



City of Dublin Education and Training Board

CFE student & apprentice feedback

Inaugural Review of CDETB's Quality Systems

In May and June 2021 learners and staff from all across the CDETB FET centres and support services were invited to give feedback on their experience of working and learning this year. For the students, apprentices and trainees enrolled in CDETB NFQ level 5 + 6 courses this involved centre based evaluation process, a scheme wide learner survey and a specialist stakeholder engagement event. This newsletter summarises **what they told us, why we asked and what we intend to do with insights we received.**

CDETB uses the learner journey into and through FET provision as the framework for our quality assurance systems. These systems are being reviewed as part of a seven year organisational wide quality improvement process with QQI that begins with a self-evaluation process and is followed an external international panel review in January 2022.

The three objective areas for the inaugural review are:-

1. governance and management of quality
2. teaching learning and assessment
3. self-evaluation, monitoring and review

With the unprecedented level of change in education that took place in 2020/2021 the core focus of the engagement and consultation process with learners for this review was to strengthen CDETB's understanding of the learner journey through the eyes of the learners. In order to be able to improve what we do and how we do it.

To help achieve that CDETB issued all level 5 & 6 learners across the scheme with the same questionnaire and invited five learners from every centre providing courses at level 5 or 6 to come to a stakeholder engagement session to

feedback on their experience of being a learner with CDETB this year.

1,013 NFQ L5 & 6 learners, submitted questionnaires **938** of those were in Colleges of Further Education (CFE) 42 from Training Centres (TC) and 33 were on CDETB courses with community providers (CP) on programmes in Local Training Initiatives and Specialist Training Providers.

78 students, trainees and apprentices from one Adult Education Centre, 14 different Colleges of Further Education and two Training Centres in the city of Dublin attended the stakeholder engagement event to share their journeys into and through City of Dublin Education and Training Board's (CDETB's) Further Education and Training (FET) courses.

On the 8th of September 2021 the report on that event and the other inaugural and annual review consultation processes will be launched at a FET staff engagement event. Artist Margaret Anne Suggs summarised what the learners at the stakeholder event had to say, posters of this feedback will be displayed in centres this year.



Surveys were returned by 1,013 learners from 16 awarding centres.

The engagement session was attended by 78 learners 14 CFE, 2 TC & 1 Adult education service



1,013 survey responses





NFQ Level 5 & 6

All 78 learners at the engagement event shared their journeys into and through CDETb courses this year. Some learners had come straight from Leaving Cert with a career plan in mind, like [Ciara](#) who wants to be a solicitor. Others, like [Vanessa](#), are retraining after coming to work in Ireland and finding their qualifications and experience did not translate to the Irish market. Some learners were in professions where the technology and role updated constantly. So rather than doing a four-year course at the start, some learners re-train every few years to keep their skills current, like [Paul](#). Other learners also choose courses in areas that they are passionate about but never had the chance to develop, like new retiree [Denis](#). The learner stories and their motivation for studying were as diverse as the learners themselves.

Many learners at the event felt the courses they were on, the way that these courses were delivered, and the commitment of the teaching staff had built and **strengthened their skills and competence** for taking up a job or further study.



They also found these courses to have built their self-belief and self-confidence. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19 to their training and learning, learners liked the **small class sizes, the commitment of teaching staff, the supports** provided by CDETb and the chance to try new things.



Feedback from students, apprentices and trainees

These findings were confirmed in the CFE learner survey where **77% of learners agreed or strongly agreed** that their **course prepared them well** to take the **next steps in their career or education**.

