

Exploring Further Education and Training:

“Who is the Further Education and Training Adult Learner”?

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Thesis submitted for the award of Doctor of Education
to Institute of Education, Dublin City University

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January 2021

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script, which appears to read "Marie Maloney".

Signed:

ID No: 16212133 Date: December 16th 2020

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge most gratefully all the staff on the Ed.D programme for their professionalism, support and wisdom. I sincerely acknowledge and thank Dr Jane O’Kelly and Dr Shivaun O’Brien I was privileged to have them both as my supervisors and lifelong friends into the future. They were always insightful, supportive, encouraging and practical in their analysis and feedback.

My fabulous classmates and our WhatsApp group who were a great support and over the four years, I learned so much with you and from you, I am very grateful for your friendship and support. To my mum, dad and brother thank you for your love.

I would like to thank City of Dublin ETB Chief Executive Carol Hanney and Directors of Further Education and Training Ann Gilton and Blake Hodgkinson and Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim ETB Chief Executive Tom Grady and Director of Further Education and Training Peter Egan for their assistance and support during the data collection phase of this research. I especially thank the adult learners that completed the questionnaire and acknowledge the honesty and generosity of the ten wonderful adult learners that willingly shared their stories and reflections during the interviews.

To my husband, Thomas and my children, Chloe, Fía and Evan, the geni you are my rock and my safe space. I express my unending love and respect for you all and thank you for the time and space you gave me to do this labour of love. This has been an exceptional journey and I have enjoyed every minute of it. When my life took an unexpected twist toward the end of this journey this research became a core part of my survival pack. It kept me focused and gave me a sense of control where I had none. I am blessed. I have so much to be thankful for, I experience love with my amazing family and exceptional friends and I have faith, hope, light and life.

Thank you all, I am grateful.

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Abbreviations

AnCO	An Chomhairle Oiliúna – the National Industrial Training Authority
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DBEI	Department of Business, Enterprise, and Innovation
DES	Department of Education and Skills (Science pre-2010).
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
DSP	Department of Social Protection
EEC	European Economic Community
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESF	European Social Fund
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
EU	European Union
FÁS	An Foras Áiseanna Saothair – the Irish National Training and Employment Authority
FET	Further Education and Training
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Awards Council
ICT	Information and Communications Technology

ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
INOUE	The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
NFQ	National Framework Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PIAAC	Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PLC	Post-Leaving Certificate
PLSS	Programme Learner Support System
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SLMRU	Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, in SOLAS
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna – Further Education and Training Authority
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

Abstract

Exploring Further Education and Training: “Who is the Further Education and Training Adult Learner”?

Fiona Maloney

This qualitative research focused on Further Education and Training (FET) in the Republic of Ireland and investigated who is the Further Education and Training adult learner? Analysis of academic literature produced two research questions that were explored through a case study approach:

- a. The characteristics of the adult FET learner
- b. The motivation to pursue a FET course as an adult

This research provides practice based evidence, baseline research and an up to date context of the FET sector. Analysis of 165 web based questionnaires and 10 interviews confirmed the characteristics and the motivations of the Irish adult FET learner. The motivation to engage in FET was found to be complex and dependent on many variables that included the satisfaction of need, self-determination and timing. The traditional profile of FET as a second chance or remedial avenue of education was challenged, as engagement was not necessarily linear but horizontal as well as vertical; lifelong and life-wide learning at the NFQ level most appropriate to their needs. This research also confirmed that adults seek qualifications. Participants were predominantly female, aged 41-65 years who were balancing multiple responsibilities and were self-motivated toward the achievement of goals including the achievement of qualifications, improved employment prospects, and progression to HE. Participants enjoyed universal familial support for their engagement in FET but acknowledged the financial responsibility associated with their engagement. The heterogeneous aspirations of the adult learner and their need for provision to be flexible, accessible and affordable was confirmed. The benefits of FET for learners, communities and employers was demonstrated as was the need for FET providers to remain responsive to the evolving demands of the economy, society and learners.

Chapter 1 Setting the Scene - introduction to the research

1.1 Exploring Further Education and Training: who is the adult learner

This qualitative research examined the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, to discover the characteristics of the FET adult learner and their motivation for engagement in FET. The central research question was: what motivated adult learners to choose a FET course of study? This research is the first qualitative profile of the Irish FET learner and their motivations. It is envisaged this research will inform FET policy and add to the overall body of academic knowledge with particular reference to the characteristics, needs and motivations of adult FET learners.

1.1.1 Background to the research question

FET provision has been shaped by a series of national and European horizontal strategies and policies all linked to wider principles and goals of FET set by SOLAS (2019). SOLAS (2019) encapsulated the core benefits of FET as:

- Improved employment prospects through engagement with vocational programmes that were linked to regional and national critical skills needs
- Progression opportunities to other education and training
- Development of transversal skills
- Social engagement.

SOLAS (2019) emphasised the measurement of the impact of FET for learners using the following metrics:

- Transition to the labour market
- Progression to higher education and training
- Improved learner confidence
- Inclination toward additional learning.

Any measurement of impact should take cognisance of the motivations of the learner for their engagement in FET. This research aims to investigate the motivation of learners and the correlation of the same to the core benefits of FET. As Fox (2003) claimed it is timely to develop “*practice-based evidence*” (p. 84) to inform the continued development of the sector.

1.1.2. My background

This research reflected my interests and professional experience and was highly relevant to my work within the FET sector. I have worked in the FET sector for more than 25 years as a consequence, my role as researcher and insider in this research process required ethical consideration and is discussed in Chapter 3.

1.1.2 Context

The term FET in Ireland usually refers to education and training provision after second level schooling, but which is not part of the third-level system. The evolution of FET has been generally split between the provision of skills training for the labour market and part-time adult education focussed on social inclusion and basic skills provision. From the mid-twentieth century on, FET, while remaining heterogenous, came to be integrated into formal national education and training systems and was seen by Government as a valuable means of promoting economic growth and a powerful tool for fostering social inclusion. The last decade saw FET transformed from an under-valued and under-funded sector, to a distinct and valuable part of the Irish education system underpinned by policy, strategy and legislation.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

Following on from **Chapter 1** Setting the Scene - Introduction to the research, **Chapter 2** Context of Further Education and Training, provides an overview of FET in Ireland. Government education policy

priorities are identified and considered alongside the role of voluntary, cultural and agricultural initiatives. The historical and more recent structures for new systematic developmental pathways for FET are examined with a review of the legislative documents that included Education and Training Boards Act 2013 and the Further Education and Training Act 2013 which established FET as a distinct, statutory, recognised, funded and regulated sector.

Chapter 3 Literature Review examines the findings drawn from academic literature in relation to the research question- what motivates adult learners to choose a FET course of study?. The research framework was informed by adult learning theory and theories of motivation. Literature related to the features and characteristics of the adult learner was considered and the relationship between adult learning and motivation theory explored with particular reference to the motivation theories of hierarchy of needs.

Chapter 4 Methodology outlines the research process, clarifies the research question, identifies the research methods and their administration to underpin the collation, analysis and reporting of the results.

Chapter 5 Findings provides a presentation of the research findings based on qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data.

Chapter 6 Discussion provides a further insight on the data through thematic analysis which allowed for triangulation of themes considered in the literature review.

Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations presents the conclusions and discussed implications for FET policy and practice. The limitations of the work are discussed and areas for possible future research that emerged from this research are reflected.

Chapter 2 Context of Further Education and Training

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contextualises the FET sector and the influences that have impacted upon it. The historical context of FET and the journey to aggregation of the previously separate further education and training sectors is charted. The quest for a definition for FET is examined. FET learning opportunities in Ireland are outlined and profiling of the FET learner concludes this chapter.

2.2 The Further Education and Training sector

The evolution of the Irish FET sector and its organic and disparate foundations must be understood and acknowledged in any analysis of the sector. SOLAS (Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna), the National Further Education and Training Authority, received responsibility to oversee the delivery of integrated FET by Education and Training Boards (ETB) in 2014. The Education and Training Boards were established under the Education and Training Boards Act 2013. The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999) gave legislative status to the FET sector as “*education and training other than primary or post-primary education or higher education and training*” (section 10). The SOLAS 2014-2019 Further Education and Training strategy for Ireland aimed to ensure a fit-for purpose FET sector was established and maintained O’Ruairc (2015) claimed the FET sector served “*the needs of a diverse student cohort, both in terms of socioeconomic disadvantage and the broader aspect of inclusive education*” (p.9).

2.2.1 Defining Further Education and Training

The term FET is used in Ireland however internationally, the term most commonly used is vocational education and training (VET). O’Leary

and Rami (2017) concluded “*the term FET is used in Ireland to encompass Further Education, Vocational Education and Vocational Education and Training*” (p. 2). Throughout this research the term FET will be used in relation to Ireland and VET used in relation to other jurisdictions. FET was depicted by the Department of Education and Skills as the distinct, diverse and vibrant sector of the Irish education system that provided learning opportunities at post-secondary school level to a range of different learners. SOLAS (2016) described the sector as “*unique within the Irish education system as it is not dedicated to any one specific group of learners by virtue of age or stage of educational development*” (p. 4). This diversity has led to much debate around a definition for FET, which often focused on what FET was not rather than depicting what FET was. While FET was not considered as post-primary it was equally not considered as third level. O’Leary and Rami (2017) claimed that the lack of clarity around FET arose from the myriad of agencies engaged in the space but also because of the “*breadth of provision and its links with other services such as employment, training, welfare, youth, school, juvenile liaison, justice and community and voluntary sector*” (p.2). The lack of clarity Murray et al, (2014) suggested “*adds to the confusion around the purpose of its activities*” (p.103) which the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) (2014) had previously claimed arose because FET was “*wide-ranging and heterogeneous in nature, making it extremely difficult to define*” (p.14). In the development of the first FET strategy SOLAS (2018) concluded “*the FET sector would benefit from clear direction from the Department of Skills and Education to help articulate exactly who FET is catering for and the expected outcome*” (p.56). As the national funding agency for FET SOLAS (2017) confirmed “*Further Education and Training (FET) refers to the provision of education and training at levels 1-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)*” (p.15). FET opportunities are recorded as life-long learning, social inclusion and access to work based learning opportunities for citizens aged sixteen and over (SOLAS 2017) and presented and conceptualised by SOLAS as the fourth pillar of the education system.

Internationally, similar to the position in Ireland an absence of a single agreed definition of VET was evidenced. The term VET is most commonly used to comprehend both full-time labour market-focused provision such as apprenticeships and traineeships and part-time education focused on social inclusion and basic skills provision. Cedefop (2014) explained

vocational education and training takes many forms; it is the most heterogeneous of the main education and training sectors in Europe today. It is difficult to grasp VET as a single institutional entity as it overlaps with other parts of the education and training system in many cases (p. 5).

Cedefop recognised that variation existed across countries and the variation in subsections with VET as a sector which resulted in inconsistent definitions of FET “*we can assume that in most countries there is not one single definition of VET, but a number of definitions either for VET as a whole and/or for its various subsectors*” (p.7). It was clear that an agile comprehension of VET was required that encompassed the development of knowledge, access to the labour market and transversal skills. In consideration of the myriad of variation across VET and in recognition of attempts to craft a definition that encapsulated the provision Rojewski (2009) proposed any definition of VET

must be flexible enough to allow for differences in secondary or postsecondary programmes and accommodate changes in various economies and countries, but at the same time identify underlying assumptions, beliefs and values that are consistent for all types of programmes and are not readily subject to change (p. 20).

From my knowledge of the sector and knowledge gathered through this research process I have defined FET as “*the local and community based trajectory of flexible lifelong and life-wide learning opportunities for learners over the age of 16*”.

2.3. Historical Context of FET in Ireland

2.3.1 Charting the journey

The evolution of the Irish FET sector can be contextualised by three distinct phases since the foundation of the State (DES 1998). The first phase from 1922 to the end of the 1960s, the second phase with the establishment of the first Committee on Adult Education by the Department of Education in 1969 and the third phase began in 1989 with the emergence of second chance education opportunities for adults. The Green Paper (1998) acknowledged that unlike other education sectors, FET “*straddled two reasonably discrete sectors a statutory sector and a voluntary, nongovernmental sector*” (p.36).

Phase one, 1922 -1968: The period from the formation of the State up to 1968 during which The Vocational Education Act 1930 was passed to establish, maintain and develop a suitable system of continuing education and technical education. The Vocational Education Act 1930 established the Vocational Education Committees (VEC), which became the main statutory provider of education for adults in this period. Ó'Murchú (1984) highlighted the important role of voluntary cultural and agricultural community-based movements in the sector.

Phase two, 1969 – 1988: This era included the establishment of AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation in 1969, which set up NALA the National Adult Literacy Association in 1977. DES (2011) articulated the purpose and priorities envisaged from these organisations

AONTAS and NALA have played and continue to play, a critical role in heightening the visibility and priority of literacy and Adult Education issues in Ireland in the development of initiatives, materials and resources to supply a growing professional base and quality standards within the sector (p.40).

The establishment of the Department of Education committee to examine the nature of adult education in Ireland with regard to its future structure heralded a new era for the sector. The mandate for adult, community and further education for the VECs broadened

considerably, with the appointment of Adult Education Organisers (AEOs) to VECs. Subsequently, two adult education advisory bodies were established by the Department of Education, from which emerged the Murphy Report (1973) on Adult Education in Ireland and the Kenny Commission on Adult Education (1983. Fleming (2004) concluded these reports “*set a more systematic developmental path for adult education*” (p.2), which included the introduction of European Social Fund (ESF) funded pre-employment courses in VEC second level schools.

Phase three, 1989 – present day: The Vocational Opportunities Training Scheme (VTOS), the first national second chance programme of education for unemployed people and supported by the ESF was introduced. Rapid development followed through An Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), the former Irish state authority with responsibility for Training and Employment established in 1988 and dissolved in 2013 and the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) in 2002 which provided part-time courses for those with less than upper secondary education or in receipt of social welfare payments. Other developments in this time period are explored in more detail below.

2.3.2 A new era

The period from 1997 to 2015 saw the introduction of new legislation and policies to the sector. This underpinned the restructuring of a sector that had largely developed organically and extemporaneously responding to local need in the absence of national policy or guidelines. The Green Paper on Adult Education (1998) introduced recognition for the sector with “*a balanced approach to adult education, incorporating economic considerations within a broad spectrum of issues, including personal, social, cultural and environmental concerns*” (p.7). This reflected the European Commission position that contributions to and from education should reflect the economic rationale of the country. The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) provided the first policy and model for Adult Education and Government commitment towards

a comprehensive system of lifelong learning and acknowledged the sector was “*the last area of mass education which remains to be developed in Ireland*” (p.22). Waters (2007) argued that while the White Paper was a welcome policy development, its failure to resource and follow through on its commitments was disappointing. Bane (2007) argued that the White Paper, although promised much, delivered little.

In 2011 an tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS), the further education and training authority was announced and subsequently established through the Further Education and Training Act, 2013. ESRI (2014) claimed SOLAS fulfilled a “*proactive and unifying governance function across the sector that ensured strategic direction at national level and facilitated sufficient autonomy to respond to local needs*” (p.19). SOLAS reflected this assertion in their proclamation of purpose in the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019 as

funding, planning and coordination of FET provision across the country, ensuring the provision of 21st century high-quality further education and training programmes to jobseekers and other learners (p.4).

At the launch of the strategy which provided the framework that defined the role of FET in Government’s economic and social priorities, the then Minister for Education concluded

this is an ambitious strategy that seeks to rebuild the entire Further Education and Training sector. There is no single area as important, to the very texture and fabric of our society, as ensuring that our people are able to find work and get paid a living wage for it (p.1).

Prior to the launch of the FET strategy in 2012 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 and became the state agency with responsibility for quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland (QQI, 2016). QQI replaced the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the

Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). QQI was given responsibility for the maintenance, development and review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). QQI required quality assurance systems to be established within ETBs that monitored, evaluated and improved the quality of FET programmes and services (QQI, 2016). In 2013 the aggregation of the VECs and FÁS, was announced. The Education and Training Boards Act provided for the dissolution of VECs and the establishment of sixteen ETBs, (Appendix A and Appendix B). The Education and Training Boards Act bestowed responsibility to the ETBs for the delivery of primary, post-primary and further education and provided for the transfer of former FÁS training functions to the ETBs. The rationale for aggregation was that the separation of education and training had created division and had led to unnecessary duplication and dual provision, which did not provide for efficiencies in the utilisation of resources. Murtagh (2009) described this process as “*the elimination of overlap and duplication of functions between Government departments*” (p.253). Since the 2013 aggregation, FET provision has been offered through the ETBs. Developments between 2013-2018 are depicted below in Figure 2.1

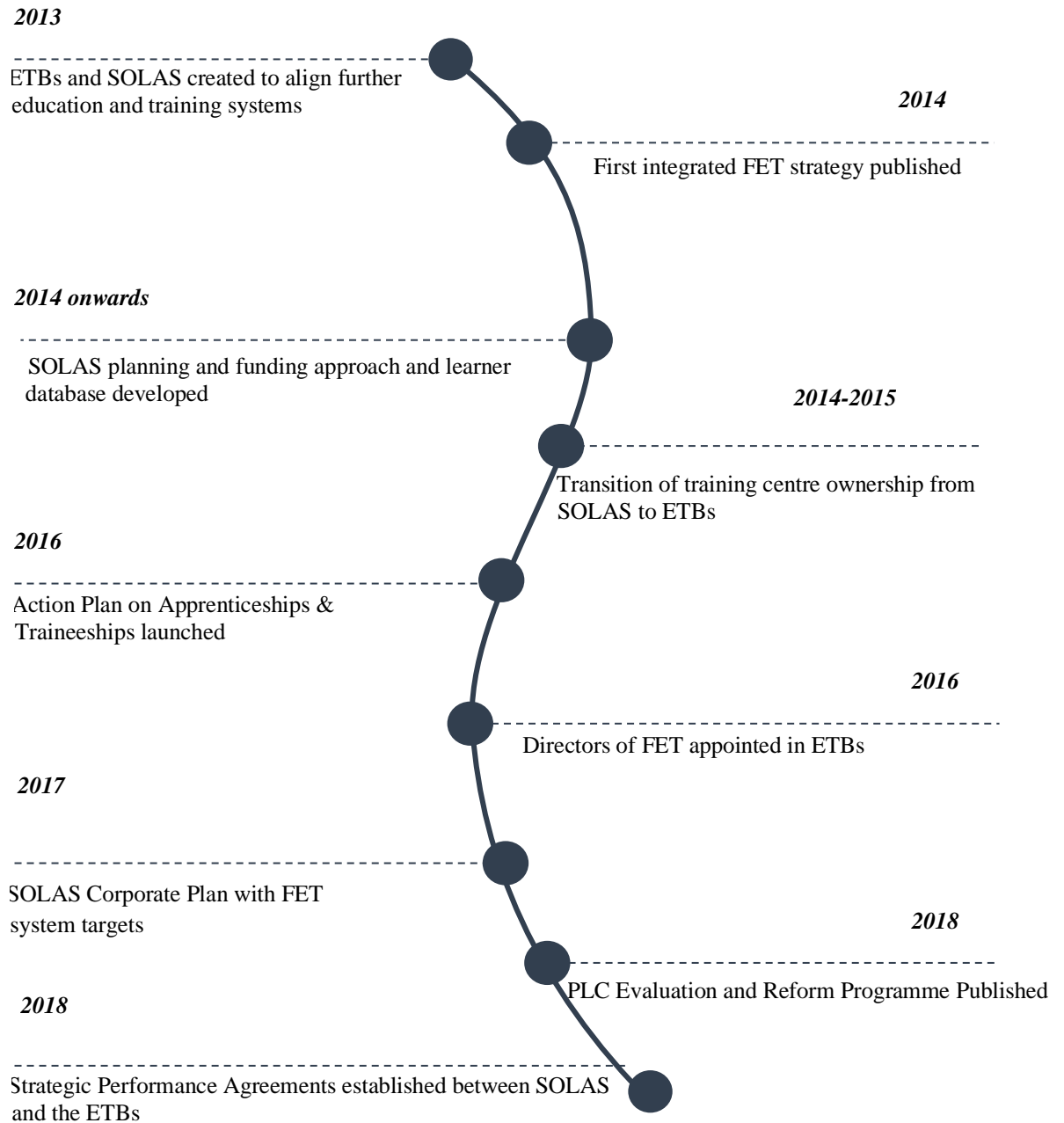


Figure 2.1 Developments since the establishment of ETBs and SOLAS

2.3.3 The catalyst and outcome

Social inclusion provision was the traditional cornerstone of FET however, the financial crash of 2008 had a significant impact on the Irish economy and labour market. Challenging economic times created a demand for up-skilling, reskilling, retraining and educational opportunities. Before the decade of boom and bust FET provision had

been positioned to advance the basic skills levels of the population as DES (1998) declared “*in an era of rapid economic change and job creation, education and skill deficiencies must not pose a barrier to any person in accessing a livelihood*”(p.7). The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) confirmed that the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy was to be advanced to ensure improved standards of literacy and numeracy was achieved across the population. McGuinness et al (2014) noted this was required “*to meet current and future needs of learners, employers and the Government*” (p. 30) as low levels of literacy were associated with poor life outcomes, school non-completion, low paid employment and unemployment (Eivers, Shiel and Shortt 2004; Kelly, McGuinness and O’Connell, 2012).

European Commission policy initiatives explicitly cited the relationship between employment, skills and vulnerability and the negative impact of low levels of basic skills. Deurnescu (2015) claimed “*education in general and VET in particular are key elements in policies to counteract social exclusion*” (p. 260). The New Skills Agenda for Europe (2016) emphasised the wider economic, social and personal consequences of low levels of basic skills in the adult population “*70 million Europeans lack adequate reading and writing skills and even more have poor numeracy and digital skills, putting them at risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion*” (p.1). The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) (2012) confirmed that “*1 in 6 Irish adults reported literacy difficulties*” (p.23) and the Irish Census of Population (2016) confirmed that 386,498 people had an education level of primary school or less while 52,214 had no formal education at all.

After the economic crash of 2008 provision that supported labour market activation was prioritised and labour market activation policies that addressed the effects of the economic downturn have significantly shaped Irish FET. The Department of Social Protection (DSP) Pathways to Work (2012) policy on labour market activation focused

on the return of unemployed people back into the workforce and prioritised *“the development and delivery of education and training programmes to meet the needs of those on the Live Register and national skills needs”* (p. 21). The DSP and ETBs implemented protocols that ensured unemployed people were referred to *“suitable education and training opportunities”* (p.21). The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) (2012) confirmed that *“priority education and training requirements”* were those that linked the *“needs of the individual and the labour market”* (p. 5). The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) (2005) concluded that the *“two extremes on a continuum: labour market oriented activation and social activation”* (p.2) created tension because *“the way activation is sometimes implemented can lead to the reverse effect; increased levels of poverty and social exclusion”* (p.2). The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) (2012) cautioned against the placement of learners on FET courses that did not reflect their needs as it was *“counterproductive”* and recommend that FET provision should have the *“flexibility to take into account the life circumstances of the adult participants”* (p 4). Crowther (2011) claimed the challenge for the FET sector was to achieve collective social and economic transformation through *“a vision of education which makes a vital contribution to a humane, democratic and socially just society as well as a thriving and sustainable economic life”* (p.15).

In 2015, Ireland committed to 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which aimed to *“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”* (p.14). AONTAS (2018) concluded *“the benefits of lifelong learning to employment, health, social cohesion and civic engagement have been recognised within the Irish Government and the European Commission for decades”*(p.1). Commitment to actions that raised employability level, personal development and raised the quality of life of citizens has remained central to FET policy. The Ireland 2040 report recognised the role of FET in *“catalysing and supporting economic and social*

development in local communities, in regions and nationally” (p.89). The programme of reforms introduced across FET were designed to meet both the needs of the country and to support learners in gaining the knowledge and skills that will enable them to engage actively in society and the knowledge-based economy (OECD, 2000; Riley, 2004).

2.4 Further Education and Training Opportunities

The FET sector has provided a range of education and training opportunities to over two hundred thousand people annually (SOLAS 2014). O’Kelly et al (2017) confirmed

the sector supports communities and individuals who wish to change and improve their lives through education and training. The complexity of reasons for engaging with the sector introduces an array of learner background and life experience that can include the impact of difficult socio-economic conditions, disability, learning difficulties, early school leaving, addiction, offenders in prison or ex-offenders (p.66).

Grummell (2007) suggested that traditionally the adult FET learner engaged in learning “*to further develop the abilities and knowledge of the individual*” (p. 7). However Ahead (2019) concluded that within the population that accessed FET “*there is a significant diversity in the profile of learners*” (p.52). SOLAS (2014) acknowledged the diversity of learners engaged in FET

FET learners come from a variety of backgrounds and from different life experiences. They may be school-leavers, employed, unemployed, single parents, carers or those who may be inactive. They may be old or young, highly educated, or unqualified or they may have a disability. They may be recovering from addiction, offenders in prison or ex-offenders. They may be highly motivated to learn and to work or they may be hard to reach and require additional supports. They may be studying to improve their skills in work or to progress to higher education and training, learning for personal development, to improve their unemployment situation, to change career or to improve their ICT, literacy and numeracy skills (p. 42).

Deurnescu (2015) concluded the FET learners “*are heterogeneous and consist of, among others, early school leavers, low-skilled workers, the unemployed and immigrants*” (p. 260). ESRI (2014) supported this view

and confirmed that FET was associated with “*vulnerable groups, returning to education and furthest from the labour market*” (p.88). Saint Vincent De Paul (2014) agreed that whilst there was diversity in profile, the ambitions of FET learners were to “*get a good, well paid job both to lift their family out of poverty and to set an example for their children*” (p.54). SOLAS (2017) concurred and stated the FET learner’s engagement “*was based on hopes and expectations that it would lead to employment or better paid, more secure employment*” (p.18). The needs of the diverse learner population must be met and supported in the acquisition of the knowledge and skills that underpins their active engagement in society and the knowledge-based economy (OECD, 2000; Riley, 2004). In 2018, 103,238 adult learners engaged on FET programmes, which was 59% of the total FET learner population the profile was as follows (SOLAS, 2018):

- 63% were female
- 43% were unemployed
- 28% were employed
- 30% were inactive
- 37 % had lower secondary education or below
- 26 % had upper secondary education
- 21 % had a post-secondary non-tertiary education
- 6 % had short-cycle or a third level non-degree education
- 10 % had a third level degree education

SOLAS (2018) confirmed the 2017 FET budget of €635,000 provided 25,000 FET courses (Appendix D) across 33 skills clusters (Appendix C) delivered to almost 250,000 individual learners, as follows:

- 113,995 full-time FET learners
- 129,357 part-time FET learners
- 230,641 were new entrants to FET
- Over two thirds were over 25 years of age as shown in Table 2.1 below

Table 2.1 Participation in FET provision by age (SOLAS, 2018)

Summary Totals:	under 25	25 and over	Total Activity
2018 activity	74697	188621	263318

Activity level was used to identify those learners who engaged in more than one FET programme in the given year, Table 2.2 below

Table 2.2 FET programme 2018 (SOLAS, 2018)

Programme Category	Distinct Learner	Activity
Adult Literacy Groups	22,428	35,304
Blended Training	537	655
Bridging and Foundation Training	574	615
BTEI Groups	22,702	35,503
Community Education	32,259	48,976
Community Training Centres	2,821	3,183
ESOL	10,399	15,403
Evening Training	12,669	14,896
FET Cooperation Hours	1,858	3,709
ITABE	1,793	2,762
Justice Workshop	213	217
Local Training Initiatives	3,280	3,548
Other Funding	2,528	2,953
PLC	47,797	53,712
Recognition of Prior Learning	87	87
Refugee Resettlement	710	1,196
Skills for Work	2,723	3,296
Skills to Advance	42	42
Specialist Training Providers	3,253	3,677
Specific Skills Training	9,443	10,464
Traineeship Employed	153	153
Traineeship Training	4,345	4,474
Voluntary Literacy Tuition	823	1,066
VTOS Core	5,519	6,813
Youthreach	4,474	6,347
Total:	172,376	259,051

FET programmes are aligned to qualifications from level one to six on the NFQ Figure 2.2 below.

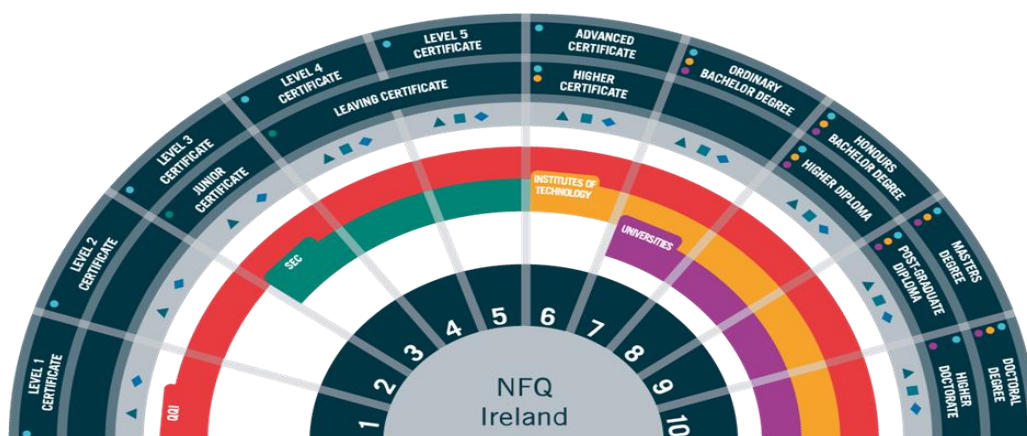


Figure 2.2 National Framework of Qualifications

QQI (2018) confirmed that over 64,000 awards and 174,000 certificates were achieved by FET learners in 2017 and 2018, Tables 2.3 and 2.4 below.

Table 2.3 QQI Awards by Level (QQI, 2018)

Awards	Level	2017	2018
Major	1	224	208
	2	619	575
	3	1,544	1,227
	4	2,019	1,676
	5	17,314	16,269
	6	3,012	2,807
Special Purpose	3	10	26
	4	244	194
	5	7,828	7,853
	6	556	640
Supplemental	6	10	44
Subtotal		33,380	31,519

Table 2.4 QQI Certificates by Level (QQI, 2018)

Certificates	Level	2017	2018
	1	532	475
	2	3,179	3,086
	3	11,038	10,254
	4	11,705	10,447
	5	26,918	24,144
	6	3,710	4,095
Subtotal		57,082	52,501
Total certificates		90,462	84,020

2.5 Conclusion

The Irish FET landscape did not develop in a planned and ordered way, but rather Greaney (1998) asserted “*developed from many and varying influences*” (p. 55) and O’Sullivan (2018) noted “*the FET sector in Ireland, as it is known today, has been constructed from the vocation education and training provision under the policy direction of a number of government departments*” (p.18). This chapter contextualised the history of FET and outlined the nature of the Irish FET sector from an organic origin to one interwoven with policy, strategy and legislation. The factors that shaped the sector which culminated in a lack of clarity and conclusive definition for FET have been outlined. The opportunities provided in FET and the influences on provision from both a national and European perspective have been examined and the profile of the adult FET learner has been considered. This chapter has contributed to the research question through the examination of the historical context of FET and has provided insight on the current landscape. Academic literature related to the characteristics and motivations of the adult FET learner are examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, findings drawn from academic literature relevant to the characteristics of the FET adult learner and their motivations for engagement in FET are examined and used to inform the theoretical framework for this research. It is acknowledged that there is little empirical research concerning adult FET learners in Ireland. As noted by O’Sullivan (2018) *“due to the fragmented nature of the development of FET the only consistent sources of data covering this period are the published policy documents of the Irish government”* (p.18). Slowey (2004) claimed these data gaps had become more obvious in recent times as *“the recent policy emphasis on lifelong learning has been to throw into sharp relief significant information gaps about many aspects of participation in post-compulsory education and training”* (p.1).

Research on adult FET learners in Ireland has been somewhat neglected. Valuable research has been conducted on adult education and adult learners in Higher Education (HE) in Ireland although most of it pre-dates the more recent transformation of the FET sector, (Fleming and Murphy, 1997; Lynch, 1997; Inglis and Murphy, 1999). Research not drawn from the Irish FET sector but relevant to the research question included: Slowey (2004) on adult participation in education and training in Scotland; Rothes et al (2014) motives and beliefs of learners enrolled in adult education; Ahl (2004) motivation in adult education and Moodie et al (2018) Case Study of Further Education in England. Academic literature on engagement and participation in FET was also explored. Horton (2017) observed *“while continuous learning is not a new concept in the field of education, the study of an individual’s motivation to participate is relatively new”* (p. 13).

3.2 The adult learner

The theme of the adult learner is well documented in academic literature with adult learners characterised by their biological, psychological and socio-economic profile in addition to their readiness and motivation to learn (Erikson, 1968; Knowles, 1980; Clark and Caffarella, 1999; Bee and Bjorklund, 2004). Research indicated that adult learners presented different learning needs, expectations and life experiences all of which have differentiated them from the traditional student (Ausburn, 2004). Cornelius and Gordon (2009) concluded that adult learners were “*extremely diverse in their nature, needs and preferences*” (p. 241). Variations in age, experience, knowledge, values, beliefs, opinions, learning styles, religion, race and gender underpinned these distinctions. Kapur (2015) elaborated on the diversity of the adult learner population

adult learners comprise of a diverse groups of people belonging to different genders, caste, class, religion, region, majority or minority groups, creed, race, ethnicity varying from each other in their needs, problems, requirements, attitudes and outlook towards life (p.111).

Malcolm (2010) considered the adult learner to be those over the age of 25. McCallum (2012) concurred that the adult learner was “*25 years of age and older and most have returned to school after having been out of formal schooling for a period of time*” (p. 19). Anderson (2013) supported this view and added “*defining adults by using the age of 25 helps simplify a complex and sometimes obtuse way of classifying adult students*” (p.12). This parameter of age as a key characteristic of the adult learner was used in this research.

Daiva (2018) acknowledged that age was an important variable, but believed any definition also needed to consider

their atypical way of coming to study at the university, their selected form of study, adult social roles performance status, such as family, parenting and financial independence as well as the nature of work: work full-time or part-time (p.43).

Adult learners have been described as a heterogeneous group motivated, autonomous, independent and self-directed in their goal-oriented learning accompanied by life experience, opinion and perspectives with meaning and relevance to their life sought from educational experiences (Knowles, 1980, 1984; Hiemstra and Sisco, 1990; and Rogers, 2007). Kapur (2015) considered these views and asserted that adult learners were “*distinctly different from each other in terms of needs, problems, requirements, attitudes and outlook that they bring to the learning situation*” (p.114). Knowles et al. (2014) claimed that the adults’ life experiences and life roles provided a platform for the learning trajectory which focused on resolution of problems or the acquisition of knowledge to support progression. Knowles (1980) identified six characteristics of the adult learner:

- Self-Concept - adult learners are mature, independent self-directed learners.
- Experience - adult learners have reservoirs of experience that inform learning.
- Need to know - they had a value and rationale attached to the learning activity.
- Readiness - adult learners oriented towards the demands of their social roles.
- Orientation - their learning needed to be related to real life.
- Motivation - was internal.

Adult Education theorists contributed to the definition of the adult learner and included independence, self-direction and a need for real life learning as key attributes in the definition of adult learners (Tough, 1977; Brookfield, 1986; Fellenz and Conti; 1989; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999; Ausburn, 2004). Kapur (2015) postulated that “*adult learners have a vast array of learning, social, vocational and professional needs which are different from the child learners*” (p. 119). Daiva (2018) claimed adult learners were “*independent, have accumulated life experience and knowledge, are responsible for their own learning, combine goals and their efficiency with their intellectual capabilities, learning ability and competence development*” (p. 45). Ostrouch-Kamińska and Vieira (2015) provided the definition that is favoured by the researcher “*a learner is an active and proactive person,*

holistic and intentional, who not only adapts to conditions or situations, but simultaneously creates and transforms the social world in which he/she is located” (p. 3).

3.2.1 The non-traditional learner

The term non-traditional learner has been used to distinguish the adult learner from the younger student (Andriekienė et al, 2006). Daiva (2018) explained the “*non-traditional student is understood as one of the older students enrolled in formal or informal studies*” (p.1). Lawler (2003) observed that non-traditional learners had emerged as an expanding student group. Cross (2009) identified the following characteristics of the non-traditional learner:

- Left formal learning immediately after completion of second-level school
- Do not work full-time
- Work a minimum of 35 hours per week
- Financially independent
- Parenting responsibilities
- Have other responsibilities
- Want to gain a qualification

Research has represented non-traditional learners as motivated and assertive (Njumbwa, 2008; Ross-Gordon, 2011), directed toward personal learning goals (Bennett et.al. 2007; Bye et.al. 2007), focused with self-determined ambitions with multiple goals - personal, social, cognitive and professional (Crawford, 2004), and independent with an accumulation of life experience and knowledge (Dupond and Ossandón, 1998). Daiva (2017) summarised “*the main features of the non-traditional student are their autonomy, responsibility, goal achievement, life experience, [and] internal motivation*” (p.47).

Thunborg et.al, (2013) identified seven types of non-traditional learners which Daiva (2017) asserted also reflected their learning motivations, Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 learning motivations of the non-traditional learner Thunborg et.al, (2013)

Learner Type	Description
Altruistic	Committed to learning to support change, personal or societal
Controversial	Learning viewed as a personal challenge designed to reflect success
Car park	Opted into learning between other life events with little commitment
At risk	Committed to learning but demands from self and others may be unrealistic
Instrumental	Engaged in learning for the achievement of goal
Lifelong learner	Engaged based on learning interests
Straightway	Engaged for the acquisition of knowledge for progression
Self-conscious	Engaged after radical changes in life

Field et.al. (2011) proposed that engagement in learning was often most apparent at points in life that included significant moments of personal change associated with issues of identity for the person for example divorce, loss of employment or children leaving home. Field et.al. (2011) believed the educational attainment level of the adult learner influenced motivation and proposed four biographical adult learner profiles, detailed below in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 learner biographical profiles Field et.al.(2011)

Learner Profile	Description
Wandering	Fragmented and incomplete learning journey as the learner lacked cultural and social knowledge capital.
Seeking a degree	Wanted progression after compulsory schooling but structural and cultural constraints restricted access. Ambition and achievement evidenced but often associated with insecurity.
Integrative	A pragmatist that used learning for development and progression from past life status to that achieved through the benefits of learning.
Emancipatory	Learning is deliberate and rooted in progression from inequalities such as racism, divorce, or domestic violence. Learning represented a commencement point and a new status.

In consideration of the profile, characteristics and motivations of the adult learner Wlodkowski (2008) stated “*adults want to be successful learners*” (p. 100) however, “*if adults have a problem experiencing success or even expecting success, their motivation for learning will usually decline*” (p. 100). Finn (2011) believed the motivation of adult learners was related to their goals and ambitions, “*adult learners often have a practical mindset when choosing to participate in educational programs*” and believed that understanding the motivation of the adult learner was “*critical to the success of the learner and of the program*” (p.35). Chao (2009) claimed “*internal and external influences on the adult learner both in their past and present experiences*” have shaped the adult learner and informed “*the adult learners’ motivation*” (p. 905).

3.3 Theories of Motivation

In the 1960’s Cyril Houle conducted seminal research into the motivations of adult learners and developed three classifications for the motivation of adults for their participation in learning: the goal oriented, the activity-oriented and the learning-oriented, table 3.3 below (Houle, 1961). Knowles (1980) recounted these as:

the first, the goal-oriented, are those who use education as a means of accomplishing fairly clear-cut objectives. The second, the activity-oriented, are those who take part because they find in the circumstances of the learning a meaning which has no necessary connection with the content or the announced purposes of the activity. The third, the learning-oriented seek knowledge for its own sake (p. 42).

Houle proposed the goal-oriented adult was motivated by personal interest and had clear and defined goals to be accomplished; the activity-oriented adult was motivated by the opportunity of social engagement with other adults and learning-oriented adults were motivated by the enhanced opportunities and self-improvement education offered, all orientations were considered equal (Houle, 1961).

Table 3.3 Houle's Typology of Adult Learner Motivational Orientations (Houle, 1961).

