**Meeting the Needs of Learners with Disabilities**

**(comprehends Mental Health and Learning Difficulties)**

**in**

**Further Education and Training (FET)**

# Context

2017 sees the 10th anniversary of the opening for signature of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Over those ten years, Ireland has made huge strides towards vindicating the rights of learners with disabilities in our school system and in third-level education but, despite much excellent practice, there still is no coherent approach to upholding the rights of all learners with disabilities in FET (Further Education).

In recent decades, our understanding of what constitutes a disability has broadened greatly. While the legal definitions of disability is explored further below, it is sufficient, at this point, to note that the 2016 Census[[1]](#footnote-1) indirectly defined disability as comprehending the following long-lasting conditions or difficulties:

* Blindness or a serious vision impairment
* Deafness or a serious hearing impairment
* An intellectual disability
* A difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating
* A difficulty with basic physical activities
* A psychological or emotional condition
* A difficulty with pain, breathing, or any other chronic illness or condition.

From a macro perspective, at a National Disability Authority (NDA) seminar on Employment Transitions among People with Disability in Ireland on 12 April 2017, the ESRI identified employment (and by implication education and training) as a crucial issue for people with disabilities from two perspectives: their economic welfare and their social participation[[2]](#footnote-2). It then set out the stark reality facing those with a disability in Ireland who want to work.

* People with disabilities are less than half as likely to be at work - 31% compared to 71% of those without disabilities. This is partly explained by the substantially lower average levels of education amongst those with a disability when compared with the rest of the population.
* Most people (82%) with a disability have worked at some stage - often more than four (4) years ago (35%).
* The chances of getting a job for a person without a disability are nearly four (4) times higher than for those with a disability and two (2) times higher if we take account of other factors such as education. Even for a person with a disability who is not affected in his/her daily life by the disability, it is more difficult to get a job.
* People with a disability are two (2) times more likely to leave a job than those without a disability. Even where a person with a disability is not affected in his/her daily life by the disability, it is more likely that s/he will leave a job.
* There is little sign of recovery in the prospects of people with disabilities getting a job.

The situation for those with a mental health disability is even more precarious. Census 2011[[3]](#footnote-3) data indicates that only 43.8% of the working age population of people with a mental health disability are in the labour force compared to 61.9% of the overall population over 15[[4]](#footnote-4). Indeed, people with a mental health disability are nine (9) times more likely to be out of the labour force than those without such a disability, the highest rate for any category of disability[[5]](#footnote-5). Of course, given the invisibility of mental health issues (and indeed some physical disabilities) and the difficulty of identifying learners with such disabilities, FET providers need to be especially proactive if Ireland is to ensure that those with mental health and other non-visible disabilities are appropriately supported and accommodated.

The role that FET can play in the recovery of people with mental health issues merits greater recognition. As Rooney[[6]](#footnote-6) notes, participation in Further Education has the potential to promote recovery and counteract marginalisation, provided FET providers promote inclusive practices and implement appropriate staff development programmes. Indeed, the significance of adult education programmes in addressing the needs of adults with mental health problems and the importance of mental health services linking effectively with education and employment services was recognised in the 2006 publication: *A Vision for Change*[[7]](#footnote-7). Clearly, when it comes to appropriately accommodating those with mental health problems in FET, the FET sector generally and individual providers must link in with the health sector if learner outcomes are to be optimised, a reality acknowledged by the World Health Organisation (WHO)[[8]](#footnote-8).

According to the ESRI,if all those with a disability who want to work had a job, 50% of people with a disability would be working and almost 5% of all workers would have a disability. Some 36,000 people with a disability are not currently working but would like to work.

Data on the prevalence of disability among FET learners is less than comprehensive – see 2.2 below. However, we can extrapolate from research data published by the NCSE[[9]](#footnote-9), the HEA[[10]](#footnote-10) and AHEAD[[11]](#footnote-11).

Section 1 of the2004 Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act[[12]](#footnote-12) broadened the definition of special education needs to mean ‘a restriction in the capacity of a person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition’ – a definition that aligns with the definition of disability set out in Section 2 of the Equal Status Act 2000[[13]](#footnote-13) - see 1.0 below. Based on the EPSEN definition, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in its 2006 report on the phased implementation of the EPSEN Act[[14]](#footnote-14) noted that the prevalence of special need (disability) in the school population was 17.7%. In a subsequent NCSE 2011 report[[15]](#footnote-15) (prepared by the ESRI) on the prevalence of special educational needs, the prevalence rate was increased to 25% based on Growing Up in Ireland[[16]](#footnote-16) data, with the caveat that this rate does not imply that additional resources may be required in all cases. Rather, it may only be necessary to tailor the pedagogical practice to meeting the specific needs of the learners.

According to research undertaken by AHEAD[[17]](#footnote-17), 5.5% of students in Higher Education have a medically validated disability – amounting to 10,000 students. Ten years ago, these students were not able to access Higher Education, which resulted in human talent being squandered. Today, these students with a medically validated disability are achieving to their potential and graduating with honours degrees.

When we have regard for our current understanding of what constitutes a disability and our awareness that those with a disability have fewer qualifications than those without a disability when they leave school[[18]](#footnote-18), the discrepancy between the NCSE and AHEAD’s rates for the prevalence of disability in education, implicitly tells us quite a lot about the prevalence of disability in FET. While the prevalence of disability among FET learners may not be documented definitively, it seems reasonable to assume that a high proportion of those with a disability have, or potentially could have, their education and training needs met in the FET sector.

While Ireland has still not ratified the UNCPRD, it would nevertheless seem timely, in the 10th anniversary year of the convention being adopted by the United Nations, that a clear strategy should be put in place to ensure that learners with disabilities involved in all FET programmes have ready access to all supports and accommodations essential to them making the most of these programmes and their lives generally.

# 1.0 Legal Responsibilities of Providers

Since 2000, under Irish Disability and Equality law, educational establishments are legally obliged to ensure that students with disabilities are not discriminated against in either their application for admission to an educational programme or their experience while on an education or training programme.

In this context, it is instructive to note that there are two kinds of discrimination[[19]](#footnote-19):

* Direct discrimination, which involves the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated, in a comparable situation on any of the nine grounds[[20]](#footnote-20), and
* Indirect discrimination, which involves less favourable treatment by impact or effect. An example of this is when someone is refused a service, not explicitly on account of a discriminatory reason, but because of a provision, practice or requirement which they find hard to satisfy.

To establish direct discrimination, a direct comparison must be made with someone or group who is not discriminated against. For example, in the case of disability discrimination the comparison must be between a person who has a disability and another who has not, or between persons with different disabilities. Indirect discrimination, on the other hand, occurs when practices or policies that do not appear to discriminate against one group more than another actually have a discriminatory impact on one group. It can also happen where a requirement that may appear non-discriminatory adversely affects a particular class of persons. So, proving that all persons are treated the same is not necessarily sufficient to disprove a charge of discrimination.

## Equal Status Acts

Significantly, **Section 2** of the Equal Status Act 2000 defines disability very broadly to include ‘a condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction’, or ‘a condition, disease or illness which affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or which results in disturbed behaviour’.

While visible physical disability is generally recognisable to most and in recent times our understanding of disability arising from specific learning difficulties has improved greatly, the legislation also comprehends those experiencing mental health difficulties such as depression, stress and anxiety, and it also applies to those suffering chronic, debilitating, medical conditions.

Section 4 (1) of the Equal Status Act states that: ‘discrimination includes a refusal or failure by the provider of a service to do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability by providing special treatment or facilities, if without such special treatment or facilities it would be impossible or unduly difficult for the person to avail himself or herself of the service’. Significantly, the May 2017 five-judge Supreme Court judgment in the case of Kim Cahill v. Minister for Education and Science clarifies the duty of service providers, including the Minister for Education and Skills, under the Equal Status Acts 2000-2015, to make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. In this case, the Court held that the legal provisions in Section 4 (1) ‘should be given a broad and generous interpretation’ and that service providers should take positive steps to ensure that students with a disability can fully participate in education and other benefits, facilities and services provided for students. The Court also noted that these provisions were ‘designed to ensure equal opportunity to all individuals whether or not they have a disability’[[21]](#footnote-21).

In her judgement in the Cahill case, Ms Justice Laffoy[[22]](#footnote-22) held that:

‘s.4(1) is clear and unambiguous. The standard of reasonableness which is at the heart of s.4(1), as has already been noted, in my view, imports the concept of proportionality. It envisages that a balance is to be maintained between the needs of the disabled person and how those needs are met by the provision of special treatment or facilities to the extent necessary to enable the disabled person to avail of the service, or to do so, without undue difficulty, on the one hand, and the effect of such provision on the service provider in the overall context of the position of the service provider, as the provider of the service, on the other hand. The interest of a third party vis-à-vis the service provider may be a relevant factor, even though it is not spelt out in s.4 …’

**Section 4 (2)** qualifies the obligation to do ‘all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability’ by stating that: ‘a refusal or failure to provide the special treatment or facilities to which subsection (1) refers shall not be deemed reasonable unless such provision would give rise to a cost, other than a nominal cost, to the provider of the service in question.’

