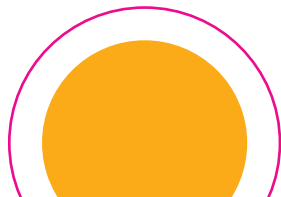
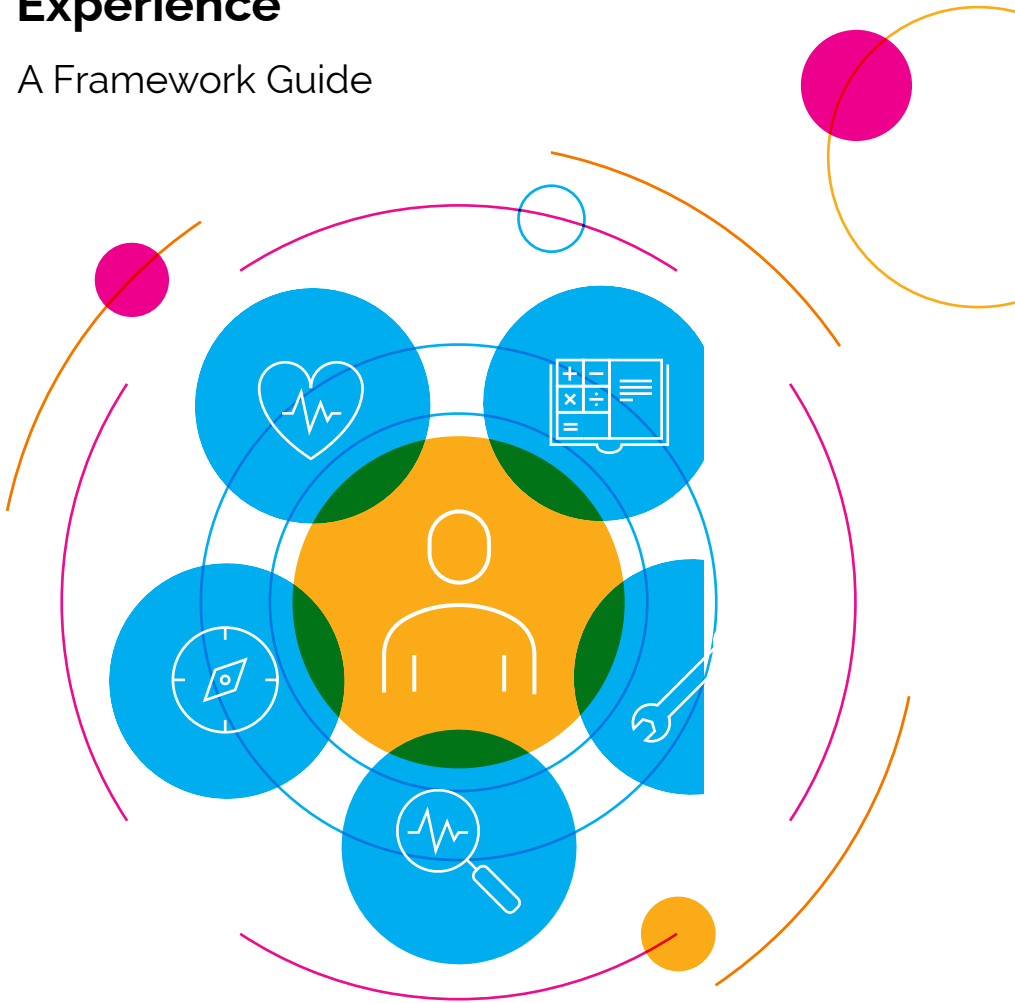


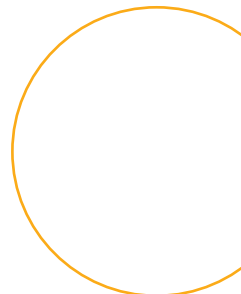
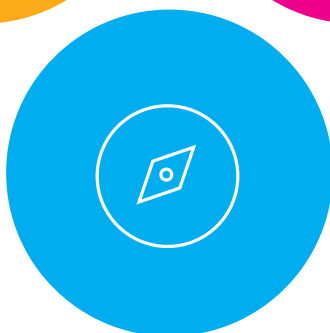
Learner Support in Further Education and Training: Towards a Consistent Learner Experience

A Framework Guide



Produced by:

Education and Training Boards
Ireland (ETBI) – SOLAS Learner
Support Programme Board | 2024



Acknowledgments

This framework guide and the accompanying position paper were developed as part of the Fostering Inclusion priority of developing and providing Consistent Learner Supports in Further Education and Training (FET), contained within *Future FET: Transforming Learning - The National Further Education and Training Strategy*.

