

Enabling Intergenerational Learning: Background Report on Family Literacy Practices in Irish Education and Training Boards (ETBs)



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Background report prepared for SOLAS
by NALA, Dr. Ann Hegarty and Dr. Maggie
Feeley.

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List of acronyms

| | | | |
|-------|--|--------|--|
| AEO | Adult Education Officer | HSE | Health Service Executive |
| ALO | Adult Literacy Organiser | ITABE | Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education |
| CDI | The Childhood Development Initiative | KCETB | Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board |
| CFL | Clare Family Learning | LCETB | Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board |
| CPD | Continuing Professional Development | MABS | Money Advice and Budgeting Service |
| CYPSC | Children and Young People's Services Committee | NALA | National Adult Literacy Agency |
| DEASP | Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection | NIACE | National Institute of Adult Continuing Education |
| DEIS | Delivering Equality in Schools | PLSS | Programme Learner Support System |
| DES | Department of Education and Skills | QQI | Quality and Qualifications Ireland |
| DSP | Department of Social Protection (now the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection) | SICAP | Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme |
| ECCE | Early Childhood Care and Education | SOLAS | An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna / The Further Education and Training Authority |
| ESF | European Social Fund | TUI | Teacher's Union of Ireland |
| ESOL | English for Speakers of Other Languages | UNESCO | The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| ETB | Education and Training Board | VEC | Vocational Education Committee |
| ETBI | Education and Training Boards Ireland | VTOS | Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme |
| EU | European Union | WIT | Waterford Institute of Technology |
| FET | Further Education and Training | WWETB | Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board |
| FETCH | Further Education and Training Course Hub | | |
| HIQA | Health Information Quality Authority | | |
| HSCL | Home School Community Liaison | | |

Acknowledgements

ETBI, NALA and SOLAS would like to acknowledge the immense work, collaboration and cooperation that went into the research elements of the study and the production of these guidelines, case studies and recommendations on family literacy. We trust that this rigorous and carefully presented research will inform the development of family literacy in further education and training for many years to come and will pave the way for even greater recognition of family literacy in addressing literacy equality across generations.

NALA was commissioned to produce these guidelines, case studies and recommendations on family literacy on behalf of SOLAS and ETBI and engaged the practice expertise of Dr. Maggie Feeley and Dr. Ann Hegarty as partners in delivering the resulting reports. Throughout the process, NALA and the research team have been greatly supported and encouraged by the enthusiasm of a host of family literacy participants, their children and their tutors. It is hoped that the resulting guidelines, case studies and recommendations do justice to the stories shared by learners and practitioners and reflect the great vision, dedication and skill evident in family literacy across ETBs.

ETBs played a central role in helping the research team unearth the rich family literacy practices evident throughout ETBs. We are grateful to the Chief Executives, Directors of Further Education and Training, Adult Education Organisers, Adult Literacy Organisers, Tutors, Resource Workers, Coordinators and all other staff in ETBs for facilitating and/or taking part in the research process.

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¹ The National Literacy, Numeracy and Basic Skills Network acted as the Advisory Group for this project. This network is a sub group of the ETBI FET Directors forum

Foreword

It is with great pleasure we present this substantial and rigorous background research carried out by NALA, Dr. Maggie Feeley and Dr. Ann Hegarty on behalf of SOLAS and ETBI.

This is the first time family literacy practices in ETBs have been researched at a national level and the research findings highlight the impressive and creative approaches to family literacy across ETBs.

The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 called for literacy provision for personal, family, social and community contexts including non-accredited group provision with emphasis on the recruitment of specific priority target groups. The Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024 seeks to advance skills, learner pathways and inclusion. Within this context, family literacy remains a firm commitment.

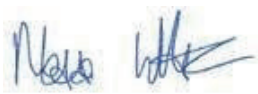
This report reveals the immense commitment and skill of all involved in family literacy and also the need to support this extremely valuable aspect of further education and training into the future. Readers will be heartened to hear the voices of so many learners who have found a way to reclaim their strengths through family literacy. Not only does family literacy support access to richer educational experiences for children and their parents, it also opens so many other opportunities in further education and training - for the learners involved and also for their communities.

We are extremely pleased to have such a solid foundation on which to base the resulting guidelines and recommendations for family literacy in further education and training. It is also extremely useful to have good family literacy practices so ably illustrated in the case studies included in this report.

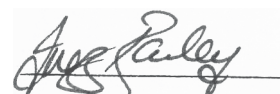
A shorter report entitled '**Family Literacy in ETBs - guidelines, case studies and recommendations**' is published in conjunction with this larger background report. It is hoped that the publication of the guidelines in such a format will aid their day to day use across ETBs, with this more detailed background report available to those to wish to delve more deeply into the research findings and methodologies.



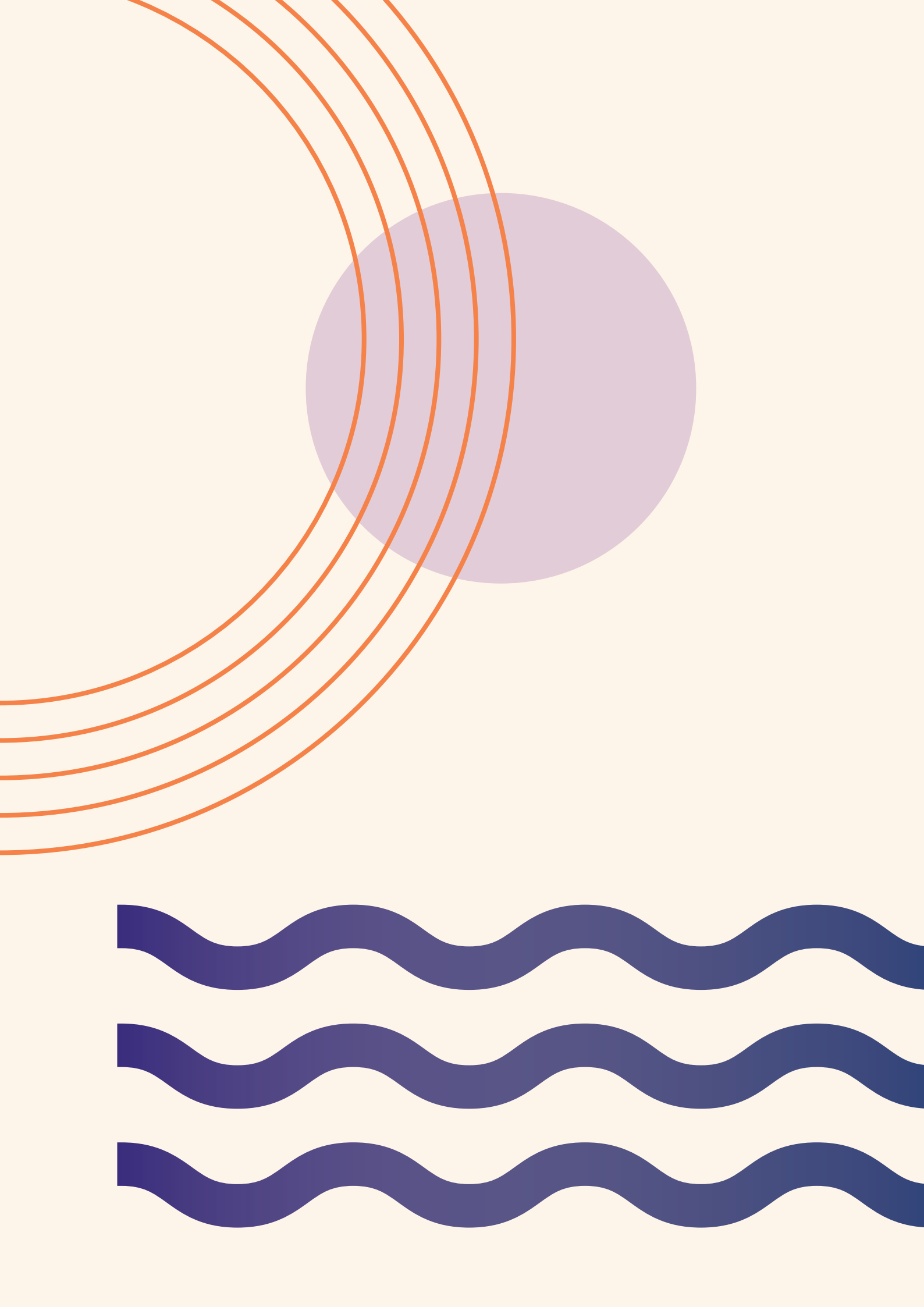
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CEO, SOLAS



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General Secretary, ETBI



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CEO, NALA



Summary report

Enabling intergenerational learning: family literacy in Ireland

I tell them I am going to school to learn too, and to do new things, and that's important. And I tell them there is no age to stop learning. I tell them you have to keep learning because it's a new world every day. And I want to make sure they are reading and thinking, and I want to be a good example to them in that. **ETB Family Learner**

It encourages parents to be more proactive with their children's education and to be more involved in what they're doing. And I think that has a long-term impact. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

The aim of this study was to 'elicit family literacy best practice from Education and Training Board (ETB) family literacy activity and relevant government policy in order to guide future development of family literacy practice.'²

In the six months between September 2018 and February 2019, we have mapped the provision of family literacy across the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) that deliver adult further education and training (FET) across Ireland. As a result, the study provides FET stakeholders with a contemporary picture of family literacy activity in ETBs in Ireland against a backdrop of the FET Strategy and wider congruent government strategies.

Throughout the study, we understand family literacy as both the literacy practices in individual families and the FET programmes that support parents to learn the skills and practices needed to help their children become effective and contented learners.

Family literacy describes the uses of literacy and numeracy within families and communities, especially activities that involve two or more generations. Family literacy also denotes education programmes that help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context. (NALA, 2004: 8)

Family literacy is needed because there are still substantial literacy inequalities amongst both adults and children in Ireland (CSO, 2013; ERC, 2015). These inequalities are indicators of wider and multi-faceted inequalities including poverty, social and cultural exclusion, disaffection and disempowerment (Baker et al, 2004). Having better literacy skills does not change structural inequalities, but it does increase the likelihood of personal well-being, employment, social and cultural inclusion and the skills to work for just change in our communities (Ibid.).

Policy, practice and context

Core childhood and adult educational policy has a strong focus on improving levels of literacy. The *Delivery of Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) (DES, 2005) provides additional resources in primary and secondary schools in areas of disadvantage. These build on the successful work of the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme and its drive to build collaborative partnerships with parents to support children's learning.

The *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People (2011-2020)* (DES, 2011) and the review document *National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life (2011-2020), Interim Review* (DES, 2017) include a commitment to enable parents to support children's literacy. The *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019* (SOLAS, 2014) also recognises the need for family literacy to address literacy learning for both parents and children.

These policies reflect wider European and global commitment to family literacy as a means of combating disadvantage and enhancing literacy levels across generations (European Commission, 2013; EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, UIL, 2017).

National and international research into family literacy make egalitarian and economic arguments in favour of family literacy. It is perceived to be good economic sense to invest in children's early education so that they will be less dependent on the public finances in adulthood (Heckman and Masterov, 2007; Elango et al, 2014). This argument is particularly persuasive where the influence of economic considerations is more heavily weighted than that of social equality.

Investment in adult literacy is seen by many as a human rights issue as well as a way to halt generational cycles of literacy inequalities and state neglect (Baker et al, 2004; Hegarty and Feeley, 2010; NALA, 2011). Pan-European family literacy research in partnership with UNESCO provides examples of good practice and evidence of improved skills for children and adults. Evidence is cited that 'the majority of learners take a step to becoming a lifelong learner and move on to more formal learning opportunities in the adult education centre' (Carpentieri et al, 2011: 222).

Family literacy has been written about in Ireland since 1994, and this information provides evidence of successful interventions that have gained national and international recognition (Clare Family Learning Project, 2009; Carpentieri et al, 2011). The literature supports adopting an adult-learning approach and working in multi-agency partnerships to access parents that will most benefit from family literacy. As literacy inequalities coincide with social, economic and cultural inequalities, studies suggest that family literacy activities that have a book-gifting element can help to ensure that children live in houses where there books are readily available

² As per the invitation to tender document distributed by NALA June 2018.

(Ibid.). Family literacy tutors need a very special skill set, and the international research suggests that ongoing tutor training is important alongside opportunities to exchange ideas with peers.

Literacies are constantly changing and family literacy activities need to be reviewed and evaluated so that they can develop apace with new technologies and shifting demands on parents and children.

Research design and implementation

We used a mixed methods approach in this study to capture both quantitative and qualitative data about current family literacy practice in Irish ETBs. Our **desk research** established the national and international theoretical and policy context in which family literacy takes place.

We designed a **survey** to collect quantitative and administrative data about the state of family literacy in Ireland in 2017. This was the last complete year of FET practice when the study was commissioned. We supplemented this data with data from in-depth **interviews and focus groups** with ETB managers, tutors, learners and stakeholder partners. These mixed methods allowed us to gather a comprehensive and multi-faceted picture of family literacy practice in Ireland.

Our core aim was to present evidence of best practice in family literacy and to identify what supported and hindered this work in ETBs. Consequently, qualitative data was coded thematically using the **Evidence, Barriers and Solutions Framework**.

Evidence of engagement, delivery, outcomes and progression were collected and coded.

Barriers and solutions were further subdivided into four areas along the contexts of in/equality as they emerged in the qualitative data:

- resources,
- cultural,
- relational, and
- systemic.

They correspond to the four key concepts of in/equality identified in Baker et al's (2004): economic, cultural, affective and political.

Research Findings

Quantitative findings

Extensive family literacy provision: The quantitative survey findings revealed extensive family literacy activity across the FET sector. Despite the sometimes *ad hoc* nature of provision, learners were engaging in family literacy, completing courses, re-engaging

and progressing to further education courses and sometimes into employment.

Lack of disaggregated data on family literacy: Whilst data is gathered in relation to Adult Literacy, family literacy is not a separate budgetary or data collection category, so its worth is relatively unknown. The absence of disaggregated family literacy data means that there can be no real data driven decision-making, and this risks overburdening staff and limiting the extent to which the ETB can respond to local needs. Furthermore, this means that numerical figures gathered and reported in Chapter 3 are indicative rather than verifiable. Nevertheless, an overall picture emerges of considerable and varied family literacy activities that are reaching parents in DEIS schools, community locations and adult learning centres.

Qualitative findings

The qualitative data mirrored the quantitative findings.

Barriers to provision: We identified barriers to provision that were resource related. The lack of available childcare for younger children, the timing of activities and poor transport in rural areas made attendance at family literacy activities challenging. For many, negative prior learning experiences made re-engagement in a learning situation unattractive.

Adult learning approach is best: We also identified that an adult learning approach that values adults' life experience and creates a relaxed, fun and learner-centred environment was found to work best. Good relationships between tutors and learners ensured many adults kept engaged and gradually became committed learners. This impacted positively on their children's schooling and shifted the whole family culture of learning.

A dedicated family learning person is needed: The time needed to develop family literacy programmes required considerable investment by those coordinating courses. All the ETBs felt that they could further develop provision in their area with additional budget and a dedicated family learning person.

A collaborative approach best to recruit participants: A collaborative partnership approach was the best way to engage 'hard-to-reach' learners through aligning with communities of practice where prospective family learners were already engaged. These partnership relations required time and effort to build and sustain them. Those currently carrying out these roles, as part of wider responsibilities, felt overstretched and limited in their capacity.

The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teacher in the DEIS school had opportunities to influence the parents who would most benefit from participation in family literacy. The HSCL teacher and the FET coordinator had a key and central role in organising activities that engage parents and support children and the school. Where this model of partnership was well developed, it had significant impact on families.

It changed the relationship between parents and the school and ultimately opened the school up to true cooperative work with parents.

Conclusions

The evidence strongly supports the effectiveness of family literacy in addressing the goals of more active inclusion and improved literacy skills for parents and children. The findings suggest a number of solutions to current barriers and indicate ways in which already good practice can be made even better.

Recommendations to extend and strengthen current family literacy

1. Collaboration

1.1 Promote interdepartmental collaboration

An interdepartmental government group that is concerned with family literacy objectives should be set up to steer the development of national family literacy policy. The group should be representative of practitioners and community stakeholders. They should be family-literacy champions and encourage the equality outcomes that intergenerational learning can deliver.

1.2 Build collaborative family literacy partnerships

To facilitate a more systematic approach to family literacy, core collaborative family literacy partnerships should be built. These would allow FET, DEIS, public libraries and CYPSCs to develop provision that harnesses all their skills, resources and contacts with parents who will most benefit from family literacy. These core groups should meet with other stakeholders and develop a local, needs-based family literacy strategy. Other stakeholders will need to participate less frequently and as local circumstances dictate. The partnership building process should be meaningfully resourced and supported.

1.3 Collect data about local family literacy partnerships

Data collection about local family literacy collaborative partnerships should gather information about all elements of the partnerships:

- engagement in adult learning,
- measured and observed impacts in schools,
- changes in use of public libraries, and
- observed impacts on families using CYPSCs services.

1.4 Establish a national repository for family literacy resources

A national repository should be established for family literacy research, learning resources and course outlines. These can be shared amongst practitioners. The ETBI digital library which is currently being developed may form part of this facility.

1.5 Develop a digital hub

A digital hub to facilitate tutor and learner dialogue should be established.

2. Planning and delivery

2.1 Focus provision on literacy content

Whether it is called family literacy or family learning, the essence of provision should be literacy focussed in content and intergenerational in the scope of learning.

2.2 Ensure an equitable spread of programmes

ETB strategic planning should ensure that family literacy is equally available to interested parents and schools across the catchment area. Those in greatest need should be prioritised where limited resources do not allow all requests to be answered.

2.3 Facilitate meaningful and constructive evaluation

Recognition of the long engagement process into literacy learning should be recognised when evaluating and measuring family literacy.

2.4 Value strengths-based and learner-centred approaches

The Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2025 should continue to emphasise the value of strengths-based and learner-centred approaches to family learning. This ethos should be recognised and articulated as the underlining culture of family literacy.

2.5 Provide adequate resourcing

Family literacy coordination and delivery should be adequately resourced with a ring-fenced budget. Data should be collected as a separate category from other literacy provision. This will provide evidence to inform future planning.

2.6 Honour learner ambitions

Accreditation should remain an optional aspect of family literacy. Measures of the 'soft skills' that family literacy facilitates should be developed and used to build evidence about diverse and unmeasured outcomes. Those wishing to develop family literacy accreditation should be supported and resourced to do so.

2.7 Keep knowledge and evidence fresh

Ongoing research and evidence gathering is needed about family literacy/intergenerational learning (where possible as part of wider longitudinal studies). Studies might usefully include:

- the impact of home-based family literacy,
- the gendered nature of learning care work,
- the impact of homelessness on family literacy practices, and
- how to ensure the greater inclusion of other underrepresented groups.

3. Training and development

3.1 Continuing professional development for core partners

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) about childhood and adult learning should be available to core partner members so that they better understand the nature of their collaborative task.

3.2 Training for all family literacy staff

All family literacy staff should have ongoing access to training and support for the development of innovative approaches to integrated literacy and themed family literacy.

Guidelines at a glance

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.
(Paulo Friere, 1972: 3)

Literacy is constantly evolving through time and from one social context to another. That is why guidelines for good practice in family literacy in terms of organisation, practice and positive outcomes should be regularly reviewed to match each diverse set of circumstances. This process should involve all stakeholders, including learners and tutors.

What follows are **14 guidelines** around which that collaborative discussion might usefully take place:

1. Taking time to think about family literacy

1.1 Retain a learner-centred ethos that values parents' role

A learner-centred ethos should underpin family literacy work. Parents are experts in their own children, and family literacy should begin from a position of enabling parents to be the best learning guides possible for their children.

1.2 Identify and agree terms used in family literacy strategies

Definitions are diverse. Like our ethos, definitions are important for who and what they include or omit. When developing a family literacy strategy, each ETB should include agreed definitions of key terms like:

- family;
- literacy;
- digital literacy;
- ESOL family literacy; and
- other relevant expressions.

1.3 Focus on the value of learning relationships and resource this work

Recognising the value of learning relationships is fundamental to adequately resourcing this time-consuming, core element of family literacy work. These learning relationships will enable more extensive and effective family literacy delivery, and ultimately they will contribute to reaching national and EU targets in lifelong learning.

1.4 Celebrate achievements in learning and other outcomes

A particularly joyful part of the adult learning process is celebrating achievements and these events should be organised to acknowledge the work of both learners and tutors. Celebrations are both a way to recognise successes and a means of inspiring new learners.

2. Developing and delivering learner-centred programmes

2.1 Provide a range of relevant and accessible courses for learners

Each ETB will have its menu of family literacy activities that are published in ways that make them accessible to prospective learners. Courses may be bespoke or adapted from a wide range of existing activities like fetchcourses.ie. These activities will be closely related to family, school and community interests. Delivery of family literacy should be sensitive to learners' needs and the learning environment should be comfortable, relaxed and accessible.

2.2 Use a central repository of family literacy resources

ETBs should use a central repository for all family literacy materials – and this should be centrally managed so that the provenance of ideas and materials is clear and safe storage ensured. The ETBI digital library may contribute to this collaboration.

2.3 Prioritise access for learners with greatest need

Those with greatest need should have priority access to family learning opportunities. Equitable strategies to engage underrepresented groups in family literacy, including men, should be designed with stakeholders so that the benefits are extended to all family members. In addition to local marketing, available learning opportunities across the country can be posted on helpmykidlearn.ie. These posts should be regularly updated.

2.4 Establish clear and agreed ways to measure – and track – success at local level

Establishing criteria for success will be part of each local family literacy strategy. Accreditation should remain optional and effective alternative measures of family literacy achievements should be shared and disseminated widely. In collaborative family literacy partnerships, success should be measured across the partner groups. Alongside FET gains, DEIS schools, libraries, CYPSCs and others should track the successes attributable to family literacy so that a full and inclusive result can be captured.

2.5 Involve family literacy tutors, organisers and learners at all phases of the design, delivery and promotion

Family literacy tutors and organisers are best placed to support learners as they begin to identify the next learning steps they wish to take. Educational guidance workers are available by appointment and will speak to groups or individual learners. It is worth reminding learners that they are the most influential form of publicising family literacy to other parents. Word-of-mouth recommendations are a trusted means of information sharing particularly where people are wary of reengagement in education.

3. Future-proofing for flexible, responsive and appropriate family learning

3.1 Remain familiar with, and contribute to, policy and research

It is important to be clear about the policy and research context for family literacy work so that provision delivers on, and is accountable in terms of, national objectives as well as prioritising individual and group needs and interests.

3.2 Create and maximise family literacy strategies that meet local needs and get the most value from funding

Through building robust local collaborative partnerships, each ETB should develop a family-literacy strategy that answers local needs and maximises funding provided for the work. Responsibility for leading the design,

implementation and accountability of the ETB strategy should be allocated to an individual or individuals skilled in learning relationship management. DEIS schools, libraries and CYPSCs, that have family literacy goals and budgets, will be core partners.

3.3 Ensure there are sufficient learner supports

Because learners benefit from opportunities for peer learning, ETBs should facilitate these opportunities in their collaborative approach to their strategic planning. An online peer chat forum might be established so that parents and others can exchange ideas and learning. Career Guidance Information Services, book-gifting and access to community childcare and transport should be available to parents, where possible.

3.4 Ensure there are sufficient tutor supports

Family literacy tutors are often part-time and relatively isolated in their work. Sustaining supportive links with tutors is an important aspect of family literacy work. Ways of recompensing tutors for collaboration, administration and training need to be planned into individual ETB structures.

3.5 Ensure reliable data is gathered in a user-friendly way – and reported on to track learning outcomes

Reliable data is important in tracking the full extent of family literacy delivery and outcomes. Obligations to report on family literacy, as part of ESF funding, are at the root of much of the learner registration process, and so user-friendly data collection mechanisms need to be developed and put in place both locally and nationally.

Conclusions

These guidelines are a beginning rather than a limitation, and they should be used creatively by ETBs to establish and develop their own distinctive family-literacy culture. This is a sure way to engage new family literacy learners, to positively impact children's schooling and to begin to redress cycles of educational disadvantage.

The guidelines aim to strengthen existing good family literacy practice so that it reaches as many families as possible and, bit-by-bit, contributes to more literacy equality for adults and children in Ireland.



Introduction

The aim of this study was to 'elicit family literacy best practice from Education and Training Board (ETB) family literacy activity and relevant government policy in order to guide future development of family literacy practice.'³

In the six months between September 2018 and February 2019, we have mapped the provision of family literacy across the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) that deliver adult further education and training (FET) across Ireland. We have gathered quantitative data through a comprehensive survey, visited all of the ETBs and discussed their work in family literacy with learners and providers and gathered examples of good practice. We have sifted through the evidence we collected and now we present our findings and what they suggest about the way forward for family literacy in the further education and training (FET) Sector.

Family literacy addresses issues across the learning generations in that it works with adults, both with and without their children, to make an indelible impression on the literacy-learning environment for everyone (Lamb et al, 2009). As such, family literacy satisfies the goals agreed in the *Programme for a Partnership Government* (Government of Ireland, 2016) and the stated aims of a number of government departments and agencies that have responsibilities for providing literacy, numeracy and digital literacy learning opportunities for children, young people and adults in Ireland (DCYA, 2014; DES, 2017).

Throughout the study, we adopt NALA's inclusive definitions of literacy and family literacy.

Literacy involves listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. But it includes more than the technical skills of communication: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change (NALA, 2011: 1).

NALA understands the term 'family literacy' to mean both the practices deployed by families to promote family learning and the learning activities that support family members to become more skilled at managing learning within the family. Family literacy, therefore, describes both the family practice in diverse families and the education programmes that aim to help enrich that practice.

Family literacy describes the uses of literacy and numeracy within families and communities, especially activities that involve two or more generations. Family literacy also denotes education programmes that help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context. (NALA, 2004: 8)

In this document, the term 'family literacy' includes oral and written language (both Irish and English), numeracy and digital literacy. It also includes the broader skills of facilitating learning where parents, carers and siblings learn how to explain new skills and concepts to each other.

In this research, we were not directly concerned with the learning done within families. These family literacy practices may include, for example, storytelling and games that develop language fluency and ways of capturing literacy, numeracy and digital literacy learning moments in the everyday home activities of cooking, setting the table, portioning food or reading the titles of television programmes on screen or in a TV guide.

Family literacy activities we studied

Our understanding of family literacy activities is, therefore, as ways of teaching and learning about socially-situated language and number use as they are enmeshed in the everyday life of families and communities. We have gathered anecdotal evidence from parents and others about the impact that family literacy learning activities have on family literacy practice, and we have included some of these accounts in our findings as evidence of the success of FET provision. Nonetheless, **our focus** is primarily on the family literacy learning opportunities provided for parents through DES- and SOLAS-funded courses.

The terms 'family literacy' and 'family learning' are used in the FET sector to describe activities aimed at enhancing the learning opportunities of parents and their children. Our inclusive and situated understanding of literacy means that **we favour family literacy as a term** that embraces both specific literacy skills and their application in a host of social and cultural circumstances (Hamilton et al, 2000).

Family learning inevitably includes literacy, and this is preferred by those who find literacy to be a term that has negative connotations for some adult learners and which may prevent their engagement in learning. In all cases, we respect the terminology used.

³ As per the invitation to tender document distributed by NALA June 2018.

Why is family literacy necessary?

Modes of communication and school learning practices are changing rapidly, and we all need to keep up to date with digital developments. There is always something new to learn. At the same time, research has shown that not all children and adults in Ireland have achieved their basic literacy potential, and this is directly linked to social and economic inequalities that are responsible for repeating generational cycles of wasted potential (CSO, 2013; Shiel et al, 2016). Family literacy is one approach to up-skilling that potentially has a dynamic social and economic impact across families and communities (Carpentieri et al, 2011).

A special module of the *Quarterly National Household Survey* (QNHS) in Quarter 2, 2012 (Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2014) surveyed parents' involvement in their children's education. Its evidence endorsed the view that all parents care about their children's schooling but not all feel confident or knowledgeable in supporting their child's learning. The CSO data show that while 59 per cent of parents felt very confident assisting with children's homework, others felt less assured.

The family literacy activities, carried out in ETBs, are designed to help parents gain the knowledge and skills they need to effectively support their children's learning. At the same time, family literacy boosts parents' learning capacity and can encourage increased participation in lifelong learning.

How our results are organised

The results of our investigations are organised here in seven chapters that provide evidence on a range of aspects of family literacy in Ireland. Originally, we developed them as four separate reports (policy, statistical survey, evidence of practice and case studies), so there is some overlap in the detail in each chapter. This means they can be easily read independently of each other.

Where there is extensive discussion of data we have used emboldened text to ease navigation.

Chapter 1 explores the national and international literature in relation to family literacy: policy, practice and context.

Chapter 2 outlines the research design and implementation.

Chapter 3 presents an analysis of the returns from our survey. This was completed by all 16 ETBs to map FET family literacy activities.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the considerable qualitative data on family literacy practice in three sections: evidence, barriers and solutions.

Chapter 5 presents three case studies – examples of good family literacy practice. These give a taste of family learning in different parts of the country.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions from the various elements of the study.

Chapter 7 puts forward guidelines to develop good FET family literacy in terms of organisation, practice and positive outcomes.



Chapter 1

A review of family literacy literature: policy, practice and context

We begin our report on family literacy in the Irish FET sector with a review of the national and international literature. Firstly, we examine some significant literacy **measurements** that have been taken of Irish school-age children and adults. In so doing, we make the **evidential case** for the need for family literacy activities. We then describe the **policy context** within which family literacy work takes place. This includes a number of Irish policy initiatives, across several government departments, some of which reflect European and wider global agreements about learning.

Against the policy backdrop, we examine the practice response that has been made since the early 1990s in relation to family literacy in schools, communities, local authorities and through FET provision. We also present an **overview** of the evaluative reports and academic research and writing on theoretical and practical aspects of family literacy nationally and internationally. Finally, we synthesise the findings in the literature in relation to best practice and recommendations for future development of Irish family literacy.

Significant literacy measurements

Context

For the past two decades, there have been emerging evidence-based concerns about literacy levels amongst both children and adults in Ireland. In a national assessment of reading literacy, one in 10 children was found to have significant difficulty at the point of transition from primary to secondary school (Shiel, 2000). Subsequent studies revealed that over 30 per cent of children in areas of disadvantage had severe literacy issues (Educational Research Centre (ERC), 2004). These literacy disparities deepened over the schooling period and were greatest in areas of concentrated socio-economic disadvantage (National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) 2009).

A low period in school-age literacy performance in 2009 intensified the focus on literacy in schools, teacher education and family literacy interventions as means of improving literacy across generations (NALA, 2009). The deep concerns about literacy led to the introduction in 2011 of the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People 2011-2020* (DES, 2011).

Improvements in literacy levels

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial international survey by the OECD that tracks country performance in reading, science and mathematics.

In 2012, Ireland scored 523 points in reading while the international average was 496. Irish 15-year-old students' reading ability – both digital and print – was ahead of that of many other countries. In 2015, for the first time in 30 years, primary reading scores, as measured by regular national studies, showed an improvement. The *National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics* (ERC, 2015) found that the skills of both 2nd class and 6th class pupils were significantly higher than when previously assessed in 2009.

In school-age literacy tests, measured in PISA in 2015, 10.2 per cent of Irish students scored at the lowest levels of reading proficiency. This is despite the fact that Ireland's overall performance improved significantly to 5th place in reading, bested only by Finland amongst the EU countries. PISA also showed that Ireland stayed above the OECD and European averages in all subjects, however, scores in mathematics and science were lower than the previous cycle. Literacy scores have remained steady, and the Educational Research Centre (ERC, 2014) suggests this reflects the increased attention on the teaching of literacy in schools.

... but, there is no room for complacency.

Ireland's mean literacy score was marginally, but not significantly, lower (by 2.4 score points) in PISA 2015, compared with PISA 2012. Lower Irish literacy scores in PISA 2015 were strongly correlated with economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS) indicating the **persistent links to inequalities** between families and educational achievement (ERC, 2015). There is also evidence of a gender gap, where girls consistently outperform boys in literacy, and where boys generally do best in numeracy and science.⁴

All of these disparities may be attributed to the **impact of accumulated advantage**, of one kind or another, which is sometimes referred to as 'The Matthew Effect' (Stanovich, 1986). The notion is rooted in the idea that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer (Bast and Reitsma, 1998). Another way of viewing such disparities is that inequalities of this kind are not inevitable, and unequal social structures can be changed to create

4 OECD PISA accessed 12 October 2018.

societies that are more egalitarian. In a less systemic approach, family literacy interventions try to redress this type of accumulated advantage by ensuring that more children live in homes with books and more parents acquire the privileged insights that allow them to support their child's learning development (Baker et al, 2004).

Ireland participated in international studies of adult literacy levels in 1997 and 2013. *The International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS) (Morgan et al, 1997) found that **22 per cent of Irish adults scored at or below the lowest level of a five-level literacy measure**. Subsequently, the OECD's *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC) found that Irish adults with the lowest scores (at or below level 1) now numbered 18 per cent of the population.⁵ Irish adult test performance in numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments (PS-TRE) revealed high numbers of adults scoring at or below the lowest level – 25 per cent and 42 per cent respectively (CSO, 2013). A significant number of adults in Ireland still have unresolved literacy issues, with poor levels of skill in numeracy and digital literacy also highlighted as issues. All of these skill areas are priorities in FET delivery.

Criticism of measures

While some accept literacy measures at face value, proponents of New Literacy Studies criticised the *International Adult Literacy Study* (OECD, 1998) and similar standardised test measures for their inability to take account of the social and cultural elements of literacy practice (Hamilton and Barton, 2000). New literacy scholars claim that when the situated context is negated, measures cease to reflect real literacy skill and are restricted to being test-based proxy measures of performance on **mechanistic aspects** of literacy. If literacy is defined as a social practice, then positivist research measures that rely heavily on statistical data are inadequate to capture the complexities of social reality. Hamilton and Barton propose the need for inclusive, qualitative and ethnographic methods (Ibid.).

