

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- City of Dublin FET College Connect Learner Hub Launch
- Student Card roll out
- International Literacy Day
- Alumni at Higher Options
- Dyslexia Awareness Month
- International Week of Deaf People .....

October is  
**Dyslexia  
Awareness  
Month**



learn more at



[www.dyslexia.ie](http://www.dyslexia.ie)

@DyslexiaIreland



.....And much, much more

# ADHD

AWARENESS MONTH

OCTOBER



Let's talk about  
media literacy

September - October 2025  
Campaign Partner Pack

#MediaLiteracyMatters



## IRISH SIGN LANGUAGE AWARENESS WEEK

23rd September to 29th September



**WITH SIGN LANGUAGE,  
EVERYONE IS INCLUDED!**

Welcome to the first issue of the Learner Support and Engagement Service (LSES) Newsletter for the academic year 2025- 2026.

We hope everybody had a great summer, even if it is, by now, a fast-fading memory in the midst of all the hub bub of the autumnal return to the classroom, studio, workshop, laboratory, kitchen, gym, playing field, stage - or wherever it is your teaching takes place.

The new academic year has got off to a flying start here in the LSES.

In August we had the pleasure of welcoming **Audrey Manning Cahill** to the team (page 3)

**On September 18** we celebrated the online launch of **College Connect**, the online hub for learners across City of Dublin FET College (page 9 -10), which Alan had been labouring away at through much of the summer. Meanwhile, the rollout of the new **City of Dublin FET College Student Card**, under the capable stewardship of Audrey, is well advanced (page 11)

Marking **International Week of Deaf People** and **Irish Sign Language (ISL) Awareness Week**, which take place concurrently in the last full week of September, we are proud to announce a **Deaf and Hearing Awareness Training** for FET staff which will be delivered here in Winstead by **Chime**, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Charity. (page 12)

In this issue marking, **International Literacy Day** which took place on September 8 we have an article on **Page to Stage** in the O'Casey Theatre on September 15 and 16 (page 13).

October 6 to 12 was **Dyslexia Awareness Week** and October 8 **International Dyslexia Awareness Day**. Thanks to **Dyslexia Ireland**, we have some powerful videos to share with you (page 14-15). October as a whole is **ADHD Awareness Month** which we mark with an interview with **Melanie Smith**, a recent photography graduate of **City of Dublin FET College Pearse**. Melanie speaks openly and sincerely about her educational journey with ADHD (page 16-18)

October is **Black History Month** in Ireland and the UK. Already, there have been a number of events including a terrific evening in the **Royal Irish Academy**, in conjunction with the **Dublin Festival of History** (page 19-20)

Finally, we have an article on City of Dublin FET College's presence at this year's **Higher Options**, with contributions from CDU librarian, **Eva Hornung**, Adult Guidance Counsellor, **Karen Granville**, **City of Dublin FET College Cathal Brugha** student **Cecilia Blandina** and **City of Dublin FET College Inchicore** graduate **Felix Owusu Asante** (page 21 - 24). We conclude, with the personal story of recent **City of Dublin FET College Dhúlaigh** creative writing graduate, **Maria Wren**, celebrating the PLC route to higher education. (page 25)

Happy reading and Happy Halloween.

John ([john.poole@cdetb.ie](mailto:john.poole@cdetb.ie) or [learnersupports@cdetb.ie](mailto:learnersupports@cdetb.ie))

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**Editor:** John Poole

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## Welcome Audrey

We are delighted to welcome Audrey Manning Cahill to Winstead as the latest member of the Learner Support and Engagement Service (LSES).

Audrey took up her position as Learner Support and Engagement Coordinator on August 11, joining us from City of Dublin FET College Dhúlaigh.

In Dhúlaigh, Audrey taught in the Health Science Department, Hairdressing Department and on BTEI courses. She also worked in the role of Employer Engagement Coordinator for Skills to Advance and Traineeships so she comes to the LSES with a strong knowledge of the day-to-day challenges facing learners today in FET.

Many of you may have already had the opportunity to meet Audrey as she has been visiting colleges and centres across the four campuses, rolling out the City of Dublin FET College student card, which she writes about below.

Audrey will be taking the lead on Learner Voice with respect to student councils and class reps, building on the work done in the last two years by Garreth Tierney to develop synergies and cooperation across City of Dublin FET College and organising the second annual Learner Leadership Week in November

Audrey poses outside the front door at Winstead



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## CDU List of Abbreviations

If you have ever felt yourself at risk of drowning in an alphabet soup of abbreviations and acronyms, help is at hand. The CDU Hub has recently published a [List of Abbreviations](#) commonly used in City of Dublin FET College.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## Ark – AHEAD's Online Courses

[Ark](#) is AHEAD's home for digital accessibility resources and know-how.