The question is: what constitutes a ‘nominal cost’? To get an understanding of what is required here, we must have regard for relevant case law. In a sense, the term ‘nominal’ is somewhat misleading as the Equality Tribunal has, in this writer’s opinion’, held (BusÁras case[[23]](#footnote-23), Marks and Spencers case[[24]](#footnote-24), Bob’s News & Deli case[[25]](#footnote-25), National School and Guidance Dog case[[26]](#footnote-26)) that, in coming to a conclusion about the extent to which a service provider is required to provide an accommodation to a disabled person, a service provider should take account, inter alia, of:

* whether the requested special treatment or facility is necessary and reasonable,
* the practicality of providing the accommodation and the need to address individual demands for accommodations as practically as possible,
* the financial and other costs involved,
* the size and resources of the provider organisation (nominal cost is relative to the resources available to the provider),
* best practice in relation to disability issues,
* the possibility of accessing grants from the State to fund the accommodations,
* the need to consult with the person seeking accommodation about what accommodations they require,
* the requirement for educational establishments to do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability,
* and the onus to be proactive in ensuring that services are accessible to everyone as far as possible.

In the case of public bodies there is arguably a greater onus on them to ensure that those with disabilities can access their services. A public body cannot simply refuse to assess a request for reasonable accommodation or to provide a blanket refusal to requests for reasonable accommodations. In effect, there is a procedural obligation on public bodies to assess whether a service provider, can or cannot provide reasonable accommodation and either failure to assess and/or failure to provide reasonable accommodation to individuals with disabilities could amount to discrimination under the Acts.

A large organisation would be expected to provide ramps and lifts to facilitate access to buildings but a small café might not be required to do so. For any service provider, however, to use cost as a justification for not providing supports or accommodations, it must demonstrate that it carried out an assessment of whether or not it could provide the required supports or accommodations.

Given that ETBs are large state bodies, their capacity to refuse supports and accommodations to learners with disabilities would appear to be seriously circumscribed – most particularly where those supports and accommodations do not involve significant capital investment. Here, the reference in Section 4 (1) of the Equal Status Act to service providers doing ‘all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability by providing special treatment or facilities’ is especially instructive.

**Section 5** of the Equal Status Act states that ‘A person shall not discriminate … in providing a service, whether the … provision is for consideration or otherwise and whether the service provided can be availed of only by a section of the public’. This may be relevant in terms of learners with disabilities accessing administrative services and other secondary services provided by the ETB, such as application forms, processes, etc.

**Section 7 (2)** of the Equal Status Act states that an educational establishment ‘shall not discriminate in relation to:

* the admission or the terms or conditions of admission of a person as a student to the establishment, the access of a student to any course, facility or benefit provided by the establishment,
* any other term or condition of participation in the establishment by a student, or
* the expulsion of a student from the establishment or any other sanction against the student.’

**Section 7 (4)(b)** of the 2000 Act exempts providers from these requirements where compliance would make it ‘impossible, or have a seriously detrimental effect on, the provision by an educational establishment of its services to other students’. Notwithstanding the reference to nominal cost in section 4 (2) above, it seems that ETBs should be guided by this obligation when making decisions about the provision of accommodations to learners with disabilities.

It was alluded to above that to establish direct discrimination, a direct comparison must be made with someone or group who is not discriminated against and that the person or group not discriminated against could be a person or group with a different disability. Here it is of significance that **Section 3(2)(g)** of the 2000 Act makes it discriminatory to provide a service to a person with one type of disability while denying the service to someone with another disability.

Lest there be any reservations about providing additional supports or accommodations to learners with disabilities, Section 14 of the Equal Status Act 2000[[27]](#footnote-27) makes it clear that nothing in the Act prohibits the taking of positive measures which are intended to:

* ‘promote equality of opportunity for persons who are, in relation to other persons, disadvantaged or who have been or are likely to be unable to avail themselves of the same opportunities as those other persons’, or
* ‘cater for the special needs of persons, or a category of persons, who, because of their circumstances, may require facilities, arrangements, services or assistance not required by persons who do not have those special needs’.

## Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) Act 2014 – Public-Sector Duty

The above legislative provisions underpin Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) Act 2014[[28]](#footnote-28), known as the Public-Sector Duty Provision, which makes it explicit that all public bodies (comprehends all government departments, SOLAS and ETBs) have a responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans.

Section 42 requires public bodies to assess and identify human rights and equality issues in preparing their strategic plans, to identify the policies and practices they have in place or that they plan to put in place to address these issues, and to report, in their annual reports, on these developments in a manner accessible to the public.

Essentially, Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 is a positive duty which focuses on public bodies taking a proactive approach to protecting human rights, promoting equality and eliminating discrimination for people using services and for staff. It puts human rights and equality at the centre of how public bodies deliver on their functions. Section 42 (2) of the Act states that public bodies ‘shall:

* Set out in a manner that is accessible to the public in its strategic plan … an assessment of the human rights and equality issues it believes to be relevant to the functions and purpose of the body and the policies, plans and actions in place or proposed to be put in place to address those issues, and
* report in a manner that is accessible to the public on developments and achievements in that regard in its annual report ...’.

As the public-sector duty focuses on human rights as well as equality, there is also a need to have regard for the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), which was incorporated into Irish law by the European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003[[29]](#footnote-29). Article 2, Protocol 1 of the ECHR[[30]](#footnote-30) provides for the right to access to education and Article 14 prohibits discrimination. The European Court on Human Rights has recognised that this can extend to accessing adult education (the right to education under the Irish Constitution extends to children, and not adults – Sinnott case[[31]](#footnote-31)). Therefore, potential human rights considerations might arise in terms of access to State-funded adult education in terms of where there is limited or no access to said services for individuals with disabilities or with a type of disability. It should be noted, however, that this is not an absolute right, and the State can justify difference in treatment where it can show that it is pursuing a legitimate aim, and the means to achieving that aim is proportionate and necessary.

## Disability Act 2005

Section 26[[32]](#footnote-32) of the Disability Act 2005 states that a public body shall:

* ‘where practicable and appropriate, ensure that the provision of access to the service by persons with and persons without disabilities is integrated’
* ‘where practicable and appropriate, provide for assistance, if requested, to persons with disabilities in accessing the service’
* ‘where appropriate, ensure the availability of persons with appropriate expertise and skills to give advice to the body about the means of ensuring that the service provided by the body is accessible to persons with disabilities’
* ‘shall authorise at least one of his or her officers to provide or arrange for and co-ordinate the provision of assistance and guidance to persons with disabilities in accessing its services’.

In practice, all this means that there is a qualified obligation on education and training providers to ensure that learners with a disability have the same opportunities as any other learners and to ensure that these learners are provided with the reasonable accommodations and supports that are required to enable them to engage with education and training programmes to the same extent as would learners who do not have a disability. For example, a blind learner should be able to avail of technology that would enable him/her to complete a course successfully, and should be trained to use the technology. Furthermore, the public duty provisions in Section 42 of the IHREC Act requires ETBs, DES and SOLAS to adopt a proactive approach to ensuring that these rights are safeguarded by requiring them to regularly assess the extent to which these entitlements are being vindicated and to report annually on the results of these assessments.

The obligation to provide supports and reasonable accommodations to learners with disabilities is not absolute in the sense that it is circumscribed by the capacity of the provider to meet the costs of providing them, though, as mentioned above, it would not be easy for a state-provider to rely on this exemption. However, there is no such get-out clause when it comes to the appointment of an ‘access-officer’ to ‘arrange for and co-ordinate the provision of assistance and guidance to persons with disabilities in accessing its services’. Furthermore, it seems obvious that ‘access officers’ are not merely members of staff with a nominal title. They would need to demonstrably be providing assistance and guidance to persons with disabilities and front-line staff would need to be aware of them and the support that they are in a position to provide to persons with a disability seeking to access (and avail successfully of) the education and training service.

# 2.0 Defining the Issues

This section investigates the issues from two perspectives:

* the challenges that FET learners with a disability face in accessing and making the most of the education and training opportunities available to them, and
* the challenges that FET providers, principally ETBs, encounter in seeking to meet the needs of FET learners with disabilities.

This exploration is undertaken from a number of different perspectives and under a number of headings:

* The inputs that emerged through meetings of a working group established to inform the development of this position paper. This working group comprised key FET personnel from the ETB sector and persons nominated by other stakeholders – for the membership of this working group see **Appendix 5.** Some input wasprovided at the meetings of the working group and other written input was submitted following those meetings. **Section 2.1** summarises the way in which FET learners with disabilities are penalised in terms of the way they are supported.
* A group of ETB Further Education teachers and ‘disability officers’ attending the 2017 AHEAD conference ventilated their concerns regarding how Further Education learners with disabilities have their particular needs met. **Section 2.2** discusses the views of these ETB FET professionals.
* In 2013, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) published a report on the experiences of students with special educational needs in moving to further and Higher Education and some of the key issues raised in this report are explored in **Section 2.3.**
* **Sections 2.4 to 2.13** explore some of the most significant issues raised in Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 in greater detail. Drafts of this paper were circulated to members of the ETBI Adult and Further Education and Training Forum (AFET) and to ETB FET directors. The feedback received from these FET professionals significantly informed the construction of Sections 2.4 to 2.13 and the subsequent recommendations set out in Section 3.0.