Socio-economic disadvantage and lower achievement

As with school-age literacy, there is a correlation between socio-economic disadvantage and lower achievement in the elements assessed in both the IALS and the PIAAC study (Martin, 2018). In their seminal study about the in-state impacts of levels of inequality, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) tracked the correlations between levels of in/equality and a number of social issues including achievement in literacy and numeracy. They argue that the achievement of higher national standards of educational performance may depend directly on reducing the existing social gradient in educational achievement in each country. For example, they show the relationship between adult literacy scores from the

International Adult Literacy Survey and corresponding scores in parental levels of education, in Finland, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

An important point to note, looking at these four countries, is the steepness of the social gradient—steepest in the United States and the United Kingdom, where inequality is high; flatter in Finland and Belgium, which are more equal. It is also clear that an important influence on the average literacy scores in each of these countries is the steepness of the social gradient. The United States and the United Kingdom have low average scores, pulled down across the social gradient. In contrast, Finland and Belgium have high average scores, pulled up across the social gradient. (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2011: 8/9)

Altogether, childhood and adult literacy measurements suggest that there is a persistent **intergenerational cycle of unmet literacy** that needs to be redressed, particularly in disadvantaged families and communities. A recent *EU Education and Training Monitoring Report* (EU, 2017) notes that Irish students' basic skills in reading, mathematics and science, tested in PISA 2015, are now 'high' and relatively unaffected by socioeconomic background (EU, 2017; Shiel et al, 2016). While this is a positive finding, nonetheless, all these studies indicate that there remains a cohort of young people and adults who require additional literacy resources if the national skills base is to be raised and greater social and economic equality is to be achieved. However, **participation in lifelong learning in Ireland is low** (6.4 per cent) compared to the EU average (10.8 per cent) and, increasing engagement is a key strategic target (European Commission, 2017).

Core policy context

Two significant policies address literacy and numeracy in schools and recognise the role of parents in children's learning by including an element of family literacy. These policies are presented in some detail in the sections below.

Policy 1: The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion (2005)

The *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion was launched in 2005 (DES, 2005). Working alongside the successful *Home School Community Liaison Scheme* (HSCLS) set up in 1990, DEIS aimed to take intensive measures to tackle the educational consequences of poverty and social exclusion. Additional resources, planning and added emphasis on literacy and numeracy were concentrated into 657 primary and 193 secondary schools in the most disadvantaged urban and rural areas (Smyth et al, 2015). Urban schools with greatest need became DEIS *Band One* schools and attracted the highest investment.

5 NALA Piac factsheet 2013 accessed 8 October 2018.

The DEIS action plan provided for a partnership between the 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs)⁶ NALA and the HSCL teacher. The goal was to collaborate to develop and implement strategies for family literacy development to complement other actions in DEIS schools. One of the main objectives of DEIS was to build on the successful work over 15 years of the HSCL teachers and to include more parents and communities in practices that would help resolve educational inequalities.

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF, 2009) published a progress report on DEIS including the community-based family literacy initiatives. It found much good family literacy practice in the community sector that might be expanded through greater cooperation between home, school and community. Recommendations advocated 'Strong parental involvement and participation at all levels from literacy policy development to delivery, including support for their own learning' (NESF, 2009: XXV).

A recent review of the HSCLS (Weir et al, 2018) found that both school principals and HSCL teachers identified increased parental involvement in schools as a central determinant in improving literacy and numeracy levels in DEIS schools. The report does not specifically address the common ground between DEIS, HSCL and FET family literacy. Nevertheless, the influence of family learning on parents' awareness of their role and capacities as first teachers of children is implicit.

An overview of DEIS evaluations, carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) (Smyth et al, 2015), and evaluations of the impact of DEIS on the lives of pupils in urban primary schools between 2007-2016 (Kavanagh and Weir, 2018) are largely positive. Kavanagh and Weir closely measured the positive impact of parental involvement in school and home learning on children's test score results. However, these reports did not deal with family literacy interventions or their potential contribution to the success of children's literacy. This is perhaps reflective of a persistent silo approach to research between educational sectors and a dearth of EU research on family literacy as cited in Carpentieri et al (2011).

Policy 2: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People (2011-2020)

The second policy – the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People (2011-2020)* – responded to questions raised by the results of PISA (2009) about the level of achievement in literacy and numeracy in Irish schools. The policy sought to address 'significant concerns' about the literacy and numeracy learning of children in Ireland and included recognition of the importance of family literacy activities (DES, 2011:8).

An interim review of the strategy – *National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life (2011-2020), Interim Review* (DES, 2017) – assessed progress against the original strategy targets (2011-2016) in relation to parents and recalibrated the emphasis on some areas for the next phase (2017-2020). The revised strategy is organised around six pillars, and these continue to focus on making literacy and numeracy an even greater priority for school-age students. In the strategy, the profile of parental involvement is higher, and, Pillar 1 – Enabling parents and communities to support children's literacy and numeracy development (DES, 2011) – is a welcome acknowledgement of parents' prominent and inalienable role in family learning.

The FET Sector welcomed the inclusion of parents in the original strategy that 'provided a central policy context for connecting young people and adults in literacy and numeracy discussions' (DES, 2017:24). Partners across education in Ireland, including NALA, then played a substantial role in raising awareness of family learning through the design and distribution of resources, through its website helpmykidlearn.ie and its TV series 'Family Project' that had an average viewership of 190,000 per episode (Ibid.).

Numeracy and digital literacy were also described in the review document as needing additional attention across the education system. Numeracy and ICT are areas where specific support should be given to parents so that they are parts of family literacy practice that parents can feel comfortable with. The review of the literacy and numeracy strategy for children and young people proposes that parental engagement be integrated into each school's School Improvement Plan.

Extending collaboration

Continued interagency collaboration and increasing interdepartmental synergy in relation to family literacy were advocated in the second phase of the *National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life (2011-2020), Interim Review* (DES, 2017). Making stronger links between school-age learning and FET adult literacy provision supports literacy and numeracy nationally and across generations. Furthermore, the work of libraries in local areas in the *Right to Read Campaign: Supporting Literacy in the Local Authority* has expanded the resources available in the community for family literacy (DRDC, 2018).

The Right to Read programme responded to the call in the *Programme for Government 2011-2016* for more systematic supports for literacy at a local level. In this case, the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), DES and Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and libraries have a common strategic interest in working together. This models an excellent example of collaboration between local authorities, community groups and education bodies who can work together to produce better literacy development across age groups.

6 Now restructured into 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs)

In December 2017, the **ETBI and LGMA** (Local Government Management Agency) signed a protocol to strengthen their existing relationships and facilitate future collaborative activities (ETBI, 2018:35). Active inclusion, adult and family literacy and lifelong learning are amongst their common objectives.⁷ *Right to Read* is a comprehensive initiative where each local authority is developing a local literacy action plan, and there are 30 local coordinators throughout the country with responsibility to implement a national programme supporting literacy and reading by delivering local systematic literacy support.

In addition to ambitions for family literacy in schools and FET settings, the DCYA policy framework – *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures 2014-2020*, recognised the importance of literacy and numeracy in the lives of young people and, the shared goals of improving literacy are integrated into DCYA's proposed strategic actions (DCYA, 2014).

More recently, DCYA has published *First 5 - A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028*. The document recognises family literacy as a key support for families and highlights the main supports needed for families in terms of literacy. This trend towards integration of literacy and numeracy across departmental strategies is welcomed and raises awareness of family literacy activities while establishing important economies of effort and resources. A whole-government approach to literacy, with an interdepartmental committee, would support this trend towards joined-up governance.

Further education and training (FET)

Operating under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), SOLAS –the Further Education and Training Authority – is the statutory agency responsible for the strategic planning, coordination and funding of the FET sector in Ireland. Since its establishment in 2013, under the Further Education & Training Act (2014), the first integrated five-year strategy – *The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019* was published by SOLAS in 2014. Underwritten by both social and economic imperatives, the Strategy describes goals to provide post-secondary education and training, including literacy and numeracy, vocational training linked to employer needs, and progression routes into work and Higher Education.

In addition to progressing an active inclusion agenda for FET, enhancing work skills is also central to the responsibilities of SOLAS. This includes pre-employment training, re-skilling and up-skilling for those already in employment, and upskilling opportunities for those who did not complete second-level education (Ibid.).

The delivery ethos of all FET courses is articulated in the FET strategy as learner-centred, participative and evidence-based. Consultation about all aspects of the strategy was far-reaching and embraced the views of national and international experts, employers and students at all levels of engagement. The strategy extends the lifelong learning ethos to FET staff who are encouraged to increase their expertise through continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, thereby adding value to the national skills base.

Literacy and numeracy in FET

Each of the 16 ETBs⁸ makes literacy and numeracy provision available locally. Provision includes one-to-one and group courses, as well as blended learning and family literacy. An integrated approach to literacy and numeracy is important throughout vocational FET programmes, as levels of literacy vary significantly and specialist subject tutors need to become adept at embedding attention to basic skills in all aspects of their delivery (Hegarty and Feeley, 2009; SOLAS, 2014).

The DES ALCES Review (2013) reviewed provision in Adult Literacy and Community Education Schemes (ALCES). It found that intensive literacy and numeracy (ITABE) and family literacy were valuable. The review also found that programmes were under-resourced and provision was patchy across the regions (DES, 2013).

The DES ALCES Review recommended that family literacy be expanded, as family literacy was shown to engage parents in learning and to encourage progression, both of which have consistently been core goals of adult learning strategies nationally and across the EU. The DES ALCES review recommended increased resourcing for provision of family literacy and greater collaboration between Adult Literacy, DEIS and Home School Community Liaison in creating family literacy opportunities to meet local needs.

At the time of writing, the *FET Strategy (2014-2019)*, SOLAS felt it required a stronger evidential research base to inform its decisions about how best to address unmet adult literacy needs; this current mapping of Irish family literacy is important in making some of that crucial evidence base available.

Section 6 of the *FET Strategy (2014-2019)* addresses Active Inclusion/Literacy and Numeracy and sets out the Irish Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy for that five-year period. The chief aims of the strategy can be summarised as:

- improved access,
- continuously improving outcomes for learners, and
- improved data and decision making.

7 <https://www.etbi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ETBI-Spring18-Web-Version.pdf> accessed 8 February 2019.

8 Formerly 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs)

Literacy learning is situated at levels 1-3 on the 10-level *National Framework of Qualifications* (NFQ). One action proposed in the Strategy was the need for attention to be given to accreditation in literacy and numeracy. There is ongoing discussion about the appropriateness of accreditation for family literacy learners.

ET 2020

Irish policy reflects the framework for cooperation – agreed by EU Member States known as **ET2020** (Education and Training 2020) – in that it also has social as well as economic goals (European Commission, 2013). The common strategic framework sets targets for a range of areas in the inclusive education strand including:

- basic skills,
- early childhood education, and
- participation in lifelong learning.

PIAAC findings informed both the ET2020 and the FET Strategy, and engagement in adult learning is presented in both as a route out of poverty, unemployment and low paid work (NESC, 2013).

NALA's family literacy policy

Family literacy has been a significant part of NALA's work since provision was first introduced in the 1990s. NALA has supported innovative practice and ensured dissemination of information about the social and economic gains from family literacy interventions. Working with parents on their needs in terms of literacy is an integral part of an adult-learning approach that is learner-centered. NALA has continuously advocated on behalf of family literacy provision and lobbied about the 'win-win scenario' that benefits both parents and children and contributes to national learning strategies across generations (NALA, 2004; 2009).

As previously highlighted, Ireland compares poorly with other EU countries in terms of participation in lifelong learning. Therefore, **engagement** of more adults in FET is congruent with a core goal of *SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019*. In addition to recommending family literacy as a way of engaging a greater number of adults in lifelong learning provision, NALA argues for an interdepartmental and interagency partnership to develop an integrated national family literacy strategy (NALA, 2009). This encouragement to collaborate is also part of the DES (2013) *Operational Guidelines for Providers of Adult Literacy* section on family literacy (DES, 2013: 11-12).

In later years, NALA has been a significant partner in implementing elements of the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (DES, 2011). NALA highlights the role all parents and communities can play in language, literacy and numeracy development (NALA, 2011). Furthermore, NALA has called for 'the establishment of a dedicated and significant funding stream for family

literacy work' **and** the expansion of DEIS family literacy initiatives in every area of disadvantage (Ibid.:3).

There have been a number of NALA research projects that illuminate the realities of family literacy activities from the perspective of disadvantaged parents and practitioners. These are discussed in the chapter 4 of this report.

Tracking progress

The Adult Education White Paper in 2000 established adult literacy as a part of adult learning policy – and one that needed to be expanded. NALA regularly reported on innovation and progression in various aspects of literacy including family literacy (DES, 2000a; NALA, 2004; 2009; 2011b). The DES Literacy Review (2013) provided the first attempt at a comprehensive appraisal of adult literacy in Ireland, and it was difficult to track disparate elements of provision.

Prior to the DES ALCES Review, the VEC Adult Literacy provision had never been reviewed in this manner.

Since 2014, more rigorous data collection has been required. The annual FET Services Plan draws on a number of data gathering mechanisms. These allow for an informed prediction of necessary grants for the upcoming year, supported by data gathered for the completed year's operations. Family literacy courses are **not differentiated** within a global funding allocation, so this study will try to:

- quantitatively map the existing family literacy provision across the 16 ETBs,
- identify the barriers experienced in developing courses, and
- suggest potential solutions.

For the past several decades, Ireland continues to be recognised amongst literacy scholars for having avoided 'the narrowness that has characterised notions of Adult Basic Education' in the UK (Hamilton et al, 2001:32). For this reason, the tensions around accreditation that dominate literacy elsewhere are less visible in Ireland. *SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019* sets a target to increase FET lifelong learning participation by 10 per cent to help Ireland reach EU averages and contribute to reaching EU targets (SOLAS, 2017). *The National Skills Strategy 2025* emphasises the need to improve basic skills of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy nationally.

Complementary policy trends

The EU Social Pillar of Rights and the FET Strategy 2014-2019

Principles of equality, social inclusion and economic logic underpin family literacy. Family literacy aims to improve the basic skills of disadvantaged adults and increase the potential of children both in the immediate- and longer term. Ireland has one of the highest percentages of population at risk of poverty (Barry, 2017), and the goal of equality and social justice increasingly underpins policy across government.

In a European context, the EU Social Pillar of Rights was unanimously agreed by the EU-27 in 2017. Member States set an agenda for implementing new and more effective rights for citizens in equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion. Progress on the Social Pillar is tracked by an **online scoreboard**, which includes measures for education, skills and lifelong learning.

Under the Social Pillar, children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance their chances of equality and their quality of early childhood care. The Social Pillar is concerned with the impact of public policy on reducing poverty in each Member State. Family literacy is situated within the Active Inclusion section of the *FET Strategy 2014-2019* and the *National Skills Strategy 2025*, which makes a significant contribution to Ireland's delivery of the Social Pillar of Rights.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The *United Nations 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG) underwrites the policies of the 193 UN member states who signed up to them in 2015. SDG4 requires countries to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all'. Family learning is critical to achieving this goal and contributing to others like poverty, nutrition, health and well-being, gender equality, water and sanitation, decent work and sustainable communities (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning (UIL), 2017).

Irish Human Rights and Equality Act (2014)

Again, reflecting the focus on equality, the public duty introduced in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act (2014) will require public bodies, including education and training organisations, to report annually on their progress in relation to in/equality in service provision and employment (ihrec.ie). This is flagged in contemporary government strategies alongside measureable goals and targets that will provide a basis for policy priorities and evidence of progress.

Commitments from government departments

The Departments of Education and Skills, Employment Affairs and Social Protection and Employment, Rural and Community Development and Children and Youth Affairs have made a commitment to family literacy. NALA already works with nine government departments on literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and the absence of a cross-departmental committee on literacy seems like a missed opportunity for governance in this vital area.

Family literacy practice in Ireland – a brief history

The early days (1990s) – pilots and interventions

Writing about family literacy in Ireland dates from the early '90s when the focus shifted from child-centered parenting and school support programmes to the specific family-related needs of adult learners, especially those with unmet literacy needs of their own.

In 1994, the 'concept of family literacy as a distinct educational intervention' was introduced in Ireland (Clare Family Learning Project, 2009). Earlier US studies of language and literacy acquisition revealed the importance of literacy activities in the home (Taylor, 1983) and the socio-economic and ethnic differences in family literacy practices and outcomes (Bryce-Heath, 1983).

Also in 1994, Clare Reading and Writing Scheme piloted a programme to help parents who lacked confidence in their own literacy skills to support their children's learning. Two years later, the first family literacy programme in Ireland was established in a partnership between Clare Reading and Writing Scheme, Clare VEC and the Adult Education Board. Funding for several years was secured through the *EU Human Resource Initiative – EMPLOYMENT-INTEGRA*. A range of family literacy interventions were developed, crèche facilities provided and close relationships established with local schools. The evaluations showed literacy and relationship benefits for parents and children, improved understanding and cooperation between parents and schools and progression of parents into other adult education courses (King, 1997).

In 2000, Clare Family Learning Project published their comprehensive *Family Learning Resource Guide* (funded by the Texas-based Dubuis Foundation) which explained the rationale for family literacy and sharing materials developed through their own work. A theoretical section provided tutors with additional insight into the methods proposed in the guide (Clare Family Learning Project, 2000).

Collaboration and training

In 1997, the Dublin Adult Learning Centre in collaboration with the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (BIFHE) began a programme – *Read to Succeed* – to help parents understand the theory behind the practice of reading to children. The course was accredited through the Northern Ireland Open College Network (NIOCN) and tutors also had opportunities to complete an accredited training module (NALA, 2004).

In the 1990s, Offaly VEC began a family learning course that was based on the Parental Involvement Programme (ERC, 1990). In the late '90s, this programme became the basis for tutor training sessions and similar adult literacy programmes run in a number of counties. County Dublin VEC adult literacy service published a *Staff Handbook on Family Learning* (County Dublin VEC, 2002) and a model of a two-stage programme for parents. Even then, there was an understanding that family literacy responded to a real need from parents and was a way to engage 'hard to reach' adults in lifelong learning.

Growing policy recognition, funding and participant numbers (2000s)

In the White Paper on Adult Education (DES, 2000a), the recognition for family literacy was already established and the strategic framework proposed an expansion of learning activities that support parents in their role as primary educators of their children. NALA consistently advocated family literacy from an adult education perspective, as a means of responding to the real needs of parents who had missed out on their own education (NALA, 2004).

DEIS was launched in 2005 and included the aim to develop family literacy initiatives.

In 2008, there were reportedly 3,551 adult learning participants enrolled in short family literacy programmes. This accounted for seven per cent of the total number of adult literacy student population (NALA, 2009).

By 2009, there were 19 innovative DEIS family literacy projects costing a total of €200,000. The DES took a key role in promoting the development of family literacy work as part of the DEIS initiative (2006-2010).

Consolidation (2012 onwards)

Also, by 2009, Clare Family Learning Project had produced a guide detailing family literacy activities in most counties in Ireland, north and south of the border (Clare Family Learning Project, 2009). The range of courses offered was diverse (including literacy, numeracy, IT, storytelling, and cookery) and specific interest groups included Irish Travellers, migrant groups, fathers and sons, grandparents, DEIS school parents, primary and secondary school parents (Ibid.).

In 2012/2013, funding of €271,900 was provided for **24 projects**. These programmes were attended by 2,800

parents. Funding of €335,500 was put in place for 2013-14 (esf.ie). The growth in support for family literacy has been small but steady, and returns for 2014-15 refer to a 'broad range of family learning programmes' but give no budget or enrolment details (Ibid.). In 2019, **family literacy became a separate category in FET returns**, and this should ensure that data-based decisions could be made about development in this area of adult learning.

Noteworthy recent initiatives

More recently, digital storytelling (DST) has become an accepted way of combining family literacy and digital literacy to good effect. In 2016, a small study in Clare: 'Digital storytelling in adult education and family literacy: a case study from rural Ireland' found that DST was accessible to literacy and ESOL learners, as well as adults who wanted to improve their digital literacy (Prins, 2016).

In 2010, the DEIS Family Literacy Committee of the DES issued administrative and programme Guidelines for Providers who are funded to provide family learning to adults in parallel to the school-age DEIS. These guidelines engage with the difference between family *literacy* and family *learning* in terms of how they are defined. Both are funded under DEIS and advocate for learner-centred collaborative learning opportunities. Family learning is less literacy focused and takes a more expansive position on the content of valuable learning activities. Nevertheless, as staff skills in integrating literacy develop, so too may the delivery of an integrated or embedded approach to family literacy (DES, 2010).

The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) is a joint project supported by the DCYA and the Atlantic Philanthropies. It is based in the Tallaght West area of Dublin. Since it was incorporated in 2007, the CDI has worked to improve outcomes for children, families and communities in Tallaght West and beyond. This includes the development and delivery of a number of language and family literacy activities that have had significant success in supporting local families.

Doodle Den was developed for senior infants (5 and 6 year-old children) to help improve children's literacy skills, including writing, text comprehension, phonics, sight vocabulary, independent reading and fluency. Each child attended three weekly after-school sessions lasting one and a half hours for each of 36 weeks. Rigorous evaluation found that there was measured improvement in 'children's literacy skills, knowledge and abilities, as well as their enjoyment, improved social skills, enhanced confidence and noticeable differences between those who participated in *Doodle Den* compared to those who did not.' (Biggart et al, 2012: 2).

The follow-on programme 'Doodle Families', introduced parental participation into the model of literacy learning and involved families in an eight week, one-hour session of family literacy. Whilst there were some

logistical issues with the organisation of the programme in schools and a clear need for careful training with facilitators, the gains for parents as enablers of their child's literacy development were valuable (Bourke and Higgins, 2016).

The CDI has called for even greater emphasis on the parental engagement aspect of DEIS - specifically in the area of the *Primary Language Curriculum* and call for the monitoring and evaluation of parental engagement. (NCCA/DES, 2016).

They also suggest timetabling a literacy partnership programme like Doodle Families, where parents and children are facilitated simultaneously (Bourke and Higgins, 2016; CDI, 2018).

The resonance between family literacy and the work of HSCL teachers is articulated in the submission by HSCL National Team to the *National Economic and Social Forum (NESF): Literacy and Social Inclusion consultation* (NESF, 2009). The submission recommends closer collaboration between DEIS schools, HSCL, adult literacy and community education.

Book-gifting is a central aspect of some family literacy projects that recognise parents' economic disadvantage and difficulties in buying books. It is important that these books are culturally respectful and reflect the lived experience of all readers both in their images and content. Libraries make a vast number of books available and expert library staff are attuned to the complex issues that arise for disadvantaged parents who themselves have literacy issues.

BookTrust works with partners throughout the UK to ensure that every child has access to books. In Northern Ireland, *BookTrust Baby* and *National Bookstart Week* are award-winning partnership projects between BookTrust and the Belfast Harbour. Working with children and their parents from birth until they leave school, the BookTrust encourages family literacy and provides the resources that make it possible.⁹

The *Right to Read* campaign, NALA, Limerick City Partnership, Clare Family Learning and Youngballymun are just a few of the organisations in Ireland that recognise that book gifting is a powerful incentive to get families reading together. The experience in Youngballymun, captured in the study by Lana McCarthy, suggests that providing free resources to parents is a key component of creating a reading routine in the home. The study suggests that books should be accompanied by coaching on how to use the resources, to maximise the gains from the activities and to ensure the new skills for parents are firmly embedded (McCarthy, 2017). Youngballymun is set to publish a 'Family Learning Manual' in early 2019.

On 14 February 2019, the Irish Times reported that the **Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL)** would soon operate in Ireland for the first time. Under the scheme, every child in Tallaght, Dublin 24, will receive a book every month until they are aged five. Books will arrive by post addressed to the child and siblings will get different age-appropriate books.¹⁰ The scheme is organised in partnership with CDI, and An Post, who will cover postage costs for a year. Parton's motivation in developing DPIL, which already operates internationally, came from her father who had unmet literacy needs throughout his life.

KFFL: In support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and as part of their Corporate Citizen agenda, in 2017 KPMG in Ireland launched **KFFL – KPMG Family for Literacy**. The initiative aims to improve literacy rates in local communities and provides economic resources for this project, as well as commitment of staff time to volunteer through providing one-to-one reading support in schools.¹¹

Family literacy research – national and international studies

Here we give an overview of empirical studies into family literacy, nationally and internationally. Research into family literacy practices in Ireland, other than the evaluative reports cited above, has been relatively limited. This study, which will establish a map of family literacy in ETBs, is both a unique and timely intervention. Our review of literature in this section is **restricted** to that which has been conducted:

- in universities,
- national literacy bodies, and/or
- published in peer-reviewed journals.

In this research, we are particularly interested in family literacy as a learning activity. Other than anecdotally, the impact family literacy has on the practice of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy within families is beyond the scope of this study (NALA, 2004).

We begin with some Irish research on family literacy and the associated issues of language. Thereafter, Irish research is integrated thematically with relevant studies from elsewhere. We conclude with gaps in research and elements of good family literacy practice.

In 2010, a **visual ethnography** was carried out with parents from different parts of Ireland: inner city Dublin, the Midlands and the West. Each group was living in an identified area of deprivation and experiencing multiple and extreme disadvantage (Watson et al, 2005). The study explored parents' understanding of family literacy, their home-based literacy practice,

9 [BookTrust UK Newsletter](#) accessed 26 October 2018.

10 [Irish Times Free Book Programme for Children](#) accessed 17 February 2019.

11 [KPMG Family for Literacy](#) accessed 1 November 2018.

and their support and learning needs (Hegarty and Feeley, 2010). Despite having very limited economic and educational resources, parents understood the value of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy and wanted to be a positive influence for their children. They were willing to do what was best for their children's learning development, but they didn't always know what this was.

Most parents reported that they frequently felt alienated from the school, and they realised there were gaps in their knowledge about how school worked, how to support language development, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. For example, one woman gave details of her son's school where they were conscious of her adult literacy issues and phoned her when there was a message being sent home so that she was forewarned about the content. All parents were enthusiastic about the idea of having access to sensitive and relevant family literacy activities in their areas (Ibid.).

In 2011, NALA carried out a **review of family literacy practice** in what were then three VEC areas:

- Limerick City,
- Wicklow, and
- South Tipperary (NALA, 2011b).

All three projects had strong partnership networks that involved Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs), literacy tutors, parents and school staff. School staff, in some cases, included HSCL teachers and other teaching staff. Collaboration was highly rated by all projects that recognised that the outcomes were beneficial for everyone: parents, children and school staff.

All programmes were consciously socially situated and tailored to meet local needs and circumstances. They were targeted at parents in areas of disadvantage, many of whom had literacy needs. In many cases, it ended up with parents progressing to further study themselves. Meeting as parents with a common purpose helped break the ice for those who would not see themselves, as one woman articulated, as 'educational'. It allowed parents to recognise their strengths, built confidence and positively boosted the learning activities at home (Ibid.).

A research briefing paper by NALA (2011b) summarised the findings of these two studies. They found that parents' practice in family literacy was strongly linked to their own childhood experiences. Parents reported that they spent a lot of energy on bolstering their child's self-esteem, encouraging and motivating them (socio emotional support). Those who received little education or encouragement in their own childhood resolved to do better for their children. The degree to which this was done, in collaboration with the school, depended on the ethos in a particular school. Where parents participated in family literacy, they improved their own skills and their child's school experience also improved.

The main thing is the confidence. The key factor is the parents [whol] become much more involved and parental involvement is hugely important to the child doing well in school. You can see an almost immediate improvement in their [child's] concentration in the classroom, completion of their homework, attendance and general overall behaviour. **HSCL Teacher**

Gains for parents and the fiscal case

Research in the UK looked at the gains for parents and the fiscal case for family literacy (NIACE, 2013a).¹² In addition to the expected findings in relation to skills acquisition, widening participation and progression, the study looked at the broader impacts of family literacy on agendas outside education. These included:

- employability,
- better health and well-being,
- improved relationships with school and family,
- social capital gains,
- greater integration in community and volunteering,
- involvement in culture and sports, and
- a reduction in reoffending.

Like Heckman and Masterov's (2007) productivity argument for investing in early childhood education, the NIACE research made the fiscal case for family learning. Using a **case study** developed on the Isle of Wight, the study cites the case of Learner A who, before a family learning intervention, cost the state £64,099 annually in medical bills and mental health supports, childcare benefits, legal aid and other claims on the state. After the family learning intervention, she is now employed and her only claim annually is for a single parent benefit of £11,000 for two children. Clearly, considerable resources were invested to supporting the learner's transition, but the gains far exceed the initial financial input in restoration of the dignity and autonomy of this individual and the expected better prospects for her two children (Ibid.).

Although often presented as the state stepping in to save families, it is also possible to view these costs as the inevitable price paid for their initial neglect and the lasting harms caused by educational inequalities (Baker et al, 2004). Whatever the perspective, it has been indicated that investment in family literacy makes sound moral and economic sense. It saves the state valuable capital that can be deployed elsewhere, and it avoids multiple levels of personal and community harms associated with educational neglect and unmet potential.

¹² [schoolgateway.gov.uk Family learning works report](https://www.schoolgateway.gov.uk/family-learning-works-report) accessed 26 October 2018.

Headline recommendations from the NIACE inquiry into family learning in England and Wales were that family literacy should be integral to childhood and adult education. Every child should have the right to be part of a learning family programme. And policy and resources should ensure that this is possible. As NALA has previously suggested, NIACE also favour interdepartmental cooperation enabled by a 'joint national forum for family learning' (NIACE, 2013b).

NIACE **define** family learning as, 'any learning activity that involves both children and adult family members, where learning outcomes are intended for both, and that contributes to a culture of learning in the family.' As is the case in Ireland, family learning is important because it has, 'a large and positive impact on children's learning, giving children greater confidence and self-belief, with measurable benefits to their literacy, language and numeracy skills' (Ibid.: 7). In this study, we are focused on family literacy, and family learning that is intent on facilitating literacy development in both parents and children.

Language issues in schools

Studies in the US clearly associated different vernacular uses of languages as a reason for literacy differences amongst children of different social class and ethnic groups (Bryce-Heath, 1983). In Ireland, language has also emerged as an implicit issue with which family literacy might engage. Gerry Mac Ruairc's (2004) study, 'Big mad words', looks at Irish schools, social class and children's perceptions of language variation. Research with 6th class primary-school children from six schools across the social class spectrum examined experiences of the standardised literacy and numeracy tests administered in schools.¹³ The study confirms language as an alienating aspect of learning, both in the tests and in the texts used in school.

Mac Ruairc also explored how children felt about being corrected in school for their colloquial use of language. He found a correlation between social class and levels of 'standard' language, the test results and teachers' perceptions of ability and expectations of children. Unsurprisingly, the test results reflected children's social class. The gap between the language of school and that of home and community was strongly felt by the children. They resented (to varying degrees) being corrected for using their own form of language and voiced a desire to be allowed to speak the way their parents did, not the way their teachers did.

Áine Cregan's (2007) empirical study in four Irish primary schools looked at language patterns of children, perceptions and practice of teachers. A second report on the study focused on attitudes and behaviours of parents (Cregan, 2008). Cregan found

a poor linguistic fit for some children (and parents) between home, community and school, which had a knock-on negative effect in terms of literacy. When schools demand a 'literate' linguistic facility that they do not teach, it means that some children and their parents are destined to remain outsiders in the world of school. Cregan identified the considerable linguistic dissonance between school and many disadvantaged communities as being directly linked to differential literacy development and to some parents' sense of exclusion from schools (Cregan, 2007; 2008).

Impact of family literacy on adults

Family literacy attracts many first time adult learners

Much is written about the benefits for children from parents' participation in family literacy activities and there is evidence too that adults gain from these interventions. A review of family literacy programmes across the EU found that participants were often coming to adult learning for the first time (Carpentieri et al, 2011). As a result of a carefully facilitated return to learning, many became ambitious for themselves, as well as their children, and continued in education and eventually into employment. This delivers on the broader strategic EU aspirations of developing into a knowledge economy, increasing participation in lifelong learning, and ending intergenerational cycles of inequality and deprivation.

Quality family literacy significantly increased literacy

Of prime importance is the evidence in a whole range of studies that quality family literacy interventions lead to significantly raised literacy levels in participating adults (NESF, 2009; Carpentieri et al, 2011; Flanagan, 2016). Parents also learned valuable skills and methods that they were able to introduce into their family literacy practices, to better realise their desire to do the best for their children. Parents spoke of the support they felt from being in a group of other parents and the sustainable nature of acquiring skills that they could deploy and develop over the long term throughout their child's schooling (NALA, 2016).

Pan-European studies of family literacy

The National Research and Development Council study in partnership with UNESCO and the EU, (Carpentieri et al, 2011), provided examples of good practice in family literacy in Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Turkey and the UK. In this publication, the Irish case study was the Clare Family Learning Project in the west of Ireland (Ibid.). From their extensive reflexive experience in delivery, the Clare Family Learning Project has honed a model of family literacy that focuses first on the development of parents' abilities, interests and knowledge that, in turn, boost children's achievement. The Delivery in the Clare Family Learning Project is

13 www.education.ie Standardised testing in primary schools accessed 31 October 2018.

flexible and informal and encourages attendance of reluctant adult learners, both women and men, in learning. Literacy is integrated or embedded in a wide variety of family learning programmes, with development of adult skills as a key component.

Many tutors currently receive training from NALA and also Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) in integrating literacy in FET courses and the potential for developing the concept of integrated family literacy is great.

Partnership with DEIS schools and HSCL means the most vulnerable families are reached and the emphasis is on fostering the notion of lifelong learning. Evidence is cited that 'the majority of learners take a step to become a lifelong learner and move on to more formal learning opportunities in the adult education centre' (Carpentieri et al, 2011: 222). An account of one participant – a migrant mother – describes how her confidence and language skills improved as a result of participating in a family learning programme. This led to her move into employment and her eventual promotion. It also meant she became a more involved parent of her own children, and from there a volunteer to support the reading skills of junior infants in her children's school.

There is an acceptance in the international literature that family literacy, delivered from a skilled adult learning perspective, increases parental confidence and engagement in lifelong learning and significantly improves literacy acquisition in the child beneficiaries (Carpentieri, 2011). In some cases, the rewards of family literacy are not solely compensatory, as they fill a gap in parents' unequal literacy level. Family literacy has given children a measured advantage over those not impacted by such an intervention, thereby, halting and redressing a cycle of educational disadvantage for children and families who experience family literacy (Ibid.).

Six meta-analyses of family literacy across the EU

Based on six meta-analyses of family literacy interventions across the EU, research concluded that family literacy should be widely available and targeted at disadvantaged parents and families. Robust quantitative evidence suggested that policymakers should more actively support the 'widespread proliferation of family literacy interventions' (Carpentieri, 2011: 11).

In the UK, successive studies of government-funded family literacy work found that it had a measurable improvement on childhood literacy (Brooks et al, 1996; 1997; 2008). Again in the UK, research on the impact of book-gifting activities like *Bookstart* found that these resulted in a sustained improvement in childhood literacy (Wade and Moore, 1998; Moore and Wade 2003).