Orientation	Characteristics
Goal-oriented learning	Realisation of a need or interest, satisfied by engagement
Activity-oriented learning	Emphasis on social participation, satisfaction found in competition of coursework
Learning-oriented learning	Leisure and career activity selections based on potential personal growth; learning viewed as enjoyable

Research has supported Houle's assertion that adult learners seek further education for advancement in their careers (Cross, 1981), improved pay (Stein, Trinko and Wanstreet, 2008), acquisition of skills (Rogers, 1951) or as a result of personal interest (Lindeman, 1926). Bulluck (2017) claimed "*since Houle, motivation to participate has remained a widely discussed topic by those interested in the education of adults*" (p.14). Boshier and Collins (1985) determined that Houle's orientations were judicious but activity-oriented learners were more complex than originally stated. Gordon (1993) postulated that activity-oriented learners could be "*prompted by a forced aggregate such as a social stimulation, social contract, external expectation, or community service items*" (p. 17). Burgess (1971) claimed the activity-oriented learner was motivated by the need for the achievement exerted by acquaintances, friends, relatives or society as a whole. Brockett and Donaghy (2011) stated the activity-orientated learner was self-directed whose learning was associated with the "*desire to know information*" (p. 10). Houle's typology was expanded upon in the exploration of motivations of adult learners and summarised in Table 3.4 below.

Table 3.4 Expanded Themes from Houle's Typology

Typology	Expanded themes
Goal-oriented learning	Personal goal (Sheffield, 1964; Burgess, 1971) Need-fulfilment (Sheffield, 1964) Professional advancement (Boshier, 1971)
Activity-oriented learning	Participation in social activity (Burgess, 1971; Boshier, 1971; Gordon, 1993) Community service (Boshier, 1971) Sociability orientation (Sheffield, 1964) Societal-goal orientation (Sheffield, 1964; Burgess, 1971) Compliance with formal requirements (Burgess, 1971; Boshier, 1971) Social contract (Boshier, 1971) Escapism (Burgess, 1971, Houle, 1983) Attainment of religious goals (Burgess, 1971)
Learning-oriented learning	Desire to know (Burgess, 1971) Cognitive interest (Sheffield, 1964; Boshier, 1971) Self-directed (Brockett and Donaghy, 2011)

Bulluck (2017) claimed “*adult learners returning to formal education seem to represent Houle’s three learner types goal-oriented learner, activity-oriented learner and learning-oriented learner*” (p. 99). Bulluck (2017) emphasised the value in the incorporation of adult learner motivation into provision planning to support adult learner engagement and identified four additional typologies that reflected the familial, personal and social orientated motivations of the adult learner which augmented Houle’s typology, Table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5 Bulluck's additional typology of learner motivation orientations

Additional typology	Description
Role modelling learner	Engagement was motivated by the need to assist and provide support to their children
Contributing to society learner	Engagement was motivated by community activism
Self-confidence learner	Engagement was motivated by the need for understanding and enhanced confidence
Self-fulfilment learner	Engagement was motivated by the need for personal accomplishment

Lindeman (1926) proposed adult learners were motivated to learn when they experienced a need or had an interest. Their orientation to learning was life-centred with their life-experiences pivotal to their learning as they had the desire to be self-directed learners. Rogers (1951) supported this view and asserted that people had a desire to be at their highest potential and become the best people they can which he named the actualising tendency. This tendency was later reflected by Maslow (1954) who claimed a person's need motivated their behaviours. Lewin (1951) proposed the need that motivated the individual was connected to their lives and their environment; therefore, adults achieved their actualising tendency when they used all their abilities in their learning. Motivation theory and the motivation of the adult learner is considered over the next sections of this chapter.

3.3.1. The study of motivation

The study of motivation has considered what propelled an individual to act, think, progress and advance. Much debate exists about what motivation is, Littman (1958) claimed *"it is evident that there is still no substantial agreement about what motivation is. I think there is something wrong when something like this persists for as long a time as it has"* (p. 115). Siebert (1985) maintained that the abstract nature of

the concept added to the difficulty “*motivation is a hypothetical construct, which may explain the variety of theories about it, here is no common concept either of human motivation, or of mutually agreed explanation*” (p.46). Bolles (1975) reflected that the difficulty may have been compounded by difference amongst theorists

there is little agreement among different proposals about what the defining criteria [of motivation] should be. What one proposes as a definition of motivated behaviour seems to depend more on his theoretical commitments than upon anything in the behaviour itself (p. 1).

Schunk et al (2014) attempted to craft a definition and claimed motivation was “*the process whereby goal-directed activities are instigated and sustained*” (p. 5). Cooke and Artino (2016) claimed the Schunk et al definition highlighted “*four key concepts: motivation is a process; it is focused on a goal; and it deals with both the initiation and the continuation of activity directed at achieving that goal*” (p. 1001). Atkinson and Birch (1978) identified four alternative aspects they believed featured in definitions of motivation: experiential, neurophysiological, behavioural and mathematical. Kleinginna and Kleinginna (1981) concluded there were three commonalities across definitions of motivation which were: an internal state or condition that activated and provided direction to behaviour, a need or aspiration that energised and guided goal-oriented behaviour and manifested in the impact needs and desires have on the intensity and direction of behaviour. Huitt (2011) summarised these views in and proposed “*motivation is an internal state or condition (sometimes described as a need, desire, or want) that serves to activate or energise behaviour and give it direction*” (p. 1). Cook and Artino (2016) reviewed the myriad of positions and definitions and deduced “*countless theories have been proposed to explain human motivation. Although each sheds light on specific aspects of motivation, each of necessity neglects others*” (p. 997). In the arena of motivation theories can be aggregated into two categories and outlined below in Table 3.6.

1. Content Theories of Motivation explored the internal factors that caused, sustained, or stopped behaviour. The key focus was on the needs that motivated people
 - a. Maslow's hierarchy of needs
 - b. Alderfer ERG theory
 - c. McClelland's Theory of Needs
 - d. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

2. Process Theories of Motivation explored how behaviour was caused, sustained, or stopped by motivational factors
 - a. Vroom's Expectancy Model
 - b. Adam's Equity Theory
 - c. Locke's goal-setting theory
 - d. Skinner's reinforcement theory

Table 3.6 Overview of theories of motivations

	Content Theories of Motivation
Maslow hierarchy of needs	Motivation based on the satisfaction of hierarchical needs
Alderfer ERG theory	Refined Maslow's theory into three categories: Existence, Relatedness and Growth
McClelland	Motivation based on three needs: achievement, power and affiliation
Herzberg – two factor theory	Motivation derived from job satisfiers
	Process Theories of Motivation
Vroom's expectancy Theory	Motivation based on the relationships between effort, performance and outcome
Adams' equity theory	Motivation based on the balance between inputs and outputs
Locke's goal-setting theory	Motivation was the direct relationship between goal setting and engagement
Skinner's reinforcement Theory	Motivation based on reinforced positive behaviour

Academic research and literature regarding motivation in adult education was based on these general motivation theories which confirmed motivation was central to successful learning (Bates, 2016; Bierema and Merriam, 2013; Wlodkowski, 2008). Knowles et al (1998) also agreed that motivation was central to learning “*adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking it*” (p. 64). On the relationship between motivation and learning Cook and Artino (2016) observed “*although different theories rarely contradict one another outright, each theory emphasises different aspects of motivation, different stages of learning, different learning tasks and different outcomes*” (p. 1010).

Ferreira and McLean (2017) agreed that internal and external rewards shaped the adult learners motivations :

adult learners tend to be more motivated to learn if they perceive that instruction will lead to some form of internal reward. External rewards such as social recognition or work-related benefits are secondary to the more powerful motivation associated with internal inducements (p.14).

Kistler (2011) concluded that internal motivations were stronger and more influential

adults are more responsive to internal motivators than external motivators. Yes, most adults do respond to external motivators like better jobs, promotions and higher salaries; however, internal motivators like increased self-esteem, job satisfaction and quality of life are the most persuasive (p. 2).

Houde (2006) agreed on the importance of internal motivations for the adult learner “*adults have a need to be self-directing and that often when engaging in education they see this need being unfulfilled*”(p. 3).

Sogunro (2014) supported this position and added “*when learners are motivated during the learning process, learning is enhanced* ” (p.24).

Slowey (2004) took a broader view of the internal motivation of the adult learner motivation “*motivation to participate in a particular learning opportunity is best conceived as the outcome of a process involving a complex combination of individual, social and economic factors*” (p. 24).

Maslow expressed concern at the lack of a definitive, motivational theory which resulted in the hierarchy of needs model (Maslow, 1943). At the core of Maslow's theory were five needs levels that explained an individual's needs and how motivation affected a particular experience such as engagement in FET. Milheim (2012) proposed Maslow's model "*paved the way for subsequent research on motivation and self-fulfilment in various settings, including education*" (p. 160).

Maslow's model has been used in other fields of education as a framework for seeking to understand the factors that influenced learner motivation (Scales, 1984; Store and Armstrong, 1981). Milheim (2012) asserted that Maslow's model "*can be used as a lens through which to examine and explore various educational contexts*" (p. 161). Maslow's theory highlighted the fact that unmotivated learners will not become more motivated by things that already satisfied their basic or lower level needs. Therefore, learning should be focused on the satisfaction of the higher level needs of the learner (Maslow, 2000). Maslow's hierarchy of needs model was used as the basis for the theoretical framework for this research and is examined in the next section.

3.3.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's (1970) hierarchical theory of human needs proposed that the needs of human beings were distinguished and prioritised into five levels, physiological, safety, belongingness, love, esteem and self-actualization Figure 3.1 below. The basic or lowest needs were depicted at the bottom of the pyramid and the needs concerned with a human being's highest potential at the top, although Maslow claimed self-actualisation was an evolutionary process with no end. The theory postulated that people were motivated to fulfil these needs but stressed that the individual's level of motivation was not static. Maslow proposed each level of need had to be somewhat satisfied before the next level asserted itself.

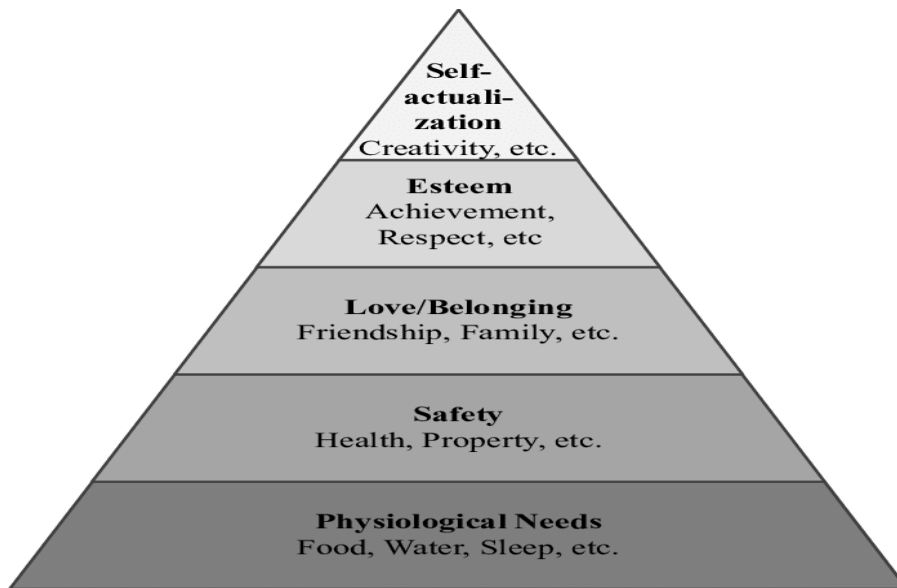


Figure 3.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's (1970) revised model included the need to know and understand aesthetic needs. Maslow claimed that humans were fuelled by a need to achieve goals and the need focused upon by an individual was the motivator of their behaviour. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory provided an explanation of behaviour and motivation which emphasised the human potential (Maslow, 1970; Milheim, 2012). Neto (2015) echoed this position and proposed that *"individuals who engage in lifelong learning increase the likelihood of reaching self-actualisation"* (p. 15). Longstreet and Shaue (1993) took a broader view and stated, *"psychologically healthy people want to fulfil their own capacities and talents and they will be self-motivated toward the acceptance and empowerment of their intrinsic nature"* (p. 134). James (1892/1962) supported Maslow's assertion but proffered that there were three levels of human need, physiological, belongingness, and spiritual. Mathes (1981) too proffered three levels of need physiological, belonging and self-actualization. Alderfer (1972) modified Maslow's model and incorporated the systems theory of Allport (1960, 1961) and produced a comparable hierarchy based on his ERG, existence, relatedness and growth theory, Figure 3.2 below. Alderfer's theory attempted to align the hierarchy with empirical research and focused on the impact that the satisfaction of the need had on the individual's self-esteem.

ERG THEORY OF MOTIVATION

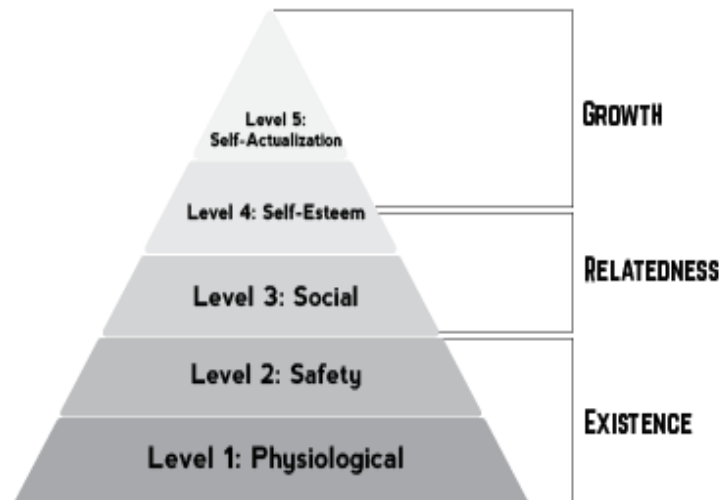


Figure 3.2 Alderfer's ERG Theory of Motivation

Although Maslow never validated his theory and admitted the theory was not based on scientific experiment, it has presented a framework for research (Nigro and Nigro, 1973). Despite the lack of empirical evidence to support Maslow's model it has remained a relevant and popular theory of human motivation (Wahba and Bridewell, 1976; Soper, Milford and Rosenthal, 1995). Criticism of Maslow's theory has focused on his methodology which consisted of clinical observations and close examination of personal friends and famous people that he regarded as being self-actualised (Heylighten, 1992). Kiel (1999) questioned why Maslow's model used a closed triangle if self-actualisation was an evolving process and suggested that an open triangle was more reflective of the evolving nature of self-actualisation (Kiel, 1999; Chawn et al, 2004).

3.3.3 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and FET

The Hierarchy of Needs model proffered that physiological needs needed to be met first. In an education setting location and accessibility of provision, financial cost, course requirements are comprehended at this level. In educational settings Milheim (2012) used Maslow's model in the study of on-line education and proposed basic needs are

addressed “*through the provision of clear, concise checklists of essential items that should be obtained by students ahead of the date when classes are scheduled to begin*” (p. 161) or completed at orientation prior to course commencement (Lynch, 2001). When physiological needs have been met, safety needs required satisfaction. Safety needs centered around the environment the individual inhabited. Milheim (2012) claimed that the provision of information that allowed adult learners to be “*acquainted with the course format and understanding course expectations*” (p.161) was essential. The provision of clear and relevant course information, content and expectations ensured safety needs of learners are addressed (Rovai, 2003; Swan, Shenand Hiltz, 2006). Prior knowledge of the course content, familiarity with the College or Centre and course tutors alleviated anxiety and uncertainty and fulfilled safety needs. Conversely, negative prior experiences of education, a lack of flexibility or uncertainty about course requirements all had the potential to negatively impact the learner and thwart satisfaction of this level. Miller (1967) added that the loss of marks or receipt of a poor grade on course work in the education environment also threatened the satisfaction of the safety need for the adult learner. This was a particular concern for learners who had not previously engaged in learning or had been distanced from the experience of learning for some time (Miller, 1967). Detailed explicit expectations from course tutors with regard to coursework and grading reduced this threat (Rovai, 2003; Swan, Shenand Hiltz, 2006). Milheim (2012) believed that identification and elimination of potential sources of adult learner stress was crucial to the satisfaction of safety needs.

Subsequent to safety needs Maslow asserted humans sought out affectionate relationships though friendships, family relations and included the relationships developed between adult learners and with tutors through collaborative learning activities. Palloff and Pratt (2005) stated “*collaboration can be seen as the cornerstone of the educational experience*” (p. 334). The relationship between class peers and others

engaged in learning was deemed equally important. Irrespective of the mode of delivery, on-line or in-person regular attendance, engagement and participation in the learning activity was considered central to the development of such relationships (Danaher, Hickey, Brown and Conway, 2007; Hrastinski, 2009). Where a sense of community among learners was absent, learners felt isolated and excluded from the learning process (Sadera, et al, 2009). Pawan, Paulus, Yalcin and Chang (2003) confirmed *“good learning is collaborative and that understanding comes through modelling, participation in and reaction to the behaviours and thoughts of others”* (p.119) with positive, timely and individually customised tutor feedback found to positively influenced learner perceptions of their learning experience (Baker, 2003; Richardson and Swan, 2003; Gallien and Oomen-Early, 2008; Furnborough and Truman, 2009).

Maslow proposed humans desired high self-esteem, confidence, achievement and the respect of others. When esteem needs were satisfied, individuals felt worth, strength, capability and adequacy. However, where they were not met individuals felt inferior, weak and helpless. In a learning environment self-esteem and a sense of value was hindered where a strong community of learning and collaboration was absent (Curtis and Lawson, 2001) and was exacerbated where a lack of positive reinforcement by peers and the instructor was experienced (Nicol and Milligan, 2006; Rovai, 2003). Palloff and Pratt (2003) in their study of on-line learning which has become an important feature of many FET programmes of learning highlighted the importance of a positive learning environment. The digital divide between younger and older learners has increased the requirement for adult learners to embrace learning enhanced by technology. The importance of good instruction characterised by flexibility and collaboration was found to have enhanced learner self-esteem and sense of worth in the digital learning environment (Benson and Dundis, 2003; Palloff and Pratt, 2003).

The highest level in Maslow's hierarchy was self-actualisation or self-fulfilment, which was motivated by the desire for personal growth. Maslow (1970) described the self-actualised individual as having

limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placing in time and space within, finally, the conviction that something extremely important had happened, so that the subject is to some extent transformed and strengthened even in his daily life by such experiences (p. 164).

Maslow claimed that few people ever fully reached self-actualisation which Tennant (2000) claimed was the “*ability to stand apart and separate from the world*” (p. 89). Little research on self-actualisation has been conducted in education settings, however early work pointed to an interest in how motivational factors impacted upon learning and the learning experience (Maslow and Groshong, 1934). Maslow (1965) proposed:

learning involves the processes which can help people become all that they are capable of becoming. Intrinsic learning is the ultimate goal of all education, including adult education. Self-actualising people learn through the processes of intrinsic learning. Self-actualising people are described as those who listen to their own voices, take responsibility, are honest and who work (p. 65).

Thorpe (2004) believed adult learners had a more productive and fulfilling experience when learning allowed them “*think about past experiences, current situations and expected outcomes of their actions*” (p. 327). Maslow's model determined that when basic needs are left unsatisfied, learners would not be focused on learning. Maslow postulated that when learners felt they had control over the learning environment they felt psychologically and emotionally safer within the learning environment. Safety needs included ease in answering or asking questions without fear of criticism from others. Maslow's theory proposed that when a learner's effort is appreciated and positive reinforcement received, the learner's self-image is enhanced.

3.4 Adult Learner Motivation

Waller (2006) claimed the motivation to return to education as an adult was highly individualised. Ambrose (2010) concurred and proffered that this was the result of the need experienced by individuals which acted

as a compass to guide and direct intellectual and creative pursuits, social and interpersonal relationships, identity and self - concept, needs for safety and material possessions and desires to be productive and competent in the world (p.71).

Adults have reported a variety of motivations reflective of Maslow's esteem and self-actualisation needs for their engagement in education which included personal development and growth (Mercer, 2007; Rogers, 1983; second chance education (Coolahan, 1981; Fenge, 2011; Gallacher, Crossan, Fieldand Merrill, 2002), up-skilling, employment, promotion and fulfilment of a lifelong goal personal growth and self-actualisation (Waller, 2006). In addition, physiological, safety and relationship needs have been reflected in influences from their previous experience of education (Paulson and Boeke, 2006; Schuller and Desjardins, 2007; Salisbury and Jephcote, 2008; Shafi and Rose, 2014), participation as a new start, an activity to pass time or as a result of a significant life event (Bridges, 2004; Sugarman, 2001; Walters, 2000). Kasworm (2003) claimed:

most adults enrol in college based on these personal life transitions or catalysts reflecting environmental forces, life changes, or external life-transition events. For example, adults may enter college because of a divorce, children entering school, a recent job loss, or a denied job promotion due to the lack of a college degree (p. 6).

Slowey (1987) confirmed that “*social involvement and contact, acquisition of specific knowledge and skills, general self-improvement and a means of assessing one's potential*” (p. 208) which reflected Maslow's needs of belonging, esteem and self-actualisation were the primary motivations for adult's participation in education. SOLAS (2017) also determined that Maslow's model reflected the reasons for

adult learner engagement in FET “*learners engage in the FET sector for a host of reasons, from learning basic literacy skills, to completing state exams, to gaining vocational training, continuing professional development or other lifelong learning activities*” (p. 15).

3.4.1 Meeting need

Chwan-Yi and Yaw-Bin (2004) concluded the main reasons people engaged in FET was to “*pursue advanced knowledge, to enhance job opportunities and to satisfy their basic needs*” (p.48). Therefore, only when adults had their basic needs met could other matters such as education, employment, relationships and self-esteem be considered. Milheim (2005) proposed that for adult learners, learning was not the “*central feature of their lives, but just one of a multiplicity of activities in which they are engaged every day*” (p. 124). Anderson (2013) agreed and confirmed “*adult learners have many work–life demands because many are married or in significant relationships and are employed either part time or full time*” (p. 27). While Kerka (1995) established that “*adults are largely voluntary participants, but the student role is just one of many roles and responsibilities competing for their time and attention*” (p. 1). Kistler (2011) concluded adult learners were “*motivated to learn when they perceive that learning will help them to address their own problems, needs, or concerns and ultimately, improve their quality of life*” (p. 3). Adult learners that do not have basic requirements such as food or shelter won’t have an adequate platform from which to be motivated toward engagement in FET or address other challenges, such as mental health, addiction or employment (Greenwood et al. 2013).

3.4.2 Motivation, influences and safety need

Maslow’s theory postulates that the adult learner must experience fulfilment of safety needs in order to progress to higher level needs. In a learning environment the physical, emotional and psychological

aspects of the experience are comprehended. Safety needs are met when supports for engagement are provided and learning is facilitated without fear of put-down or reprimand. Jonker (2005) argued, “*at the individual level, schooling can offer the confidence of becoming an educated, knowledgeable person. It can also saddle one for life with the feeling that one is doomed to fail*” (p. 123). The negative impact of prior experiences of education on the adult learners safety needs should not be undervalued as Knowles et al, (1998) explained when “*experiences are ignored or devalued; adults will perceive this as rejecting not only their experience but rejecting themselves as persons*” (p. 67). The similarities between FET and school including location, times and approach can challenge the satisfaction of safety needs when previous negative experiences or traumatic memories are triggered and negatively impact or reduce the likelihood of re-engagement in education as an adult (NALA, 2010; Crosnoe and Cooper, 2010; Eurofound, 2012). When previous experiences of learning or life experiences have manifested as barriers to learning, reduced or limited autonomy or self-direction is also evidenced (Davenport and Davenport, 1985; Rachal, 2002; Lowry, 1989; Kerka, 2002). Fulfilment of the adult learners safety was compromised where difficulties with literacy or numeracy had resulted in disadvantage in the job market and challenges in the negotiation of daily life had been experienced (SOLAS, 2018). Lynch and Drudy (1993) confirmed “*learners use adult education as a means of improving their literacy skills*” (p.265) which was supported when PIAAC (2012) results confirmed “*1 in 6 Irish adults reported literacy difficulties*” (p.23). SOLAS (2017) reflected the importance of satisfaction of safety needs in the confirmation that the learner’s engagement in FET “*was based on hopes and expectations that it would lead to employment, or better paid, more secure employment*” (p.18).

Saint Vincent De Paul (2014) believed that safety needs were fulfilled when adult learners achieved “*a good, well paid job both to lift their family out of poverty*” (p.54). Illeris (2003) also agreed that engagement

in education was primarily for economic reasons rather than an “*inner drive or interest*” (p.13). Findsen and McCullough (2006) demonstrated that learners undertook learning for more than one reason, however work-related considerations were the most significant driving force. Astin (1998) investigated the relative importance of two seemingly conflicting motivations for learners: the development of a meaningful philosophy of life and being well-off financially. Astin (1998) found that in the early part of the programme, goals that focused on life peaked, while being well-off financially was less important. At the end of the programme the two motivations had traded positions. The key motivation was the satisfaction of the safety need through being well-off financially while the development of a meaningful philosophy of life was less significant. Astin confirmed that “*the chief benefit of a college education is to increase one’s earning power*” (p.6) and “*to be able to make more money*” (p.7).

Darmody and Fleming (2009) suggested that safety needs are challenged where adult learners have struggled to balance the demands of work, family and financial responsibilities. Chen (2014) claimed engagement in education for the adult learner can be marred or negated by “*the commitment and effort needed in the short-term in adopting a student role often comes in conflict with familial roles and work roles*” (p.5). Adebayo (2006) agreed and claimed adult learners were faced with

employment demands and social and family responsibilities. No, doubt, combining work commitment, family responsibilities, and school obligations may be very complex and tasking. Ultimately, the struggling and juggling inherent in this may create tension and health-related problems for the individuals concerned (p. 126).

The outcome has been described as role strain (Goode, 1960) or the double day (Hartsock, 1998) and often related to thoughts of withdrawing (Markle, 2015). Most academic research conducted on multiple role and role strain has focused on females as they are most

frequently cited primary caregivers in the home (Adebayo, 2006; Berkove, 1979; Carney-Crompton and Tan, 2002; Clouder, 1997; Darab, 2004; Egan, 2004; Home, 1998, 1997, 1992; Home and Hinds, 2000; Quimby and O'Brien, 2006). Cullen (1994) stated "*the pressures of juggling the roles of student, partner, [parent], worker would be lessened if the role of student was seen as including the others*" (p. 8).

3.4.3 Motivation, influences and belonging need

Tett and Crowther (2011) claimed that adult learners were influenced by relationships which shaped their expectations, hopes and aspirations. In particular, previous learning experiences and family influences have been found to be a significant influence on the adult learner (Rees et al, 2000). Familial and peer support has been documented as central to positive engagement in FET. The absence of such support was considered a significant barrier to engagement and challenged the individuals' belonging needs (Martinez and Munday, 1998). The Department of Education in the UK (2018) reflected upon the influence of family and its influence on Maslow's belonging needs and acknowledged that "*growing up in a household where education and work were not valued can negatively impact on the likelihood of an adult viewing education as valuable*" (p. 27). Bailey and Coleman (1998) determined that "*a tradition of familial disengagement with education can present a high attitudinal barrier*" (p. 21) and therefore challenged the learner belonging need as their decision to engage in FET was incongruent with family values. SOLAS (2017) concluded "*when value has not been attributed to education, training or employment it can be hard to alter this perception and create recognition of the value of education*" (p. 22).

Researchers have argued that participation in post-compulsory education represented the generation social capital (Baron et al, 2000; Field, 2005; Schuller et al., 2004). Field (2005) suggested "*social capital is important for learning and learning is important for social*

capital” (p.110). Croll (2004) explained that “*the central idea underlying social capital is that social relationships and the personal networks which they create are a resource which can be used to generate outcomes which are valued*” (p. 398). Schuller (2004b) postulated that the benefits of learning included increased social capital and stated the “*benefit from the returns on the investment in the shape of better health, stronger social networks, enhanced family life*” (p.12). Houde (2006) confirmed the belonging need of the adult learner was addressed when value was given to the learners experiences “*the learner’s experience is a valuable resource in the classroom*” (p. 4). Lindeman (1926) also underscored the value and importance of the learners' experience in the satisfaction of the belonging need “*the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner’s experience*” (p. 9). When the adult learners experience was augmented by opportunities for participation in new and different groups including learning groups their belongingness base was expanded and opportunities for engagement outside of what was familiar was facilitated (Benson et al, 2003).

3.4.4 Motivation, influences and esteem need

Studies have indicated that engagement in FET provided adult learners with positive learning experiences and addressed esteem needs as they acquired a renewed sense of self and increased confidence and self-esteem, (McNair, 2002; Slevin, 2009; Evoy and McDonnell, 2011; Bailey, Breen and Ward, 2010; Bailey, Ward and Goodrick, 2011). Feinstein and Sabates (2008) found engagement in FET mitigated against “*personal and social dislocation*” (p.57) and a sense of empowerment (Neville et al, 2014). Engagement in FET often signalled a new start for many adult learners (Walters, 2000). Jarvis (2009) explained that the sense of identity held by an adult learner resulted from a constellation of socially shaped interactions with family, education and work; therefore “*fundamental to our understanding of learning, is the whole person in a social situation*” (p 31). Hall (1993)

asserted that the adult learners identity was the result of status and character assigned by powerful others and the individuals own sense of self

cultural identities come from somewhere and have histories. But far from being eternally fixed in some essentialist past, they are subject to the continual play of history, culture and power identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (p.349).

Researchers have recognised the potential negative power of previous experiences of education to block the creation of an alternative image to that of a capable and competent learner (Balatti et al, 2006; Ivanic et al, 2006). Crowther (2011) reflected this position and observed “*learning is therefore not only about acquiring new skills and practices but is also about changes in people’s identity*” (p. 689) and added that adult learners’ “*activities and choices are both constrained and enabled by their horizons for action and this has a major impact on the decision to engage in learning*” (p. 689). This was supported by Drudy and Lynch (1993) who found females engaged in FET reported enhanced self-esteem and sense of identity. The interaction between the adult learners' self-confidence in their social world and as a learner were found to be inextricably linked to their prior experiences of learning and social capital (Field, 2005; McGivney, 2001; Schuller et al, 2004). Hammond (2004) found that adult learners that had failed in school “*gained in confidence, from later successful learning experiences*”(p. 42). Balatti et al (2006) found the relationships adult learners had with their tutors

were the most significant factor affecting social capital outcomes. It was through these relationships that many participants redefined their connection with educational institutions, redefined their relationships with other adults in authority positions and for some, redefined themselves as capable learners (p. 33).

Tett (2016) elaborated “*identity and learning are closely related through the institutions of the family, education and work that socially shape an individual’s outlook and self-image*”(p. 1). The position that

the adult learner identity was shaped by family, education and work was considered by Wenger (1998) as a self-fulfilling prophecy “*we know who we are by what is familiar, understandable, usable, negotiable; we know who we are not by what is foreign, opaque, unwieldy, unproductive*”(p 153). Owens (2000) in her study of marginalised men with low levels of educational attainment, found they had “*a deeply internalised sense of worthlessness and powerlessness*” (p. 23). SOLAS (2017) explained the positive impact of engagement in education on self-esteem “*FET allows an opportunity for learners to identify and then test skills and capacities which acts as a huge confidence booster*” (p.47). Orth, Trzesniewski and Robins (2010) also confirmed that engagement with education had a significant positive impact on self-esteem in their longitudinal study. Neville et al (2014) claimed engagement in FET represented “*a transformative base for adult learners, their families and wider community*” (p. 53). Schuller (2004b) added that “*the effect of education in raising people’s sights is experienced more widely as a positive influence on the cultural norms that encourage others to do the same*” (p. 191). Confidence, social engagement and acquisition of social capital are an affect and affected by learning (Field 2005). Tett and Maclachlan (2007) believed the satisfaction of esteem needs of the adult learners could be attributed to “*approaches to learning that places the adult learner at the centre of practice where learning activities are chosen or adapted to learners’ individual goals, personal interests or immediate lives*” (p. 21). Ivanic et al, (2006) supported this view and elaborated on the environment required for this approach to thrive “*creating a supportive atmosphere where learners were treated with respect and equality within relationships of warmth and trust in the classroom*” (p. 41). Balatti et al (2006) proclaimed that for the adult learner the culmination of the learning experience was that they had

produced the resources, that is knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs that led to social capital outcomes and/or human capital outcomes, such as literacy and numeracy skills and the more elusive intrapersonal skills and attributes, for example, confidence and self-esteem (p. 7).

3.4.5 Motivation, influences and self-actualisation need

Academic research has postulated that adult learners are active, engaged participants in the creation and construction of their learning and had a level of maturity associated with self-actualisation (Mezirow, 1991; Freire, 1970; Otway and Carnelley, 2013; Akçay and Akyol, 2014). Maslow (1962) described self-actualisation “*as a development of personality which frees the person from the deficiency problems of youth*” which enabled the individual “*face, endure and grapple with the 'real' problems of life*”(p. 109). Neto (2015) considered the process of self-actualisation and claimed that “*individuals who seek meaning and understanding in the dissatisfaction confronted by circumstances in life are likely to be motivated by self-actualisation needs*” (p. 20). Neto (2015) believed that this dissatisfaction motivated the adult towards learning and self-actualisation, which demonstrated “*curiosity surrounding the purpose of learning, this means if an individual is engaged in academic activities they are engaged in higher needs of self-actualisation*” (p. 23). Knowles et al (1998) concluded that adults engaged in learning when they were “*ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations*” (p. 67). Houde (2006) agreed that “*adult learners are life-problem, or task-centred in their approach to learning*” (p. 4). Dirkx (1998) claimed learning as an adult provided “*opportunities to name, reflect on and reconstruct various aspects of one’s self and one’s relationship with the world*” (p. 9).

Liu (2016) considered the adult learner reached self-actualisation through coursework which “*exhibited the development of a variety of new skills and knowledge*” of the adult learner and allowed the sharing of “*both positive or negative experience with fellow classmates and teachers*” (p.143). Self-actualisation was evidenced as the adult learner identified with others and developed peer relationships and understood their personal shortcomings and worked to address the same (McNeill, 2015; Maslow, 1970; Franzenburg, 2009; Huss and Magos, 2014).

Tennant (1997) proffered that as the adult learner demonstrated the capacity to *“follow a social norm without their horizons being bounded in the sense that they fail to see or consider other possibilities”* (p.13), they revealed their self-actualisation tendency and were *“developing to the full stature of which they are capable”* (p.13). Dirkx (1998) added that through self-actualisation *“adults develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which these social structures shape and influence the ways they think about themselves and the world”* (p.3).

3.5 Theoretical Framework

Iqbal (2007) proposed the theoretical framework for any thesis was *“the most difficult but not impossible part of the proposal”* (p.17). Eisenhart (1991) defined the theoretical framework as *“a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory, constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships”* (p. 205). Grant and Osanloo (2014) provided a more granular description

the theoretical framework consists of the selected theory (or theories) that undergirds your thinking with regards to how you understand and plan to research your topic, as well as the concepts and definitions from that theory that are relevant to your topic (p.13).

Merriam (2001) claimed it was the responsibility of the researcher to ensure the selected theory connected to their research.

The theoretical framework for this research was informed by adult learning theory (Knowles 1975; Vygotsky, 1978; Mezirow, 1991) and Maslow’s Hierarchy Of Needs theory (Maslow 1943). Seminal work by Knowles (1975) on the characteristics of the adult learner provided the cornerstone of the theoretical framework this was augmented with more recent research on the biographical profiles of non-traditional learner and by Daiva (2018), Kapur (2015), Ostrouch and Vieira (2015), Field (2011) and Cross (2009). This was complemented by Houle’s (1961) research on the orientations of adult learning which was supplemented

by Bulluck (2017). As process theories of motivation were focused on work environments they were deemed inappropriate for this research. Content theories were more appropriate and within these Maslow's seminal theory could not be overlooked. I believed Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory provided the most appropriate lens to explore the motivation of the adult FET learner. In addition, Maslow's theory was deemed appropriate because:

1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was deemed to be a well-established theory that addressed how fulfilment of needs affected the motivation of the adult learner and emphasised the lived experience of research participants and allowed for the interpretative nature of this research.
2. Maslow's theory was more granular and allowed for greater exploration of motivation than E.R.G. theory.
3. There was no major difference between the theory proffered by Alderfer (1972) and Maslow (1970).
4. Maslow's theory and terms were better known (Sundberg, Winebarger and Taplin, 2002).
5. The researcher believed that both Maslow's model was appropriate as like FET provision it focused on the development of the full potential of the individual.
6. Given the heterogeneity of the adult learner community the researcher believed any investigation of the motivations of this population was best considered with Maslow's model as it allowed for the expression and interpretation of individual variation and difference across the needs and motivations of the adult FET learner.

Leshem and Trafford (2007) confirmed the development of the theoretical framework for the literature provided a "*theoretical overview of intended research*" (p. 96). In consideration of the research question who is the Further Education and Training adult learner? The theoretical framework for the literature review is depicted below in

Figure 3.3 and Appendix E. This framework examined the following qualitative dimensions:

1. Characteristics of the adult learner
2. Adult learner orientation toward learning
3. Motivations for participation

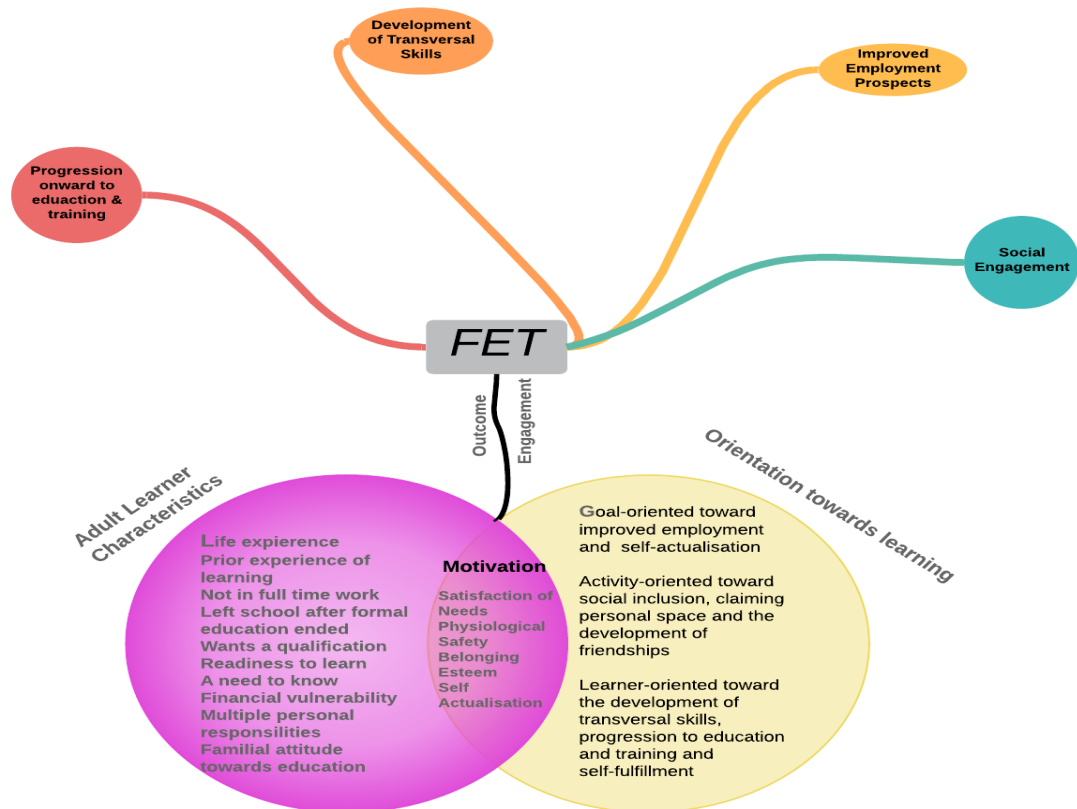


Figure 3.3 Theoretical framework for research

Key concepts from the theoretical framework were used to develop the conceptual framework and to structure the questionnaire and interview questions and inform the approach to the discussion of the findings. Assumptions that emerged from the literature and that influenced the conceptual framework were:

- Adults entered the FET learning environment ready to learn and were self-directed in the decision to engage in FET (Knowles; 1984)
- Engagement in FET was relevant to their life and directed toward the satisfaction of need (Maslow, 1970; Alderfer, 1972; Palloff and Pratt, 1999).

- Life experiences and needs of the adult learner influenced the motivation for engagement in learning (Knowles 1963, Mezirow, 1978, Merriam, 2007).
- Motivation is multi-dimensional and ranged from second-chance education to enhanced job opportunities, personal fulfilment and growth (Maslow, 1954; Mercer, 2007; Rogers, 1983; Coolahan, 1981; Fenge, 2011; Gallacher, Crossan, Fieldand Merrill, 2002; McFadden, 1995; Waller, 2006).