## 2.1 How are FET learners with disabilities supported differently?

2.1.1 While there is a lack of comprehensive data about the numbers of learners in FET with a disability, the indications are that the number of learners with disabilities accessing Further Education and Training (FET) in the ETB sector is growing annually. Details of the numbers of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) learners accessing the Higher Education Authority (HEA) fund for learners with disabilities, in recent years, are provided in **Appendix 2**. Over those years, however, the funds made available to support these learners was declining – **see Appendix 1**. A breakdown of these learners by disability category is included at **Appendix 3** and **Appendix 4** reports the number of beneficiaries of the HEA fund (PLC learners only) by disability category.[[33]](#footnote-33) It is important to note that the data in these tables is only for PLC learners.

These learners expect to be able to access any programme and expect to be included in all aspects of a programme, including work experience and social activities. Both practices and attitudes are evolving and, as is the norm in first- and second-level education, including students with disabilities is now everyone's job, not just the job of a designated disability officer.

Moreover, because many FET learners with disabilities have received a range of supports in second-level and are aware of the supports available in third level, the expectations of students with disabilities regarding the supports they will receive in FET are high.

2.1.2 In first-, second- and third-level education, there is a standardised process/system in place to address the needs of students with special needs of one kind or another. In particular, the general allocation model (GAM) put in place for first- and second-level schools ensures, to a very significant extent, that the supports for these students are both appropriate and timely. In third-level, the HEA-administered Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD), though in need of reform, provides a vehicle for students with appropriately validated disabilities gaining access to supports and accommodations.

2.1.3 In FET, learners in Post Leaving Certificate courses (PLC) have access to the HEA-administered Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD). This fund is not means-tested and is available to all with disabilities studying in full-time publicly-funded courses at level 5 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

2.1.4 For learners in Teagasc, VTOS, Apprenticeships, Traineeships, ETB training centres and part-time FET programmes such as the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Community Education or adult literacy, there is no specific fund or system in place to standardise the assessment of learners’ special needs and/or to ensure such learners receive appropriate and timely supports or accommodations. Admittedly, an ETBI working group is currently finalising the development of a National Assessment Procedures Handbook to inform the provision of reasonable accommodations in examinations and assessments to all FET learners. Reasonable accommodations, however, cannot be confined to assessment, they must extend across the whole of FET provision from access/recruitment through to progression to Further Education and training and, wherever feasible, to the sustainable employment.

2.1.5 Unlike the situation that prevails in respect of most first-, second- or third-level education, a significant proportion of FET centres are accommodated in rented buildings that are not always accessible to those with mobility problems. As well as the access issue, quality of some of this accommodation can be below what is desirable in an educational setting. For example, the lighting may not be suitable and this all impacts most on those with a disability.

2.1.6 There is one source of guidance and information for students in the school system and at third-level. For FET, however, other than in the case of PLC provision, guidance is provided by several agencies – ETB Adult Guidance Services, the DSP, the HSE, etc. There needs to be an integrated FET Information, Recruitment and Guidance Support Service so that FET learners can access information and guidance from a single source rather than obtaining different kinds of information and guidance from disparate, disconnected entities. Appropriate integrated guidance and information is particularly critical to learners and prospective learners with disabilities.

2.1.7 There seems to be an apprehension that giving adult learners in FET access to appropriate supports and accommodations could open the door to unquantifiable funding demands. This apprehension is not well-founded – see below.

## 2.2 Views of ETB staff involved in supporting learners with disabilities

A group of ETB Further Education teachers and ‘disability officers’ attending the 2017 AHEAD[[34]](#footnote-34) conference met together as part of the conference and set out their concerns regarding how Further Education learners with disabilities have their needs met and possible responses to these concerns. The following summarises, interrogates and comments on both the concerns and proposed solutions.

* There are excellent practices across the ETBs around catering to learner diversity but when it comes to learners with disabilities, the support services available to them are inconsistent and *ad hoc* and the good practices are not always visible to others.
* The infrastructure/system needs to be improved if we are to quality assure the learning experience of learners with disabilities and ensure that they have the same opportunities to take part as other learners.
* The disability officer role is the agent for active Inclusion in the Further Education college but the hours allocated to this role are inconsistent and, across the country, the hours allocated to such roles appear unrelated to either the number of learners with disabilities or the nature of those disabilities.
* The role and functions of the disability officer does not seem to be understood in a consistent way either within or across ETBs.
* There is no national database of the numbers of learners with a disability in Further Education and Training, nor is there data regarding the prevalence of specific disabilities or the complexity of the supports required by learners with a disability. It is appreciated that Table 3.9 in the SOLAS 2016 Further Education and Training Services Plan[[35]](#footnote-35) documents the number of beneficiaries of SOLAS-funded programmes reported as having a disability. And it is acknowledged that there are real logistical challenges in capturing reliable data about some disabilities, particularly in relation to mental health. However, there are concerns about the completeness of the data in Table 3.9. There is a perception that the disabilities of significant numbers of FET learners are neither identified nor recorded. Besides, there is a need for data regarding the supports and accommodations made available to FET learners with disabilities and the extent to which these interventions are enabling these learners to improve their education and training outcomes.

The implementation of the new Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) in the ETB sector will go some way towards improving the data set in relation to learners with disabilities in FET. That said, the problems associated with learner self-disclosure will persist and, in the case of those who are identified as having disabilities subsequent to their registration, it will be necessary to update PLSS accordingly. The difficulties with self-disclosure are most evident in the case of learners with mental health issues. This was highlighted in a recent survey of 1,000 adults undertaken by See Change[[36]](#footnote-36), which found that one in seven experiencing mental health difficulties would delay treatment for fear of letting others know and some 40% would conceal a mental health issue from family, friends and colleagues.

Given the challenge of identifying learners with mental health issues, there may be a need for a different approach to supporting FET learners with mental health problems. Here, the approach taken in Further Education and third-level education in Northern Ireland may be relevant. There, Inspire[[37]](#footnote-37), formerly Carecall, provides a counselling service to all students in Further Education (irrespective of the programme they are involved in) and all third-level students. This service allows students to talk and begin to explore issues that are causing them difficulties: alcohol or drug problems, anxiety, depression, bereavement, bullying, compulsive behaviour, debt concerns, eating disorders, exam stress, family problems, fear of failure, loneliness, etc.

The Carecall counsellor initially assesses the level of risk a student is in and for non-immediate risk cases the student receives an appointment for a counselling session within three working days from point of contact. For high-risk cases, the counsellor may see the student immediately, or indeed call for medical intervention. Carecall updates the student’s GP where necessary.

South of the border, at NUI Maynooth, the National Learning Network (NLN)[[38]](#footnote-38), provides a support service to students who have been formally diagnosed as having significant learning needs such as: depression or anxiety, ASD or ADHD. Here the focus is on improving these students’ academic outcomes. While the merit of this service is palpable, its confinement to students with formal diagnoses inevitably means that many requiring the support of such a service miss out. On this basis, a service modelled on what operates in Northern Ireland would seem preferable for FET. The Education and recovery report prepared for Bray Adult Education Network recommended that this model of support for people with disabilities should be explored at an ETB level and that the relationship between NLN and the access programmes in Further Education institutions could be modelled by other mainstream providers[[39]](#footnote-39).

* The rigidity of many of the QQI assessment criteria for awards, particularly in relation to the communications awards, makes it very difficult for learners with a disability that impinges on their reading, writing or speaking to complete these awards successfully.
* There is insufficient guidance for staff on how to deal with issues such as inability to do a course, diagnosis of disability, mental health, Asperger’s syndrome and learners with Autism.
* FE Teachers tend to be judged more on the extent to which their learners obtain awards rather than on the individual achievement of learners and their learning journey. This tends to militate against those with a disability.
* Staff supporting learners with disabilities have inadequate access to relevant professional development.
* There is no specific funding available for diagnostic assessments where learners require them to access supports and accommodations.
* Those who support Further Education learners with disabilities have valuable experience and would welcome opportunities to share their expertise and ideas. Thus, there would be merit in establishing a support network for disability officers to facilitate them learning from one another and sharing good practice. There could be a national network and each ETB could also provide structured opportunities for disability officers to meet and share information about their work. An effective practitioner network could significantly improve compliance with legislation and services to learners with disabilities. A Disability Officers Network could be supported by AHEAD and it could take responsibility for the development and regular updating of ETB sectoral guidelines on inclusion.
* Each ETB could take out membership of AHEAD and this would give staff supporting FET learners with a disability access to up-to-date information and advice relevant to this work.
* SOLAS should develop a standardised approach to ETBs gathering and analysing data on learners with disabilities in FET. The output from this analysis would provide information essential to planning improvements in provision for learners with disabilities and to evaluating the extent to which this improvement is being achieved over time. In a sense, the implementation of PLSS addresses this concern to a significant extent.
* SOLAS should commission research into the participation of learners with disabilities in FET, the range of these disabilities, the supports available to and taken up by these learners, the courses being undertaken by these learners, and the academic and employment achievements of these learners. This research should capture the voice of learners with disabilities and identify their experiences and concerns. The results of this research would inform the planning of FET provision (including the supports and accommodations that should be made available) for learners with disabilities and it could also be provided to QQI to inform the development of assessment processes more appropriate to the needs of those with disabilities.
* The Further Education and Training sector should work towards establishing fit-for-purpose procedures to assure the quality of educational provision to learners with a disability – procedures that are compliant with what is required in law. Doing this will entail the establishment of a consistent system for assessing the support and accommodation requirements of learners with a disability, and provide training to all ETB staff involved in managing or delivering FET on inclusive pedagogical practice, on how to create an inclusive classroom, and on all provision moving towards a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) model[[40]](#footnote-40).