In Turkey, longitudinal studies have produced evidence of long-term cognitive and non-cognitive gains for disadvantaged children resulting from family literacy interventions (Bekman, 2003). Follow up studies of

the Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP) (after seven years and again after 19 years) found that the combination of intensive parent education and intensive early childhood education produced better parent child relationships, meant parents had higher expectations of their children, and that children had fewer behavioural problems (Kagıtcıbası et al, 2005; 2009). Furthermore, a majority of the children who benefitted from early enrichment had 'more favourable trajectories of development into young adulthood in the cognitive/ achievement and social developmental domains than comparable children who did not receive enrichment' (Ibid., 2009: 2).

Gender and family literacy

The TEEP study was limited in that only mothers received the parental element of the programme. Elsewhere, too, the predominance of mothers taking up opportunities for family literacy mirrors traditional parental care roles where 'parent' is often synonymous with 'mother'. In the US and Canada, research found that family literacy, notwithstanding its great value, sometimes risked placing additional pressures on already overburdened women (Smythe and Isserlis, 2003).

Fathers

Fathers, too, are influential in childhood learning development and research indicates that fathers' role in family literacy activities contributes positively to childhood levels of literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional development (Morgan et al, 2009). Masculinity has been constructed outside the boundaries of care and this has contributed to men's exclusion from care work and to some boys' disaffection with literacy and learning in general (Lynch and Feeley, 2009). The solution is greater than an educational response, but learning is undoubtedly the core issue.

In 2017, there was a study of 20 Irish fathers from inner city Dublin involved in family literacy. The men, mostly former construction workers, had become redundant during the recession that lasted from 2008-2013. Consequently, they had (involuntarily) assumed the role of full-time carer in their families, while their partners took up paid employment outside the home (Hegarty, 2017). Using photovoice methodology, the research explored the men's responsibilities as at-home educational support workers. They had, for the most part, embraced their new family role, although they felt ill-prepared by their schooling and their own socialisation as breadwinning, working class men.

The men found the task of supporting children's learning both challenging and rewarding; evidence emerged of fathers' need for programmes that would help and guide them with the everyday business of family literacy. The men stated a preference for local, flexible and short courses. They wanted the content negotiated with them.

They described an adult learning approach to a family literacy course where they were respected and enabled to acquire the skills to meet their children's learning needs (Ibid.). NIACE (2013a) identify men as prominent amongst the groups that are underrepresented in family learning programmes.

Recruiting male participants

The recruitment of men into adult literacy classes has been studied fairly consistently, and the findings suggest the task is complex and challenging (Bailey and Coleman, 1998; Owens, 2000; Corridan, 2002; NALA, 2009). Research reveals that men often hold unhappy memories of school. Men can also feel embarrassment and a fear of being stigmatised or exposed as vulnerable before male peers (Goffman, 1963). On a more positive note, these same dreads meant that many Irish men opted for the faceless option of distance literacy learning provided by NALA telephone tutors. In this way, they could garner enough self-esteem to progress to other face-to-face learning options (Feeley and Hegarty, 2013).

Identifying accessible bridges back into learning for disadvantaged men is vital; family literacy offers an opportunity to target this group, and this aspect of family literacy merits greater attention.

Family literacy and disadvantage

Ireland has a large number of **lone parent households**, 90 percent of which are headed by women who, because of patchy and expensive childcare and precarious work arrangements, are more likely to experience extremes of social and economic disadvantage (Barry and Feeley, 2016). The European Political Strategy Centre published the *10 Trends Transforming Education As We Know It*, and it cited early childhood learning as Trend 1. With one in four children under the age of six at risk of poverty and social exclusion, evidence suggests that urgent measures are needed to tackle disadvantage (European Commission, 2017).

Effects of disadvantage start early

In terms of learning development, the effects of disadvantage begin startlingly early, with many children able to read by the time they reach primary school and others already lagging far behind (ERC, 2004; DES, 2005; Eivers et al, 2005; NESF, 2009). The main predictor of these early educational inequalities lies in economic and cultural factors, but although they are correlated, they are not necessarily causal in unequal literacy outcomes (Parsons and Bynner, 2007; NIACE, 2013a). Studies show that parental involvement in school is more than four times as important in socio-economic class in influencing the academic performance of young people aged 16. (Nunn, 2007 quoted in NIACE, 2013:11).

Good family literacy supports arrest educational disadvantage

When good quality family literacy supports and intensive early childhood interventions take place in parallel, evidence suggests that the impact for children can be positive, and the inevitability of educational disadvantage is arrested (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011).

As Cregan (2007) and O'Ruairc's (2004) studies established, one major challenge in the school context is that of **cultural alienation**. This has been described as education being 'the making' of some (middle class) students and possibly leading to 'the unmaking' of others who are perceived to be culturally less acceptable (Reay, 2010). That school is a better fit for some children (and parents) than for others clearly illustrates Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1986; 1989). Habitus is the impact of the sum and total of our life experience at any given moment, and it prepares us for the degree with which we can transfer easily into a range of diverse cultural fields or milieus. The sense of being 'a fish out of water' is familiar to those whose home context does not reflect the language, behaviours or value system of school.

Disadvantage is heterogeneous. Throughout the research consulted for this project, the outcomes of family literacy for disadvantaged parents varied. This indicates that programmes need to be designed and facilitated with a clear focus on the specific needs of particular groups of parents and carers. There is no 'off the shelf' model of family literacy and efforts to replicate or transfer programmes in a range of contexts have proved problematic (Eldering and Vedder, 1999; Manz et al, 2010). Nevertheless, there are clear messages in the literature about what constitutes best practice in family literacy.

These include:

- meaningful and supportive home-school links,
- culturally appropriate support, and
- learning opportunities for parents, with accessible and welcoming family and community-based interventions (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011).

Faced with the consequences of social inequalities, there is debate in the literature about the role of the adult educator and the degree to which they are morally responsible to engage with, and act on, structural inequalities that impact their learners. In the context of adult learning and social disadvantage, Michael Apple outlines the role of the educator who cannot stand on the balcony and watch and social struggles against inequality play out around them. Apple identified nine tasks for the critical educator or organic intellectual. He suggests that the role of a tutor should be to:

1. Expose exploitation
2. Indicate spaces for change
3. Support community-led actions for change

4. Deploy intellectual skills for the purpose of change
5. Defend and extend the role of radical critical traditions
6. Maintain focus and accessibility for multiple audiences
7. Get off the balcony! (meaning move on from observing to acting)
8. Embody the role of critical researcher and activist
9. Use privilege to extend the reach of education to those without a voice (Apple (2012; 2015))

The ideological tradition of critical literacy has strong roots in community-based adult learning (Freire and Macedo, 1987) and tutors and others are challenged to balance tensions between ideology and policy. The degree to which inequality and social disadvantage are implicated in adult literacy and family learning underlines the complex environment within which ETB work takes place.

Partnerships

Good working partnerships add to family literacy success

Good working partnerships is a recurring element that defines successful family literacy activities. In fact, the articulated aspirations of family literacy have moved away from parental involvement and engagement to home/school/community partnerships, with all the implied power rebalancing that implies (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). It is not about parents learning to fit with schools, but rather schools, parents and communities learning to accommodate each other. As a Scottish research project found, collaborative family literacy ventures involved schools seeing parents as people, rather than problems (Tett et al, 2001; 2017).

Research with three **community-based family literacy programmes** in a Dublin suburb was grounded in such collaborative learning partnerships. The study worked with 35 women to distil a framework for the practice of family literacy (McCarthy, 2017). Based around the acronym SPACES, the framework identifies core ingredients of a family literacy approach with disadvantaged parents:

- **School, parent, community partnerships** – respectful and equal collaboration
- **Parental confidence** – parents are willing to do family literacy work but need support
- **Assessment and evaluation** – programmes need to be rigorously reviewed and updated
- **Coaching and resources** – book gifting and related coaching in how to read to children
- **Environment for learning** – creation of a fun, informal and welcoming learning space
- **Strengths-based approach** – train staff to recognise and develop existing strengths

The *Inspectorate Good Practice Guide: Effective literacy and numeracy practices in DEIS schools* (DES, 2009) cites examples of parental involvement in some exemplary practice in schools. One example was of parents receiving support in effective reading to children. **The Book Start programme** had a book gifting element and opportunities for parents to observe and practise reading to their junior infant child. In this way, parents became involved and comfortable in the school early on, and the home-school divide was reduced for both parents and children.

This practice echoes the advice and recommendations in the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) *Good Practice Guide to Literacy Development in the Early Years* (NEPS, 2015). Links with parents are encouraged here too, and examples of parental involvement in language development and early reading strategies are proposed.

Best practice

Use of the strengths model

Adult-focused family literacy programmes are best when they follow a model of adult education that builds on existing strengths, are learner-centred and facilitated by skilled personnel. Relationships of trust are needed for those who have been disheartened about learning through their experiences in schooling. Programmes that aim to re-engage disadvantaged adults need to be developed with this history in mind, and they need to include a degree of negotiation and flexibility about content and process. The benefits are improved parental confidence and efficacy, and increased social and cultural capital and empowerment—particularly of disadvantaged parents (Swain et al, 2009). Schools also gain in that children have multiple supports working congruently, which eases the pressure on teachers and diminishes expectations/acceptance of educational inequalities.

Provide educational and socio-emotional support skills

The best childhood outcomes in terms of literacy and future employment in adulthood were identified in programmes where parents got not just educational support, but also socio-emotional support skills that benefitted them and their children (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011). Children became more confident as readers and learners with sustained, long-term literacy development. Benefits for children were tracked from programmes where parents were shown how to facilitate specific literacy skills in their children and practical ways to support learning in general (Sénéchal and Young, 2008).

Family literacy is not suggested anywhere in the literature as a resolution to the real and trenchant effects of social and economic disadvantage in the lives of families and communities. It can, however, introduce a

means of bridging the deep cultural chasm that some families face in becoming included in school, which makes it a worthwhile and hopeful endeavour (Tett, 2017).

Quality provision

As outlined earlier, UNESCO has been advocating family literacy and global family literacy initiatives within the context of the Global Sustainable Development Goals (GSDGs)¹⁴. GSDG4 deals with aspects of quality education. Case studies of intergenerational approaches to literacy teaching and learning are gathered from across the globe for a study that gathers together global best practice (UIL, 2015). Projects from Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe (including Clare Family Learning), North America, Latin America and the Caribbean are elaborated and common success factors identified. These **essential** elements of successful family literacy are:

1. programme quality,
2. partnerships,
3. research-based evidence of achievement, and
4. funding.

Elements of **good** practice include:

- engaging,
- collaborative ways of working,
- cultural sensitivity,
- learner-centred activities that are fun and delivered by well-trained and skilled staff (UNESCO UIL, 2015).

All family literacy programmes face challenges: engaging and dealing with diverse needs in a group, securing adequate resources to sustain delivery, the need for staff CPD and developing sustainable and equal partnerships (Ibid.). Nonetheless, there is ample evidence in the literature to indicate the nature of good practice and to establish sources of support, information and possible collaboration.

Gaps in research

The two main gaps in research are studies showing the implications of family literacy for adults and how family literacy works in the home.

Implications for adults

Much of the research about family literacy is concerned with the impact on the lives of children while there are fewer insights into the implications for adults of this additional and skillful parental role (Carpentieri, 2011).

How family literacy works in the home

There is a reported dearth of information about what parents do to implement family literacy in the home; linked to this is the under-researched question of how family literacy programmes are received in practice in the home context (Ibid.). These are intrusive questions, but as Hegarty's photovoice study demonstrated, with sensitive facilitation, it is possible to involve research participants in producing images and rich accounts of 'at home' literacy practices (Hegarty, 2016a).

In photovoice research, research participants take control of data production through constructing photographic images to reflect their intimate family literacy practices. This allows us to share hitherto unobservable aspects of family learning. Consequently, we may in future be able to more fully understand the reality of family literacy in context.

14 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html>

Conclusions

This review of national and international literature has been completed to gather together a range of experience and analyses of family literacy. Since its inception in the '80s to the present day, examples of good practice in family literacy are viewed widely as a way of enabling both parents and children from disadvantaged communities to reduce the gap between privilege and inequality in education.

Quality family literacy builds skills and confidence in parents and children and delivers on national and international policy targets for both childhood and adult literacy learning.

Research evidence concurs that certain pedagogical and organisational elements enable successful family literacy practice:

The right learning approach – and environment

- adopt an adult-learning approach
- ensure that the learning environment is physically and culturally comfortable
- ensure programme content builds on adult strengths (rather than pinpointing deficits)
- build strong interagency partnerships

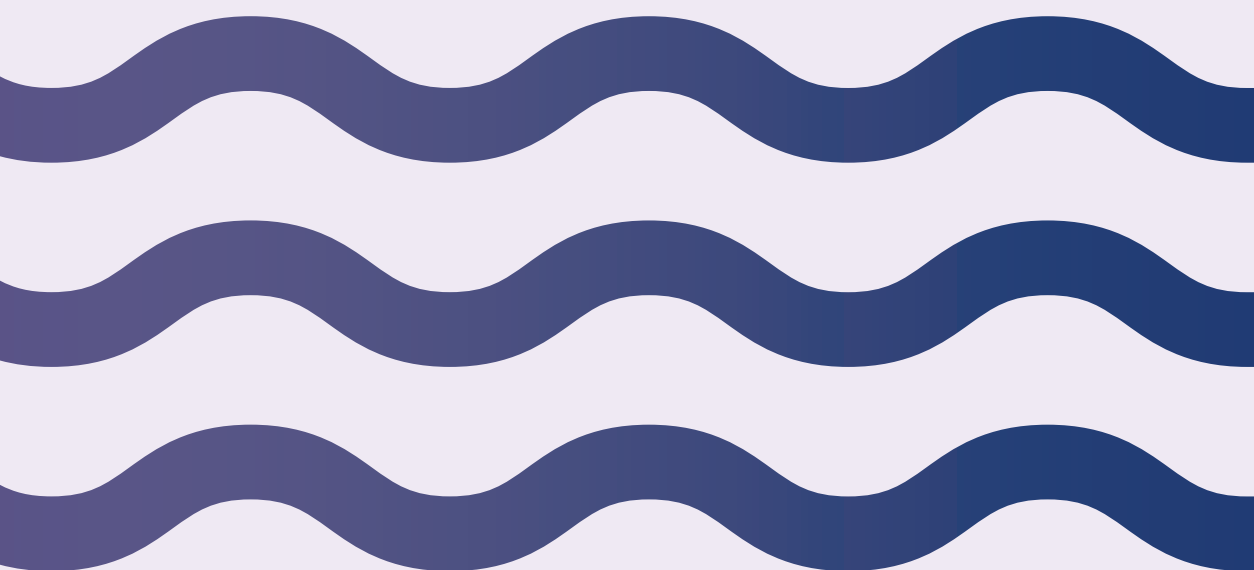
Monitoring, evaluating and improving

- monitor and evaluate delivery
- revise content and approach regularly
- include "book-gifting", where possible, to ensure that there are books in the home
- support staff and share skills and experience often

Respect for all

- ensure that family literacy programmes respect local, vernacular language and literacy
- facilitate schools and parents in reducing the cultural gap between them so that schools can be equal and welcoming places of learning for all children and their parents.

The learning from this literature review will be read alongside the findings from other chapters in the report to arrive at clear and supportive guidelines for the future development of FET family literacy.



Chapter 2

Research design and implementation

This national study of family literacy in the Irish further education and training (FET) Sector took place in the six months between September 2018 and February 2019. The study aimed to 'elicit family literacy best practice from Education and Training Boards' (ETBs) family literacy activity and relevant government policy in order to guide future development of family literacy practice.¹⁵ The purpose of the research was to provide FET stakeholders with a contemporary picture of family literacy activity in ETBs in Ireland against a backdrop of the FET Strategy and wider related government policy.

We used a **mixed methods approach** in our study to capture both quantitative and qualitative data about current family literacy practice in Irish ETBs. **Desk research** established the national and international theoretical and policy context in which family literacy takes place.

A **survey questionnaire** collected quantitative and related administrative data about the state of family literacy in 2017. This was the last complete year of figures about FET practice, at the point when the study was commissioned.

In-depth interviews and focus groups supplement this data. We conducted these interviews and focus groups with ETB managers, tutors, learners and stakeholder partners.

These mixed methods allowed us to gather a comprehensive and multi-faceted picture of family literacy practice.

This chapter outlines:

- the methodological approach,
- the design of the research and its implementation,
- some limitations and aspects of the topic that were beyond this time-limited study, and
- some potential directions for research that might build upon this initial mapping of Irish FET family literacy.

Methodological approach

Debate about the most valid way to gather research information in any particular field is inevitably also about epistemological matters: understandings of the meaning of knowledge itself and assumptions about the nature of social reality (Byrne and Lentin, 2000; Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Feminists, critical theorists and egalitarians have all argued against the dominance of the positivistic approach to educational research. They support respectful, cooperative research partnerships that allow hitherto unheard voices to shape their own narratives and outline their interpretation of their experience (Baker *et al.*, 2004; Byrne and Lentin, 2000; Freire and Macedo, 1987; Habermas, 1984).

Wholly positivist inquiry inclines towards the abstraction of reality through quantitative studies that create generalisations about the nature and relevance of learning in society. Quantitative measures are useful in mapping the extent of learning provision, but they do not seek to problematise accepted understandings of concepts like literacy and family. Political arithmetic used on its own can tend to constrain meaning to that which can be 'objectively' measured and exclude the vital, deep insider knowledge of research subjects. (Hamilton and Barton, 2000)

Alongside a **mixed methods** approach, we include the additional dimension of **practitioner research**. The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) group was formed in 1985. Based in Lancaster University, RaPAL was established to support democratic practices in adult literacy work and promote learning equality through ensuring that teaching, learning and research (and tutors, learners and researchers) are kept connected. Rooted in New Literacy Studies, a socially-situated view of literacy, this approach to research aims to maintain a dynamic relationship between research and practice so that the meaning of literacy remains open and responsive to the variety of changing social contexts and practices that exist in our society. Practitioner research adopts a critical stance in relation to literacy policy design and particularly challenges decisions that are based on simplistic and mechanistic definitions of literacy (Hamilton and Barton, 2000; Fowler and Mace, 2005).

The researchers

The researchers who undertook this study are experienced literacy and family literacy practitioners and, as such, have a deep theoretical and practical understanding of the issues under scrutiny. Both have completed doctoral studies in aspects of family literacy (Feeley, 2014; Hegarty, 2017). Consequently, we are able to appreciate nuances in the data that might elude a non-practitioner researcher.

Literacy is a sensitive field of study and having practitioner experience allows a researcher to access

15 Invitation to tender document distributed by NALA in June 2018.

rich data from research participants who appreciate this practitioner status. The status of a practitioner researcher is that of purposively objective insider, and this requires both honesty and rigour in equal measure. Our positionality is important. We are feminists and egalitarians who believe that literacy is a barometer of in/equality. As such, our belief is that the unequal structures in which literacy is situated require attention if just change is to happen.

The design of the research and its implementation

Our study included four elements:

1. a literature review,
2. a national survey,
3. interviews and focus groups, and
4. three case studies of good practice.

1. Literature review

We first gathered and reviewed an extensive literature that established the origins and developments of family literacy both in Ireland and further afield. At the same time, we established contact with all 16 ETBs (see the map on page 78) to prepare to gather qualitative data about family literacy in each area. Firstly, we had telephone conversations with Adult Education Officers (AEO), explained the proposed research plan and sent an information leaflet about the study to confirm the detail.

Each AEO undertook to organise a representative group of family literacy tutors, learners and stakeholders in their area. The make-up of each visit varied, but we got a picture of each family literacy practice in the area. As we understand literacy to be a social practice, we expected this diversity. The total number of interviews, focus groups and observations of family literacy in practice are outlined in Table 1 below.

We interviewed both of the tutors who deliver family literacy CPD in Clare and Waterford and data from those interviews informed the findings. The schedule of visits extended from November to January. Research tools (see Appendix 2) were piloted in Clare Family Learning where we spent two full days meeting practitioners, learners and stakeholders and taking part in family learning activities.

Research participants, in each of the 16 ETBs, signed consent forms and these were read aloud and discussed with learners. Information leaflets about the research were available as was a list of contacts for anyone who required additional support information as a result of their participation in the study.

2. A national survey

The online survey, developed and distributed using Survey Monkey, was sent to all ETB AEOs in October 2018. Several reminders were sent prior to the survey being distributed. This meant AEOs were prepared for its arrival and proposed return date. Initial plans for surveys to be returned and collated within a fixed period proved unrealistic and final returns arrived early in January.

An unexpected finding was the difficulty that people had accessing the data required to complete the survey. Full survey findings are discussed in Chapter 3. Despite the challenges, we had a 100 per cent return rate for the survey and AEOs provided as much data as possible as well as detailed additional comments. Commitment to family literacy was clearly articulated.

3. Interviews and focus groups

In all, this study involved qualitative research with 157 participants. See Table 1 below for a breakdown, by category, of research participants.

Table 1: Qualitative research activity

| Approach to data collection | Category | Number |
|-----------------------------|--|------------|
| Observation | Family literacy activity | 4 |
| Interview/focus group | Parent/carer | 26 |
| | AEO | 14 |
| | ALO | 31 |
| | Family literacy coordinator | 2 |
| | Resource worker | 10 |
| | Family literacy tutor | 37 |
| | HSCL teacher | 33 |
| | School principal | 1 |
| | Other stakeholder | 3 |
| | Total number of research participants | 157 |

4. Case studies

Three **case studies** of good practice were developed from the visits to the ETBs. These were selected to elaborate different types of provision. The three cases studied selected represent the excellent practice we saw in many ETBs. The participant ETBs who took part in the three case studies verified the draft version of their particular case study and made a number of minor changes. The case studies are presented in Chapter 5.

Data analysis

Interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed and coded thematically using MAXqda. This is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDA) tool that allows storage and rigorous scrutiny of data. The code tree is revised continuously until all data is coded when a final code system is created. A loose framework of barriers, evidence and solutions was used initially, as this reflected the framework around which research tools were designed and the data was collected. Subsequently, we introduced a further organisational framework based on a conceptualisation of equality (Baker et al, 2004). This matched the emerging themes and allowed for more concise representation of the findings.

The data presented in Chapter four are organised as follows:

Section one presents evidence of engagement in family literacy, delivery of activities, outcomes from participation and progression to further learning and/or employment. **Section two** presents data in relation to perceived barriers to participation in family literacy. Barriers are organised in four subcategories: resource barriers, cultural barriers, relational barriers and systemic barriers. The same subcategories are used to organise the data about solutions to better family literacy practice.

Table 2: Thematic code scheme: organisation

| Section | Data about | Data about | Data about | Data about |
|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Section one | | | | |
| Evidence of | Engagement | Delivery | Outcomes | Progression |
| Section two | | | | |
| Barrier type | Resource | Cultural | Relational | Systemic |
| Section three | | | | |
| Solution type | Resource | Cultural | Relational | Systemic |

The final code tree is available upon request from the researchers. In addition to the codes and themes, it provides a numerical count of the total number of coded items under each themed heading. The coded segments were subsequently used to ensure that the evidence provided by research participants is central to the presentation of the qualitative findings. These segments are attributed in such a way as to respect the promise of anonymity and confidentiality upon which consent was accessed. The quotes are representative of all ETBs and stakeholders. The data analysis is at Chapter 4 of this report.

Limitations

In the six months available for the study, we engaged in some detail with every ETB and mapped national family literacy activities. While we have collected full and rich qualitative data, the quantitative data is limited for a number of reasons.

- Family literacy was not a separate data category on the FET data system in 2017, and figures provided by AEOs reflect their own records of local practice.
- In some cases where staff roles had changed, local and institutional knowledge was incomplete. The numerical survey data are, therefore, indicative rather than verifiably accurate. They are the best overview possible in the absence of a rigorous data record.
- Personal identity data, once entered into the PLSS data system, become unavailable to ETB personnel. Some ETBs were able to provide data from their own records and others were not.

Nevertheless, a reasonably full indicative mapping of ETB family literacy activities emerged and this is a good beginning.

Future directions for research

Complete map of family literacy

Future studies could usefully build on these beginnings and use full and verifiable data from the FET PLSS system to create a complete map of family literacy. Our study was focussed on adult aspects of family literacy within the ETBs.

Broader impacts

Future collaborative research with core family literacy partners in DEIS schools, public libraries and CYPSCs might create a broader picture of the impacts of family literacy on parents, children, schools and the wider community.

Record how collaborative partnership operates

How structured collaborative partnership activity works would also be worth recording.

Family literacy within families

A study of family literacy practice within families would provide useful information to inform best practice in the context of family literacy learning content. Finally, men are largely underrepresented in family literacy activities despite discrete provision aimed at their inclusion.

Gendered inequalities in family literacy

The gendered inequalities in family literacy activity, both in FET provision and in the home, need greater understanding if we are to reach this large group of citizens who are currently resistant to family learning.

Conclusions

Family literacy is a rich area of adult education that merits extensive study in relation to its significant response to active inclusion goals and the redress of intergenerational cycles of educational disadvantage.

ETBs cooperated fully with us in the study. They sought quantitative data from their own and colleagues' records and recollections. They welcomed the researchers to their area and provided hospitality and access to a wide range of stakeholders. In many ways, they demonstrated their commitment to family literacy work and to the significant outcomes they had witnessed with disadvantaged learners and their families.

We observed:

- young parents learning how to enhance the development of small babies,
- young children in schools demonstrating their pride at their parents' involvement in their school, and
- parents discussing their increased coping skills in supporting their children's learning at home.

We met family literacy tutors, HSCL teachers, DEIS head teachers and from all of these we gathered **unequivocal evidence about the positive contribution of family literacy** to families, schools and communities. The chapters that follow present the full findings from the research activities.



Chapter 3

Survey analysis

As part of mapping family literacy provision across ETBs, we wanted to get a sense of the existing scale and scope of provision, including how these services are organised. We gathered data in relation to 2017, as this was the most recent year for which returns had been made.

Survey returns and gaps in information

An online survey was distributed to **16 ETBs** on 26 October 2018, and, despite difficulties accessing figures, 16 returns were received. A response rate of 100 per cent was most satisfactory and indicative of the interest and dedication to this area of adult education. There are some gaps in data partially due to the fact that, until now, family literacy has not been a separate category on the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) – the ETB data collection system. Because it was not a funding stream, there has been no category for reporting on family literacy, however, this will change from 2019, so that data can be captured going forward. The gaps are also due to staffing changes that mean insider knowledge, critical to manually calculating numbers through familiarity with provision, has been lost.

Detail in relation to learner characteristics like age, gender and ethnicity was hard to access. Once entered by the learner or programme coordinator into the PLSS, this personal data is no longer visible. We requested this information from the ETBI, but as it is sensitive data it does not require those inputting on PLSS to have access to it, so it was unavailable. Some ETBs provided some detail, and we present it. It is a finding in itself that much of the illustrative data on family learning is not available for both administrative and personnel reasons.

The report is organised so that larger data tables are in a Data Annexe at the end of the report. A brief description and comment on each question and a discussion of the findings and their implications precedes this. The online survey was developed using Survey Monkey and a copy of the questions is available at Appendix 3.

Figure 1: Map of Education and Training Boards in Ireland¹⁶



The survey results

We present here an analysis of each of the answers to the 26-question survey.

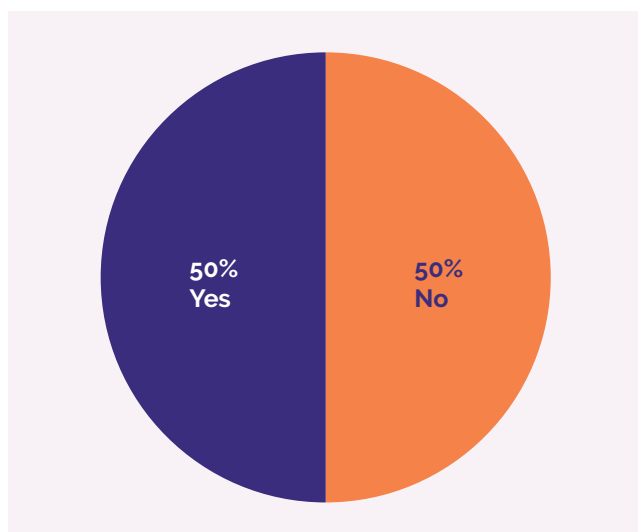
Question 1 gathered **administrative data** and established that in seven of 16 ETBs there is an identified person (or people) named as responsible for family literacy. In some cases, this is an Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO) who holds responsibility for family literacy within a wider adult literacy role. In certain ETBs, a number of resource workers also have a family literacy organisational role. Only in two cases was one named individual solely responsible for family literacy provision. In Clare, the entire ALO time was allocated for family literacy. In Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim ETB, there were 16 hours weekly allocated to a family literacy coordinator for facilitation and tutoring.

Question 2 sought to establish to what **extent ETBs had incorporated family literacy** into their strategic planning process, had agreed the value of this approach to engaging adult learners, and the underwriting ethos of this approach.

16 ETBI Procurement accessed 13 August 2019.

Figure 2: Family literacy ethos, mission and strategy

Does your ETB have an agreed family literacy ethos, mission and/or strategy?



Half of the respondents affirmed that their ETB had an agreed ethos, mission and strategy for family literacy. Half did not.

Question 3: If you answered 'yes', please outline here. If not please explain the range of perspectives on delivery of family literacy in your area.

While only eight respondents answered 'Yes' to this question, a further five gave a response that indicated an approach to provision that was in line with the DES Guidelines (2010; 2013) and a broader adult learning ethos. This suggests that family literacy has developed organically rather than strategically, and the data that follow further illustrates this absence of conscious structure.

The perspectives described in individual returns were based on empowerment of parents as primary teachers of their children with an intergenerational focus. Many described a responsive partnership with DEIS schools, some collaborative provision with other agencies and basic principles of inclusion, equality and empowerment through education. (There were 13 responses to Q3).

Question 4 related to **adult and family literacy hours and costs**. The responses in relation to hours and costs are summarised at **Table 7** in the annexe of data tables at the end of the report. They demonstrate a wide diversity of family literacy provision that averages to almost 9 per cent of the overall literacy activity.

The total number of enrolments in ETB family literacy based on our survey returns is **3,359**. The FET Services Plan provides total figures for adult literacy in 2017 of 37,621.¹⁷ Given the gaps in data in Table 7, the total we arrived at for adult literacy is **33,495**, which, with omissions considered is close to the PLSS figure. Three ETBs returned no information in relation to total adult literacy participation. Others noted that they had excluded ESOL and ITABE, which to a great extent accounts for differences. Figures submitted are largely estimated, and it is clear that there has been no systematic approach to organisation or reporting on this quite substantial area of work.

The annual family literacy participant numbers per ETB cover a wide range from 30 to 813, representing respectively 1.5 per cent – 22 per cent of the total literacy provision in the ETB area. Budget, tutor and coordination hours also vary greatly both in themselves **and** in relation to the number of courses in a given area. The figures are not sufficiently reliable to enable the calculation of a unit cost, particularly as this would need to take account of intensive predevelopment investment. Future data collection will need to explore a weighting system for 'hard to reach' learners if reporting across the ETB is to be equitable.

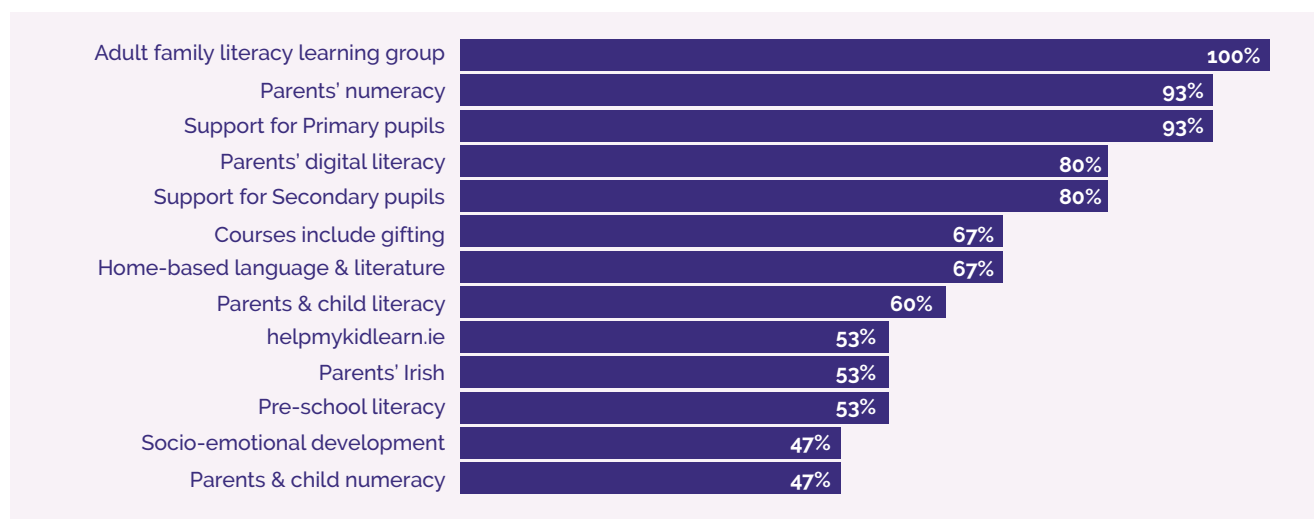
For the most part, the responses indicated that supply of family literacy meets demand. This reflects the case that most courses are provided in response to collaboration with DEIS schools and are, therefore, predictable. Answers to a subsidiary question about what additional resources would enable in terms of family literacy activities showed that there was a strong indication that additional development is limited by the absence of a dedicated family literacy coordinator. Additional resources would allow expansion of family literacy provision and the establishment of the interagency collaborative partnerships that are shown here to be key to engaging marginalised learners.

17 SOLAS (2017) *The 2017 Further Education and Training Services Plan*, Dublin: SOLAS.

Question 5 explored the **range of courses and activities** provided in each ETB and responses are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Family literacy learning opportunities

Which of the following family literacy learning opportunities do you provide?



Fifteen ETBs answered question 5 and the range of activities is extensive. A greater number of courses are delivered to parent groups without children. This reflects complications of working with children in relation to insurance and Garda vetting.

Family literacy provision in ETB premises is **not always appropriate for children**. This may be because of the design of the building or for insurance reasons. Where school premises are used, adults are reportedly dissuaded from participation when there is mandatory Garda vetting in place. The Boards of Management of schools decide on the question of vetting for child protection. Some have opted for vetting of any adult who is present in the school and taking part in any learning activities with or without children. Others have less stringent regulations and allow parental involvement without vetting when joint activities are with a parent's own children or when the activity is a one-off activity attended by parents and staff.

The subject matter of family literacy is weighted towards language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in more than half of the ETBs. Support for parents with children in Gael Scoileanna is also evident in half the ETBs. Some ETBs offer family learning activities that help support parents and children to manage learning at different stages of a child's development. Others provide support for parents to prepare for the transition between primary and secondary school. Half of all ETBs use the website helpmykidlearn.ie in their delivery of family learning.