3.6 Conclusion

The literature review provided an understanding of the profile and characteristics of the adult FET learner and their motivation for participation. Consideration was given to the definition of the adult learner and the non-traditional learner. Definitions of motivation were reviewed and motivation theories outlined. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was chosen as it was a well-established theory that addressed how needs fulfilment affected the motivation of the adult learner and emphasised the lived experience of research participants and allowed for the interpretative nature of this research. Maslow's theory has been restated, developed and modified but has remained a popular research framework and its adaptability to specific topics including the motivation of the adult learner resulted in its use in this research. The theoretical framework based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs was developed to provide what Leshem and Trafford (2007) described as a "*theoretical overview of intended research*"(p. 96). The literature review focused on the research question and structured the theoretical framework which in turn framed the analysis of findings and discussion which was focused on the characteristics and motivation of the adult FET learner.

Chapter Four Methodology

4.1. Introduction

Creswell (2013) proposed that “*research is a process of steps used to collect and analyse information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue*” (p.26). The steps Creswell identified included “*pose a question, collect data to answer the question and present an answer to the question*” (p.26). Silverman (2000) claimed that the first step in undertaking research was to answer the question, “*what am I really trying to find out?*” (p. 68). The second step was the identification of the most appropriate research methodology and methods and the third consideration was how best to deploy the research method.

This chapter outlines the philosophical assumptions and the design strategy that underpinned this research and the methodological approach and research design chosen to examine the research question, what motivated adult learners to choose a FET course of study. The research question was broken down into two sub-parts:

- a. The characteristics of the adult FET learner
- b. The motivation to undertake a FET course

The research design for this study was a descriptive and interpretive case study analysed through the qualitative methods of a web-based questionnaire and interviews. The stages and process in the determination of the research approach, research subjects, instruments of data collection and data analysis are outlined later in this chapter.

4.2. Research Paradigm

Thomas Kuhn (1962) defined the research paradigm as “*an integrated cluster of substantive concepts, variables and problems attached with corresponding methodological approaches and tools*” (p.32). The research paradigm provided the framework within which the beliefs, values and assumptions regarding the nature and approach of the research are reflected (Kuhn, 1977). Given (2008) stated the research

paradigm was “*essentially the worldview, the framework of beliefs, values and methods within which research takes place*” (p.825). The research paradigm is the representation of the researcher’s ontology, their reality in respect of the research topic, their epistemology, their understanding of that reality; and of the methodology they choose to demonstrate knowledge about that reality.

4.2.1 Positivist paradigm

The positivist paradigm based on the philosophy of August Comte (1798 - 1857), who proposed that scientific methodology must be applied in the research of social and psychological phenomena, meaning that empirical evidence must be derived from careful observation, whether or not there was experimental manipulation. Comte maintained that the science of human social life was revealed and understood only through the use of scientific methods (Leong, 2008). The positivist paradigm contended for research to be scientific and objective, the researcher was obliged to have remained independent from the research and to have engaged minimally with the research participants.

4.2.2 Post-positivist paradigm

The post-positivist paradigm acknowledged the role of subjective interpretation, previous experience and knowledge on the ideological position of a researcher. It contended that reality is multi-layered and complex (Cohen et al. 2007) and examined the unexplored dimensions of a phenomenon, rather than relationships among components (Gray, 2014). Post-positivists claimed that it was through interaction that humans interpreted phenomena, attached meaning and constructed experiences. Ritchie et al (2013) explained that “*knowledge is produced by exploring and understanding the social world of the people being studied, focusing on their meanings and interpretations*” (p.12). A post-positivist paradigm was applied to this research.

4.2.3 The ontology of the researcher

The ontological position of the researcher, Bracken (2010) claimed, “*is a critical facet of the research process because it enables the researcher to uncover how their perceptions of human nature impact on the approach, they consciously adopt to reveal social truths*” (p.2). The dominant ontological and epistemological traditions are categorised as:

- Positivism which promoted scientific quantitative methods
- Interpretivism which promoted humanistic qualitative methods.

The post-positivist paradigm proffers that the method to be applied in a particular study should be selected based on the research question being addressed and acknowledged that the reality being researched was multi-layered and complex and acknowledged the role of previous experience and the position of a researcher as insider. The ontology of this researcher was that knowledge is a social reality, value-laden and evidenced through investigation and interpretation, Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 Research Paradigm

PARADIGM Post Positivist	Why adult learners engaged in FET required investigation
Ontology Interpretivist	What was the motivation to engage in a FET?
Epistemology Interpretivist	Research focused on generation of understanding of the motivation for engagement in FET.
Methodology Interpretivist	Qualitative methods voiced the experiences of the research participants.

This research was primarily qualitative; therefore, the post-positivist paradigm best suited this research as it provided for a description and interpretation of the research topic. As a researcher, I generated a limited amount of descriptive quantitative information through the questionnaire that provided useful contextual information for the profile and characteristics of the adult FET learner. The interview focused on the subjective experience of the participants and the researcher assumed a learning role with the research participants rather than an experimental or testing one. In post-positivist research, truth is constructed through a dialogue; that discusses the matters raised during the interviews, the participants' reactions, and interpretations of these interwoven ideas form the analysis and how the ideas might be used. This approach allowed for triangulation in understanding the research question.

4.3. Framework for this research

Morrison (1993) confirmed the main decision areas in research: *“orienting decisions; research design; methodology; data analysis; presenting and reporting the results”* (p.79). The framework for this research involved what Creswell (2007) described as the *“entire process of research from conceptualising a problem to writing research questions and on to data collection, analysis, interpretation and report writing”* (p.5).

Cohen et al. (2007) stated that *“there is no single blueprint for planning research”* (p. 78). The four-stage planning model of Cohen et al (2007), Figure 4.1 below, informed this research and identified the decisions to be addressed at each stage of the research process which according to Cohen et al. were .

identify the purposes of the research; Identify and give priority to the constraints under which the research will take place; Plan the possibilities for the research within these constraints; Decide the research design (p.94).

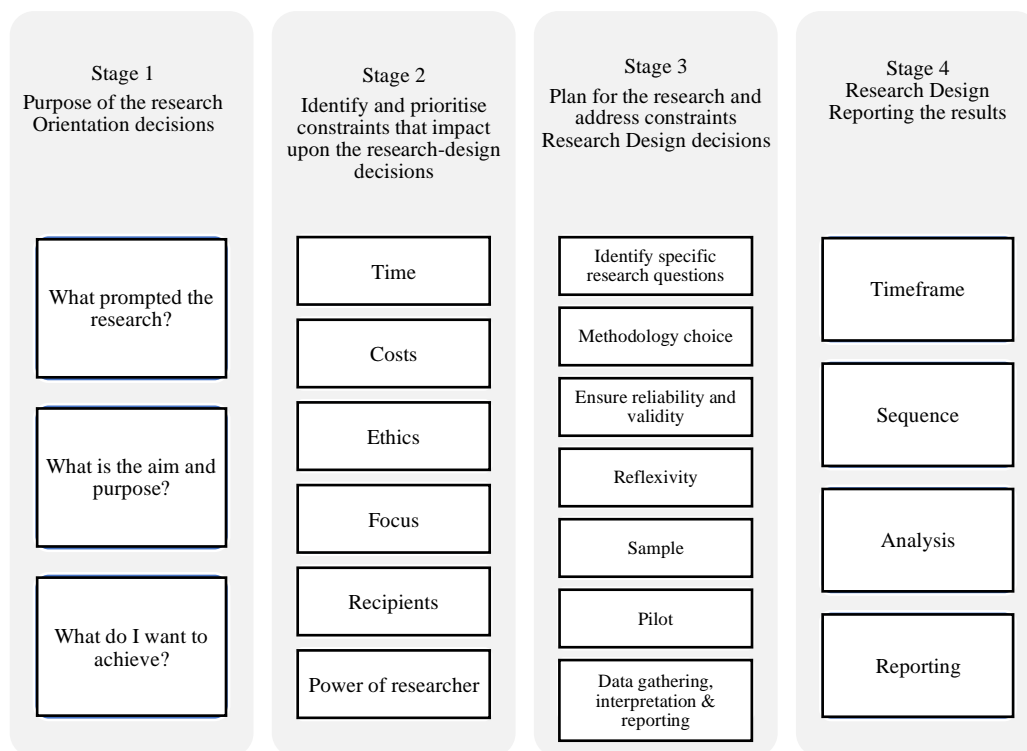


Figure 4.1 Cohen's four-stage planning model

The four stages of planning addressed:

- Purpose of the research and establishment of the research question was informed by literature review and shaped by the theoretical framework.
- Research design decisions established that a case study methodology that used qualitative methods of both a web-based questionnaire and interviews was deemed the most appropriate.

The factors that influenced this decision were:

- the learner voice was to be captured
- a dispersed purposeful sample of full and part-time adult FET learners needed to be included
- participation in the questionnaire would be voluntary and self-selected. Questionnaire participants would then volunteer for participation in the interview.
- The plan for research implementation, limitations and delimitations considered:
 - the size and spread of the sample
 - voluntary participation of the research participants

- optimizing a cross section of part-time and full-time participants
 - reflexivity at each stage
 - administration of the pilot study
- Administration of the research, analysis and reporting of findings was based on the final iteration of the research instruments which were refined through the pilot study.

4.3.1 Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted within a large ETB that volunteered to be part of the research process but was not included in the final sample. The researcher met the ETB Director of Further Education and Training and the Further Education and Training coordinators and informed them about the research and the pilot study. The Further Education and Training coordinators then informed all the adult learners engaged on the same full-time and part-time courses as those comprehended within the full research about the pilot study. The adult learners interested in being part of the pilot study were asked to contact a designated Further Education and Training coordinator within the ETB, who in turn liaised with the researcher. A total of 18 voluntary adult FET learners met with the researcher to complete the pilot study of the questionnaire in an ICT room that had been provided by the ETB, 5 of whom remained with the researcher after completion of the questionnaire to pilot the interview questions. Each participant of the pilot study had the use of a computer in order to complete the web-based questionnaire. The interview questions were asked orally so no equipment was required. In advance of completing both the web-based questionnaire and the interview the researcher outlined the purpose of the research and explained that the pilot study would examine the following aspects of the proposed research design and process:

- the information provided to participants by the researcher in respect of the research process and purpose
- the recruitment of participants
- the research questionnaire
- the research interview questions

The researcher remained in the room with the participants of the pilot study and encouraged them to ask questions, seek clarifications or note difficulties to the researcher as they progressed through the web-based questionnaire and interview questions. The researcher recorded all feedback and answered all questions that were raised and provided the clarifications that were requested. Among the amendments recommended were:

- FET changed to Further Education and Training throughout the web-based questionnaire
- Three questions removed as they represented duplication
- Inclusion of age bands in question 7 (what age did you finish formal education?)
- Question 12 changed from open ended question to a drop-down list
- The inclusion of partner and DEASP Case Officer to question 33
- The inclusion of DEASP/INTREO/Jobpath as an option in question 39
- Inclusion of detail regarding the interview duration and location
- Interview questions were shortened and checked for plain English
- The sequence of interview questions was refined to ensure the questions complimented each other

The pilot study confirmed that:

- It was possible to recruit participants based on the inclusion criteria of the research and confirmed participants willingness to participate in the study
- The participants found the web-based questionnaire and interview questions to be relevant and appropriate to the aims of the research.

- The participants of the pilot study generally found that the web-based questionnaire construction was clear and logical.
- The language used for both the web-based questionnaire and interview was unambiguous and free from jargon.
- The questionnaire tool was appropriate for the sample population.

The pilot study identified potential flaws in the questionnaire and interview questions which allowed for amendments to be made that enhanced the sequence and format of questions for both the interview and questionnaire. These flaws included deficiencies in the recording of informed consent at the start of the questionnaire, and in the request for participation in the interview. These two specifications were addressed to ensure that the questionnaire addressed ethical requirements. A reflexive, iterative approach was taken to the development of the final version of the questionnaire, the interview questions and the research protocol so that after the appropriate amendments they could then be utilised in the full research. The final iteration of the questionnaire, interview questions and research protocol for informed consent was based on the feedback of the participants of the pilot. All comments and recommendations provided by the participants of the pilot study were taken into consideration before final proofing was completed and errors amended.

4.4 Methodological Approach

The terms methodology and methods although often used interchangeably, have distinct meanings. Methodology is the theory or paradigm behind the research methods used to gather and analyse the data gathered. Limited evidence existed on why adult learners chose FET programmes or their motivation to engage with FET. This qualitative case study comprehended learners engaged in FET provided

through ETBs¹. The research methods in this research consisted of a web-based questionnaire administered to volunteer FET adult learners on full-time and part-time accredited FET programmes in both ETBs and a follow-up interview with a purposeful representative sample of this group. The use of the questionnaire and the interview allowed for the “how” and “why” research questions to be investigated and give voice to the participants. As proposed by Driscoll et al. (2007), “*the collection and analysis of structured survey and open-ended key informant interviews in an iterative analytic process can provide important information on emergent and unexpected themes*” (p. 24). Furthermore, the methods supported the identification of patterns or themes in the responses, which underpinned the analysis of findings.

4.5 Research Mode

Creswell (2007) identified narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, case study and grounded theory as the most frequently used approaches in social research. Case study methodology was used in this research as an in-depth appreciation of the motivations of the adult FET learners was required. Zainal (2007) proposed the case study was most appropriate for research where limited research existed on the subject area, as was the case with this research.

4.5.1. Case study methodology

Case study as a research methodology was used to capture the complexity of a single subject and aimed to identify principles underlying the phenomena under scrutiny. Zainal (2007) concluded “*case studies explore and investigate contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships*” (p. 2). In this research,

¹ City of Dublin Education and Training Board and Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board

the opportunity for additional insights into the characteristics and motivations of the adult FET learner was best achieved through the deployment of a case study. Zainal (2007) concurred “*through case study methods, a researcher is able to go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioural conditions through the actor’s perspective*” (p.1). Yin (1984) proposed three categories of case studies:

- Exploratory – general research questions that give rise to further examination
- Descriptive – description of the research phenomenon as it naturally occurs
- Explanatory – surface and deep level research to explain the phenomena

Zainal (2007) stated that “*descriptive case studies set out to describe the natural phenomena which occur within the data in question*” (p. 3). This research was a descriptive case study as it examined the characteristics of the adult FET learner and their motivation for engagement in FET. The research question was informed by existing academic literature, appreciation of the theoretical issues and in-depth knowledge of the FET setting. This case study had pre-defined boundaries that established the subject area for investigation and the time period covered by the case study and there was a relevant research population that was of interest to the researcher. The data gathered from respondents was collated and reviewed, which provided a breadth and depth of understanding of the research question. It is acknowledged the research was conducted on a relatively small sample of adult FET learners it does however make a significant contribution to academic literature on the motivations of the Irish adult FET learner. This research also contributes to new knowledge as it provides practice based evidence and baseline research for an under-researched pillar of the Irish education sector, provides an up to date context of the FET sector and provides detail on what FET is rather than ‘what it is not’.

This research is also the first qualitative profile of the Irish FET learner and their motivations.

4.6 Qualitative Research Methods

Calder (1977) suggested that the type of data to be collected determined the data collection method deployed. He suggested two classifications of knowledge: firstly, scientific which required the use of quantitative methods; and secondly, every-day knowledge which required qualitative methods of data collection. Lester (1999) described the qualitative approach as the collection of *“deep information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s)”*(p.1). Lester also confirmed that qualitative approaches allowed responses to be *“juxtaposed and compared, to identify and confirm relationships between different themes and factors”*(p. 2).

This research deployed qualitative methods which supported an in-depth exploration of the characteristics and motivation of the adult FET learner. Qualitative methods represented what Finlay (2011) identified as the *“constantly evolving, dynamic and co-created relational process to which both participant and research contribute”* (p 24). This approach, Creswell (2003) confirmed, allowed the researcher *“to give voice to diverse perspectives, to better advocate for participants or to better understand a phenomenon or process that is changing as a result of being studied”* (p. 216). The decision to use these qualitative methods arose from the recognition of restrictions on resources including time, skills and expertise. However, their use provided sufficient detail to produce robust results. The features of the data collection methods of web-based questionnaires and interviews are summarised and compared in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 Data collection methods used

Data Collection Method	Description	Advantage	Disadvantage
Web-Based Questionnaire	Email used which provided speed and immediacy.	Access to a wider sample	Limited to the pool of contacts of researcher
	Respondents had the option to respond or decline at the touch of a button.	Cost and time effective	Respondents may be biased
		Unobtrusive	Anonymity issues
		Higher response rate	
Interview	One-to-one recorded interaction	Researcher regulated the questions.	Not a naturalistic setting.
		Opportunity to expand on responses.	Researcher presence may bias responses.
		Additional information may emerge.	Response quality dependent on interviewee willingness to impart information.

4.6.1 Questionnaires

Denscombe (2007) confirmed questionnaires allowed a profile to be generated at a given point in time on the research area. Ebert et al (2018) reflected on the changes observed in the types of questionnaire being used and noted “*the preferred mode for collecting survey data in research has traditionally been the paper questionnaire*” (p.1), however, “*the growing use of the Internet has made the web-based questionnaire an obvious alternative to the paper questionnaire*” (p.1). Salah and Bista (2017) concurred that “*in educational research, the online survey has become a popular method of data collection*” (p. 64).

Web-based questionnaires became a predominant method of data collection because of factors such as ease, fast response time and low cost. The web-based questionnaire represented several important advantages over a paper-based version for this research, which included reduced response time and cost, ease of data entry, flexibility of and control over questionnaire format and the utilisation of technology. The use of a web-based questionnaire in this research was considered a relatively quick and efficient technique for the acquisition of information from the FET adult learner respondents, whereas conducting interviews on the full population of respondents was considered impractical. Wright (2005) concluded that “*online survey services make online survey research much easier and faster*” (p.1084). Leung (2001) noted that “*to maximise our response rate, we have to consider carefully how we administer the questionnaire, establish rapport, explain the purpose of the survey and remind those who have not responded*” (p.151). Murdoch et al (2014) in their research on the impact of different privacy conditions on response rate suggested that “*results showed no association between privacy and response rate or survey completeness*” (p. 90). Campbell and Watters (1990) agreed that “*there is no evidence that anonymity improves response to postal questionnaires, but the use of reminders may do so*” (p.75).

The response rate to a questionnaire can be affected by the design of the questionnaire, the length and the type of questions asked. Unclear, poorly constructed or intrusive questions were found to impede the response rate. Bissett (1994) confirmed that “*well designed questionnaires are highly structured to allow the same types of information to be collected from a large number of people in the same way and for data to be analysed quantitatively and systematically*” (p.202). With attention paid to these considerations, the questionnaire and instructions for its completion were drawn up, and the questionnaire was piloted among a small group of FET learners. However, Boynton and Greenhalgh (2004) noted that “just because a questionnaire has been piloted on a few of your colleagues, used in previous studies, or

published in a peer reviewed journal does not mean it is either valid or reliable” (p.2). After several iterations and final proofing, the final questionnaire was uploaded to the web-based Survey Monkey application. Boynton and Greenhalgh (2004) warned “*weasel words to avoid in question stems include commonly, usually many, some and hardly ever*” (p.4). Shorter questionnaires have been associated with a higher response rate (Liu and Wronski, 2017; Porter, 2004a). Bissett (1994) advocated for a variation between closed questions and open questions as open questions allowed for “*exploration of the range of possible themes arising from an issue*” and closed questions were “*easy to code, record and analyse results quantitatively*”(p.203).

Scholars have observed a decline in response rates of web-based questionnaires compared to paper based and postal questionnaires (Fan and Yan, 2010; Fosnacht, Sarraf, Howeand Peck, 2017; Roberts and Allen, 2015; Shannon and Bradshaw, 2002; Sheehan, 2001). Granello and Wheaton (2004) concluded poor IT skills or lack of IT equipment impacted the response rates therefore “*it is impossible to know the response rates*” (p.381). Limitations associated with web-based questionnaires have included the representativeness of the sample, lowered response rate, interpretation errors and technical difficulties.

4.6.2 Interviews

Interviews were used in this research to gather responses from a purposeful representative sample group of FET adult learners. As a research method Clifford (1997) stated, “*interview techniques are widely used as a means of gathering data in qualitative research*” (p.40). Kvale (1996) added that “*interviewing is a way to collect data as well as to gain knowledge from individuals*” (p. 14). David and Sutton (2004) advised that knowledge of “*key themes and sub-questions in advance gives the researcher a sense of order from which to draw questions from unplanned encounters*” (p. 87). Corbetta (2003)

explained the importance of prior identification of key themes, issues and questions to be addressed

the order in which the various topics are dealt with and the wording of the questions are left to the interviewer's discretion. Within each topic, the interviewer is free to conduct the conversation as he thinks fit, to ask the questions he deems appropriate in the words he considers best, to give explanation and ask for clarification if the answer is not clear, to prompt the respondent to elucidate further if necessary and to establish his own style of conversation (p.270).

The interview provided opportunities to probe for such unplanned encounters and document the views and opinions of the interviewee. Such probing allowed for the exploration of areas which were not initially considered (Gray, 2004). O'Leary (2004) concluded

interviews generally start with some defined questioning plan but pursue a more conversational style of interview that may see questions answered in an order more natural to the flow of conversation (p.164).

Patton (2002) recommended that the practice for the interviewer was

to explore, probe and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject, to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined (p. 343).

Hoyle et al. (2002) asserted that interview questions had “*dual goals of motivating the respondent to give full and precise replies while avoiding biases stemming from social desirability, conformity, or other constructs of disinterest*” (p.144). Morgan (1996) proposed that interviews had the advantage of making “*purposeful use of interaction to generate data*” (p.130), unlike quantitative methods which, Schratz (1993) stated transformed the “*voice of the research subject into statistical data, leaving little understanding of the context in which particular social practices occur*” (p.10). The aim of the interviews in this research was to build on the information gained from the web-based questionnaire and to ascertain in more detail the profile, characteristics and motivation of the adult FET learner.

4.7. Selecting the Sample

The myriad of provision within the FET sector necessitated limiting the scope of the study. The sampling method in this research used a limited number of programmes and a limited cohort of FET learners. Learners over the age of 25 and registered on one of six FET programme areas, Table 4.3 below, which included a reasonable split between full-time and part-time FET provision were targeted. Provision specifically targeted at FET learners under the age of 25 was excluded from the research.

Table 4.3 FET courses from which learners were invited to participate in the research

Full-time Courses	Part-time Courses
PLC	Adult Literacy
VTOS	Skills for Work
Specific Skills Training	Community Education

The number of individual FET learners in 2017 also informed this sample Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4 ETB distinct learners and activities in 2017 (SOLAS 2017)

ETB	Distinct Learner
Cavan Monaghan ETB	8,771
City of Dublin ETB	25,859
Cork ETB	19,456
Donegal ETB	6,251
Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB	21,317
Galway Roscommon ETB	11,061
Kerry ETB	8,399
Kildare Wicklow ETB	10,396
Kilkenny Carlow ETB	7,348
Laois Offaly ETB	5,484

Limerick Clare ETB	14,372
Longford Westmeath ETB	5,739
Louth Meath ETB	11,115
Mayo, Sligo Leitrim ETB	11,669
Tipperary ETB	7,256
Waterford Wexford ETB	11,862
Total	186,355

ETBs were categorised as aggregated and non-aggregated based upon their composition after the aggregation process of 2012, Table 4.5 below:

Table 4.5 ETBs aggregated and non-aggregated

Aggregated (2)	Aggregated (3)	Non-Aggregated
Cavan Monaghan ETB Cork ETB Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB Galway Roscommon ETB Kildare Wicklow ETB Kilkenny Carlow ETB Laois Offaly ETB Limerick Clare ETB Longford Westmeath ETB Louth Meath ETB Tipperary ETB Waterford Wexford ETB	Mayo, Sligo Leitrim ETB	City of Dublin ETB Donegal ETB Kerry ETB

The largest non-aggregated ETB, City of Dublin and the largest aggregated ETB, Mayo, Sligo Leitrim ETB were selected for the purpose of this research. The total learner population of the two ETBs covered by this research is noted below in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Total Research Population - Source PLSS 2019

Non-Aggregated ETB	Learner population 2017	Aggregated ETB	Learner population 2017
City of Dublin	25,859	Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim	11,669

As part of the web-based questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their interest in being involved in the interview phase of the research. Those who expressed interest were contacted and their availability to complete an interview with the researcher was confirmed.

4.7.1 Purposeful sampling

This research took its purposeful sample from adult learners aged over 25 registered on the identified FET courses with the two ETBs² that participated in the research, Table 4.7 and 4.8 below.

Table 4.7 Purposeful Sampling Population Full-time courses

	MSLETB	CDETB
PLC	217	1,121
VTOS Core	89	108
Specific Skills Training	51	68
Totals	357	1,297

² Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB) and City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB)

Table 4.8 Purposeful Sampling Population Part-time courses

	MSLETB	CDETB
Adult Literacy Groups	480	547
Skills for Work	181	18
Community Education	589	941
Totals	1,250	1,506

The aim of the purposeful sample was to obtain rich data from the adult FET learners that were the focus of the research. The purposeful sample for this research was 85% of adult FET learners on full-time courses, Figure 4.2 below and 15% on part-time courses Figure 4.3 below.

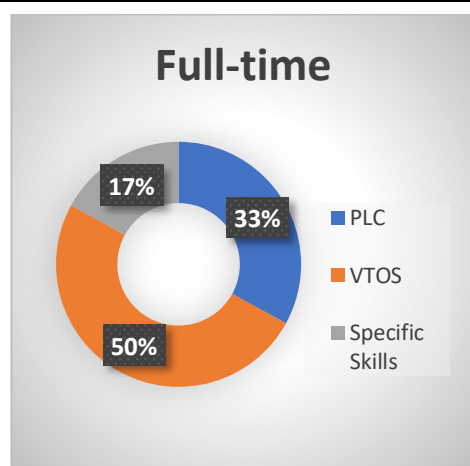


Figure 4.2 Purposeful Sample Full-time learners

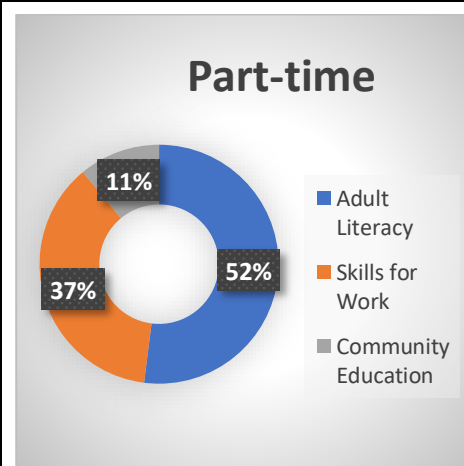


Figure 4.3 Purposeful Sample Part-time learners

Patton (2002) explained that the power of purposeful sampling was the selection of information rich data cases

Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations (p. 230).

Suri (2011) claimed that purposeful sampling required “*access to key informants in the field who can help in identifying information-rich cases*” (p. 4) in what Palinkas et al. (2015) described as “*related to the phenomenon of interest*” (p. 533). Purposeful sampling in this research required the engagement of adult FET learners from each ETB that provided a representative spread based on age, gender and education attainment. The sampling framework used in this research was adapted from Ames et al (2019), which combined the purposeful sampling strategies proposed by Suri (2011), two sampling strategies were used in this research:

- Sampling for maximum variation
- Sampling for data richness

Ames et al (2019) concluded sampling for maximum variation provided “*a global understanding of the phenomenon of interest, including similarities and differences across different settings*” (p 3). The inclusion of adult FET learners from both the urban and rural ETBs at the interview stage helped to ensure a reasonable representation of findings. Ames et al (2019) concluded that sampling for data richness “*can provide in-depth insights into the phenomenon of interest, allowing the researcher to better interpret the meaning and context of findings presented in the primary studies*” (p.4) The questionnaire provided for maximum variation which was supplemented by the interview which provided for data richness through the use of qualitative open questions which Patton (2002) proposed allowed for “*logical generalizations with the reasoning that if it happens there, it will happen anywhere, or, vice versa, if it doesn’t happen there, it won’t happen anywhere*” (p. 236). Palinkas et al. (2015) considered the challenges presented by purposeful sampling

there are numerous challenges in identifying and applying the appropriate purposeful sampling strategy in any study as the range of variation in a sample from which a purposive sample is to be taken is often not really known at the outset of a study (p. 536).

The sampling framework allowed meaningful comparisons to be made across the research participants.

4.8 Data Collection Process

The data collection processes resulted in a total of 214 questionnaires being received. Of these 165 were completed in full and used for data analysis. The questionnaires excluded from the analysis included 30 that refused to provide consent and 19 that were abandoned before completion. 10 interviews were completed and analysed. The data collection process associated with the web-based questionnaire and interview are outlined below.

4.8.1 Questionnaire

Survey Monkey was used in this research. It provided a reliable and secure means of collection and management of the questionnaires and it assured and ensured respondent anonymity. Wright (2005) supported this approach as it facilitated “*the inclusion of individuals in distant locations, the ability to reach difficult to contact participants and the convenience of having automated data collection, which reduces researcher time and effort*” (p.1083). The questionnaire (Appendix F and F1) was populated with both open and closed questions designed to capture a profile of FET adult learners and their motivations for engagement in FET. The questionnaire consisted of seven thematic sections, where questions were grouped so that respondents did not need to jump mentally between themes (Dillman, 2014). There were a total of 48 questions in the questionnaire which were a mix of open, closed and rating types. There were 24 closed, 7 open, 11 matrix and 6 rating scale questions. Demanding or time-consuming questions that required extensive text were avoided (Burgess, 2001). Checkboxes for closed responses were provided rather than asking respondents to write responses. As this was a web-based questionnaire, the requirement to scroll or switch screen was avoided (Dillman, 2014). With the prior agreement of the ETBs, the questionnaire was circulated by email to the

Directors of Further Education and Training in both ETBs. The email detailed the research, outlined the research process and requested assistance in engaging the cooperation of their ETBs' FET adult learners. The web-based questionnaire invitation which included the unique web link to the web-based questionnaire was shared then with the adult FET learners on the six identified programmes within both ETBs by ETB Directors of Further Education and Training. Salah and Bista (2017) confirmed learners "*prefer completing electronic surveys received mostly from students, colleagues and authority figures (e.g. department chair or higher) compared to people from other organizations who they do not know personally or professionally*" (p. 70). Full details about the research, including the right to withdraw and the option to engage in the interview stage, was included with the invitation. All questions were mandatory within the questionnaire and respondents completed the questionnaire voluntarily as there was no incentive to participate. Time was allocated for the completion of the questionnaire within the tuition period and the researcher was available on-line, by telephone or on-site by prior arrangement if required by the ETB. The option to complete the questionnaire outside of the tuition time but within a specified timeframe was also available. Reminders were provided by ETB staff and circulated to all adult FET learners within both ETBs regularly over the three-week period of time that the web-based questionnaire was open. Learners were also encouraged to participate in the questionnaire by ETB staff.

214 adult FET learners engaged with the questionnaire, 19 abandoned the questionnaire before completion and 30 refused to provide consent at the start of the questionnaire resulting in 49 being excluded from the data analysis phase. A total of 165 completed questionnaires were used in the data analysis phase. Higher response rates have been associated with greater engagement with participants during the research process (Coates, 2006). The response rate in this research was lower than anticipated and participation rates from part-time adult FET learners was lower than that from full-time FET learners. Part-time learners had

less class contact with tutors and therefore received fewer reminders and less encouragement to complete the questionnaire. It was not possible to have confirmation of how many adult FET learners actually received the invitation to participate or the invitation was left unopened in their email inbox or if they had access to IT equipment outside of the learning environment, which may have impacted the response rate from part-time learners. It was acknowledged that web-based questionnaires typically elicited lower response rates than face-to-face administration of questionnaires (Dommeyer et al., 2004; Porter, 2004) however, a higher incidence of detailed information to open-ended questions was associated with online questionnaires (Layne et al., 1999; Dommeyer et al., 2004). At the time of distribution two other learner focused questionnaires were released from other agencies which Nair et al (2008) claimed increased the likelihood of “*the so-called ‘survey fatigue’ factor, the over-surveying of students*” (p. 226). Only 25% of those that completed the web-based questionnaire expressed interest in the interview phase of the research, these were contacted by the researcher.

4.8.2 Interview

Interviews were conducted with ten adult FET learners that indicated their interest and availability to complete the interview. Twenty-six full-time learners and one part-time learner had indicated their interest in completing the interview. Each prospective volunteer interview participant was contacted by the researcher, ten full-time learners confirmed their interest and availability for the interview phase of the research. The interview process was outlined, the approximate duration of the interview and the questions that would be asked were shared (Appendix J). Braun and Clarke (2006) claimed the interview process allowed for expression of the “*experiences, meanings and the reality of participants*” (p.81). A time and date that suited each interviewee for the interview to be completed was arranged. At the interview, each

interviewee was provided with the interview consent form which included consent for the interview to be recorded and were given time to read and sign the same. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. Interviewees were confident, pleasant and willingly shared their experience and were generous with their time. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) claimed the qualitative interview reflected the interpretivist paradigm *“that logic flows from specific to general and that knower and known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality”* (p. 14).

4.9 Data Analysis

The process of data analysis involved identifying common patterns within the responses and critically analysing them in order to address the research question.

4.9.1 Data Analysis- Closed Questions

The data analysis process commenced with the data reduction process of summarising the findings from the web-based questionnaire closed questions. The data reduction process was straightforward as the closed questions were easily quantifiable as they were final in their nature e.g., age and gender of participants, type of FET provision they were engaged in and level of award. This facilitated the categorisation of respondents into groups based on the answer they selected. This data was then used to create and export explanatory charts. Halim et al (2018) confirmed *“data collected can be sorted and displayed graphically according to the user”* (p. 311). The full closed data set was filtered to compare, view and categorise responses. The data was also downloaded into excel and a series of pivot tables was used to cross tabulate data under a range of inquiries, e.g., gender and socio-economic status table 4.9 below

Table 4.9 Excel data inquiry

Count of Which of the following best describes your situation before you commenced the Further Education and Training course?		
Row Labels	Female	Male (blank)
Carer		4
Employed	15	13
Homemaker	14	
Not in employment due to ill health / disability	4	4
On a scheme	4	1
School leaver	3	3
Student (other than school)	7	6
Unemployed	21	17
(blank)		
Grand Total	72	44

4.9.2 Data Analysis- Open Questions

A thematic analysis of the content from the interviews and the open-ended questionnaire responses was then undertaken. The responses from the open-ended questions were inputted to NVIVO for more in-depth thematic analysis. Verbatim quotations from the open-ended questionnaire responses have been included in the findings and discussion chapters and have been coded alphanumerically Q1- Q165. Verbatim quotations from the interviewees are also referenced within this text in an alphanumeric format coded as detailed in table 4.10 below.

Table 4.10 participant coding

Research Id number	Provision Identification	Location Identification	Gender	Age Group	Final code
I1	Specific Skills Training	CDETB	M	26-40	I1SC
I2	PLC	MSLETB	F	41-65	I2PM
I3	PLC	MSLETB	M	41-65	I3PM
I4	PLC	CDETB	F	26-40	I4PC
I5	PLC	MSLETB	M	41-65	I5PM
I6	VTOS	MSLETB	F	26-40	I6VM
I7	VTOS	MSLETB	F	41-65	I7VM
I8	Specific Skills Training	CDETB	F	26-40	I8SC
I9	Specific Skills Training	CDETB	F	41-65	I9SC
I10	Specific Skills Training	CDETB	F	26-40	I10SC

Final themes were threaded back to the following qualitative dimensions of the theoretical framework:

1. Characteristics of the adult learner
2. Adult learner orientation toward learning
3. Motivations for participation

The thematic analysis was based on the Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step process which is detailed below:

1. Familiarisation

Familiarisation with the open-ended questionnaire and interview data was achieved as the data was fully reviewed, actively read, listened to, and transcribed before re-reading. Researcher notes and early impressions were also reviewed. Key points noted at this stage included the importance of achieving a qualification, dissatisfaction with current employment and that the decision to participate in FET was self-directed.

2. Coding

This research was concerned with addressing specific research questions therefore this was an emergent process where the data provided information about the research question. Codes emerged from the data that described the content. The codes were then refined into groups that aligned with the research question. The motivation of the adult learner was a key research question, themes that arose in both the questionnaire and interviews in this respect were lack of qualifications and dissatisfaction with current employment. Open coding was used which allowed for the development and modification of codes as I worked through the coding process. Each segment of data that was relevant or captured something interesting about the research question was coded and recorded in NVIVO (Appendix L) and detailed in table 4.11 below. This stage involved deconstructing the data from its original chronology into an initial set of non-hierarchical codes which included:

Table 4.11 NVIVO Initial Coding

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes - 16 initial codes were developed at this phase of coding	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Contribution to society	5	7
Dissatisfaction with current or previous employment	10	20
Economic motivation	11	29
Education Attainment	11	41
Engagement based on inclusion	8	19
Familial support	10	31
Financial vulnerability	8	23
Lack of qualifications	10	26
Life Experience	8	19
Multiple responsibilities	5	14
Need to know	11	31
Previous experience of education	7	50
Readiness to learn	11	89
Role model	4	7
Self Esteem	11	29
Self-Fulfilment	11	59

3. Generating themes

The process continued with a further analysis of the initial codes and relevant data extracts recorded in NVivo to underpin the searching for themes. The search for themes involved merging, renaming, distilling, and clustering related codes into broader categories of codes to reconstruct the data into a framework that makes sense to further the analysis. In this stage the codes were organised into broader themes that addressed the research question. 5 themes which reflected the adult learner characteristics and motivation arose which were aligned to the theoretical framework. One such theme was “Characteristics and Motivation- Self Actualisation” which included text associated with learner characteristics and self-actualisation needs, this included dissatisfaction with current or previous employment, detailed below in table 4.12 below.

Table 4.12 Generation of themes in NVIVO

Phase 3 - Searching for Themes - 5 key categories were identified and mapped in phase 3	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Characteristics, Need and Motivation - Physiological Need	11	138
Financial vulnerability	8	23
Lack of qualifications	10	26
Readiness to learn	11	89
Characteristics, Need and Motivation- Belonging Need	11	84
Engagement based on inclusion	8	21
Familial support	10	63
Characteristics, Need and Motivation- Esteem Need	11	106
Dissatisfaction with current or previous employment	10	20
Lack of qualifications	10	26
Life Experience	8	24
Self Esteem	11	36
Characteristics, Need and Motivation- Safety Need	11	287
Economic motivation	11	66
Education Attainment	11	41
Financial vulnerability	8	23
Lack of qualifications	10	26
Multiple responsibilities	5	14
Need to know	11	34
Previous experience of education	8	83
Characteristics, Need and Motivation- Self Actualisation	11	131
Contribution to society	5	7
Dissatisfaction with current or previous employment	10	20
Life Experience	8	26
Lack of qualifications	10	26
Self-Fulfilment	11	61

4. Reviewing themes

Patterns and themes in the codes across the different interviews were reviewed and the reorganised categories were further broken down into subcategories to better understand the meanings embedded therein. Codes that reflected the more

specific themes that emerged were defined and recorded in NVIVO. When I reviewed that themes of characteristics and motivations two high-level themes and associated codes emerged which captured and reflected different aspects of the responses provided by the research participants. This was an iterative process, where I went back and forth between themes, codes, and extracts until I had all coded data comprehended under coherent themes that represented the data accurately and threaded back to the research question and the theoretical framework. The process produced 2 themes; one theme collapsed all the text related to the characteristics and needs of the adult learner; this theme had 5 sub-themes; the second theme included all text that reflected the influencing factors on the motivation of the adult learner which had 2 sub-themes table 4.13 below.

Table 4.13 Reviewing themes in NVIVO

Phase 4 - Reviewing Themes (Coding on) - 32 reviewed and refined codes were created or refined at this phase	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Characteristics and Need		
Engagement based on inclusion	7	9
Change in circumstances	5	6
Claiming space	2	3
Self-Actualisation	10	159
Self-Fulfilment	10	61
Life Experience	8	26
Contribution to society	5	7
Life Transitions	10	39
Lack of qualifications	10	26
Development of Transversal Skills	10	123
Readiness to learn	10	89
Need to know	10	34
Improved Employment Prospects	10	145
Economic motivation	10	66
Improved circumstances	9	22
Gaining employment	9	14
Dissatisfaction with current or previous employment	10	20
Financial vulnerability	8	23
Progression to Education and Training	10	124

Prior Experience of Education	6	71
Current experience of education	2	12
Education Attainment	10	41
Influencing Factors		
Familial support	10	55
Multiple responsibilities	5	14
Negative influence	2	8
Positive influence	10	23
Role model	5	10
Self-Esteem		
Self-doubt and trepidation	10	36
Life Experience	8	24

5. Defining and naming themes

Final themes were confirmed that captured the essence of each theme in a concise manner which involved conceptually mapping and collapsing categories into a broader thematic framework table 4.14 below.