## 2.3 NCSE Research

In 2013, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) published a report that explored the experiences of students with special educational needs in moving to further and Higher Education[[41]](#footnote-41) and the findings in this report significantly inform the subject matter of this position paper. While a detailed review of the findings, conclusions and recommendations in the NCSE report is beyond the scope of this paper, the following captures some of the key issues that emerged from this research.

* There was a steady increase from 2003–4 to 2009–10 in the number of learners in Further Education with special educational needs (SEN) availing of support from the Disability Fund administered by the HEA. Approximately 600 learners were granted support in the academic year 2009–10, the majority (51%) of whom had specific learning disabilities. As in Higher Education, students with sensory impairments are seriously under-represented (at 10%). The majority of students with SEN (68%) availing of the Disability Fund are aged 18 to 23 years, with 12% aged 23 to 30 years. Students with SEN are predominantly enrolled in courses within humanities and the arts (24%), services (22%), and health and welfare (21%). Further Education faces the following challenges in ensuring access for learners with SEN: relatively low numbers accessing the Disability Fund; low participation rates of learners with sensory impairments, physical disabilities and multiple disabilities; lack of participation targets; and the fact that only full-time learners are eligible.
* In Ireland, targeted access initiatives have focused on facilitating access for students with SEN to Higher Education, and consequently, an infrastructure has been established which includes a supplementary admissions system (DARE[[42]](#footnote-42)) and a network of access and disability officers across Higher Education institutions.
* While there have been worthwhile initiatives promoting access to Further Education for students with SEN, with some colleges appointing a teacher to take specific responsibility for access, transfer and progression of students with SEN, there is little evidence of a coherent, sector-wide approach. The support infrastructure for learners with SEN in Further Education is not as highly developed as it is for Higher Education. The diverse and often localised nature of Further Education courses and the lack of a central application process makes it difficult to quantify the extent of participation by learners with SEN in Further Education.
* An individualised approach to transition planning is critically important to young people with disabilities transitioning successfully to adulthood and, in the US, it is mandated that transition planning begins at age 14.
* Collaborative relationships between post-primary schools and further and Higher Education institutions is critical to young people with disabilities making successful transitions from second-level education to further and Higher Education.
* Parents and families play a crucial role in supporting the decision-making of students with SEN regarding post-school options. Hence there is a need to ensure that information relevant to such decisions is readily accessible.
* Providing appropriate individualised support in further and Higher Education for students with SEN supports an effective transition process and progression.
* It is important that learners with SEN disclose their special education need to the college or centre to ensure that appropriate supports and accommodations are in place. However, this is not always clearly understood or conveyed to the student concerned, their families or the professionals involved. Disclosure of SEN should continue to be promoted by support professionals, and actively facilitated at multiple points in the transition process. Besides, those with SEN can perceive disclosure of their disability as a disadvantage to them pursuing their chosen course of study or even career. This highlights the need for systems and processes that address disability in the absence of disclosure – Universal Design for learning, easily accessible and inviting counselling services, etc. Learners and prospective learners need to be assured that they will not be discriminated against because of their disability.
* Institutional readiness to facilitate access, transfer and progression for students with SEN is a critical factor in ensuring successful transition and progression within further and Higher Education.
* One of the biggest challenges facing all students on transition to further and Higher Education is around the significant changes in teaching, learning and assessment encountered.
* Students with SEN particularly welcome the opportunity to establish working relationships with tutors and lecturers who are approachable and treat them like adults.
* Social integration into further or Higher Education environments is a critical factor in ensuring successful transition and retention for all students including those with SEN.
* Losing established friendship groups and social networks is perceived to be a major challenge in transition for students with SEN and stereotypical reactions to SEN among student peers without SEN is a major fear for students with SEN.
* Consideration should be given to developing targeted access initiatives for Further Education provision (as happened for Higher Education) to increase the capacity of Further Education to support the academic and social needs of students with SEN making the transition to, and progressing through, Further Education.
* School should begin the process of transition-planning for students with SEN in Junior Cycle, and parents should be facilitated to become active participants in this process, while at national policy level, the individual education planning process as envisaged in the EPSEN Act (2004) should be commenced to provide a structured framework of support for this transition-planning process.
* Guidance counsellors should be afforded the opportunity to further enhance their knowledge and skills regarding critical aspects of transition-planning for students with SEN. Indeed, all staff in further and Higher Education should be provided with opportunities enhance their capacity to develop accessible courses and modes of assessment.
* A single central point of information, regarding access, transfer and progression pathways across all further and Higher Education institutions, should be established.
* Targeted funding should be provided to enable the development of structured partnerships between schools and further and Higher Education institutions.
* Further and Higher Education institutions need to ensure that accessibility procedures and funding and support mechanisms are regularly reviewed and audited to enable students with SEN to avail of appropriate supports.
* Course literature should include comprehensive information about available supports for students with SEN in adapting to the academic requirements of the course. And specific information should be provided on teaching, learning, and assessment strategies pursued in the institution.

## 2.4 Support for PLC learners through the Higher Education Authority’s Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD)

The level of funding through the HEA for PLC learners with disabilities has decreased appreciably over the years. Also, the application process is administratively burdensome and resource intensive, resources are not made available to the Further Education colleges until well into the academic year, and a sizable proportion of learners (particularly adults returning to learning[[43]](#footnote-43) rather than recent school-leavers) who could benefit from the fund do not seem to be aware of it. This means that learners may have abandoned their courses before the resources become available to them officially or drop out because they are unable to progress in their studies without the supports and accommodations that they are eligible for but unaware of. Certainly, some larger colleges have, through a proactive use of the HEA fund, gone a long way towards providing their special needs learners with appropriate and timely accommodations. Others, on the other hand, are understandably hesitant about providing supports to learners until the funds to do so are received from the HEA.

Besides, the current requirement for educational/psychological assessments to access learning supports and accommodations through the Higher Education Authority’s Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD), creates a barrier for adult learners.

The FSD is currently being reviewed by PACEC (Public and Economic Consultants) and it is understood that, in the course of the consultations undertaken in carrying out the review, the issues raised above (see 2.2) were also highlighted, as were concerns about the need for a forum to share good practice in using the FSD, the need to extend the fund to part-time learners and the need to raise the awareness of the fund among potential beneficiaries and those who influence them and provide information and guidance to them.

It is anticipated that the review will recommend the adoption of a block grant allocation approach (incorporating devolved responsibility for allocating resources to learners with disabilities), ideally on a multi-annual funding basis, taking into consideration:

* historical trends, e.g. numbers of learners supported by FSD in the previous year or rolling average (by category of disability);
* weighting by learners needs (low, high) and by year (higher for first year, given that most retention issues arise then, when needs are being identified/emerging);

It is also anticipated that the review will recommend:

* that these principles should apply to both higher and Further Education, facilitating an allocation process which would notify institutions of their grant in a timely manner prior to the commencement of an academic year,
* a streamlining of the entire process of applying for FSD funding, and
* significantly increasing the awareness of the availability of supports and accommodations among potential beneficiaries of the fund.

As a significant amount of PLC provision can be quite small in scale, it may be difficult to generate reliable predictive data on the resources that may be required in individual schools or colleges to support learners with disabilities. This difficulty may be overcome by the HEA providing funding on a whole of ETB basis rather than on a school or college basis. Similarly, it may be best, in some instances, to devolve authority to ETBs rather than to Colleges to allocate resources.

## 2.5 Need for a standardised process/system

While many ETBs have developed excellent practice around the admission and support of learners with disabilities, the absence of a standardised process/system presents ETBs with significant challenges in ensuring compliance with their legal obligations to these learners. This system would need to comprehend such matters as:

* assessment of need,
* a schedule of the accommodations available to meet specific needs that is sufficiently flexible to allow for complex or non-standard needs being met appropriately,
* realistic targets for over a period of years ensuring that FET learners with disabilities have a best-in-class system of accommodations available to them,
* staffing appropriate to ensuring the effectiveness of the system, and
* continuous professional development programmes to build the capacity of those who lead and deliver FET in ETBs to identify and meet the needs of learners with disabilities efficaciously.