Question 6 asked for examples of **other options of family literacy** offered and produced an impressive list, available at Appendix 4. First aid, support with dyslexia, driver theory, a range of approaches to ESOL and various creative activities are listed. Most frequent are themed or integrated approaches to family literacy

where literacy, numeracy and digital literacy are consciously embedded in the process of learning a practical skill.

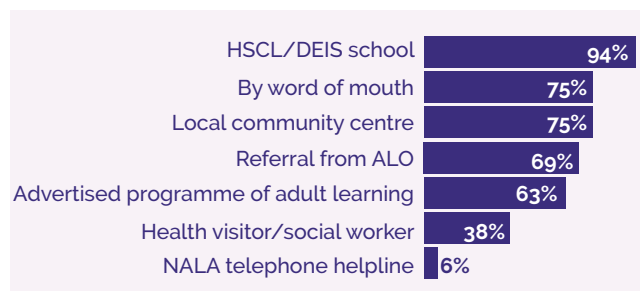
Themed activities include sewing, cooking, gardening and various arts and crafts. Several courses are offered that encourage use of cultural venues like libraries, museums and galleries. Some specific partnerships with libraries provide for parents and children together. In areas where second and third country nationals are living, there are a number of advocacy activities and courses aimed at encouraging degrees of interculturalism.

Question 7 sought data about **course duration** and the responses are reproduced in Table 8 in the Data Annexe. Programmes are mostly six weeks long. ITABE options last 84 hours and some accredited and unaccredited courses last throughout the academic year. Although most providers are flexible, few offer an acknowledged drop-in model of engagement. Most ETBs occasionally organise a one-off event for family learners either seasonally or in response to demand.

Question 8 asked about **methods of engagement and recruitment** of family literacy learners. The results are shown in figure 4 below. The partnership between ETB and DEIS schools through collaboration with Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teachers is the way most family literacy activities are arranged. Other connections emphasise the importance of local community knowledge and interagency collaboration.

Figure 4: Engagement, referral and recruitment of family learners

By which of the following methods are participants recruited/referred?



Question 9 asked for **other means of recruitment** used by ETBs. These were many and various and a full list is at Appendix 5. Some recruitment takes place through existing courses where information is given by word of mouth. Learners are also effective in recruiting other parents to family learning events. HSE staff, who are in contact with families, disseminate information about forthcoming activities. Also helpful in recruiting learners are:

- community groups,
- community partnerships (like Leader), charities like St Vincent de Paul, and
- others with connection to particular communities of practice.

Compiling an up-to-date list of family literacy activities on helpmykidlearn.ie is also suggested as a way of information being centrally collated and readily accessible to those with digital access.

Questions 10 and 11 asked whether quantitative **evidence of outcomes** from family literacy had been gathered and was responded to by 13 ETBs. The results are shown at figure 5 below. Question 10 and 11 are discussed together.

Figure 5: Quantitative outcomes from family literacy activities

Have you gathered quantitative evidence of any of the following outcomes from family literacy activities?

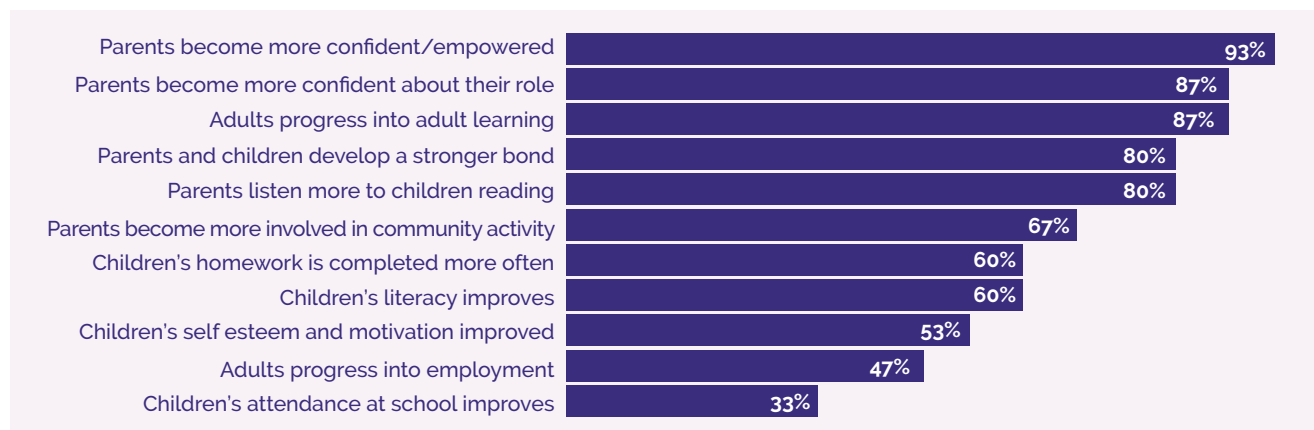


Question 11 asked if ETBs had gathered **anecdotal evidence** of the outcomes of family literacy, and the comparison can be made between the responses in figure 5 and figure 6. Thirteen ETBs felt they had quantitative evidence of positive outcomes from family literacy, and fifteen had anecdotal data of similar results but for the most part to a much greater degree. This is understandable given the limited availability of data.

More ETBs felt they had anecdotal evidence of progress for both adults and children across the range of measures. Fourteen ETBs selected parents become more confident and empowered. The fact that parents become more confident about their role in children's learning is the next most selected evidence alongside the outcome of adults progressing into other adult learning. ETBs are more likely to gather anecdotal evidence from adults, which may explain their greater response to statements about outcomes for adults.

Figure 6: Anecdotal evidence about family literacy outcomes

Have you anecdotal evidence of any of the following outcomes from family literacy activities?



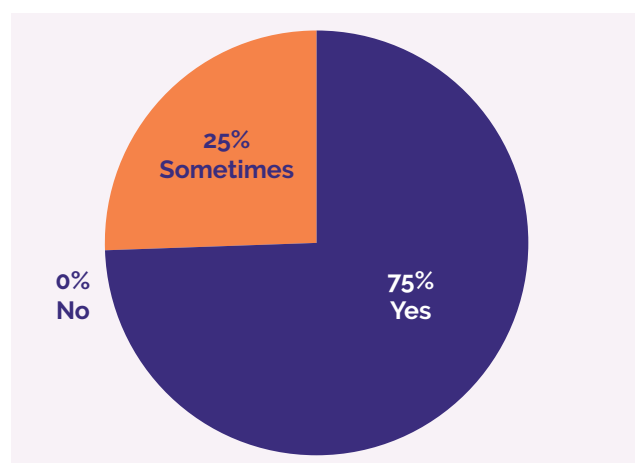
Question 12 examines the issue of **assessment and accreditation**. The responses are recorded at Table 9 in the Data Annexe. The data show that five of the 16 ETBs offer accredited family literacy between QQI levels 1-3. In one case, this is qualified with the explanation that family literacy is used to engage learners and accreditation is offered as a progression route once the learner is settled. At this point, an initial assessment will take place and the learner will be offered accreditation routes at QQI levels 2-4. As would be expected, most provision involved some type of initial assessment and summative assessment as well. Again, in one ETB this closer scrutiny of a learner's literacy needs is delayed until after the initial engagement stage. Literacy tutors, resource workers or a referring ALO carry out all of these assessments.

Question 13 asked if family literacy programmes were **regularly evaluated**. The data show that most programmes are regularly evaluated while for others this happens less frequently.

Question 14 looked for information about who participated in **end of course evaluation**. The responses in relation to the participants in family literacy course evaluations demonstrate that participants and tutors most frequently evaluate courses with occasional inclusion of partnership members and others.

Figure 7: Evaluation of family literacy programmes

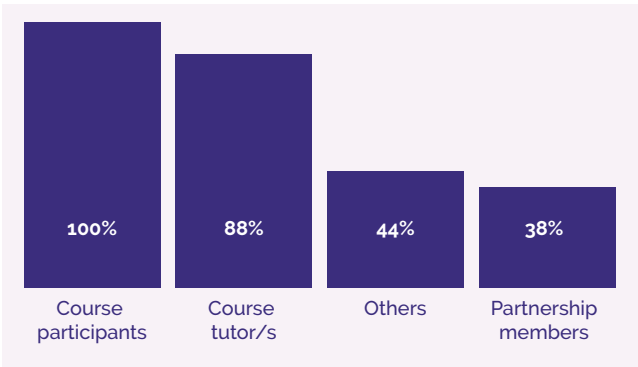
Are family literacy programmes evaluated regularly?



Question 15 established that **other evaluators** included HSCL teachers, an ESOL coordinator, ALOs and AEOs. Partners and stakeholders involved in piloting a family literacy project would also be included in the evaluation process. This is the case, for example, with the St Vincent de Paul and the local library.

Figure 8: Participants in family literacy course evaluations

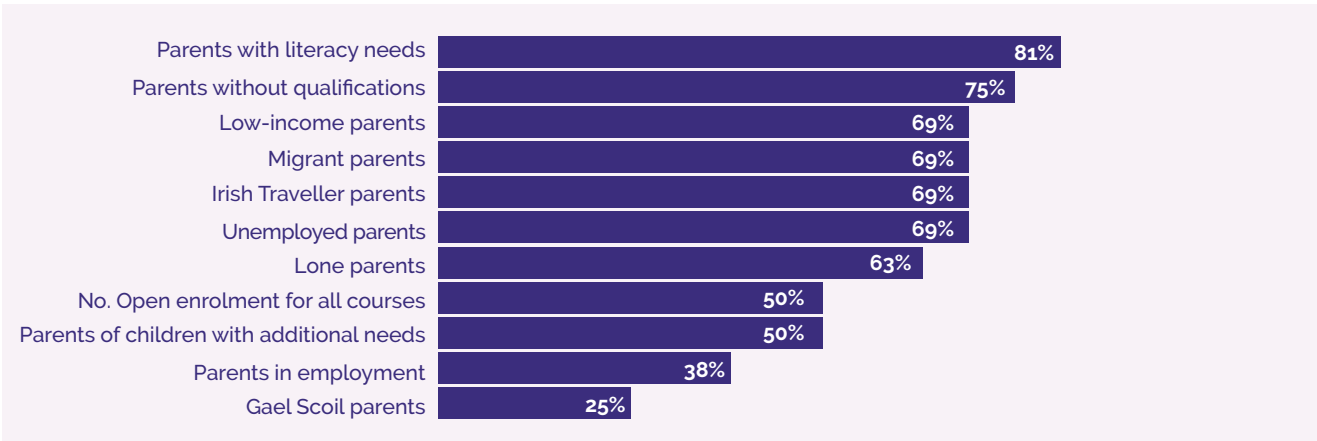
Who participates in evaluations?



Question 16 sought evidence of the particular groups that become involved in family literacy provision.

Figure 9: Groups that participate in family literacy

Do any of your family literacy programmes target/attract particular groups?



The survey shows that family literacy reaches a wide number of the groups most in need of support in redressing educational inequalities. Family literacy also engages those who are most difficult to attract into lifelong learning.

Other groups reported in response to **question 17** included refugee and asylum seekers, Roma and parents from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. A partnership with Focus Ireland and RESPOND engages parents at risk of homelessness, those with mental health issues and ex-offenders. One respondent also works with mothers who are not in a low income bracket but have difficulties bonding with their child. This respondent comments that a mix of parents ‘encourages critical thinking and mind sets are challenged’.

Question 18 explored data in relation to family literacy participant numbers. As already discussed, family literacy has not to date been a separate category in the ETB data collection system. This results in figures being a little patchy and survey respondents relying on estimates and first-hand knowledge. The detailed

responses are in Table 10 in the data annexe. Despite numerous gaps, we can see clear evidence that once engaged, family literacy learners are retained within the system and a sizeable number progress to other learning. In most ETBs, the number of parents and children attending family literacy together is limited. We know that for the most part this is due to a greater insistence on Garda vetting for a parent attending activities in schools.

The **gender** of family literacy participants was the subject of **question 19** reported in Table 11 in the data annexe. While some were unable to answer these questions, there were sufficient respondents to provide evidence of the gender disparities in family literacy. These reflect wider cultural assumptions about the gendering of family care roles. Where providers made gender specific activities available such as, Dads and Lads, this often increased the proportion of fathers taking part, but not always. One ETB reported that some mothers asked to participate in courses aimed at fathers. In one ETB, an option for fathers and daughters to do woodwork together bucks the gender stereotyped trend somewhat.

Again in relation to **ethnicity**, the data available in response to **question 20** were patchy. The detail is presented in Table 12 of the data annexe. The majority of respondents cited lack of access to personal data once entered on the PLSS as the reason for not having this information. Areas where there is a Direct Provision site or a Refugee Resettlement Programme may have significant numbers from minority ethnic groups. In a few places, Irish Travellers were engaged in relatively large numbers.

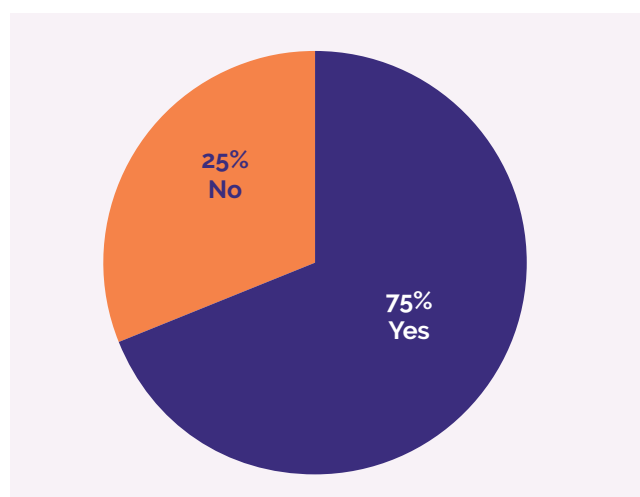
Questions 18-20 demonstrate that there is scope, with appropriate resources and **collaborative learning partnerships**, for further engagement of marginalised groups in family learning.

Question 21 asked if ETBs organised family literacy activities in partnership with other agencies or groups.

The five ETBs that answered 'no' to the question about working in partnership with other agencies or groups subsequently affirmed in that they worked with DEIS schools and HSCL teachers in their area. Both DEIS and FET are part of DES provision and so may not be seen by some as an 'other group'. Some who had answered 'no' also named other agencies with which they worked. These included Direct Provision Centres, local community groups, libraries and social workers. We represent ETBs answers accurately here, but it would seem, as would be expected, that 100 per cent of ETBs work in partnership with others in making family literacy activities available.

Figure 10: Family literacy in partnership with other groups

Do you organise family literacy activities in partnership with other groups?



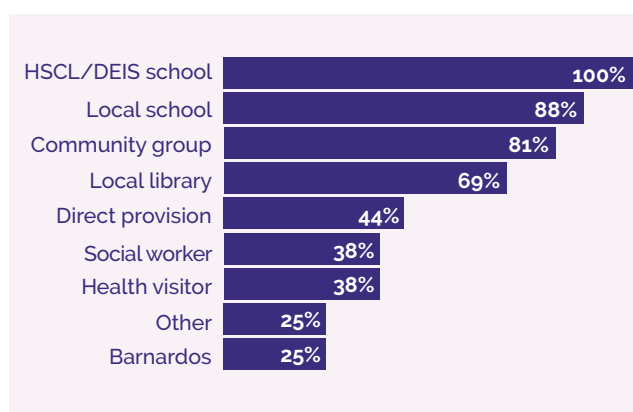
Questions 22 and 23 were framed to identify the **specific partners** with whom ETBs collaborated with in their provision of family literacy activities. These confirm that the most frequent partners include:

- DEIS schools,
- local community groups, and
- libraries.

Other partners noted in response to **Question 23** include TUSLA, the local Partnership group, local Leader groups, HSE, St Vincent de Paul, Family Resource Centres, Community Development Groups, CYPSC, Women's Refuges, RESPOND and Focus Ireland, Speech Therapists and local maternity units.

Figure 11: Collaborative partners in ETB family literacy provision

With which of the following do you work in making family literacy activities available?



In all 16 ETBs, **question 24** provided evidence that family literacy is predominantly **dependent on part-time literacy tutors**. Part-time tutors are involved in 100 per cent of family literacy provision. Only four ETBs have full-time staff members involved in family literacy, and this is alongside part-time colleagues. No ETBs use volunteer tutors in family literacy activities. (See figure 12)

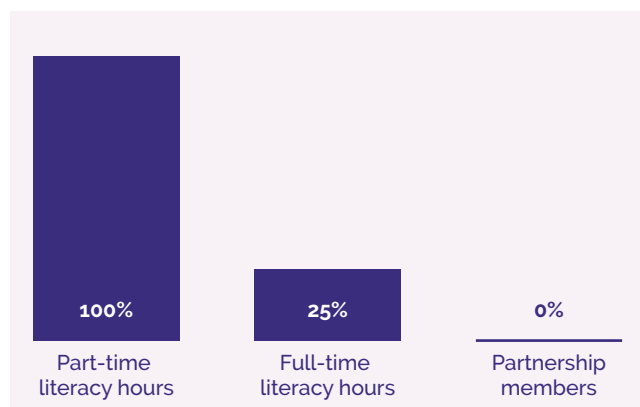
Question 25 examined the **availability and uptake of training** for those involved in delivery of family literacy. All but one ETB had family literacy training. In most other ETBs, 100 per cent of staff had trained either in:

- Clare Family Learning, **or**
- Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

Both of these provide specific family literacy training for tutors. In a small number of cases, not all staff were trained. The precarious nature of part-time staff meant that some only availed of training when they were sure of work. For others, access to available training was prohibitive in terms of travel and the associated costs. In slightly over half of ETBs, there was an interest in further CPD opportunities.

Figure 12: Family literacy tutors

Which of the following are involved in family literacy delivery?



Question 26 asked for any **other comments**, and 12 of the 16 ETBs responded.

Several noted that they had difficulty identifying accurate data in response to survey questions. This is because family literacy was not a category on the PLSS ETB data reporting system. This meant that data solely pertaining to family literacy was not gathered or stored. Furthermore, personal data became unavailable once entered into the system and, therefore, gender, ethnicity and other identity data were no longer available to ETBs.

One respondent commented that family literacy was not always clearly distinguishable from other literacy provision all of which might be seen to be of benefit to families. This made reporting on statistics not altogether unambiguous.

Uneven provision in ETBs and different operating systems that are a legacy of pre-merger times also made responding to the Survey somewhat disjointed for AEOs.

A number of ETBs remarked that that the **role of the HSCL** was pivotal in access and engaging the parents that would most benefit from family literacy. It was noted that an increase in the number of HSCLs would mean more of these connections could be made. Family literacy was seen as a vital means of bringing parents with adult learning needs into the system where they could meet with literacy staff and begin the relationships that would allow them to engage in further learning both for their family and for themselves.

Finally, a number of comments stated that family learning was a growing area of interest and expected to expand in the coming year. It was seen to bring hope to those who could see no way out of their circumstances and to be an effective active inclusion measure. There was a call for greater, more systematic organisation of

family literacy with clearly identified staff within each ETB. A repository for all the materials and courses developed to date was proposed as a means of making family literacy more cohesive across the different areas throughout each ETB. Research that records adult gains through family literacy, as well as those of children, was called for and links with a third-level institution that would comprehensively capture the evidence about family literacy generally were suggested in respondents' comments.

Conclusion

The evidence in the surveys is that a wide range of family literacy work is taking place in ETBs in Ireland. The provision is delivered by qualified, mostly part-time, tutors who are adept at the integration of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy into a whole range of skill areas. The provision is not evenly spread either amongst ETBs or within individual catchments. Many qualified their survey return by pointing out that family literacy was a greater focus in one internal division of their ETB (often a single county) than another. Often this is a legacy issue from pre-merger times and is more reflective of the VEC culture than ETBs.

Differences in resource investment choices

The figures also identify differences between the resources that ETBs choose to invest in family literacy in terms of budget, tutor hours and range of provision. There are differences too in the status and visibility of family literacy in diverse ETBs' organisational culture. In some areas there were no hours for family literacy coordination, and this was not always attributed to the task lying with the ALO.

A clear role for family literacy preferred

A number of ETBs indicated that the role of family literacy coordinator is indeed subsumed within that of the wider adult literacy organiser. In a few cases there is a separate role devoted entirely to family literacy. These are local choices to make, however, the survey returns make reference to a preferred structure that will identify a clear and discrete family literacy organising role. In turn, this would allow the strategic development of family literacy rather than what is often, of necessity, an *ad hoc* development approach.

Disaggregated family literacy data – an issue ...

Whilst data is gathered in relation to adult literacy, family literacy is not a separate budgetary or data collection category and as such its worth is relatively unknown. The absence of disaggregated family literacy data means that there can be no real, data driven decision-making and this risks overburdening staff and limiting the extent to which the ETB can respond to local needs.

... but family literacy is in every ETB

Despite this relative invisibility in ETB structures, family learning is a recognisable element of adult literacy provision in every ETB. It makes a sizeable contribution to the engagement, retention and progression of disadvantaged adult learners. The goals of active inclusion are thereby well served.

Collaborative learning partnerships are important

As is clear in the literature, collaborative learning partnerships are an integral part of establishing family literacy activities. DEIS schools give access to parents that want to improve their capacity to support their children. These networks are not fully explored to date in terms of the demand for family literacy. There are also schools that do not have DEIS status but that would benefit from family literacy provision. This requires consideration to fully address disadvantage. Without a HSCL teacher and with overstretched adult literacy organisers, this will remain the case.

Range of provision with many benefits

Beyond the school system, the survey shows a range of other family literacy provision around the country. There are skills, experience and resources in abundance, and it makes sense that facilitating greater use and sharing of this experience becomes part of a new approach to developing family literacy activities. The evidence clearly shows that once engaged, many parents:

- progress to further learning,
- become more employment-ready,
- take part more fully in the education of their children, and
- become more involved in local communities.

In terms of active inclusion goals, family literacy provides a means of attracting new learners who are motivated by their desire to support their child's learning development. Through participation in family learning they become more confident and may feel empowered to consider their own learning needs more carefully.

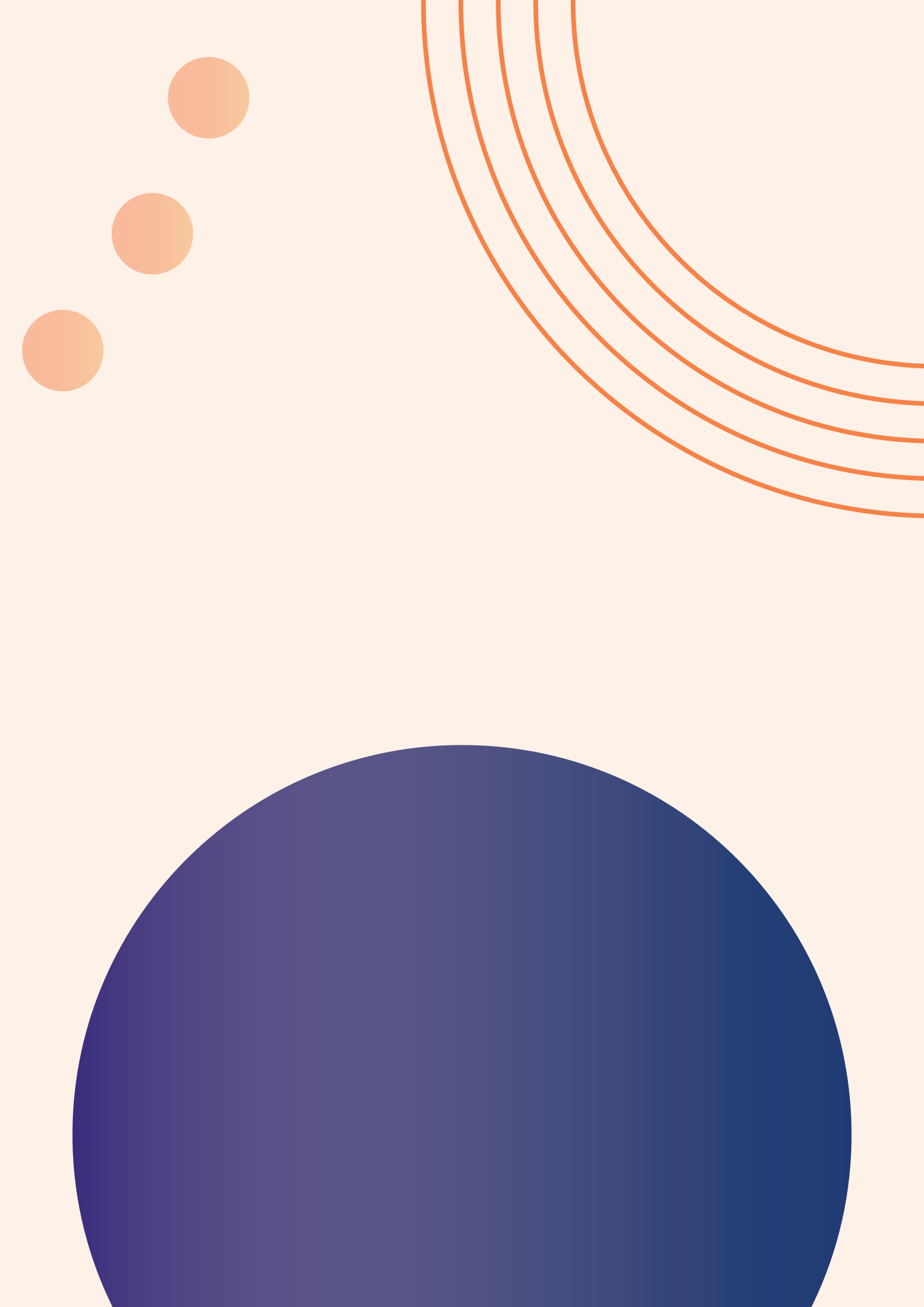
The FET Strategy 2014-2019, and subsequent strategies, aims to provide quality, accessible and flexible provision for such learners. This should remain the case for subsequent FET strategies. There is extensive pre-engagement work that needs to be done to allow learners to reach FET provision and this needs to be recognised and resourced. Most family literacy providers stated that, with resources, they could expand their family literacy programme and increase the number of adult lifelong learners accordingly.

Accreditation useful though not compulsory

There are diverse approaches to the provision of accreditation in family literacy but the evidence suggests that some learners achieve Level 1-3 while engaged in family literacy. In some cases, participation is non-accredited. It allows people to learn without the pressure of gathering evidence of that learning. Others are free to progress more confidently to accredited provision if that they want to. Both options satisfy the goals of the FET Strategy 2014-2019 in the way that providers think best fits their learners' needs. This learner-centred approach is a central and cherished part of the adult learning ethos espoused by most family literacy providers.

Our focus

Our focus is on the evidence in the data in relation to adult literacy. There is ample data too that demonstrate the value of family literacy to children, schools and the interruption of cycles of educational inequality.



Chapter 4

Family literacy practice: evidence, barriers and solutions

Analysis of the extensive qualitative data allows us to create a generalised contextual picture of the practice that we observed and discussed with ETB family learners, providers and stakeholders. It is presented here as a common statement of the learning from all 16 ETBs and so the views are not attributed to a particular place or person. In this way the anonymity assured to participants is respected.

The findings are described within the framework that has underpinned the data collection: evidence (engagement; programme delivery; outcomes including accreditation; progression – including to further training and employment) barriers, and solutions. Our categorisation of barriers overlaps with, and builds on, that used in the SOLAS¹⁸ study (Mooney and O'Rourke, 2017). Our focus extends beyond barriers to examining the practices within the FET sector. These practices are successfully engaging, retaining and managing the progression of family learners.

Gender roles and childcare are culturally established, and they have resource and structural elements. We include them in the category of relational barriers (as they occur most often in this category). Many coded segments could be attributed to a range of themes and, so, it is when the evidence is read together that the whole picture clearly emerges.

Table 3: Thematic code scheme: organisation of data

| Section | Data about | Data about | Data about | Data about |
|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Section one | | | | |
| Evidence of | Engagement | Delivery | Outcomes | Progression |
| Section two | | | | |
| Barrier type | Resource | Cultural | Relational | Systemic |
| Section three | | | | |
| Solution type | Resource | Cultural | Relational | Systemic |

The categorisation used to describe barriers and solutions are separated out for analysis. In reality, like the elements of in/equality they are deeply interconnected and inextricably bound one with the other (Baker et al, 2004). There is inevitably significant overlap in the issues that emerged and their classification. For example, language proficiency was mentioned as a barrier to participation as well as a cultural difference and an outcome of participation in family learning.

18 SOLAS is the Irish Further Education and Training Authority

Section one: Evidence of family literacy activities in practice

We have systematically gathered **evidence** about a full range of aspects of family learning activities. These are presented here under headings of:

- engagement (including recruitment and retention),
- programme delivery,
- outcomes (including accreditation), and
- progression (including to further training and employment). Progression is of course an outcome but singled out here because of its significance in FET policy.

All these overlap within the data are inevitable and illustrate the complex nature of this area of work.

Evidence of engagement

Engagement of family literacy participants can be an **intensive and time-consuming** aspect of delivery. Just 'getting started' was described as the biggest part of the learner engagement process.

And, I think it's just getting parents in the very first day, because it's a daunting first day of not knowing. And then, normally, once people get in the first day, they'll continue to come. It's just at the start. ETB Family Literacy Tutor

This is especially true given the barriers discussed above and the level of disaffection many potential learners have with the education system (Bailey and Coleman, 1998). Evidence suggests that engaging adults in lifelong learning can be a difficult task, and unmet literacy needs further add to the recruitment challenge¹⁹. Family literacy presents a way of attracting parents into learning for **motives other than their own needs**. Echoing the research, all parents spoke of being motivated to change their children's life for the better and saw family literacy as a key skill in achieving this goal (Hegarty and Feeley, 2010). Those charged with recruitment were aware that concerns about children's well-being were a strong motivating factor in getting parents to return to learning.

I would do a course for my children before I would do one for myself. I'm at the bottom of a long list, so it's a good way to get mums and dads back to education. ETB Family Literacy Learner

People mightn't come in for themselves. Adults mightn't come in for themselves, but when they have children and there's homework and all that kind of thing and they have literacy difficulties, they go, 'Oh, what do I do now?' So the family literacy can help them get a way in and help them kind of

at the home end of things. ETB ALO

And, as well, then people don't have any problem coming in to learn something that's going to help them help their children. So, it's kind of ... there's more motivation than anything. ETB AEO

Once parents are engaged in learning, there is the opportunity to **introduce them to other options** for themselves.

I think most parents will do anything for their children and their very reluctance then to focus on themselves ... And the parent then can see, oh, I really enjoyed this, and then move on to other things. And I think that's the importance of family learning. ETB Family Literacy Tutor

To attract parents, providers use the full gamut of devices from simple word-of-mouth to polished video and social media **advertising**.

So, you might do up little flyers and ask them just to hand them out to kids, and the kids take them home in the schoolbags. But it would be flyers or posters, things like that, in-house resources, community centres, anywhere where there are people on the ground that are in contact with these parents coming in or out for whatever reason. The GPs' surgeries, we would go to all those kinds of places in the area. ETB ALO

Establishing awareness of new courses is a gradual task that frontloads family literacy recruitment to a much greater extent than, for example, a straightforward accredited IT course that is offered to already motivated students. Much strategy and effort is needed to find out how to sell an activity to those who may not yet be aware of their potential influence in their children's learning. **Posters** are placed in communities and schools. **Leaflets** are sent home with children in DEIS schools at the beginning of each term listing courses available. **Collaborative recruitment efforts** take place in schools and other community locations and tutors, and ALOs get to meet parents with diverse and not always predictable outcomes.

I encourage the schools to have open days. And, if they have an open day, then I'll be there. And then they usually invite other people like too and you get 10 minutes or so to sell your pitch. But then, you know, we stay around for a cup of tea and then anyone who wants to come over to me then when we're just having tea and whatever will chat away. I find then people do ask me things that aren't my remit, but I just refer them to Guidance. So, I don't think there's ever been someone to whom I have been able to say 'there's nothing we can do for you.' ETB ALO

19 SOLAS Lifelong Learning Report 2017, accessed 11 February 2019.

Despite sustained effort, results can be disappointing and tutors may struggle to fill a class at the outset. Engagement requires time, resilience and creativity on the part of the provider. In addition to the usual traditional methods of recruitment, a number of learners had found family literacy courses on the **FETCH system**, and the idea of having a **course directory** on helpmykidlearn.ie also emerged in discussions.

As research in Britain showed, where partnership approaches are taken, the engagement process can be substantially eased (NIACE, 2013a). The support and influence of a class teacher, a HSCL teacher, a head teacher or another parent can all help recruit a new parent to a family literacy course.

The whole barrier of going in the door, whether it's a centre or a school, ... because there are many people that maybe had a very bad experience of education and maybe felt the system failed them as well. So like to actually bridge that barrier is probably - you know, but that's where maybe the agencies and the other bodies can really help us.

ETB ALO

Recruitment can also be achieved through established relationships of trust with a community group, a health visitor or a family resource centre.

I think it can't be a one-man show or a one-organisation show. It has to be a multiple approach. I've noticed that when we advertise something ourselves we may not always get a full class. But, this time we sold it to everyone. So Tusla has bought into it. The public health nurses have bought into it. And a lot of other, you know, all these stakeholders have bought into it, and they are also involved in recruiting and transmitting this information, sending people along. We don't have all of the target group people we want but there's a good lot of them in the groups that I'm working with now.

ETB Family Literacy Tutor

In one area, a homeless agency had a **Facebook** page with over 100 followers where information about family literacy events could be posted. The use of social media is unpredictable in terms of recruitment outcomes. Whereas the data described how the homeless social media connection proved effective, efforts in another ETB to engage young mothers through social media was unsuccessful.

Programmes for refugees as part of resettlement programmes were most easily promoted through **centres where people were resident** and where adult learning facilities were available on site. Providers of family literacy to ESOL found an enthusiasm for opportunities to create a new life, to learn a new language and to enhance their children's learning.

The collaboration between **ETBs and DEIS schools** was cited by all as the most effective way to develop family literacy activities with the 'target parent' group. The partnership worked to the advantage of both parties.

I think the main source of help with recruitment would be the home-school liaisons because I suppose they're the ones who are in contact with the school.

ETB Family Literacy Tutor

It's really important for tutors, because sometimes they do feel like they're isolated and working on their own. So, if they do have those different webs and connections, you know — and you learn so much from others. I have actually learned so much from working with home-school teachers around children's curriculum and what parents need to know. Because I'm not aware ... I'm not a primary school teacher. I'm an adult literacy teacher, so what do I know about the children's curriculum nowadays? Do you know what I mean?