When participants were asked **what should be remembered by CDETb** when reviewing and planning courses, they thought that:

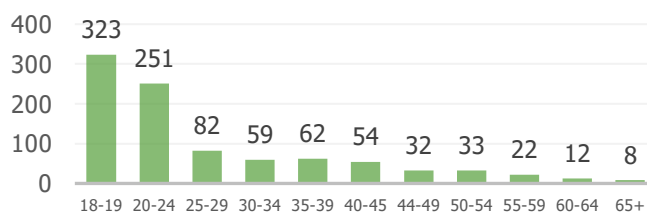
- The courses could be easier to find and get on to
- FET opportunities and options should be better promoted by CDETb
- Connections between centres should be promoted to help the sharing of resources and to highlight all the FET opportunities available

and that courses should continue to cater to the diversity of learners, based on their needs and goals.

To respond to the diverse needs of learners, industry, society and employers CDETb provides educational opportunities all year round. In 2020 **39,115 learners attended courses in CDETb**, this is down from **52,024 in 2019** with most of the losses due to COVID 19 restrictions. Despite the restrictions in 2020 CDETb provided **1,232 QQI accredited courses**, 200 courses accredited by other awarding bodies and **989 uncertified courses**, these uncertified courses were primarily in [Adult Education \(AES\)](#), and [Education to Prisons \(EP\)](#), provision.

Colleges of Further Education (CFE) primarily work on an academic calendar basis providing PLC courses and non-craft apprenticeships at level 5&6. There were **6,427** students registered on level **5 & 6 PLC courses** and **104 on non-craft apprenticeships** in May 2021 when this survey was issued, 938 learners responded giving a response rate of 14% of registered PLC /non craft apprentice learners.

The youngest CFE level 5 learner in May 2021 was 18 years of age, the oldest over 70 years of age with the majority of the learners in CFE provision aged under 24 years of age. This age spread is reflected in the learners who responded to the survey.



'This course and the people I've meet during my time here, have helped me to further achieve my goals and I can't be more grateful'



Coping with remote delivery and COVID 19 restrictions

COVID 19 public health restrictions in Dublin city turned out to be even **more stringent than expected**, with many learners restricted from entering centres from the start of term. From September to December 2020, **CFE centres were limited to a maximum of 20% of their enrolled learners attending at any one time**, forcing most courses into some level of remote delivery.

In January 2021 this became even more restricted with centres operating fully remotely from January to late March 2021 and only returning to **20% capacity** after Easter. These restrictions impacted on the assessment periods and quality assurance measures as well as teaching and learning.

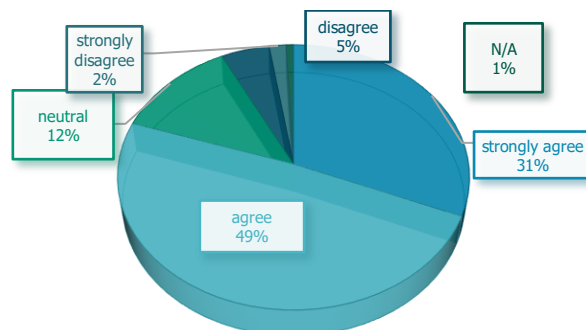
In the May 2020 review of the impact of COVID 19 on teaching, learning and assessment (the '[informing the future](#)' report) CDETb staff and centres identified '**access to technology for staff and learners**', '**IT knowhow**', and '**understanding of how to teach remotely / pedagogy**' as key areas to be addressed.

Amid the uncertainty brought about by COVID 19 CDETb put plans in place locally and centrally to address each of these areas. For example in relation to '**access to technology**' CDETb used the SOLAS grant scheme to procure **1,295 laptops/laptops and dongles for learners**, alongside local donations of laptops, tablets, phones and devices for loan to learners across the scheme to ensure as many learners as possible had access to an appropriate device to complete their course remotely.

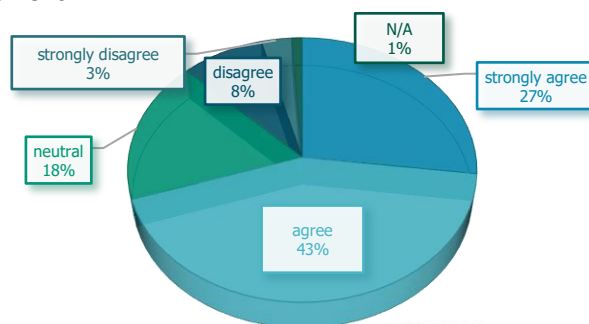
The learner survey asked a number of questions to check the effectiveness of these actions beginning with access to the equipment and technology needed to do their course remotely.