Table 4.14 Defining and naming themes in NVIVO

Phase 5 - Defining and Naming Theme - two major themes with sub-themes were defined and named at phase 5	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Characteristics and Needs of the adult FET learner	10	428
Engagement based on inclusion	9	7
Development of Transversal Skills	10	123
Self-Actualisation	10	133
Improved Employment Prospects	10	145
Progression to Education and Training	10	150
Influences on the motivation of the adult learner	10	115
Familial support	10	55
Self Esteem	10	60

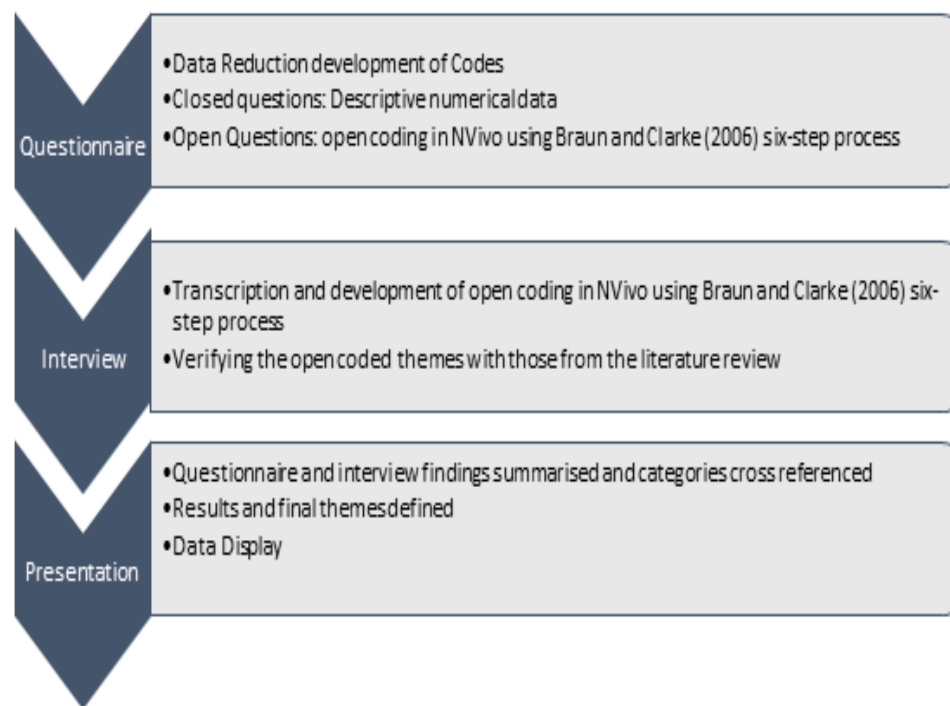
6. Writing up

Data extracts that related to the themes, the research question, the literature review and the theoretical framework were identified and the analysis of the research completed and documented. Direct quotations from the research participants

are included, Mills et al (2006) stated this enabled their accounts to remain visible in the final text so *“that the reader can make a connection between analytical findings and the data from which they were derived”* (p.11).

The data analysis journey is depicted below in figure 4.5

Figure 4.5 Data Analysis Journey



The final review of the 165 questionnaires and 10 interview transcripts revealed that data saturation had been achieved as themes were recurrent with mounting evidence of the same code and no new emergent data.

4.9.3 Data Selection and Presentation

As this was a qualitative research process the data largely consisted of statements/responses from the open-ended questionnaire and the interview transcripts and some limited quantitative data generated from the closed questions. On examination of the data gathered I concluded that it was all relevant. In the presentation of the data, it was important that it connected back to the research question and the theoretical

framework and conveyed the themes and sub-themes that emerged through the thematic analysis stage. The results of the thematic analysis of the closed data suggested a number of data queries with regard to the demographic profile of the participants e.g. socio-economic status, gender and age; gender and level of award being undertaken, age, gender and education attainment prior to commencement in FET which are presented through figures and tables. The results of the thematic analysis of the questionnaire answers to open questions and the transcript of interviews is presented in terms of a final set of emergent themes. These themes were further interrogated in light of the closed data analysis and the overarching research questions. Final themes are presented below table 4.15

Table 4.15 final emergent themes.

Characteristics of the adult FET learner	Motivation for the adult FET learner	Barriers and Support for the adult learner
Gender and Age	Orientation toward learning	Familial attitude
Socio-Economic Status	Achievement of a qualification	Multiple responsibilities
Education Attainment	Personal Interest and Improvement	Financial vulnerability
Adult Learner Characteristics	Enhanced employment opportunities	Transition to adult learner
	Social Engagement	FET as a learning environment

4.10. Reflexivity

Gouldner (1971) explained the process of reflexivity as the “*analytic attention to the researcher's role in qualitative research*” (p. 16.). Mautner and Doucet (2003) proposed that, as researchers conduct analysis on “*other people’s accounts of their lives, it seems appropriate for us to reflect on our own account*” (p. 420). Jootunet al (2009)

considered the core of reflexivity was “*to make the relationship between and the influence of the researcher and the participants explicit*” (p. 45). Reflexivity has been described as both a concept and a process (Dowling, 2006) that is underpinned with self-awareness (Lambert et al, 2010) and active engagement in the research process (Shaffir and Stebbins, 1991). Palaganas (2017) reflected on the researcher and the research process and concluded:

the researcher’s positionality/ies does not exist independently of the research process nor does it completely determine the latter. Instead, this must be seen as a dialogue – challenging perspectives and assumptions both about the social world and of the researcher him/herself. This enriches the research process and its outcomes (p.427).

It was important that the researcher did not impact the research process; however, it must be acknowledged that, through interactions with research subjects, this may happen. In this research, the researcher had a direct and professional involvement with the research topic and the research subjects, which resulted in insider research. Green (2014) described “*insider research*”, which this research was, as “*that which is conducted within a social group, organization or culture of which the researcher is also a member*” (p.1). According to Merton (1972), the insider enjoyed a prior knowledge of the research community and its members, although Hellowell (2006) noted that the term did not imply that the researcher was a member, Merton (1972) explained “*one need not be Caesar in order to understand Caesar*” (p. 31). The influence, if any, of insider research may be more evidenced in qualitative research, as the methods deployed may be less structured than those used in quantitative methods. Green (2014) claimed that an increased incidence of insider research was

happening within the field of education, as the expansion of professional doctorate programs, such as the Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.), has resulted in more teachers engaging in research in their own educational institutions (p. 1).

The existence of researcher preconceptions or bias may be undesirable but Malterud (2001) observed “*preconceptions are not the same as bias,*

unless the researcher fails to mention them” (p. 484). Malterud considered the researcher as part of the research process and concluded

a researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate and the framing and communication of conclusions (p. 484).

The reflexive approach applied to this research allowed the researcher to acknowledge what Mruck and Breuer (2003) described as “*presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process*” (p. 3) and give consideration to the research and the research process. According to Jootun et al. (2009), a degree of subjectivity may be evidenced in qualitative research as the “*interpretation of the participants' behaviour and collected data is influenced by the values, beliefs, experience and interest of the researcher*” (p. 45). Reflexivity resulted in an open and transparent research process. Jootun et al. (2009) confirmed that awareness of the “*reciprocal influence of both participants and researcher/s on the process and outcome is important to ensure rigor in qualitative research*” (p. 45). Reay (2007) argued that reflexivity is “*about giving as full and honest an account of the research process as possible, in particular explicating the position of the researcher in relation to the research*” (p. 611). The ethical aspects of insider research are discussed in greater detail in the next section.

4.10 Ethics

As already acknowledged, the researcher occupied an insider role, as the study employed a group with whom the researcher had a professional relationship. In this research, the insider role provided a greater understanding of FET and the formal education system hierarchy within which it is located. Floyd and Arthur (2010) suggested

that insider researchers had an “*enhanced sense of trust and relational responsibility*” (p.2), as insider researchers, they claimed

we felt closer to our participants; therefore, our sense of responsibility was arguably stronger than if we were conducting research in an institution where we did not have any links (p.2).

While much is written about insider research, Mercer (2007) noted that little of the literature related to issues “*facing educationalists researching the management of their own institutions*” (p.3). Mercer continued: “*research methodology, in education generally and in educational leadership more specifically, tends to gloss over the intricacies of insider research conducted at one’s place of work*” (p.4). The issues regarding the dual role as researcher and Director of Further Education and Training Support Services in Education and Training Boards Ireland³ (ETBI), required consideration and acknowledgement. During the research process, the researcher did not offer any opinion in relation to question areas and strived to conduct the research objectively. Shah (2004) reflected on insider research and concluded that “*a social insider is better positioned as a researcher because of his/her knowledge of the relevant patterns of social interaction required for gaining access and making meaning*” (p.556).

The DCU ethics protocol and process were observed. An application to the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee was completed in February 2019. To obtain access to the research participants an outline of the research proposal was provided to the Chief Executives of the two ETBs and permission to conduct the research with their learners sought and received (Appendix G). The research purpose and process was outlined to the Directors of Further Education and Training and relevant staff within the two ETBs (Appendix H) in advance of commencement of the research (Appendix I). In order to obtain informed consent, from the research participants details regarding the

³ Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) was established under the Education and Training Boards Act 2013. It is an association established to collectively represent education and training boards and promote their interests in the development of education, training and youth work in Ireland.

research that included the right to refuse to take part and the right to withdraw from the research at any stage was prepared and shared with the full research population (Appendix J). Participants were informed that the questionnaires were anonymous and they would be required to indicate their consent to participate in the research study at the commencement of the web-based questionnaire. Questionnaire participants were informed that extracts from the questionnaire responses could appear in the final report.

Interviewees were asked to complete a consent form at the commencement of the interview. They were assured that all interview responses were anonymous (Appendix I) as neither the name of the interview participant nor the name of the associated ETB or centre was recorded or identified in the research. Interviewees were informed that extracts from the interview could appear in the final report and that they could request a copy of the interview transcript and that the transcript was for use only by the researcher and, if required, by the research supervisor or Dublin City University examiners (Appendix J). Powney and Watts (1987) explained the benefit of research participant consent *“research benefits from interviewees being fully informed from the start of what the researchers and the interviewees are trying to establish”* (p.147). Questionnaire and interview participants were informed that all data relating to the research was to be stored on a password-protected computer accessed only by the researcher up to and including the date of the court of examiners in Dublin City University thereafter they would be destroyed.

4.11 Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are those potential weaknesses that are out of the control of the researcher. The primary limitation of this research was the size of the population of adult learners across FET. The decision to include only the largest urban ETB and the largest rural ETB on an identified number of FET programmes distilled the number of possible research

participants. Ultimately not every adult FET learner agreed to participate and some that commenced the questionnaire did not complete it in full. Therefore, the final purposeful sample was limited.

The inclusion of part-time learners in the research created a challenge as many part-time programmes are not engaged in class contact on a regular basis, which made engagement by the researcher and reminders by the ETB staff of the research more difficult. The engagement level of the part-time adult learner in the research was low and the limitations presented by the small response rate from part-time adult learners was noted. The research questionnaire was conducted over a three-week timeframe and participation in the research was optional, therefore an optimal cross-section of the adult learner participants was not achieved. Participation in the interviews was optional and only those that completed the questionnaire could complete the interview. Therefore, participants of this research may not be regarded as having provided an equal representation of the motivations of the overall FET learner community. It is recognised by the researcher that there are other providers of FET across the country that are not included in this research, which is a limitation of this research. The new knowledge created through this research has added to this field of study and has provided valuable contributions to the understanding of the motivations of the adult FET learner from an Irish perspective. Notwithstanding the final small sample, consistencies were evidenced in the findings which could be further investigated by other researchers.

Delimitations defined the scope and parameters of research studies (Patton, 2002). The researcher was curious to understand the motivations of the adult FET learner in order to inform programme development and delivery. The population of this research was specifically delimited to the adult learners aged over 25 engaged in six specific FET programmes across two Education and Training Boards (ETB) that voluntarily agreed to complete the questionnaire and the interview. The diversity of provision within the FET sector in Ireland

necessitated focusing the scope of the study to a limited number of programmes and a particular cohort of FET learners. It was not feasible to have included all learners across all FET provision as the focus of this research was the adult learner. FET adult learners are considered to have a variety of backgrounds, life experiences, socioeconomic statuses, ages, education levels, levels of ability with varied levels of motivation and reasons for undertaking FET courses. Greater differences in purpose, relevance and suitability would be evidenced if all of the FET learners under 25's had been included.

4.12 Conclusion

The research paradigm and rationale for the methods and methodology deployed in this research, which examined the motivations of adult learners to choose a FET course of study have been outlined. The research methods utilised were considered reliable and appropriate for this research process and population. Ethical considerations that included researcher bias have been discussed and reflexivity considered as it related to this research.

Chapter Five Findings

5.1 Introduction

The findings that emerged through thematic analysis of the sample data set of 165 questionnaires and ten interviews are outlined in this chapter. The research participants were drawn from the over 25 age group of the learner population on the six programmes of Further Education and Training. Participation in the research process was voluntary, 85% of questionnaire respondents were full-time FET learners and 15% were part-time FET learners, all interviewees were full-time FET learners. The findings presented here both creates knowledge and expands the understanding of FET in relation to the motivation of adult FET learners and the correlation of the same to the core benefits of FET from an Irish perspective. The analysis of the barriers and supports as identified by the adult FET learner provides a significant contribution to literature on participation in FET and provides insight and understanding of the Irish adult FET learner. The research findings are presented in this chapter under the following headings:

- Characteristics of the adult FET learner
- Motivation for the adult FET learner
- Barriers and Support for the adult learner

5.2 Characteristics of the adult FET learner

The findings with regard to the characteristics and profile of the adult FET learner are outlined in this section under the following headings:

- Gender and Age
- Socio-Economic Status
- Education Attainment
- Adult Learner Characteristics

5.2.1. Gender and Age

The majority of research participants were female, 70%, further analysis by gender and age revealed that participation was highest amongst the 41-65 age cohort for both males and females, Figures 5.1 and 5.2 below.

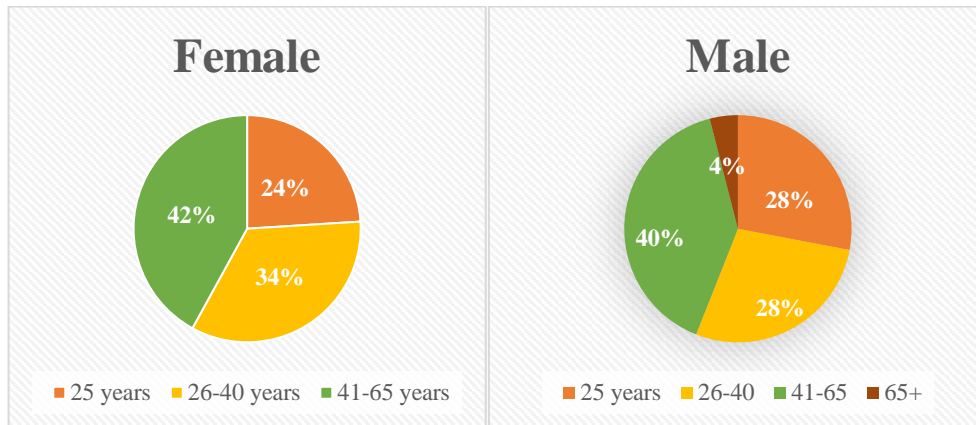


Figure 5.1 Gender and age profile- female`

Figure 5.2 Gender and age profile- male

The majority of research participants were engaged in vocationally orientated provision with the highest numbers associated with full-time specific skills training and part-time skills to advance programmes. The nature of the programmes in the research did not suggest any gender differentiation. However, availability of provision across levels in FET centres would have differed.

- The prolife of female enrolment on accredited FET programmes was as follows:
 - 15% at level 4 or below
 - 70% at level 5
 - 15% at level 6
- The prolife of male enrolment on accredited FET programmes was as follows:
 - 24% at level 4 or below
 - 54 % at level 5
 - 22% at level 6

5.2.2. Socio-Economic Status

Review of the socio-economic status of the research participants, provided findings that were reflective of the characteristics Cross (2009) proffered for the non-traditional learner as :

- 33% had been unemployed
- 7% were not in employment due to ill health / disability
- 24% were employed
- 12% had been engaged in home duties
- 4% had been engaged in care duties
- 4% were on a community scheme
- 16% had been a learner in FET or HE

The socio-economic status of the participants was interrogated by gender and age, Figures 5.3 and 5.4 below, in which more females were engaged in home and care duties or were unemployed prior to commencement in FET. It was interesting to note that no males in any age group reported home or care duties as their socio-economic status prior to commencement in FET. Only one quarter of all age groups reported having been in employment prior to commencement in FET. Across all age ranges females had a higher incidence of unemployment than males, within the female population the 25 year olds reported the highest levels of unemployment. Interestingly the 25 year old males had the highest levels of employment and lowest level of unemployment across the male population.

Figure 5.3 Socio-Economic Status by gender and Age

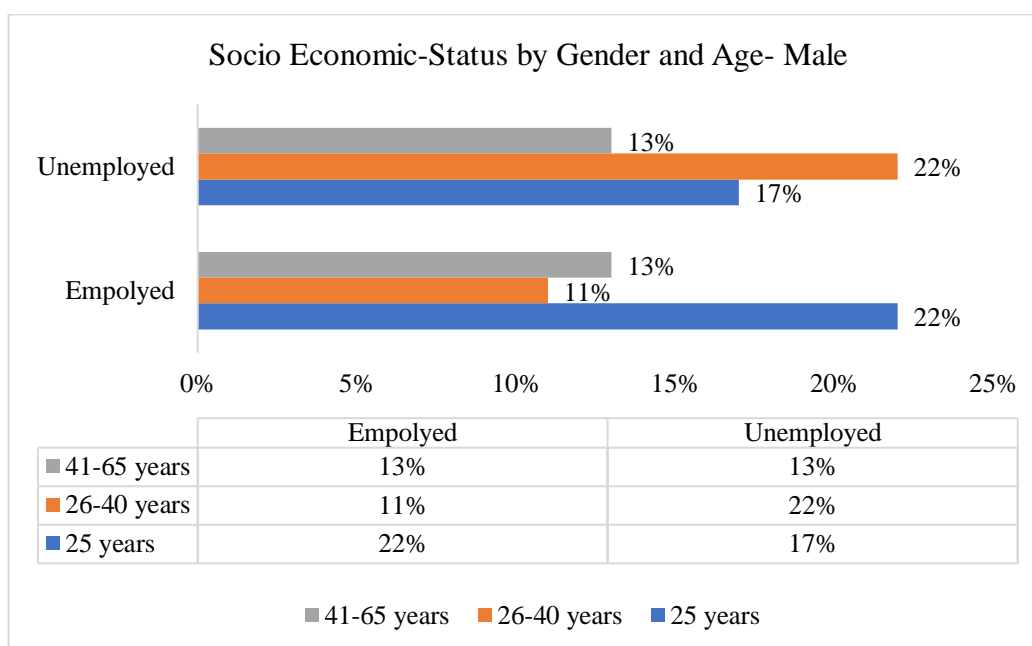
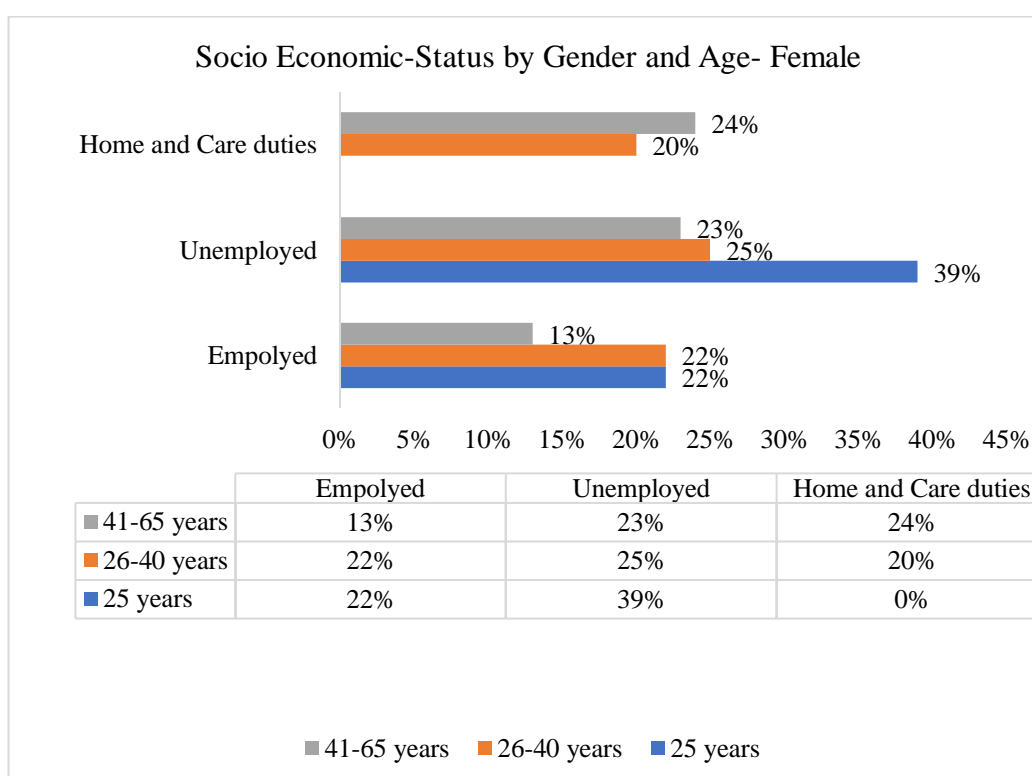


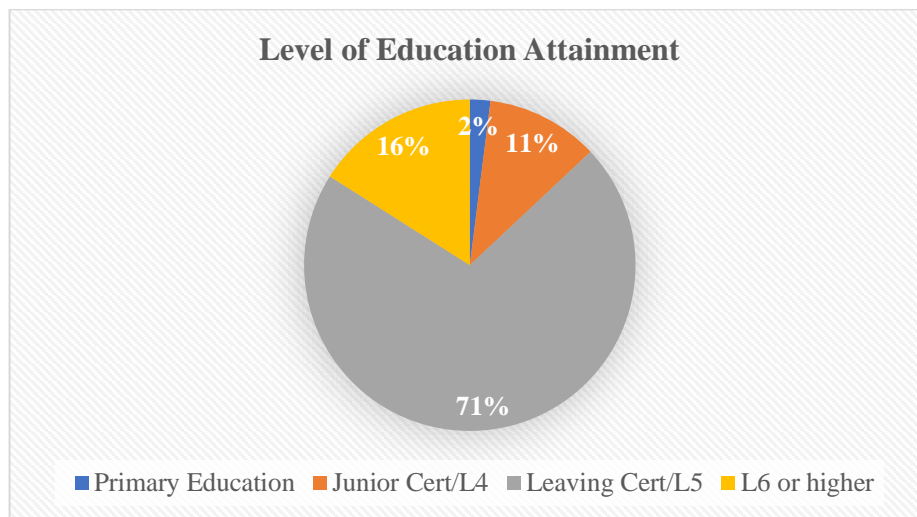
Figure 5.4 Socio-Economic Status by gender and Age



5.2.3. Education Attainment

The majority of participants had completed upper second-level education, figure 5.5 below, which is equivalent to level 5, prior to commencement in FET, which confirmed Slowey's (2004) assertion that adults participating in learning are more likely to be more qualified than non-participants. This suggested that participation in FET was neither remedial or second-chance education and questioned the validity of the assertion that older learners were more likely to have left school with no qualifications (Watson et al., 2006).

Figure 5.5 level of education prior to commencement in FET



Analysis confirmed that 87% of female participants had achieved level 5 education or equivalent prior to commencement in FET. Only 13% of females had a level 4 award or lower prior to commencement, which classified them as early school leavers of which:

- 9% were aged 25
- 36% were aged 26-40
- 55% aged 41-65.

48% confirmed they continued in education after second-level education; 20% claimed they had wanted to continue in education after second-level education, but life circumstances prevented it. This mirrored Field et. al's (2011) typography of seeking a degree, where

progression after compulsory schooling was desired but structural and cultural constraints restricted access, ambition and achievement evidenced but often associated with insecurity. Further interrogation of the data with regard to Cross's typology and Field et al's (2012) non-traditional learner biographical profile confirmed that only 13% of the research participants had lower than upper second-level education of which:

- 4% indicated they never entered second-level education
- 8% did not complete second-level education as it was not important in their life at the time

These research participants reflected Field et. al's (2011) typography of the wandering learner that returned to education as an adult as they had an uncompleted learning journey in the earlier stages of their life, "*I would have loved to have the opportunity to do a course like this, when I left school, I finished school at 16 and had to get a job*".

Previous levels of education attainment did not appear to influence the level of award that the research participants pursued. Accredited programmes accounted for 98% of engagement with awards in Information Technology, Health, Family other Social Services, Tourism and Business Administration recording the highest participation rates, the level of award pursued was as follows:

- Part-time level 4 programmes 21%
- Full-time level 5 programmes 65%
- Full-time level 6 programmes 21%

These findings confirm that engagement in FET was not necessarily linear but appropriate to the needs of the individual.

5.2.4. Adult Learner Characteristics

The research was interrogated to consider Knowles (1980) characteristics of the adult learner which confirmed:

- **Self-Concept** -11% described themselves as a mature, independent self-directed learner
- **Experience** – 27% believed their life-experience would inform their learning
- **Readiness** – 34% were ready to engage in learning for advancement
- **Need to Know** – 55% confirmed engagement in FET was related to their quest for advancement in their career
- **Orientation** – 43% engaged for self-advancement and to improve their life circumstances
- **Motivation** – 100% confirmed their motivation was internal and self-directed

5.3 Motivation of the adult FET learner

As this research aimed to identify the motivations of adult learners, the findings presented in this section are aligned to the key themes that emerged from the research with regard to motivation:

- Orientation toward learning
- Achievement of a qualification
- Enhanced employment opportunities
- Personal Interest and Improvement
- Social Engagement

Participants indicated that achievement of a qualification, enhanced employment opportunities, learning more about a vocational skill area and personal improvement ranked highest as motivation for engagement, Figure 5.6 below, while employer or DEASP requirements ranked lowest.

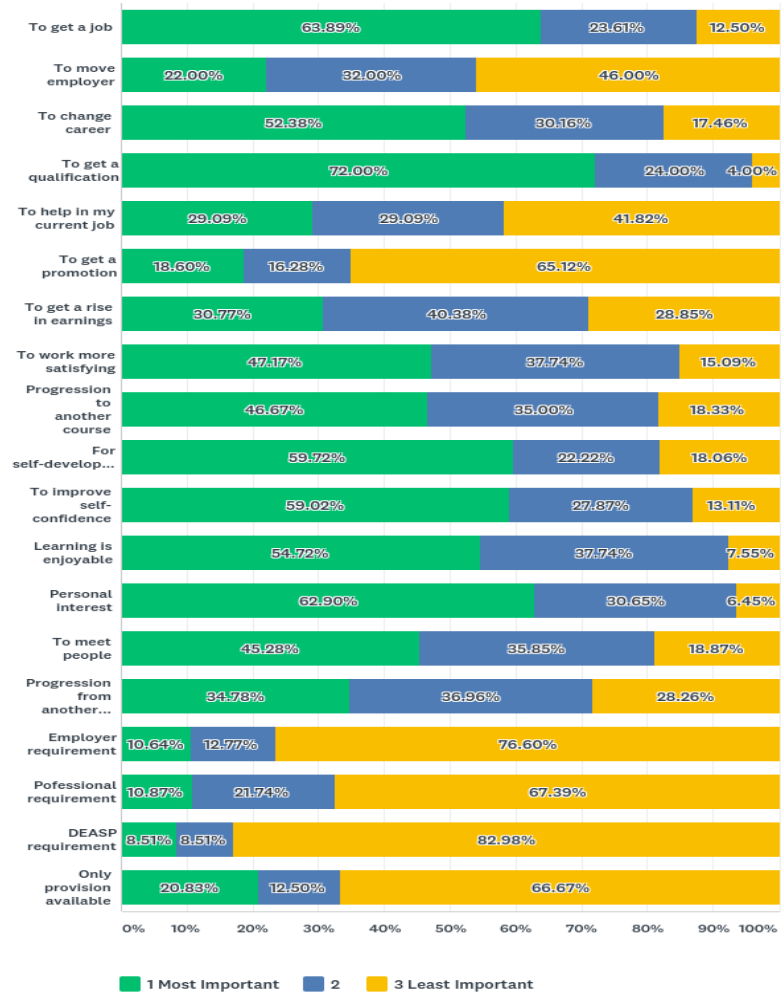


Figure 5.6 Motivation for engagement in FET

5.3.1 Orientation toward learning

The research investigated the orientation of the adult FET learners, for many the orientations toward learning were not mutually exclusive, many identified as activity oriented learners but also hoped to secure employment, which indicated goal orientation.

- 33% were goal-oriented, that identified improved employment and self-actualisation as their primary objective.
- 49% were activity-oriented, that identified social engagement, claiming personal space and the development of friendships as their primary objective.
- 18% were learner-oriented, that identified the development of transversal skills, progression to education and training and self-actualisation as their primary objective.

An overview of learner orientations is depicted in Figure 5.7 below based on the primary orientation reported:

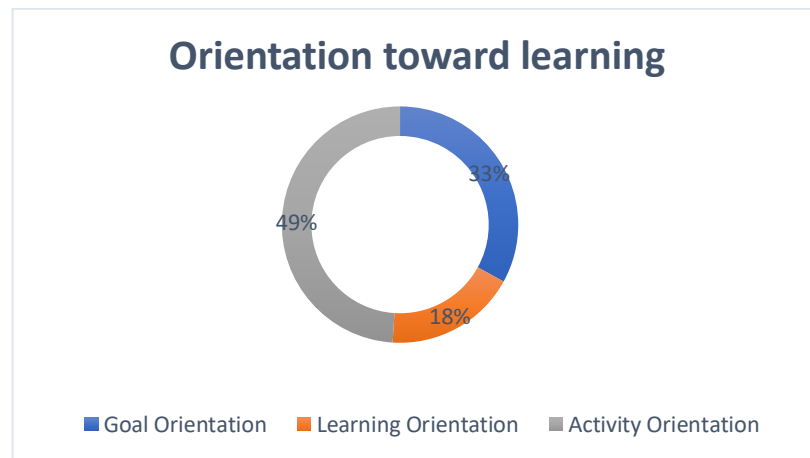


Figure 5.7 Adult Learner orientation toward learning

5.3.2 Achievement of a Qualification

Analysis of the data indicated that the participants had self-selected their FET course as it facilitated the achievement of a qualification which would lead to enhanced employment opportunities or progression into HE.

Reflective of the findings of Dupond and Ossandón (1998) the achievement of a qualification that supported work ambitions was a primary motivator for the majority of participants.

- 72% chose their FET course because IISC “*I always wanted to do this course to have a skill and the qualification they were my biggest motivation*”; I9SC “*I want qualifications that I don’t have*”; I5PM “*to help me and get a qualification*”; Q23/27/73 “*I wanted a qualification*”. Those that had been in the labour market claimed the lack of qualifications was a threat to their employment opportunities even when they had acquired skill and knowledge in the workplace, they had no qualification that underpinned it; I9SC “*I can go to an interview, but I won’t get a job because even though I have experience I have no*

qualifications. I was made redundant after working for over 30 years without formal qualifications and decided it was now time to get qualifications”.

- 57% believed that people with a qualification are better placed to be employed Q21 *“I need qualifications to gain employment”*.
- 60% asserted that those with a qualification earned more money
- 64% saw a positive correlation between a FET qualification and employment opportunities

Participants in this research reported they had always wanted a qualification or skills which was coupled with a sense that things might have been different if they had continued or followed a different career path I9SC *“I would have loved to had the opportunity to do a course like this, a FET course when I left school, I finished school at 16 and had to get a job”*; I7VM *“I heard about this course now for more than 4 years, always thought of attending one day”*. The need for a qualification to I1SCSC5 *“close the gaps on my CV”* was frequently reported. Many had acquired knowledge and experience in previous work but had no qualification that supported career or education progression I4PC *“getting a qualification is very important”*. The sense that opportunities were missed out because of the lack of a qualification was evidenced Q57 *“my lack of computer skills were a disadvantage in my job”*.

The achievement of a qualification was also associated with the opportunity for fulfilment of life ambitions 13 *“when I was young, I always wanted to be nurse and work in a hospital my goal is to work in palliative care in the future”*; *I would like to be a paramedic or nurse”*; Q3 *“I have always loved animals and set up my own dog walking, minding and grooming service”*; Q10 *“I wanted to study film production and script writing”*; Q62 *“personal training and gym work as I want to run a gym”*; Q77 *“I want to become a nurse”*; Q89 *“I want to do TV and Radio work”*. In this research 82% of respondents indicated they saw FET as means to get onto a HE course of learning;

IISC “a great stepping stone if you want to get on a higher education course”; Q6 “once I finish the course I am studying, it will guarantee me a place in the IoT”; IISC “I knew further education and training could help you get a higher education course if you did not get enough points to get the course you wanted”. FET has long been considered a progression route for those that have not qualified for HE directly and many FET courses have direct progression to many third level institutions.

5.3.3 Enhanced Employment Opportunities

Much FET provision is focused on specific vocational orientations and aligned to the increased requirement for recognised qualifications across occupations. The research participants acknowledged that enhanced employment opportunities were an important motivator I2PM “I thought this course would be a great way of learning a new skill and improve my CV and hopefully it would work for me and get me in the direction I wanted to go in”. The gap between current skill level and the skill level required for the labour market was recognised IISC “me on my CV does not look good, it looks like a train wreck” 12 “I need to improve my CV” and the motivation to improve employment prospects IISC “I wanted to get away from being on the dole”; Q79 “I want to work and earn my keep as opposed to being on benefits” was evidenced, Figure 5.8 below. 88% of this sample confirmed their motivation was to get a job, 83% wanted to change career and 70% as a means to increase earnings.

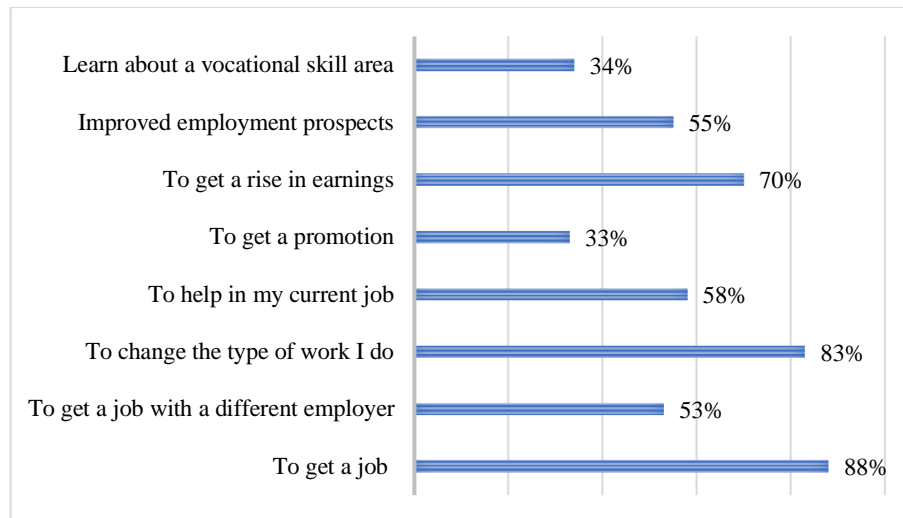


Figure 5.8 Enhanced employment opportunities as motivation

Entry to the labour market was the main motivation cited I1SC *“the end game is to get a job”*; I5PM *“getting employment is the main motivating factor for me”*, I8SC *“I got rejection letters from workplaces and employers where I had tried to get employment, because I did not have the required skills or experience relevant to the job”*; Q2 *“I was unhappy with my circumstances and wanted to increase my chances of finding employment”*; Q24 *“to get help finding employment”*; Q25 *“I was unemployed and struggling”*. Dissatisfaction with current work, I2PM *“I didn’t want to go back to my old job”*; I3PM *“I was working but I was not happy I did not enjoy it”* and the aspiration for improved work circumstances including improved pay and change of employer also ranked high as motivations across the research participants, I1SC *“I wanted to further myself and have the opportunity to travel abroad with a qualification”*; I3PM *“I love this course because it gives me the skills to do the job I always wanted to do”*.

The value of skills and the positive implication associated with employment was reflected by participants I7VM *“you learn much more than you think including soft skills that go in your favour for employment”*; I3PM *“it gives me the skills to do the job I always wanted to do”*. Associated with this theme was the motivation Q1/13/14/54/58/68/70/75/76//91/101 *“to upskill”* that addressed a skills

gap Q53 *“learn the basic about computers”*; Q61 *“to improve my cooking skills”*; Q93 *“I need computer skills to help me with day to day running of my business. i.e. internet banking spreadsheets and emails”* and job dissatisfaction I4PC *“I quit my job because I did not like it and I could not progress in it”*. The motivation for many was to update skills and improve life Q88 *“to update my skill get job and change my life”*; Q46 *“to make a better life for myself”*; Q51 *“have a better life”*; Q55 *“update my skills”*; I4PC *“I was ready to do the course to get a good job”*, I8SC *“to help me secure my future and to get skills”*; I4PC *“sometimes you have to change things in your life ”*. Those that experienced redundancy or unemployment saw FET as a means to upskill for the labour market I8SC *“with all the new regulations you need to have qualifications and certification because you could be working somewhere for a long time and know the work but if something happened while you might have the experience but if you have no qualifications you could be made redundant”*; I9SC *“I was made redundant and feel this is an opportunity to get a qualification in a different area than I have worked in before”*; Q23 *“I was made redundant after working for over 30 years without formal qualifications and decided it was now time to get qualifications”*; Q10 *“I decided to try and re-educate myself in the hopes of working in a field that I would enjoy”*; Q23 *“I wanted a qualification and I want to get back into employment”*; Q24 *“I’m tired of being unemployed”*; Q 42 *“I wanted to get back to employment”*; Q50 *“Unhappy working in offices sitting at the same place all day in call-centers I’d rather work with my hands”*. The transversal skills developed through practical FET training and work experience was acknowledged by 56% of participants; I6VM *“it is like getting a set of tools that you always have you can use them at any time”*; I8SC *“the work placement element really swayed it for me because it was going to be beneficial to me because it would give me the opportunity to experience the actual workplace related to this area of work”*; Q9 *“the amazing learning processes I am going through via this course will give me opportunities in the workplace I most*

certainly would not have otherwise!"; Q26 "this course offered work placement and that helped me decide; Q100 "learn useful skills".

5.3.4 Personal Interest and Improvement

The acquisition of knowledge for its own reward, the appeasement of an inquisitive mind coupled with increased self-esteem and general well-being were confirmed by research participants as motivations for engagement in FET, Figure 5.9 below.

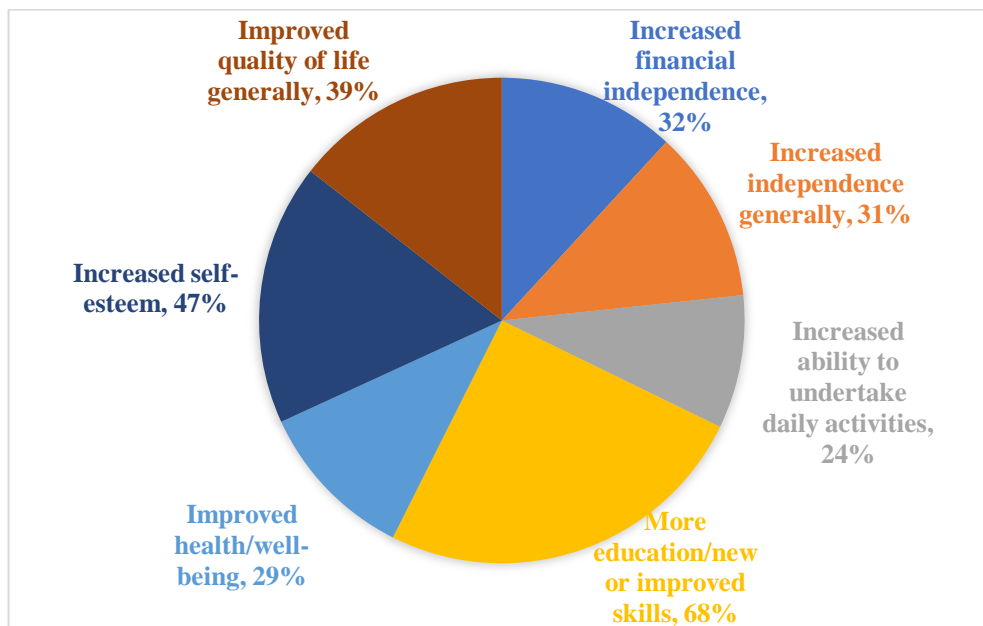


Figure 5.9 Personal interest and improvement

The quest for personal improvement was evidenced among participants who felt that they had more to offer and achieve, Q87 "I want do something new in my life more than a homemaker"; Q59 "after this course I can get job what I was dreaming about since as a small kid "; I1SC "I am capable of doing so many more things". The quest for personal improvement was linked to a confluence of events Q111 "I saw an opportunity and had the chance to take it" or appropriate timing Q3/20 and I2PM "it's my time now". A shift in life circumstances related to work, family and relationships had proffered the opportunity for engagement; 80% of the female interviewees confirmed that children had become independent so they now had time for their own ambitions to be pursued and 20% indicated that a significant life event or change

in circumstances had triggered engagement Q7 *“my son has special needs and I needed to change jobs to facilitate his learning”*; Q72 *“unemployment and health changes”*; I1SC *“I had been promised an apprenticeship, but I got let down”*; I2PM *“youngest child is now in the creche”*; I3PM *“I was working but I was not happy”*; I5PM *“I worked in Childcare for 25 years and I think I had just reached the end of the road with it. I had had enough”*. However, not all life transitions had been foreseen I5PM *“I looked after my dad before he passed away”*; I6VM *“my mother decided at very short notice that she didn't want me caring for her anymore”* which catapulted participants into an unknown space; I6VM *“I was a bit like a lost soul”* which motivated engagement and supported self-fulfilment I2PM *“gave me options that I didn't even know I had ”*; I4PC *“I have big expectations for myself ”*; Q2 *“I'm enjoying the course and meeting people with similar interests”*; I6VM *“it was the best time that I've had in years. It was so beneficial to me”* ; Q87 *“allowed me to do something new in my life”*; Q98 *“I decided to do something for myself”*.