The framework guide, and the accompanying position paper, were developed with the oversight of the ETBI-SOLAS Learner Support Programme Board. Acknowledgments are given to the enormous contribution made by the ETBI-SOLAS Learner Support Programme Board, whose commitment to improving these, through rigorous feedback, dialogue and engagement immensely strengthened the work produced. A full list of organisations and individuals represented on the Board can be found in the Appendices (Appendix 2) of this document. We also acknowledge the FET practitioners from across the Education and Training Boards (ETB) network who took the time to prepare and submit case studies which portray such rich examples of learner supports being provided in the sector. A special word of thanks is extended to the SOLAS Learner Support Team who compiled the publication and worked collaboratively with the sector throughout.

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that we present this framework guide, and the accompanying position paper, for Learner Support in Further Education and Training. FET is uniquely placed to take learners as far as they want to go and has an exceptional record in reaching diverse communities and providing inclusive education and training. An important stepping stone towards further embedding inclusiveness in the FET sector, this body of work – A Learner Support Framework - builds on our sector's ambitious Transforming Learning Strategy. It is a clear statement and recognition that widely available and enhanced learner supports are a vital enabling factor for delivering effectively on the key aspects of FET provision, directly contributing to the aims of the sector and the key targets – to widen participation, create pathways, and promote lifelong learning.

This work builds a common understanding of 'Learner Support' in FET and will contribute to empowerment at local ETB level, primarily by aiming to enable and facilitate flexibility and agility regarding support provision. The framework is enhanced by several case studies demonstrating how different types of supports are being provided across the sector and showcasing the progress already being made by FET practitioners in delivering for their learners.

This work is the result of a cross-sectoral co-operation, with SOLAS working closely with the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) and, with key inputs being garnered from FET practitioners, it reflects the impact that learner supports have on improving and enhancing the learner experience in FET. SOLAS and ETBI are delighted to bring this vital resource to the sector and would like to extend thanks to everyone who gave their time to contribute to its development.