ETB Family Literacy Tutor

We had a home-school person and she had two schools in my area and she was just fantastically into meeting the parents and the open, you know — meeting the junior infant parents in June before the schools closed. And I used to go down to that. And she had a pack to start the children off. She got money somewhere, and there was a pack for every parent with, you know, all the essentials that the child would need for the year and all of that. And, again she would have a couple of us kind of saying what we do in the area. And we got that opportunity.

ETB ALO

Where a family room exists in a DEIS school, the role of the HSCL is central to engaging the parents that will most benefit from courses on offer. Timing family literacy provision to dovetail with school drop-off and collection times and creating a relaxed and welcoming environment has proved most effective. Sometimes overburdened parents appreciate tea, coffee and snacks and the chance to socialise with other parents with few opportunities for social inclusion. The desire to enhance children's life chances is common to all parents and parents we met in DEIS school family literacy activities were convinced of the benefits.

I know a mum and she does night shifts, and she's here in the morning for classes because she thinks it's important to link with the school and to know what's happening for her kid.

Family literacy learner

I can sit and do his homework with him now and I can do his reading and writing and I'm learning with him. Even on the bus now we are reading the signs together. I say to him how important it is for him to read. I say to him you want to be able to go into your computer and use it, and you need to be able to read to do that. I tell him learning is for the rest of his life and that he'll always be learning.

Family Literacy Learner

Once parents are engaged in the family learning environment opportunities open up and the adult learning process can become transformative for individuals, families, schools and communities. **Learners** to whom we spoke told us about the care taken to make them welcome and to help them relax into learning. They, in turn, became enthusiastic about recruiting other parents whose reluctance they understood and could address.

An adult learning ethos described by Barton and Tusting (2003) was evident in the practice we observed and was clear in the reasons given for retention of learners. Fun learning and social inclusion recur as positive themes in the data.

*Well, what I believe is I would go back to something if I enjoyed my session there, whatever it is. You know... if I went to an event, went to a class, went to a course – whatever – and if I had a good time, I felt good. I got something valuable out of it. I would go back. And the 'valuable' can be something that I learned and that I had fun. I met people. It could be a host of different things. So, in the classes that have a good response, I find there's a mix of that ... so that the people who come get to know each other, so there's nice social environment. They're chatting away, and, also they're completely engaged with what I'm doing. So, they get fun out of that too. So there's double, you know, benefit of them coming there. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

In most instances, people were initially **attracted to learning rather than literacy**. The former was viewed as positive and optimistic whereas literacy generated resistance in those with unmet needs and negativity about their learning ability. One tutor talked about a gradual process of integrating 'literacy by stealth' to allow people to settle and become more confident in their learning ability. The comment was to do with support rather than deception. This scaffolding is a feature of skilled adult pedagogical practice that empowers learners to learn and to take responsibility for their own individual learning style (Ibid.; Vgotsky, 1962; 1978).

Literacy was sometimes an integral feature in a themed approach where literacy was not explicitly mentioned in the title.

*So I think that for some people and maybe for me up until maybe a couple of years ago that the notion of losing literacy, as a term, would be a scary prospect. But it's not as much anymore because I don't think literacy should be a standalone - I think it should be integrated - into other things, which would take away with the stigma and we would deal with every person who walks in and work with them at their level. **ETB ALO***

Creative and practical (unthreatening) courses were offered that allowed parents to become reengaged with learning and acquire a new learning identity.

A **themed or integrated approach** to family learning allowed literacy to be embedded in cookery, sewing, stained-glass making and other courses. Multi-skilled tutors trained in literacy, family learning and other areas enabled parents to settle comfortably into adult learning. They discovered they could indeed learn. They could have fun and make new friends, and they could share their learning with children with whom they made new learning relationships.

*I see parents and children getting to learn a little more about each other - you know, things that they didn't know before. So, that element of novelty of finding out some new aspect about the child, or vice versa – the child finding about the father. I saw those kind of parents coming back as well, you know. And I think it's again a sense of feeling good about yourself when your son says: 'Dad, I didn't know you could paint'; 'Dad, I didn't know you could make this so well'. You know? So that sense of feeling good about that would make them to come back. So, those are the two main things that I saw: a parent that got something out of coming for themselves; and those who were able to make a connection with the child. So these two kind of parents kept coming back. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

Once engaged, some parents choose to remain and progress in a system that provides free learning opportunities that bring about significant changes in family life. For those whose trajectory is more interrupted, they have at least learned how to connect with the system at a future time, when they wish to.

*Some continue on and some do get the bug, but once they have the confidence or they come in to find out what they want or to find out, then a lot of the time those learners they're gone for a while, then they come back, they'll re-engage. But at least they know where we are and they'll come back again. **ETB AEO***

Engagement is the first major step in having choices about becoming a part of this growing culture of partnership between parents and schools.

Evidence of delivery

Family literacy that we observed and discussed with ETBs is designed and delivered according to principles of adult learning. These recognise the strengths and life experience of adult learners, and they also facilitate, rather than dictate, learning. Learning is scaffolded to match learners starting place, and to support their needs and pace of learning.

*The flexibility of the FL model is its key feature in my view. That ALOs can offer such a range of programmes is fantastic, and I have seen it work very well as a recruitment ground for other mainstream literacy programmes, and a hotbed of word-of-mouth advertising for the literacy service. **ETB ALO***

Parents **learn in groups** where diversity is welcomed as it provides for rich learning opportunities. In Freirean style, the content of delivery is steered to coincide with the needs and interests of the group who are free to learn as creatively or mechanically as their individuality requires (Freire, 1972). The underpinning literacy content in family literacy courses was emphasised in all ETBs. There was caution about losing the literacy element in family learning and straying into community education territory. However, there was an awareness about the difficulties of engaging adults in explicitly named literacy courses.

*Like, what value is it for the parents if they're not actually addressing their own literacy, addressing the issue of how to help their child's literacy, addressing the understanding of what family learning means? Understanding what it is for a child to read a book, understanding that you can have a six-month-old with a book and that's actually okay, and it's not stupid or ridiculous like that, it's actually turning the page and ... or how to talk to your child about a book. That's all really important. **ETB AEO***

The following story illustrates the **time** it can take before someone is ready to tackle their unmet literacy needs. The engagement in a safe, supportive family learning environment plays its part in that development process.

*We had a woman once who came to live here, and she was totally illiterate. She couldn't even write her name. When I copped it, I got her in for cookery then for sewing. Basically, she did four classes that had no literacy and then she felt encouraged to do a computer class. And it was after that that she admitted her literacy issues and now she has continued on to the ETB and her child is in third class, and she can do his reading with him. Before that, he was going to all the homework clubs. That was a real good-luck story. She had to take a lot of courses and there were a lot of home visits to get her there. But she did get there, and she's so proud now to be able to teach her children; and they are so proud to see her there in the classroom. It really takes a lot of time to build up those relationships. It takes time and trust for them to say they have issues with reading and writing. They might first say they can't help with the homework but they won't say it directly. **HSCL Teacher***

Creativity was emphasised in much of the provision we saw and impressive outcomes were achieved through integrated or themed family literacy approaches. These recognise the adult as a learner with learning needs that do not always need to be directly geared towards the child's curriculum.

I didn't do the Leaving Cert 'cause I struggled with numeracy, and I have two children ... and I thought it was important to study maths, because it meant I could help them with their homework. I went on to study communications and that helped with

*English as well. We did spellings and form filling which was great, and I did computers as well. At the moment, I am studying self-advocacy and computers and personal care. I'm here 3 years now. I was very nervous the first time I came because it had been so long since I was in education. What I liked about coming was it fitted in with the school hours, and the tutors are great at giving assistance if you are stuck at anything. We start at 9.30 and I'm finished at 1.00 o'clock. I drop the kids to school first and then I go to school. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

Research has shown that integrating or embedding literacy with other skills is an effective way to **learn a number of skills at once** (Hegarty and Feeley, 2009). Through a range of courses parents were becoming more efficient teachers of children. They did this by learning how literacy and numeracy and digital literacy are embedded in cookery and sewing and other options. Perhaps for the first time, they were learning to learn and how to support learning in others.

A family literacy sewing tutor explained how parents learn to create new objects and to share that skill with their children. They also learn how complex concepts are developed by activities like cutting and assembling pattern pieces, placing the right sides of material together to form seams, cutting things on the bias and so on. Family teaching moments can be explained throughout many learning activities if the tutor has the skills to facilitate and enable this approach.

*So, when I work with parents, you know, most of our family learning, a lot of it I do is I talk to them - I work with them first as parental groups and then we go work with the children. So when I work with them I try and point out to them where the literacy element is. I don't start with that. But as I'm talking to them, as they're doing things, you know, I say, 'And when you focus on this what do you notice happening?' And they say, 'oh, yeah, we're talking about numbers, we're talking about words, we're talking about spelling, and these kinds of things, distances and measures and stuff'. So they're unconsciously doing it. We're doing it and then when we point it out to them I think it has a greater impact because then they feel, ah, I've been doing it already. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

New Literacies

An impressive array of family literacy activities has been developed since family literacy began to be recorded in Ireland in the early 1990s (Clare Family Learning Project, 2000). Traditional literacy and numeracy have been extended to embrace digital literacy, which has begun to change how we write and read and exchange messages in a range of social contexts. The ever-shifting social situation in which we use literacy means that literacy itself is also always changing. This is the basic tenet of New Literacy Studies (Hamilton et al, 2000). Family literacy reflects this phenomenon and responds flexibly and innovatively to the demand for new and more focussed supports for parents. Where the school system communicates with parents by apps, **digital literacy** becomes an imperative for parents if they are to be included.

Yeah, some of the home-school liaisons would be really good. And I suppose the basic computers class that I'm doing at the moment came from an idea from one of the home-school liaison, and it was because they only - so I suppose they had a lot of parents coming in with low computer literacy and they needed to be set up on this Aladdin app to receive all the updates from the school. And without them being set up they were caught in the loop that they didn't know what was going on within the school. So I suppose that's why we set up the basic computers class - to get the parents set up on the App and to learn basic IT skills so that they could be more in tune. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Ideally, a family learning culture could be developed where parents engage with courses across their child's learning development. From support for the development of babies across the developmental stages and major transitions, parents could avail of short supportive learning activities suitable to that moment. Promotion of language and literacy would be integrated across these programmes that would facilitate the learning development of the parent and child simultaneously. Many of these courses have been designed as needed. For example, Internet literacy and safety is a new area for many parents irrespective of prior educational achievements.

We gathered evidence of family learning courses developed to cover **each stage of child development**. *My Baby and Me* and *Snuggle Stories* facilitate parents in understanding how their baby learns and develops – and how they can support and encourage this. These early interventions were seen as vital in easing engagement in the whole learning journey.

I suppose it really made me realise that when we're going into schools, sometimes we're getting at it too late, you know? That if people have difficulties, it's better to be able to reach them at an earlier stage and to be able to work with them ... you know, through the learning process with their children.

Because we had one or two parents who were quite needy in that group, who needed extra supports, one in parenting and two or three who needed ... just ... supports around their own literacy, you know? And to be able to identify it at that stage, before they're in school, before they have homework, it just made it a little bit easier and less stressful for them, I suppose. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Research has shown that reading to children in a particular way can enable them to better fit within, and succeed in the education system (Bryce-Heath, 1983). Family literacy programmes show parents how to read effectively to a child so that they reap the benefits of the immediate pleasure of the event and become comfortable and successful learners throughout their lives. In the ETBs, we saw evidence of a range of family learning activities that already extends throughout the chronological stages until transition to secondary school and beyond.

Learner 1: *With your first child going from primary school to secondary it's just so new. I felt very far from school and the course was a huge help to me.*

Learner 2: *And, it really set my mind at ease. It was really practical, and we learnt loads. Some of it was about how to reassure the children too so that they wouldn't pick up your worries. It was all mums and one dad.*

Within these different age groups, parents learn about the demands of the curriculum and how they can support and reinforce learning at home. In some cases, parents have been recruited into preparing props to support storytelling and to be volunteers as Reading Buddies in their child's school.

There are **specific supports** that exist to help children with reading, maths, Irish, and other subjects that exist across ETBs. Here is one example:

Well, we have a new Gaelscoil in our area so a lot of the parents are anxious to do Irish and, you know, they need it to help their children with their homework. They need to understand what's going on in the class. You know, very few of them are fluent in Irish, you know, but they want their children to go to a Gaelscoil. So you kind of go, you know, it's vitally important that they understand and they can help, like, and they're involved. So it's been really positive, and there's been huge I suppose retention of people because they can see how valuable it is, you know. **ETB ALO**

In this instance, parents learn the subject matter and how to help their children when there are difficulties. Parents also come to recognise and enjoy their role as a primary learning influence in their child's life. Early years language development, establishing routines with children, fun with maths and science, understanding what your child is learning and an extensive range of courses that allow parents to 'follow the child's journey' as one tutor told us.

A parallel range of supports exists to make the parent/child learning relationship as relevant as possible across the school life of a child. In some cases, these interventions are designed to support parents who view their own education as having been unsatisfactory – and, in some cases, damaging. Inclusion in the school benefits the parent, the child and the school too.

I brought my daughter to lots of events here too, and it got her used to the school and I found that very helpful. And, on her first day of school, she was just so used to everything ... You really need to be grounded for your kids, you know? If you're not it's just chaos. Last year, we had a giant game of snakes and ladders here for Maths for fun ... everyone was learning but it was so much fun!

ETB Family Literacy Learner

In other cases, tutors remark on how parents, across the community and irrespective of educational outcomes, need support in understanding the early stages of development and how language and learning are fostered. Often **parents progress together**, learn from each other and form solidary parent groups. We met parents who had established online social networks where they supported each other with problematic aspects of homework. We observed and discussed ways in which family learning is responding to the needs of individuals, families, schools and communities. We did this in groups of parents, in groups with parents and their children and in other combinations of groups.

In our culture, family learning continues to mostly attract **women**, but most providers are consciously trying to respond to the parental learning needs of men as well as women. The gendered nature of family literacy is an area that merits greater attention and as yet is little-researched (Hegarty, 2016b).

For **speakers of English as another language**, the embedding of family learning associated with the school system and curriculum is invaluable. Parents become included in the culture of school and learn new words that describe events. The language of the school system, attendance, completion of homework and how to participate in parent meetings and the wider school community are core learning elements. In this case, the content of programmes is negotiated with the HSCL teacher and other staff who highlight areas of need.

In the wider community, we heard of homelessness advocacy groups who suggested ways to support parents to manage learning development without the basic stability of a home place. Yet again some who are new to Ireland learned to understand the basic skills included in procedures like property rental, medical services and court appearances. These are not directly related to children's learning, but they certainly contribute to a safe, stable home life, which is a significant factor in child development. At the same time, linguistically able and culturally savvy parents become better equipped to manage children's learning and model good learning practices.

Interagency partnerships help engage learners and are influential in the course content and activity focus. Blending and sharing resources, skills and expertise through interagency partnerships are clearly key ingredients in the success of all aspects of family learning (NIACE, 2013a). Those partnerships merit guidance and support so that they can cease to be *ad hoc* and become strategic structures around which family literacy is designed and delivered.

Evidence of outcomes

Once engaged in family literacy, adult participants reap extensive benefits that are shared with children, schools and the wider community.

It encourages parents to be more proactive with their children's education and to be more involved in what they're doing. And I think that has a long-term impact. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Learners described their lives as '**transformed**' by family literacy. They had learned to be 'relaxed', 'confident' learners with new positive identities and were able to consider further learning options and, in some cases, employment. We repeatedly heard that parents had not considered the extent of their potential as facilitators of their child's actual learning. They knew they could be encouraging and supportive, but they were surprised and inspired about the close learning relationship that was developing with their children as a result of family literacy.

And then the other thing that strongly I noticed was the connection with the children. There was a lot of the times the parents wouldn't know what the children were capable of and then the child wouldn't know what their fathers were capable of or their mothers were capable of and I so I could see their surprise. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Parents and children learned **new information** about each other. Children were surprised by their parent's abilities. The family connection became better and stronger and parents consciously became learning role models. Mothers told us how happy their children were to see them in their school during the day. They told us that their children were proud of their work in the school. Those who made artefacts to enhance story telling in their child's class heard their child say to their peers with pride, 'My mammy made that...' There was an impact on children's attitude to school too.

And she loves school now, and I think I have given her more interest in it. She doesn't miss a day. I'm trying to encourage her. I left school very young, and it's now that I'm regretting it so I don't want her to feel that....I want her to see the good side. **ETB Family Literacy Learner**

Parents who regularly attended family literacy in a DEIS school became **more proactive in their child's education**. Tutors could see that parents' shift in attitude to maths, for example, was influential in a child's approach to new learning.

*Well, they're just taking control of it then. They're going, 'I'm going to just do another one [sum] now just to practice again, you know. I know I have it right now; I just want to practice again, you know.' And that sharing — even that attitude at home it just makes a difference. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

*But also with the maths I think, you know, it's the fear element. I mean, lots of people say, 'Oh, I'm no good at maths' and that kind of rubs off on their kids, because they don't want to try things then. So at least if they have that confidence it just means that, you know, they'll give it a go, they'll try it, and it'll rub off on their children then. **HSCL Teacher***

Parents developed **better relationships** with the class teacher, the HSCL teacher, the head teacher and the other parents. The school community expanded to embrace the parent group and the parents responded by contributing valuable time and enriching the learning community. Some parents volunteered as Reading Buddies. A group of fathers made houses for the *Three Pigs* and the story had extra impact for the children as a result.

A mother's group made **multicultural artefacts** that became central to the expression of the school ethos. They were displayed in the school, in the Council Offices and the Library and reported on in the press and on local radio. Parents made new friends, experienced improved mental health and were included in a new dimension of the community. More learning took place at home, and children were noticeably happier in school. Teachers also remarked that homework and attendance improved substantially. The multiplier effect was unstoppable and the beneficiaries many.

*And, also, ultimately then obviously the kids they're being helped at home with homework and able to complete it better. There's less kind of tension and stuff like that. They're happier kids in school. It's that cycle. The class teacher then is ultimately happier too. **HSCL Teacher***

A significant outcome we observed and discussed in one DEIS school was the **culture shift** in the relationship between parents and school staff. The relationship, which was traditionally quite separate, became one of recognised partnership where the school saw the inclusion of the parent as the most effective way to enhance the child's learning experience. Beneficial outcomes accrued to children, parents, teachers and the whole school where family literacy is intricately enmeshed in the life and practice of the school.

There is a range of views in ETBs about accreditation of family literacy activities. **Accreditation** is generally optional, and some ETBs argue that the focus should be on supporting parents to help their children rather than on accrediting parents' new skills.

*I think the measure isn't of how many adults attended our parent courses went on for accreditation. I think the measure is how many of those adults felt it worked well, empowered them to help their children at home in the house. I would dislike strongly if it became an accreditation course. **ETB ALO***

For those ETBs who construed family literacy as school-based support with the content of their children's curriculum, accreditation was seen as largely inappropriate. Others felt that for those who were insecure in their learning identity, engagement in learning was thought of as a sufficient outcome in itself.

*And, then not everybody who comes and does a course actually is ready for accreditation. And a lot of what we do under family literacy would be six-week courses, maybe in kind of engagement things, which may end up then for some of those parents coming into existing courses or could result in us doing something further with them, but is often the case that it's an engagement thing — you do something, helping your child with homework or spelling or helping your child with subtraction or helping third class kids with whatever they are learning. **ETB AEO***

Where accreditation is an available option, many take it up. In most cases – and for the first time – parents completed programmes accredited at QQI Level 1 to Level 3. A tutor explained that success could be quite quick at these levels and was highly motivating for parents. Sometimes the accreditation was in a subject area like cookery or sewing or child development where the literacy and numeracy were embedded. Some learners had completed major awards at Level 3 involving 7/8 modules. Others had completed QQI Child Development and Caring for Children in one year of family learning. Many ESOL learners were keen to complete accredited courses from the outset, and there was general satisfaction with the acquisition of certificates.

Some ETBs held annual award ceremonies and these encourage new parents and engage new learners. When parents chose to complete accreditation it was usually a satisfying and motivating time. However, the content of QQI modules is not always a fit for short courses with a very particular family learning focus.

Because we had a group who did the Irish at Level 3, and they kind of felt at the end of it that it was in contrast to what they actually wanted to do. They wanted to speak more and they wanted to be able to be a little more fluent, a little more confident. And they had all this writing to do and they had all

these learning outcomes to complete. And they did it and they were able to do it, but it wasn't what they came for. **ETB ALO**

I'd just also say one thing to you about accreditation. We did do it with the English class. So we had an English language class. And we had a few years without and then we asked the parents would they like to and a lot of them said yes. And then I think the pressure became kind of where they were feeling the pressure coming on that they had to get this done and it had to be submitted. So it was no longer coming in and having conversation and learning about whatever or learning — It was now pressure. And we lost half of the class. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

A number of tutors noted that the content of **some QQI syllabi would benefit from being revised** so that the learning outcomes are a better match for what is useful to family learners. Accreditation that does not take account of the breadth of skills parents learn in family literacy is seen to sell them short. The rich resources in the ETBs for family learning might be taken into account in developing new modules of accrediting the rich learning that takes place in family literacy. In general, given the diversity of learners, accreditation should remain an optional aspect of family literacy where adult learners and tutors agree together about the direction of learning.

Evidence of progression

Evidence of progression came in different ways. For some learners, engaging with literacy learning was a sign of progression when they took a number of creative and craft courses before openly recognising their literacy needs. Developing relationships of trust with tutors and becoming settled in the adult learning environment helped this progress that was carefully managed by family learning tutors.

For others, engagement in family learning was progression from refugee resettlement programmes, and it marked a move towards community integration and social inclusion.

Others took on **new learning roles** in the family. Grandparents learned to support the reading development of grandchildren, and parents found they could recreate a better childhood through learning with their children.

A lot of people have also done family literacy courses with me and then moved on in here to further classes. There's been a constant stream of them. That works really well. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

My Baby and Me, well, we went onto My Toddler and Me and then the parents were saying, 'We've actually sorted ourselves out now to do a course and we'd love another course.' So we put them

down for Caring For Children and Paediatric First Aid. We give them the suite of courses when they finish a course, and then we keep them on file. **ETB Resource Worker**

So we have found a lot of the parents will progress in and we've had a few men, we've had a few dads, particularly who came for the maths. **ETB Resource Worker**

In one instance, the transition of their child to secondary school was used as an opportunity to support parents with their immediate concerns and to offer opportunities for progression to further learning.

We also do a night about settling children into secondary school where we talk about things like learning styles. We do an exercise where we write up sheets with all the subjects on them, and we ask people to ask them to go and stand beside the ones they liked when they were at school. And it's very interactive, and we talk about what the full range of subjects with them and it works well and we really stress the importance of being positive and praising their children. Then, we do a learning style quiz and the extension of vocabulary at home and the big jump their children will make when they go into secondary school. And we give them emoji words to put on their fridges to help them to talk to their children about how they are and we also do some fun exercises around stretching vocabulary use. At the end of that, they can sign on to a project maths course and a lot of them do. **ETB ALO**

The close cooperation with **Educational Guidance** was mentioned as important in helping adults identify options for progress and make informed decisions. ALOs made sure that learners had access to Guidance at the most appropriate moment.

The guidance officer is in the centre. So she'd make an appointment with the tutor to come in and speak with the group on a specific day, and then if anybody would like to speak with her individually they'll make that appointment. **ETB ALO**

The data show abundant evidence of **progress** for those who had previously been reluctant to engage in programmes. Involvement in Snuggle Stories led to some learners completing QQI Child Development Levels 3 and 4 and establishing a potential employment destination. Six parents who completed a HSE Cook It Programme found jobs. Elsewhere, learners progressed to VTOS to acquire employment skills. Through completing QQI Level 1-3, adults **learned about portfolio building**. This made progression to future learning easier, as doing the portfolios taught them good timekeeping skills, how to complete a project and how to manage good group working relationships. Most importantly, they lifted the lid on their own potential and became open to wider opportunities than they had previously imagined.

*I think from my end, just seeing people coming in at the start maybe not confident and then maybe deciding to take an exam and then even physically coming in to do the exam. You know, you can see the growth, the personal growth from maybe six or seven months and then the confidence they get, then maybe they'll consider — you know, they become aware then maybe there are other options within the ETB. So that whole kind of personal development process takes place. **ETB AEO***

What the parents say ...

*I have two daughters in the school, and I get good support here. When my girls see me involved here in the school, they know I'm there and they like that ... they get to see me and know what I'm doing and it's a nice certainty for them, it's reassuring for them. **ETB Family Learner***

*Not all parents know what to do ... we did a course here called Parents Plus, and I got so much out of that. It was a big commitment, it was three months, and we got all the books to go with it ... and I still look back at those. It was about disciplining your child in a positive way. I learned strategies that have helped me as a parent ... like sitting down with him and giving him individual time, instead of saying 'There's the television, I have to go and do the dinner' where now I can say to myself that can wait, the dishes can wait. Sitting at the table and giving your child that time is important ... twenty minutes of reading with him or making a jigsaw or that. That's what they want and you can build from that. I am his primary carer, and it is a lot of work on a mum's shoulders. But, the course was great, and I got a lot out of it for myself. I understood him more, and we're building on that relationship and we're growing as a family. I've been saying to other mums 'You missed that class last week. It was great. Why don't you come back next week?' **ETB Family Learner***

*I have no idea yet what I'm going to do next, but I have found the courses in the school are stepping stones for us. And it's important to have those there for mothers. **ETB Family Learner***

*I do want to go back to work. That's the next stage for me, and I'm looking into doing a course with SOLAS now. With the new hospital opening, there will be work for administrators. From being here, I find I want to learn more, obviously, to help my kid but also for me so I can advance. I want to get out there, to get back into the classroom again and to do it. It's another step forward. **ETB Family Learner***

*I want to go back to work now. Something like this has really helped my language development, and I have also learned a lot about what other courses are available for me in the local community. Talking to other people has really helped me to know what is going on. **ETB Family Learner***

*I have two children here and they love school. The classes here are great for me, and there is something different to go to each term. They really try to involve the parents, and it has a good impact on my kids to see me here. I tell them that they go to school to learn and to be good human beings and to learn values ... parents are the first teachers, but the teachers are there to reinforce those. I tell them I am going to school to learn too and to do new things and that's important and I tell them there is no age to stop learning. I tell them you have to keep learning because it's a new world every day and I want to make sure they are reading and thinking and I want to be a good example to them in that. **ETB Family Learner***

*My eldest son has dyslexia, and I find I'm more able to help him with spellings and reading now. Before they'd be afraid to ask me questions at home, but now they do. They see I can help. I find too I'm more confident speaking to the school teachers. I can ask questions now that I wouldn't have before. I can stand up for my children, and I can find out now what they are entitled to from the education system. My kids are so proud of me for coming back. They're chuffed, sometimes I hear them say 'Oh my mum's in college', you know and that's nice for me to hear. **ETB Family Learner***

Success was infectious. One young woman had enlisted her mother who completed a Health Care Level 5 module. Her mother has been employed since, and she updates her qualification annually.

In one ETB, we met a tutor who had begun as an adult learner and progressed to being a qualified family learning tutor determined to share her new vision with others.

*Almost 10 years ago I came back into education. I've kind of gone through the system. I'm now teaching. I did a couple of family learning classes when my son was in school. I've also gone back and done a level 5 and a level 6 in WIT. I did Applied Social Studies and Social Care there and then went on to do a postgraduate in teaching and FE. So I'm just newly teaching. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

Progression was encouraged and managed carefully by tutors. Pressure was eliminated but **opportunities to scaffold the next stages** were maximised. Learners were introduced to the environment and staff involved in taking up higher-level courses.

We make sure that they could meet with another group somewhere along the way; that I'd arrange that there was going to be somebody else around so that they could, you know, have a tea-break and have a chat. Something like that opens up everything, because we're always saying: 'If you want to try something else why don't you try ... oh, we have this running at the minute. Why don't you

try that?' And suddenly they start thinking: 'I could do it,' you know? **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

... and at the end of that then when they're finished each of the programmes, we would bring in details, we would give them forms to fill in if they're interested in any other course. We would give them details of what goes on in the adult education service. So it's about lifelong learning, trying to get people back in, trying to get them interested. They might go to a community education programme. They might go to something in that and then into the literacy service. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Anxieties were debunked and in some cases people took multiple courses at Level 3 before moving confidently on to the next stage. We met a learner who was intent on going to college to come back and teach other adults. We met a woman who wanted to start her own business, and we also heard of others who had got part-time work that matched their childcare commitments.

I'd love to go to college and just do something and just feel, yeah, I've achieved something. But, I mean, come the end of this course anyway I will talk to somebody and say look it, I want to do something else now, and they'll help me decide. Yeah, from doing nothing, sitting feeling useless.

ETB Family Literacy Learner

These outcomes, from across the 16 ETBs, are indicative of the potential of family learning to engage some of the people who have been alienated by prior learning experiences. Through aspirations for their children, they can be reconnected with their own learning potential and see their own and their children's lives transformed.

Key messages about evidence of family literacy in practice

Evidence shows that family literacy works

There is strong evidence that family literacy in Irish ETBs is effectively engaging parents with literacy issues, retaining them in courses, supporting them in achieving a range of outcomes and enabling them to move on to further learning or employment.

Engaging people with unmet literacy needs in family literacy takes time and partners

Engagement of those with unmet literacy needs in family literacy is a lengthy process that requires additional time and is greatly facilitated by working in partnership with other community stakeholders. The HSCL teacher in a DEIS school is a pivotal partner in developing family literacy. Community action groups enable links to be made with the most disadvantaged learners.

Family literacy is most effective when it has an adult learning ethos

Family literacy delivery works best when it is informed by an adult learning ethos. A themed or integrated approach is effective and tutor skills are key to retaining learners. Learner solidarity contributes significantly to retention.

Family literacy outcomes benefit all

Outcomes from family literacy benefit parents, children, schools and communities. A new culture of parental inclusion develops in schools where family literacy takes place.

Family learning promotes progression

Many learners progress from family literacy to other courses. Some feel able to move towards skills training, and others into work. Most feel more confident and have a greater understanding of their role as facilitator of their child's learning.

Section two: Barriers to participation in family literacy activities

Four types of barriers emerged in this study:

1. resource barriers,
2. cultural barriers,
3. relational, and
4. systemic barriers.

These correspond to the contexts of inequality identified by Baker et al (2004) that were named as economic, cultural, affective and political inequalities. We have modified these to better reflect the specific family literacy context and the evidence we gathered.

1. Resource barriers

The coded data produced evidence of a number of resource barriers impacting on participation in family literacy activities. These were sometimes common across all ETBs or specific to a particular ETB location or even smaller enclaves within the one catchment area. A dearth of **public transport** was a barrier to participation in rural areas and mentioned in almost every ETB, as was **poor broadband** and mobile phone coverage. It was also observed that around the country, many migrants were accessing rented accommodation in more remote areas where it was less costly to live. Consequently, the **time** and travel cost spent accessing a family literacy group was more prohibitive than in places where learning was easily accessible.

There are different dynamics depending on where you are based. We miss out on resources because sometimes when they are planning. They think there's nothing outside of the city! Family literacy courses are happening in the bigger towns and our parents can't get to them. That's a barrier for them.

ETB Family Literacy Tutor

Another barrier now is that migrants are renting further out, because it is cheaper ... but that means they are too far away and there is no transport that would get them in here for a morning class when their children are at school. So, now we try to go out as close as we can to where people are. So, if they are going to the school we have the class in the DEIS school.

ETB Family Literacy Tutor

Timing too could be a barrier to participation, and it was agreed that those (mostly women) balancing demands of getting some children to school or childcare needed to be carefully considered in planning flexible learning schedules. Generally, family literacy that is a collaborative venture between ETBs and DEIS/HSCL is organised around parents' time demands. Time was a barrier too for those developing family literacy activities. The limited availability of DEIS status in areas where rural poverty is prevalent, alongside wealthy areas,

meant that the vital support of a HSCL teacher was unavailable. ALOs with responsibility for developing family literacy and other stakeholders highlighted this inequality of resources.

The urban rural divide, in terms of support services, are worlds apart. There is a huge service deficit here, and the needs are so high. It's just frightening really. If you've a family in crisis in the city, you just take out a list of services you can refer them on to. If you're living in rural Ireland and you're a family that wants extra support and you do not have transport, you're going nowhere. There is nothing for you and rural disadvantage is just huge. In some places here, you have huge wealth beside huge disadvantage and the wealth overshadows everything and that effects DEIS status.

Family Literacy Stakeholder

In a whole host of ways family literacy is a distinctly local affair (Barton and Hamilton 1998). It follows then that on the provision side too, distances to be covered and lack of time to focus on the relationships that enable family literacy is identified as a barrier to development. All ETBs felt that with more time they could develop their family literacy activities and engage more parents in learning.

Lack of information about the availability of family literacy was seen as an ongoing challenge. Unlike other learning programmes that remain relatively unchanged from year to year, family literacy is constantly evolving and responding to different needs. This means that communicating with prospective parents is a demanding part of the engagement process. In some cases, working in collaboration with a local agency solves many resource issues. They help to publicise courses, and they may also provide accommodation and sometimes childcare. This may be the HSCL teacher in the DEIS school, a support group for parents of children with learning difficulties or disabilities, a homeless support agency and others with an associated community of interest.

The housing association ... They'd have a community house, so it's great. Like we'd actually do the literacy classes in the community houses because there would be a lot of — you know, in some cases there would be mental health issues and that, you know, that people would—it would be challenging maybe to go too far. So the fact that it's on the doorstep really helps.

ETB Family Literacy Tutor

Despite the fact that family literacy courses are free of charge, prospective learners were prevented from engaging by fear of **hidden costs**, for example the need to buy a book, ingredients for a cookery class or other costly resources. Poverty impacts on every area of life and sometimes the imperative of day-to-day survival means that the resources needed to travel to a course may not be available.

*It's also the cost. I mean, to be honest with you, you know ... like ... I mean, we've had people who started courses here with the best of intentions of attending. and when it comes to the end of the month and they've to choose between food on the table and petrol in the car, they choose the food on the table, you know? So, there is a huge issue in this whole area. **ETB ALO***

As well as financial challenges, **mental health** was raised as a barrier to participation in learning. Learners spoke of their isolation prior to joining in family literacy activities. For some this was because of language or economic restrictions. For others the fundamental personal resource of a permanent home or stable mental well-being was missing and facing out into a social, educational setting was a cause of additional anxiety.