5.3.4 Social Engagement

Social contact and involvement were key motivators for some adult learners. Whilst the majority of respondents entered FET to obtain skills or qualifications, 20% of research participants were motivated to engage in FET as an escape from boredom or relief from the ordinary daily routines of work or home, Q6 *“I was bored being a stay at home parent”*; Q 103,110/112 *“I wanted to get skills and get out of the house”*; Q18 *“needed to do something with my spare time”*; Q68 *“to get out and do something”* ; Q69 *“I was looking for something to pass the day and learn new things”*; Q105 *“just to be out is good for the head”*. In this research FET represented a social outlet for some Q28/100 *“I would like to make new friends”*; Q 105 *“to get out and about”*; Q2/10/110 *“get out of the house and meet new people”*. An analysis revealed that almost as many people engaged in FET to meet

new people, 81%, as they did because learning gave them pleasure or they had an interest in the subject, 93% Figure 5.10 below

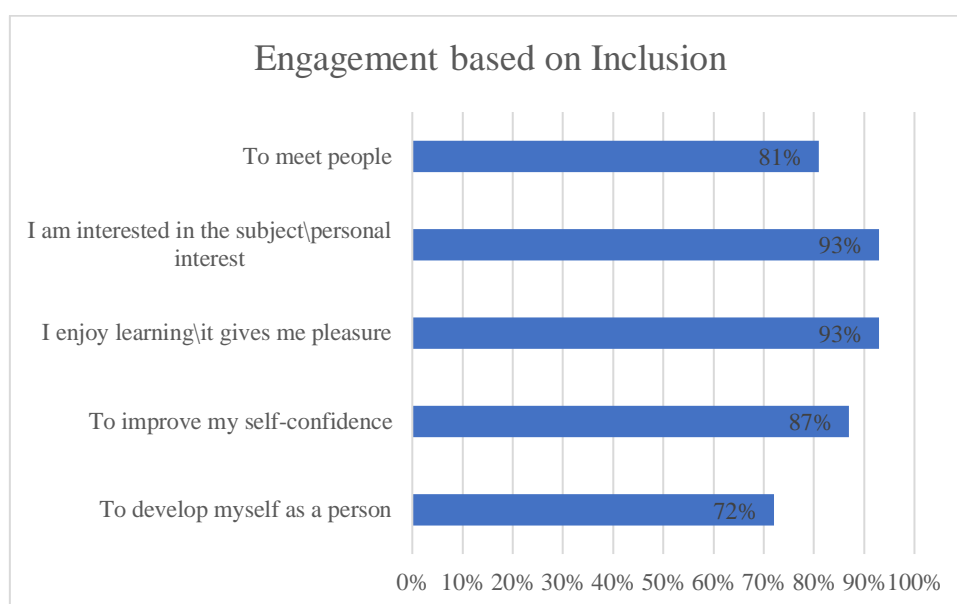


Figure 5.10 Social engagement as motivation

5.4 Barriers and supports for the adult learner

The supports and barriers to engagement in FET as reported by the research participants were considered under the following headings

- Familial attitude
- Multiple responsibilities
- Financial vulnerability
- Transition to adult learner
- FET as a learning environment

The research participants confirmed that the decision to engage in FET was their own and was not imposed by DEASP, an employer or other external agency. FET was cited as the preferred route of learning, and that knowledge of FET prior to commencement had positively influenced their engagement in FET. In addition to being able to achieve a qualification, factors that supported their decision to engage in FET was the local availability of provision that interested

them, affordability, work placement and linkages with employers and higher education progression routes, Figure 5.11 below.

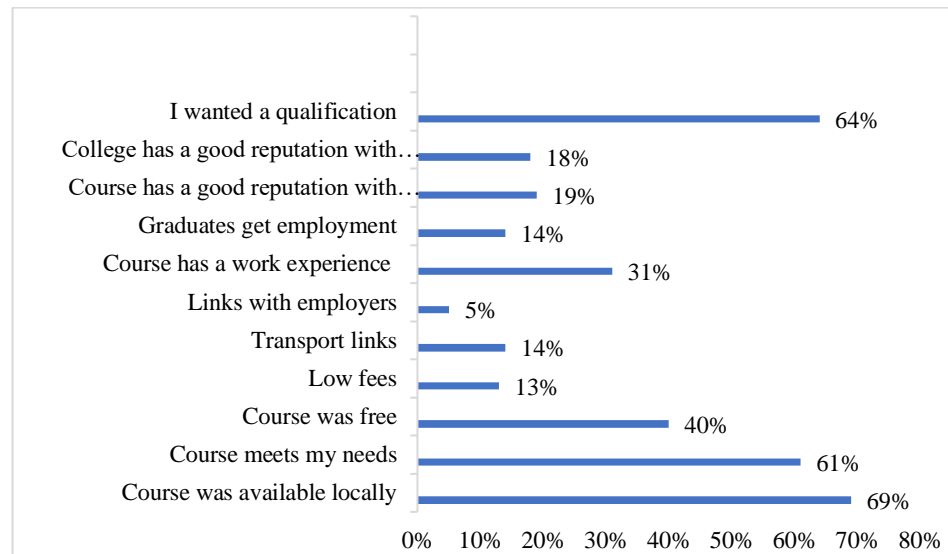


Figure 5.11 Factors that informed decision

5.4.1 Familial attitude

The majority of participants acknowledged the substantial support and encouragement from family and friends which was a positive influence on their engagement; 15 “*my spouse and family were very supportive of my decision*”. It was acknowledged that familial support for personal ambitions or education attainment had not been experienced by all research participants in their younger years IISC “*I didn’t have a family support network, I was a latchkey child growing up*”; Q2 “*I did not have the opportunity earlier in life*”. It was evidenced in this research that family support was present and positive, any negative familial attitude towards education had not manifested itself as a barrier to engagement I 2 3/5/8/9 “*they were all supportive for me to do the course*”; 1 4/7/10 “*family, friends and partner were very supportive*”.

5.4.2 Multiple responsibilities

The research participants confirmed engagement in FET had simultaneously enhanced their self-esteem and created tension with the multiple roles and responsibilities they juggled on a daily basis held, in particular with the care of children and elderly parents; I9SC *“I have lots to juggle”*; I1SC *“I have care roles with my parents and at home”*. The associated responsibilities and demands took precedence over learning I2PM *“if my baby was unsettled in the creche, if he had not been happy or settled it would have swayed my decision to do the course”*. The illness of a child or a breakdown in domestic arrangements immediately resulted in time away from the course, I2PM *“when you're a parent you do worry about going back to work or go back to education, because the kids do come first”*. An unexpected outcome for many was the recognition of the role they fulfilled as role model in their pursuit of a qualification for family members; I9SC *“I would not like to let my children see me pull out of it, because that is not what I want them to see”*; I1SC *“I don't want to leave or drop out”*

5.5.3 Financial Vulnerability

A significant number of participants of this research confirmed that they had given up work to facilitate course commencement. Unlike part-time provision, the full-time provision included in this research attracted a grant or training allowance. Findings confirmed that 90% of interviewees had received a grant or training allowance however, it represented a significant reduction in income from what they had previously earned through employment. In addition, the threat of a deduction in training allowances or loss of DEASP payments as a result of absenteeism from the course was evidenced Q1 *“money is docked if people are even a few mins late”*. The research participants struggled with the financial responsibility associated with their engagement in FET and revealed the weight of the responsibility they felt in relation to the negative financial impact on their family as a result of their engagement; I1SC *“I knew this year would be hard, a rough year just*

bread and butter as there is no additional money coming in. I did worry at the beginning if I would be able to keep going with the lack of money”; I2PM “financially it's difficult”; I7VM “there are many things we can't afford”. The financial vulnerability felt by the research participants was mitigated by the moral support and encouragement received from family; I1SC “I discussed it with my parents and partner but they were all supportive for me to do the course”; I8SC “they don't put pressure on me to have money for things if they did I think I would feel that I would have to leave and get a job”. Financial concerns were also outweighed by the perceived benefits and the opportunities that arose from engagement I8SC “ I don't have money because I am studying but that is ok it is not forever”; I1SC “in the long run, I will be better off”; I8SC “I'm doing this course to get the skills in order to get the job I want and earn good money and have a future”; Q2 “the financial investment was a consideration”; Q9 “my desire is to learn and to reach a goal which will give me a job whereby I am reliant on myself financially”; Q79 “I want to work and earn my keep as opposed to being on benefits”; Q83 “I want to get back to earning my own money”.

5.4.4 Transition to adult learner

This research found that the transition to adult learner was accompanied by some feelings of apprehension and anxiety, I1SC “*I felt overwhelmed with the idea of starting*” I6VM “*it was a bit daunting*”; I2PM “*to take that step out is a bit scary*”; I8SC “*when I left my last job, my confidence was very affected*”; I9SC “*I was nervous about starting, it was all new and I didn't know what to expect*”. There were concerns about the subject matter and their ability to cope with the challenges of learning, I1SC “*maybe I'm not as good as I think I am*”. However, these feelings were balanced by the experiences on the course I1SC “*I'm getting on well with the course content*”; Q87 “*this is by far the hardest thing I have done, but doable (I hope)*” and their vision for the future I6VM “*it has motivated me to try and look at stuff that I would*

never have done before"; I8SC *"my confidence and self-esteem has improved"*. Prior knowledge of FET and personal contacts in the ETB centre or college before commencement also alleviated anxiety I2PM *"I spoke with the person that runs the course, she's very approachable."*; I3PM *"I did a different course in the same College and I loved the tutors"*. The outcome was an amalgam of personal growth and course success, associated with being recognised, supported and valued by tutors and family. The importance of self-determination in the decision to engage in FET was evidenced Q62 *"I chose to do this course out of my own interest and it wasn't just something that was forced on me"* with the recognition I6VM *"if I had not had the opportunity to do the course I would have missed out"*.

5.4.5 FET as a learning environment

This research found that the FET learning environment was considered friendly, supportive and responsive to their needs Q13 *"it is a smaller group and easier to learn"*; Q23 *"if you ask a question you will be answered and do not feel stupid because you asked a question"*. The course content, work experience and peer relationships were all cited as factors that positively influenced engagement I2PM *"I'm learning new stuff all the time"*; I3PM *"I love this college and the course, it is brilliant"*; Q62 *"this experience is a lot better than other courses I've done in the past as I chose to do this course out of my own interest and it wasn't just something that was forced on me"*; I4PC *"I'm very happy with my choice of course it is good and has a fast pace, so you see the results"*; Q75 *"it's a good experience, small numbers and course work is explained clearly, not rushed"*; Q108 *"very positive atmosphere and a great tutor, who has high pedagogical skills"*. The research participants believed that the approach to teaching and learning in FET provided greater insight and understanding of the vocational area Q24 *"I get more help if I find anything to difficult"*; Q37 *"you are taught and allow to learn at your own pace"*; Q75 *"It's a good experience,*

small numbers and course work is explained clearly, not rushed". Reflections on the learning atmosphere were very positive Q108 *"very positive atmosphere"*; Q102 *"more relaxed than school days"*; Q105 *"it is more relaxed and fun with a good group of people"* which coupled with the support from tutors Q24 *"I get more help if I find anything to difficult"* ; Q23 *"the tutors cannot do enough for me"*; Q89 *"great tutors who are so helpful and understanding"* resulted in improved confidence and self-esteem of the adult FET learner.

FET was also viewed very positively when compared to previous interactions with education IISC *"we don't all start on the same level playing friend"*, *"when I left school, I felt stupid and I remember being humiliated in class"*; however, their experience of FET resulted in the conclusion *"I'm glad I am back now"*. Participants that had attended Higher Education prior to their FET course confirmed FET was Q52 *"more inclusive than 3rd level "* and Q50 *"better teaching skills than the 3rd level colleges"*; all the while being considered Q72 *"easier than university but still challenging"* . The key difference was that FET was Q51 *"more hands on"* and Q61 *"I like the practical nature of this course"*. Respondents acknowledged that the course work was challenging, however, the sense of responsibility and ownership experienced outweighed any concerns; Q82 *"it's not as strict or condescending as school. I thoroughly enjoyed it"*; Q100 *"it's more self-paced"*; Q101 *"it is very informal and I learn at my own pace which is very important"*. In addition, their status as an adult learner was important Q25 *"in my previous course I didn't feel like I was treated like an adult. I felt like I had just continued in secondary school"*; Q47 *"you are treated like an adult and your opinion counts and matters"*.

The participants of this research believed that FET was open to everyone with school leavers and the unemployed most targeted by FET provision, I9SC *"I don't think people realise that these courses are available to them even if you're not on social welfare"*. While the research participants believed that FET was focused on the provision of

skills that supported employment and the quality of FET provision was good, the lack of modern facilities in some FET centres was stated. The societal perception of FET was examined which revealed I2PM “*I don't think it gets the recognition that it deserves*” but recognised I1SC “*they offer the opportunity to learn a skill and they are a great stepping stone if you want to get on a higher education course*”. Participants were asked if they encouraged others to engage in FET, a significant majority confirmed they had and would encourage participation in FET; I3PM “*I am encouraging everybody to join FET and I tell them it's never too late*”; I7VM “*I definitely want to encourage people to do FET*”.

5.6 Conclusion

The findings gathered through the research methods of the questionnaire and interviews that investigated what motivated adult learners to engage in FET were presented in this chapter. The motivation for adults participating in FET can be connected to various extraneous variables, including financial and domestic responsibilities. Frequently the decision to engage in FET is connected to a bigger picture of personal fulfilment of ambitions and achievement of goals. Findings indicated that participants engaged in FET as it supported their ambitions or addressed personal interest. They felt supported and encouraged by family and friends and the experience of FET was positive and resulted in greater self-confidence, efficacy and agency. The decision to engage in FET was self-motivated and largely based on the interpretation of need for the achievement of a qualification that underpinned employment opportunities, career progression and self-improvement.

This research which was developed from the contributions provided by the participants adds to the body of academic knowledge about the characteristics and motivations of adult FET learners in an Irish context. This work can be used to inform policy and practice in FET to meet the

needs and address the motivations of the Irish adult FET learner. Direct quotes from the research participants have been used which West (1996) claimed provided “*an understanding of these learners*” (p.32) which requires the reader “*to immerse oneself sympathetically in another’s world in all its messy and contradictory confusion* (p. 32). A thematic discussion of these findings is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The findings gathered through the research methods of the questionnaire and interviews are discussed in this chapter. The profile generated of the adult FET learner contributes to the overall understanding of the motivations of the adult FET learner and contributes to academic knowledge in this area. Direct quotations from the research participants are used in this chapter. Mills et al (2006) explained this enabled the research participant experience to remain visible in the final text so “*that the reader can make a connection between analytical findings and the data from which they were derived*” (p.11). The previous chapter described the findings of this research. This chapter reflects back to the literature review in order to develop a fuller understanding of the themes that emerged from the research and locate them within the context of existing knowledge.

The motivation to engage in FET was complex and dependent on many variables that included the satisfaction of need, self-determination, readiness and timing. Engagement in FET was found to be a deliberate journey of knowledge and skills acquisition underpinned by the need for transformation. The traditional profile of FET as a second chance or remedial was challenged as adult learner engagement was not necessarily linear but lifelong and life-wide at the NFQ level most appropriate to need and confirmed that adults do seek qualifications. Female participation was largely focused on entry/re-entry to the labour market, while male participation was focused on career progression or change. Gender stereotyping was evidenced as female participants reported role strain as a result of multiple responsibilities as they balanced personal and domestic responsibilities. Females cited the diminution of role, claiming space, social capital and wellbeing as sources of motivation for their engagement in FET. The duality of motivation, support and potential barriers experienced by the adult FET

learner provide a lens through which the responsiveness, appropriateness, flexibility, accessibility and affordability of FET can be considered.

The discussion is presented as follows:

- Characteristics of the adult FET learner
 - Critical Commentary
- Motivation for the adult FET learner
 - Critical Commentary
- Barriers and Support for the adult learner
 - Critical Commentary

6.2 Characteristics of the adult FET learner

6.2.1. Gender

This research correlated positively with the findings of similar studies in terms of gender and age (SOLAS, 2018; Watson, 2006; Fleming and Murphy, 1997) as the adult FET learner was predominantly female, aged 41-65 years, engaged in full-time learning on an accredited FET programme, previous to which they had been primarily unemployed or outside of the labour market, often exclusively as a result caring responsibilities prior to their engagement in FET. The numbers of adults, particularly females re-entering formal educational systems to participate in vocational and work-related courses has risen, reflecting the national emphasis in FET policy on up-skilling, re-skilling, certification and qualifications (Sargant, 1996; King et al., 2002). However, traditional gender roles continue to impact female re-engagement in education as they experience the need to balance multiple roles. Gatmaitan (2006) pointed to the push/pull effect that the roles of learner and mother have on female learners and suggested that the strength of one role relies on the strength of the other. For the participants in this study, being a learner was very important to fulfil unrealised ambitions as was the need to provide for their family.

Female participants in this research noted that reduced responsibilities because children had left home or started school or elderly parents passed away had created a space that allowed them to pursue long-held or unrealised ambitions. It was noteworthy that similar to the findings of Coakley (2005) the female participants of this research continued to prioritise caring and domestic responsibilities and their role as mother over education or work I2PM “*when you're a parent that's the most important thing*”. This finding also positively correlated to the findings of Duncan et al, (2003) where females adjudicated engagement in education or work as secondary to domestic responsibilities I2PM “*if the children are ever sick or a child has a doctor's appointment*” and parental responsibilities took precedence over learning. This corroborated the assertion that gender stereotypes remain and little has changed with regard to traditional household gender roles (Best and Williams, 1993; Maccoby, 2000; Alvarez, 2014).

The gender stereotyping evidenced in this research was reflective of CSO (2019) findings that 218,000 women were categorised as being on home duties and participation levels in the labour market were lower for females in couples with children at 68% compared to a participation rate of 88% for males in couples with children. Occhionero and Nocenzi (2009) claimed that “*structural factors and cultural stereotypes still contribute to a ‘gender divide’ in the workplace*” (p. 155). Eurostat (2008) found that females aged 25–64 had a higher level of engagement in continuous learning or training once in employment than males. This positive and interesting findings goes some way to explain why females aged 25-64 make up the majority of adult learners (Spencer, 2006).

6.2.2. Education Attainment

SOLAS (2020) noted that a striking feature of the FET landscape was that “*movements within FET were not universally linear and with large groups of learners moving both up and down the levels of the NFQ*”

framework to avail of opportunities to engage in initial learning, upskilling and reskilling” (p.14). The majority of participants in this research had completed upper second-level or level 5 education prior to commencement in FET. finding questioned the traditional positioning of FET as second-chance education and the validity of the assertion that older learners are more likely to have left school without qualifications (Watson et al., 2006). National policy to increase retention rates at second-level and the impact of the extensive reach of ETBs and FET into and across local communities would appear to be offsetting the traditional association of educational disadvantage with adult learners (Grummell, 2007; Cross, 2009, SOLAS , 2018). Slowey (2004) asserted that adults participating in learning are more likely to be more qualified than non-participants. The current Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in much occupation displacement which the SMLRU (2020) have predicted will continue to negatively impact vulnerable sectors of the economy including females, part-time workers, those with lower levels of education and those whose skills don’t match labour market requirements. In such scenarios the adult learner will need to be facilitated to engage horizontally as well as vertically between courses and NFQ levels as they choose offerings across the tertiary continuum that meets their needs to develop work and life skills (Anderson, 2004).

The continuation of study or advancing beyond FET had not been an ambition for many of the research participants when they commenced their course. However, the positive experience of FET had resulted in the reconsideration of these possibilities; I3PM *“I don't want to finish studying now I want to continue”*. This is good news as Ireland’s lifelong learning rate remains behind the EU target. The European Commission ET2020 Strategic Framework advocated that by 2020 an average of *“15% of adults would engage in lifelong learning”* (p.7). Unfortunately, when compared to the EU average, Ireland has remained below the 15% average set by the EU with a participation rate 12.5% in 2018. Positive positioning of FET as a valuable learning trajectory can

support the attraction and retention of more adult learners and meet the skills strategy objective of 15% engaged in lifelong learning by 2025.

FET has long been recognised as an alternative progression route for HE (Coolahan, 1981; Fenge, 2011; Gallacher, Crossan, Fieldand Merrill, 2002; McFadden, 1995a; O’Kelly et al 2017), the findings of this research supported this position. Facilitating progression to HE is one of the primary aims of FET and ensuring adult learners are informed of and can access the relevant course and qualifications for HE progression is imperative as I9SC confirmed

I don’t think it is known that by doing a FET course and getting your 8 distinctions they count as points for CAO. Young people could use this as a route into higher education. It is very hard to get information about FET, once you are in the FET system it is very easy to get information but when you are not in it you can’t find it.

The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015 – 2019 set a target that 10%, approximately 2,000 of new entrants to higher education would hold a FET qualification as the basis for their application. Currently the FET graduate at Level 5 and 6 accounts for approximately one-quarter of the annual intake to the technological higher education sector (SOLAS, 2019). In this research 29% indicated that progression to HE was their primary goal, Q5 “*I didn’t get enough points in my leaving cert so using this course as an alternative for entry*”, which confirmed FET learners were aware of FET as an access route to HE. Access to HE via FET has been buoyed by evidence that in the period 2001-2018 the number of applications to HE that used a FET qualification for entry increased from under 3,000 to over 14,000 (SOLAS, 2020) and confirmation that the FET graduate that progressed into HE prosper (SOLAS, 2019). In 2018, 77,785 applications were received by CAO, 4,870 of these were adult learners that used their FET qualification for entry while 3,020 used their dual qualifications from the Leaving Certificate and FET for entry (SOLAS, 2020). SOLAS (2019) also confirmed that annually, approximately 2,000 or 10% of PLC learners had previously engaged in HE.

6.2.3 Critical Commentary

Academic research on participation and non-participation in education during the adult life-course has informed FET policy development in Ireland with regard to barriers to participation (SOLAS, 2017), widening participation (The Equality Authority, 2010; European Commission, 2015) and labour market initiatives (SOLAS, 2020). The literature review confirmed that adult learners choose to learn what was meaningful to them and their lives (Knowles, 1980, 1984; Hiemstra and Sisco, 1990; and Rogers, 2007). The findings confirmed this position but also highlighted the importance of being able to accommodate learning around the work and family commitments of the adult learner I10SC *“I have care roles with my parents and at home”*; I2PM *“I know that it is flexible so if the kids need me, I’m there with them”*. It was also interesting that when the adult learner felt that FET providers recognised these responsibilities and acknowledged the life experiences of the adult learner it was highly valued and positively impacted on the self-esteem and motivation of the adult learner. I4PC *“I have chosen a good course and centre, it’s a good direction I’m going in.”*. Another interesting aspect of the findings was that the adult learner believed the local availability and ease of access to FET opened up opportunities of learning, while simultaneously eliminating two of the main barriers to engagement, time and travel cost. However, while opportunities of learning were available there was evidence that gender based stereotypes impacted upon engagement.

The findings confirmed that although 87% of female participants had achieved level 5 education or equivalent prior to commencement in FET they were disproportionately unemployed or engaged in home and care duties prior to commencement in FET compared to males. Interestingly, males and females equally reported that entry to the labour market was their primary motivation I5PM *“getting employment is the main motivating factor for me”*; I9SC *“I want to get back into the workforce”*. This finding supported the SOLAS (2020) analysis that

approximately “17,000 women with either upper secondary or higher education qualifications seeking to return to work” (p. 30). As female learners are more likely to be outside of the labour market they risk being excluded from opportunities for learning when learning is increasingly linked to the workplace. There has been significant investment for FET programmes to upskill the workforce, which positions those in the workplace as more valuable than those outside of it. This does not augur well for females who are more likely to be engaged in home and care duties and therefore outside of the workforce. FET policy continues to ignore the contributions females make to the informal economy and fails to accommodate the knowledge and experience that female learners bring to the learning environment through their informal, non-formal and social learning experiences. This may go some way to explain why national policy focused on attracting female learners into traditionally gendered strands of FET such as traditional craft apprenticeships has failed to produce results. Female participation rates in traditionally gendered provision remain low at 3% (SOLAS, 2019). Despite the career prospects and financial benefits associated with sectors dominated by male participation, efforts to reduce the gender imbalance are slow to gain traction. It must be also acknowledged that there are few males participating in traditionally female gendered strands of FET such as childcare and social care, this may reflect deep-seated societal concerns relating to potential risks (Beck et al., 2006b), but also impacts the discussion on the status and salaries of these sectors of the economy.

From this research it is evident that gender differences must be considered when understanding the motivations, barriers and supports to adult learners, I7VM “*I hope to set up the business*”; I6VM “*I live in rural Ireland and it was a social outlet*”; I2PM “*I had a lot of doubt and when you're at home for four years it is an awful long time and to take that step out is a bit scary*”. Caffarella and Olsen (1993) urged that adult learning theory must address the importance of social connectedness and the existence of a multiplicity of roles in consideration of adult

females learners. FET provision targeted at female learners must consider how flexibility, care supports and financial aid can be interwoven into offerings as failure to do so will produce barriers to participation, in the form of role conflicts or economic problems as evidenced in this research. The conflicting roles the female participants of this research identified included mother, wife, daughter, partner, worker, and learner; coupled with economic barriers due to lower earnings all had the potential to create conflicts that distracted from learning (Home, 1998; Kramarae, 2001). FET providers must guard against the potential of macro-level attitudinal barriers such as vilification and subjugation (Stalker, 1998) emerging within their sphere of influence. In order to support female participation FET providers must endeavour to have flexibility in course scheduling, easy access to course information and provide financial assistance to support adult learners in managing their multiple responsibilities (Allen, 1993; Kasworm, 2003).

As FET policy promotes provision that is seen as economically important, the voluntary and uncertified FET provision which traditionally played an important role for female participants with care and home responsibilities whose participation was limited by economic, time and spatial factors (King et al., 2002) becomes less important. Non-vocational provision is long noted as an entry route to education and important in developing social and civic responsibility, through active engagement in their communities, (Fleming, 2004; Grummell, 2007) but may now be at risk of being deemed non-essential as it is not considered valuable in meeting the demands of the labour market. The attachment of economic drivers to FET learning opportunities supports the neo-liberal positioning of education for the benefit of the labour market and the economy but does not support or encourage reflection or critical analysis of the value or relevance to the learner of the learning opportunities available. The increased neo-liberalist influence on FET policy has determined what is prioritised for

learners, who are the learners and what is expected as a result of the investment in education and training (European Commission, 2010).

FET policy has targeted support for vulnerable groups in the workforce, particularly those with an education level below level 5 on the NFQ with the development of transversal and digital skills of older and low-skilled workers in employment being prioritised (SOLAS, 2020). This research has confirmed that it is those that were outside of the labour market or had few qualifications that are engaging as an adult in learning. However, the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE) (2012) caution that the placement of learners on FET courses *“which are not appropriate to their needs is counterproductive”* (p 4). Educational attainment and employment opportunities have been consistently linked, as I8SC explained *“I got rejection letters from workplaces and employers where I had tried to get employment, because I did not have the required skills or experience relevant to the job”*. The CSO (2018) confirmed that unemployment rates for those aged 25-64 years old persons fell as the level of education attained increased. Additionally, the proportion of low-qualified adults decreased from 17.5% in 2017 to 16.8% in 2018 (European Commission, 2019) and significant progress was evident in the level of adult participation in learning, which rose from 9% in 2017 to 12.5% in 2018. However, there are still approximately 420,000 low-qualified adults in the Irish population (SOLAS, 2020). Similar to the findings here, the OECD’s Education at Glance (2019) reported that 56% of Irish 25-34 year olds had received higher or further education, well above the 44% OECD average. This does not assuage the concern raised by the PIAAC (2012) report that confirmed although 51% of the 25-34 year old population in Ireland held a third-level award, their literacy and numeracy skills were not comparable to the award level.

6.3 Motivation for the adult FET learner

Ambrose et al (2010) claimed as learners commence a course after compulsory education, they “*gain greater autonomy over what, when, and how they study and learn, the importance of motivation, in the context of learning, cannot be overstated as it generates, directs, and sustains what they do to learn*” (p. 69). Securing employment and a qualification was the primary motivation for the participants of this research followed by self-improvement and personal interest. The research participants were beyond physiological needs on Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs, but provided evidence of the other four levels of Maslow’s Theory:

- **Fulfilment of safety needs** was evidenced where life events such as unemployment or redundancy triggered engagement in FET so that the achievement of a qualification would enhance employment prospects and secure a better future.
- **Fulfilment of belonging needs** was demonstrated where engagement provided an opportunity to create a network of friends and the opportunity to engage with like-minded peers.
- **Fulfilment of esteem needs** was revealed when participants confirmed their trajectory of learning in FET went beyond the qualification and skills they initially sought as improved self-esteem and confidence emerged from engagement. The increase in self-esteem better equipped them for future opportunities and supported aspirations for promotion and escape from an unfulfilling career or life path.
- **Fulfilment of self-actualisation needs** was articulated by participants as personal growth; achievement of ambitions and realisation of potential was deemed to be a source of motivation for engagement and an outcome of their engagement in FET.

This section considers the motivation of the adult FET learner that emerged from the findings under the following headings:

- Goal orientation and enhanced employment opportunities
- Learning orientation and achievement of a qualification
- Activity Orientation and personal interest and improvement

6.3.1. Goal orientation and enhanced employment opportunities

Adult learners are more self-directed and goal-oriented than traditional learners (Knowles, 1984). Cross (1981) confirmed that the goal oriented learner was focused on “*learning that will improve one’s position in life is a major motivation*” (p.6) while Apps (1991) observed that the goal-oriented learner wanted to “*learn something that they can apply immediately*” (p. 42) which was reflected by the participants in his research. Goal oriented learners made up 33% of this research with improved pay, employment opportunities and career advancement cited as their primary motivations. Goal oriented learners in this research confirmed they had deferred the decision to progress in education immediately after school as they entered employment or started a family and now wanted to pursue education to enhance their life opportunities. This was reflective of the Field et. al (2011) typography of the wandering learner who returned to education as an adult as they had an uncompleted learning journey, 19SC4 “*I would have loved to have the opportunity to do a course like this, when I left school, I finished school at 16 and had to get a job*”. After the period of boom and bust the FET sector was positioned with a national strategy to support economic regeneration. Cedefop (2008) confirmed that FET systems across European countries had to “*face the challenge of adapting to changing demands both current and future in the labour market*” (p.45). The Department of Social Protection (DSP) Pathways to Work (2012) had prioritised “*the development and delivery of education and training programmes to meet the needs of those on the Live Register and national skills needs*” (p. 21). This resulted in the

implementation of joint protocols between DSP and ETBs to ensure unemployed people could be referred to “*suitable education and training opportunities*” (p.21). The EGFSN (2012) confirmed the “*priority education and training requirements*” were those that linked the “*needs of the individual and the labour market*” (p. 5). Interestingly, only 5% of this sample confirmed they engaged in FET as a result of referral from DSP.

The world of work is constantly evolving, adapting to new technological innovations and economic globalisation. The OECD (2016) reported that approximately one-quarter of workers in advanced economies had a discrepancy between their skill level and those required for their job. The requirement to address basic skills gaps was recognised after the economic crisis of 2008, which the European Commission (2010) stated “*wiped out years of economic and social progress and exposed structural weaknesses in Europe's economy*” (p.3). This was evidenced in this research as 55% confirmed they engaged in FET to upskill. The goal oriented learners in this research may be already facing increasing labour market insecurity and have recognised the need to enhance their skills and qualifications. SOLAS (2019) reaffirmed the role of FET in the provision of labour market skills particularly for the unemployed or vulnerable workers to access or remain in the labour market

there is a substantial base of the existing workforce with low levels of prior education, with 940,000 holding NFQ level 5 or below. A third of these workers are currently in low skilled occupations (e.g. elementary / operative) and as such are extremely vulnerable to cyclical downturns and industrial change (p. 25).

Cross-government policy has explicitly articulated the role of FET in labour market activation and the re-skilling and up-skilling of learners who face labour market displacement so they can compete for emergent sustainable employment opportunities (DBEI, Future Jobs Ireland; DPER, Project Ireland 2040; DES, National Skills Strategy; DES, Action Plan for Education). An estimated one million movements

between employment, unemployment and inactivity took place in Ireland in 2012 (SOLAS, 2018), which SOLAS (2018) claimed *“highlights the difficulties facing lower skilled people in securing sustainable employment”* (p.20). This was evidenced in this research as participants confirmed their engagement in FET was Q47 *“to get new skills for a career change”*; Q15 *“to change my career direction”*. SOLAS (2018) confirmed *“the need for upskilling for low-qualified people is stressed as they are more vulnerable to precarious jobs and twice as likely as better qualified people to experience long-term unemployment”* (p. 12).

SOLAS (2019) confirmed that government policy has been reflected in FET provision so that *“investment in human capital, through high quality education and training, can be optimised”* (p.25). It was not surprising that research participants reported they had engaged in FET in order to achieve a skill and to gain employment; reflective of the findings of Findsen and McCullough (2006) and Illeris (2003) who claimed that economic drivers were most prevalent amongst adult learners. This position also correlated positively with the ESRI (2014) and Saint Vincent De Paul (2014) assertion that FET attracted learners who wanted to develop skills to support their entry or return to the labour market. Martin (2018) observed *“skills are a vital ingredient for economic success and individual and social well-being, now more than ever before as the Fourth Industrial Revolution gets into its stride and ageing populations and workforces become the new norm”* (p.36). As a result, Kistler (2011) noted both the employed and unemployed were *“looking at education and training programs to help them to be more marketable and competitive in the current job market,”* (p. 3). The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2017) endorsed the role of FET in providing the opportunity for citizens to *“refresh economically-valuable skills”* (p.15) which are required to ensure the future competitiveness of Ireland. Jenkins (2017) observed that *“the importance of a highly skilled and well-qualified workforce to the modern economy has been repeatedly emphasised by policy-makers”*

(p.445). The value of FET as a route of learning was enhanced when SOLAS (2019) confirmed that 52% of graduates from labour market focused FET programmes secured employment, of which 44% were in sustainable employment for at least 3 months and 30% in full sustainable employment. This success rate was also confirmed by the CSO (2019) who found that 62% of 2016 FET graduates with full awards were in substantial employment in the first year after graduation which supported the position that FET programmes supported and stimulated employment opportunities for learners.

6.3.2. Learning orientation and achievement of a qualification

Grummell (2007) claimed that participation in FET “*was intended to further develop the abilities and knowledge of the individual* ” (p.7). Learning oriented learners, cited the development of vocational or transversal skills, and progression to education and training as their primary motivation. This learning orientation mirrored the Field et. al (2011) typography of seeking a degree where progression after compulsory schooling was desired but did not happen. The emphasis on accredited life-long learning has been accentuated in policy rhetoric since 1997 after a poor PIAAC performance propelled Ireland into significant action. The DES (2000) White Paper Learning for Life acknowledged the shortcomings of the education sector, including FET in supporting the adult learner to obtain qualifications was: “*the rigidity of the Irish education system, with its predominant emphasis on full-time provision: time-specific entry and exit opportunities, and its linear, sequential organisation*” (p. 84). The need for provision that facilitates flexible access to FET has been acknowledged and echoed by the participants of this research (SOLAS, 2018; Sweeney, 2013).

The participants of this research confirmed that the decision to pursue education as an adult was coupled with personal ambition and achievement, albeit associated with insecurity. Jameson and Fusco (2014) confirmed that the transition to adult learner was often accompanied by feelings of apprehension and anxiety which Knowles (1998) acknowledged was compounded by thoughts of being judged *“nothing makes an adult feel more childlike than being judged by another adult”* (p.88). Field et al (2011) proposed this integrative biography represented a process of self-development and progression from a past life status (Sheffield, 1964; Boshier, 1971); 14PC *“I knew I wanted to do something more and something better”*. The desire for a qualification was associated with specific careers, progression to HE or the need to be more marketable. The achievement of a qualification provides formal recognition of achievement and may support an onward trajectory of achievement in other aspects of life. While skills and knowledge had been acquired by many in previous work roles it was asserted that a qualification would support current and future efforts to change career or progress in their current role. The achievement of a qualification provides formal recognition of achievement and may support an onward trajectory of achievement in other aspects of life. Redundancy and dissatisfaction with current employment were cited as the motivation to gain a qualification. The post-economic crash era provided a situation where both the labour market and the policy environment was conducive for adults to pursue qualifications (Fuller 2007). The dominant narrative in academic literature asserts that few adults seek qualifications in adulthood (Gorard and Rees 2002; Biesta et al. 2011) which is challenged by the findings of this research.

FET provision is largely focused and aligned to the increased requirement for recognised qualifications across occupations, e.g., childcare workers require a L5/6 award. The majority of research participants were pursuing a qualification at level 5 with similar levels of engagement when analysed by gender, with 70% of females and 54% of males. Jenkins (2017) suggested that:

“gender differences in patterns of obtaining qualifications over the life course were striking. In initial education and in early adulthood (up to age 33) men were more likely to obtain qualifications than women, but in mid-life markedly higher proportions of women obtained qualifications than men (p. 452).”

In 2013 Ireland’s PIAAC results indicated that 14.7% of the adult population, 16-65 year-olds, reported limited experience with computers and that they lacked basic computer skills. Therefore, it was not surprising to find that participation was highest on Information Technology, Business and Administration, Health, Family and other Social Services programmes which reflected the practical mindset of the adult learner (Finn, 2011). There was no evidence to suggest that these programmes attracted one gender over the other, but as there was a higher number of females in this study it was not surprising to find a higher concentration of females across all programmes. While vocational and technical skills delivered through FET will remain important, they will evolve continuously and rapidly to meet the demands of new realities. Therefore, the adult learner is more likely to move horizontally as well as vertically between courses and NFQ levels as they choose offerings across the tertiary continuum that meets their needs and addresses their motivation to develop work and life skills (Anderson, 2004).

6.3.3 Activity Orientation and personal interest and improvement

The adult learner participated in FET not only to develop skills and knowledge but also to create and expand social networks. Activity oriented learners, 49% of this research cohort reflected the Field et al (2011) emancipatory biography where learning was deliberate, reflected personal interest and improvement and was associated with a significant life transition with the primary objective of claiming personal space and the development of friendships. The findings indicated that engagement in FET fulfilled belonging needs and provided social capital through the development of a new network of

friends and engagement with like-minded peers. The research participants emphasised the importance of the camaraderie and support they experienced from each other, interestingly they also noted their role as a role model in the classroom, I9SC *“I may be the oldest in the class and have more expertise, but we are all the same in the class”*; I10SC *“I can raise an issue and deal with it the younger ones would be more intimidated to raise issues with the tutors”*. Academic research confirmed the relationships and friendships formed between learners were important features of the adult learners experience (Mooney, 2011; Merriam and Kee; 2014). Field (2005) cited in Merriam and Kee (2014) linked lifelong learning, social capital and wellbeing *“participation in learning tends to enhance social capital, by helping develop social competencies, extending social networks, and promoting shared norms and tolerance of others”* (p.23). Theories of social capital and adult learning assert that both are actively constructed through the interaction of the individual and their lived experiences, both of which are valued and central to the FET learning experience. 27% of the research participants confirmed their life-experience informed their course work and their experience of FET was much better than previous experiences of education. Fingeret and Drennon (1997) claimed the social and personal transformation that resulted from engagement was often greater than the outcome that triggered engagement. The activity oriented participants in this research asserted their learning experience had extended beyond the course content and their initial motivation. Engagement in FET had provided Q79 *“insight to lots of important life and work skills”* which had resulted in them becoming Q26 *“very independent and responsible”*. Such outcomes were considered emancipatory by Mezirow (1991) and Freire (1970) as engagement in education resulted in perspective transformation and provided for a more inclusive and integrated perspective for the adult learner.