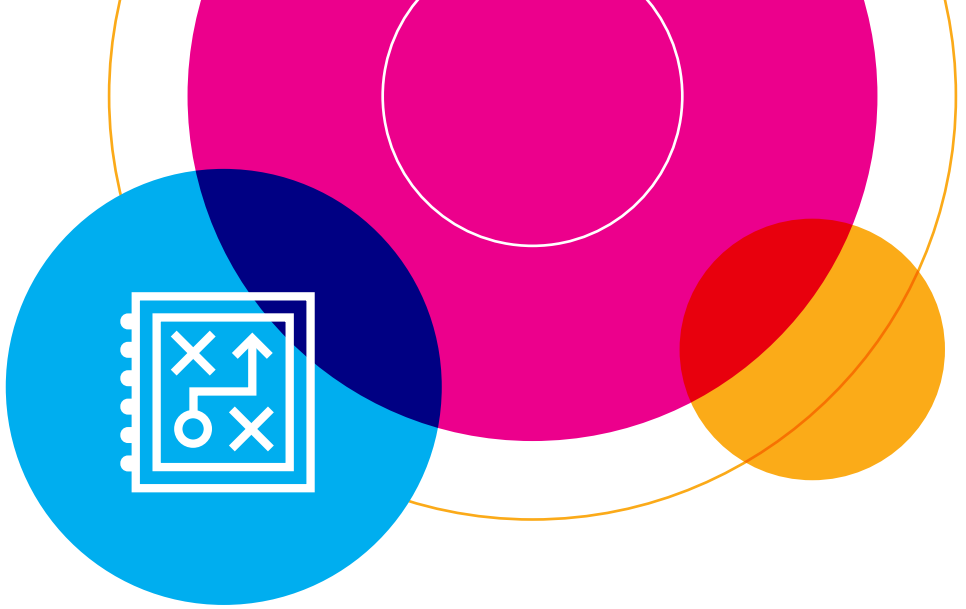


Andrew Brownlee
CEO of SOLAS



Paul Patton
Director of FET, Limerick
and Clare ETB

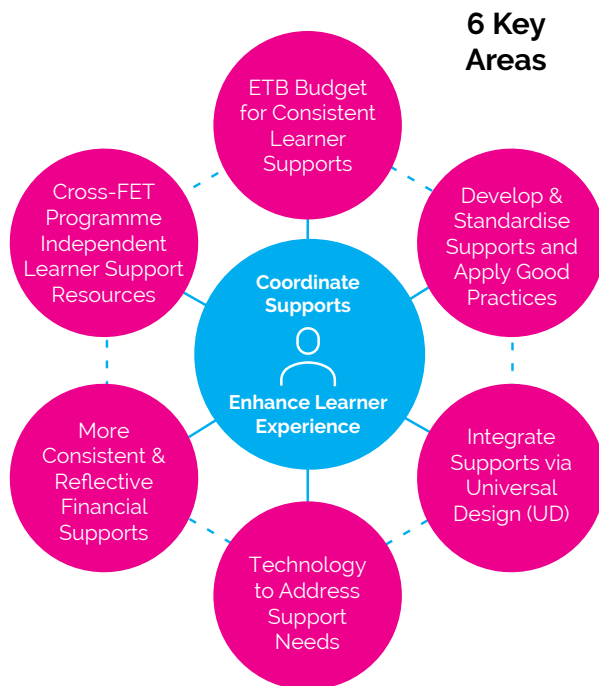
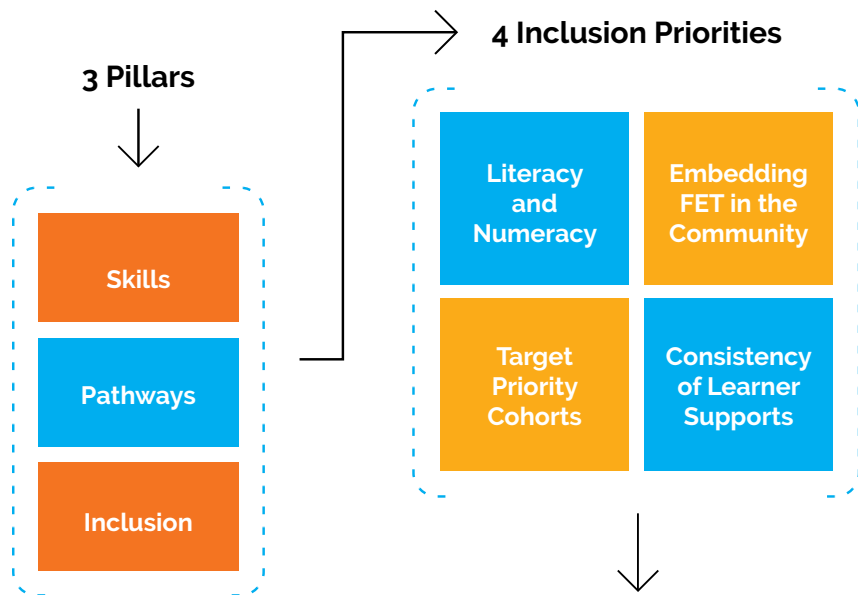
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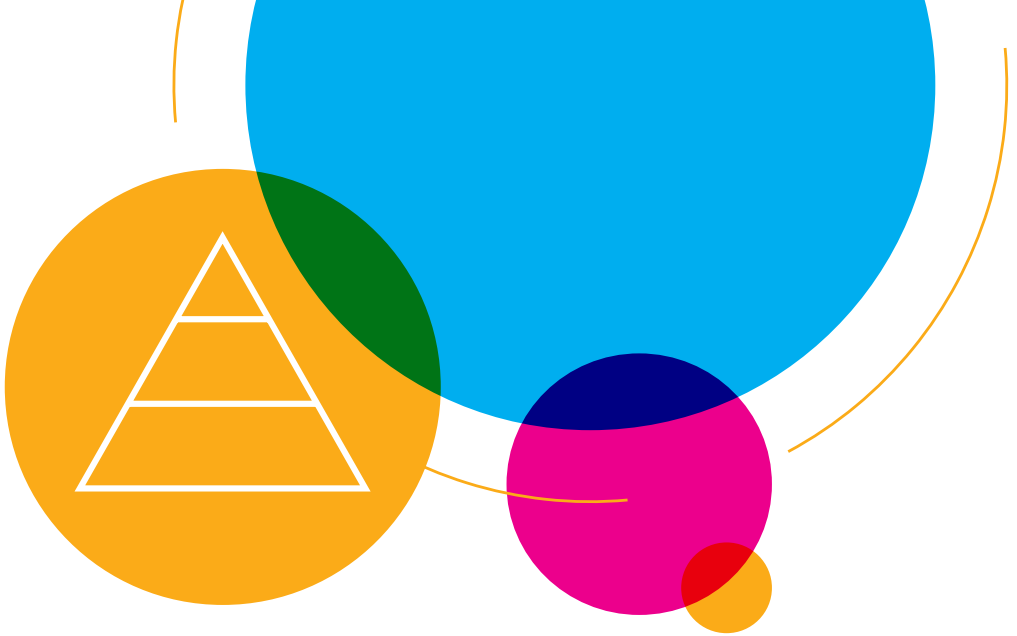


A Framework Guide - Origins and Aims

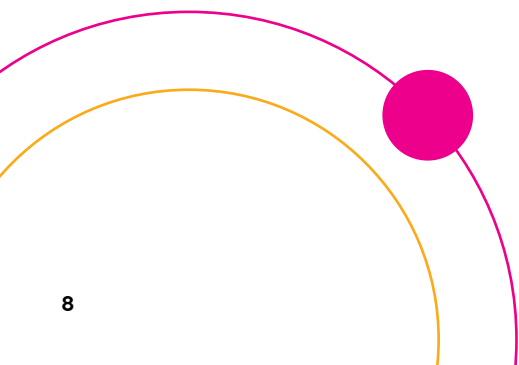
Fostering Inclusion is a priority in the FET Strategy and outlines a clear ambition for delivering Consistent Learner Supports.