Built into it are four short, role-based, self-directed online courses which the Learner Support and Engagement Service team has signed up for and completed over the last few months and which may be of interest.

A good starting point could be [Disability 101: Awareness, Inclusion and Equity](#) which covers the range and nature of disabilities, the impact disabilities can have in education and the workplace, the legislation in place to protect the rights of disabled people and how improved processes, practices and policies could create better working or learning environments for all, including disabled people.

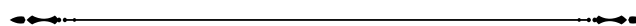
The courses take 90 – 120 minutes to complete and when you complete the self-paced course, you will receive a Digital Badge, that will be emailed to you automatically, which you can use as evidence of CPD and even add to your email footer.



## ADHD Awareness Month

October is ADHD Awareness Month during which ADHD Ireland runs a multi-week conference offering practical information, emotional support, and connection for families, adults, and students navigating ADHD. All of the events are online, and several are free. I was at the webinar **Third Level Students** on October 7 delivered by Ethan Lloyd, and it was absolutely brilliant. Primarily intended for students, it was also very useful for educators. The good news is that the webinar will be repeated at least a couple more times into November. [ADHD Annual Conference](#)

(If your centre is doing anything in connection with ADHD Awareness Month, we would love to hear about it for the November/December issue.)



# NEWS IN BRIEF

## Active Citizen Voter Education Programme and the Presidential Election

**Fionnaigh Connaughton** from **Dublin Adult Learning Centre** (DALC) has been in touch to share resources they have created in advance of the presidential election as part of DALC's Active Citizen Voter Education Programme.

The programme, which was an Aontas Star Award winner back in the spring, was developed because people with unmet literacy needs are often not registered to vote and do not exercise their right to vote. In an interview with **Social Justice Ireland's** [podcast](#) series **Social Justice Matters** Fionnaigh discusses the origins and content of the Active Citizenship Voter Education programme, why it's needed and the impact it has.

[The President of Ireland](#)

[Are you Registered to Vote?](#)

[The Presidential Election](#)

[Electoral Commission Easy Read](#)

[The President's House](#)

[Worksheet 1](#)

[Worksheet 2](#)

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## Plain Language, Let's Talk about Media Literacy and KCETB Report

The Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) office in SOLAS has launched its [Let's Talk about Media Literacy](#) campaign, which will run throughout October leading up to UNESCO's [Global Media and Information Literacy \(MIL\) Week](#) in the last week of the month. As part of the campaign, **Andrew Connolly**, Co-ordinator of the Dublin Regional Literacy Coalition, spoke to [Near FM's Donie Tarrant](#).

**Kilkenny Carlow ETB** has published its Literacy for Life research [Project Report](#) which looks at perceptions and experiences of unmet literacy needs among staff providing services to the public. It makes for interesting reading. Thank you to Deidre Geoghan, Kilkenny Carlow's Regional Literacy Co-ordinator.

Finally, ALL launched its [new free online course](#) focused on plain language in June. It has produced a short video [Let's Talk about Plain Language](#) and an accompanying [fact sheet](#) to explain what plain language is about and how the course can help people who communicate with the public do so in a way that is clear and easy to understand. Having completed the three-part course, I must say it is very practical and informative and well worth the 95 minutes it took.

# Dates for your Diary

## Black History Month

October is Black History Month in Ireland and the UK. Already, there have been a number of events including a terrific evening in the Royal Irish Academy, in conjunction with the Dublin Festival of History (page 19-20 ) In the coming days....

- **The National Youth Council of Ireland** (NYCI) is hosting an [online event](#) on October 17, bringing together youth workers from all over Ireland to celebrate Black history, culture, art, and people, and explore how to embed these celebrations into their practice.
- **Poetry Celebration:** [The Irish Writers Centre and Poetry Ireland](#) are co-hosting a celebration with readings from Black and Irish writers on October 24.
- The **Civic Theatre** in Tallaght is hosting an exhibition called **"Whose Story?"** throughout October.
- **TU Dublin** is showcasing the ["Art of Africa"](#) from October 13, 15 & 17

[Sky Television](#) has an extensive schedule of documentaries and films for Black History Month. If your centre is doing anything during the month to celebrate Black culture, do let us know.



# Dates for your Diary

## ETBI webinars on AI and Neurodiversity Awareness

Two [webinars](#) from ETBI's PL&D October calendar that might be of interest: on **October 14** it is the hot topic of AI and on **October 23** it is neurodiversity awareness training.