Activity-oriented learners referenced the importance of meeting like-minded people, social engagement and developing friendships as being important. This position supported the findings of Shafi and Rose (2014) who claimed that life transitions motivated adults to re-engage in education. Giddens (1991) hypothesised that the adult learner's biographical narrative flexed and changed across their life. This was evidenced with the activity oriented learner where claiming space, timing and readiness for engagement in FET was reflected; Q2 "*it came at the right time*". A sense of agency, efficacy and entitlement was also evidenced in the statements related to claiming space and timing Q6 "*I was bored being a stay at home parent*"; Q87 "*I wanted to do something new in my life other than being a homemaker*". Mercer (2007) claimed that engagement in education as an adult was often the realisation of a long held desire, that resulted in the reclamation of a part of the self that had been neglected which assisted in the regeneration of a revised identity. An amalgam of motivation, opportunity and support meant that timing was appropriate to pursue personal and vocational ambitions. Female participants in particular articulated their engagement in FET as their opportunity for 'me time' having devoted many years to domestic caring responsibilities.

Kasworm (2003) claimed that the motivation for adult engagement in FET was frequently associated with a change in personal circumstances. Aslanian and Brickell (1980) supported the view that the life transitions related to employment frequently triggered engagement in learning for adults. The majority of research participants here confirmed that a diminution of a former role as a result of bereavement, divorce, redundancy, unemployment and children starting school triggered their engagement in FET. The impact of life transitions on self-esteem is well documented. (Alexander, 2001; Mruck, 1999). James et al (2005) observed "*the demands of life are not constant, so self-esteem levels will fluctuate depending on what is happening and how we are able to deal with them*" (p. 6) and confirmed that engagement in adult learning had a positive impact on self-esteem,

“particularly with regard to sense of capability or efficacy, sense of purpose, experience of flow or fulfilment, sense of responsibility and accountability and sense of belonging” (p. 6). Ecclestone (2009) proposed that life transitions could be an impetus for new learning for some individuals but could be equally unsettling, difficult and unproductive for others. This position was supported by Santrock (2009) who asserted that such events were *“not a catastrophe, but a turning point marked by both increased vulnerability and enhanced potential”* (p.23). Marcia, (2010) also agreed that transitions *“are not necessarily negative, without them there is no growth”* (p.33). Aslanian and Brickell (1980) explained that adults experienced disequilibrium during such periods of transition that required *“new knowledge, new skills and/or new attitudes or values”* (p.34). Participants of this research reaffirmed West’s (1996) claim that FET provided a space to investigate their identities, which included the discovering or reclamation of aspects of themselves that had been previously neglected or submerged, Q2 *“I did not have the opportunity earlier in life, as I was busy rearing my family and other circumstances prevented it”*.

6.3.4 Critical Commentary

As the number of adults in FET increases, understanding their motivation is a critical variable in the success of their learning journey. Adult learners have multiple roles and responsibilities and their motivation to attend and to be successful in learning is very different to the younger learner, yet it has been afforded little attention. West (1996) observed *“understanding of student motivation is limited precisely because learners themselves have rarely been asked or encouraged to reflect in unstructured and longitudinal ways on their reasons for learning in relation to personal histories”* (p.1). Cross (1981) reminded us that *“motives differ for different groups of learners, at different stages of life, and most individuals have not one but multiple reasons for learning”* (p.97). This research provided evidence of Houle’s

typology and the additional themes proposed by Bulluck (2017) however, this typology alone does not provide a sufficient conceptualisation of the adult FET learner, as was evidenced in this research their motivation was multi-layered and complex. Research participants confirmed the importance of:

- being a good role model for their family
- contributing to their community and wider society
- gaining self-confidence and improved self-esteem
- self-fulfilment through the achievement of their goals

Identification of the learning orientations and motivations of adult learners can inform FET providers on how to enhance adult participation and sustain their motivation for the duration of the learning journey. In this research inter-related orientations e.g., redundancy and career enhancement, upskilling and progression in education and inter-related motivations e.g., employment and qualifications, progression to HE and improved confidence, dissatisfaction with work and skills advancement, friendships and social engagement were evidenced. Understanding the learning orientations and motivations of adult learners should underpin FET programme planning to assist FET providers in constructing their roles as educators (Houle, 1961). It is important for FET providers to understand the inter-related orientations and motivations of adult learners and appreciate that frequently life-transitions associated with the diminution of a former role forces a re-evaluation of one's life and its manifestation is the motivation to engage in a journey of self-discovery in education. This requires investment in both professional development of staff in terms of andragogy and learner centred practice and in the provision of high-quality, lifelong and life-wide career information, advice and guidance as well as learning and psychological supports.

Walters (2000) claimed the adult learner journey of self-discovery and improvement had three elements, redundancy, recognition and regeneration, the beginning, middle and end of the experience. Walters (2000) claimed that redundancy occurred when aspects of life were altered. In this research redundancy was experienced through changed circumstances where the conclusion of care duties, diminution of a former role or loss of employment where roles that had been central to the life experience of the participants had been removed and the role they had fulfilled became irrelevant and redundant. Recognition occurred when opportunities and possibilities that arose from the change were acknowledged and considered which included engagement in FET to change direction, improve self-confidence and fulfil long held ambitions. Regeneration was the outcome of the process, demonstrated by revised ways of thinking and being that supported a new frame of reference. Transformation as an outcome of engagement equated to Walters regeneration and was also evidenced in this research as a motivation as participants:

- Focused on a new career trajectory because of a life transition.

I5PM *“I looked after my dad before he died, I provided care for him and then for my mom before she passed away, she had cancer. Caring for others was something I never thought I'd actually be able to do, I always thought oh no I can't do that job but when you're in the situation you have to do it, I realised actually I could do it right and enjoyed it. So, I thought OK , I will do a course in this area and get a qualification”.*

I6VM *“I was a carer for my mom for the best part of six years it would have been seven years coming up next year. I was my mother carer and she decided at very short notice that she didn't want me caring for her anymore. So, I was a bit like a lost soul because six or seven years out of the workplace is a long time”.*

- Focused on the rejuvenation of skills and realignment of ambitions after a life transition.

I2PM *“I had been at home for four years now with the children before that I was working full time, it's nice to be at home for them but at the same time it's great to get back to work”.*

I9SC *“I worked for 30 years and I was made redundant; I want to get back into the workforce. I haven’t done an interview for 30 years and I want to get qualifications, I have lots of experience but no qualifications; I can go to an interview, but I won’t get a job because even though I have experience I have no qualifications”*.

- Left a way of life behind after a life transition.

I1SC *“I was fed up with what I was doing, and I wanted to further myself and have the opportunity to travel abroad with a qualification; I knew I wanted the opportunities so that's why I started”*.

I7VM *“I was a school-teacher of history geography; I decided I would like to set up a business”*.

This research confirmed that engagement in FET for the goal, activity or learning oriented learner, was voluntary and self-motivated either for up-skilling, re-skilling, career advancement, as well as life fulfilment and personal growth. In my experience FET providers believe that provision focused at labour market activation, individual empowerment, community development and social change are not mutually exclusive. Rather they are viewed as compatible and complementary. Transformative and emancipatory learning as espoused by Freire (1970) and Mezirow (1978) is achieved through a process of self-reflection and critique of their life status. The development of such awareness and the ability to view the world in multiple ways to support reflective action which can bring about changes is critical to sustain the motivation of the adult learner. Achieving this complex action may pose difficulties, so FET policy needs to be balanced against the constraints of strategy and the complex motivations and needs of adult learners. As an educator with an understanding of transformative learning theories I can appreciate the tension involved for FET policy makers and providers to affect an equal balance between the personal, social and economic objectives in FET policy and strategy. However, I believe it is realistic to expect FET programmes at all levels to foster the development of the critical

thinking skills that support effective participation in society. The face of adult learning is likely to change dramatically over the next 10 years and the needs of adult learners will change as those in work will increasingly need to chart their own unique learning pathway to sustain a 40- or 50-year career. Increased digitalisation with an abundance of learning materials and offerings from many different providers and players will enable the personalisation of the learning processes for the adult learner. Enhanced fluidity will be demanded to ensure adult learners can move easily from one educational setting to another without impediments, based on their interests, needs, abilities and socio-economic requirements. However, an aging population, with an increasing retirement age will necessitate the need for FET policy-makers and providers to develop a framework of options that will provide for the orientations and motivations of all adult learners and minimise the risk of inequality and social exclusion. The OECD (2019) claimed that the most disadvantaged including the unemployed and older people are least likely to engage in education to train, re-skill or upskill, with only 20% of low-skilled adults likely to engage in FET compared to 58% of high-skilled adults. Inclusive FET opportunities for adults have the potential to be an equaliser but can widen gaps if it is not. Therefore, FET provision into the future will be underpinned by the principles of affordability, accessibility, quality, and personalisation as adult learners chart their own unique learning pathway, through a FET sector that must support the diversity of adult learners, encompass their lived experience and provide learning pathways and opportunities that aligns to their motivation and orientation toward learning.

6.4. Barriers and support for the adult learner

Numerous influencing factors that have been found to manifest as either barriers or supports to participation in education. These have included, the influence of family or peers, financial implications, the availability of advice, information or guidance, previous experiences of education, and perceived quality of provision. Ambrose et al (2010) proposed such

barriers or supports “*influences the direction, intensity, persistence, and quality of the learning behaviours*” (p.66). Ambrose (2010) continued that such influence “*act as a compass to guide and direct intellectual and creative pursuits, social and interpersonal relationships, identity and self - concept, needs for safety and material possessions, and desires to be productive and competent in the world*” (p.71). Wolters (1998) agreed that influences were a determinant in the learners decision “*to engage in a particular activity and the intensity of his or her effort and persistence for that activity*” (p. 224). The influence of barriers and supports on a learner provide context and value which underpins their motivation to succeed (Ryan, 1970, Mitchell, 1982, Elliot and Fryer, 2008). SOLAS (2017) concluded that “*motivational barriers may stem from previous negative experience of school and education, a lack of value placed on learning by family, the perception of FET as of low value, or the impression that extrinsic barriers are insurmountable*” (p. 17). The supports and barriers to engagement in FET as reported by the research participants are considered under the following headings

- Familial support
- Transition to adult learner
- View of FET provision

6.4.1 Familial Support

The overwhelming majority, 93% of research participants, confirmed they were supported by their family in their decision to engage in FET. This was an important finding as it is well documented that a lack of familial support can manifest as a barrier to learning and reduce self-directed engagement, as the disparity between the culture of the home and the decision to engage in education can be too great for the adult learner to overcome (Davenport and Davenport, 1985; Lowry, 1989; Reay et al., 2002; Rachal, 2002; Kerka, 2002; Mercer and Saunders, 2004; Tett, 2004; Brine and Waller, 2004). It was interesting to note that all research participants had discussed their decision to engage in

FET with their family or friends, all of whom fully supported their engagement, even where family and friends were not themselves predisposed to learning. A majority of 58% confirmed that it was a family member that had suggested engagement in FET to the participant in the first instance. The vertical and horizontal support received from family, children, partners, employers and friends was a positive finding and supported the learners' perspective of themselves as role models for learning within their families and communities.

The findings here were also similar to those of Darmody and Fleming (2009) as the majority of participants struggled with the financial responsibility associated with their engagement in FET and expressed concern that they could not provide for their family or hold down a job for the duration of their FET course. This role strain triggered thoughts of withdrawal when the role of learner became conflicted with familial responsibilities (Goode (1960; Markle, 2015). Tinto (1993) argued that economic and financial constraints frequently led to learner departure. Registration and exam fees, costs of course books and materials with reduced state grant support and DEASP back to education allowances create the perfect storm for adult learners. Participants described the difficulty of trying to make ends meet and the struggle of coping financially as a learner and the constant fear of losing any of their training allowance Q1 *“money is docked if people are even a few minutes late”*. The toll of such a struggle can be enormous, the research participants confirmed the impact it had on their lives which included guilt for not earning and responsibility for the sacrifices their families made in order to support their engagement in FET. Fortunately, all research participants acknowledged they enjoyed the support of their family to pursue their ambitions through FET. This support was important for the participants of this research because it also assuaged thoughts of withdrawal (Goode, 1960) and reduced the experience of role strain (Van Meter and Agronow, 1982). The financial commitment associated with FET is less than that associated with HE as course durations are shorter, fees are lower and some courses attract a training

allowance. The national network of ETBs means FET provision is available across all counties which also reduces costs associated with travel and accommodation. Such factors are likely to become more important for adult learners when choosing a path of learning as we enter an unprecedented period of economic downturn.

6.4.2 Transition to Adult Learner

Knowles (1980) proposed that adult learners, such as the cohort in this research, were self-directed with a developed sense of self, experience-rich and intrinsically motivated as they know what they want to learn based on their needs and experiences. In this research the decision to engage in FET was self-determined and the experience was positive. This correlated positively with Murphy and Roopchand (2003) who found that higher levels of intrinsic motivation and self-esteem in adult learners positively impacted their satisfaction levels. Prior negative experiences of education have been found to reduce the likelihood of re-engagement in education, including FET (Crosnoe and Cooper, 2010; Eurofound, 2012). While previous negative experiences were acknowledged by some participants they did not pose a barrier to participation. The participants of this research were overwhelmingly positive regarding their experience of FET and their decision to return as an adult learner to FET. Course content, work experience and peer relationships were cited as factors that positively influenced satisfaction levels. The FET learning environment was described as friendly, encouraging and supportive; I2PM stated *“the support from the tutors is better than I thought it would be. It’s exceeded my expectations”*. Personal contacts, prior knowledge of FET, accessibility of provision and recommendations from others positively influenced the decision to engage in FET and eased the transition to adult learner. Gallacher et al (2002) confirmed that *“often what is important is not just knowing about provision but knowing someone who has experienced learning and experienced it in a positive way”* (p. 503). FET colleges and centres are

established and familiar features of many local areas which eased transition and allayed fears for many. The local community based nature of FET colleges and centres provided a sense of familiarity and flexibility for learners who had multiple responsibilities Q108 *“the course was available in my locality”*; I2PM *“I know that it is flexible so if the kids need me, I'm there with them”*. This familiarity in addition to feedback from previous learners, knowledge of the course location and course tutors coupled with understanding the course work made the transition to adult learner less daunting.

Ambrose (2010) proposed that participation in FET was based on the need to know how to cope with real-life situations and be productive and competent in the world, which was reflected in this research, Q26 *“to get a good paying job and to be independent”*; Q79 *“to contribute to society by working and being as independent a human being as possible”*. This supported Jonker's (2005) assertion that engagement in FET provided the confidence associated with becoming educated and knowledgeable. Respondents acknowledged that effort was required in their coursework, however, their sense of responsibility and achievement outweighed any concerns. Participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the approach to teaching and learning in FET compared to previous experiences of education. Wlodkowski (2008) and Ferreira and McLean (2017) highlighted the importance of recognising the adult learners potential and their accomplishments in maintaining motivation. This was echoed by the participants as they confirmed the importance of being recognised by tutors for their achievements in FET. Knowles argued that the adult learners' prior knowledge should be used as a teaching and learning resource to motivate and engage adult learners, 26% of this sample confirmed *“I have lots of life-experience that will inform my course work”*. Participants of this research indicated their engagement in FET had been a reflective fulcrum from which they delineated positive changes I7VM *“you learn much more than you think including soft skills; I'm very thankful for the support I get on the course”*; I8SC *“my confidence*

and self-esteem has improved I knew I could not go back into myself as I had just after I had left the job, here and this course has been great for me in that regard ”. The research participants acknowledged they experienced anxiety when they commenced in FET, but also revealed the enhanced sense of identity, improved confidence, self-esteem and personal growth they achieved as a result of engagement.

6.4.3 View of FET provision

The majority of participants confirmed FET was their preferred route of learning as the local availability of provision, associated affordability, HE progression routes, linkages with local employers, practical training and work experience aspects all positively influenced the decision to engage in FET. Respondents believed school leavers and unemployed persons were the cohorts that FET was most targeted toward with employers among those least targeted. Current trends in FET policy would appear to support this view with the notable exception of employers who are a significant stakeholder in both the development and delivery of FET.

FET courses were not considered to be easier than HE but the majority agreed FET was more focused on the provision of skills that supported employment. When asked about societal perception and the value of FET, HE fared better, I2PM claimed *“I think somebody in a university or college is looked upon as being far smarter. I don't think it (FET) gets the recognition that it deserves or anything like that. And I think they're kind of viewed as a steppingstone to something else”*. This supported the Cedefop (2017) claim that FET *“suffers from poor reputation and much discourse on tertiary education still favours university education over post-secondary FET, which adds to its unattractiveness”* (p. 76). The ESRI (2014) concluded that FET was seen as having a lower status than HE which had been influenced by the use of negative terms that had resulted in FET being cast in the role of second-best option. SOLAS (2014) acknowledged that the standing of FET in Irish society had to be

enhanced and acknowledged that the *“standing and esteem in which Further Education and Training is held by Irish society stands in contrast to the higher esteem in which higher education is held by learners and parents alike”* (p.60) and aimed to ensure FET became *“as a valued learning path leading to agreed employment, career, developmental, personal and social options”* (p. 32). O’Kelly and Rami (2018) concluded that efforts across the FET sector to enhance its image have been *“aimed at improving learner access and outcomes for all who will engage in FET so that they too can fulfil their potential and meet their career employment, personal or developmental aspirations”* (p. 273). The research participants confirmed that their positive experience of FET meant they had and would encourage others to participate in FET; I3 *“I tell everyone and I am encouraging everybody to join FET and I tell them it's never too late”*.

6.4.4 Critical Commentary

Lifelong learning has been found to have a positive impact on peoples’ personal, family and social lives, through improved well-being and self-confidence and overcoming social isolation or exclusion (King, 2004; McGivney, 2004; Norman and Hyland, 2003; Bailey and Coleman, 1998). Participants of this research reflected that engagement in FET built confidence and provided a positive educational experience which supported an onwards pathway to employment, further study and personal growth. Tellado (2012) argued that successful and satisfying education experiences occur where participants feel safe to share their opinion and feel respected. The interdependent relationship between the adult learners life history and biography and their motivation to engage in learning must be respected. The FET learning experience was deemed to be positive because they were able to speak up about their interests, and needs, and were heard and respected Q47 *“you are treated like an adult and your opinion counts and matters. As adult learners are a significant cohort within the FET learner population (Solas, 2019) they are important to the*

future direction of FET. It is incumbent on FET providers to facilitate lifelong learning opportunities that meet the needs of all learners and to raise awareness among the general public and policy makers of the benefits of FET to the individual, society and the economy. The need for FET providers to host family events and orientations, have flexibility in course scheduling, ensure easy access to course information and provide financial assistance to support adult learners in managing their multiple responsibilities (Allen, 1993; Kasworm, 2003) becomes increasingly important as the adult learner cohorts grows.

Understanding adult learners' characteristics in order to support adult learning and overcome barriers is both necessary and valuable. The adult learner's personal experiences and motivations provide important context that can be used to improve service and policies. It is important that adults returning to education are consulted about the type of education and training they need, as well as the support they require to complete the courses on offer. It is evident from this research that adult learners are self-directed, have prior life experiences and bring a wealth of knowledge and experiences with them to the learning environment; and therefore, motivated to engage in learning that is relevant to their lives and can be applied immediately. It was evident that familial support was critical to the adult learner. Although not reported in this research, negative attitudes regarding education held by family or friends are associated with lower participation and completion rates (Bamber and Tett, 2000; Terry, 2007). The level of familial support can either positively or negatively impact engagement in lifelong learning. Positive familial support like that reported in this research lessened the demands of juggling multiple roles and reduced role strain. This also led participants to acknowledge the potential of FET to address and mitigate against intergenerational disadvantage. SOLAS (2017) concluded FET *"enables learners to progress socially, personally and economically allowing people to be self-sufficient by participating in the labour market, get jobs, live different lives and promote education within their family"* (p. 47). However, domestic responsibilities, in particular childcare, continue to present a significant

barrier to participation in FET, which was demonstrated by the female participants in this research. While female participants reported multiple responsibilities they also regarded their engagement in FET as both a release from domestic and caring responsibilities and an expression of their own ambitions, which is important for providers to consider as they struggle to attract females into traditionally gendered FET provision. As educational, economic and social disadvantages tend to be linked, it is important that support for engaging adults in lifelong learning are recognised by providers and recognised in the FET policy agenda.

The ESRI (2014) research highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the FET sector. Among the weaknesses and potential barriers was the language used to describe the sector. Much of the language was criticised as it reinforced an image of FET as a low status part of the education system through the use of terms that included remedial, transitional, compensatory or second-chance. The subsequent FET Strategy aimed to remove barriers and ensure supports were available that would “*deliver a higher quality learning experience leading to better outcomes for all those who engage in FET*” (p.3). Cedefop (2017) later noted that the image of FET “*needs to be improved not just in the eyes of young people, but also their families and other key players such as teachers, careers advisers and employers*” (p. 77). This much reported poor image of FET presents a barrier to participation in FET as negative perceptions of FET can lead to low participation rates and does little to advance the SOLAS (2017) assertion that FET was “*a high quality viable alternative, or pathway, to work or higher education*” (p. 7). Rami (2018) asserted that

“the F/VET system in Ireland has often struggled to reconcile the economic and educational values of our society. Education and Training in Ireland is not only about employability, it is also concerned with the key concept of lifelong learning. It is seen both in policy and structural terms as being one of the main pillars essential to the building and maintaining of a highly skilled workforce operating within a knowledge society” (p. 46).

In this research FET was proven to be a first choice of study, which supported an entry route to work and an alternative route to higher

education for adult learners. FET in Ireland like many other countries has traditionally been neglected and marginalised in policy discussions, the OECD (2010) observed FET was “*often overshadowed by the increasing emphasis on general academic education and the role of schools in preparing students for university education*” (p.11). Wallace (2014) claimed the FET sector “*has come to be seen as a progression route for those who have failed at school*” and therefore “*the aspirations of learners in FE tend to be lower*” (p. 7). Wallace (2014) questioned the verbosity of information and guidance provided by schools in relation to vocational qualifications and concluded it “*may be inadequate*” (p.10) which negatively impacted a learners ability to make an informed choice about whether or not to enter the FET sector. This lack of verbose information may have contributed to the often cited low status of FET as a first option by learners. Cedefop (2001) concluded “*the standing of vocational compared to academic education is still an unresolved problem throughout Europe*” (p.24). The FET Strategy (2014) acknowledged that the standing of FET in Irish society had to be enhanced and acknowledged that the “*standing and esteem in which Further Education and Training is held by Irish society stands in contrast to the higher esteem in which higher education is held by learners and parents alike*” (p.60). Wallace (2014) concluded that the majority of FET learners came from the lower and middle socio-economic classes with low academic achievements which “*may serve to perpetuate negative notions about the value and desirability of the FE curriculum*” (p.7). More recent research Solas (2015) concluded that FET was “*deemed important by the vast majority of adults, with 9 in 10 rating it so. In relation to its impact on Ireland’s competitiveness in the minds of multinationals looking to locate in Europe, almost 3 in 4 feel it extremely important*” (p. 21). Additionally, the Solas (2015) research indicated that FET enhanced Ireland

“*at a corporate level with 9 in 10 agreeing that it will increase the attractiveness of the Irish workforce to employers and foreign investors. It is also seen to have a personal benefit, with 4 in 5 agreeing that it facilitates social inclusion and personal development as well as assisting those who are unemployed to find jobs*” (p.22).

The FET Strategy (2014) aimed to ensure FET was regarded “*as a valued learning path leading to agreed employment, career, developmental, personal and social options*” (p. 32). O’Kelly (2018) concluded the features of FET that made it attractive to learners included flexibility, smaller class size and individual attention, support offered and that fact that the social development of the learner was equally important to accreditation. Negative perceptions of FET, in comparison with other education pathways may result in potential learners opting for alternative education routes. The importance of a more positive perception of FET among potential participants is vital if FET is to be viewed as a viable pathway to work or higher education. While the participants of this research were very positive in their reflection on FET the impact of negative perceptions of FET could result in low self-esteem among FET learners and an underestimation or undervaluing of FET as a learning route by employers.

6.5 Conclusion

This research provided insights to the personal accounts, attitudes, beliefs and motivations of current Irish adult FET learners. Participation was predominantly by females, who were aged 41-65 years and who had been previously unemployed or outside of the labour market. The adult FET learner was primarily enrolled on level 5 accredited programmes with the majority having completed upper second-level education prior to commencement. The acquisition of a qualification to support improved employment prospects or progression to HE were the most frequently cited motivations for engagement.

Life transitions and timing were frequently cited as the trigger for engagement. However, the decision to engage was ultimately self-directed. It was interesting that engagement in FET was neither remedial in purpose nor necessarily linear in direction. Familial support, the opportunity to create and expand social networks coupled

with the local availability of FET provision positively influenced the experience of FET. Female participants reflected on the challenge of balancing multiple responsibilities with embracing the opportunity to pursue their ambitions. Participants were unanimous in their satisfaction with their experience in FET and acknowledged the positive impact it had on their self-esteem.

Removing barriers and supporting the adult learner is both necessary and valuable as we continue to develop the FET sector. The learner's personal experience and motivations provides important information that can be used to improve service and policies. Furthermore, it is important that adults returning to education are consulted about the type of education and training they need, as well as the support they require to complete the courses on offer. These findings make a significant contribution to the limited academic literature on the Irish FET adult learner and the FET landscape, their motivations for pursuing a FET course and the barriers and supports to their engagement with FET.

Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This qualitative research focused on FET from an Irish perspective and investigated two research questions through a case study approach:

- a. The characteristics of the adult FET learner
- b. The motivation to pursue a FET course as an adult

Research similar to this study has been conducted in other jurisdictions and on other sections of the Irish education system, for example the experiences of adult learners in HE, but similar research has not been conducted on the FET sector. Previous research on the FET sector has tended to focus on the professional development of FET practitioners (Rami et al, 2017) and the review and evaluation of FET provision (Rami, J. and O’Leary, M., 2017; ESRI, 2014). SOLAS (2019) postulated that the core benefits of engagement in FET were improved employment prospects through engagement with vocational programmes that were linked to regional and national critical skills needs, progression opportunities to other education and training, the development of transversal skills and social engagement. This research has provided practice based evidence that the motivation of the adult FET learner was positively aligned to these stated core benefits of FET.

7.2 Contribution to knowledge

Petre and Rugg (2010) confirmed that “*making a significant contribution means adding to knowledge or contributing to the discourse – that is, providing evidence to substantiate a conclusion that’s worth making*” (p.14). This research significantly contributes to the limited academic literature on the characteristics and motivations of the Irish FET learner and to academic writing on the evolution of FET in Ireland. In particular, this research contributes to new knowledge as follows:

- This thesis has provided practice based evidence and baseline research for an under-researched pillar of the Irish education system
- This research contributes to recent an historiographical debates concerning the Irish FET sector by providing a comprehensive review of the current context of the FET sector
- This thesis is the first qualitative profile of the Irish FET learner and their motivations, prior to this research only limited quantitative profiles of the Irish adult FET learner had been developed
- The findings in this research provide a new understanding of the value adult learners placed on their FET learning pathway
- The findings from this research make important contributions to the current literature on the influence of the barriers and supports on the adult learners motivation
- This research provides evidence of the voice of the adult FET learner with regard to their motivation to engage in FET

7.2 Conclusions arising from Research

This research confirmed that FET met the needs of a diverse cohort of learners in their deliberate journey of knowledge and skills acquisition that was underpinned by their self-determined need for claiming space, academic or personal advancement, the acquisition of skills and knowledge for employment, and the deliberate seizing of opportunities to realise long held ambitions. On completion of their FET course learners expected to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to either quickly establish themselves in the labour market or gain entry to higher education. This expectation confirmed the need for FET providers to be cognisant of the aspirations and hopes of learners to ensure they offer provision and learner support services that align to learner needs and expectations.

An important finding to emerge from this research was that the motivation of the adult learner was complex and dependent on many variables that included the satisfaction of need, self-determination, readiness and timing. One unanticipated finding was that the traditional profile of FET as a second chance or remedial was challenged as nearly all of the adult learners in this study had completed upper second-level education prior to commencement in FET. It can therefore be asserted that engagement in FET was not a “second chance” at education but rather it was a platform for personal and professional transformation focused toward the achievement of a qualification, improved employment prospects or career development. Interestingly while the qualifications being pursued were primarily vocational they were not necessarily a linear progression from the level of education held prior to engagement in FET. Female participants confirmed that their engagement was designed to facilitate their entry or re-entry to the labour market, while males acknowledged their engagement was often associated with labour market insecurity and focused on career progression or change. In the majority of cases engagement in FET had been triggered by a life transition that had forced a re-evaluation of one’s life. It can therefore be concluded that adult FET learners are self-motivated, with readiness to learn what they need to know in order to manage their real-life situations. Additionally, the evidence from this research suggests that the diminution of role, the need to claim space, the development of social capital and wellbeing are influential in the motivation to engage in FET.

This work also contributes to the existing knowledge of SOLAS (2018), Watson, (2006) and Fleming and Murphy, (1997) who also found that the adult FET learner was predominantly female. The evidence from this study suggests that prior to engagement in FET the adult learner had been unemployed or outside of the labour market, for females this was often exclusively as a result of caring responsibilities. The results of this research also indicated that gender stereotyping was evidenced with regard to traditional household gender roles as female participants

reported they had multiple responsibilities which resulted in role strain with regard to their engagement in FET. These findings contribute to our understanding of the motivation of the female adult FET learner and the potential barriers experienced by them as an adult FET learner. A key policy priority should therefore be to plan FET provision and services that are flexible, accessible and affordable for those who have home and care responsibilities. Contrary to expectations and the findings of recent research on barriers to participation (SOLAS, 2017), the traditional barriers such as a negative attitude towards re-entering education, a lack of available courses and a lack of familial support associated with engagement in education were not supported by this research. This research demonstrated that participants were universally supported in their engagement in learning by their family and friends and any previous negative association with school did not pose a barrier to participation. Although, the majority of participants reported that they struggled with the financial responsibility associated with their engagement, familial support assuage any concerns in this regard. As FET provides over two hundred thousand opportunities of learning annually, it is important that potential barriers to participation are understood so that appropriate learner supports are reflected in FET policy and strategy. Supports that can assuage role strain including free childcare places, training allowances and learning supports do not apply to all forms of FET provision, therefore the extension of these supports across all FET provision should be advanced to ensure consistency of access and support nationwide.

It was encouraging to find that FET was confirmed as the first choice of learning pathway for participants. Participants of this research confirmed that the course they were interested in was available locally, it offered practical training through linkages with employers which they valued and it provided a progression route to HE. The participants of this research had a very positive perception of FET which may be partly explained by their own positive personal experiences of FET. There has been significant investment in the promotion and positioning of FET

which has improved the image of FET as a valuable pathway of learning. This is evidenced by the value and recognition assigned to FET by the current adult FET learners who participated in this research.

7.2 Recommendations for policy and practice arising from research

This research has provided insights into the heterogeneous aspirations of the adult learner and taken together with the insights provided on the demographics and characteristics of the adult FET learner can inform targeted FET interventions. The findings here also have important implications for future practice. The demographic of the adult FET learner will be shaped by an increasing and aging population and raised retirement age. As people live and work for longer the necessity to engage in episodes of upskilling throughout their lives is set to increase. The strategic direction of FET was to increase the number of employers and their employees accessing FET as conduit for upskilling to meet labour market demands. While the steep rise in unemployment due to COVID-19 restrictions has decelerated in recent times, it is not certain how far unemployment will fall as the COVID-19 crisis continues to adversely affect the labour market. Hospitality, tourism, personal services and retail have been the hardest hit sectors however, other occupations and sectors may be affected in the future due to a weaker demand for goods and services. It is worth noting that the occupations thought to be most impacted by COVID-19 have a high concentration of young people and females. As our economy flexes, FET policy should ensure that all learners irrespective of participation in or distance from the labour market are enabled to access opportunities of learning as need arises in their lives.

The research findings are significant for FET providers as it confirmed the need to have an enhanced portfolio of flexible learning opportunities available for learners, supported by professional, skilled and knowledgeable FET practitioners; in an environment that recognises the competing responsibilities of the adult learner. Significant progress has

been achieved by ETBs with regard to quality assurance and the development of cross-ETB approaches to the development of curricula, teaching and learning, and the professional development of staff. In order to enhance the advances made to date there is a need for a continued commitment to ensuring appropriate professional development opportunities are available for FET staff in terms of andragogy and learner centred provision to ensure learners receive a high-quality experience and outcome. However, important practical implications emerge especially for the smaller and more disparate FET providers outside of the ETB network not least of which is the requirement for considerable sectoral resourcing.

This research confirmed that the local nature of FET is a jewel in the FET crown. However, the findings have identified a number of important implications for future practice. Greater efforts are needed to ensure that the adult FET learner can navigate learning opportunities into, across and from FET. Access, transfer and progression opportunities should be formalised and integrated into quality assurance processes and national policy. A reasonable approach to address this issue could be the development of a FET-HE transition framework that allows learners to move seamlessly between FET and HE as their needs dictate. A framework can be progressed through the FET Strategy 2020-2025 or the Action Plan for Education or the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education. According to this research the value of FET extended beyond achievement of a qualification or improved skills for career progression. It can thus be suggested that a framework to capture learner feedback and the wider benefits of learning should be advanced and adopted across the FET sector. This will ensure that the spectrum of benefits from engagement in FET are captured and integrated into the way that FET is measured.

This research confirmed that the FET learning environment was considered to be encouraging and supportive and was the ‘first choice’ for the participants of this research, critics have claimed the sector has

failed to capture the heart and mind of the “Irish mammy” for the education of her offspring. Whilst increased efforts must be made to better inform all potential FET learners of course and career options, it is interesting that this research has demonstrated that it is the same “Irish mammy” that is the ‘typical’ adult FET learner. It must be accepted that efforts to enhance the messaging and positioning of FET to increase its reach to all potential learners, their families, teachers, careers guidance advisers and employers should be prioritised. In doing so, FET can be firmly positioned as a high quality first choice of learning that offers learners diverse and flexible progression pathways to work or education

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

This research aimed to understand the motivation of the adult FET learner from various vocational areas in many FET centres and colleges across two ETBs. Further research should be conducted with a regional sample from the national ETB network, as saturation was achieved in this research because the interview responses overlapped. Increasing the sample may have provided additional findings and solidified or refuted the overlap in interview responses. Further research should be conducted on one skill cluster or discipline across all the entire national network of ETBs should be undertaken to explore the motivation of the adult FET learner for engagement in that vocational area.

This research found that the adult FET learner grew in self-confidence as a result of their engagement in FET. A natural progression of this research would be to investigate the nature of the change in learners’ levels of self-confidence over the duration of their FET programme.

Finally, a longitudinal study that includes entry and exit interviews could usefully explore the persistence of adult learner motivation over the duration of the FET programme.

7.4 Conclusion

Ireland has had a strong national network of ETBs that has been agile in meeting the demands of the Irish economy and associated education policy. The on-going challenge for the ETB FET sector is to remain flexible and responsive to the evolving changes and demands of the economy, society and learners. Continued work is required to enhance and grow the profile in order to demonstrate the benefits of FET to potential learners, communities, employers and Government. This will ensure that all parties can appreciate the nature of FET as depicted by SOLAS (2019) *“FET is unique. FET is for everyone. It is available in every community in Ireland, and offers every individual, regardless of any previous level of education, a pathway to take them as far as they want to go”*.

This qualitative case-study research provided insights on the characteristics and motivations of the adult FET learner and contributed to writings on the evolution of FET in Ireland. As a researcher the process provided me with an opportunity to reflect on the sector I am employed in. I was surprised by some of the findings particularly by the level of self-directed engagement across learners. I was also interested to find that learners were motivated by their need to achieve a skill and/or to gain a qualification that supported their life ambitions. The level of satisfaction with FET and the positivity reported with regard to their experience of FET was unexpected but delightful. This research has presented FET through the vantage point of the adult FET learner and re-emphasised the value of FET for communities. This research has significantly contributed to the limited academic literature on the characteristics and motivations of the Irish FET learner and has contributed to academic writing on the evolution of FET in Ireland.

