in some organisations

Removing these barriers, which operate at both an organisational and sectoral level, would support skills development and lifelong learning among staff and volunteers. Findings from this research may be used to inform future literacy awareness training in the sector.

Positive Motivations & Contributions

The research shows that the sector is comprised of motivated individuals who work to achieve a positive impact in their communities. The research found that volunteers and staff, whether or not they encountered barriers due to literacy issues, were proud of the contribution they are making to the lives of the individuals, communities and wider societies they serve.

It is our view that when CV sector organisations and the people that work in them, paid and unpaid, are resourced to apply a literacy friendly approach to their work, removing internal literacy barriers and meeting the unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs amongst staff and volunteers, they will be even better placed to support the communities in which they work and further support those in the community with their own literacy challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the survey findings, interviews and literature review, this report makes a series of recommendations to meet the specific literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs of staff and volunteers in the community and voluntary sector and to overcome the barriers identified.

- 1. Skill development should be prioritised among staff and volunteers by creating an organisational culture that supports continuous learning and development.** This can be achieved by providing opportunities for staff and volunteers to attend training, workshops, and conferences, and by encouraging them to share their learning with others. Organisations, many of which lack funding to provide training budgets and dedicated learning and development staff, need to be supported to develop cultures of continuous lifelong learning. This could involve offering flexible work arrangements, providing access to online learning resources, and ensuring that staff and volunteers are not overburdened with their workload.
- 2. Policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders must increase their awareness about the importance of addressing literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs among staff and volunteers in the community and voluntary sector.** This could involve increased funding for training and development programmes in Literacy Awareness and Plain English, as well as highlighting the positive impact that skilled staff and volunteers have on the sector.
- 3. Community and voluntary sector organisations need to be resourced and encouraged to reference literacy in their existing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies and embed literacy friendly approaches in their work practices.** This could include recruitment, training, working conditions, communication, and equal opportunities policies. Organisations in the sector will need resourcing and support in order to implement a literacy-friendly first approach.
- 4. There is a need to undertake a more in-depth study into the literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs in the CV sector to support the co-design of key supports.**

5. Ensure ease of access to suitable literacy training programmes for CV sector employers and workers.

Raise awareness of and ensure access to initiatives such as Skills for Work which can provide tailored task-specific training, including reading, writing and maths skills; local literacy services run by Education and Training Boards (ETBs); and the Learn with NALA distance learning service and elearning platform (www.learnwithnala.ie). These programmes must be supported by adequate funding, be culturally appropriate to the CV sector and designed to be accessible educational resources. The programmes should be designed based on the identified skills gaps among staff and volunteers and rooted in the day-to-day context of CV sector work, to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

In conclusion, the community and voluntary sector requires support to address the impact of unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs amongst staff and volunteers. The report's analysis section highlights the need for targeted training programmes, prioritising skill development and lifelong learning, providing necessary time and resources to staff and volunteers to engage in learning, increasing awareness among stakeholders and policy-makers, and developing policies to support staff and volunteers.

There are tens of thousands of people who work in the CV sector, paid and unpaid, contributing countless hours of their time, their experience, expertise, passion and drive and many of them are hampered because of needless barriers and unmet literacy needs. Addressing these key areas will help to ensure that these individuals can reach their potential, meaning the community and voluntary sector can perform at its best and deliver the services that our communities need.

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Q1: Are you?	Please Tick
A member of staff in the community and voluntary sector	
A volunteer in the community and voluntary sector	
Both. I work in the sector and also volunteer	
Other	

Q2: How long have you been in this role?	Please Tick
Up to a year	
1-5 years	
6-10 years	
More than 10 years	
Other	

Q3: What type of group do you volunteer or work for?

For example, this might be a charity, a sports group or church group.

Q4: Why did you choose to volunteer or work in the community and voluntary sector?

Please answer in relation to the main role you have in the sector.

Q5: Thinking about your work in the community and voluntary sector, what are you most proud of?

Q6: What level of education have you reached so far?	Please Tick
Did not complete primary school	
Completed primary school	
Completed junior Cycle or Inter Cert	
Completed Senior Cycle	
Completed Apprenticeship	
Attended university	
Attended technological university	
Attended College of Education	
Other	

Q7: Before you joined the community and voluntary sector, did you do any education courses or learning after you left school?	Please Tick
This might be formal training leading to a certificate, or informal training for example manual handling or first aid.	
Yes	
No	
Other	

Q8: If no, was this because:	Please Tick
I wasn't interested	
I didn't know where to go	
I couldn't afford it	
I didn't have the time	
I was embarrassed	
I didn't have a computer	
I didn't have broadband	

Q9: How did you overcome any challenges you mentioned?

--

Q10: If you answered yes, please tell us what you did?

--

Q11: Did you ever take part in learning on computers or mobile phone? For example, library courses on IT, coaching from a family member	Please Tick
Yes	
No	
Other	

Q 12: If you answered yes, please tell us what you did?

--

Q13: Do you meet any challenges with literacy?	Please Tick
No	
Public Speaking	
Completing funding applications	
Taking and reading minutes	
Filling in forms	
Completing incident forms	
Reading emails	
Speaking to others	
Completing Garda vetting	
Other	

Q14: Do you meet any challenges with numbers?	Please Tick
No	
Managing my time	
Adding up numbers for a report	
Adding up numbers for funding	
Filling in timesheets	
Keeping count of money	
Dialling/texting phone numbers	
Organising people into groups	
Other	

Q15: Do you meet any challenges with using computers?	Please Tick
No	
Sending emails	
Accessing and using the internet	
Using social media	
Using messaging services	
Joining video calls	

Q16: What would help you improve your skills?

(In relation to literacy, numeracy and computers)

Q17: Did you ever use ‘Learn with NALA’, our online platform to help with reading, writing, maths, as well as other topics?

Q 18: What county do you live in (Drop-down list provided)?

Q19: Do you have any learning needs? For example, do you have dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, or other needs?

Q20: If you want to discuss your experience of having difficulties with maths, reading, writing or computers, we would like to get in touch with you.

Please note we will not share your contact details with anyone else and will delete them from our system once the research is complete.

End:

Thank you for completing this survey.

Your response has been submitted and will help The Wheel and NALA plan services in the future.

Appendix 2

Acronyms

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ALL	Adult Literacy for Life Strategy
CV	Community and Voluntary
CPD	Continued Professional Development
ECDL	European Computer Driving License
FET	Further Education and Training
IT	Information Technology
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
PDF	Portable Document Format



The Wheel is Ireland's national association of charities, community groups, and social enterprises.

As a representative voice, we provide leadership to the sector and advocate on behalf of our growing community of members.

As a supportive resource, we offer advice, training, and other opportunities to people working or volunteering in the sector.

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The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a charity and membership based organisation.

We work to support adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs to take part fully in society and to have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs.

NALA does this by raising awareness of the importance of literacy, doing research and sharing good practice, providing online learning courses, providing a tutoring service and by lobbying for further investment to improve adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills.

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In Ireland, more than 500,000 people have unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs. This means they may be unable to fill in a form, vote, read instructions on medicines, add up a bill, help kids with homework, or search the web for information.

Adult Literacy for Life is a 10 year, whole-of-government and society strategy dedicated to making an Ireland where every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy to fully engage in society and realise their potential. Because literacy changes lives.

www.adultliteracyforlife.ie