Coping with remote delivery

80% of CFE students agreed or strongly agreed that they had **access to the technology** they needed to do their course with 7% of actively disagreeing with the statement.



70% also agreed or strongly agreed that they had **access to the equipment** they needed to do their course with 11% of learners actively disagreeing with the statement.



Students on courses that required access to specialist technology or equipment were more likely to respond negatively to these questions.



Throughout the COVID 19 emergency CDETb and its staff have heavily invested time and resources to improve and develop the skills and competencies required to teach, learn and assess remotely. This included IT skills and remote teaching pedagogy. Fortunately CDETb and a number of its centres were already delivering some blended learning programmes that included remote and online delivery. This infrastructure was built on throughout the last year with the development of Moodle platforms, Professional Learning and Development (PLD) opportunities including the use of Technology Enhanced Learning Mentor Supports (TELMS) and subject based communities of practice (fCOPs).

'Teachers were enthusiastic to get over hurdles. Great environment for learning and staff did their best.' – learner event



Learner feedback on remote learning

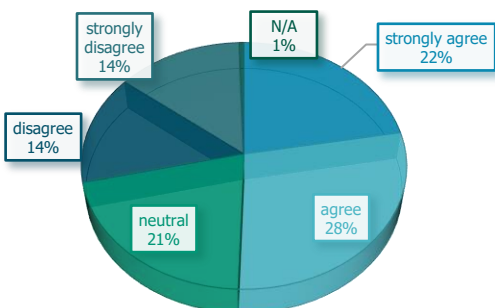
When learners were asked if they saw an improvement in their teachers online teaching skills over the year. The responses were overwhelming positive, with many of the learners complementing the teachers for the work they put in, or expressing concern for how the changes must have been affecting them.

Yes, I was very impressed how they managed to cover everything that needed to be covered. It must have been very hard for them being bombarded with emails for corrections.

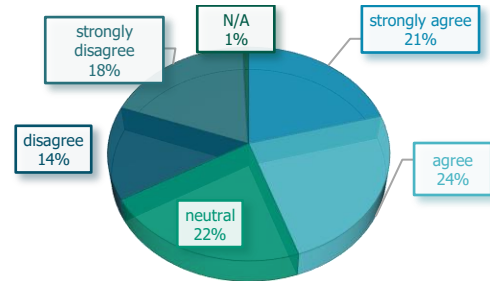
Yes definitely, especially during this last lockdown after Christmas, they really helped and I didn't feel as if I was missing out from a quality education.

However some learners highlighted that there was no improvement either because the teachers were good from the beginning or because one or two of their teachers didn't engage well with online teaching and available technology for example teachers continuing to deliver their class online in the same way as they did in the face to face classroom.

When it came to **remote or online classes** learners were mixed about whether they would like to continue with them next year with **only 50% of learners agreeing or strongly agreeing** that they think some online learning/learning from home, should be kept as part of their course.



This fell to **45% for learners aged under 24 years of age** with **32% actively disagreeing** with the statement. This response matches what learners at the stakeholder

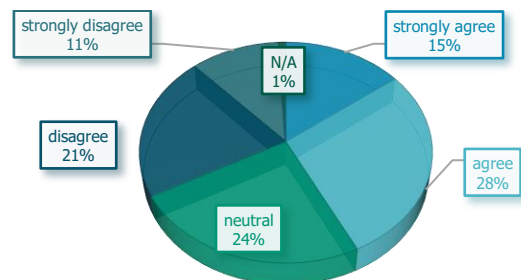


event said. Older learners or learners with more responsibilities **valued the flexibilities that came with online learning**, most of the learners valued **having access to recorded classes or online materials after classes** and learners of all ages highlighted that **they preferred the online classes on some of the wet cold days of winter.**



Some of the younger learner's dislike of remote learning may be linked to access to campus life and the social interactions with classmates and teachers.