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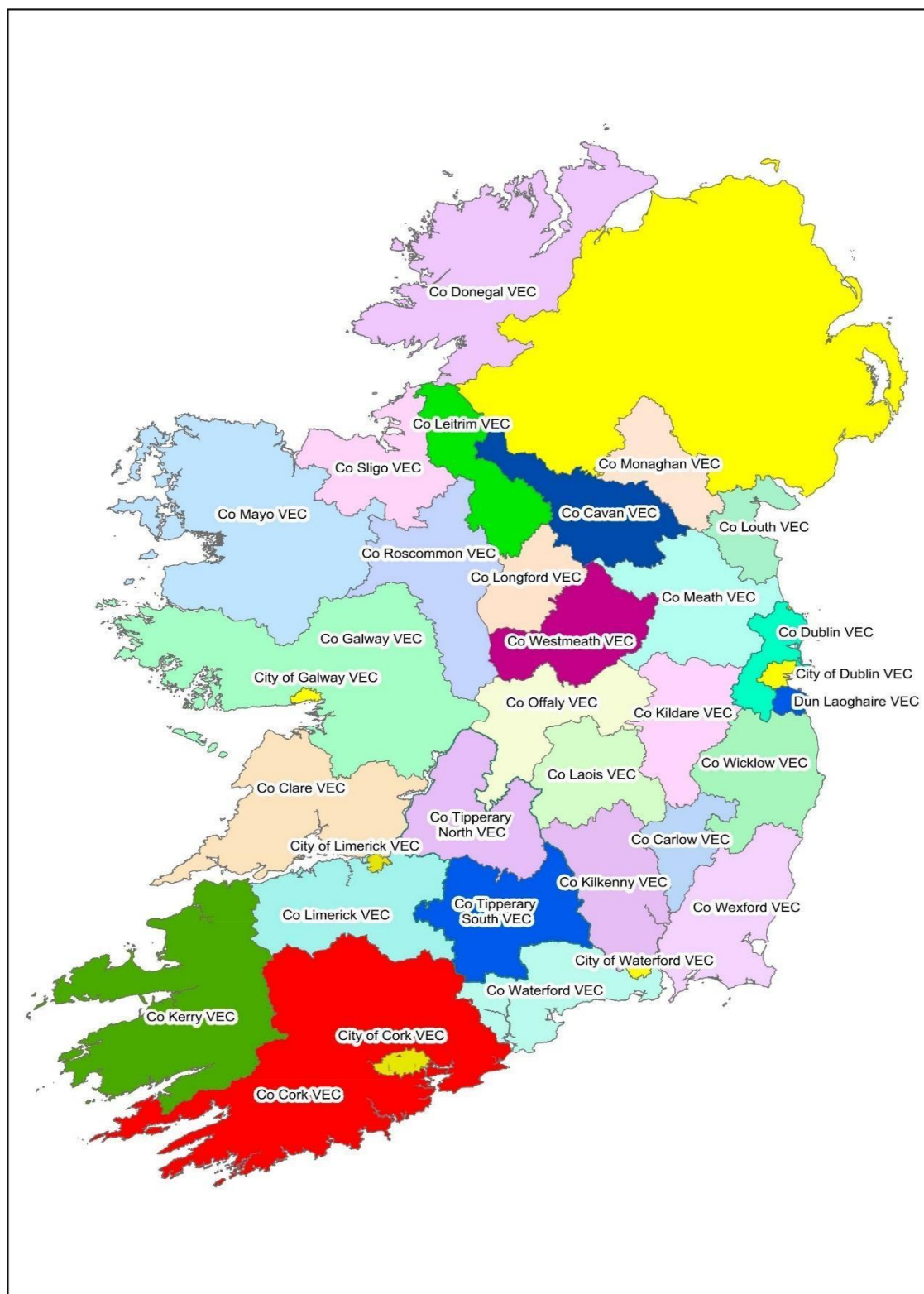
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Appendix A Configuration of the Education and Training Boards



Appendix B Configuration of the Vocational Education Committees



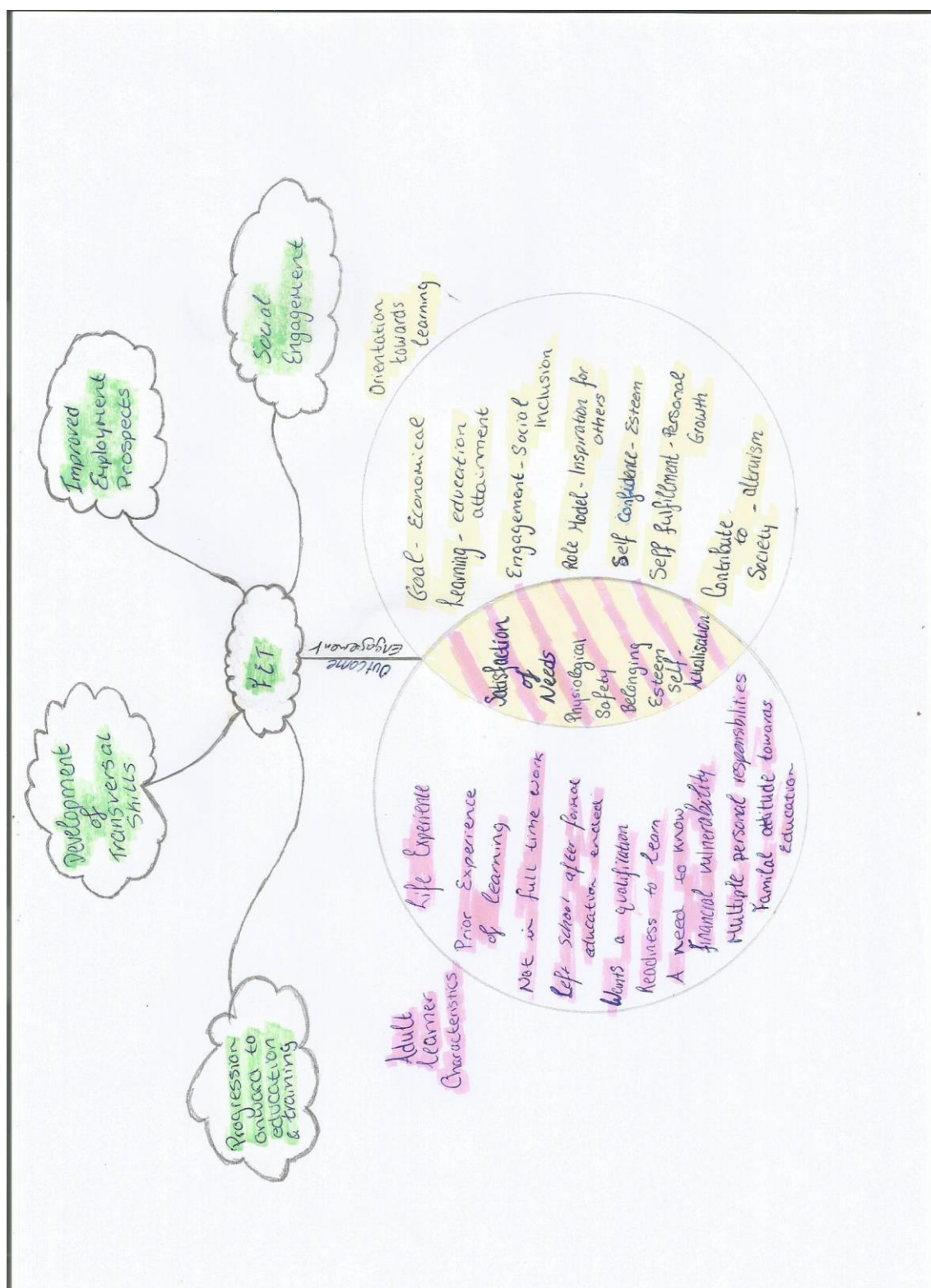
Appendix C FET ISCED Categories

1. Generic programmes and qualifications
2. Business and administration and law
3. Health and welfare
4. Services
5. Arts and humanities
6. Education
7. ICT
8. Engineering, manufacturing and construction
9. Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary
10. Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics
11. Social sciences, journalism and information

Appendix D ETB Further Education and Training Programmes

Full-Time Provision	Part-Time Provision
Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Full-time one/two year course leading to awards at NFQ levels 5 and 6.	Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) General learning with awards at NFQ levels 1-6.
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) Full-time two year course for the unemployed over the age of 21.	Adult Literacy Part-time communication skills course -reading, writing, numeracy and ICT.
Youthreach Full-time two-year course, leading to awards at NFQ level 3 and 4 for early school leavers, aged 15-20 who are not in employment.	Community Education Community projects with awards at NFQ levels 3–8.
Bridging/Foundation courses Full-time one-year course at NFQ levels 3 and 4 for those unemployed for a year.	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Classes to learn English or improve English.
Specific Skills Training (SST) Full-time 6-month industry focused course leading to awards at NFQ levels 4-6 or from a non-statutory accrediting body.	Skills for Work Programme aimed at developing the basic skills of employees.
Traineeship Full-time 4-9 month occupation-specific training with awards at NFQ levels 4-6 or from a recognised non-statutory accredited body.	Evening Courses Short up-skilling modules with awards at NFQ level 4-6 or from recognised non-statutory accredited body.
Community Training Centres (CTCs) One-year full-time community based training course at NFQ levels 3 and 4 for early school leavers, aged between 16 and 21.	Blended Learning Mix of classroom, lab, practical, on-line training, with tutor support at NFQ level 4-6 or From recognised non-statutory accredited body.
Specialist Training Providers (STPs) Training programmes for people with disabilities with awards at NFQ levels 1-6.	
The Local Training Initiative programme (LTI) Full-time community project-based training programme at NFQ levels 3, 4 and 5 for unemployed people aged 18 – 35.	

Appendix E Theoretical Framework



Appendix F Research Questionnaire

Introduction

Plain English Statement

This questionnaire is part of a research study to investigate Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner? You were selected as a potential participant because you are currently taking part in an ETB Further Education and Training course. The research will investigate the profile of Further Education and Training adult learners who engage in Further Education and Training and the key reasons why learners choose to engage in a Further Education and Training course. There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks. You will be asked to give your reasons for choosing the ETB Further Education and Training course and what influenced your decision to do this course. The benefits of completing the questionnaire include the opportunity to influence future ETB Further Education and Training course design and learner supports. The information will be deleted after the research has been completed.

Instructions

You can ask questions about this research at any time either before, during or after the research and I will answer them. If you want to ask a question please contact me, at fiona.maloney@etbi.ie or by telephone at 087 1322831. This questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. At the end of the questionnaire you can also indicate your willingness to participate in an interview which will take place at a later date. The deadline for completion of this questionnaire is 18 October 2019.

- Please note once the link is opened, the questionnaire **MUST** be completed in that one sitting.
- You can change your answer on any questionnaire page until the questionnaire is complete
- Answers cannot be changed after the questionnaire has been completed.
- The questionnaire can only be completed from the same device once.

All information collected will be anonymised, kept securely and will only be used to inform this particular research. You will receive no payment/reimbursement for your participation. The decision to participate in this questionnaire is entirely up to you. You are asked to answer all questions.

Consent

Please tick yes or no for the following questions in relation to your consent to participate in this research.

If “No” is provided as an answer you will not be able to continue with this questionnaire.

1. I have read the Plain Language Statement on the previous screen (or had it read to me)
☐ Yes ☐ No
2. I understand the information provided.
☐ Yes ☐ No
3. I understand how to contact the researcher if I have questions or if I want to discuss this study.
☐ Yes ☐ No
4. I consent to participate in this research project.
☐ Yes ☐ No

Participant Information

5. What is your gender?
☐ Female ☐ Male

6. What is your age?

<input type="radio"/> 16-25	<input type="radio"/> 26-40	<input type="radio"/> 41-65	<input type="radio"/> 65+
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Learner Profile

7. At what age did you finish education?

<input type="radio"/> 0-11	<input type="radio"/> 12-16	<input type="radio"/> 16-18	<input type="radio"/> 18-24
<input type="radio"/> 25-34	<input type="radio"/> 35-44	<input type="radio"/> 45-54	<input type="radio"/> 55-78

8. Which of the following statements describes you best?

- ☐ I did not enter second level education.
- ☐ I did not complete second-level school as I did not see it as important in my life.
- ☐ I wanted to continue in education after second level school, but my life circumstances did not allow it.
- ☐ I continued in education after second level school
- ☐ I completed second level education and thought I was finished with education then.

9. Please tick each of the statements that apply to you:

- ☐ I am a mature, independent self-directed learner so I do not need a teacher to provide me with all the information I need to successfully complete this course.
- ☐ I have lots of life-experience that will inform my course work.
- ☐ I want to know more about the vocational area I am studying as it will benefit me in my career.
- ☐ I need to do this course to upskill or improve my employment prospects.
- ☐ I need to do this course to help myself and improve my life situation.
- ☐ I am doing this course for the enjoyment of learning.
- ☐ Other (please give details)

10. What is the highest level of education completed before you started on your current Further Education and Training course?

- ☐ Pre-Primary education
- ☐ Primary education
- ☐ Junior Cert or equivalent (Junior/Inter/Group Certificate)
- ☐ Further Education and Training Award / Certificate at NFQ level 3
- ☐ Leaving Certificate or equivalent
- ☐ Further Education and Training qualification QQI/ FAS/ FETAC
- ☐ Third Level
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other (please specify)

11. Which of the following best describes your situation before you commenced the Further Education and Training course?

<input type="radio"/> School leaver	<input type="radio"/> Unemployed
<input type="radio"/> Student (other than school)	<input type="radio"/> Retired
<input type="radio"/> Homemaker	<input type="radio"/> Not in employment due to ill health/disability
<input type="radio"/> Carer	<input type="radio"/> On a scheme
<input type="radio"/> Employed	

12. What is your area of study? (Choose one of the following)

<input type="radio"/> Information Technology	<input type="radio"/> Natural Resources
<input type="radio"/> Sales & Marketing	<input type="radio"/> Science & Technology
<input type="radio"/> Built Environment	<input type="radio"/> Transport, Distribution & Logistics
<input type="radio"/> Financial Services	<input type="radio"/> Animal Science
<input type="radio"/> Manufacturing	<input type="radio"/> Agriculture, Horticulture and Mariculture
<input type="radio"/> Food and Beverage	<input type="radio"/> Hairdressing, Beauty and Complementary Therapies
<input type="radio"/> General Learning	<input type="radio"/> Health, Family other Social Services
<input type="radio"/> Literacy	<input type="radio"/> Research and Education-Training
<input type="radio"/> Numeracy	<input type="radio"/> Skills Sampling, General Learning & Core Personal
<input type="radio"/> Arts & Crafts	<input type="radio"/> Security, Guarding & Emergency Services
<input type="radio"/> Business, Administration	<input type="radio"/> Entrepreneurship
<input type="radio"/> Personal Development	<input type="radio"/> Sport and Leisure
<input type="radio"/> Engineering	<input type="radio"/> Media Graphics Communications
<input type="radio"/> Language	<input type="radio"/> Web Development & Design
<input type="radio"/> Management	
<input type="radio"/> Tourism	

13. Is your Further Education and Training course: (please choose one)?

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time

14. If you are in a Full-time Further Education and Training course, please indicate type of the course:

<input type="radio"/> Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Courses		
<input type="radio"/> Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)		
<input type="radio"/> Specific Skills Training (SST)		
<input type="radio"/> Traineeship		
<input type="radio"/> Apprenticeship		

15. If you are in a Part-time Further Education and Training course, please indicate type of the course:

<input type="radio"/>	Evening Training	<input type="radio"/>	Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)
<input type="radio"/>	Adult Literacy	<input type="radio"/>	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
<input type="radio"/>	Skills for Work	<input type="radio"/>	Blended Learning Courses
<input type="radio"/>	Community Education		

16. Does the Further Education and Training course you are on provide certification?

- ☐ Yes, after successful completion of courses assessments or portfolio
- ☐ No, it doesn't

17. What level of award is associated with your Further Education and Training course?

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	Level 10
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. When you chose to complete this course had you applied to a University or Institute of Technology?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes (Please explain why you chose Further Education and Training Course)

19. Did practical training or work experience being part of your Further Education and Training course influence your choice of the course?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

20. Rank from 1 to 3 which of the following groups Further Education and Training courses are aimed at? 1 being those courses are aimed at most.

	1 Most Important	2	3 Least Important
School Leavers			
Employers			
Employees			
Unemployed persons			
Carers			
Persons with a disability			
Community Groups			
Travellers			
People who want to upskill or retrain			
Early school leavers			

Knowledge of Further Education and Training

21. Had you heard of Further Education and Training Courses before you applied to this course?

- ☐ Yes, and I knew what it was
☐ Yes, but I didn't really know what it was
☐ No, I had never heard of it

22. Which of the following statements do you agree with?

- ☐ Further Education and Training Courses are highly valued in my community
☐ I place high value on Further Education and Training Courses
☐ Further Education and Training Courses have the same value as Higher Education courses in a University or Institute of Technology
☐ Further Education and Training Courses have a lower value than Higher Education courses.

23. How would you describe your Further Education and Training course? (choose your top 3, 1 being the most important and 3 being the least)

	1 Most Important	2	3 Least Important
Open to everyone			
Modern and up to date			
High quality			
Easier than higher level colleges			
Fun			
Focused on offering skills for employment			
Not as good as courses offered by a private company			
Other (please specify)			

24. Please respond to each of the statements below using the scale 1-5.
1 being Strongly Disagree - 5 being Strongly Agree

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree
Further Education and Training courses have a high status					
Further Education and Training courses are difficult					
People with qualifications get the best jobs					
People with qualifications make more money					
People who go to a Further Education and Training courses have a better chance of getting a job than those who do not					
If I do a Further Education and Training courses people will think I am intelligent					

Influences on Engagement in Further Education and Training

25. Have you ever encouraged anybody to do a Further Education and Training course?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

26. Would you encourage others to do a Further Education and Training course?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No (Please explain why)

Reasons for Engaging in Further Education and Training

27. Please choose one of the following statements that best describes you:

	<p>I started this course as a way to make changes for myself</p> <p>I started this course to learn English</p> <p>I started this course as a personal challenge</p> <p>I started this course to get a job</p> <p>I started this course to pass time between jobs, or while I make up my mind about my career</p> <p>I started this course because it was easy and I will complete it without difficulty.</p> <p>I started this course so I could get a better job or a better life.</p> <p>I started this course because I love learning new things.</p> <p>I started this course after a significant life event impacted me</p> <p>I started this course as a way to learn about the subject area and to help me progress further in my studies.</p> <p>Other (please give details)</p>
--	--

28. What prompted you to join this course?

29. What kind of a course were you looking for and why?

30. What were the most and least important reasons for choosing an ETB Further Education and Training course? (Please select only 3 choices and rank from 1- 3, 1 being the most important 3 being the least)

	1 Most Important	2	3 Least Important
To get a job			
To get a job with a different employer			
To change the type of work I do			
To get a recognised qualification			
To help in my current job			
To get a promotion			
To get a rise in earnings			
To make my work more satisfying			
To help me get onto a future course of learning			
To develop myself as a person			
To improve my self-confidence			
I enjoy learning\it gives me pleasure			
I am interested in the subject\personal interest			
To meet people			
As a result of participating in another activity			
Not really my choice - employer requirement			
Not really my choice - professional requirement			
Not really my choice - benefit requirement			
Only type of learning available			

31. What factors influenced your decision to take up your place on the ETB Further Education and Training Course? (Tick all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Course was available locally	<input type="checkbox"/> Course has a good reputation with employers
<input type="checkbox"/> Course meets my needs	<input type="checkbox"/> College has a good reputation with employers
<input type="checkbox"/> Course was free	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends were doing the course
<input type="checkbox"/> Low fees	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends were at the same college/centre
<input type="checkbox"/> Transport links	<input type="checkbox"/> It was the only course I was offered
<input type="checkbox"/> Links with employers	<input type="checkbox"/> DEASP required me to attend the course
<input type="checkbox"/> It was something to do	<input type="checkbox"/> Course was recommended
<input type="checkbox"/> Graduates get employment	<input type="checkbox"/> Course has a work experience part
<input type="checkbox"/> I wanted a qualification	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)

32. Do you feel your decision to do this course is supported by family and friends?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

33. How did you hear about your course?

<input type="radio"/> Guidance Counsellor	<input type="radio"/> Sibling
<input type="radio"/> Intreo Office	<input type="radio"/> Friend
<input type="radio"/> Newspaper	<input type="radio"/> Partner
<input type="radio"/> Radio	<input type="radio"/> Spouse
<input type="radio"/> Website	<input type="radio"/> DEASP Case Officer
<input type="radio"/> Fetchcourses.ie	<input type="radio"/> Workplace
<input type="radio"/> Parent	<input type="radio"/> School

34. Did you discuss your decision to do a Further Education and Training course with any of the following?

<input type="checkbox"/> Guidance Counsellor	<input type="checkbox"/> Friend
<input type="checkbox"/> Intreo Office	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse
<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Partner
<input type="checkbox"/> Sibling	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)

35. Were you encouraged to do a Further Education and Training Course?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes (If Yes, who encouraged you? Please specify)

36. Who chose the Further Education and Training course you are on?

<input type="radio"/> I did	<input type="radio"/> Career Guidance Counsellor
<input type="radio"/> DEASP Case Officer	<input type="radio"/> Sibling
<input type="radio"/> Intreo Officer	<input type="radio"/> Friend
<input type="radio"/> Parent	<input type="radio"/> ETB Advisor
<input type="radio"/> Partner	<input type="radio"/> Course Coordinator

37. What motivated you to start this course?

38. Are you satisfied that you chose the right Further Education and Training course?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

39. Which of the following statements best describes your decision to do this course?

<input type="radio"/> I decided to do this course on my own initiative
<input type="radio"/> I decided to do this course because of a relative or friend
<input type="radio"/> I decided to do this course because of my employer
<input type="radio"/> I decided to do this course because of a guidance counsellor
<input type="radio"/> I decided to do this course because of DEASP/INTREO/Jobpath
<input type="radio"/> Other (please specify)

40. Do you think the course will result in any changes to your life? (Select All that Apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Increased financial independence	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased ability to undertake daily activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased independence generally	<input type="checkbox"/> More education/new or improved skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved health/well-being	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased motivation to return to the workforce
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved chance of being employed	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased self-esteem
<input type="checkbox"/> Improved quality of life generally	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)

Satisfaction with Further Education and Training Course

41. Is there anything that you would like to change about your course?

42. What part of your course do you like best?

43. Overall, how satisfied are you with the Further Education and Training course?

Not Satisfied				Very Satisfied
★	★	★	★	★

44. How does this experience of education compare to previous experiences of Education?

45. Are there any other services not provided by the Further Education and Training College/Centre, which would have been useful in helping you engage in your course?

☐ No

☐ Yes (Please specify)

46. Have you any suggestions that would improve the course design and/or learner supports? Any other comments you would like to make about your decision to do this course?

47. Are you interested in engaging in a discussion on Who is the Further Education and Training learner? The discussion will only take 15 minutes of your time, it will be done in a venue convenient for you which could be the place where your course takes place and at a time that suits you.

☐ No

☐ Yes (Please provide your telephone number or email address)

Thank you for taking part in this research.

You can ask questions about this research at any time either before, during or after the research and I will answer them. If you want to ask a question please contact me, at fiona.maloney@etbi.ie or by telephone at 087 1322831.

Completed Research Questionnaire

Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner?

#1COMPLETE Collector: Web Link 1 (Web Link) Started: Wednesday, October 09, 2019 12:48:09 PM Time Spent:00:11:36 00:IP Address: 92.251.207.96

Page 3: Consent

Q1 I have read the Plain Language Statement on the

Yes, previous screen (or had it read to me)

Q2 I understand the information provided Yes

Page 4: Consent

Q3 I understand how to contact the researcher if I

Yes, have questions or if I want to discuss this study

Q4 I consent to participate in this research project. Yes

Page 5: Participant information

Q5 What is your gender? Female

Q6 What is your age? 41 to 65

Page 6: Learner Profile

Q7 At what age did you finish education? 16 - 18

Q8 Which of the following statements describes you

I wanted to continue in education after second level best. school, but my life circumstances did not allow it.

Q9 Please tick each of the statements that apply to you: I need to do this course to help myself and improve my life situation.

Q10 What is the highest level of education completed before you started on your current Further Education and Training course:

Leaving Certificate or equivalent

Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner?

Q11 Which of the following best describes your situation before you commenced the Further Education and Training course?

Unemployed

Q12 What is your area of study? (Choose one of the following)

Tourism

Q13 Is your Further Education and Training course:

Full-time (please choose one)

Q14 If you are in a Full-time Further Education and Training course please indicate type of the course:

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)

Q15 If you are in a Part-time Further Education and Training course please indicate type of the course:

Respondent skipped this question

Q16 Does the Further Education and Training course you are on provide certification?

Yes, after successful completion of courses assessments or portfolio

Q17 What level of award is associated with your Further Education and Training course?

Level 5

Q18 When you chose to complete this course had you applied to a University or Institute of Technology?

No

Q19 Did practical training or work experience being part of your Further Education and Training course influence your choice of the course?

No

Q20 Rank from 1 to 3 which of the following groups Further Education and Training courses are aimed at? 1 being those courses are aimed at most.

Unemployed persons 1 Most Important

Page 12: Knowledge of Further Education and Training

Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner?

Q21 Had you heard of Further Education and Training Courses before you applied to this course?

Yes, and I knew what it was

Q22 Which of the following statements do you agree with?

Further Education and Training Courses have a lower value then Higher Education courses.

Q23 How would you describe your Further Education and Training course? (choose your top 3, 1 being the most important and 3 being the least)

Easier than higher level colleges 3 Least Important

Fun 1 Most Important

Focused on offering skills for employment 2

Q24 Please respond to each of the statements below using the scale 1-5 1 being Strongly Disagree - 5 being Strongly Agree

Further Education and Training courses have a high status 3

Further Education and Training courses are difficult 3

People with qualifications get the best jobs 5 Strongly Agree

People with qualifications make more money 5 Strongly Agree

People who go to a Further Education and Training courses have a better chance of getting a job than those who do not 5 Strongly Agree

If I do a Further Education and Training courses people will think I am intelligent

5 Strongly Agree

Page 13: Influences on Engagement in Further Education and Training

Q25 Have you ever encouraged anybody to do a Further Education and Training course?

No

Q26 Would you encourage others to do a Further Education and Training course?

Yes

Page 14: Reasons for engaging in Further Education and Training

Q27 Please choose one of the following statements that best describes you:

I started this course to pass time between jobs

Q28 What prompted you to join this course?

I wanted to get skills and get out of the house. I am a lone parent and need to get a job as well

Q29 What kind of a course were you looking for and why?

Wasn't sure but I live in a remote place and this is the only course here.

Q30 What were the most and least important reasons for choosing an ETB Further Education and Training course? (Please select only 3 choices and rank from 1- 3, 1 being the most important 3 being the least)

To improve my self-confidence 3 Least Important

To meet people 2

Only type of learning available 1 Most Important

Q31 What factors influenced your decision to take up your place on the ETB Further Education and Training Course? (Tick all that apply)

Course was available locally,

Course was free,

Course has a work experience part,

It was something to do

Q32 Do you feel your decision to do this course is supported by family and friends?

Yes

Q33 How did you hear about your course?

Coordinator contacted me

Q34 Did you discuss your decision to do a Further Education and Training course with any of the following?

Friend

Q35 Were you encouraged to do a Further Education and Training Course

Yes (If Yes, who encouraged you? Please specify): parent

Q36 Who chose the Further Education and Training course you are on?

I did

Q37 What motivated you to start this course?

Get out of the house. Meet people

Q38 Are you satisfied that you chose the right Further Education and Training course? Yes

Q39 Which of the following statements best describes your decision to do this course?

Other (please specify): Myself and my parents

Q40 Do you think the course will result in any changes to your life? (Select All that Apply)

More education/new or improved skills,

Improved health/well-being,

Improved chance of being employed,

Increased self-esteem

Page 15: Satisfaction with Further Education and Training Course

Q41 Is there anything that you would like to change about your course?

No

Q42 What part of your course do you like best?

meeting people ... groups discussions. Interesting. friends

Q43 Overall, how satisfied are you with the Further Education and Training course?

Very satisfied

Q44 How does this experience of education compare to previous experiences of Education? hated school. This is fun. Treat me like an adult

Q45 Are there any other services not provided by the Further Education and Training College/Centre, which would have been useful in helping you engage in your course?

No

Q46 Have you any suggestions that would improve the course design and/or learner supports? No

Q47 Any other comments you would like to make about your decision to do this course? No

A48 Are you interested in engaging in a discussion on Who is the Further Education and Training learner? The discussion will only take 15 minutes of your time, it will be done in a venue convenient for you which could be the place where your course takes place and at a time that suits you. No

Appendix G Correspondence to Chief Executives

Dear Chief Executive

I hope this finds you well. I am writing to request your assistance with my studies in Dublin City University on the Professional Doctorate in Education programme. I am conducting my final piece of research which is "Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner?" This research considers who is the FET learner and why adult learners choose FET. The learner's influencers and reasons for engaging in FET will be examined.

I hope to conduct my research within both the City of Dublin and Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Boards as the largest urban ETB and the largest rural ETB. I hope to conduct a web-based questionnaire with a representative cross section of ETB FET adult learners on both full-time and part-time courses. This will be followed by a purposeful selection of 16 interview participants 8 from part-time and 8 from full-time provision, with an equal split between the 2 ETBs. The online questionnaire will be anonymous, participants will not be asked to disclose their name or ETB. I will not be collecting or retaining any information about their identity. Those who complete the online questionnaire will be asked to indicate if they would be interested in participating in the interview which will last approximately one hour. The decision to participate in the research will be at the discretion of the learner. They may refuse to take part in the study at any time.

If you are willing to allow me to conduct my research in MSLETB and CDET B I can provide information regarding the research to your Director of FET and arrange an information session/sheet for tutors, coordinators, managers and learners regarding the research. I will provide the link to the research questions and agree a timeline for the learners to complete the questionnaire, the questionnaire takes approximately 10 minutes to complete.

If you require more detail about the research or the process let me know. I would be very grateful for your assistance with this research, but I will understand if you are not in a position to do so.

Kind regards

Fiona Maloney

Appendix H Correspondence to ETB Directors of FET

Dear colleague,

I am completing a dissertation as part of my Dublin City University Professional Doctorate in Education. My research topic is Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner?

I would be grateful if you would encourage participation in this research study and make the link below available to the adult learners, those aged 25 or over, within your ETB within the following programme areas:

Full-time Courses	Part-time Courses
PLC	Adult Literacy
VTOS	Skills for Work
Specific Skills Training	Community Education

I have included the following detail in relation to the research and the research process:

1. Research information
2. Research consent
3. Details regarding the web-based questionnaire.

I am available to meet with you and/or your learners with regard to this research. If you wish to meet me in order to answer any questions in relation to any aspect of this research process or if you would like to have me available to meet with learners to support and assist in the dissemination process of the web-based questionnaire, please contact me by telephone on 087-1322831 or by email at fiona.maloney@etbi.ie

I am grateful of your support and cooperation with this research process

Yours faithfully

Fiona Maloney



Research information regarding the web-based questionnaire research "Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner?"

You are being asked to be in a research study to investigate Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner? You were selected as a potential participant because you are engaged on an ETB Further Education and Training course.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of the research is to examine Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner?

The research will investigate the profile of FET adult learners who engage in FET and the key reasons learners choose to engage in a Further Education and Training course. Recent FET strategies and evaluations have profiled and critiqued FET provision however, little research has been conducted that explores the motivations of the 220,000 learners that engage in FET learning annually. The capture and value of the learner voice is named as a priority action in the FET Strategy. Supporting and including the voice of the learner is both necessary and valuable as we continue to develop the FET sector. The learner's own personal experience and motivations provides important information that can be used to improve service and policies. Furthermore, it is important that adults returning to education are consulted about the type of education and training they need, as well as the support they require to complete the courses on offer. This research will provide a clear profile of the reasons adult learners gave for pursuing a Further Education and Training course and identify areas for Further Education and Training providers to consider for the enhancement of Further Education and Training.

Description of the Research Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete a web-based questionnaire which will take approximately ten minutes to complete. You may also indicate your willingness to participate in an interview which will last approximately sixty minutes to explore the research question in more detail.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Research

There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks. You will be asked to disclose your reasons for choosing the ETB Further Education and Training course and what influenced you in making the decision about your course.

Benefits of Being in the Research

The benefits of participation is the opportunity to influence future ETB Further Education and Training course design and learner supports. The study also provides you with the opportunity to identify what influences learners in their course choices.

Confidentiality

I will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity, course, or ETB. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file for thirteen months, up to and including the date of the court of examiners in DCU, thereafter they will be destroyed. Only I and my supervisors will have access to the raw data. Recorded information will only be accessed by the researcher and will be deleted when all other records associated with this research are destroyed. I will not include any information in any report that may be published that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments

You will receive no payment/reimbursement for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this research is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the research *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the researcher. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the questionnaire at any point during the process.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the research at any time feel free to contact me, at fiona.maloney@etbi.ie or by telephone at 087 132283. If you like, a summary of the results of the research will be sent to you. If you wish to report a concern in relation to any aspect of this research, please contact notify Dr. Shivaun O'Brien or Dr Jane O'Kelly, at shivaun.obrien@dcu.ie or jane.okelly@dcu.ie

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie



Information for programme delivery managers, co-Ordinator and staff regarding the competition of the web-based questionnaire as part of Ed D. Dublin City University research "Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner?"

I would be grateful if you would encourage participation in this research study and make the link below available to the adult learners, those aged 25 or over, within your ETB within the following programme areas:

Full-time Courses	Part-time Courses
PLC	Adult Literacy
VTOS	Skills for Work
Specific Skills Training	Community Education

The questionnaire can be completed as part of programme provision or independently by learners in their own time. **The deadline for completion is October 11th 2019.** Please note once the link is opened, the questionnaire **MUST** be completed in that one sitting.

- Respondents can change their answers on any questionnaire page until the questionnaire is complete.
- Answers cannot be changed after the questionnaire has been completed.
- Questionnaires can only be completed once, from the same device.

Web-based questionnaire link:

[Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner?](#)

I am available to meet with you and/or your learners with regard to this research. If You wish to meet me in order to answer any questions in relation to any aspect of this research process or if you would like to have me available to meet with learners to support and assist in the dissemination process of the web-based questionnaire, please contact me by telephone on 087-1322831 or by email at fiona.maloney@etbi.ie

Appendix I Consent to participate in an interview as part of Ed D.



Information regarding consent to participate in a web-based questionnaire as part of Ed D. Dublin City University research "Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner?"

Research consent

Research participants will be asked to indicate that they have read and understood the information provided at the start of the web-based questionnaire. The following questions will be displayed and each research participant will be required to provide a Yes or No answer for each one.

Please complete the following (tick Yes or No for each question)

- | | |
|---|--------|
| I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me) | Yes/No |
| I understand the information provided | Yes/No |
| I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study | Yes/No |
| I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions | Yes/No |
| I consent to participate in this research project. | |

If "No" is provided as an answer to any of the questions they will not be used in the research.



**Dublin City University Professional Doctorate in Education
Consent to participate in web-based questionnaire for Ed. D.**

Researcher: Fiona Maloney
ETBI Director of Further Education and Training
Contact details: fiona.maloney@etbi.ie

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study to investigate Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner? You were selected as a potential participant because you are engaged on an ETB Further Education and Training course. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of the research is to examine Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner? The research will investigate the profile of FET adult learners who engage in FET and the key reasons learners choose to engage in a Further Education and Training course. Recent FET strategies and evaluations have profiled and critiqued FET provision however, little research has been conducted that explores the motivations of the 220,000 learners that engage in FET learning annually. The capture and value of the learner voice is named as a priority action in the FET Strategy. Supporting and including the voice of the learner is both necessary and valuable as we continue to develop the FET sector. The learner's own personal experience and motivations provides important information that can be used to improve service and policies. Furthermore, it is important that adults returning to education are consulted about the type of education and training they need, as well as the support they require to complete the courses on offer. This research will provide a clear profile of the reasons adult learners gave for pursuing a Further Education and Training course and identify areas for Further Education and Training providers to consider for the enhancement of Further Education and Training.

Description of the Research Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete a web-based questionnaire which will take approximately ten minutes to complete. You may also indicate your willingness to participate in an interview which will last approximately sixty minutes to explore the research question in more detail.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Research

There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks. You will be asked to disclose your reasons for choosing the ETB Further Education and Training course and what influenced you in making the decision about your course.

Benefits of Being in the Research

The benefits of participation is the opportunity to influence future ETB Further Education and Training course design and learner supports. The study also provides you with the opportunity to identify what influences learners in their course choices.

Confidentiality

I will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity, course, or ETB. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file for thirteen months, up to and including the date of the court of examiners in DCU, thereafter they will be destroyed. Only I and my supervisors will have access to the raw data. Recorded information will only be accessed by the researcher and will be deleted when all other records associated with this research are destroyed. I will not include any information in any report that may be published that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments

You will receive no payment/reimbursement for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this research is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the research *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the researcher. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the questionnaire at any point during the process.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the research at any time feel free to contact me, at fiona.maloney@etbi.ie or by telephone at 087 132283. If you like, a summary of the results of the research will be sent to you. If you wish to report a concern in relation to any aspect of this research, please contact notify Dr. Shivaun O'Brien or Dr Jane O'Kelly, appointed supervisors at shivaun.obrien@dcu.ie or jane.okelly@dcu.ie If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and

Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

Participant – please complete the following (tick Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)

Yes/No

I understand the information provided

Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study

Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions

Yes/No

Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Yes/No



**Dublin City University Professional Doctorate in Education
Consent to participate in an interview as part of Ed D.**

Title of study: Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner?

Researcher: Fiona Maloney
ETBI Director of Further Education and Training
Contact details: fiona.maloney@etbi.ie

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study to investigate Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner? You were selected as a potential participant because you are engaged on an ETB Further Education and Training course. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of the research is to examine Who is the Further Education and Training adult learner? The research aims to establish a profile of learners who engage in FET and the key reasons learners choose to engage in a Further Education and Training course. Recent FET strategies and evaluations have profiled and critiqued FET provision however, little research has been conducted that explores the motivations of the 220,000 learners that engage in FET learning annually. The capture and value of the learner voice is named as a priority action in the FET Strategy. Supporting and including the voice of the learner is both necessary and valuable as we continue to develop the FET sector. The learner's own personal experience and motivations provides important information that can be used to improve service and policies. Furthermore, it is important that adults returning to education are consulted about the type of education and training they need, as well as the support they require to complete the courses on offer. This research will provide a clear profile of the reasons learners gave for pursuing a Further Education and Training course and identify areas for Further Education and Training providers to consider for the enhancement of Further Education and Training.

Description of the Research Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in an interview which will last approximately sixty minutes.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Research

There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks. You will be asked to disclose your reasons for choosing the ETB Further Education and Training course, what influenced you in making the decision about your course and your experience of the Further Education and Training course.

Benefits of Being in the Research

The benefits of participation is the opportunity to influence future ETB Further Education and Training course design and learner supports. The study also provides you with the opportunity to identify what influences learners in their course choices.

Confidentiality

I will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity, course, or ETB. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file for thirteen months, up to and including the date of the court of examiners in DCU, thereafter they will be destroyed. Only I and my supervisors will have access to the raw data. Recorded information will only be accessed by the researcher and will be deleted when all other records associated with this research are destroyed. I will not include any information in any report that may be published that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments

You will receive no payment/reimbursement for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this research is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the research *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the researcher. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the focus group interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the research at any time feel free to contact me, at fiona.maloney@etbi.ie or by telephone at 087 132283. If you like, a summary of the results of the research will be sent to you. If you wish to report a concern in relation to any aspect of this research, please contact notify Dr. Shivaun O'Brien or Dr Jane O'Kelly,

appointed supervisors at shivaun.obrien@dcu.ie or jane.okelly@dcu.ie If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)

Yes/No

I understand the information provided

Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study

Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions

Yes/No

I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped

Yes/No

Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participants Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Date: _____

Appendix J Interview Questions

Introduction and consent

- Welcome and introductions
- Completion of consent form

Motivations and Influencers on decision to engage in FET

- Why did you apply to join an ETB Further Education and Training course?
- What was your main motivation for joining the course?
- Who did you discuss your application to join the Further Education and Training course with?
- Did they influence your decision?
- Were you encouraged to pursue a Further Education and Training course and, if so, by whom?
- Are you happy with your choice of course?
- Would you encourage other people to do a further education training course?
- Where did you hear about your course?
- Did you know people applying to the same ETB Further Education and Training course as you?
- How do you think Further Education and Training is viewed by people?

Appendix K Interview Transcripts

Interviewee 1-11

Researcher:

Good morning Interviewee 1 thank you for agreeing to do the interview with me today it should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will be taking some notes and recording the interview. Is that ok with you?

Interviewee 1:

Yes

Researcher:

I have an information sheet here that provides you with information on the interview and the interview process I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to read it and ask any questions that you might have, if you are happy with the content I will ask you to then sign the form providing your written consent to engage in this interview.

Interviewee 1:

That is fine.

Researcher:

Where did you hear about the course?

Interviewee 1:

I am doing a specific skills training course I knew about as I have always wanted to do it, I got on this one through my employer. I read up on the course and then spoke with my employer and the apprenticeship advisor in the ETB for advice.

Researcher:

Were you familiar with further education and training courses before you started this one?

Interviewee 1:

I heard about them as secondary school, but I started late. I'm 25. I was aware of further education and training courses before and I knew further education and training could help you get a higher education course if you did not get enough points to get the course you wanted.

Researcher:

Why did you decide to do this further education training course?

Interviewee 1:

I was fed up with what I was doing and I wanted to further myself and have the opportunity to travel abroad with a qualification which is why I choose this course.

Researcher:

Are you happy with your choice of course?

Interviewee 1:

Yes, very happy.

Researcher:

Were you in contact with DEASP or Intreo before you commenced your course?
Were they involved in your decision to go on the course?

Interviewee 1:

I was on jobseekers payment, but I wanted to do an apprenticeship, I had been promised an apprenticeship, but I got let down which is why I was on the Jobseekers. Because I was on Jobseekers, I had to speak with DEASP on my course choice when I explained what I wanted to do and I had an employer who agreed to support me to go this route.

Researcher:

What was your main motivation for joining the course? What motivated you to look for the apprenticeship, was it the qualification?

Interviewee 1:

I always wanted to do this course to have a skill and the qualification they were my biggest motivation and I wanted a job that I could travel with.

Researcher:

Did the motivation to do the course come from yourself or was it family members or other people?

Interviewee 1:

There was no pressure from family or friends, but I saw friends who had qualifications who could travel and I wanted that for myself, the motivation came from myself. I knew I wanted the opportunities so that's why I started.

Researcher:

Who did you discuss your application to join the Further Education and Training course with?

Interviewee 1:

I discussed it with my parents and partner. Doing the course meant I would be on less money. It represented a pay cut for me, but they were all supportive for me to do the course.

Researcher:

Did the opportunities presented by doing the course outweigh the realities of the pay cut and reduced money while you were doing the course?

Interviewee 1:

You have to look at what it will do for you in the long run, you can be down when you see your friends going out and that but in the long run, I will be better off. I am in year 2 now and I am back at the same money now with my new employer that I was at when I had to give up the Jobseekers payment to do this course.

Researcher:

Would you encourage other people to do a further education training course?

Interviewee 1:

It is hard when you leave secondary school to know what to do, further education training courses can be 1 or 2 years and help you know what you want to do and they provide you with a skill they are very beneficial.

Researcher:

Do you think that the further education training courses are as having the same quality as higher education courses?

Interviewee 1:

I don't think they are viewed as the same, but I do believe they are valued. They offer the opportunity to learn a skill and they are a great steppingstone if you want to get on a higher education course.

Researcher:

I was interested in what motivated you to do the course, Who influenced you to do the course and if you were happy with your choice. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Interviewee 1 :

Nothing at all.

Interviewee 2 -I2

Researcher:

Hello Interviewee, 2, thank you for agreeing to do the interview with me today it should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will be taking some notes and recording the interview. Is that ok with you?

Interviewee 2:

Yes

Researcher:

I have an information sheet here that provides you with information on the interview and the interview process I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to read it and ask any questions that you might have, if you are happy with the content I will ask you to then sign the form providing your written consent to engage in this interview.

Interviewee 2:

Ok.

Researcher:

Where did you hear about the course you are on?

Interviewee 2:

My brother did it a few years ago before he moved to England, I heard about it from him, so I contacted them in the College as I wanted to get back to work and to work in an office and I knew that course was good from my brother.

Researcher:

You were familiar with further education and training courses before you started this one?