The annual planning and funding engagement between each ETB and SOLAS provides a mechanism and platform upon which provision for all learners, including those with disabilities, is planned for and funded. That said, the establishment of a clear systems/process and of service benchmarks, in accordance with which the particular needs of learners with disabilities are met, would greatly inform and enhance the annual SOLAS-ETB planning and funding engagement and also the education and training and subsequent life outcomes for learners with disabilities.

The following exemplifies the lack of a standardised approach to meeting the needs of learners with SEN/disability:

There was no specific provision for learners with special education needs in Youthreach until 2007. At that point, the Special Education Needs Initiative (SENI)[[44]](#footnote-44) for Youthreach was introduced by Dr Mary Gordon of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) for a representative sample of 20 out of a total of some 100 Youthreach centres. The initiative involved the introduction of the Web Wheel[[45]](#footnote-45) model of intervention and this resulted in significant benefits across a wide range of learner outcomes for learners in the centres involved in the initiative. When compared with their counterparts in a matched group of 20 Non-SENI centres, SENI learners showed significantly greater rates of retention, higher levels of formal accreditation, better progress in the acquisition of personal and social competencies and more successful progression. SENI proved to be an innovative and cost-effective way of addressing SEN in an educational setting. Using a broad definition of special needs, it resulted in organisational change and the systematic building of staff capacity to respond flexibly and practically to the identified learner needs of students with SEN. Following its evaluation*[[46]](#footnote-46)*, it was recommended that the initiative be rolled out to all centres but to date the roll-out has not materialised. In resource terms, this means that a centre with 35 learners participating in the initiative receives some €81,000.00 more funding annually than does a similarly-sized centre that is not involved with the initiative. The loss to the centres not in the initiative is not confined to funding. More significantly, the staff in those centres have not had the opportunity to enhance their capacity to meet the needs of students with SEN that those involved in SENI have had.

## 2.6 Absence of dedicated budget line

In the Higher Education sector, an adjustment is made within the core grant allocation to reflect the costs to the institutions of attracting and supporting students who come from under-represented backgrounds, including students with a disability. An additional weighting of 33% is currently used.

The absence of a clear budget line to resource the provision of supports to learners with disabilities means that the provision of such supports effectively entails a withdrawal of resources from other provision. This has invidious implications for those who manage FET provision, as they must decide between reducing the level of FET provision or supporting the needs of those with disabilities. Neither schools nor HEIs are faced with this predicament. There is an incontestable case for those who manage FET provision having access to dedicated and adequate budgets to enable them to meet, to an acceptable standard, the needs of learners with disabilities.

## 2.7 National Guidelines to inform standards of practice

If there were clear guidelines about what providers need to do to meet their obligations to FET learners with disabilities, they would inform and streamline the work of identifying learners with disabilities and supporting such learners effectively.

Though the absence of such a system does not absolve providers from their legal obligations, given the fragmented character and small scale of much FET provision, it makes it very difficult for a provider, such as an ETB, to guarantee that the rights of all learners with disabilities are always met to an acceptable standard.

National guidelines are essential for translating the statutory obligations imposed on providers into a language and format that clarify for providers the level and nature of the supports and accommodations they must provide to learners with disabilities. They are also crucial to informing learners with disabilities about the supports and accommodations they may reasonably expect to receive from FET providers. On their own, however, the usefulness of guidelines is inevitably limited. There is need for a strategy to guide the full implementation of the guidelines

##  2.8 National Strategy for implementation of the national guidelines

There are clear systems in place to facilitate the provision of appropriate supports and/or accommodations to students at first- and second-level, students at third-level and learners in PLC courses, but the latter group only constitutes a relatively small proportion of all FET learners. Notwithstanding misgivings about some aspects of the system that operates for third-level and for PLC students, it is generally acknowledged that it supports learners with appropriately validated disabilities relatively efficiently and effectively. Since, as has been contended above, the proportion of learners with disabilities of one kind or another in Further Education and training is significantly greater than that in third-level, the case for establishing guidelines and budgets to support appropriately these learners in FET is compelling. Here, it needs to be acknowledged that a high proportion of adult learners returning to education and/or training at levels one to six on the NFQ will not have had a good experience of education in their earlier years and that the provenance of this ‘below par’ experience will have been what may be termed a disability. The broad definition of disability set out in Section 2 of the 2000 Act is what is applicable here: literally any ‘condition or malfunction’ which causes a person with it to learn differently from a person without the ‘condition or malfunction’. So, one does not have to have a serious or manifest disability to be classified as disabled and entitled to a ‘special accommodation’.

## 2.9 Accessibility of Buildings used to deliver FET

All buildings and locations providing FET need to be accessible to those experiencing mobility problems. The difficulty here is that a sizable proportion of FET provision is accommodated in rented buildings and/or older buildings where the relative cost of making them accessible might be expected to be very high as there may be only a relatively small number of learners using a particular building or site. The lack of capital funding for FET presents challenges here. While there certainly is merit in dispersing FET provision geographically to make it more accessible, we also need to ensure that those with disabilities can access such provision. Accessibility is not only a function of location.

## 2.10 Guidance to FET learners and prospective learners

As is acknowledged in the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019[[47]](#footnote-47) there is a need for an integrated approach to the provision of Guidance to FET learners and indeed prospective learners. Guidance is critical to learners with disabilities accessing and making the most of the Further Education and training opportunities available to them. Without appropriate guidance those with disabilities will not know what supports and accommodations are available to them.

An integrated model of guidance for the FET sector should build on practice currently in operation within the AEGI services and incorporate national referral protocols between Adult Guidance Services, the DSP and other national agencies e.g. HSE, disability services, etc. The need for such protocols was a key recommendation in a 2016 report prepared on behalf of the Bray Adult Education Network[[48]](#footnote-48).

## 2.11 Cost of Providing FET Learners with access to appropriate supports and accommodations

The cost of providing all FET learners with access to appropriate supports and accommodations should not be prohibitive for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, enabling learners with disabilities to live independently and to support themselves should generate significant savings to both the Social Protection and Health budgets, in the medium- to long-term.

Secondly, it should be possible to develop the capacity of trainers, teachers, tutors or guidance personnel to carry out quality-assured needs-assessments for a substantial proportion of learners with other than low incidence disabilities. If this was done, the provision of supports to learners with SEN would be more timely and the cost of the assessments undertaken by external experts would be significantly reduced. Such assessments are essential to identifying the supports and/or accommodations these learners require to successfully engage with and complete FET programmes. In this regard, the recent change to the RACE (Reasonable Accommodations Certificate Examinations) for students undertaking the Leaving Certificate examination[[49]](#footnote-49) is instructive. Until 2016, Leaving Certificate candidates required a diagnosis from an educational psychologist to be granted an accommodation in taking the examination. Schools now have devolved authority to make decisions about the accommodations granted to students taking both the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate examinations.

Thirdly, adults with dyslexia and similar learning disabilities do not necessarily require supports that require funding. Sometimes, additional time to complete tasks and effective support strategies are sufficient to enable the learner to achieve his/her potential. In this regard, implementing a Universal Design for Learning approach can be synergistic – see 3.6.2 below.

## 2.12 Guidelines and tools for SOLAS and ETBs to assist them to comply with their Public-Sector Duty under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act (IHREC) 2014

The Public-Sector Duty imposed on SOLAS and ETBs is onerous and new and it is imperative that this duty is observed as efficiently as possible in respect of all learners in FET programmes. Of course, this duty is not confined to service users (learners) but extends to staff and others with whom the ETBs engage. There would seem to be a distinct need for the IHREC to develop guidelines and tools to assist both SOLAS and the ETBs complying with this duty.

## 2.13 Connectivity between school, Further Education and the world of work

A theme that emerged repeatedly in the course of consultations undertaken during the preparation of this paper relates to the disconnect between school and Further Education and training and school and the workplace. It was generally felt that many with a disability found school a relatively positive experience. However, unlike students without disabilities, those with significant disabilities tended to not have embarked on work-experience – probably because it was felt that they were not ‘work-ready’. Critically, this means that on leaving school, these students are much less prepared for work than are their contemporaries without a disability. Additionally, those with disabilities are inadequately prepared for progression to FET. Several consulted suggested that there is a need for a support service that engages with a disabled student towards the end of his/her Junior Cycle education, facilitates and supports their engagement in work experience during their Senior Cycle studies and, on leaving school, supports their progression to FET, where appropriate, their participation in work experience during their FET studies and subsequently their entry to sustainable employment.

# 3.0 Recommendations

In Sections 1 and 2 above, these key concerns were identified apropos FET provision meeting the additional needs of learners with disabilities.