CDET B CFE were very conscious of the need for learners to experience 'college life' and creatively provided a variety of events and opportunities to replicate social events that would take place throughout the year. But despite the great effort that was put in to organising these online events and encouraging class interaction in the online environment only **43% of learners agreed or strongly agreed** that they had a lot of **opportunities to interact with their classmates** with 33% actively disagreeing with the statement.



This increased to **63% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had a lot of interactions with teachers** with 15% of learners actively disagreeing with the statement.

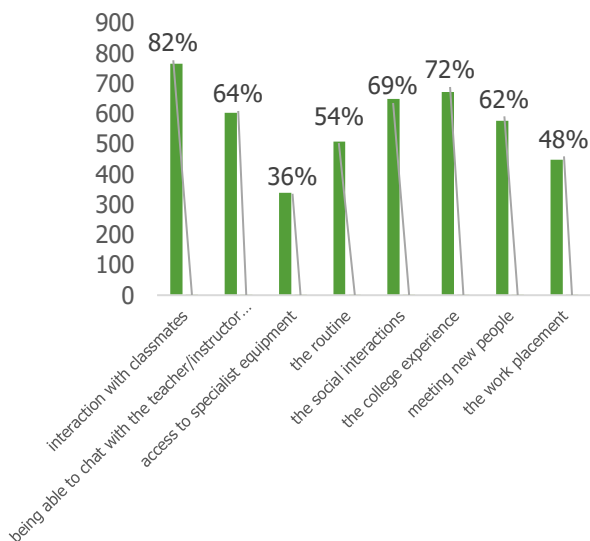
[availability of teachers]

'it would have been easier for everyone in person but they did make themselves available at all times'



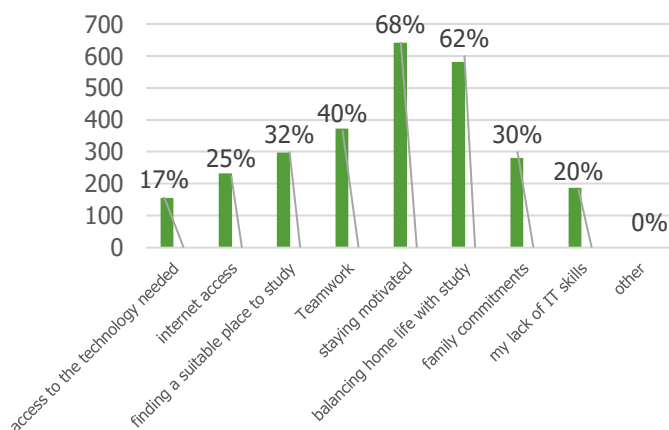
Challenges and Supports

When asked what they missed most about not being in centres this year learners identified **interactions with classmates 82%** and the **college experience 72%** as two of the things they **missed the most**.

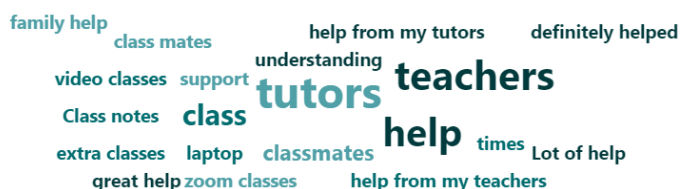


What they **found hardest about studying remotely** were **staying motivated 68%** and **balancing home life 62%**.

Lack of IT skills 20% and **access to technology 17%** were identified as the least difficult aspect of remote study for respondents, with one learner indicating that they found something not listed hard.



When it came to identifying the **supports they most relied** on 749 learners answered the question with **CDET staff** listed by the majority of learners. This included naming roles for example **teachers, tutors, subject teachers, course coordinators and guidance councillors** as well as **naming specific teachers**.