### Showcase Webinar- AI in Practice Exemplars

Hosted by **John Kilroy**, founder and CPO of **Digital Learning Institute**, (DLI), in this 90 minute-long webinar, FET practitioners will present their AI use cases. It promises to be an excellent opportunity to learn about the next steps you can take to improve your use of AI in Teaching & Learning.

### Neurodiversity Awareness Training

This one hour webinar delivered by **Stephen Kelly**, managing director of **Ability Focus** begins by looking at disability, before moving on to focus on the diversity within neurodiversity and highlighting three well-known areas of neurodiversity: autism, ADHD and Dyslexia.

**Ability Focus** specialises in disability awareness, neurodiversity awareness and reasonable accommodation training for organisations in the civil, public, educational, not-for-profit and private sectors. The company was established with a view to addressing the disability and neurodiversity knowledge gap which currently exists in workplaces and is the leading provider of disability inclusion training in Ireland.

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## AONTAS Star Awards 2026

Nominations for the Aontas Star Awards 2026 close on 30 October 2025. You can nominate projects and initiatives in six categories this year:

- Global Citizenship Education
- Health and Wellbeing
- Learner Voice
- Social Inclusion
- Third-Level Access and Engagement
- Social Change for a Better World

[Nominations link](#)



## Stand Up Awareness Week November 3- 7

**Belong To's** [Stand Up Awareness Week](#) is a time for post-primary schools, youth services and **Youthreach** centres in Ireland to take a stand against homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.

The Education and Training team at Belong To will be delivering 45 minute online workshops for educators on various dates through October. The workshops will cover everything you need to know about running a successful Stand Up Awareness Week.

The week is an opportunity to take steps to make spaces welcoming and inclusive for LGBTQ+ young people. Belong To will equip you with the resources, tools and knowledge needed to host Stand Up Awareness Week. We'd love to hear from any of our Youthreach centres planning to participate.



## Better Options – AHEAD's online fair for students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties



Registration is now open for Better Options, AHEAD's annual college information event exploring post-secondary education and training in Ireland.

Better Options is a free event, taking place online (via Zoom) on **Saturday October 25, 10. 30 am to 2.30 pm** with information on entry routes (DARE), guidance support, information around disability support, inclusive technology and how to get the most out of the college experience.

This event will also be of interest to guidance counsellors, parents and guardians of a person disability or anyone with a disability looking at returning to education. [Register](#)

# College Connect Road Show in Full Swing

Alan has been labouring away through the summer to ensure that the Learner Support and Engagement Service's SharePoint learner hub [College Connect](#) would be ready to launch as learners arrived on campus for the new academic year.

Alan writes:

Over the past two weeks I have had the great fortune of visiting many of our centres for the 'College Connect' student SharePoint roadshow. I received a really warm welcome in every centre I visited and the atmosphere and energy in each college was fantastic as I spoke to staff and new learners. It is always such an exciting time of year to speak to learners about their learning journey in City of Dublin FET College.



Alan with enthusiastic learners in City of Dublin FET College Crumlin

Some learners were at the beginning of their journey with us and some were continuing along the road. Both learners and staff were equally as enthusiastic and curious as to how College Connect could be utilised to support both teaching, learning and college life!

For the past fortnight, I have conducted live demos, showed learners and staff how to access the site on laptops and mobile phones and had lots of fun, laughter and great interactions along the way.

I would like to thank my many points of contact in each centre, from teachers, support staff, senior leadership teams and front of house staff for the amazing City of Dublin FET College welcome I received.

# College Connect Road Show in Full Swing



Alan talks to a learner in City of Dublin FET College, Rathmines

We greatly appreciate their huge efforts in promoting College Connect amongst their learner cohorts. That support is crucial if College Connect is to become, as we hope it will, an essential tool in every learner's journey with City of Dublin FET College.

John adds:

Alan took time out from his personal appearances to launch College Connect online for staff on September 25, which was very well attended and garnered lots of positive feedback in the chat. [Watch the launch here](#)



From left: In City of Dublin FET College Plunket, Pearse and Inchicore

# City of Dublin FET College Student Card Rollout Well Underway

Since she arrived in Winstead, Audrey has been busy preparing for the rollout of this year's student cards, which I think you'll agree look very smart indeed.

Audrey writes:



This year's rollout of the City of Dublin FET College student cards across our campuses has been met with great enthusiasm from learners across all the services. The previous rollout of the student card was a co-branded card with ISIC but this year, we are delighted to be able to deliver a fully branded City of Dublin FET College student card.