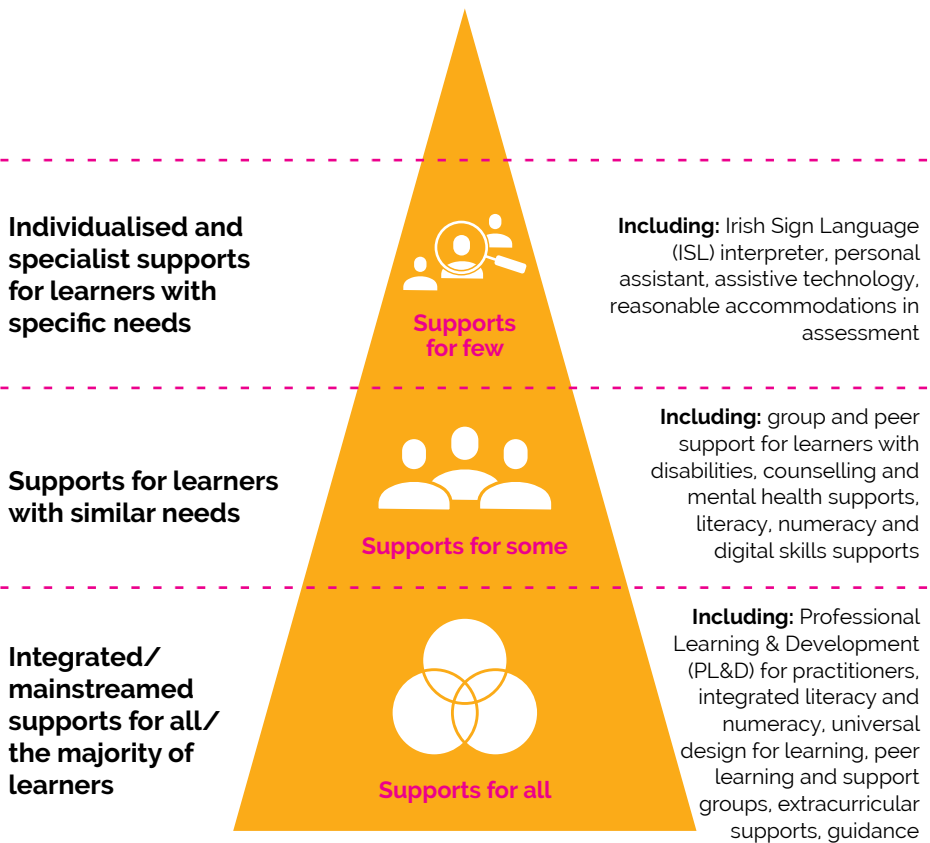
This framework works towards realising this ambition. The framework is underpinned by a Universal Design (UD) approach and aligns with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. It aims to support access and achievement and enhance the overall learner experience within FET.