* Despite the existence of a significant body of legislation and case law, there is a lack of clarity regarding what FET providers need to do to meet their legal and social justice obligations to learners with disabilities. Providers require authoritative and accessible guidelines to inform their practice if they are to efficiently and effectively meet their obligations.
* There is a need for more reliable and comprehensive data regarding learners with disabilities in FET, the accommodations and supports made available to them, and the efficacy of these accommodation and supports.
* National and local systems, processes and budget provisions (infrastructure) are required around meeting the needs of all learners with disabilities in FET. While many challenges remain around meeting the needs of learners with disabilities in 1st, 2nd and 3rd level, there are systems in place for 1st, 2nd and 3rd level education. When it comes to the establishment of a system/s for FET, the role and function of the access officer and the disability officer would appear to be crucial.
* All buildings accommodating FET provision need to be accessible and fit-for-purpose.
* FET learners and prospective learners with disabilities require access to a single, accessible and comprehensive source of guidance, information and support. Similarly, those involved in delivering FET need the support of identified colleagues with a particular competence set around meeting the needs of learners with disabilities.
* There is a need for a standardised, efficient system and process to facilitate the identification of persons with disabilities, the assessment of their needs and the accommodations and supports that should be extended to them. Besides, where disabilities may not be identified/disclosed (for example, mental health issues) there will be a need for a fit-for-purpose support structure for such ‘unidentified’ learners, based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
* The HEA fund for students with disabilities should be reformed to operate on a general allocation model so that resources are available on a timely basis to allow for learners with special needs having access to appropriate supports and accommodations from the very beginning of their FET programmes.
* There is a need for appropriate guidance and continuous professional development for all staff involved with the provision of FET, including support staff, around how best to meet the needs of learners with disabilities.
* There is a need for an individualised approach to transition-planning for young people with disabilities, beginning no later than when these learners are in their mid-teens and extending to the point where sustainable employment is secured. Essentially, there is need for a single service that supports young people with disabilities in their progression from school to sustainable employment.
* There is a need to continuously promote the accommodations and supports available to learners with disabilities.
* There is a need for a national strategy for meeting the needs of FET learners with disabilities over a period of years.
* There is a need for guidelines and tools to inform and support compliance with the Public-Sector Duty as set out in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.

## Arising from the identification of the above issues, the following recommendations are proposed.

* 1. The DES and/or SOLAS, in consultation with ETBI, the National Disability Authority (NDA), the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), the Health Services Executive (HSE), the office of the Minister of State for Disability Issues and other stakeholders, should develop and publish clear and accessible national guidelines for State-funded FET providers regarding what they need to do to ensure that learners with disabilities are not discriminated against in either their application for admission to a FET programme or their experience while on a programme. These guidelines should go beyond what is required to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and encompass best practice in meeting the needs of learners with disabilities – so they can achieve to the maximum of their potential, in terms of education and training and wider life outcomes. Such guidelines do not have to be hugely detailed and could substantively comprise hierarchical checklists.
	2. The DES and/or SOLAS, following a process of consultation with ETBI, the NDA, the IHREC, the HSE and other stakeholders, should set out clear goals and targets regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in FET.
	3. The DES and/or SOLAS should develop and maintain a single website as an easily accessible resource for anyone wishing to find out about disability in the FET sector – FET providers, persons with disabilities and those who influence and guide them, and the general public. There is already a wealth of relevant information in the public domain. The problem is that it is in different repositories. It needs to be accessible through a single portal.
	4. The IHREC, in consultation with the DES, SOLAS and ETBI, should develop national guidelines to assist SOLAS and the ETBs complying with their Public-Sector Duty under the provisions of Section 42 of the IHREC Act.
	5. Those who manage FET programmes in ETBs should be provided with a dedicated and adequate budget line to resource the provision of appropriate supports and accommodations to learners with disabilities. As well as funding the costs of supports and accommodations, these budgets would need to be sufficient to cover the costs of screening (and undertaking specific assessments where required) all FET learners at the point of registration, so that those delivering the programmes are aware of the specific needs of those they teach, tutor or instruct, and so that learners with disabilities are provided with the specific supports and accommodations they require to make the most of their education and training programmes. The conducting of educational, psychological, behavioural and medical assessments might be resourced through the HSE or maybe interdepartmentally between Education, Social Protection and Health, given that enabling those with disabilities to live independent self-supporting lives will generate savings for both the Social Protection and Health budgets.
	6. The DES and/or SOLAS, in consultation with ETBI, should develop a national strategy for realising the standards set out in the national guidelines (see 3.1 above) and the targets set out in 3.2 above. This strategy will need to explicitly set out how the guidelines are to be realised in terms of the following:

3.6.1 **The system to be established locally and nationally to facilitate the assessment of learners’ needs and the making of determinations about what accommodations/supports should be provided to them.** These assessments are essential to providing learners with disabilities with the supports and accommodation they require. Indeed, research findings presented to the 2017 AHEAD Conference clearly imply that students with an undiagnosed disability pose the highest risk of dropping out of their course. In this respect, it is worth noting that AHEAD has developed a standardised paper-based needs assessment process for carrying out needs analyses and if this system or a variation of it was put on-line and made available to all managing or delivering ETB programmes, it could make the needs assessment task easier to undertake, quality-assure the process, and facilitate the timely and secure sharing of the assessment results with all who need to have access to them.

As many learners with learning and other disabilities do not self-declare, there would be merit in putting in place a standardised and fit-for-purpose process that screens all learners at point of entry to Further Education and training to identify any special needs they may have.

An exemplar of how this may be done operates in Blanchardstown Institute of Technology. Here the National Learning Network (NLN)[[50]](#footnote-50) screens and profiles all students at the point of their induction, on a volunteer basis, using an online tool called the Do-It Profiler[[51]](#footnote-51). The students who opt for screening receive immediate printed feedback on their learning styles with some suggestions about how they should best study, etc. Some 10% of those screened are deemed to have a learning difficulty that requires additional support or intervention to ensure that they can complete their studies successfully. These students are invited to visit the NLN service, based in the Institute, for verbal feedback and this usually leads to a series of support meetings. There is an exceptionally high uptake on this initiative[[52]](#footnote-52), which ensures that those most likely to be vulnerable in the crucial early weeks of their third-level studies are supported and reassured from the outset. A further benefit of this screening and profiling exercise is that any lecturer may request a group ‘learning styles’ profile report. This indicates the ways in which his/her group learn best and makes suggestions about teaching and learning approaches that are likely to maximise learning outcomes for members of the class group.

The Do-It Profiler tool is even capable of identifying learners with anxiety and related conditions but this capability is not being used currently. Given the sensitivity associated with such conditions, it is understandable that such functionality is not currently being utilised. That said, the possibilities of using this functionality in the future, in an FET context, would seem to warrant exploration.

At Blanchardstown IT, NLN also assists students to build their capacity to manage anxiety, to improve their communications and confidence, and generally to enhance their sense of wellbeing. The NLN service at the IT, which includes an educational psychologist and an occupational therapist, is also being implemented in Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT). The 2016 report prepared for Bray Adult Education Network recommended that this model of good practice be explored further with a view to improving services to those experiencing mental health difficulties[[53]](#footnote-53).

3.6.2 **The merit in the strategy addressing the whole matter of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).** Given the extent to which FET learners may not be identified as having a disability (mental health, specific learning difficulties, attention/concentration, etc.), notwithstanding the implementation of good screening processes at the point of entry to FET programmes, there would be merit in the strategy addressing the whole matter of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Indeed, a comprehensive UDL approach reduces the need to identify students with a wide range of disabilities. The implementation of UDL in a college or centre can benefit all students. For example, UDL in a pedagogy context results in information being presented in a variety of ways and, as each learner learns in a variety of ways, this would be to the benefit of all learners. Likewise, making curricular materials available online benefits all learners, including students who have visual impairments and are using text-to-speech software to read the material.

At a minimum, the strategy should name UDL as a key means of meeting the needs of learners with a disability while enhancing the FET experience for all learners, and should propose the development of national guidelines on the implementation of UDL in FET provision. Already, the National Disability Authority (NDA)[[54]](#footnote-54) and AHEAD have undertaken significant work in this area and it would be relatively easy to build on this work to develop the required guidelines.

3.6.3 **Targets (and plans for their achievement) to be set for achieving a full implementation of the guidelines over several years.** It is unrealistic to expect every element in the guidelines to be achieved from the outset.

3.6.4 **The appointment of a staff member at ETB and/or college/centre level as the lead and key contact and support person for both staff and learners around meeting the special needs of learners with disabilities.** This staff member might be the ‘access officer’ prescribed by Section 26 of the Disability Act 2005, but, in an ETB providing a range of FET programmes to a significant number of learners, it is unlikely that one staff member would be able to meet the needs of staff and students around catering to the needs of learners with disabilities. The work of such personnel should not be confined to facilitating access to FET programmes, it should extend to supporting learners with disabilities throughout their participation in FET programmes and their securing and retention of employment.

It would also be important to elaborate a clear role and functions for the statutorily required Access Officer in ETBs.