To date, 5,556 links have been sent to students; this enables them to upload a photograph to complete their student card registration. Following on from that, over 2688 learners will receive their student cards over the coming days.

A great feature of this year's card is that for learners on full-time courses, the card will now be acceptable for the student Leap card application process, minimising the paperwork upload.

I had a wonderful opportunity to visit **Ballymun Youthreach** and **North Great George's St Youthreach** this week and received a very warm welcome in both centres, the learners readily agreed to have their picture taken and were thrilled to receive the student card on the day. Feedback from the learners was that they couldn't wait to go shopping to avail of student discounts!



Learners in City of Dublin FET College (Youthreach) North Great Georges Street with their student cards.

# International Week of Deaf People, Irish Sign Language Awareness Week and Chime Deaf and hearing Awareness Training

[International Week of Deaf People](#) (IWDP) is held annually in the last full week of September. Here in Ireland the celebration coincides with Irish Sign Language (ISL) Awareness Week. This year's global theme was "**No Human Rights Without Sign Language Rights**".

The annual initiative prompted us to get in contact with [Chime](#), the national charity for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HoH) people to see how we might celebrate the week. They suggested that we could host one of their Deaf and Hearing Awareness training courses.

The notice was too short to have the training in place for the IWDP itself, but we are delighted to say that in collaboration with **Denise O'Connor** (PL&D Co-ordinator), that the training course will take place here in Winstead on October 17.

In the first instance we will be prioritising staff working directly with deaf learners. As we have already had expressions of interest from elsewhere across City of Dublin FET College, there is every likelihood the course will be oversubscribed. Happily, if this proves to be the case Chime will put on a further training after the mid-term break so if you are interested, please [register](#).

In the meanwhile Chime offers the following practical advice on creating a Deaf-friendly and inclusive environment in colleges and further education centres.

- **Communication accessibility** – utilising ISL interpreters, notetakers (if applicable), closed captions displayed on PowerPoint Presentations, incorporating visual aids instead of reams of text.
- **Physical environments** – ensuring little background noise in the classroom when teaching, seating arrangement in semi-circle or U-shape if possible to allow for better lip-reading, Flashing fire alarms and buddy system for Deaf/Hearing students.
- **Socialisation** – set up ISL club/society for students in collaboration with student union, Deaf/hard of hearing social groups, encouraging students to link in with the Disability Officer for supports, collaborative group activities using interactive software or texting/video calling

Another big day celebrating deaf culture is National ISL Day on December 14 marking the passing of the Irish Sign Language Act in 2017. Since its inauguration many buildings across the country have been lit in [Blue](#) to mark the day or flown the [Deaf Flag](#). Is this something centres across City of Dublin FET College could join in with? Lighting a building is expensive but flags aren't!



# Page to Stage



Denise Todd Goudie

**Denise Todd Goodie** is Adult Literacy Organiser for Dublin North East Inner City.

Denise writes:

This initiative was funded by the Adult Literacy for Life Fund. Members of the local community, the gardening club, Senior citizens, the art club and young adults got together to form a creative writing group. Their short stories were about things that happened to them throughout their lives.

We then brought in professional and non-professional writers to facilitate workshops to bring the short stories to life and turn them into plays to be performed over two days during the Sean O'Casey Arts Festival. Budding actors from the local and surrounding communities performed the plays. These stories will also be produced in book form following more creative writing workshops.

10 tiny plays were performed in the Sean O'Casey Theatre on September 15 and 16. Among the authors, pictured below (from left) were Evelyn Barry (Ladies Day Out), Margaret Gaffney (The Bingo), Margaret Roper (Aggie) Carmel Gormley (Gertie), and Anne Redmond (The Ring).



# Dyslexia Awareness Week 2025

The newsletter should arrive in your inbox just as Dyslexia Awareness Week 2025 comes to an end.

Some readers will have recently completed the Dyslexia Ireland online training course for FET educators which FESS organised in September. Feedback on the course here in the office was very positive and the good news for those of us who didn't get to do the course in September but are interested in learning more about dyslexia, is that FESS will be running the two-part course again in November due to the high demand

In the meanwhile, Caoimhe O'Malley, Senior Adult Dyslexia Coordinator at Dyslexia Ireland has shared the link [Adult Dyslexia Hub Ireland](#)

Caoimhe writes:

"This platform has been developed by Dyslexia Ireland to provide information and learning support for dyslexic adults. It offers advice across key areas such as Literacy, Understanding Dyslexia, Education, Workplace, and the Voices of Dyslexia. The site is video-led, guiding users through information in an accessible way to build confidence, deepen understanding, and provide guidance on accessing accommodations

In particular, the **Voices of Dyslexia** section features personal stories from people who have experienced dyslexia firsthand. These insights highlight both the commonalities and the diversity of experiences across the spectrum, and they may resonate strongly with your staff in raising awareness of how



**November 11** - [Dyslexia Course for FET and HE Educators Part 1](#)

**November 18** - [Dyslexia Course for FET and HE Educators Part 2](#)



students can thrive when supported appropriately."