*Isolation and loneliness is a big problem, in urban and rural areas, do you know what I mean? So like a lot of the centres are out in rural areas and any family learning programmes that happen are going to obviously help combat isolation and mental health issues. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

Family literacy brings hope to people in the immediate moments and in the longer term – and even across generations. We heard evidence of individual lives transformed by finding the resources to return to learning and the impact that had on children's attitude to schooling. Where parents were resourced to engage in family literacy, the knock on effect on family culture, and life itself, was marked.

*Yeah and for my kids now I say to them you are never too old to learn. That just because you're in school now doesn't mean that's it. I said to them they are on life's journey and there's always new things to learn and that learning gives you confidence, do you know like? They don't have to be sitting at home doing nothing when they are older or if they are unemployed sometime. There is always places like this that they can go to and that's good for mental health too because when you are at home all the time it is hard and there is a lot of worry now about mental health and suicide and that. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

In the final part of this chapter, we will look at the solutions that ETBs have found to at least some of the challenges they encounter.

2. Cultural barriers

For a host of reasons, the greatest hurdle for many parents and providers alike was just 'getting started'. This was true especially of parents for whom neither parenthood nor education were an easy fit. Engagement in learning brought cultural inclusion that surpassed family literacy alone and lead to integration into a new support community.

*If it's your first child, you're kind of shy, and you don't really know how to take those first steps back. One of the new mothers here told me she just didn't talk to anybody here in the school ... she just dropped the kids to school and left. Now she is getting to know other mums, and she said it was great for her to hear that other mums were going through the same thing as her. **HSCL Teacher***

Cultural barriers were evident across ETB areas. Despite massive progress in raising the profile and standing of adult literacy, it remains culturally stigmatised for many with unmet literacy needs. The **stigma** extends beyond adults to other family members, so this is an issue considered carefully in all ETBs. In this regard, we found that the terms *family learning* and *family literacy* were used interchangeably, and this was sometimes a way of diluting the attention on literacy. It was accepted that family literacy was a specific skills area within a wider number of family learning opportunities integrated across a range of subjects and activities.

Some providers consciously avoided use of the term 'literacy' which they felt had negative associations likely to be off-putting for learners. This is true not just across family literacy but across the whole field of adult literacy where the social stigma of unmet literacy needs results in all terms and euphemisms (adult literacy, basic skills, essential skills, skills for life) eventually becoming culturally discredited (Goffman, 1963).

*We don't actually use the word 'literacy'. We don't use it all here really. And like I think, well, one of the advantages of having a bigger centre where there's lots of different things going on – again, like you were saying, it reduces the stigma, like. You could be here doing like a Level 1 or you could be doing a Level 4 or you could be a contractor training. **ETB ALO***

*'Learning' I suppose shows that, you know, you're not looking for something that's a deficit, you're actually going to increase your skill, whereas 'literacy' kind of it's kind of like, you know, I have a deficit in my learning that I need to, you know. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

A number of ETBs strategically used generic family learning topics to engage parents and establish relationships of trust from where it then became possible to address more sensitive literacy issues and encourage more specific learning goals. The initial connection having been firmly made, they found it was

more likely that people would, with time, become open to engage with unmet literacy needs.

*And it's ... like ... it's okay, because it's under family learning and this is promoted as, you know, just a matter of what your background is or where you're coming from. In family learning, we're all equal. Nobody's got a booklet [on] how to do all of this stuff. So it's a very safe starting point for people to come back. And then the discussion when they're out with their friends and stuff: 'Oh, what are you doing? I'm doing computers. Or I'm doing a bit of sewing. Or, do you know what, I'm doing a course on dyslexia' or whatever it is ... or brush up on the Irish. And it's great. And then they come back to that and then sign up for something else. **ETB ALO***

Unhappy prior learning experiences like those elaborated by Bailey and Coleman (1998) are acknowledged as an impediment to participation in adult learning generally, and this was also a significant focus for current family literacy learners. Planning actions and processes to counteract demotivating school experiences is a significant ingredient of ending generational cycles of educational inequality. Through acknowledging and upskilling parents first as teachers, they learn how to make the most of their child's learning potential and embrace their vital parental role in that regard. This social stigma was reportedly not experienced by refugee and asylum seeker parents and those living in Direct Provision. These learners were eager to cross the lines between home and school and to grasp new opportunities for their families. In particular geographic locations, new communities were described in the data as enthusiastically welcoming the chance to avail of family learning ESOL provision and other options.

*In this school, we have a lot of foreign nationals. You'd bump into them here in the mornings, and we run English classes here in the school for them to help the parents help the kids with their homework. Let's say an ESOL learner comes in and they are trying to learn English, and they are trying to learn literacy ... it's very much for themselves. If an ESOL person comes in through the schools for family literacy, their focus is on their child. And, parents in ESOL here, can bring their children to class with them, which they can't in a more formal class ... in the college where there is no childcare and that's a big advantage. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

Other groups of parents, often referred to in the data as 'target parents', were judged to be harder to reach and required a much longer lead in time and resource investment than was available to the ETB. Where numbers are sometimes a significant measure of success in FET, providers have to make choices between the IT course – which will fill easily – and the family literacy course that requires **extensive investment** for what appears to be a smaller return in some people's views.

*But they are some of the most difficult-to-reach learners. So it would be extra pressure on some literacy services to have money that they had to spend to reach that group, because they are more difficult to reach than another group. So it will be extra. Like ... you would need to see the value of it in order to put in the time. **ETB AEO***

The collaborative partnership between ETBs and HSCL teachers helped breach the divide between ETBs and some parents. If there was no HSCL teacher, this makes things harder.

*Yeah, do you know what I mean? So, even with the help of the home-school liaison you're not always getting the people that you want to reach, you know? And that's probably the biggest challenge is getting the bodies in. **ETB ALO***

*I think it's definitely having an engagement with those that are probably hardest to reach and having a home-school liaison officer who already has that connection with learners that we would never maybe get that connection with. They are probably more difficult to reach for us. So, it is about getting that access for us that's the benefit. **ETB ALO***

Among the hardest to reach learners are Irish Travellers and Roma, many of whom are coping with extreme disadvantage and multifaceted challenges. Those coordinating family literacy, in the spirit of adult learning, needed the time to invest in building relationships with Traveller and Roma people and their communities.

Increasing evidence of **homelessness** in some places raised the issue of how much of a priority family literacy could be for those already managing a complex and chaotic period of change.²⁰ In September 2018, 88 families, including 193 children, became newly homeless in the Dublin area alone. In October 2018, the total number of homeless people in Ireland reached 9,753 and numbers without a home steadily rise each month.²¹ This reality led providers to question the appropriateness of some popular family literacy topics for homeless people. Where cookery was a well-liked introductory course in many places, providers saw a dissonance or conflict for homeless family learners and for those in Direct Provision. Their children never saw their parents cooking. In such circumstances, embracing education as a realistic priority or recognising the cultural power of family literacy activities was not something with which everyone could equally engage.

While family literacy is usually targeted at a particular group of multiply disadvantaged parents, we heard frequently from tutors who felt that the need for support

20 <http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/social-protection/reports/Joint-Committee-on-Social-Protection-Report-on-the-Position-of-Lone-Parents-in-Ireland-June-2017.pdf> accessed 8 February 2019.

21 **Focus Ireland Homelessness Figures** accessed 10 February 2019.

in creating good learning relationships at home crossed traditionally assumed class and cultural boundaries.

I think a lot of parents don't know just how important it is ... and the importance of their role. And I find that, irrespective of social class or standing. They don't realize it is good to read to your child especially at bedtime. I find that how people do it can be really weird. They know it's a good thing to do but they don't know how to read and to impart a love of learning in children. I just sit down and show them how to do it. It sounds so simple but if no one shows you how to do it how are you supposed to know? **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

The ethos and culture of the local school was a determinant of the degree to which it was viewed as parent friendly. Weir et al (2018) found that in DEIS schools, the role of the school in the community had been reinvented, and this was true of many family literacy activities that we visited. Traditionally, the role of facilitating childhood literacy learning has been seen as rooted firmly within the school system. Many parents still **do not see themselves as having a clear role** in this regard nor do they feel they have the knowledge and skills for the job. Providers felt that sometimes this impression was reinforced through the parent's relationship with the school where they felt largely excluded from their child's learning development.

Yes, because they just think oh, the school are the experts. Yeah, and like books and things like that are left for the school. Yeah, yeah, and they don't think that they have a role within that. Yeah and I think the schools unknown to themselves can be quite disempowering for parents because they're not included in much. Like a lot of the parents.

ETB Family Literacy Tutor

The **facilities available** to the HSCL teacher varied with some DEIS schools having purpose-built family rooms while others found accessing adult seating or a consistent room allocation difficult. When the school made ample provision to include parents, it made family literacy development more straightforward. In many cases, parents became settled in school-based family literacy. They felt secure in the familiar school location, and they felt encouraged to progress into the adult learning facility-transition that required additional support.

Despite cultural impediments, we found abundant evidence of transformative family literacy activities, and the findings of this are outlined in the sections above and below.

3. Relational barriers

Interagency approaches to organising family literacy are widely thought essential to developing focussed and relevant learning programmes. A number of government departments have family literacy goals in their strategic plans, yet there is **no interdepartmental vehicle** to carry responsibility for this work. This lack of connection is reflected across the entire structure, where disparate family literacy champions struggle to produce excellent adult learning provision without the comfort and support of strategic direction.

The need for **childcare** for parents with children not yet eligible for ECCE places is a barrier for those with children aged 0-3 years.

Childcare is very difficult for parents to organise, and often the target parents are unable to attend classes due to caring for younger children. **ETB AEO**

In some cases, this is overcome by parents being allowed to bring children with them, but this is an **insurance issue** for ETBs and not all schools have sufficient capacity. The gap here is brought about by a slowly evolving childcare infrastructure beside the inalienable demands of the parental relationship that take priority over the need or desire to return to adult learning (Lynch et al, 2009).

If they want mums to do courses to get us back to work they need to think about our lives and what we have to do before we join classes. There's no point in expecting us to be at a course at 9.00 we have to drop our kids to school. They need to understand that and even in the workplace now things have changed it's all flexi hours now to suit mums. **ETB Family Literacy Learner**

We witnessed the delight of parents who were enabled to end their isolation in the home and participate in a *My baby and me* course delivered to parents and babies together. There is no free-state childcare until the age of 3 years, and *My Baby and Me* fills the gap between birth and three years of age. This is an important family learning development time.

Where a school had a parents' room, there were benefits for both parents and toddlers who learned seamlessly to relate to the school environment.

I was able to bring my boy with me when he was a baby and then later on he came as a toddler and sat here and read his books or coloured in and it was good for me and it was good for him for our social and emotional development. When it came to school time for him there were no tears for him, he just settled right in. **ETB Family Literacy Learner**

The role of grandparents in family care means that they too may find intergenerational family literacy support

welcome. In the course of research conversations, one ETB decided to market their family literacy to active retirement groups to recognise the role played by older family members.

Exactly — the homework becomes an issue and in some cases the grandparents are really the primary carer in the 9 to 5, Monday to Friday kind of week of the child. So, I mean, they have an important role in all of this. Sometimes it is them that, you know, are supporting the child and the education and linking in with the school if there are problems or whatever. So even acknowledging — or opening it up or maybe even focusing on are you a grandparent, you know, of a child; would you be interested in these? There are active retirement groups and stuff like that. Maybe we should be linking in with them. That's something we don't do.

ETB ALO

Gendered relational roles mean that it is still commonly accepted that childcare and concerns with school matters are the domain of the mother (Smythe and Isserlis, 2003). For lone parents in particular, the option of shared childcare is not available. Creative solutions and interagency cooperation needs to happen to cater for childcare needs. Of parents who depend on welfare in Ireland, nearly 90 per cent are women and the task of managing household poverty largely falls to them (Barry and Feeley, 2016).

Difficulties within families also need to be borne in mind when courses are being promoted to parents. Dealing with family relations requires sensitivity and respect for peoples' everyday struggles.

And you have to gauge where people are at — sometimes they are just in survival mode. Their husband may have just left, or they may be in the refuge or they might be just out of prison ... If they are in that survival mode, there is no point in going to them about courses so your home visit would be very different then. And you'd take a very different approach. And you have to know the family well enough to know where they are at, and, when you see everything is going good, that's when you can approach them about courses. But you are on deaf ears! They feel you are not appreciating where they are if you are going on about courses. And to know that you have to be on the ground with them. You have to be very real with them because, if you are not real with them, then where do you go?

HSCL Teacher

From another perspective, **boys and men are excluded** from care in a range of ways and are underrepresented in many family literacy activities (Owens, 2000). Discrete provision for fathers and sons, like Dads and Lads, has had some degree of success in engaging male family learners, but the gendered care roles within two-parent heterosexual families remain stubbornly in position. Perhaps this is a relational barrier of too great a magnitude for family learning alone to dismantle.

Nevertheless, efforts made to open family literacy to all parents have had an impact. Most ETBs now offer courses for fathers that are designed to overcome traditional gender barriers (NALA, 2009; Hegarty, 2016b), and there are signs that some of these are proving successful.

Good relationships were cited in every ETB as having a pivotal influence on every aspect of family literacy, and this will become more apparent in the solutions outlined below.

4. Systemic barriers

The degree of family literacy provision is left to each ETB to establish. Family literacy does not attract a ring-fenced budget nor, at the time of data collection in this study, were family literacy figures disaggregated from the broader adult literacy annual returns. The literature identifies **short-term funding** as a barrier to the development of family literacy, and some suggested that future initiatives should be financed with a 'dedicated budget' that enables close monitoring and evaluation (Morgan and O'Donnell, 2016: 46).²² ETBs supported this idea of ring-fenced funding for family literacy with some qualifications in terms of ensuring appropriate, learner-centred reporting criteria.

If the budget was ... if there was a chance that the budget could be ring-fenced like it used to be; it would be great if the criteria for entry and exit were different to our standard literacy stuff, because we're not talking about the same kind of literacies. So I think, you know, open it up. It doesn't have to be that they have to have a particular standard of education. It's that they have a need in an area and we're going to meet that, and the exit shouldn't be 'they should progress onto'. It should be, you know, 'have they gained what they wanted from that course'?

ETB ALO

Because in these significant organisational ways family literacy is invisible, there are observations in the data about the perceived value and status of this area of work. The low status of the curriculum area is also reflected in the number of part-time tutors who staff family literacy provision. They and their colleagues see their **working conditions as precarious**. They may develop a new course in their own (unpaid) time without knowing if there will be sufficient numbers for the course to take place.

So the tutors might be really interested in continuing with the family learning, like you were saying, you know, get great feedback from it and get great satisfaction. But unless there's time that they're going to be guaranteed, that their Tuesday slot if they give it to you is going to be filled from September until June, they'll say, you know, 'I'll do for now until I find something else.'

ETB ALO

²² NALA Family Literacy Literature Review accessed on 21 January 2019.

There is also evidence in the data of **tutor availability** being fraught with insecurities, as they take their work where they can get it, which may not always be in family literacy. There are associated complications too in access to CPD.

*Every time that comes up and we say, well, if you want our tutors to go to that will you pay them? And then there's a big silence. No money. It's very hard to ask tutors to go to something at their own expense. They mightn't get any work out of it. It might come to nothing because you mightn't get the necessary enrolment. But there seems to be a rule that part-timers nationally can't be paid except for contact hours. **ETB AEO***

Despite much recognition of the tutor's role in the international literature (Carpentieri et al, 2011), there is a lack of clarity and cohesion about the ethos and strategic goals of family literacy learning. This in turn restricts development and expansion. Time delays and a lack of a guaranteed budget in the current system can lead to complications in strategic planning and recruitment.

*Well, I mean, obviously you're going to put more resources and more manpower into the larger budgets. You know, if you consider it in the scale of the overall budget what we have for family literacy, it really is minuscule. **ETB AEO***

Organisers feel there is unexploited potential in family learning as a tool for recruiting, retaining and progressing unengaged adult learners. This **absence of a clear ethos, guidelines and strategic targets** is a structural barrier that creates a degree of uncertainty and inertia and means that family literacy has yet to develop its full capacity in adult learning.

Some respondents cited **unresolved aspects of the FET restructuring process** as impacting on family literacy. The county structure has lingered in some places, and staff changes and system reorganisation have presented challenges to the strategic development of family literacy. Some ETBs have clear staff roles dedicated to family literacy, but others have a more fragmented approach, which in some measure they attributed to the incomplete restructuring process. This appears as a strategic planning issue and a management issue. These issues require attention so that family literacy can be developed more evenly spread across the entire ETB map.

At an operational level, the need to gather detailed data to comply with European Social Fund (ESF) reporting demands means that family literacy providers are faced with a detailed Programme Learning Support System (PLSS) registration form. This needs to be completed to enrol each learner and is reportedly sometimes a barrier to participation. Some learners refuse to provide the information required, and they are often unaware of why the data is demanded. Furthermore, the direction to read the data protection policy to literacy learners is neither engaging nor practicable.

The proposed online completion of the registration form is not possible in many circumstances, and the need to have a second digital device to verify identity is beyond the resources of many disadvantaged adult learners. Some providers viewed being exposed for not having phone credit as an unnecessary revelation of a person's limited circumstances. In some cases, these hurdles have been addressed by explaining to staff the rationale behind the PLSS form, so that they can explain it to learners. The hurdle has also been addressed by allocating additional time to staff, so that they can support literacy learners when completing the form.

In at least 50 per cent of ETBs, the perceived unreasonable demand for personal administrative data has resulted in the loss of learners who refused to engage.

*I mean, we've tried to work around it and tried several different ways. So we explain that the personal information is kept separate from the tick box information. You know, the personal stuff is stuff that we would use ourselves to contact them again but any of the rest of it is just put into a database. The PPS Number is quite challenging. You know, it depends on their circumstances. Some people kind of just don't feel like they want to share that with you, and they're quite suspicious of being asked that question. **ETB ALO***

Increasingly, the governing body in DEIS schools require parents attending family literacy events to have undergone **Garda vetting** before engaging in learning activities in the school. This is the case whether or not children are present for these courses. Again, this is a barrier to some who find the process intrusive and do not wish any prior misdemeanours to be known in their children's school or in their community. The issues of confidentiality and privacy are central.

Better procedures may be achievable in relation to the registration form. This could be done, for example, by separating anonymous ESF equality data from other enrolment details. This might allay some concerns people have about their privacy being invaded.

The new data protection policy has introduced yet another administrative layer to the enrolment process that presents difficulties for tutors.

*See the page about data protection? You are supposed to read that to our literacy learners ... it really puts people off and sometimes people just don't come back. **ETB ALO***

In some cases, these processes are impeding learners from proceeding with their enrolment, so attention to finding solutions is important both for learners and to satisfy EU targets for adult learning participation.

Key messages about barriers to participation in family literacy activities

Excellent practice but significant barriers remain ...

Alongside excellent family literacy practice, we found that a number of barriers in the area of resources, culture, relationships and systems.

Disadvantage and the lack of information impact on engagement

Poverty, homelessness, poor mental health, poor transport services in rural areas and lack of information all impacted on adults' engagement with family literacy.

Stigma around unmet literacy needs

Having unmet literacy needs remains stigmatised in Irish society and so fear of judgement and feelings of alienation from learning were barriers to inclusion. Sometimes, parents saw the school culture as excluding but the HSCL teacher is a positive link. Others feel even more excluded due to language and ethnicity differences.

Care responsibilities and gender-related barriers

Care responsibilities and lack of public childcare for children aged 0-3 years limited some parents' availability for family literacy. Gender too is a cultural barrier with many men feeling less engaged in family care matters than women.

Invisibility of family literacy in adult learning structures

Family literacy is not visible in the adult learning structures. It has no discrete budget and data are not separately collected. This lower profile impacts on organisational priorities which in turn affect delivery. Administrative systems can be off-putting too. The complicated and intrusive registration form, the GDPR regulations and the increased demands for Garda vetting can all impede engagement. A systemic lack of structure around family literacy and the heavy demands of time needed to engage learners all limit the potential development of family literacy work.

Section three: Solutions for improved family literacy practice

The data about solutions to barriers to good practice in family literacy activities are organised under the same framework as the barriers section above:

1. resource solutions,
2. cultural solutions,
3. relational solutions, and
4. systemic solutions.

As was stated about other evidential elements, we find considerable overlap in classifications between individual items of data. Relational factors, for example, are significant in each category of solutions. We, however, locate them primarily in systemic solutions, as this is where the support for interagency work must begin. Again, this interconnection between categories suggests that it is in reading the entirety of the chapter that the full implications of the findings become apparent.

The data that follow are coded from notes on observations of family literacy practice and interviews and focus groups with family literacy staff, learners and interagency partners. Stakeholders talked to us about what works well in family literacy provision and what would facilitate more efficient and more inclusive practice. Providers emphasised that 'target parents' are hard to engage, and the processes leading to recruitment are demanding in terms of time and effort. We address the barriers identified earlier, and we present the views we heard about possible improvements to the current system.

The data code tree that underwrites the qualitative findings is available on request from the researchers.

1. Resource solutions

We begin by examining elements of resources that are deemed central to successful family learning provision. Some resource barriers are beyond the scope of ETBs.

Outreach

Access to family learning where transport links are poor suggests the need for outreach and / or engagement with local transport links that are developing in many rural areas.

Welcoming environment: schedule and ethos

A welcoming learning environment is important both for reasons of access and retention. A parent room in the DEIS school was seen as a good option, as it would be convenient for those dropping children to school and collecting them.

Family learning could be **planned to match the parent's schedule** with the added advantage of engaging them (and sometimes the next generation of learners) into the school and facilitating greater familiarity in relationships between staff and parents.

*...the one school that we're developing a relationship with, they seem to be quite open and they've great resources. They've actually built on two brand new big facility rooms, you know, with a little bit of cooking, you know for parents. And they have a room for a crèche. So they're trying to - so basically parents drop the kids off. They've got young kids. They're trying to offer the classes early in the morning so leave the kids in the crèche - and go straight into the class. **ETB ALO***

Whether in the school or in another community location, the learning environment needs to reinforce the **adult learning ethos**. This helps put adults at their ease, as it banishes memories of harmful prior learning experiences and empowers people to take control of their own learning future.

*The learning environment needs to be created, and it needs to be worked at because basically what you want to do is ... you want to engage parents. First of all, you want to retain them in the programme, and then you want to be able to reengage them. You want to move them on, or you want them, if they're not quite ready to move from family learning, well, maybe move them sideways into another programme. **ETB ALO***

Books at home

The presence of **books in the home** is a vital motivation in family literacy development. This is shown in the data and in the literature. Educational disadvantage and poverty mean that some parents have less objectified or credentialised capitals than others (Bourdieu, 1986). Priorities about spending limited income may mean that buying books is an unaffordable luxury. Consequently, opportunities for book-gifting and use of local libraries are key ways of ensuring this element of literacy – book-gifting – is resourced.

*I think that the library do provide a very neutral kind of platform for this kind of thing. It takes it out of the ETB and literacy and, you know, it maybe makes it more, I don't know, attractive. Those [libraries] are very open and welcoming and maybe less threatening. It's just you see more of the venue. So I think it's a venue to run courses and to publicise courses. They're really good. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

ETBs and libraries working together

The protocol between ETBs and libraries is a key development that can be further used in family literacy practice (ETBI, 2018). The material and human resources offered by the library service have much to

offer in future family literacy collaborative efforts. We heard of numerous local schemes for gifting books to babies, and these should be linked to family learning opportunities. This would help parents know how best to make use of these books.

*Well, it was exactly through — it was a link between the DEIS school and the ETB, and we just did one of the Clare Family Learning programmes - Reading with your child. And, we got books for the children every week. And, I suppose the development over six weeks with the children was amazing. You would see it happening, you know, because they're just so transparent. So it was just fantastic. **ETB ALO***

The gifting of books and other items also facilitated themed family literacy and meant that families had the resources to practice their new skills at home as well as in the family literacy learning environment.

*Vincent de Paul pay for the ingredients, give them all a lasagne dish and a copy of the cookery book, and you were doing something in the lasagne dish every week. **ETB Resource Worker***

The provision of tea, coffee and occasional snacks contribute to establishing a relaxed and friendly environment, and they have become a recognised element of the adult learning environment. Where a DEIS family room exists, the ease of access to the HSCL teacher facilitates good relationships between parents and the school. It creates a locus too for the ETB/DEIS partnership and strengthens the basis of really fruitful family literacy provision. This core pairing is pivotal.

*So like it really is the home-school liaison coordinator [that] is the gatekeeper, and we can just knock at the door. Now, I think we should persistently knock at the door, and we should be always at the door and waiting for the next opportunity. **ETB ALO***

*Well, I think a lot of the time it depends on the relationship with the home-school liaison person. The ones who've been there for a while can mean you've established a relationship with them. But, they change quite frequently, so it kind of means going back to because they're the link with a lot of the schools. **ETB ALO***

Continuity of responsibility

HSCL teachers are usually in a post for five years, and ALOs with responsibility for developing ETB family literacy found the change of HSCL personnel somewhat disruptive. Some suggested an overlapping handover period with HSCL teachers or some other form of **structure that would save losing momentum** in provision.

I feel if somebody goes like that and somebody new comes it takes them a year to grow into the job within the school and with the parents before they

even think about us. They might come over and say hello, but it could be a long time before you see them again, because they're just finding out what the job is. **ETB ALO**

Family room

There is abundant evidence to show that a **family room** for parents within the school creates a new learning partnership that ETBs can facilitate through carefully negotiated family literacy activities.

Sharing of budgets to ensure continuity

ETB and DEIS **budgets can be shared** to resource activities and to ensure continuity of age-appropriate courses. Our findings show that children are empowered by their parent's presence in school during the day, and they are proud of the input their parents make. When parents contribute to day-to-day learning by their presence, by creating props and artefacts or volunteering as Reading Buddies this has a general positive impact. Parents feel included and connected to the child's learning. Children welcome their parent's presence enthusiastically, and school personnel observe a marked improvement in the child's learning development in a range of ways. When parents are involved in learning, their children's school attendance improves, and children are more animated in class activities. They also submit their homework regularly.

School-based provision

The most effective model of family learning in local communities is when family learning is **located in the school** and facilitated through resource sharing between DEIS, HSCL and the ETBs literacy staff. This was repeatedly mentioned during our research visits. Where no school parent facility exists or where parents are unhappy to attend classes there, local outreach needs to be organised and partnering with local libraries and other agencies can greatly accommodate this.

I think the family resource centres really are a good place for that. You know, it takes the remit away from the school and, maybe sometimes, the parents don't associate it with the school. It's something in our locality even though we know behind the scenes it is family learning. Do you know what I mean? But it takes away the idea that, oh, the school is telling us almost to do something. But, I think the family resource centre is a good way.

ETB Resource Worker

The progression into an ETB adult learning centre is also an option, but the school-based model is undoubtedly best for busy parents. As parents need support with IT issues, the language of digital communication and online security, it is an advantage if computer facilities are available in the same location.

They could drop the children in the morning [and] go across to the parent room and the school had the computers ... and ... they had whatever was

*needed and then, you know, they were there then to collect the child on the way back. **ETB ALO***

Tutors and other ETB staff felt that the **function of family literacy coordination** was pivotal and should be a human resource that is introduced across the ETB structure. This position was envisaged as a type of specialised ALO who would be passionate about family learning and whose role would be to build a solid interagency approach to family learning provision. Proponents cautioned that such a specialised role should not be introduced at point one on the salary scale, but it should be given recognition as a skilled position that requires respect and status.

*And that's I think where we go back to the old days where we had a special coordinator who had time to do that. The ALO is not always available to be at that class at a particular time to give the information, you know. **ETB AEO***

Resourcing of provision – personnel, local agencies and time and training

The idea of a person in each ETB, who was responsible for family literacy, was linked to the need for family literacy to be a named category in the ETB data collection system. That person would then provide the information which the ETB would use to base their annual bid for ring-fenced funding. Given the uneven nature of family literacy across ETB areas, this resource would be strategically planned for, and requested, using the current system of drawing down funding. It would allow for, and encourage, organic growth. An alternative suggestion is that family learning is developed at a prescribed percentage of adult literacy provision, but in some cases this might mean a reduction rather than a growth of provision.

Family learning coordination would include a human resource management role. They would support family learning tutors and ensure that their skills are maintained, used, shared and valued in a system that currently risks excellent tutors becoming isolated.

Tutoring skills were seen as a vital element that determined the delivery and success of family literacy activities.

*Tutors need to also have commitment, because it's a lot of hard work really designing those programmes and making sure that everything that happens within the programmes is done to a really high standard. So, it is really around being very reflexive around that as well ... and having that adult learning strengths-based approach is really important. You have to have that engrained within you because when you have those essential skills first of all, that's going to support your engagement. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

I was saying to you the programme is run repeatedly and it's because the tutor's really brilliant - and we always get full classes for that.

As many as she can take, we are always fully subscribed for it. ETB ALO

Local agencies are also seen as an important resource in developing new family literacy activities. They can support those steering development and ensure that a large investment of time and effort finally comes together.

Well, we had a programme that worked well. It took about three years to get it up and running. It was a My Baby and Me programme from Clare Family Learning Centre and it was with parents of under 2s. And it took like talking to NCIs, parent and toddler programmes, the local public health nurses, the primary schools in the area, and finally the key to it was the local family resource worker, who was herself a social worker, to pull it together and kind of give us a space where you could just bring in parents and toddlers and just let them—and give them books every week to read and let them take home the books with them. ETB ALO

The time taken to develop new programmes suggests that a more structured way of working in partnership needs to be a central task of family literacy organisation. Local coordinators should be trained in partnership development and management. It is suggested that they should access family learning awareness training for HSCL tutors, library staff and other key partners in their locality. The family literacy guidelines developed from this study offer clarity to the diverse aspects of family learning, its tutors and coordinators. They suggest ways that human and material resources might be shared with others and how a resource repository, real or virtual, might be established.

Making the registration process easier

We have seen that the **enrolment and registration system** for ETB family learning is problematic, and this was true in most of the ETBs we visited. It is worth resourcing the search for a means of collecting the necessary data required by funders and national administrative systems in a way that does not also alienate new learners and overburden staff. Given that this data is collected across the EU-28 it may be that others have developed a more user-friendly model. This is particularly pertinent when the learners have unmet literacy needs and are fearful of reengaging in learning.

Where time was invested locally in training family literacy staff to understand the demands of the reporting system, it made the process less contentious. Tutors were able to explain to learners the reasoning behind the personal nature of the data and why it was significant. As personal data is not available to tutors after entry in the system, it may be possible to separate out the ESF data from ETB enrolment details. The former could be gathered anonymously thereby confirming the confidential nature of the details and counteracting the related difficulties.

Stable employment conditions

Given the changing nature of parents' learning needs, family literacy tutors need some stability in their employment conditions. Their current precarious and part-time situation means that family literacy depends too much on *ad hoc* factors. Tutors should be resourced with the time to develop new courses, pilot them with learners and where desirable, accredit them through the QQI system. There is clear evidence that family literacy reaches learners that were hitherto reluctant to engage in adult learning. It makes sense to maximise the approach and so to the benefit to families, schools and communities.

I think that family literacy needs to be developed as a more structured thing. I know I go into my eight schools ad hoc whenever I get around to doing it or whenever they call me or whatever, but, I mean, if it's properly funded and properly coordinated then you can certainly do something bigger with it. ETB ALO

Research

It was suggested that family learning merits ongoing research and partnership with third level institutions would be useful centrally for family literacy generally or in some local ETB areas. In this way innovative practice can continue to be captured and shared nationally and internationally.

3. Cultural solutions

We gathered extensive evidence of the dynamic cultural impact of family learning in individual lives, on families, in schools and the wider community. ETB staff spoke often about the centrality of an adult learning ethos that underpinned their work.

I think it's a sense of empowerment that they get from it and it's also they start to acknowledge themselves that they have skills and they have the capability of learning. So many people, especially adults, kind of go, well, I'm too stupid, you know, I could never learn that. You know, and I think the environment that we provide gives them a sense of that it's safe, you know, and that you're not going to be judged because you ask a question. ETB Family Literacy Tutor

Maintain the ethos

This adult learning philosophy was epitomised in the respect for each FET learner's rich learning history and their right to choose their own learning path, and to learn equally from the tutor and other learners. Adult literacy has deep roots in the writing of Paulo Freire and his influential work: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972). Freire argued that adult learning should liberating rather than domesticating and there are strong echoes of that ideology in family literacy practice. ETB family literacy staff members were committed to activities that seek to

empower parents, to include them in schools and give them a voice in their own and their children's learning.

*Well, I suppose it's about helping the parents — for me that's one of the key things in adult learning is helping the parents to recognise what they're already doing and to honour, you know, what they're doing in the home and the literacy that already exists in the home and to see the value of that, because I suppose very often, you know, it's not that they need to be taught. You know, we're not coming in to teach parents to do what they already know how to do. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

*You know, I think it's what literacy tutors are good at is just creating that trust in the room. That's what it's about really. And then, you know, letting people kind of come forward themselves. **ETB AEO***

*Yeah, that's the whole ethos of adult education in meeting the learner where he or she is at and being able to support them to achieve what their goal is, whether that's, you know, learning how to do long division or writing a birthday card for the first time, or whatever, you know, to doing something more. **ETB AEO***

Develop secure partnerships – and a culture of family learning

We have discussed how the impact of the ETB/DEIS partnership in schools is positively transformational of school culture. Aside from the immediate advantages of sharing budgets and human resources, there are deeper cultural solutions encouraged by family literacy. Longstanding lines of demarcation between teachers and parents are blurred and children, parents and schools all benefit from this **cultural shift**. There are signs in the data of the need for opportunities to put those partnerships on a more secure footing. In particular there is a perceived gap between the **adult learning ethos** of family literacy and the culture of schools that have traditionally been more authoritarian places. The absence of these discussions about ethos arises from time to time in the data as (totally surmountable) impediments to progress.

Both DEIS schools and ETBs have goals and targets to meet, and these may not be entirely congruent. Ethos particularly may not be shared territory and these things require attention in the interest of partnership development. It is fine for partners to be different as long as that diversity is recognised and accommodated.

I suppose the things that I found were highlighted, worked really well, were the home-school community liaison cluster. Now, their cluster meetings have been cut back, the number they can have, but that was a great opportunity to meet all the schools in a collective space. And I suppose I felt the home-school community liaison coordinators here were looking to the ETB — what list of classes can you do? And I was kind of trying to flip it and say, well, let's see what's happening

*here for you, what are you needs in the schools, you know, and kind of I suppose tease out what they saw as family learning as opposed to maybe a list of classes. **ETB ALO***

*It's partly led by parental needs and what the parents would like. So it is based on consultation. Sometimes I can organise what parents like and sometimes it's not possible. We're also tied by the school's DEIS plan. The DEIS themes are literacy, numeracy, parental participation, attendance, retention and well-being. So I have to slot programmes into my budget and time into all of those themes. Every school's DEIS plan informs what can be done. **HSCL Teacher***

These same conversations need to be had within different areas of the ETBs where ideological differences may exist that make progression for adult learners more difficult than need be.