3.6.5 **The capacity building that will need to be undertaken with staff.** While systems and processes are essential and some staff will certainly have key roles to play in these systems and processes, ultimately the needs of learners with disabilities will have to be met by all the FET provider’s staff – support staff and those directly involved in delivering the programmes such as teachers, tutors and instructors. While this issue can be addressed through the implementation of the SOLAS-ETBI FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING Professional Development Strategy 2017-2019[[55]](#footnote-55), it should be clearly referenced in the strategy being proposed here. As was recommended in the 2016 report for Bray Adult Education Network, mental health awareness training should be provided to all involved in the provision of FET[[56]](#footnote-56) – front of house staff, support staff and those delivering the FET programmes.

3.6.6 **FET learners with a disability being provided with supports and accommodations that do not impose a financial burden on the learner.**

3.6.7 **The establishment of virtual and physical practitioner networks for those supporting learners with disabilities and those leading the support of learners with disabilities.** This can also be addressed through the implementation of the SOLAS-ETBI FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING Professional Development Strategy 2017-2019[[57]](#footnote-57)

3.6.8 **The capturing of comprehensive and relevant data regarding disability in FET and the development of an appropriate database capable of supporting the development and ongoing evaluation of both policy, strategy and practice.**

3.6.9 **The research that will need to be conducted on an ongoing basis into catering to the needs of FET learners with a disability.**

3.6.10 **Referral protocols between FET services and mental health services and between FET services (Adult Guidance, Community Education, etc) and the Department of Social Protection (DSP).** These protocols should also provide for ongoing connectivity between FET providers and both the DSP and the HSE so that the FET provider may obtain guidance and support for learners with mental health issues across the duration of their FET programme. For example, where the learner is not progressing in his/her course, the FET provider should be able to call on the HSE for additional support and/or guidance. Indeed, it may mean that a learner with a mental health issue could simultaneously be in receipt of services from both health (therapeutic or clinical) and education. Admission to an FET programme cannot be a way of permanently transferring responsibility for the welfare of a person with a mental health problem from health to education and training.

Here, also, there may be a need to include a guidance framework for the establishment of partnerships between community mental health services and FET provision so that issues may be addressed as they arise rather than becoming a reason for a learner dropping out of FET. The expertise of mental health professionals is essential to effective proactivity in this context[[58]](#footnote-58).

3.6.11 **Progression routes for those with a mental health disability, in particular.** Some with a mental health disability may not be able, at first, to participate in mainstream FET programmes and may need to progress to such programmes through what might be termed bridging programmes. The design and delivery of these bridging programmes will require collaboration between FET and the HSE’s mental health services. Such bridging programmes, while provided in a mainstream setting, should be tailored to people with mental health issues until they are ready to access more mainstream programmes. Successful progression routes for those with mental health difficulties also require more flexible FET provision and health services preparing people for participation in FET prior to them accessing it. These twin objectives can be achieved with better partnership between FET and the health services.[[59]](#footnote-59).

3.6.12 **The extent to which FET programmes might be required to reserve a proportion of their places for learners with disabilities.** For example, in the case of contracted training, where the contractor may be remunerated on the basis of the proportion of course graduates who gain employment, there may be an incentive to recruit learners who do not have a disability.

3.6.13 **SOLAS and ETBs complying with relevant provisions in Section 42 of the IHREC Act.**

3.6.14 **Persons with disabilities, on exiting FET programmes, being supported in their efforts to obtain and retain employment.** The big challenge for many of these learners is accessing employment and becoming as self-supporting as possible and this challenge may only emerge after they have left education and training. The system needs to proactively address this issue even to the point of second-level students with disabilities being linked in to an appropriate support service before they leave school and this service assisting such students to gain appropriate work experience. This would ensure that school leavers with disabilities would not just drift into unemployment and dependence. The support service should then continue to engage with these students throughout their FET programme and in the process support them with work placements and, on completion of their education and training, with transition to sustainable employment.[[60]](#footnote-60) Such a support service should have a focus on persons with disabilities maximising their potential and, wherever feasible, acquiring the competences that would enable them to gain employment, earn a living and make a contribution to society, rather than on directing them towards disability services operated by the HSE. This would support the achievement of the goals and targets set out in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024[[61]](#footnote-61) - most particularly **Action 5.1** which requires departments and agencies ‘to work together to develop an effective coordinated policy approach (and draw up an implementation plan based on that approach), to assist individuals with disabilities, including those who require a high level of support, to obtain and retain employment …’

While protocols between government departments and agencies involved in supporting young people with disabilities on their paths to work can assist, they can only go so far. There is a need for what might be termed a ‘one-stop-shop’ to provide supports to these young people, their families and the education and training services they attend or seek to access. After all, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy is underpinned by the presumption that people with disabilities can get a job, enjoy a rewarding career, earn a living and make a contribution to society, provided they get the supports they need to do so, both in terms of their education and training and when they are at work. We also need to be cognisant that even where participation in Further Education may not give someone with a disability the capacity to obtain and retain employment, it can enhance a person’s quality of life and this can indirectly benefit the exchequer.

This strategy should be incorporated into, or, alternatively, clearly referenced in the proposed National Disability Inclusion Strategy, when it is published.

* 1. There should be an audit of all buildings and locations providing FET, to document the extent to which each of these buildings is accessible to learners with disabilities. This audit should comprehend a recommendation about how buildings and locations that are not accessible to people with disabilities might be made accessible, or, alternatively, how the provision might be relocated to provide such accessibility.
	2. The HEA fund for students with disabilities should be reformed to operate on a general allocation model so that resources are available on a timely basis to allow for learners with special needs having access to appropriate supports and accommodations from the very beginning of their FET programmes. This may necessitate funding being made available on a whole of ETB rather than individual school or college basis, in some instances. The reform should also involve a campaign to build awareness of the fund among potential beneficiaries and those who influence and guide them, and responsibility for the allocation of resources to individual learners should be devolved to colleges or ETBs, as appropriate.

# 4.0 Concluding Comments

This report is very much a first step in what can be a very rewarding journey for all stakeholders. A significant minority of our citizens currently do not have the opportunity to make the most of their lives because of their disabilities and the ongoing cost of this failure to both the person with a disability and the wider society is significant.

Significantly, this position paper does not document the voice of FET learners with disabilities and this is, in many respects a glaring omission. In implementing any or all of the above recommendations, there would need to be regard for the learners’ voice in a very tangible way, at every step in the process.

Disability is not only physical and visible. It comes in many hidden guises such as mental health, intellectual and learning difficulties, and a majority of those with these disabilities can acquire skills and hold down fulfilling jobs if they are provided with appropriate supports and accommodations when learning and working. Even where they do not gain employment, their quality of life can be enhanced through their participation in FET programmes, which is something that also generates indirect benefit to the exchequer.

Further Education and training is very much a key element in ensuring that many with disabilities can achieve to their potential in life by acquiring the skills necessary to obtaining sustainable employment and contributing to their own and society’s welfare, or by having a better quality of life.

Already Further Education and training contributes hugely to persons encountering some form of disadvantage (including disability) overcoming their disadvantage and living fulfilling lives. That said, Further Education and training can do significantly more for those with a disability if the above recommendations are implemented. There is a need for national guidelines and a strategy for their incremental implementation over time. The need for ‘strategic policy directives operating at a systems level’ was acknowledged in the 2016 *Education and Recovery* report written for the Bray Adult Education Network[[62]](#footnote-62).

The implementation of the strategy does not necessarily have to impose significant new demands on the exchequer. Rather, their implementation involves putting systems, processes and standards in place to structure and support a more coherent approach to meeting the needs of FET learners with disabilities. The amount of work involved in doing this is quite manageable and could be undertaken in a relatively short period of time. After all, it merely involves drawing on current best practice, documenting it and, over time, embedding it at every level of FET provision.