[Voices of dyslexia](#)

This link takes you to 13 short videos in which people with dyslexia speak about different aspects of their personal experience, covering everything from the [First Signs of Dyslexia](#) to [Advice to my Younger Self](#) As a teacher who taught ESOL /EAL for 35 years with shamefully little understanding or appreciation of what dyslexia might mean for

# Dyslexia Awareness Week 2025

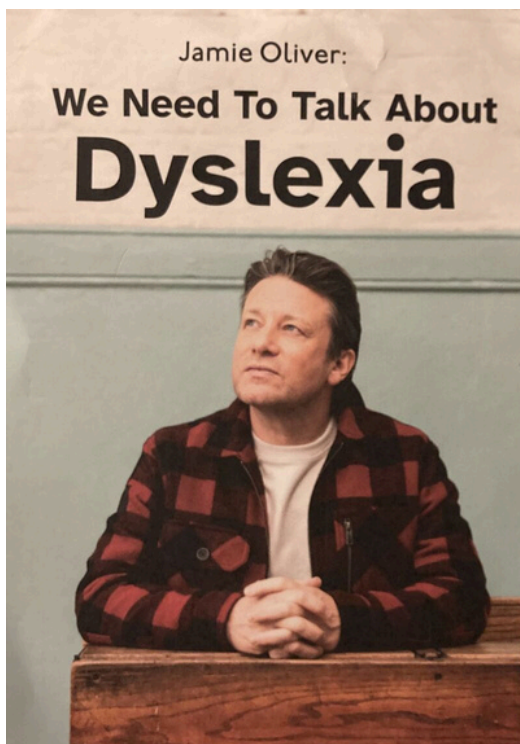
a second language learner, I found [Education and Lifelong Learning](#) especially impactful.

These testimonials leave no room for doubting on the one hand how much damage the teacher who is poorly informed about dyslexia can do, and on the other, how much of a positive difference the well-informed teacher can make

Another very useful resource is [What's Good for Dyslexia is Good for All](#) a guide for people working in the FET sector in Ireland, which was published by the Dyslexia Association of Ireland and Solas Learning Works in 2021

The guidelines provide a summary of the key issues that need to be considered by teachers, trainers and tutors when providing supports to adults with dyslexia. These guidelines seek to begin to address the knowledge gaps and help tutors and trainers play their role in helping learners with dyslexia to thrive.

Finally, in a recent edition of The Brendan O'Connor Show, the RTÉ presenter spoke at length to celebrity chef Jamie Oliver about his journey with dyslexia. The interview is well worth a listen. [Jamie Oliver on Dyslexia](#) (11.37 - 21.09)



**“Inclusive classrooms make all kids cleverer, more empathetic and happier”** - Jamie Oliver

**“That is the best and most compelling explanation of all that, that I have ever heard”** – Brendan O'Connor

# ADHD Awareness Month – An Interview with Melanie Smith, City of Dublin FET College, Pearse Graduate

## Portraying the Lived Experience of Neurodivergent Learners in Pearse

When I visited City of Dublin FET College Pearse's [Photography Exhibition 2025](#), in May, I was especially struck by Melanie Smith's project which had as its theme the experience of neurodivergent learners in the college.

I thought at the time it would be great to learn more about the project and the photographer behind it, so I took the occasion of ADHD Awareness Month to interview Melanie about herself and her project.

Over 40 minutes, she told me about dealing with the widespread "stigma and negative labelling in the media and the educational system", how she had wavered between denial, telling adults "I'm fine. I'm ok" and being angry with teachers, asking "Why aren't they doing their job properly?", though looking back, she understood that the teachers didn't have sufficient training or knowledge. (She also had the positive memory of one teacher who, recognising Melanie's love for writing, took the time to sit down with her and encourage her.)



Melanie Smith

She talked about how in her teens, through her own research she discovered that there were lots of young divergent women doing well in education, the army and other areas of life, which gave her the confidence to think "It's not going to stop me." She went from feeling shame to being proud.

Melanie has a nephew and niece who are neurodivergent. She readily admitted that there have been "significant improvements," but she was adamant that "there is still a far long way to go".