Learners also identified

- **Access to technology and online content** including the laptop loan scheme and access to equipment. Learners also named access to recorded classes and materials as a great support.
- **specific supports** phone calls and emails from teachers, additional tutorial supports, counselling and guidance, extensions on submission of assignments
- **classmates, other students, family, friends and work colleagues** these involved both practical and emotional supports

'Having access to office suite and the ability to use zoom to communicate with course lead was great. Quick response times in emails from most of the teachers'

'When tutors recorded classes or instructional parts of classes we could watch again at a later time.'

The lockdown and COVID 19 restrictions also impacted the ability to run exams and offer work placements. **48%** of learners highlighted that they **missed the work experience**. This was discussed at the learner event. While many learners were looking forward to work experience, especially those coming from school or looking for a taste of work in a particular area, a number of learners were happy not to have work compulsory experience this year. They thought that the alternative module of personal and professional development [5N2985](#) was more suitable for them. This was particularly true of the more mature learners and the younger learners who were using their course to access a third level college place.

'The teachers went over and beyond to make sure I got the skills I needed.'



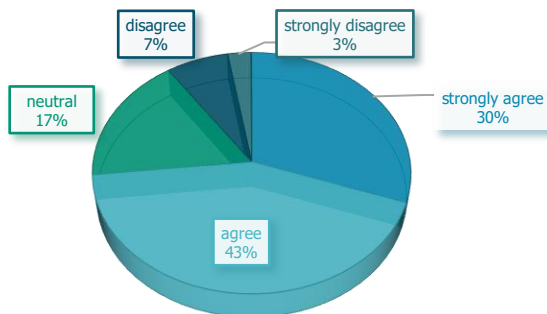
Learner feedback on communication and voice

Overview of the steps entailed in 'transformative dialogue' drawn from the [NCCA learner voice research study 2017](#)

In its [statement of strategy 2021 – 2025](#) CDETБ stated its commitment to developing effective consultation and communication processes with staff, learners and stakeholders. 'Effective communication' was named under **Pillar 1 Profile** of that strategy and 'harnessing and embracing the voice of learners in the strategic direction and leadership of CDETБ' named in **Pillar 2 People**.

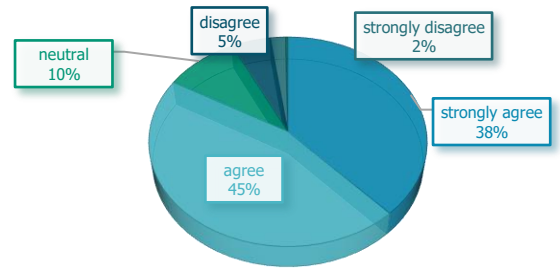
A lot of changes took place in 2020/2021 because of COVID 19. To assess how effective the **communication** procedures with students were during the year and to ascertain the level of **collaboration and harnessing the voice of learners** that took place a number of questions were included in the learner survey with the following emerging:-

73% of CFE learners **agreed or strongly agreed** that **they felt like their opinion mattered** and were **listened to by their teachers** with 10% actively

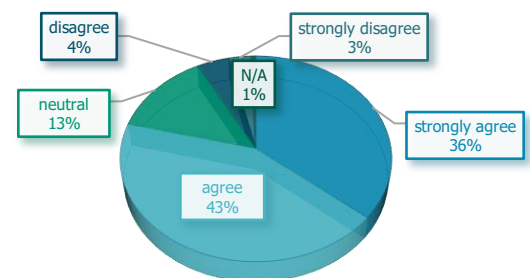


disagreeing with the statement. This increased to 78% for learners over 20 years of age and 79% for learner over 25 years of age. Only 6% of learners over 25 years of age actively disagreed with the statement.