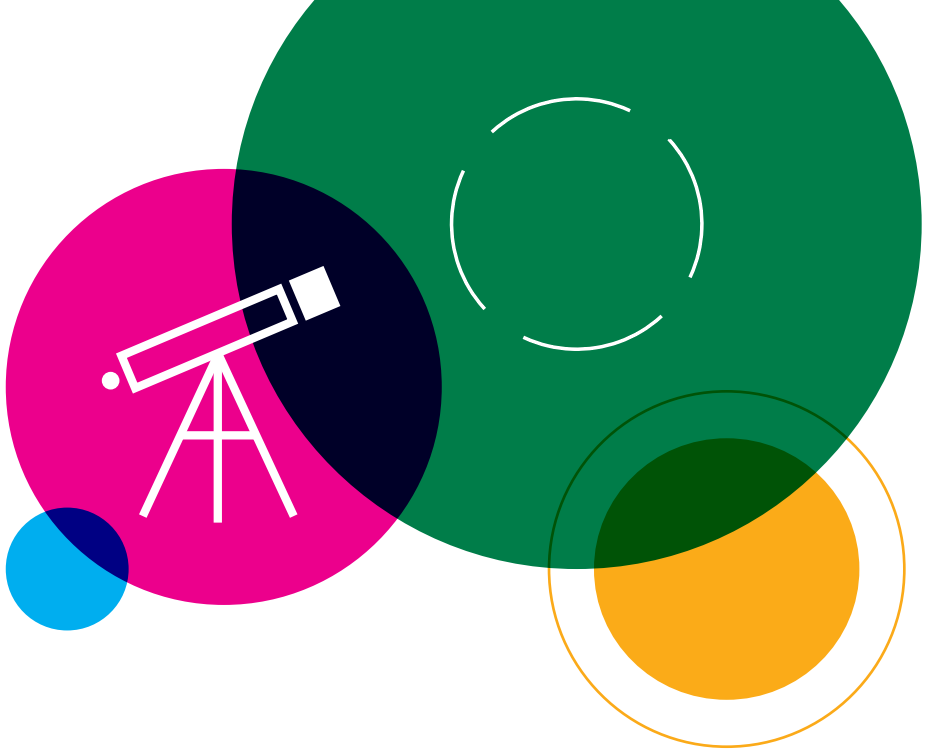




Distribution: The Learner Supports Pyramid

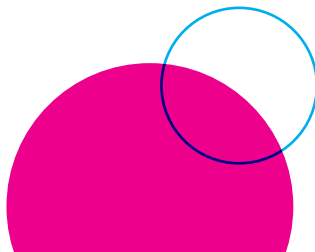






Overview of the Framework for Delivering an Enhanced Learner Experience

Learner supports can be categorised in different ways, for example, by theme: learning, disability, health, wellbeing, financial, supporting pathways and transitions, and by other topics considered "beyond the classroom", such as learner induction, guidance and the provision of extracurricular activities.

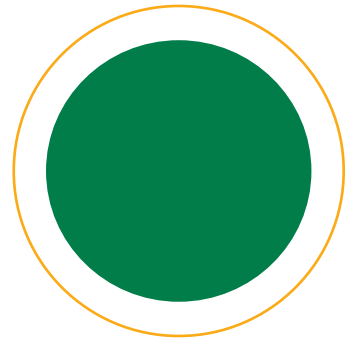
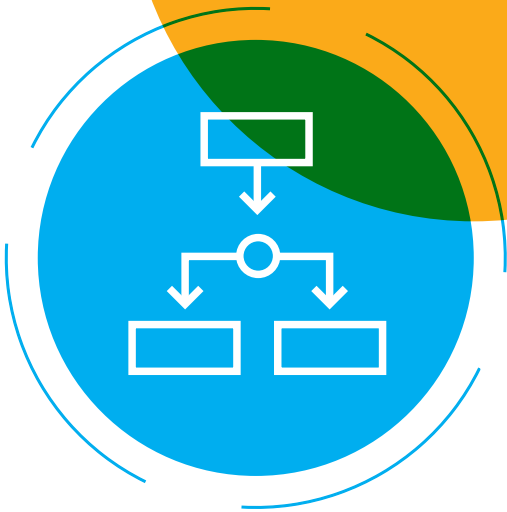


Thematic categorisation is conceptually useful, as it helps to visualise the broad range of supports available to learners across the system but requires mapping to do so systematically. Significant work on this is already underway within the sector, carried out by the ETBI and the Directors of Further Education and Training Forum (DFET).

However, to plan for implementation, it is also important to acknowledge diverse providers of supports (e.g. ETBs, as well as 'external' providers - Government Departments, NGOs), avenues or modes of delivery (e.g. directly provided to individual learners and indirect supports, namely those resources provided to FET practitioners to support learners*), as well as their scope and availability, that is to say, who can avail of them (universally available to all, or only available to learners who meet certain verifiable criteria). Finally, there are built-in supports that are integrated into the system or provision, consistent with, and underpinned by a Universal Design approach.

Categorisation by provider, avenue, and availability is practically useful as it helps to plan for continuum of learner supports, seamless and consistent provision and implementation, and differentiation, as applicable and appropriate.

**See Appendix 1 for a summary of SOLAS sponsored resources for FET practitioners and FET providers.*



Categories of Learner Supports

The Framework proposed here categorises learner supports by provider, avenue or mode of delivery, and availability. Learner Supports would be coordinated by a central resource, developed at ETB level, with different action areas, depending on the category and the nature of support.

Direct Supports

Provided by ETBs, directly to individual learners, based on identified or expressed need:

- Guidance Services
- Specialised disability supports for learners with greater needs
- Counselling, wellbeing and mental health support
- Adapted assessment options
- Outreach programmes
- Learner representation
- Extracurricular activities, tours, visits, etc.