In her introduction to the project in the graduation exhibition, Melanie explained that she was motivated by the frequent news reports of children with special needs being denied their right to an education which she described as "heart-breaking".

Convinced that "the more everybody talks about it, the more everybody learns", and wanting to increase awareness of "the lived experience" of neurodivergent students, Melanie decided for her project to interview and photograph some of her fellow neurodivergent learners in the college who were navigating the challenges of further education. Melanie herself has ADHD and OC.

# ADHD Awareness Month – An Interview with Melanie Smith, City of Dublin FET College, Pearse Graduate

Melanie explains in more detail:

“My exhibition was about neurodivergent students. When doing the images, I was overthinking them because I wanted to do the right thing by the people who participated in the exhibition and to tell their stories the right way.

I'm glad I chose the images I did because it shows that the people felt confident and engaged with the viewers.

I wanted to create a connection between the subjects and viewers, so the viewers would get to know the subjects' personalities and stories, increasing their awareness of people who are not neurotypical

I'm glad I chose to collaborate with the guys in Pearse College because if I hadn't, I wouldn't have met the people who were involved in the exhibition, and I got to learn so much and meet amazing people. Further education has come a long way with helping neurodivergent students, and they 100 percent advocated for that and give hope to other students who are in the same situation.

Not everybody's response was what I hoped for. Some people thought it was just “images of students from Pearse College,” others that it was “political,” “self -serving” or “opportunistic.” This was disappointing but I asked myself “How do I use it to my advantage. How do I deal with this criticism? How do I bring it forward to the next college?”



Three of Melanie's portraits from the exhibition

# ADHD Awareness Month – An Interview with Melanie Smith, City of Dublin FET College, Pearse Graduate

My advice to teachers would be to recognize that, regardless of the size of their presence, their words, teaching, and knowledge carry significance—not just in the moment, but in shaping a student's future understanding. Please handle this responsibility with care, and use your role to guide, inspire, and empower your students. Don't make assumptions. Listen. Sit down with students and listen to their perspective.

I wanted to say that we live in a society that isn't built with neurodivergent people in mind and there are, unfortunately, still stigma and people who aren't going to understand but don't let that dishearten you. Even when you feel like you can't do it, remember there are people who are willing to understand and help and you are not alone. The more we talk about it, the more awareness we bring forward; the more people will understand (though maybe not everyone!) and the more change and progress will happen because if we can talk about other important things in the world, we should be able to talk about this

Melanie is now studying in IADT. We wish her every success.

If you're looking for information and resources to support your work as an educator or to guide learners, check out the following links:

1. [College Connect- Neurodiversity Supports](#)

2. [ADHD Ireland's tips for educators working with older students.](#)

3. **ADDitude** Magazine is a useful resource and has some useful resources for both educators and individuals who have ADHD. [This resource includes tips for adult learners returning to education](#) while [this article addresses myths and truths about ADHD.](#)



Melanie, with Hannah Clarke at our Learner Conference in April, 2025

# Black History Month

## Racism – a global language with many dialects

### Black History Month

Black History Month, which is celebrated in Ireland and the UK each October, got off to an impressive start in Dublin on Monday October 6 with a lecture by distinguished British academic and journalist **Professor Gary Younge**.

Speaking to a nearly full house in the distinguished surroundings of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA)'s library, Professor Younge's lecture was titled **After All They've Been Through You'd Think They'd Know Better: Why race is fluid; racism is solid and experience is not always the greatest teacher**.

"Who do you think "they" are?" asked the man seated beside me. "Black people?" I ventured tentatively.

In fact, "they" turned out to be Irish people, and then, more widely, any emigrant nation who had been subjected to systematic racism in the countries where they settled as immigrants, though actually my answer was as wrong-headed as it might first seem.



Professor Younge began by arguing that in political terms, race has nothing to do with phenotypes so that to be Irish in Britain in the 1950s was to be politically Black.

How could it be then that sections of Irish people, having experienced historical racism, become racist themselves?

Professor Younge argued that in fact it was not true that hardship necessarily causes empathy. Here he referenced Imelda May's poem **You don't get to Be Racist and Irish**. However well-meaning the sentiment might be, it was not necessarily helpful, he argued, saying the reality was that having a history of migration and discrimination was no guarantee against developing racism and anti-migrant sentiment against another group.

# Black History Month

Professor Young reformulated May's line as **"You can be Irish and racist, but you don't have to be"**. The Irish experience of racism had the potential to influence the narrative but ultimately you couldn't shame people into anti-racism. What is needed, he concluded, is a narrative that highlights all the positives that migration has brought, of how it was an economic necessity.