*But then if they go from this family learning programme which is Maths For Parents, which has this lovely atmosphere, and then you go in to do Level 3 maths and we have a tutor who doesn't know where that person has come from, you know, how we got them in, you're probably going to lose them because it's so, so different. You know, maths is heavy for the best of people and to go from this nice environment where we're doing maths with matchsticks or buttons or whatever to going into — let's have a look at algebra — I mean, even, I suppose, like the content of those QQI programmes they don't lend themselves to fun. It's very rigid. **ETB ALO***

It was noted too that the adult learning philosophy that family literacy adopts should be carefully explored in **awareness training** with both school staff and parents. This allows everyone to understand this pedagogical approach and will further help disarm the fears of anxious parents. Adopting an adult learning ethos suggests that dialogue with prospective learners and family literacy providers' needs to explore peoples' interests so that courses respond to real rather than assumed need. This illustrates another essential aspect of the role of the person/s who coordinate/s family literacy practices.

*I suppose in terms of further education what we would always have called active adult education, active inclusion has been a core principle and it's central to our way of working with adults. They have to be on board. They have to want to. They have to have motivation. They have to have interest. And that's where we always start with our learners, because I always say that we can have ideas about what we should do but learners vote with their feet. So if the experience is good for them that's what they want to come to. It's not necessarily that we may think that we should provide courses in a particular area. If there's no interest they won't come. **ETB AEO***

The data demonstrated that despite their current *ad hoc* nature, successful partnerships between DEIS Schools and ETBs were bringing about a cultural shift in the openness of schools to the inclusion of parents (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). There is recognition that this type of collaborative work is time consuming and requires special sensitivities and skills. Nevertheless it is a new learning culture worth working towards and developing.

I think, though, trying to develop the school, as an open learning space for adults is really important, and developing that sort of ethos. And I appreciate there can be a barrier, but I think I suppose the benefits far outweigh that barrier and that fear, and trying to maybe look at ways of overcoming that fear are important. Because I think — just again just maybe if family literacy is run directly in school, you know, and then maybe the principal comes down and gives the cert to the parents. You know, it's just everybody is celebrating the learning and children are seeing their parents learning. It's a great confidence booster and it can move people on to more learning. **ETB AEO**

Alternative, more immediate ways of communicating the family literacy culture to parents were suggested. **These included You Tube videos for parents** that reinforce teaching points in home-based literacy and that demystify family learning activities. Learners told us they had worried needlessly about reengaging in adult learning. Their expectations had been based on past experiences in their own schooling, and, in fact, they found adult learning to be welcoming and empowering. They felt more people should know that this was the case. **Locally celebrating and publicising** the work of parents in schools is shown to be an additional way of impacting the community learning culture. It also raises awareness of ETB work and attracts the attention of potential partners and learners.

In the spirit of transformative adult learning, parents and ETB staff told us repeatedly that parents were empowered by their experience of family literacy. They had moved from a position of feeling daunted by their capacity to deal with some aspects of their parental role to a certainty that they could acquire the skills they needed in a supportive and friendly learning environment.

My daughter has special needs and she has an intellectual disability, and I applied for her to go to a foundation. One of the tutors here helped me write the letter to apply for a place there. I had it written myself, but she helped me tidy it up and that helped a lot and she got a place. When I was meeting with them to get her assessed and everything, I was able to get on the phone and organise all that myself and I was able to be really precise about it all, I felt more powerful. **ETB Family Literacy Learner**

Yeah knowledge is power! And there really is something for everyone here and it is great to have the creative courses as sometimes you need to do that type of thing instead of always working on the spellings. I've also made some nice friends here.

ETB Family Literacy Learner

The evidence suggests that family literacy has established a **clear identity** as a means of connecting children, their parents and schools to create a better, more inclusive learning culture that holds the promise of reducing the stubborn cycles of educational disadvantage.

I suppose it's supporting programmes. Classes that support parents in their role as parents to support their child's learning. I'm very clear, and we're all very clear that it's a class ... that it's a learning opportunity, that it's not like a coffee morning or a book club or, you know, that sort of thing. That there's an educational progressive element to it but it's supporting the parent as a parent. And it can be a very broad thing but, to me, that's what makes it what it is, that element of the parent is learning something that they can take home. So that personal empowerment is very important. **ETB ALO**

Our research shows that there is a need to create some certainty about the acceptance within FET culture of the **adult learning ethos** that is **integral to family literacy**. This will invigorate family learning to take hold of its role in addressing educational disadvantage and positively influencing families, schools and communities. The guidelines from this study for ETB family literacy will make this ethos explicit and reinforce the value and status of family literacy in the FET system. Maintaining this learner-centred culture was seen to be more difficult as an imperative if accountability becomes more dominant (Carpentieri, 2013).

The equilibrium between the learning and management cultures needs to be kept in balance, especially in multiagency partnerships where partners may have diverse and even competing objectives. The development of **collaborative partnership strategic plans** allows for a balance to be maintained between local cultural demands and the central strategy of the ETBs.

Family literacy champions

Family learning champions played a big role in developing provision. These could be managers that understand and support the vital importance of literacy across the FET sector or school principals who wholeheartedly welcome parents into the school as learners. The result of this good leadership is a new culture that engages parents, carers and children in intergenerational learning. The evidence of that changing culture is clear in the findings from this research.

It also means that then a lot of parents are comfortable enough to actually come in. And if there is issues or difficulties around it they can actually come in. Well, I'd hope that they'd all come in and feel that they can actually talk about stuff, because, you know, it's not all going to be plain sailing and if stuff does happen they can actually come in and talk about it because they're comfortable, they know people, they, you know, are able to come in and talk. And they also come in on a regular basis and help out, which is fantastic.

HSCL Teacher

You do kind of feel part of it. You do feel part of the community. Because my older son went through the school as well and, you know, they didn't have the - well, I wasn't aware of it if they did. And so it's a lot different this time, you know, going through it with the younger boy. **ETB Family Literacy Learner**

You know, you can see it amongst parents. You know, that they can see oh, well, maybe this isn't so bad and the principal is approachable and friendly and all of those kinds of things, whereas maybe they didn't think it before. And the home-school officers would be back to you too and say, you know, this has altered, this has made a big improvement, and this has happened or that has happened subsequently. **ETB ALO**

Accreditation – an option

We heard from many ETBs that learners progressed best when accreditation was available but entirely optional. Furthermore, the data suggest that they were more likely to choose opportunities for accreditation than to reject them. Nevertheless there was a body of opinion that felt strongly that family learning should not be tied into the expectation of accreditation, and it should focus entirely on the parent becoming more skilled at facilitating the child's learning. There is an interesting and potentially challenging conflict here between the accreditation culture of adult education and schools' desire to focus on child outcomes (and the parents' ability to facilitate those outcomes). Comments from a tutor and an ALO capture some elements of the argument.

From my gut instinct I really think in our school-based work, we're not an adult education centre. Actually this is primary school for primary school kids and we're all about helping everyone on the way to support those kids to come up. And that is through empowering adults but our end goal is the child. And I just see that accreditation would conflict with that goal. **ETB ALO**

Yeah, and, you see, I think that's the role then of the family learning tutor: to marry both together. Because my role is not with the children, it's with the parents. I'm an adult. I work in adult education. But

for that half an hour every week I work with parents and children together. So that's the focus. **ETB Resource Worker**

You know, it's up to us too as ETBs to keep liaising with tutors and students and home-school liaison teachers. If parents and grandparents and carers want to do certification then we could facilitate that outside of family learning. The value of family learning - not only should funding be ring-fenced, but the values, ethos, methodologies, what we do, how we do it, and how we do it so individually with each school and what works for them, has to be ring-fenced. **ETB ALO**

Progress possible

The encouragement of progression is well managed currently in the system and should continue to be part of family learning culture. During research discussions with AEOs, the potential was raised for **offering family learning modules** to parents engaged on other FET programmes. This might coincide with gaps in vocational provision or take place over lunchtime in training centres. It would allow parents in training to be included in family literacy activities.

Interculturalism on the agenda

Increasingly, as new groups begin to settle in Ireland - particularly in rural areas, interculturalism is finding its way onto the FET agenda. ESOL classes and ESOL family literacy are on many learning agendas. Parents learn the English they need to communicate with their child's school and with other parents they meet. We heard how parents are prepared for the conversations they may have at parent teacher meetings and in other learning related encounters. This is not a one-way system and **opportunities for intercultural exchange** are used by staff to further good relationships amongst FET learners.

And I'll give you another example. Now, last Monday there was a cookery class here in this centre, but the Syrians don't normally come here. They have another venue where we have the lessons. But they came up here, and they did a cookery demonstration of their own food and, you know, teachers and all the students had a little sample. But it was lovely, and they really enjoyed it ... and it was an introduction of them to this centre. The multicultural aspect is great. Like, you know, people are meeting people from other cultures that they would never meet in any other circumstances, you know, and there's that integration and people getting along and getting to know each other. And that's been really successful. **ETB ALO**

Fun

The feature mentioned most frequently in relation to family literacy was that it should be **fun**. It was suggested that CPD in family literacy need a continued

focus on the developing relevant programmes while retaining the enjoyability factor. Again, this highlights the skills and effort that family literacy tuition entails.

And the other thing that I would really highlight and emphasise is fun. Have fun when you're having your programme. And always in my head is, right, first of all we need to engage the parents. Then we need to make sure that our teaching-learning environment is so much fun that they want to stay, they want to learn more, they're enjoying it, they're not just learning from the tutor, they're learning from their peers, everybody has a different story. ETB Family Literacy Tutor

Key to the management of considerable changes in childhood and family literacy are a host of relationships. The evidence of how these human connections can help create more effective family literacy provision are explored next.

3. Relational solutions

More than any other factor, relationships were cited most often as the crucial ingredient of successful family learning provision.

I think the relationships are key across the whole family literacy spectrum. I think it's about relationships. ETB AEO

Good relationships

This identification of the key role of good learning relationships extended across all aspects of provision from engagement, retention, delivery and the many positive outcomes recorded from family literacy.

Childcare provided

The childcare relationship was cited as a barrier to engagement, and it is often the pivotal resource that allows parents to attend family learning activities. **Partnerships** with pre-school and ECCE providers can facilitate family learning for parents of 0-3 year olds. There is no free statutory childcare provision for this age cohort. In some cases, children can attend learning events with parents in schools where appropriate insurance and adequate facilities are in place. For health and safety reasons, adult learning centres are less likely to be appropriate for inclusion of toddlers in family learning and this particularly restricts economically and socially disadvantaged parents from attending activities.

Get more men involved in learning

For the moment, reflecting wider cultural care relationships, men are underrepresented in family learning (Owens, 2000; Corridan, 2002). All the ETBs we visited understood this inequality and were continuously experimenting with innovative ways to find solutions to this situation. Family literacy makes its contribution to **growing care relationships**, and men reap the benefits of provision when they are included in it.

We find that the Story Sacks is building because the dads and the granddads and all will get involved. And they loved that because we - it was in one of the schools again - they made all the houses for the three bears - or the three little pigs - and, do you know what I mean, they felt they were actually part of that. ETB AEO

Well, these are the things that stick in my head because they're memorable memories, you know. I've also have telephones, street telephone things that I was using with Dads and their sons. His father went around the corner, and he was only a little fella - I think he was four or five - and he was looking at to us - I said, 'You can talk. Say something to daddy.' And he spoke into the phone and said, 'Dad, I love you'. You know, these guys - and I could see that dad was nearly melting there. I said okay! ETB Family Literacy Tutor

The contribution to the parent child bond has been discussed in the data that provide evidence of family literacy delivery. One tutor who had completed additional postgraduate studies cited his learning about the centrality of **caring** relationships to family learning.

Okay, I didn't know before as to how it was happening, but now from my, you know, recent work and studies and everything I now know that the more there is an attachment or a connection between a parent and a child, the more communication there is, and the more communication there is, the more learning there is. As simple as that. ETB family Literacy Tutor

Family literacy coordination

This function was seen by all ETBs as a human resource that can devote consistent time to building relationships that are the foundation of local collaborative partnerships. These partnerships can, in turn, reduce barriers to access and recruitment of learners. Local ETB staff see this as essential to engagement with parents who, as a result of past educational experience, are reluctant to return to education either on their own or their children's behalf.

ETB-DEIS relations

Close links between HSCL and family literacy staff enable programmes to be cultivated sensitively around the parents who are in greatest need. The **ETB – DEIS relationship** is acknowledged across the ETBs as the core relationship in developing successful family learning. The data are replete with anecdotes that illustrate this shift in parent teacher relationships.

And it builds up the relationships too, because if the parents are in the school they're meeting with the teachers, they're meeting the principals. We had a principal in one of the schools and he used to come in every day and have the dinner with the parents, that they'd cooked, and, I mean, the relationship,

how that impacted on the long term of, you know, the parents' attitude towards the school was enormous. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

It changes, it shifts the relationship completely between parent, teacher and principal. You know, you can see it amongst parents. You know, that they can see oh, well, maybe this isn't so bad and the principal is approachable and friendly and all of those kinds of things, whereas maybe they didn't think it before. And the home-school officers would be back to you too and say, you know, this has altered, this has made a big improvement, and this has happened or that has happened subsequently. **ETB Resource Worker**

Recognise parents' role in learning and advertising

Parents were aware too of the valuable contribution that they make to the school community.

And it's a support for the school too to know that we are there and I think they need our support. At Christmas we come in and decorate the school ... it's an extension of family really for our children. The ethos here is kindness and love and support and I want that for my boy to be brought up around. It's important. **ETB Family Literacy Learner**

Relationships are relevant too in rural parts of the country where outreach provision may be needed in a way that it is not in an urban setting. Travel distance and time impact on the development of relationships in the more rural ETB areas where coordination has a greater geographical element. Whatever the terrain, **interagency links** are supportive and merit investment so that partnerships are as effective as possible. Cooperation hours were mentioned as a mechanism for resourcing family learning partnerships and developing local service agreements. It was suggested that family literacy coordination would allow relationships to be built in a strategic way that a number of often overstretched resource workers and ALOs cannot.

Reaching parents who are less likely to attend family literacy was found to depend on, firstly, building a relationship of **trust** that allowed people to cross over barriers they felt as an impediment to their engagement in adult learning.

We've a lot of Roma and Traveller parents and they find it hard to complete the forms for secondary school applications. I helped a couple of parents with that last year because it wouldn't have happened otherwise. One of those mums is willing to engage now and she has enrolled for classes. She had been living on the roadside for a long time and literacy was not her priority. Housing was top of her agenda. I've built up a good relationship with her now and she's not ashamed to ask for help now. **ETB AEO**

In research consulted for this project and in our own data for this project, family literacy was seen to aid **social and community inclusion** and provide opportunities for parent solidarity and networks of learning communities (NIACE, 2013b). This was motivating for people to remain in adult learning where they had a new and vital social network. The adult learning approach enabled this networking to take place.

They're building relationships with other parents too, their own peers, which can be a lifeline too for some people that might not have that connection. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

It just empowers them. It gives them something back that for many of them they missed out on or that they feel they couldn't access or they weren't good enough to access. And also the realisation that they're not on their own. Generally, like, the cup of tea or, you know, when they have a break, that's when they actually do more networking. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

The parental relationships were opportunities to learn informally about the parenting experiences of others and this was additional family learning that arose naturally in the learning community.

I found a lot of the parents would start to maybe disclose and say, well, you know, my Bobby did this or, you know, Jenny did that. And I found that they were really — it was almost like they felt very comfortable and they felt that, you know, this is good, it's good to talk. Yeah, and it was good to talk, and that they felt that they had, you know, support. There was peers around them; that they weren't the only ones that maybe would experience such behaviour at home and that there was a safe place or a safe environment to come to, and friendly, that just helped them a little bit. You know, that support network. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

We heard of many occasions where parents were key in engaging other parents by their enthusiasm and attention to peers that they thought would benefit from courses. They also highlight the need for **ongoing promotion of family literacy** so that information is known throughout communities.

I have a friend and I got her to come too. She never went anywhere either and she got a job since. She couldn't believe the classes were free. She wouldn't have been able to come if she had to pay. **ETB Family Literacy Learner**

It's a pity not many people know about the service. I tell my neighbours about it. **ETB Family Literacy Learner**

HSCL teachers recognised the effectiveness of **parents promoting** family literacy by word of mouth. Relationships of trust and solidarity amongst parents were found to exceed the impact of more costly publicity mechanisms.

And it's like everything. If somebody has a positive experience and a good experience, word of mouth is key. We had one parent who went into the schoolyard and she was meeting people and she said that she was doing a maths course in the local school, and that year we had fourteen. **HSCL Teacher**

But, I mean, one of the most positive things that we've seen is that you can spend a fortune on advertising and it doesn't matter. It's the word of mouth. It's women going out and being ambassadors for the programme. **HSCL Teacher**

Good tutors and ALOs

Learners acclaimed many **tutors** as inspirational and it was such relationships of trust that allowed adults to become confident learners and to progress on to further training and into work. Tutors were aware of the impact of these learning relationships and they became a conscious part of their practice. They saw making these connections as significant in the retention of family learners.

So in a classroom I would build a relationship with the learners. And I've noticed the better that works, the more often the learners came back. Irrespective of the curriculum content almost, if I'd built a relationship with the learners, and you often will, they were more likely to come back for future classes. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Because, you know, sometimes we would know the families maybe better, like, you know what I mean, more so than the teachers, you know. But I definitely think, you know, it all boils down to relationships. First of all the relationship between the home-school and the family — so in order to kind of obviously get in there to talk where maybe things are going on. But I think the second thing that's very important, and we've been very lucky with our tutors, is the relationship with the tutor and the parent who comes in, you know, because once those barriers are broken down and there's an element of trust there then it'll flourish. So they're the two relationships I feel that kind of help, you know, parents that come in to these courses. **ETB ALO**

Even when learners are comfortable in family literacy provision, they may have misgivings about making the step towards further learning. The relationship with a sympathetic ALO can mean that those anxieties can be allayed and the progression supported.

A lot of people would have thought they were not good enough to come up here [to the FE college]. Sometimes I'd actually walk across with them. I'd say 'Come on across with me I'm going over now'. When you make your move like that you jump over the edge a bit and there you are you are in another space and you need time to get used to that new space. **ETB ALO**

All of these crucial relationships tend to be an invisible and unrecognised part of learning. The skills involved in making good connections with colleagues and learners are taken for granted rather than forming part of CPD. This lack of recognition also means that the considerable work and time that is devoted to building and maintaining relationships is not resourced and left very much to the good will of those involved. Nonetheless, relationships are identified throughout this study as central to every aspect of family literacy success.

4. Systemic solutions

Without a more intimate understanding of SOLAS and the ETB structure, these suggestions for systemic change are true to the evidence gathered from research participants, but remain **indicative**. They need to be considered by the organisation and adapted to fit within wider strategic and structural boundaries. With that caveat, we present ideas for making family literacy systems more supportive of the work and thereby increasing its efficacy.

Address outstanding structural issues

Six years since 33 VECs were merged into 16 ETBs, some legacy issues remain that have a bearing on family literacy. Within the ETB structure, there were signs post-restructuring that not every element in the newly aligned entities was fully integrated. Some ETBs family literacy provision has remained fairly fixed within previous county boundaries, and the capacity was not always available to invest in making better internal relationships and creating a cohesive family literacy structure across each ETB. This needs to be addressed so that family literacy is equally available and accessible.

An honest **review within ETBs** of the unresolved remnants of restructuring was suggested. This could form the basis for establishing a new system to support family literacy. This would also allow providers to maximise the contribution to adult and childhood literacy learning targets.

Strategic expansion, including how to situate family literacy

ETBs were generally happy with their family literacy work and schools, parents and other partners welcomed the outcomes. Nevertheless, many were conscious of the unstructured nature of their work that tended to be responsive to demand rather than having a studied strategic framework. The **scope for expanding** the work, given additional resources, was also evident. Some kept their provision limited so as to maintain quality, but they were aware of additional demand and stronger partnerships that could be made.

I'll start by saying that the structure that we have for family learning is working very well in a limited capacity. It's in that limited capacity because

we want to keep it working as well as it possibly can for small groups and with a small number of schools.

*The structure is not contributing to the growth of family learning because we don't have a dedicated person to build the relationships with home-school liaison teachers, and more specifically in schools, particularly schools in areas that are just out of DEIS status or haven't got DEIS status but badly need family learning support from ETBs, but the ALO or the resource worker simply does not have the time to spend to build the relationships. **ETB ALO***

At a time when there is a drive to increase participation in adult learning and address literacy inequalities in schools, it is timely to enable the expansion of an area of work that addresses both of these issues.

*It's very easy to say, you know, that you have this amount of money, how come you have this number of people? It comes down to people at the end of the day. So we need someone to build the capacity, I feel. What we are doing we're doing it very well because we care about family learning and we have excellent relationships with the schools, we have excellent home-school liaison teachers to work with. Our family learning tutors show great commitment and skills. So what we have works really well, but we really should be expanding now. But I'm not willing to try to do that because it can compromise the quality of what we have. **ETB ALO***

Current good work in this area will become clearer with systematic strategising and data collection. As referred to under resource solutions, the collection of data requires review so that it can enrich efforts to meet targets. It is our understanding that early in 2019 family literacy will become a separate category on the PLSS system. **A new approach** will provide the chance to share information with staff and parents about the important role of data and the benefits in terms of access to reliable local learning trends. This will diminish a substantial resource barrier in the current registration process and further add to the evidence about the positive impact of family literacy.

Some research participants expressed the view that lack of recognition of family literacy was indicative of its perceived value within the FET sector. This view also counteracted the drive for engagement of reluctant learners in that it ensured that family literacy remained somewhat invisible.

*And you can maybe then kind of make it more — you know, more obvious and more visible in the community if it's something more strategic. Because I don't think we're visible, I don't think people see. **ETB ALO***

Discussions about the structure of family literacy within FET were qualified for a small number of respondents

who were conscious of mooted changes to adult education. They voiced concerns about the loss of literacy as a distinct aspect of adult education and alongside that a decrease in the profile of family literacy.

*But there's also a suggestion that the adult education service as a whole would be rebranded. So that would have to be maybe part of that; highlighting the service and that this is an integral part of the adult education service. **ETB ALO***

The need for a definite structure to support family literacy was discussed alongside issues of budget and accountability.

*And I suppose there isn't an explicit structure that supports family learning. It used to be more on the agenda I suppose when there was a specific fund. But of course development will always happen if there's more funding put behind it. So I think that if there was a case to be made for more funding I think that would be a very positive step. **ETB AEO***

*So do I think it should be ring-fenced? Possibly to protect it. Yeah, even if someone else came looking for money nobody could touch the family learning money. That's probably not a bad idea—as long as it was enough. Right now there's flexibility. **ETB ALO***

Separating family literacy from literacy in general was strongly endorsed by FET staff that identified it as a distinct form of literacy that required different recognition and support. The long engagement process for family literacy and the preference for accreditation to remain optional were significant points in this argument. A small number of people expressed the hope that separate classification would not mean an increased administrative burden that would detract from the work.

*I think it's not a good thing [for family literacy to be included with literacy] because it was great to have ring-fenced money and there was more than just the hours, you could utilise it for other things. But also if it had its own code ... now it's lumped in with all other courses and we have a bit of pressure for accreditation. If you could look at that separately and say it's never accredited ... I think it'd be great to have it separated out, because most of what we do is — well, in our area most of what we do is non-accredited. And it's first engagement, so it shouldn't have to be accredited. **ETB ALO***

*We did have a separate budget for a little while, and I suppose, you know, there's for and against. Sometimes the paperwork involved in it kind of takes from the actual time you spend going out and talking to people, I suppose. Yes, we could do with structuring it a bit better and probably meeting your clusters regularly. **ETB ALO***

Make measures meaningful

Those coordinating family literacy felt that there was a need to reflect carefully about how success in family literacy might be meaningfully measured (Hamilton et al, 2015). Applying the same criteria as for other types of FET provision did not seem logical, and there was a suggestion that the **case study approach** completed currently by educational guidance staff might offer a more appropriate measure.

Yeah, if it's family learning why are we measuring whether the person gets employment or goes to another course? Like if it's a family learning programme surely that's not just the only benefit. And yet that's all we measure. ETB ALO

In the same vein, many remarked that this study provided a welcome opportunity to present a picture of the achievements of family literacy that other measures did not allow. Several ETBs told us that they gathered anecdotal data about learners' achievements that were not required by the FET system, because they were conscious of the important developments that took place that were going unrecorded.

It's so important that SOLAS are doing this research now, because again I always felt that that was the next step; that nobody's going back to their learners that have been through these programmes and speaking with them like you just did to capture where they're going and what it was like for them. Because again without that knowledge the funding for family literacy could just disappear because they're not seeing the benefit of it. But, you know, just in hearing the learning this morning there's huge benefit. ETB ALO

The introduction of discrete family literacy funding and data collection must also be accompanied by the development of **appropriate measures of success**. These should be in line with FET and DES targets but also congruent with a family literacy ethos and practice. Aside from engagement figures and the details of those who opt for accreditation, there are inevitably individual impacts for parents and children and organisational outcomes for schools and FET. How these measureable and so-called 'soft skills' might best be captured will be addressed in the guidelines that accompany this report (See Chapter 6).

Resource adequately

Giving added attention to family literacy work does not need to be about reinventing something that has been delivering excellent adult education for decades. It is about fully recognising its proven value and resourcing it adequately so that it can flourish.

So, yeah, I think family literacy is one that we should have much more structure on. We have it just because it's needed or if we're lucky enough that the people are getting out into the community and figuring out what's needed. But it's not

structured. Having a budget ... it forms the habit and then you do it. But if you're not going to be asked at the end of the year ... if nobody's ever saying it, sometimes you can get caught up in just doing the ordinary business of the day and you forget, you know? Just that there would be a guideline that would say that's your family literacy budget. Say up to 30 per cent of that can be used for development costs. And that then gives you the time to get out there to meet the people. And it should be more joined up. We've got some amazingly trained staff and tutors. We've got lots of contacts. We alone have forty adult centres around the two counties that we could use for different things. You know, it's already there. Rather than reinventing —like what you'd hate to see is that in another year or two years' time they set up a separate body — 'here's the family literacy' — you just think no, no! Let the people who are there do it! ETB AEO

Interagency solutions

'Interagency' was the single most coded item of data in the study and produced irrefutable evidence that the development of family literacy and the engagement of 'hard to reach' learners lies in working closely with others. Working in **'collaborative' partnerships** may be a better way of describing interagency family learning initiatives. It is more reflective of the type of partnership that needs to be built and will avoid confusion with existing 'interagency' approaches that are designed to counteract multiple disadvantages.

It really is about us being able to reach people. I think the ETBs have to work with other organisations to do that. We just don't have the capacities or the resources certainly in our ETB even though we're a small ETB. We just don't have those resources to do that on-the-ground work and link like other agencies might have. So we need to look at key players that we can work with in order to help us, and family learning is one of those areas. ETB AEO

To embed a partnership culture, some awareness training about adult literacy and adult learning principles would be useful. At the same time, FET staff may need to become more familiar with the school culture so that partners have an equal respect and recognition for the imperatives directing each other's work. The role of head teacher is pivotal to good collaborative partnerships in schools and the exemplar, (recorded throughout this study), of such cooperation in practice might be circulated to school principals so that they are familiar with the demands and the benefits.

Commitment building through relationships, strategies, training, steering group and good communication

Our extensive data collection enabled us to learn that relationship building between ETBs, HSCL, and libraries might be a good foundation for core local

development of family literacy. FET, DEIS and libraries all have expressed commitment to family literacy in their strategic documents (SOLAS, 2014; DES, 2017; DRCD, 2018). CYPSCs too have a role in local consultation and in family literacy that may make them appropriate partners in a new collaborative structure (DCYA, 2014). With a focus on disadvantage, they would also contribute to greater understanding in significant areas that impact on family learning development. Other strategic partners are important too, but we heard evidence of long and unproductive interagency meetings because of diverse agendas. We suggest a core collaborative partnership that meets regularly and makes contact when needed with other agencies.

*So there are all the different pieces need to be in place to make it effective. So going back to strategy then, you need to have the strategy where if there's money who's going to help you spend the money and how is it going to be rolled out in a sustainable manner? Otherwise I think we're kind of filling gaps without solving a problem or serving the people we want to serve effectively. **ETB AEO***

In the spirit of adult learning, and when new resources are available, ETBs should take in hand their own family literacy strategy development, congruent with FET overarching goals. All ETBs already have an unofficial network of interested stakeholders. Meeting with core collaborative partners to **audit local needs** should be their first step. Formal and collective consultation with the wider group of agencies who will support engagement of learners should be organised at least twice in the academic year – once for planning and once for review and evaluation. This should be timed to fit alongside the annual processes of bidding and accounting for funding.

Forming robust collaborative relationships requires work. Some HSCL teachers told us they felt their role was not understood, and they felt undervalued in some forums. In maintaining smooth working partnerships, changes in HSCL personnel and structure need to be taken into account. This can avoid any difficulties that might arise when a new HSCL teacher comes into post.

Evidence suggests that HSCL teachers and others would benefit from **CPD in adult-learning** approaches and awareness training in aspects of family literacy. There are considerable cultural differences between school and FET learning styles and the HSCL teachers to whom we spoke told us they were not given any preparation for this.

The ETB was identified as the central partner in family learning delivery and **collaborative partnerships led by the ETB** were seen by all as a core structure in harnessing good relational solutions. A wide range of partner agencies were identified as essential in engaging reluctant individuals and groups. Where a community group had won the trust of marginalised people, they could support people to see the merits of family learning, when it was appropriate for them.

There are central and local elements to proposed structural solutions. It was noted that a named **family literacy person in NALA** would be useful. They would collate a diary of family learning events to share in the sector. A **central repository** was proposed for material resources like course outlines worthy of sharing.

*It would be good to have a forum where we could hear from others what is working you know? It would be good to hear what has been a massive hit somewhere else. **ETB ALO***

Clare Family Learning have been generous over the years in sharing their experience, and this experience might usefully be added to now that others are developing and delivering innovative family literacy activities. A **core national family learning steering group** drawing on existing FET expertise could coordinate information sharing about good practice, steer training, resource development and other aspects of family learning provision. Through ETBI and SOLAS management representation, this steering group's deliberations could be introduced into central strategy meetings and some continuity assured throughout the national structure.

A number of government departments have family literacy strategic targets, and there needs to be some **interdepartmental communication mechanism** that allows for cooperation and economies of budget and effort. The scope from greater cohesion around national literacy achievement was remarked upon regularly throughout this study.

Local partnerships formation needs to become less *ad hoc*, and ETB staff require clearer information about the family literacy agenda of existing groups such as DEIS/ HSCL staff, School Completion programmes, libraries, CYPSC, health nurses, SICAP and others.

To make robust collaborative partnerships in ETB areas, it is essential that this type of information sharing is possible. It is suggested that **collaboration should be written** into:

- ETB strategic plans,
- memos of understanding, and
- Service Level Agreements (SLAs) - which should be extended to encompass core collaborative work.

Collaboration in turn allows realistic review of budgets and outputs and more focussed future planning. This type of rationalisation, alongside better data collection, will allow informed budgetary planning.

Key messages about solutions for improved family literacy practice

We gathered evidence of solutions in the area of resources, culture, relationships and systems.

Use outreach family literacy as needed

Where transport services are poor, outreach family literacy works well.

Create an appropriate learning environment

Accommodation in a school, library or community facility can provide an appropriate adult-learning environment. Book-gifting, library services, tea, coffee and snacks all helped overcome resource gaps and make parents feel welcome. Most important was the human resource of a family literacy coordinator who would build local collaborative and support and solidify links with tutors and community partners.

An adult-learning philosophy helps family literacy and should be shared – and celebrated

An underpinning adult learning philosophy supported all aspects of successful family literacy. A process of partnership building is pivotal and needs to discuss diverse goals and measures of success, avoid tensions and find an accommodation that suits everyone. Growing awareness of the adult-friendly way of working in family literacy helps overcome historic fears of learning situations. Celebrations of family literacy help raise the profile for other parents.

Relationships central to family literacy success

Relationships were cited most often as the core ingredient of success in family literacy. Accessible childcare frees up parents to attend as do courses where younger children are welcome. Gendered care inequalities need to be considered in developing learning programmes that encourage participation for all parents and carers. The HSCL teacher can help engage parents while the ETB family literacy coordinator needs time to manage all aspects of collaboration and the different support needs that learners have throughout their learning journey.

Structures needed to harness strengths of those who enable good family literacy practices

Supportive structures need to be put in place that will harness the strengths of all those who enable good family literacy practices. Alternatives to unwieldy administrative data procedures are required. In addition, all tutors should be given access to the CPD that will develop their skills to facilitate learning. Attention should be given to the lack of security many part-time family literacy staff report about their conditions of employment. This will ensure that the organisation of family literacy is as smooth as possible.

Create resources and systems to monitor and evaluate impact of family literacy

Ring-fenced funding and the collection of family literacy data will make programme monitoring and evaluation possible and allow the benefits of family literacy to be accurately measured.

Conclusions

Staff and learners in FET family literacy programmes were unequivocal about its value in terms of supporting intergenerational learning for families, schools and communities. The rich qualitative data analysis in this chapter provides an extensive overview of the findings from all 16 ETB areas. We describe the practice we have seen and discussed and some of the ways that it clearly satisfies the goals articulated in departmental strategic plans.

We also looked at barriers that providers identify as limiting their development of family literacy. Finally, we suggest solutions provided during our research that address perceived challenges encountered by organisers and tutors in their efforts to constantly develop family literacy provision.

Understanding an adult learner-centred culture was thought to be essential for ETB managers and practitioners. Those we interviewed felt that everyone benefitted from remaining connected to the reality of learners' lives and their adult learning experience. Family literacy was shown to be a vital way to engage adult learners who would participate in learning for their children's benefit when they would not do so for themselves.

Family literacy tutors are skilled at engaging, retaining and enabling progression for reluctant learners and that is key to FET and EU strategy and targets. Understanding and recognising this ethos and culture and giving it value and status are necessary if ESF adult learning targets are to be achieved.

Most importantly, the findings that have emerged from the study demonstrate the effectiveness of current family literacy delivery and indicate the steps that might be taken to create a stable structure around that already skilful practice. In this way, the work that aims to tackle educational inequality can be supported, and the FET strategy can more effectively contribute to better literacy outcomes for parents, families and for future generations.

This chapter has been largely focussed on the data gathered from providers about family literacy practice and structures. The case studies that follow reveal the impact of family literacy on beneficiaries including learners, school staff and other stakeholders.