External Supports

Provided by Government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)/Not-for-profit/Nonprofit agencies:

- Welfare system supports provided by Department of Social Protection (DSP)
- Needs assessment: Dyslexia & dyscalculia assessments provided by Dyslexia Ireland (DI)
- Supported internships for people with disabilities provided by AHEAD
- National Adult Learner Forum/ Learner Voice, provided/ delivered by AONTAS

Central
Coordinating
Resource



Developed at
ETB Level

Indirect Supports

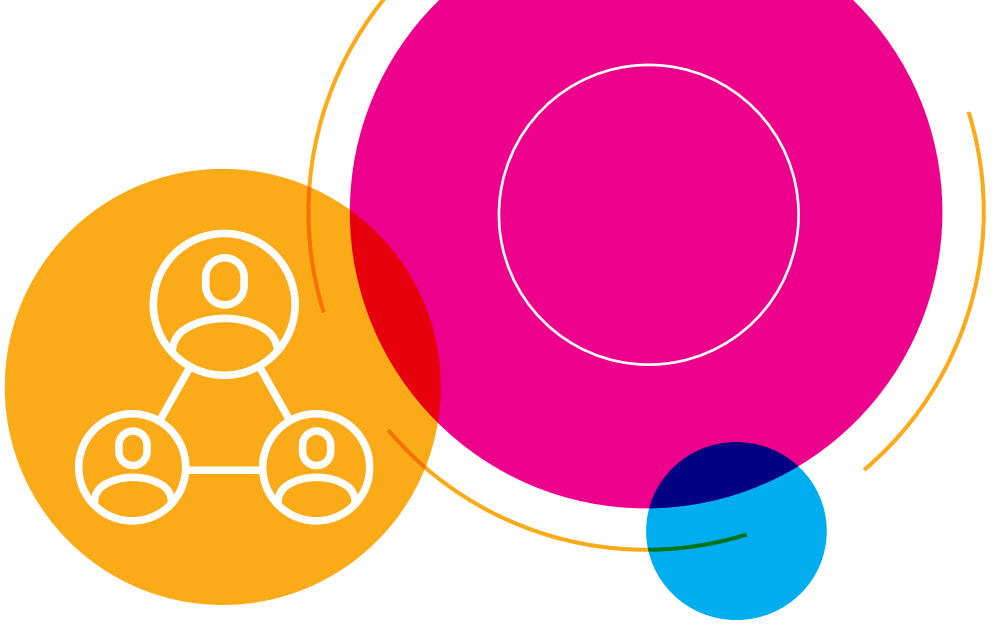
Provided and implemented by ETBs, to FET practitioners, to support them to support learners:

- Relevant PL&D
- Support units in ETBs (e.g. curriculum development, inclusion)
- Professional Peer Learning Networks
- Good Practice Guidelines/Guides on key topics/themes (e.g. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Assessment, Change to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Inclusion)
- FET learning environment in alignment with Public Sector Duty (PSD)

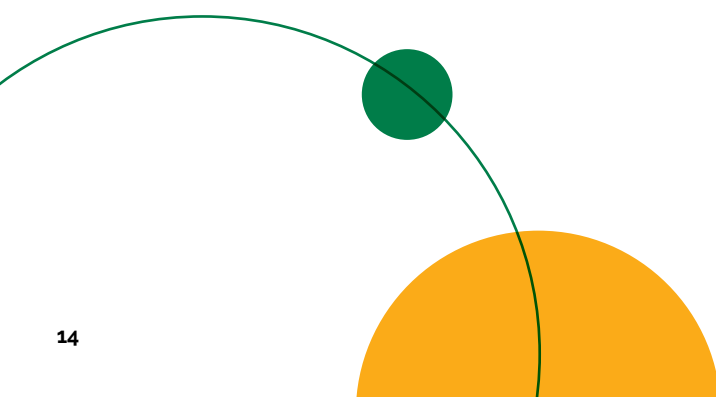
Integrated Supports

Supports integrated into FET provision, available without restriction to all learners who want/require them:

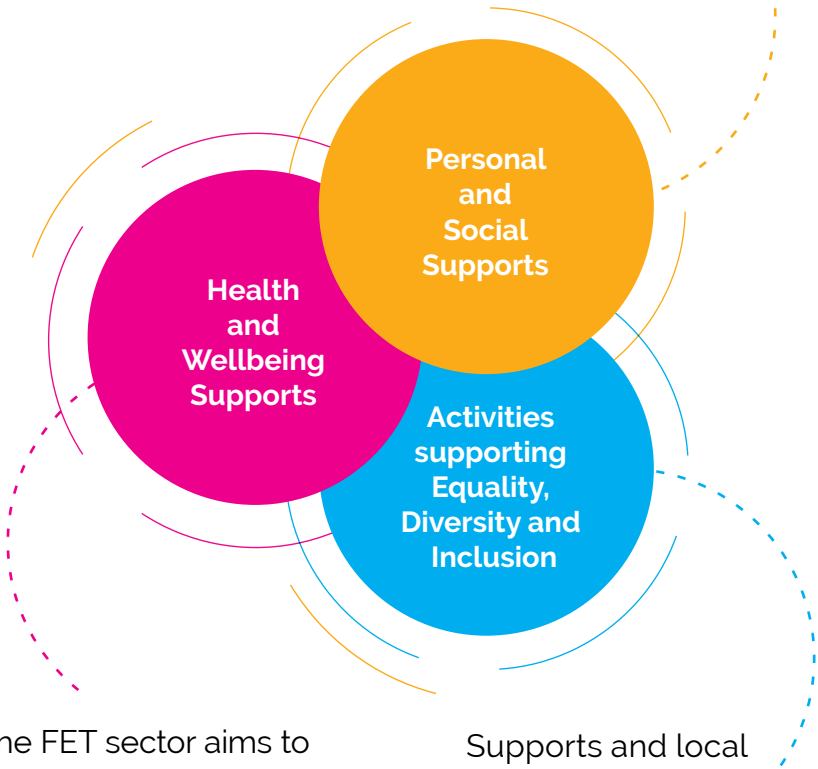
- UD/UDL for curriculum design, teaching and learning, and assessment
- Integrated literacy and numeracy
- Accessible Information
- Technology Enhanced Learning
- UD/UDL in virtual learning spaces



The Personal, Social and Cultural Aspects of Learner Experience

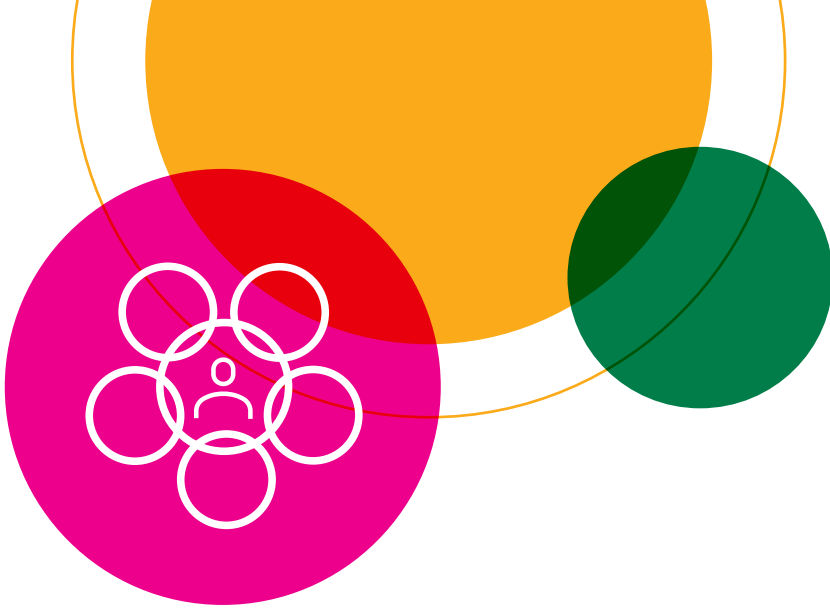


We recognise that a positive learner experience when engaging with FET is more readily achieved when a learner feels at ease within the learning environment and the course of study.

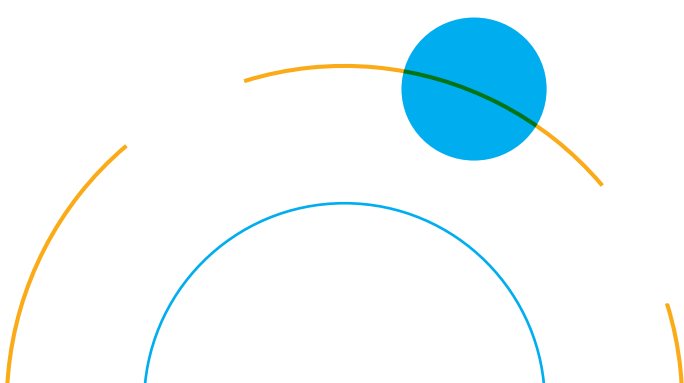


The FET sector aims to provide teaching and learning environments that are open and inclusive to a diverse range of cultural backgrounds across the learner and staff community.

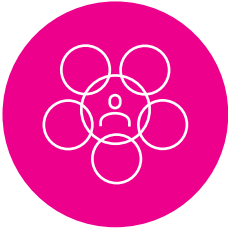
Supports and local initiatives aimed at increasing access from diverse groups, such as linkages with local communities, cultural organisations and representative groups are important.



**Central Coordinating
Resource Action Areas:
Linking, Supporting, Facilitating,
by Learner Support Category**



**Central
Coordinating
Resource**



**At ETB
Level**



Link

Learners to Direct and External Supports

- Network with other ETBs, external providers and existing community supports to explore synergies/connections.
- Provide information on Direct & External Supports.
- Support application processes.