Interviewee 2:

I was aware of them, but I was not sure about all the content. I'm not on a DEASP payment so I did not know if I would be eligible for the course, so I went to the College to talk to them and they said I would be eligible, so I went and did it.

Researcher:

Did you discuss your application to join the Further Education and Training course with anyone?

Interviewee 2:

I did discuss it with my partner at home as I am a parent of 3 small children. The ETB did tell me that even though I was not on a DEASP payment I could still get free childcare in the local creche because of the course I was on. I spoke to the creche and I told them I might be doing the course so the creche told me I could get childcare for all 3 children for a small amount each week.

Researcher:

Did you feel that you were supported by your family and friends to engage in the course?

Interviewee 2:

I definitely was at home for four years now with the children before that I was working full time, I'd been working since I was 16, I was always working until I was at home with children. It's nice to be at home for them but at the same time it's great to get back to work because I'm not in receipt of any social payment. Financially it's difficult. The youngest child is now in the creche so I kind of Figured it is the time I would get back to work to do something. I didn't want to go back to my old job. It was grand, but the hours are long and you have to work weekends and holidays. So, I didn't want to work in that area with the hours, late evenings and Christmas. It was very difficult for me with small children. I wanted to go back to work, but I just didn't want to be in that kind of job again. So, I thought an office job might be the way to go and I really needed to further my education on computers and e-mail and excel and I wanted to have the skills to work in an office.

Researcher:

Was the main motivation for doing the course?

Interviewee 2:

To upskill and get employment because I'm fully qualified in a different profession and I worked in a pharmacy and I was very good at it but it's hard work and you are working with the public all the time and it is time consuming. The hours are quite long and everything and I just felt I was older now and I just didn't really want to go back into that kind of work. So, I thought this course would be a great way of learning a new skill and I need to improve my CV and hopefully it would work for me and get me in the direction I wanted to go in.

Researcher:

Did you know people applying to the same ETB Further Education and Training course as you?

Interviewee 2:

Some of them Yes. It's a small town. So, you always meet people that you know. So yeah, I did. I knew most of them and then the others I got to know very well and we all got on really well because it's a nice small class. And you know most people

know each other anyway. So, you just kind everyone you know it's lovely, helpful and nice.

Researcher:

Do you find it difficult to juggle the roles you have?

Interviewee 2:

It's one of the many roles I think when you're a parent that's the most important thing. If my baby was unsettled in the creche concerned me if he had not been happy or settled it would have swayed my decision to do the course. I was more concerned about him and the creche and worried if would be okay or would he miss me. I think if he had not been ok in the creche I would have stayed home with him for another while longer , but that wasn't the case. He was happy so I was happy.

Researcher:

Were you encouraged to pursue a Further Education and Training course and, if so, by whom?

Interviewee 2:

Well, I have to say I spoke with the person that runs the course because my brother was on the course with her before, I had met her a few times through my brother. She's very approachable. She's very nice and kind so I spoke to her privately first to ask her what my options were. She made me believe that I can actually do this. It was her that told me about the creche and that and I had a lot of doubt and when you're at home for four years it is an awful long time and to take that step out is a bit scary and she was absolutely brilliant. And as I said she just gave me options that I didn't even know I had like with the creche, she has been brilliant. She's so understanding if the children are ever sick or a child has a doctor's appointment or a hospital appointment there's no problem. She completely understands that. There's great flexibility which is important when you're a parent because you do worry about these things when you're going back to work or go back to education you know because the kids do come first. She has also given me options for after the course and she's given me so much advice about what to do. She told me to register with public jobs and other options like that. You know I never heard about them before, I didn't know what that was and I know even when I'm finished of course I can still go back and ask for something or ask her a question about something or whatever you know she's completely available she's always there for everybody. She is so very approachable.

Researcher:

What was your main motivation for joining the course?

Interviewee 2:

I made the decision myself. My partner works as well and he's actually doing a college course through his work, he's continuously upskilling and everything as well. And you know I see him succeed and I see him always developing so I thought to myself then OK it's nice to be at home with your children and you'll never get

those years back again and I have reared them well. I feel that now they're bigger, it's time for me now. I'm 31 now and the kids are getting on a bit and it's my time now. I need to get back and earn money. I don't have to spend any money. I get it from my partner for shopping and for the kids. I can't go on trips with my friends and go out with my friends and stuff like that. So, I kind of thought now it's my time. I spent my 20s with the babies and now they're bigger. I felt it was my time now so the decision and motivation to do the course came from me.

Researcher:

Are you happy with your choice of course?

Interviewee 2:

Yes. Because I know I'm learning new stuff all the time and I know that it is flexible so if the kids need me, I'm there with them. I'm definitely happy with my decision. I have no regrets whatsoever. The support from the tutors is better than I thought it would be. And they've been more supportive than I thought they'd ever be. So, it's great. It's exceeded my expectations.

Researcher:

What was your main motivation for joining the course? Was it to upskill and get employment?

Interviewee 2:

Yes, that's exactly what it is. Do up my CV, do a few interviews and do whatever I have to do. When I am fully finished with the course, I will be out and getting a new job hopefully this time next year I'll be in full time employment.

Researcher:

How do you think Further Education and Training is viewed by people?

Interviewee 2:

I think somebody in a university or college, or something is looked upon as being far smarter. I don't think it gets the recognition that it deserves or anything like that. And I think they're kind of viewed as a steppingstone to something else. Whereas a college course is viewed as that's your career that's what you're qualified in and you're going to be some sort of a profession or have a certain type of a job. I'm not on social welfare and I'm the only one in the class who's not, I think a lot of the time it's viewed that you go on these courses and it's just full of people who are on social welfare and they're just have to be there and that they don't want this job. A lot of people view it that way, of course I don't. I don't think people realize either that these courses are available to them even if you're not on social welfare that you can still do this course. I've said it to a few friends of mine who are working in the home or who have recently left jobs. Look up these courses, you can do whatever you want to do. You don't have to be on social welfare, or you don't have to have any other requirements. You can just apply and hopefully get the place to do these courses.

Researcher:

I was interested in what motivated you to do the course, Who influenced you to do the course and if you were happy with your choice. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Interviewee 2 :

No, I have covered everything.

Interviewee 3 -I3

Researcher:

Hello Interviewee, 3, thank you for agreeing to do the interview with me today it should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will be taking some notes and recording the interview. Is that ok with you?

Interviewee 3:

Yes

Researcher:

I have an information sheet here that provides you with information on the interview and the interview process I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to read it and ask any questions that you might have, if you are happy with the content I will ask you to then sign the form providing your written consent to engage in this interview.

Interviewee 3:

Yes, that's fine.

Researcher:

Where did you hear about the course you are on?

Interviewee 3:

2 years ago, I did a different course in the same College and I loved the tutors, I wanted to do another course and I looked up courses and found this one on the internet and it was close to me and in the same College, so I was happy to do it.

Researcher:

Did somebody prompt or motivate you to do the course?

Interviewee 3:

No, but when I was young, I always wanted to be a nurse and work in a hospital, but I ended up doing business administration which I did not like so I decided to leave my job and re-skill in the care area. I love this course because it gives me the skills to do the job I always wanted to do. My goal is to work in palliative care in the future, my dream is to get into the HSE, I would like to be a paramedic or nurse. I have already got a part-time job through this course. Because of my work placement.

Researcher:

Did you discuss your application to join the Further Education and Training course with anyone?

Interviewee 3:

I discussed with my spouse who supports it which is great. I like to look after people and the course was ideal.

Researcher:

Did you feel that you were supported by your family and friends to engage in the course?

Interviewee 3:

Very supportive, my spouse was very supportive and said you take the time to do the course you don't have to work just go and study. put your time into studying. I like to work myself, but they were very supportive.

Researcher:

Do you find it difficult to juggle the social roles you have?

Interviewee 3:

It is a full time course and as a full time student and you have lots of other roles. Being a student is only one of my many roles. I also work but I like being busy. I have always been busy and I love the course and the pressure is doable because the teachers are so good in a college they basically help you out with anything you can't do and they'll take their time extra to make sure you have everything done correctly so that's why it's that's why I love this college and the course, it is brilliant

Researcher:

Were you encouraged or influenced by others to pursue a Further Education and Training course, and if so, by whom?

Interviewee 3:

When I was at school, teachers advised me to do nursing because of my nature probably and my spouse says the same. I am a caring and nurturing person which influenced this decision.

Researcher:

How do you think Further Education and Training is viewed by people?

Interviewee 3:

It is viewed very well; Absolutely I chose not to go to Higher Education. I think more people should go to FET and see how great it is. I was thinking to myself more people need to know to do their nursing or other courses through FET, it is great .Like I was saying I don't want to finish studying now I want to continue. I don't want to leave the place because it's so good and the teaching is of a high level. The level of information they gave you is way up there at least Level 7. I tell everyone and I am encouraging everybody to join FET and I tell them it's never too late.

Researcher:

What was your main motivation for joining the course?

Interviewee 3:

As I said I did other courses and I was working but I was not happy I did not enjoy it. I did some childcare which I loved. I love nursing and the care profession. I love taking care of other people, older people and at home and in nursing homes, who simply don't have family around them, that idea really makes me sad so in a way I love to be there for those people and give them as much attention and care as possible, for them to be loved and looked after. So, I'm just doing my little bit in my community. I always felt bad that older people could be so alone, not all of them but many of them when they don't have relatives around or simply, they live far away. Yes, that was the main motivator for me. English is not my first language and I was very worried about learning and studying and how to cope with big fancy words. The teachers are really good. They made sure I could understand everything .

Researcher:

I was interested in what motivated you to do the course, Who influenced you to do the course and if you were happy with your choice. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Interviewee 3 :

Not everything has been covered.

Interviewee 4 -I4

Researcher:

Hello Interviewee, 4, thank you for agreeing to do the interview with me today it should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will be taking some notes and recording the interview. Is that ok with you?

Interviewee 4:

Ok

Researcher:

I have an information sheet here that provides you with information on the interview and the interview process I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to read it and ask any questions that you might have, if you are happy with the content I will ask you to then sign the form providing your written consent to engage in this interview.

Interviewee 4:

Yes, ok

Researcher:

Where did you hear about the course you are on?

Interviewee 4:

When I came to Ireland, I had a friend mention to me that there was a course that I could do here in this centre, it was for Jobseekers. I quit my job because I did not like it and I could not progress in it. So, I did some research because I wanted to find out what courses were available to help me. I could not do the Springboard courses then I found this one and I was very happy to do it. Actually, I worked quite close to the centre and I used to see people going by bus, but I had no clue about how it worked or who could go there.

Researcher:

Did you discuss your application to join the Further Education and Training course with anyone?

Interviewee 4:

I asked my spouse's opinion and to see if we would afford it. Because I wasn't sure if I would get a job seeker. So, it's a full time course. I already quit my job so taking the course meant I would not be looking for a job for a while. I thought I might get something part time but that is not easy to find. But we agreed I would do the course.

Researcher:

Did you feel that you were supported by your family and friends to engage in the course?

Interviewee 4:

Yes, my spouse and my friends were great. My family and friends are not that into studying that much but my mother was very supportive, but I knew I wanted to do this anyway. When they heard I got in and that I decided I wanted to do the course nobody tried to convince me not to do it.

Researcher:

Were you encouraged or influenced by others to pursue a Further Education and Training course, and if so, by whom?

Interviewee 4:

Family asked me if I could afford it. I had been called for a cleaning job and I knew I wanted to do something more and something better, so I decided to get onto the course. I was ready to do it. Life is expensive and I was ready to do the course to get a good job. I can do other things as a hobby.

Researcher: ,

How do you think Further Education and Training is viewed by people?

Interviewee 4:

I don't think they take it as seriously as Higher Education, they can have a vision that is a lazy route but that is not correct. Some people think you could get the training in a job at work, but they forget that they are already in the area, but I would never get called for an interview because I don't have the course or qualification or the experience. You can get the lucky ones who can get into the workplace without experience or qualifications.

Researcher:

What was your main motivation for joining the course?

Interviewee 4:

It was a combination. I wanted to get skills and a qualification. I wanted to work in an office, but I wasn't ready to work in the office as I did not have the skills. This is also a career change. I did a College course before in Interior Design, Where I live is very far away from jobs or interviews, for work in that area. When I did get some work, it was always very far away from my house and when you don't have transport to get you there, it was very complicated for me and I could not afford transport. So, I decided that this course would be great because I would have a wide range of choices. It's like it doesn't matter where you live in the country, you're going to get something with this course. I am looking forward to getting employment. That's my main focus. I can't stay in studying; I want to study but I want to be at

work. When I started the course, I was afraid of the money because when I applied to the course I didn't know if I would get a training allowance which would still be much less than what I was getting in my previous job. I was afraid of how I would manage and I was afraid of my level of English. I speak English but it wasn't very good when I started. I was afraid that I would not feel comfortable or not and actually everybody's very patient and speaks so well and I have no problem. For me getting a qualification is very important .

Researcher:

Are you happy with your choice of course?

Interviewee 4:

Yes, I am. I really wanted to change and change my job direction and I think I have chosen a good course and centre, it's a good direction I'm going in. I'm very happy with my choice. Of course, it is good and has a fast pace, so you see the results. I have big expectations for myself.

Researcher:

Would you encourage other people to do a further education training course?

Interviewee 4:

I would. I think it is a great opportunity. Rather than being in a job that's not what you want or like. I used to work in a deli before and there was no opportunity to progress and I think that you should progress. There are always jobs that people have to do, but if it's productive or a job you like then FET gives you the opportunity to do something else. I hope to do more courses in the future. I have applied already to do another course; it is so good I am so excited. Definitely based on my experience knowledge is never too much. Sometimes you have to change things in your life or where you live or your needs. It is easier when you open the options for yourself.

Researcher:

I was interested in what motivated you to do the course, Who influenced you to do the course and if you were happy with your choice. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Interviewee 4 :

Not all are fine.

Interviewee 5 - I5

Researcher:

Good morning Interviewee 5 thank you for agreeing to do the interview with me today it should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will be taking some notes and recording the interview. Is that ok with you?

Interviewee 5:

Yes

Researcher:

I have an information sheet here that provides you with information on the interview and the interview process I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to read it and ask any questions that you might have, if you are happy with the content I will ask you to then sign the form providing your written consent to engage in this interview.

Interviewee 5:

OK.

Researcher:

Where did you hear about the course?

Interviewee 5:

I knew the College as my son attended it after he left school, so I knew about it from him. It was also in the newspaper; it was easy to get information about the course.

Researcher:

Why did you decide to do this further education training course?

Interviewee 5:

I looked after my dad before he died, I provided care for him and then for my mom before she passed away. It was something I never thought I'd actually be able to do, I always thought oh no I can't do that job but when you're in the situation you have to do it. I realized actually I could do it right and enjoyed it. So, I thought OK maybe I will do a course in this area to help me and get a qualification.

Researcher:

Are you happy with your choice of course?

Interviewee 5:

Yes, 100%

Researcher:

What was your main motivation for joining the course?

Interviewee 5:

I worked in Childcare for 25 years and I think I had just reached the end of the road with it. I had had enough. I and it was all just paperwork and not about the children anymore. And I had always said I wanted to be a nurse. I never thought I could do it, work with patients and do the things that you need to as a nurse. What I tried it then I knew it was for me and I knew I could do what I needed to do. It was a change of a career and change of direction. Getting employment is the main motivating factor for me. I am also thinking about progressing onto Higher Education to complete my nursing, that is definitely an option for me.

Researcher:

Who did you discuss your application to join the Further Education and Training course with?

Interviewee 5:

My spouse and family, they were very supportive of my decision.

Researcher:

Would you encourage other people to do a further education training course?

Interviewee 5:

Yes definitely.

Researcher:

Do you think that the further education training courses are viewed as having the same quality as higher education courses?

Interviewee 5:

I would say they are better; the tutors have more time to spend with the students. Everyone on my course is enjoying it because of the interactions with the tutors as they know everyone, the smaller classes help. I was in the RTC years ago and it was not as friendly, the teachers were not as friendly or helpful. This is a big factor in helping me make the decision to continue with studying.

Researcher:

Do you find it difficult to juggle the social roles you have?

Interviewee 5:

It is one of many roles, but I think because my family is older. I'm lucky that I can give my time to be a student. I think for younger learners the balance of student life and family life would be difficult enough. My kids are older and my spouse has a good job so I can afford to do the course.

Researcher:

I was interested in what motivated you to do the course, Who influenced you to do the course and if you were happy with your choice. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Interviewee 5 :

I primarily motivated the decision to do the course. My work with community alert and dealing with the older people influenced the decision also. I wish I had done the course sooner; it is great.

Interviewee 6 – I6

Researcher:

Good evening Interviewee 6 thank you for agreeing to do the interview with me today it should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will be taking some notes and recording the interview. Is that ok with you?

Interviewee 6:

Yes

Researcher:

I have an information sheet here that provides you with information on the interview and the interview process I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to read it and ask any questions that you might have, if you are happy with the content I will ask you to then sign the form providing your written consent for the interview.

Interviewee 6:

OK.

Researcher:

Where did you hear about the course?

Interviewee 6:

Well, I was a carer for my mom for the best part of six years it would have been seven years coming up next year. I was my mother carer and she decided at very short notice that she didn't want me caring for her anymore. So, I was a bit like a lost soul because six or seven years out of the workplace is a long time. And the unfortunate thing about being on carer's allowance is that you are not allowed to do any major schemes or take work, or you know obviously not for obvious reasons. That kind of threw me then when I was a bit down in the dumps because I'm not one to sit on my laurels, I'm always a busy bee. So, I was in the local cafe here and I met a lady who was working in the local College. She said you know what you should know now that you have time on your hands. You should come to the college and check out the photography course, So I did. It was an amazing course I started late. I think I was about three weeks behind everybody, but it was the best time that I've had in years. It was so beneficial to me.

Researcher:

Are you happy with your choice of course?

Interviewee 6:

Yes, the content was amazing. For somebody who had left school in the 80s it was a bit daunting initially but incredibly interesting at the same time once you got your brain around having to work for itself again .

Researcher:

Who did you discuss your application to join the Further Education and Training course with?

Interviewee 6:

Not really because I would have been the eldest of nine children, so I was brought up to be busy not doing nothing. The issue with having too much time on your hands is that you could get down in the dumps and especially if you're living in rural areas. Even the travel to the course was not a problem for me. I also had an interest in the course content. I think learning is always easier when you've got that initial interest.

Researcher:

Why did you decide to do this further education training course?

Interviewee 6:

It was to secure employment. It had been six or seven years since I had worked outside of the home. The materials that were in that course and the amount of confidence boosting that they gave me I can't speak for everybody else, but they certainly gave me and I gained so much from the course. The lady I met encouraged me to do the course. She knew me and she knew that I had a huge interest in the course. She was definitely the trigger that I actually started the course. The good experience I had there would motivate me to do it again, it is like getting a set of tools that you always have, you can use them at any time.

Researcher:

Would you encourage other people to do a further education training course?

Interviewee 6:

Yes, and I would do it all over again. The college and the tutors are so good. When you go to the College will not see a happier bunch of young people and older ones! Everyone chooses to be there. Or they might have tried something else that wasn't for them. You can see everyone is happy doing what they're doing. You know there's a level of pressure involved in learning, but they all seem very happy. I was lucky enough to meet a student from last year and she was telling me that she worked with the HSE for years and now she's doing something completely different as a direct result of her course.

Researcher:

Do you think that the further education training courses are viewed as having the same quality as higher education courses?

Interviewee 6:

I never did a higher education course before; I wasn't one of these people who attended third level education. So, this was all very new for me. I think that in talking to other students that they would definitely use it as a steppingstone to get into a

third level education. .FET kind of gives you the hunger for more, it gives you the incentive to keep going. FET courses are Priceless, You couldn't put a price on it.

Researcher:

Do you find it difficult to juggle the social roles you have?

Interviewee 6:

I was lucky I only had to focus on learning and being a student.

Researcher:

I was interested in what motivated you to do the course, Who influenced you to do the course and if you were happy with your choice. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Interviewee 6 :

If I had not had the opportunity to do the course I would have missed out. I live in rural Ireland and it was a social outlet and everyone tutors and other students were all so nice. It's the best confidence builder that I've had in years. The whole experience was excellent. It has motivated me to try and look at stuff that I would never have done before.

Interviewee 7 - I7

Researcher:

Good evening Interviewee 7 thank you for agreeing to do the interview with me today it should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will be taking some notes and recording the interview. Is that ok with you?

Interviewee 7:

Yes

Researcher:

I have an information sheet here that provides you with information on the interview and the interview process I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to read it and ask any questions that you might have, if you are happy with the content I will ask you to then sign the form providing your written consent to engage in this interview.

Interviewee 7:

Yes.

Researcher:

Where did you hear about the course?

Interviewee 7:

I knew about the course long before I started to live in Ireland because I moved over to Ireland in 2018 and I heard about it already in 2013 2014 when people thought about the course. I tried to find a job, but I could not get one that matched up with my qualifications. And then I had the possibility to do this course and I'm on the course now. I was a teacher in Austria. I was teaching history geography. I was a schoolteacher

Researcher:

Are you happy with your choice of course?

Interviewee 7:

Very happy.

Researcher:

Did you discuss your application for the Further Education and Training course with?

Interviewee 7:

I discussed it with family with friends and people who had already been on the course and the Intro. Everybody was supportive. Nobody said no that's not a good idea. You should do something else.

Researcher:

Why did you decide to do this further education training course?

Interviewee 7:

I always had an interest in the topic. When we decided to move over to Ireland this course actually happened to be a perfect opportunity for me to learn so much more about the topic. I was also considering that I would start a business to bring people over from Europe to Ireland the island that I learned to love for the last 20 years. I have had a very interesting life now in education. I was a teacher and worked for the European Council for education in Europe. When I moved over to Ireland, I decided I would like to set up a business where I can bring students and young people over to Ireland . I hope to set up the business in the near future when I finish my course and I know more about my topic. My motivation is intrinsic and my understanding of teaching was always to give my students the possibility to relate to what I'm teaching. Everybody likes to be educated and everybody likes to learn.. Not all school learning helps young people learn.

Researcher:

Would you encourage other people to do a further education training course?

Interviewee 7:

Yes, and I already did , you learn much more than you think including soft skills that go in your favour for employment. I definitely want to encourage people to do FET.

Researcher:

Do you think that the further education training courses are viewed as having the same quality as higher education courses?

Interviewee 7:

I'm an educator so I think every opportunity to be educated or to learn is brilliant. I think that some people might feel it is of a lesser degree because of the Levels the courses are at. But being on the course and talking to the people on the course they have a totally different view of the course. They view it as a very important part of their life, but I think the standing could always be better.

Researcher:

I was interested in what motivated you to do the course, Who influenced you to do the course and if you were happy with your choice. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Interviewee 7 :

I will now be on the course for a year and I won't be able to work so there are many things we can't afford. We have to cut down on certain things. But it's worth it.

There is only one course offered in the country in what I am doing and I know people from other countries interested in this course also. I'm very thankful for the support I get on the course. I'm just happy on the course and I hope to set up my business after finishing the course.

Interviewee 8 - I8

Researcher:

Good morning Interviewee 8 thank you for agreeing to do the interview with me today it should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will be taking some notes and recording the interview. Is that ok with you?

Interviewee 8:

Yes

Researcher:

I have an information sheet here that provides you with information on the interview and the interview process I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to read it and ask any questions that you might have, if you are happy with the content will you sign the form providing your written consent to engage in this interview.

Interviewee 8:

Yes ok.

Researcher:

Where did you hear about the course?

Interviewee 8:

I didn't know a lot about FET before I started. I knew some details about Springboard courses through family and friends. Once I was told about FET, I found it very easy to get information about the course. I'm telling loads of people about FET because I am here now. I found out about FET thorough Intreo if they had not told me I would not have known. They put me forward for this course.

Researcher:

Are you happy with your choice of course?

Interviewee 8:

I am because this is the area of work I want to go into, I was working in a different area and I did not like it. It had gotten toxic. I had been working there for 3 years full-time, I did a course before I was in my last employment.

Researcher:

Who did you discuss your application to join the Further Education and Training course with?

Interviewee 8:

I thought about it first and then I spoke with my parents, siblings and partner. I also did some research on it on-line. The work placement element really swayed me because it was going to be beneficial to me because it would give me the opportunity to experience the actual workplace related to this area of work. With all the new regulations you need to have qualifications and certification because you could be working somewhere for a long time and know the work but if something happened while you might have the experience but if you have no qualifications you could be made redundant. It is important to have the skills and qualification to know how to do a job the right way.

Researcher:

Why did you decide to do this further education training course?

Interviewee 8:

I wanted to learn skills and get a job, because most employers want people to have skills relevant to the job. I did not have the skills for the area of work I want to go into, so I needed the skills I am getting now. I got rejection letters from workplaces and employers where I had tried to get employment, because I did not have the required skills or experience relevant to the job.

I'm here for myself and to look after my future. My partner also said a course would be good to help me secure my future and to get skills. I did try to get a job in order to learn the skills if someone would take a chance on me but that didn't happen. He was a big influence in a good way. I want to get skills to get a job so we can have a future, a mortgage etc. We can't do lots of other things right now because I don't have money because I am studying but that is ok it is not forever. When I left my last job, my confidence was very affected, I had been bubbly and outgoing and the experiences from that placement were not good and did affect me. I did not want to go back to feeling like that. My confidence and self-esteem has improved. I knew I could not go back to myself as I had just after I had left the job, and this course has been great for me in that regard.

Researcher:

Were you encouraged or supported to pursue a Further Education and Training course and, if so, by whom?

Interviewee 8:

The Intreo Case Officer and my family, friends and partner were very supportive and I really liked the course especially the work placement. My family and partner were great also very supportive of my decision but also supportive of me as I have don't have money to do things or go out with them and they make allowances for me and help me out They don't put pressure on me to have money for things if they did I think I would feel that I would have to leave and get a job, so that I would just have money rather than doing this course to get the skills in order to get the job I want and earn good money and have a future.

The people here, the tutors and the others on the course also motivate me to keep going on this course and to go on more and do more courses and learn more skills.

Researcher:

Would you encourage other people to do a further education training course?

Interviewee 8:

Yes, particularly as you can upskill through FET, my sister is in a job and I am learning stuff she wants to know how to do but she never learned how.

Researcher:

Do you think that the further education training courses are viewed as having the same quality as higher education courses?

Interviewee 8:

I was not keen on coming back to College, but I definitely did not want to go to Higher Education again. They are not viewed the same, I view them as equal do, but other people might not. Some FET courses have a training allowance and some people don't agree with that, they think we are scrounging off the state, but we are getting skills and work out of these courses as we are turned into workers. A lot of the higher education courses don't always result in people getting a job or work.

Researcher:

I was interested in what motivated you to do the course, Who influenced you to do the course and if you were happy with your choice. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Interviewee 8 :

No, I have covered everything.

Interviewee 9 - I9

Researcher:

Good morning Interviewee 9 thank you for agreeing to do the interview with me today it should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will be taking some notes and recording the interview. Is that ok with you?

Interviewee 9:

Yes

Researcher:

I have an information sheet that provides information on the interview and the interview process I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to read it and ask any questions that you might have, if you are happy with the content I will ask you to then sign the form providing your written consent to engage in this interview.

Interviewee 9:

Yes, ok.

Researcher:

Where did you hear about the course?

Interviewee 9:

I worked for 30 years and I was made redundant in June and I had to go to Intreo. The case officer wanted me to do a course. I was going to do a different course but a friend told me about this course and I asked if I could do this one because it was more interesting and it was different. The other course was very similar to what I had been doing in my job for 30 years. This course had started but my case officer got me a place, I started late but I was glad my friend had told me about it.

Researcher:

Were you familiar with further education and training courses before you started?

Interviewee 9:

I was, I worked in a private college before this and some of our learners would have come through the system. I also knew the Intreo Case Officer. I had never been in one of the FET centres before. I find it very different to what I knew, everything was done in class and nothing was done outside of the class.

Researcher:

Are you happy with your choice of course?

Interviewee 9:

Yes, very happy and I am hoping to do more.

Researcher:

Who did you discuss your application to join the Further Education and Training course with?

Interviewee 9:

I discussed it with my family and spouse and a family member who did this course before. I contacted the centre after the case officer got me the place, they gave me all the information about the course and told me I would be fine because I was nervous about starting, it was all new and I didn't know what to expect. They are all so helpful and nice, so different from what my children experienced in higher education. They help us so much

Researcher:

Why did you decide to do this further education training course?

Interviewee 9:

I want to get back into the workforce. I haven't done an interview for 30 years and I want to get qualifications, I have lots of experience but no qualifications. The motivation came from me. I wanted to do it, but now I would not like to let my children see me pull out of it, because that is not what I want them to see. If the course was not for me, I would have said it, but it was I want to see it through. I want qualifications that I don't have. I can go to an interview, but I won't get a job because even though I have experience I have no qualifications. I have huge amounts of experience, but I have no qualification and that is no good to me.

Researcher:

Were you encouraged and supported to pursue a Further Education and Training course and, if so, by whom?

Interviewee 9:

Yes, definitely the family was very supportive. It is a very important motivator for my children too. They see me studying and at College and enjoying it. They are all proud and say fair play for going back after so many years. Money wise we were down a huge amount from me working. It could have been said to me to go out and get work, but it was not, it was to go and do the course and enjoy it.

Researcher:

Would you encourage other people to do a further education training course?

Interviewee 9:

Most certainly, I'm now hoping to come back and do more courses because there are so many opportunities. I am giving out leaflets to other people about courses, there are so many opportunities even part time and evening courses.

Researcher:

Do you think that the further education training courses are viewed as having the same quality as higher education courses?

Interviewee 9:

My offspring have gone into Higher Education one of them left because she did not like it and then went on a FET course that she really liked and is now back in Higher Education and doing what she has found out she wants to do. My other offspring also went to Higher Education and was not happy so is leaving it and going to work for the year. I feel every young person should do a FET course before they decide to do any Higher Education course, I have two children who left Higher Education and left, they are much happier now because they are on the right course and doing the right thing for themselves. I would have loved to have the opportunity to do a course like this, a FET course when I left school, I finished school at 16 and had to get a job. FET courses are not as valued as Higher Ed courses and that is wrong. I am telling people all about them. I don't think it is known that by doing a FET course and getting your 8 distinctions they count as points for CAO. Young people could use this as a route into higher education. It is very hard to get information about FET, once you are in the FET system it is very easy to get information but when you are not in it you can't find it. When I went to Intreo I got the information.

Researcher:

Do you find it difficult to juggle the social roles you have?

Interviewee 9:

I love the course. I may be the oldest in the class and have more expertise, but we are all the same in the class. I have lots to juggle and do but I don't find it hard. The course is full time and I get a lot of the work done here and in class. It is easier than if I had to do the course in the evening.

Researcher:

I was interested in what motivated you to do the course, Who influenced you to do the course and if you were happy with your choice. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Interviewee 9 :

Some of the rules are not reflective of the workplace like docking of money if you are late, the workplace is not like that and it may not be giving some of the young people a true reflection of what would happen in the real workplace. Some people think the only people in FET are jobseekers and that is not true. Lots of very successful people have gone through the FET route FET was referred to as the back door and it is not, it is a ladder, but some people don't know where the first step on the ladder is.

Interviewee 10 – I10

Researcher:

Good morning evening 10 thank you for agreeing to do the interview with me today it should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will be taking some notes and recording the interview. Is that ok with you?

Interviewee 10:

Yes

Researcher:

I have an information sheet here that provides you with information on the interview and the interview process I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to read it and ask any questions that you might have, if you are happy with the content I will ask you to then sign the form providing your written consent to engage in this interview.

Interviewee 10:

Yes, perfect.

Researcher:

Where did you hear about the course?

Interviewee 10:

I am local so I have known about the centre for a long time. It is easy to access. I can walk or cycle. I get the bus at the minute. I did an evening course a few years ago which I enjoyed. I had worked in retail and I found it difficult as you are working with people that can be difficult and I did not like the fact that a lot of the products being sold were being made in countries that were exploiting women and children and negatively affecting the world. I just didn't like it. So, I decided to do a course so that I could go a different route. My CV does not look good. It is a train wreck but now that I have my courses it will close the gaps on my CV. I did always think about coming back but I could not before now. It seemed impossible back then and even now it can seem impossible.

Researcher:

Were you familiar with further education and training courses before you started this one?

Interviewee 10:

I knew adult education was always an option but I never knew that it would be available to me. I didn't have the confidence to go into it until now. I didn't have someone to give me the guidance or advise me on the pathways and I didn't have the confidence to do it. I looked it up many times, but I didn't really know where to start or how to get into it. I felt overwhelmed with the idea of starting something. When my child was young, I did think about going back to do something, but I got

overwhelmed and didn't do it. Personal circumstances impacted also; we don't all start on the same level playing field. I have a disorder in which I manage through sport and exercise rather than medication and that is a lot to take into account when you want to go back to study. Also, when my child was young I didn't have a family support network to mind him so that I could go back and do a course. It did seem difficult; I was a latchkey child growing up and I did not want that for my child, so I suppose it is the right time for me to do this course.

Researcher:

Are you happy with your choice of course?

Interviewee 10:

Yes, very happy and I am hoping to do more, this is a great start.

Researcher:

Who did you discuss your application to join the Further Education and Training course with?

Interviewee 10:

I was with Seetec and they discussed the course with me. The course was not due to start when I was with them and Intreo wanted me to go and get a job whereas Seetec knew I wanted to do this course and that it would be of benefit to me, so they kept my file working until this course started. I do have some concerns with what happens in the Seetec centres there is a lot of room for improvement in how those services are delivered. My child was very supportive, He knew this year would be hard, a rough year just bread and butter as there is no additional money coming in. I did worry at the beginning if I would be able to keep going with the lack of money. The course is 33 hours per week and I could be working those hours but even my child said to me to keep going and to do the course I don't want to leave or drop out. It is hard though I see other people who have personal issues and if their training allowance is docked it would be very easy to drop out of the course. You do need guidance and advice about how to do things and learn things for yourself. I did try to do a course when my child was very young but the travel and commute to the course was very difficult,

Researcher:

Why did you decide to do this further education training course?

Interviewee 10:

The end game is to get a job, in an ideal world I will continue studying but I don't know at the minute. I'm fed up being broke knowing that I am capable of doing so many more things and I want to have something as my CV looks like a train wreck, maybe I'm a train wreck! I know the sports I do has boosted my confidence and before I started I thought I would not be able to do all the parts of the course and when I started and saw so many of the others on the course were very young I did think I won't be able to do it and maybe I'm not as good as I think I am. But it turned out

not to be the case, I get along with the rest of the class and I'm getting on well with the course content. I did raise some issues I had here with the centre when they were docking money for lateness. I think my age was an influence. I can raise an issue and deal with it. The younger ones would be more intimidated to raise issues with the tutors. I wanted to get away from being on the dole and meeting the people in that system, they were not helpful or nice. One of them said to me 'you are not doing anything your child can be proud of'. I was supposed to start on a Tus course, but they did not send over my start dates and it never happened. I did everything I could to try to get it fixed. I even contacted politicians, but they would not fix their errors on my dates. I motivated myself to do this course and it was my decision. I want to be useful to myself, my family and my community.

Researcher:

Were you encouraged and supported to pursue a Further Education and Training course and, if so, by whom?

Interviewee 10:

My family was not great, parental support is not there and I try to make it matter less to me. My partner and friends are great. I do a lot of sports which I find great and opened me up to meet lots of other people and they were all positive towards me and they encouraged me to do things. When I left school, I felt stupid and I remember being humiliated in class at primary and secondary school by teachers being put in a corner or at a desk on my own it were not good it was so bad I just dropped out. I always enjoyed reading and music. I loved reading even though they may not have been the books I was supposed to be reading. Teachers never saw my love of reading and all that turned me off education until now and I'm glad I am back now. Other people believe in me, not my family though I think my friends believe in me more than I believe in myself. My family was not supportive. My partner, son and friends were very supportive and told me to go on and do the course and other courses.

Researcher:

Would you encourage other people to do a further education training course?

Interviewee 10:

Yes, when you are on Social Welfare you can slip off the radar, if I had known things earlier, I would have been here before now. Your family doesn't always help or support you. I have had personal issues and I've gone through a lot in my life and medication and talking is not always the answer to all health issues. I would recommend people do a course where they are always better doing something rather than nothing, it gives a focus and a sense of purpose. It is good to have a challenge, a goal to be tested in everything

Researcher:

Do you think that the further education training courses are viewed as having the same quality as higher education courses?

Interviewee 10:

I know a lot of people who have done degrees and they do not have a great career and many of the courses don't always lead you somewhere. FET is much better and it leads you to work and it has a purpose and a focus.

Researcher:

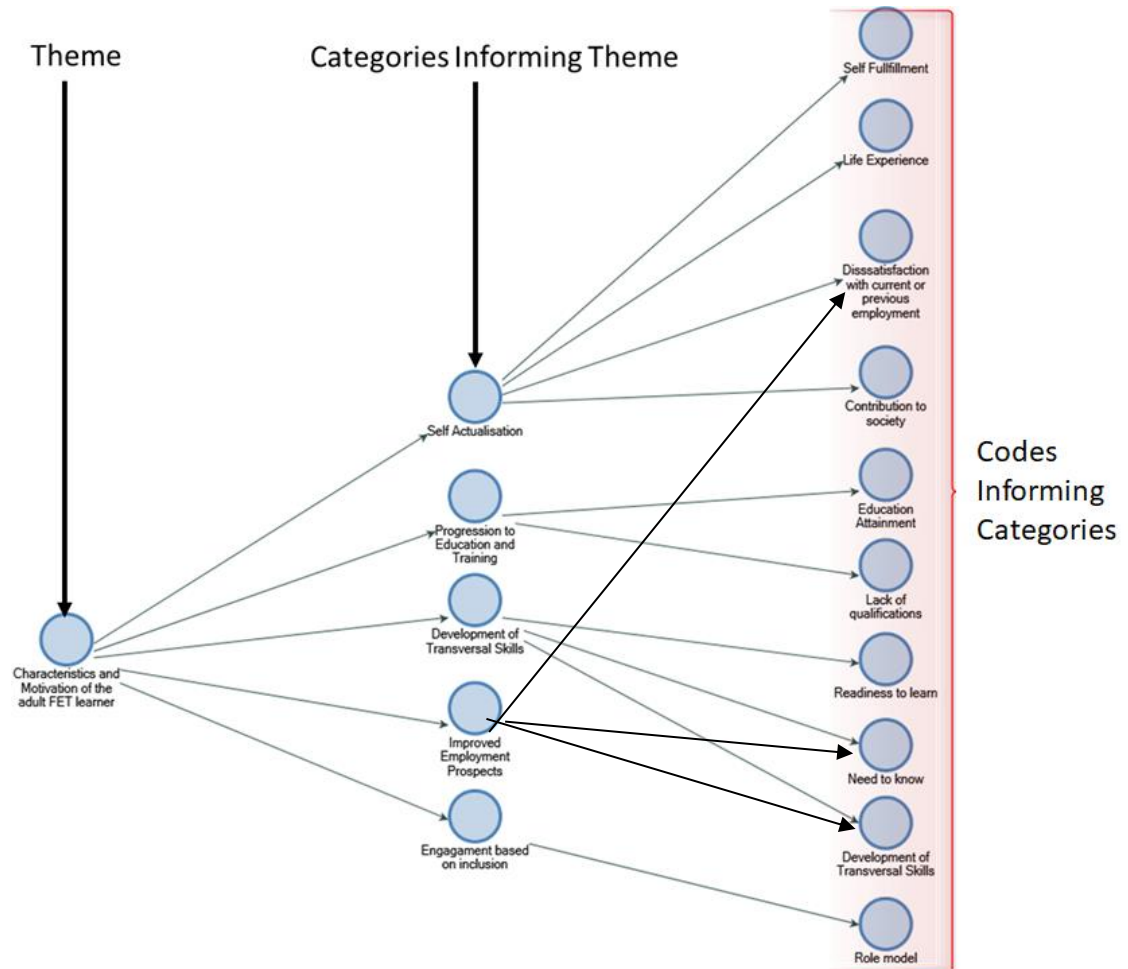
Do you find it difficult to juggle the social roles you have?

Interviewee 10:

Like most women I have a lot of roles, I have care roles with my parents and at home. We make human beings; we raise them and we mind them as they die and society tells us that we have to have a career to be validated. It really feels like that more now than ever and the role of mother seems to be more undervalued now more than ever. My child is the best thing that ever happened to me. I am so proud of him and everything he is doing, studying and working. He is just the best. I am so proud of him. I am one of the older people in the class and you look after the younger ones, the life and work experience I have had all impacts on how you engage in the course.

Appendix L NVIVO Nodes\Coding

⁴ Example of flow from codes to categories to themes



⁴ Codebook – example of process of conceptually mapping codes to categories to themes