Professor Young's lecture will be available shortly on the [RIA's YouTube](#) channel

The very thought-provoking lecture was followed by a very engaged Q&A, moderated by **Dr. Ebum Joseph**, UCD lecturer (and previous contributor to our newsletter!)



Dr Ebum Joseph



Susan Mwaniki

Finally, spoken word artist, **Susan Mwaniki**, took to the podium to perform her poem **Identity Island**. Born to Kenyan parents in Botswana, where she grew up, but was not entitled to citizenship, she moved to South Africa for high school and college before migrating to Ireland. Her poem, she says is "an ode to immigrant children" and the "diaspora attachment you experience of what you call home versus what your parents do." [Identity Island](#)

**"When your diaspora parents go "home", they are actually taking you away;  
Away from your life, your home, the place you want to stay"**

The evening concluded with some delicious Nigerian food from the kitchen of Mama Shee, over which the audience had the opportunity to socialise in what was a very convivial atmosphere indeed, notwithstanding the sometimes disheartening nature of much of what we had heard earlier.

# When FET Can Be the Best Option for Today's School Leavers - Higher Options 2025

When I visited City of Dublin FET College's stand on the final morning of this year's Higher Options, business was brisk. Eva Hornung, CDU librarian and veteran of 25 years of the annual education expo reported that it had been the same for the previous two days.



Eva writes:

Higher Options is Ireland's largest education expo, where up to 30,000 students, their teachers and guidance counsellors as well as parents, gather information about third-level options. Attendees have a choice of talking to over 100 Irish and international institutions and employers. Additionally, they can attend a wide range of career talks.

Each year, staff from Head Office, the FET colleges, the adult education guidance team, the training centres, and the Curriculum Development Unit work together to promote City of Dublin FET College's offerings from PLC courses, traineeships and apprenticeships.

This year, we were back in the most prominent place close to the main entrance. We had superb support from some of our current learners who spoke eloquently about their own experiences and encouraged other young people to consider studying with us. They did this with charm, wit, and lots of laughter.

Our merchandise proved very popular again. It attracted a lot of visitors to our stand and helped young people make that initial contact with our staff – apparently the lip balm was trending on TikTok!

Over the course of three days, our team answered thousands of questions and showed potential learners all the different opportunities our FET colleges and training centres can offer them. For the first time in the last 25 years, I have heard young people asking specifically for PLC courses and apprenticeships – not as a fall back option, but as a destination in itself or as a vital stepping stone into employment. I hope that each and every one of them finds a programme they love and that they succeed in.

If you have never attended Higher Options, consider visiting it next year: <https://higheroptions.irishtimes.com/home>. Say hello to your colleagues at the City of Dublin FET College stand - you might even get a bickie!"

# When FET Can Be the Best Option for Today's School Leavers - Higher Options 2025



The City of Dublin FET College stand was very popular

As Eva mentions, over the three days some current and past students were on the stand answering the questions of potential future students. The latter clearly relished the opportunity to hear first-hand about the learner experience at City of Dublin FET College. Among the current students was Cecilia Blandina, who is a second-year Digital and Business Studies (DABS) student in City of Dublin FET College Cathal Brugha



Cecilia writes:

My time at Higher Options was amazing! Thanks to all for the opportunity of being able to represent my course over the days.

Being a Digital and Business Skills student and representing the dual university course from City of Dublin FET College and National College of Ireland at Higher Options was a wonderful experience. Not only was I able to speak to

potential students for the DABS course I was also able to share my experience of an unconventional journey to higher education.

Higher Options reminded me of myself as a fifth-year student heading off and seeing the possibilities on my horizon. My time at City of Dublin FET College Cathal Brugha has been amazing. Teaching staff bring their work background into our learning which makes the lectures more engaging and easier to understand in practice when you are out in placement.

I've learned so much thus far and have had the opportunity to complete an internship in Virgin Media in my first year of the degree course. This helped me understand classroom principles in a corporate setting, gain invaluable skills and be ready for the next challenge that I hope to bring forward into further placements and in my corporate career once I graduate.

Courses like this are so important for the future because they give people who are more practical, the chance to work and study at the same time. I believe it will bring forth a different generation of leaders within the workforce.