Support

Practitioners to support Learners

- Identify relevant Professional Learning & Development.
- Promote Professional Learning networks and Communities of Practice (COP).
- Provide information on Indirect Supports.
- Promote relevant Good Practice Guidelines/Guides.



Facilitate

Integration of Learner Supports

- Support peer learning and support groups.
- Champion the adoption of Universal Design principles.
- Promote relevant Indirect Supports.
- Provide data and information to help identify supports suitable for integration.

Appendices

Appendix 1: SOLAS Sponsored Resources for Consistent Learner Support

Good Practice Guidelines and Toolkits

Initial and Ongoing Assessment of Adult Literacy and Numeracy at NFQ levels 1-3 Guidelines, Toolkit and Research Report

Assessing Literacy and Numeracy at NFQ Levels 4-6 in ETBs: A Handbook of National Guidelines, Toolkit, Background Report and FAQs

Family Literacy in Practice in ETBs - Guidelines, Case studies and Recommendations

Initial and Ongoing Assessment of English Language Competency of Migrant Learners in FET - Research Report, Guidelines, and Toolkit

Implementation of Guidelines on the Inclusion of Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in Adult Literacy Services - Background Report & Case Studies

Good Practice in Integrated and Standalone Numeracy Provision and Levels 1-3 - Background Report, Guidelines, and Recommendations

UDL for FET Practitioners: Guidance for Implementing Universal Design for Learning in Irish Further Education and Training

Data resources

The **Skills and Labour Market Research Unit**

provides information in relation to anticipation and early identification of skill needs through national and international research, which can be leveraged to inform stakeholders such as guidance services. The outputs are used as resources to inform education and training provision, and to support the learners' decision-making process regarding their education and career choices.

The **Data Analytics Unit** produces 'FET in Numbers' Cohort Reports, including reports on:

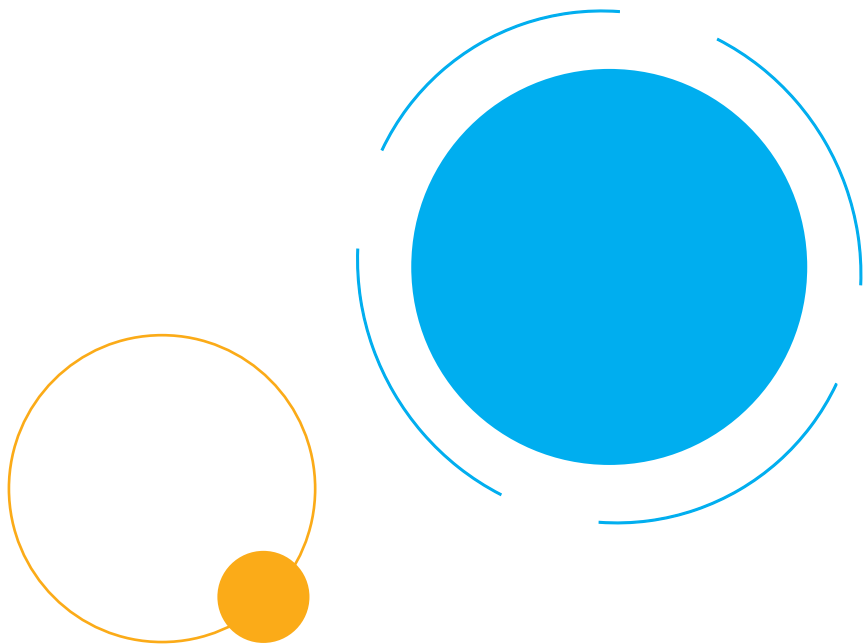
- Traveller Community
- Roma Community
- Learners with Disabilities
- Lifelong Learning

All resources can be accessed at the SOLAS Online library by [clicking here](#).

Appendices

Appendix 2: ETBI - SOLAS Learner Support Programme Board Membership

Name	Role	Organisation
Paul Patton (Chairperson)	Director of Further Education & Training (FET)	Limerick Clare ETB
Roisin Doherty	Director of Learner Support	SOLAS
Blake Hodgkinson	Director of Further Education & Training (FET)	City of Dublin ETB
Ken Seery	Director of Further Education & Training (FET)	Kildare Wicklow ETB
Fergus Craddock	Inclusion Unit Manager	Education and Training Boards Ireland
Dr Joseph Collins	Director of Further Education & Training (FET)	Education and Training Boards Ireland
Ciaran O'Brien	Director of Further Education & Training (FET)	Donegal ETB
Martha Bolger	Director of Further Education & Training (FET)	Kilkenny Carlow ETB



SOLAS - An tSeirbhís Oideachais

Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna

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