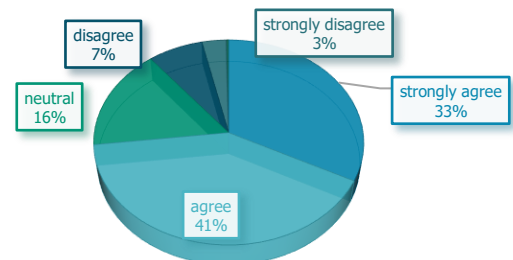
83% of CFE learners **agreed or strongly agreed** that they were **kept informed about changes that were happening in their course because of COVID 19**, with only 7% of learners disagreeing with that statement.



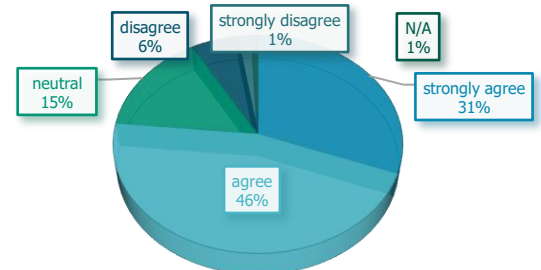
When asked if they were consulted about the changes or if their personal circumstances were considered **79%** of CFE learners **agreed or strongly agreed** that they were **consulted about changes that were happening to their course** because of COVID 19 with 7% of respondents actively disagreeing with the statement.



74% of CFE learners **agreed or strongly agreed** that their **personal needs and circumstances were taken into consideration** when **changes were happening** to their courses with 10% of learners disagreeing with the statement.



77% of CFE learners **agreed or strongly agreed** that they were **given enough information to be able to do alternatives to skills demonstrations and exams**



'It was a real challenge going back to school at this stage in my life, but the teachers were all very understanding and supportive.'



Experience of studying this year

Feedback from the level 5&6 learner event

What it was like to be a learner during COVID 19

Using both Padlet and small group discussions, learners at the event shared their experience of studying this year focusing on what went well, what didn't, and what can CDETB learn from that. They also discussed what changes introduced because of COVID 19 should be kept after the emergency phase of COVID 19 passes.

WHAT WENT WELL

- Most teachers and instructors were very committed, supportive and went the extra mile
- Access to modern tech and equipment, including the laptop loan scheme
- Learner support
- Not having to travel
- Having videos/ recorded classes to look back on
- Some modules/course, like spreadsheets and IT, were easier to do via Zoom than in class
- Teachers linking with each other about the new assessment briefs
- Changing course workload to respond to COVID
- Work simulations
- Finishing the courses in time for CAO offers
- Meeting people from different backgrounds

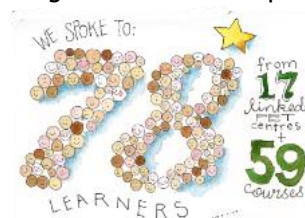
WHAT DIDN'T

- Internet connections (both learner and staff)
- Timely access to the technology and equipment
- Spending time with classmates
- Some colleges used multiple platforms to deliver courses and collect assignments – this was confusing for learners
- Transport delays due to reduced bus service capacity
- Diversity of IT skills among staff and learners
- Diversity of ability and motivation among learners
- learners concerned about how teaching staff are supported
- Lack of online library
- Some staff produced great online content to support class delivery but some only delivered in their usual content in the virtual room
- Uncertainty created by COVID 19 - alternatives not clear enough or provided fast enough

WHAT COVID 19 CHANGES SHOULD WE KEEP

- Remote delivery one or two days per week for some modules
- Recording classes or videos for watching in your own time/at own speed
- The mix of assessment techniques – broader than exams
- Semesterisation – finishing some modules before starting others
- Blended programmes for appropriate courses –(IT and theory modules suggested)
- UDL approach
- Technology/laptop lending scheme
- While most learners would have preferred to do a work placement some learners thought Personal and Professional development module was very useful for preparing for their next step

The '[listening and learning](#)' stakeholder engagement report from this event will be launched at the staff engagement event on the 8th of September 2021.



'in CDETB you are a person not a number'



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