*‘Disabled people need more invested in their education, housing, job training, transportation, assistive technology, and independent-living facilities. Governments earn back this investment - and more - by making people with disabilities economically productive citizens’*

**Jesse Ventura**

# Appendix 1: FSD ALLOCATIONS SINCE 2012-13

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sector** | **Total Allocated 2012-13** | **Total Allocated 2013-14** | **Total Allocated 2014-15** | **Total Allocated 2015-16** |
|
| Higher Education | 7,744,590 | 7,595,393 | 7,689,645 | 7,593,906 |
| Further Education | 2,496,769 | 2,394,736 | 2,372,927 | 2,400,272 |
| Other EU | 349,059 | 315,521 | 345,826 | 374,801 |
| **Total** | **10,590,418** | **10,305,650** | **10,408,398** | **10,368,979** |

# Appendix 2: FSD BENEFICIARIES SINCE 2012-13

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sector** | **2012-13** | **2013-14** | **2014-15** | **2015-16** |
|
| Higher Education | 6755 | 7413 | 8524 | 8920 |
| Further Education | 956 | 1224 | 1350 | 1362 |
| Other EU | 186 | 172 | 176 | 204 |
| **Total** | **7897** | **8809** | **10050** | **10486** |

# Appendix 3: FSD BENEFICIARIES - by Disability Category 2015-16

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Disability category** | **Number of Beneficiaries** |
|  | **Further Education** | **Higher Education** |
| ADD/ADHD | 31 | 347 |
| Autistic Spectrum Disorder | 96 | 543 |
| Blind/Vision Impaired | 19 | 166 |
| Deaf/Hard of Hearing | 42 | 260 |
| Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (Dyspraxia) | 45 | 519 |
| General Learning Difficulty/ Intellectual Difficulty/Acquired Brain Injury | 136 |  |
| Multiple Disabilities | 349 |  |
| Mental Health Condition | 81 | 956 |
| Neurological Condition | 19 | 332 |
| Physical Disability | 46 | 582 |
| Significant Ongoing Illness | 24 | 943 |
| Speech, Language & Communication Disorders | 31 | 50 |
| SpLD (Dyslexia/Dyscalculia) | 443 | 4222 |
| **Grand Total** | **1,362** | **8,920** |

# Appendix 4: FSD BENEFICIARIES - by Disability Category & Type of Institution 2015-16

| **Disability Category** | **Irish Higher Education Institutions** | **Irish Further Education Institutions** | **UK Institutions** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **N** | **%** | **N** | **%** | **N** | **%** |
| ADD/ADHD | 278 | 3.3% | 25 | 1.9% | 2 | 1.1% |
| Autistic Spectrum Disorder | 345 | 4.0% | 88 | 6.5% | 2 | 1.1% |
| Blind/Visual Impairment | 160 | 1.9% | 23 | 1.7% | 2 | 1.1% |
| Deaf/Hard of Hearing | 220 | 2.6% | 36 | 2.7% | 6 | 3.4% |
| Mental Health | 808 | 9.5% | 68 | 5.0% | 8 | 4.5% |
| Multi-Disability | 773 | 9.1% | 273 | 20.2% | 3 | 1.7% |
| Other | 292 | 3.4% | 192 | 14.2% | 5 | 2.8% |
| Physical Disability/Mobility Impairment | 464 | 5.4% | 44 | 3.3% | 1 | 0.6% |
| Significant Ongoing Illness | 801 | 9.4% | 30 | 2.2% | 4 | 2.3% |
| Specific Learning Difficulties | 4,383 | 51.4% | 571 | 42.3% | 143 | 81.3% |
| Total | 8,524 | 100.0% | 1,350 | 100.0% | 176 | 100.0% |

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|  |
| --- |
| **Appendix 5: Needs of SEN Learners in FET****Working Group** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name | Organisation |
| Lucianne Bird | NLN |
| Maureen Conway | CDETB |
| Sheena Duffy | HEA |
| Catherine Greene | KWETB |
| Teresa Griffin | NCSE |
| Ann Heelan | AHEAD |
| Joan Hennessy | SOLAS |
| Ray Jordan | NCSE |
| John Kearney | CMETB |
| Michelle Kinsella | Dyslexia Association of Ireland |
| Ann Marie Lacey | Cavan Institute |
| Margaret McCarthy | DES |
| Gerry McKenny | Cavan Institute - CMETB |
| Clare McMahon | ETBI |
| Pat O’ Mahony | ETBI |
| Mary Quirke | AHEAD |
| Jane Sweetman | HEA |
| Mary Walsh | WWETB |

1. See Question 16 in [2016 Census Form](http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/census2016/2016censusforms/65995_English_Household_2016_New_Version_Do_Not_Complete.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For further details see: [Employment Transitions among People with Disabilities in Ireland](http://nda.ie/nda-files/Employment-Transitions-among-People-with-a-Disability-in-Ireland-.pdf) – ESRI Research Series Number 58, March 217 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Comparable data from the 2016 Census will not be available until December 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Central Statistics Office (2012), Census Profile 8 – Our Bill of Health – Health, Disability and Carers in Ireland [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Watson, D, Kingston G and McGinnity, F (2012:19) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Rooney (2010), Adult Education and mental Health Recovery, PhD thesis. NUIM [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/Mentalhealth/Mental_Health_-_A_Vision_for_Change.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs220/en/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://ncse.ie/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <http://www.hea.ie/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://www.ahead.ie/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. [http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/act/30/section/1/enacted/en/html#](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/act/30/section/1/enacted/en/html) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/enacted/en/html> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ncse_imp_report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://www.esri.ie/pubs/BKMNEXT198.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <http://www.esri.ie/growing-up-in-ireland/> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <https://www.ahead.ie/> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See: [Educational and Employment Experiences of People with a Disability in Ireland: an Analysis of the National Disability Survey](http://nda.ie/nda-files/Non-Technical-Summary-Educational-and-Employment-Experiences-of-People-with-Disabilities-in-Ireland-PDF-version-.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <https://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/equality_and_mental_health___what_advocates_need_to_know.pdf> at Page 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Section: [3(2) of The Equal Status Act, 2000](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/section/3/enacted/en/html#sec3) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. <http://www.supremecourt.ie/Judgments.nsf/1b0757edc371032e802572ea0061450e/fe0138121d36dda88025812a003b6bcd?OpenDocument> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. <http://www.supremecourt.ie/Judgments.nsf/WebSCJudgmentsByYear/4FA737032F09A68E8025812B0042515D?opendocument> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. <https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/Cases/2011/November/DEC-S2011-052-Full-Case-Report.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <http://www.lrc.ie/en/Cases/2009/January/DEC-S2009-005-Full-Case-Report.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/cases/2004/february/DEC-S2004-025-full-case-report.html [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. https://www.workplacerelations.ie//en/cases/2016/july/dec-s2016-048.html [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/section/14/enacted/en/html [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2014/act/25/enacted/en/html [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2003/act/20/enacted/en/print.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. <http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. [http://www.jsijournal.ie/html/Volume%202%20No.%202/2%5B2%5D\_Quinlivan&Keys\_An%20Analysis%20of%20Sinnott.pdf](http://www.jsijournal.ie/html/Volume%202%20No.%202/2%5B2%5D_Quinlivan%26Keys_An%20Analysis%20of%20Sinnott.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For the National Disability Authority's Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information Provided by Public Bodies see: <http://nda.ie/Good-practice/Codes-of-Practice/Code-of-Practice-on-Accessibility-of-Public-Services-and-Information-Provided-by-Public-Bodies-/> [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The data included in tables 1, 2,3 & 4 is sourced from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. https://www.ahead.ie/ [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/FET%20Services%20Plan%202016.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. http://www.seechange.ie/ [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. https://www.inspirewellbeing.org/our-services/inspire-students [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. http://www.nln.ie/ [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. https://issuu.com/brayareapartnership/docs/education\_and\_recovery\_report - see Para 3) iii & iv, p 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See: <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl> [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Moving to Further and Higher Education (Conor Mc Guckin, Michael Shevlin, Sheena Bell and Cristina Devecchi), - An Exploration of the Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs, NCSE REPORT NO.14 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. http://accesscollege.ie/dare/ [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Half of PLC learners are over 20 years of age and more than a fifth are over 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. For a report on the pilot phase of the Initiative, see: <http://www.youthreach.ie/wp-content/uploads/SEN-INITIATIVE-REPORT-2009.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. For further details of the model see: <http://www.youthreach.ie/web-wheel/staff-training/webwheel-model/> [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. <http://www.youthreach.ie/wp-content/uploads/SEN-INITIATIVE-EVALUATION-REPORT-2013.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. <https://issuu.com/brayareapartnership/docs/education_and_recovery_report> - see Table 1, Page 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. <https://www.examinations.ie/schools/cs_view.php?q=fd8bb6c95031c7af7bc67154c68381c5656a4829> [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. NLN’s Specialist Vocational Training services are funded by the DES/ SOLAS through the ETBs. Currently, NLN provides specialist Education Support Services to Further and Higher Education colleges – CDETB, ITB, NUIM, NUIG, NCAD and IADT [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. http://doitprofiler.com/ [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Clearly, there are concerns about those who either do not opt to be screened or those who, having been screened, do not engage with the support service, following an invitation to do so. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. https://issuu.com/brayareapartnership/docs/education\_and\_recovery\_report - see Table 1, p 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. http://nda.ie/ [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/SolasFETPDS.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. https://issuu.com/brayareapartnership/docs/education\_and\_recovery\_report - see Table 1, p 4 & Table 3, p 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/SolasFETPDS.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. https://issuu.com/brayareapartnership/docs/education\_and\_recovery\_report - see Table 3, p 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. https://issuu.com/brayareapartnership/docs/education\_and\_recovery\_report - see Para 2), p 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Details of an exemplar service that has been established to provide such support may be accessed at: http://www.walk.ie/what-we-do/employment.php [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Comprehensive%20Employment%20Strategy%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities%20-%20FINAL.pdf/Files/Comprehensive%20Employment%20Strategy%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities%20-%20FINAL.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. https://issuu.com/brayareapartnership/docs/education\_and\_recovery\_report - see Para 3) i, p 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-62)