# When FET Can Be the Best Option for Today's School Leavers - Higher Options 2025

Away from the stand in Talk Hall 4 there were daily panel discussions about FET, hosted by Irish Times journalist Róisín Ingle. On the morning I was there, Felix Owusu Asante was one of the panellists. Felix, a Business and Human Resources graduate of City of Dublin FET College Inchicore, was one of the guest speakers at our Learner Voice Conference in March and had wowed the conference with his talk of future leadership. Now studying Human Resources in the National College of Ireland (NCI), he was again in sparkling form in the RDS,

He explained how he was already working as an accountant when he realised the part of the job he liked best was dealing with people and found himself drawn towards Human Resources. However, he was reluctant to embark on a four-year course of study in what might turn out to be a whim. Then a friend told him about the possibility of doing a QQI Level 6 course in a PLC and he jumped at the chance. He would get a thorough grounding in what HR was about before committing to a four-year degree and when it turned out HR was indeed for him, his QQI qualification enabled him to go directly into second year of the degree programme. [Part 1](#)

Felix admitted that earlier on the City of Dublin FET College stand he'd told punters a PLC course as a bit of a "cheat's way" into university, providing an alternative route for those who did not shine in the rigid system of closed book exams!

However, he was quick to add that it wasn't just a way of circumventing the points system. He gave the example of a classmate from Inchicore who, having got all the points she needed and forked out several thousand for a university course, then realised halfway through first year it was not for her. As Róisín pointed out not everybody knew at 17 or 18 what they wanted to do. PLC courses provided an economical way of testing the waters. [Part 2](#)



Felix and Aideen Lyster worked together on several projects in City of Dublin FET College Inchicore last year when Aideen was the guidance counsellor and Felix was a student there.

# When FET Can Be the Best Option for Today's School Leavers - Higher Options 2025



For those unsure what direction they were headed, there were Adult Guidance Counsellors available to have a chat, among them Karen Granville, City of Dublin FET College Finglas, Barry Road.



Karen writes:

"The Adult Guidance Counsellors and Guidance Information Officers were delighted to help out at Higher Options again this year. It is a great opportunity to provide impartial guidance and information on course options to secondary school students on what was another very busy three days.

This year, students were interested in many types of courses but questions about nursing and engineering were particularly popular. A lot of students were not aware of the opportunities completing a FET course can give them and many didn't know that they could use these courses to gain entry to a degree course afterwards. Also, the term FET is still new to many students, so it was great to have the chance to explain it and the many opportunities FET can provide to them. All in all, it was a thoroughly enjoyable and worthwhile experience. We look forward to next year!"

# Newsflash! Nobody Cared that I didn't Sit the Leaving Certificate

Maria Wren, a recent graduate of City of Dublin FET College Dhúlaigh, shares how doing a creative writing course enabled her to fulfil her dream of going to university and inspired her to want to become a teacher.



Maria Wren

Hi, my name is Maria, I'm 18, and I've just graduated from the Creative Writing course in City of Dublin FET College, Dhúlaigh. It's safe to say that if you had told me two years ago that I would be studying for a degree in UCD I would have laughed in your face, because, unlike a lot of people, I never did my Leaving Certificate.

Secondary school was definitely one of my biggest struggles. I was struggling a lot with my mental health which made learning close to impossible. I got to the middle of 5th year when I had to stop going to school. This honestly broke me, as I've always wanted to go to college.

I remember feeling so defeated but I was determined to find something that would allow me to follow my passions, despite being told many times, "You'll go nowhere without your leaving cert."

This is when I came across QQI. I had done a lot of research and soon discovered that I could go into Creative Writing in Dhúlaigh without having to do my Leaving Cert. With English being one of my favourite subjects in school, of course I applied straight away. After a short interview with my course coordinator and the guidance counsellor on the Coolock campus I soon received my offer. Little did I know it was the start of a year I'll never forget!

Throughout my year in Dhúlaigh I met some of my best friends, and every day I went in excited to talk to everyone. I had so many amazing opportunities such as entering creative writing competitions for some of the work I completed during the year and holding a charity bake sale in the canteen since baking is one of my favourite things to do. Although I was learning so much every day, it didn't feel like school. I had so much freedom in my own education and everything I did was in my control. This meant that even when things got difficult it was a lot easier to keep going. I had such a good relationship with everyone, including my teachers and news flash! Nobody cared that I didn't have my Leaving.

In the end I used my award to apply through CAO which led me to where I am today. People always think it's funny when I tell them, ironically enough, after leaving school in 5th year, I still want to study to be a teacher. But honestly, it's the teachers I had throughout my PLC course that inspired me to be like them. My hope for the future is to help people who are in the same situation as I was in school. I want to teach people that there are so many different paths you can take to get to where you want to be in life. Nothing is impossible, and I can assure you that no matter what you're told, the world won't end if you don't do your leaving cert..