Chapter 5

Case studies of good practice

Family literacy ideally responds to learner needs and so the profile of practice varies greatly from one ETB area to another depending on the specific locality and the development of programmes that meet their parents' learning priorities.

History plays its part too in that some family literacy providers have had a longer period of engagement with this field of study than others. Consequently, they have had more opportunities to refine their portfolio of family literacy events, to build collaborative networks and to enrich the skill base of tutors that interact with parents and children. Our research has uncovered a number of important features of family literacy programme provision, and the three examples that we have selected to elaborate on exemplify some of these key features.

In our ETB visits, we witnessed fine examples of family literacy delivered with care, skill and enthusiasm. All these activities are successfully engaging parents and other family members in the vital work of intergenerational learning. From the practice we saw, it is clear that family literacy infuses adult learning with the joy and fun of involvement with childhood learning and development. It transfers attention away from the adult and places the focus on how to facilitate children's learning. In this way, skilled family literacy tutors enable adults to learn while maintaining the connection with the transfer of new skills and knowledge within the family.

For many parents we talked to, their experience in the ETB was the first encounter where they felt that they could be a successful learner. There is evidence that some parents progress from family literacy to courses for their own intellectual growth and development. Some progress to accredited courses and others find employment that fits with their family circumstances.

We present our three case studies here in the order in which we visited them. In each case, we met with a range of ETB staff and learners involved in family literacy. We visited some examples of family literacy provision and met with a range of stakeholders involved in collaborating in local delivery. In addition to the visits to each ETB, where possible, we studied written and audio-visual materials and artefacts that had been developed through family literacy curriculum development and delivery. These gave a flavour of the role the programmes played in adult and family literacy for individuals, families, schools and the wider community. Our accounts are evidence-based and rooted in data recorded, transcribed and subsequently coded and analysed using MAXQDA – a software

tool that allows rigorous and systematic scrutiny of qualitative and quantitative data. We have verified the content of the case studies with the relevant ETBs.

These three examples of good practice illustrate a substantial amount of good adult learning practice delivered by dedicated, skilled and inspirational tutors. We do **not** suggest that the examples here are better than what is done elsewhere, but these examples of family learning that merit particular attention. In each case study, we place learner voices alongside those of the ETB staff whose work is key to the success of these activities.

Case studies

The case practice examples we studied, and the numbers of family literacy learners in each, were as follows:

- **Good practice example 1:** Limerick and Clare ETB and themed literacy – sewing and quilting (300 family literacy learners)
- **Good practice example 2:** Kilkenny and Carlow ETB, the Friday Group (30 family literacy learners)
- **Good practice example 3:** Waterford and Wexford ETB, engaging and retaining marginalised parents (180 family literacy learners)

Good practice example 1: Limerick and Clare ETB and themed literacy

In Limerick and Clare ETB (LCETB), there are 2,434 adult literacy learners and 300 of these are family literacy learners. Table 4 below provides more detail on family literacy provision in this ETB in terms of hours, staffing, courses, accreditation options and so on.

Table 4: Limerick and Clare ETB in numbers

| Category | Total |
|--|-------|
| Total number of adult literacy learners | 2,434 |
| Total of family literacy learners | 300 |
| Family literacy hours per week | 32 |
| Paid family literacy tutor hours in 2017 | 1,300 |
| Family literacy organiser hours per week | 37 |
| Family literacy courses in 2017 | 81 |
| Hours of family literacy in 2017 | 1,300 |
| Accredited options on offer | Yes |
| QQI Levels | 1-3 |
| Course completers | 300 |
| Progression to more learning | 160 |

The range of family learning skills, knowledge and experience in Clare Family Learning, LCETB, is well known across national and international literacy circles. Clare Family Learning Project (CFL) celebrates 25 years of delivering family learning this year, 2019. Since 1994, the Family Learning Project has had a rich history at the centre of Ireland's development of family learning as an important element of lifelong learning. CFL has designed innovative provision, been responsive to parents' learning needs, participated in collaborative programme delivery, developed practice guides and exemplar materials and generously shared experience and resources with providers elsewhere. Every ETB in this study mentioned CFL for its flagship role in family literacy and its solidarity with colleagues.

The first family learning tutor training took place in Ennis, County Clare in 1998. Since then CFL has regularly delivered training to tutors throughout Ireland and from further afield. The family learning staff in CFL are experienced, have a wide array of skills and knowledge and are constantly innovating and adding to their repertoire of provision. A number of EU states continue to send staff to Ennis for training and scholars have completed postgraduate and doctoral studies on CFL's accomplishments. US and other academics spend study time in Clare and write and speak of the excellent practice they have witnessed.

It was difficult to choose an aspect of CFL as a case

study given the breadth of provision. The family learning menu of courses and activities now spans, the whole learning route from birth to college. There are a host of programmes for parents who want support to develop their children's literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and creativity. Activities that smooth transitions into – and out of – diverse educational sectors are also in place.

Aware of the gap in learning activity between birth and three years of age, when the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) becomes available to families, CFL has most recently developed a new offering: *My Baby and Me*. This was adapted and further developed from an original class offered in Sligo, and is accompanied by innovative materials and skilled tuition. Now an eight-week course, *My Baby and Me*, has drawn on tutors' skills in language, literacy and numeracy development alongside psychotherapy, child development and parenting.

At the heart of family learning, CFL fosters adults' need for **self-actualisation** through the desire for further education and training. As a fundamental factor in enabling the parent to become the child's first teacher, CFL nurtures the learning development of parents, so they can more confidently embrace that role. We gathered robust evidence of CFL's skilled approach to integrated family literacy during a two-day immersion in the CFL's activities. The case study we choose to share here is of a family learning course in **sewing and quilt making**. We visited the group in action, interviewed the tutor and several learners. The learners were articulate and insightful, and the model of themed or integrated family literacy merited further reflection.

Ethos

LCETB does not have an agreed family literacy ethos, mission or strategy across the ETB. However, in parts of the ETB, especially Clare, there is a strong and proven commitment to family learning. This is articulated in the survey comments:

We respond to the needs of our learners, where they are in their lives, and build on their existing knowledge. We value the home as a learning place, stressing the importance of the parent as their child's first teacher. We enable the building of social networks for parents and, in all this, we encourage the notion of lifelong learning.

The practice of this ethos is evident in the relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere in all of the centres and schools we visited. In the adult learning centre in Ennis, family learning takes place alongside other further education and training (FET) courses. This enables parents to gradually become part of a learning community. It also means that progressing to other areas and levels of study can be made less daunting. Relationships across subject areas and learning levels are promoted in such a way that transitions and progressions are part of daily provision.

As one learner indicated:

Yeah, and that's what I like about the adult education. Because in Ireland as a child, you got walloped if you didn't know it, and it wasn't that oh, you might be dyslexic or maths mightn't be your strong suit. Just, you didn't get it, so you were stupid. But we're not stupid. We just have a different way of learning and I feel like dealing with the tutors here - they each see you as your individual person and they teach you that way that suits you - I feel anyway. **LCETB Family Literacy Learner**

Collaboration

CFL works in close collaboration with partners throughout the catchment areas and beyond. We met a group of HSCL teachers who are working across the two counties, and we discussed with them how they work in cooperation with CFL in joint family learning ventures. CFL is closely connected, amongst others, to:

- the DEIS Schools and HSCL teachers,
- Children and Young Peoples Services Committee (CYPSC),
- local libraries,
- Roma and Irish Traveller groups,
- St Vincent de Paul,
- Immigrant Support Services,
- Family Resources centres,
- Support workers,
- the County Childcare Committee, and
- Clare Haven Women's Shelter.

These agencies help to engage learners and collaborate in making appropriate family learning available to parents throughout the community. Much of that provision takes the form of outreach courses, and the tutors we met facilitate family learning throughout the catchment area and beyond.

In Clare, the Adult Literacy Organiser's position is predominantly that of Family Learning Coordinator. Her extensive role in maintaining, managing and developing all aspects of family learning – including tutor support and continuing professional development (CPD) – far exceeds the demands of a single ETB area. In addition to tutor training work at national level, she sustains a network of interested, international tutors and scholars and ensures a respected profile for Ireland in international family learning circles. Despite this expansive responsibility, she still maintains close and caring relationships with all: learners, colleagues, interagency partners and international family learning actors.

Family learning practice

At a time when an integrated approach to literacy and numeracy is beginning to take cultural hold across youth and adult FET, it is interesting to consider the usefulness of this approach in family learning provision.

Many tutors have consciously been embedding literacy and numeracy into broader vocational learning for some time. Here we look at adding the context of family learning so that a parent is learning a vocational skill with literacy and numeracy and digital literacy integrated across the content. At the same time, they are learning about their own learning process and how to facilitate learning (of literacy, numeracy and the vocational skill) with other family members.

Integration in practice

The sewing and quilting family learning course has been delivered for 14 years by a tutor who is qualified in art, sewing, literacy and family learning. She teaches a number of accredited Art and Design courses, and the family learning Sewing and Quilting is accredited at QQI Levels 1-3. CFL find that some learners need a roundabout route into literacy learning, and this can be through initial engagement in a practical subject like sewing, cookery or even stained glass making. The accreditation route is not pushed on new learners but sensitively presented as optional. In practice, the tutor finds that most people opt for the QQI pathway. The approach is to scaffold subject specific language acquisition so that learning is incremental and measured.

I explain that almost everyone has a problem because the manuals that you get ... they're impossible to understand. Paper patterns are impossible to understand. So, you are starting at the very beginning. And then literacy isn't really that much of a problem, because you introduce these words really slowly and you write them up on the board and they write them into their purple book that I give them. And so, they get used to these words one by one and they know what they mean.

LCETB Family Literacy Tutor

The sewing and quilting course has reading and writing skills in-built. Acquisition of new vocabulary is stepped and learners given a method to note and learn the meaning of new terms. These are rehearsed in class and the way to retain new language is modelled from the beginning.

So their vocabulary when they've finished is pretty big, enormous. And we do a lot of writing onto the board and they copy it down to try and remind them, to get things in their head. **LCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Digital literacy is also practised, as phones and iPads are used in class to research topics and design details for quilt squares. While we were visiting the group, they were planning squares for a suffrage centenary quilt. They were looking for images of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and discussing how she broke a window in Dublin Castle in the 1920s. Written notes were made and images stored for tracing onto fabric. Numeracy was ever-present in measuring cloth, stitches, the dimension of panels and so on.

I think the maths learning is very significant ... like we use set squares and protractors ... and cutting things neatly and incorporating seam allowances into things you're really cutting. So they really have to think of the conscious cut. And measurements ... like I would do about metric measures - millimetres and centimetres and so on measuring, and adding seam allowances and remembering the seam allowance each side. And things like symmetry, and parallel lines, and how to spell them properly.

*And there are also all those maths skills that you miss out on if you don't do Junior Cert maths. We were just talking when they were cutting out the hamper on the quilt they were making about suffrage, and I said, 'we could cut it on the straight grain', they all know about the grain - 'but let's cut it on the bias, because if we do it won't fray'. So they went, 'What's the bias again?' '45 degrees off the straight grain.' So the straight grain is the warp thread, the cross grain's the weft thread, and the bias is at 45 degrees. And we all know 45 degrees is half a right angle. So I drew that up on the board, and I watched them get out their books and write it down. **LCETB Family Literacy Tutor***

Although for QQI Levels 1-3 learners have to grapple with new and complicated language and concepts, it is done incidentally as an integral part of the creative process. It then becomes a secondary and subsidiary consideration.

*We don't even mention it. Literacy isn't really mentioned to them. Okay, this is a family learning class. This is all about learning things to take home and do with the kids in your life. And I don't go, 'this is about learning words and how to sew properly and how to measure and how to write down a measurement. So on the last day usually you do an evaluation and then go, 'Let's see do we know what these words mean before you go off. It's slipping them into a world of new words, new techniques. It is literacy by stealth, isn't it really? **LCETB Family Literacy Tutor***

Learner experience of family learning

Adopting a Freirean approach to adult learning makes a positive impact on learners. We spoke to three women who had unsatisfactory school experiences and were conscious of having unmet literacy needs. One woman described her experience of family literacy learning in the following positive terms. Her new experience of a learner-friendly pedagogy was overshadowing her previous negative experiences.

That's what I love about this is everybody builds you up. You know what, they boost you. There's never a 'oh God, look at the state of that'. It's 'that's fantastic'. And even if you instinctively go to knock yourself, which we have a dirty habit of, the tutor will kind of pounce in straight away. She'll say, 'No,

*but look at that.' Like she'll always pointing out the strengths we have. **LCETB Family Literacy Learner***

Another learner was happy to have found that learning to learn could be an enjoyable process. She described becoming isolated at school because of her undiagnosed dyslexia. She has three daughters who are also struggling with literacy, but they are getting supports at school that she had not had received. She said that others with a similar learning legacy did not want to put themselves in that situation again, and so, did not engage in adult learning.

*So they don't want to put themselves in that situation, to feel less than who they are. And everybody is unique and everybody is beautiful but it's just when you're a child and you're being taught that actually no, you're different, you're wrong, you need to be punished and isolated, that's wrong. So when you're going back to the College you can inadvertently go back as a child. Then when you go back and you step in — Yeah — when you go back and you see them and actually, you know, they're nice and they're friendly, you're like damn it, you've missed out on so much. **LCETB Family Literacy Learner***

Another woman who returned to learning because she was unable to help her children with homework described her lack of confidence. She had initially come to get help with reading and to try to develop her confidence. Her experience in the Sewing and Quilting course allowed her to progress to an adult literacy class in addition to the sewing class. Sewing was the hook for her.

*I think if you have nice stuff to introduce them [learners] to. That might get them settled in. I don't know, that's my story. It's got me in here. And actually it was after that I came for the reading. **LCETB Family Literacy Learner***

All three learners that we spoke to were lavish in their praise of their tutor and of family learning as a resource that has been transformational for them. One learner described how the relaxed atmosphere in the group had allowed her to become socially integrated:

*I certainly can feel relaxed when I come in here. I'm not uptight and nervous. Yeah, from doing nothing, sitting feeling useless. Now I feel I'm doing something. I'm getting back out there. It might be something — it mightn't be much at the moment, but it's basically a steppingstone for me. I'd probably be at home in my house and not going outside the door, very depressed. That's the truth. **LCETB Family Literacy Learner***

One learner whose sewing skills now allow her produce articles that are of a saleable standard, plans to continue learning, to go to college and to start her own business.

Outcomes

Family learners communicated a sense of engagement and inclusion in the culture of adult learning. One woman bought a second-hand sewing machine for her daughter, and they now sew together at home. She told us how her radically improved sense of self-worth had changed relationships in the home, and her family's well-being was also markedly better.

An older woman got part-time employment as a cleaner in the local hospital, in some part because she was able to say she was enrolled in an adult learning course. She was also able to get references from tutors. She said she felt more confident every day she left after class. This meant, at work, she was no longer the quiet person at the back during meetings and intimidated by visits from inspectors from the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA).

Weeks went on then, I wasn't at the back anymore. I was coming up the front, wanted to learn more. I was interested. I felt I could do a lot. **LCETB Family Literacy Learner**

The learners we met were finished QQI Level 3, and some were planning to progress to Level 4 in another location. Those who needed to stay in local learning facilities because of childcare demands planned to take on other courses, and one person planned to continue with literacy classes as well.

Beyond the measurable outcomes of QQI accreditation, employment skills in timekeeping, project planning and completion and working collaboratively in a group were also evident. Furthermore, the course tutor was aware of cognitive development that could be used in other areas of study and in work.

I suppose it sort of opens your mind, doesn't it? And then you start thinking. And I go, 'You've got to start using your sewing eyes and you look at things with sewing eyes and you see how they're made.' And they start to say that home actually — 'I was in the shop and looked at how it was made, and I thought oh, I know how to make that now.' You know, when you get them they don't understand things about putting the right sides together and doing the seam and then turning it to the right side and all the seams are constructed with right sides facing. So things like reversal and other concepts that are transferable to the workplace. **LCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Family learning and accreditation contributed to a new identity for the women we spoke with. One woman, for example, became the 'fixer' in her family, and the person to whom everyone looked when sewing and creative skills were called for. She was particularly pleased to have won the admiration and respect of her mother and three daughters.

The tutor told us that a number of people moved to VTOS from the Level 3 sewing class, and others had gained part-time work doing repairs and alterations that suited their care responsibilities. And, others were able to make things for themselves and their families and gained great satisfaction from that.

The tutor was convinced that creativity was a capability to awaken in people and that the demise of handwork was a cultural loss. People become engaged in learning when there is the chance to learn how to make things.

And you get people — people are happier when they're making things. All their worries disappear. **LCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

The learners seemed to bear this message out. Creativity allowed them to find an assurance that they had lost at school and to become engaged adult learners. Sewing was a stepping-stone for some from, and into, adult literacy learning. Furthermore, the integrated approach to sewing and quilting meant that they were already more confident about literacy and numeracy learning and now had other skills and knowledge to bring with them.

Find out who you are. When you find you enjoy something, it develops you as a person as well, I think. You have a ball of wool and next minute you see - and it's something. **LCETB Family Literacy Learner**

Conclusions

This integrated approach to family learning is multifaceted and engages those who are drawn to creative approaches to learning. With the focus on literacy and numeracy somewhat blurred, learners are absorbed in the practical aspects of the Sewing and Quilting course and enabled to learn valuable things incidentally.

We gathered evidence of learners' self-esteem and learning skills transformed by their experience of integrated family literacy. Literacy, digital literacy and numeracy levels were raised. Many achieved QQI Levels 1-3 accreditation and aspired to progress to further training, work, including or self-employment. Parents shared their new learning and revitalised attitudes to learning with their children and other family members.

The Sewing and Quilting course is a skilled and impressive example of family learning that builds on learners' existing skills whilst strategically scaffolding learner engagement and literacy development.

Good practice example 2: Kilkenny and Carlow ETB, the Friday Group

In Kilkenny and Carlow ETB (KCETB), there are 2,031 adult literacy learners and 30 of these are family literacy learners. Table 5 below provides more detail on family literacy provision in this ETB in terms of hours, staffing, courses, accreditation options and so on.

Table 5: Kilkenny and Carlow ETB Family Literacy in numbers

| Category | Total |
|--|--------|
| Total number of adult literacy learners | 2,031 |
| Total of family literacy learners | 30 |
| Family literacy hours per week | 6 |
| Paid family literacy tutor hours in 2017 | 218.75 |
| Family literacy organiser hours in 2017 | 75 |
| Family literacy courses in 2017 | 11 |
| Hours of family literacy in 2017 | 218.75 |
| Accredited options on offer | Yes |
| QQI Levels | 3 |
| Course completers | 30 |
| Progression to more learning | 12 |

A partnership between a Kilkenny DEIS primary school and Kilkenny and Carlow ETB has evolved into a successful family learning group. The results are transformative for parents, children, the school and the wider community. Originally, provision for parents who were adult literacy learners took place in the adult learning centre. Organisers were aware of other parents who would find the prospect of joining a group in the centre daunting. With this in mind, they added the 'Friday Morning' slot in the school. The Friday Morning group is now a feeder for the group that meets in the Adult Learning Centre, which offers a wide range of QQI accredited modules from Level 2 to 4.

The Friday Morning group moved to a room in the school where the tutors and HSCL created a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Two tutors, one a craft specialist and the other an experienced literacy tutor, work every Friday morning with up to 16 women. The women are local parents and some newcomers from countries who have now settled in Kilkenny. There is tea and coffee and scones. The radio is playing in the background, and what had started as a small group has developed into a vibrant, highly successful family learning group.

The cup of tea ... I think we underestimate the importance of the cup of tea. It is a great icebreaker. It settles everyone down. It relaxes new parents.

It's the best way to start a new term or project and also going out for a cup of tea at the end of term is the best way to finish it all off. A lot of planning and feedback happens informally at these times. At one time we wondered about calling the group 'It all starts with a cup of tea'. KCETB AEO

On the morning we visited the Friday Group the women were waiting to talk to us about their learning experience. The Principal brought us to the room. There women and principal were laughing and there was some banter. The caretaker who provides tea slipped away when we arrived. It was not immediately clear who was a tutor and who was a family learner. There was a buggy with a sleeping child and other mothers had also brought their toddlers. Parents told us that by the time the toddlers went to school, they were settled well, as they were familiar with the school which made the transition to school easier.

Ethos

KCETB espouses a clear family learning ethos that is parent-centered and egalitarian in practice. This ethos is articulated as, 'Parents are the first and most natural teachers of their children, and everyone is awarded the same opportunities regardless of cultural background.' This ethos was clear when we met the Friday Group. Everyone introduced themselves and listened respectfully to others. There was clarity about the goals of the group and pride in its achievements. The women felt very much at home in their children's school and were pleased with having found a way to be part of this family learning project. In later discussion with the AEO and ALO, we found that the ethos was firmly fixed throughout the area.

Well, I suppose in Kilkenny centre we have a strong link with the schools, as you've experienced already, and also then there's a big strong family literacy ethos among the tutors and among coordinators, so that drives that ethos of family literacy and linking with the schools and the importance, I suppose, the importance of starting with the parents to get to target the young people, to, I suppose, probably work ourselves out of a job ultimately down the line because we're not going to have as much literacy issues. KCETB ALO

As well as the relaxed atmosphere, we discovered that there was exceptional collaboration between the school and the ETB. This included identification of parents who might benefit from joining the group and close networking about the activities in which the group engaged. In later discussion with the school principal, we heard that the group had become a vital mechanism through which the school supported children whom they felt were struggling with some aspect of learning.

It now is our way to support a child who needs support. It's one of our most important ways of doing it now ... because if we can get the parent on board there are a few other things start happening

*... I notice it hugely ... the parents are much more comfortable coming to talk to me. They will attend parent teacher meetings now. Their children are good attenders at school as a result. One of the teachers has set up literacy kits and maths kits for parents and they would be the parents now who would come in if she's doing a session and they would bring the stuff home and do it. **DEIS School Principal***

The women in the Friday Group benefited individually and as a group from their time together. At the same time, other benefits accrued to their children, their family learning relationships, the work of the school and to the wider community.

Collaboration

On a practical level, the family learning partnership is within the strategic goals of both the DEIS school and the ETB literacy service. Both have resources and expertise to share. Both are eager to provide meaningful learning opportunities for their participants. Family learning makes this possible.

*I suppose it's a combination. We would fund the book. We would fund the equipment that's needed for that. And that's part of our DEIS grant, because it's fulfilling the literacy and numeracy aspect. You see, with a DEIS school you have to have a literacy and numeracy plan, attendance plan, involvement of parents, and involvement of outside agencies. So it's hitting that brief. **DEIS School Principal***

Encouraging participation in adult learning is the goal of the ETB, and the Friday Group is a means of engaging learners that is made accessible through their child's school. The women explained how they had come to join the group...

*I started here in September and my son is in the school here. I am happy because I have been able to know the ladies in this group. I am also learning more English here. I am seven years in Ireland and I want to learn more and more. Before I came to the group, I did not know many people ... now my son is in school here, so I am in school now too! I come to an English class here too. **Friday Group Member***

*I came because of the arts and crafts. For me, it was to get out of the house and to have time away from the kids as well. It's a break away and it's nice to meet new people. **Friday Group Member***

Their child's teacher told various women about the group and others heard by word-of-mouth in and around the school campus. Events in the school are used to spread the word about the group, and group members see the value of the group and tell others about it.

I heard about the class from a teacher in the school. She told me there was a parents group that met here on a Friday morning and that they made

*things for the classrooms ... my daughter loves it that I come down and that we made all the things for the classroom and she was telling all the other kids. **Friday Group Member***

The Friday group offers clear benefits to parents who felt isolated and excluded. Parents in the group also focus more on their own learning while also attending to the literacy, numeracy and cultural development of their children. Family learning delivers on multiple levels.

Family learning practice

By design, the activities of the family learning group are closely related to the life of the school. This seemingly simple approach means that the connection between the Friday Group parents and the life of the school produces maximum advantage for everyone. Each year, the Friday Group undertakes a number of projects related to the life and learning activities in the school. These are literacy related explicitly **or** in how they are applied. The group tutors discuss the current literacy focus in a particular age group and prepare complementary activities and materials with the Friday Group.

When the idea of storytelling using 'Big Books' was proposed, the ETB and the school held a workshop with the originator of Story Sacks – Neil Griffiths. These events were organised in conjunction with Kilkenny Adult Education Centre, Kilkenny Library and County Kilkenny Childcare Committee, each sharing the cost for the two days equally. The events were open to parents, other family members, library staff, teachers, tutors, childcare workers and children – who had a storytelling session. The Friday Group subsequently became involved in preparing storytelling sessions for children and in making Story Sacks that contained props and other artefacts to enhance the delivery of the story.

*Every year then they look at a project. Now, what we've tried to do with literacy then is we've looked at what would the school like in terms of literacy that would assist us. So we have the Big Books that the parents did and they would have brought children down and read to them the stories. So that led to kind of storytelling at home. **DEIS School Principal***

Inevitably the parents' involvement brought them into direct experience of their child's schoolwork, and this resulted in 'common ground' and setting aside time and space for a rich learning exchange. Parents' confidence increased, so they were able to better support their child's literacy development. Other benefits also ensued.

Another time, the school became aware that a number of children in a junior infant group had no bedtime routine, so, the Friday Group selected an appropriate story and devised a storytelling session about bedtime routines. The parents and their children benefitted from this session, as they used it at home to build a bedtime routine. The group also learned the importance of

bedtime routine and sleep. The process of discussing and developing the story and the artefacts and the engagement with children in telling the story all contributed to cementing new practices for all involved.

Similarly, when hygiene arose as an issue, the Friday Group developed a routine for getting up in the morning, washing your face and teeth, and so on, and this was communicated creatively to the children. The use of literacy and the creative ways to communicate with children has boosted adults' skills.

Over time, the magnitude of these projects has developed. The school has a diverse community of parents and children, and it promotes respect and recognition of this multiculturalism. Each year, it holds an intercultural day with exchanges of cultural traditions, involving parents and children. The Friday Group developed a book to support this ethos, and it became a core vehicle for literacy and creativity. The result was a colourful children's book introducing 22 different nationalities that made up the school community. The book was launched on Intercultural Day and became a source of great pride for all involved. A quilt capturing much of the artwork prepared for the book now hangs in the school hall.

The approach to the group takes account of the demands on parents and the different levels of language and literacy amongst the women. The school prides itself on knowing its children and parents well. It encourages those in difficult circumstances or who are isolated to join the Friday Group. Some choose not to join, but the awareness and appeal of the group has grown.

We're very flexible about timekeeping too. Mothers have a lot of demands on them in the mornings, lots of comings and goings. Like one mother, she drops her child here then walks up the road to the crèche then comes back down here again to the group. **KCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

There is no pressure on members of the group to complete accredited modules, but the link with the adult learning-centre facilitates those that do want to go down this route.

But we do a lot of QQI modules. Just at Level 3. But last year we started doing a Level 4 just as a kind of a steppingstone, and it would be well supported. But the Level 3s they do the regular ones that, you know, that are relevant: nutrition and so on. **KCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Tutors also consider learner progression. Learners may progress into a basic literacy group and ESOL class or, in some cases, a vocational course. The ETB element in the partnership facilitates progression along appropriate learning routes, and the established relationships mean that parents have a connection to further learning when they feel ready.

By the end of the year, we nearly always have everyone linked into something else. It may be a

one-to-one in literacy or something else. Some of the women go to the English class here ... we'd chat about that from early on. **KCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Outcomes

Children

We heard numerous stories about how parents were delighted by their child's response to their being in the school. They describe their own transformed status in their children's eyes and their pride at their parent's accomplishments. The mothers understand that they are part of a growing learning culture, and they cite evidence of increased family learning activities at home.

The children are proud too! So for my daughter now, the quilt that we did that is hanging up in the hall she loves telling her friends, 'My mum did that now.' So by parents learning – their kids are learning too. I do a lot of arts and crafts with my daughter at home now. **Friday Group Member**

When I get my child from school he asks me, 'Mama, what you do in school today?' I said to him, 'I make something nice for Halloween'. 'Something nice?' he said, 'Show me, show me!'. He asks me every week, 'What happens mama?' He is happy I come here to his school. **Friday Group Member**

Children gain a sense of belonging through being able to claim association with their parent's handiwork. School becomes more closely connected to family, and the alienation some children can feel in school is eliminated for children in the Friday Group. Parents are aware of the benefits from being part of a group. It helps them feel less isolated. The parents also know that their children benefit from them being in the school.

Yes, my boys are very proud of me too that I am here in the school. They can say to others, 'My Mum made this and this and this here in school!' Like I showed them this book we are doing and they were so excited and that is good. Being here helps you to unwind too. I think it is important for the kids to know we are interested and involved in their schooling. **Friday Group Member**

For one woman, the impact of family learning extends across a number of generations and illustrates that belief and encouragement in education is perhaps as important as academic achievement. Parents who have benefited little from the education system can still foster a positive view of education in their children. In the following case, the Friday Group has already reached three generations.

My ones know that Fridays I go to school too, and they get very excited about that. My Mam left school at thirteen but we were all made to go to school. That was the rule! My Mam came back to college when I came back. She did a Level 5 in Healthcare. It was a big thing for her. She's out

working in the healthcare sector now. Every year, she goes back and upgrades. My kids saw my mother going back and me going back. **Friday Group Member**

Parents

Besides the evidence of parents' gains in terms of bonding more with their children around school and learning, the data show that parents gain in other ways. Their own learning is enhanced and they find strength in the support of other parents. The sense of inclusion in the school was an impressive change for them too. They were impressed that they were now on first name terms with the head teacher and staff members. This made authority figures, whom they had previously felt intimidated by, much more approachable and will have an inevitable knock-on effect of more open communication regarding their children in the school.

I'd feel more comfortable now if I had to approach the headmistress or one of the teachers here ... it would be more comfortable for sure. Before you wouldn't know what they were like ... and, they also get to know us and what kind of people we are. And the home schoolteacher is here every morning we meet. And now we are all on first name terms with one another so that's a change really. It's also a lovely atmosphere here... **Friday Group Member**

Learning about education is incidental to the family learning process where content and pedagogical matters are discussed. For some, this opens up new areas of interest. We met and heard about a number of family learners who had become more ambitious as a result of their experience.

She felt she didn't have — education got lost somewhere, you know. I mean, she had to work, go out to work early, and there wasn't a focus with her parents to educate her. Now, when she had her own children she realised, well, I want them to have a better advantage than I had. So she heard about the family learning — she heard in the school. So she said, 'Oh, I'll give that a try. I'm not going to stay but I'm going to give it a try. But I'm not going to stay.' She now wants to go on. And, she said just yesterday, 'I know I can now go onto further education. I want to become a tutor. I want to go into adult education. I want to get that degree and I can do it.' And that's what she said. And she said, 'I'm doing it.' So she said, 'Well, my computer skills are not the best, so in January myself and my husband we are going and we're doing a computer course as well.' She said, 'I'm going to need that to type up my assignments for College.' **KCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Family learning changes parents' lives and there is copious evidence of a multiplier effect in families and communities.

School benefits

The principal of the DEIS primary school in Kilkenny highly praised the role of family learning in transforming the educational experience of children in her school. She was closely involved in the activities of the Friday Group. This was not accidental. She purposively saw the group as a way of giving added support to families where it was needed. She cooperated closely with the ETB tutors and was involved in a range of collaborative social inclusion partnerships in the wider community.

She provided detailed evidence of the group's success in improving children's learning experiences both in school and at home. The Friday Group parents had become a positive and appreciated influence within the school.

Well, what they're saying is that parents are more involved, you know, that they know that parents are doing the homework, they know that parents are reading the book with them, and they know that before those parents would — when the HSCL teacher would do a session on — you know, she's doing it now in junior infants — kits they could bring home with magnetic letters in it and different things they can do, games they can play around that. Those parents may not have been the parents who would have done that before, whereas now they would because they see the importance of literacy.

DEIS School Principal

The Friday Group parents had become those who could be depended upon to participate in school activities that supported literacy and numeracy development. Their participation in school-based literacy and numeracy activities had enabled their understanding and willingness to join in other school activities. The relationships of trust that have developed have eliminated parents' fears of being judged as wanting, and these parents now avail of all opportunities to support their children.

Now, we also have the Reading Recovery programme in the school, so some of those children would be involved in that. And parents come in and observe that. And they can come in and observe as many times ... so those parents would now come in to observe. And then they can practise with the children afterwards. They learn that and any of the parents that come to the Friday Group would have a very good rate of involvement, you know? **DEIS School Principal**

The Friday Group activities are no longer ancillary, they have become an integral and prized part of the annual school calendar.

Now, the highlight of the school year is the Intercultural Day, and the highlight of that would be launching whatever project the Friday Group have done, every year. **DEIS School Principal**

Wider community outcomes

Family learning has a significant impact on the wider environment. The Friday Group in Kilkenny DEIS School has made an impression in a number of ways both in the national family literacy sector and in the Kilkenny area. Parents from the Friday Group have addressed parents groups in the school and participated in a national NALA Family Literacy conference where they described their work.

Beyond the field of literacy and adult learning, the group's book on multiculturalism and the related wall hanging has attracted attention across the county. Their contribution to intercultural understanding is important in the group, in the school and in the wider society that sometimes struggles to find good role models for interculturalism.

...and the success story as well is that the wall hanging you'll see in the hall — that's gone to the County Council offices. It was displayed in Rothe House and in the library during Arts Week. It's on the Kilkenny People and one of the parents she spoke on Radio Kilkenny. **DEIS School Principal**

We did this book last year. There's an intercultural day here every year in the school and we launched the book at that. The Friday Group were all signing the book for their families and it was a really brilliant day. One of our famous hurlers launched the book. The work was on display in the local Council Offices and the group's pictures were in the paper! **KCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Conclusion

This school-based programme provides an interesting contrast to the previous case study in that there is a more explicit emphasis on the literacy work of the school. Each case study was developed to match a different context and diverse adult learning needs. These are local choices made by a family literacy coordinator – as part of the collaborative design of a local family literacy strategy. Together, the case studies exemplify the merits of both approaches in dealing with intergenerational literacy learning, and they are indicative of the diversity that family literacy has to offer.

The Friday Group is an unassuming but impressive example of what family literacy and family learning can achieve when school literacy is the focus. It is rooted in caring and strategic relationships and mobilises what is best in people and learning systems to make a brighter and more inclusive future. Children, parents, the school and the community all benefit immeasurably from this DEIS-ETB partnership.

Good practice example 3: Waterford and Wexford ETB, engaging and retaining marginalised parents

In Waterford and Wexford ETB (WWETB), there are 1,800 adult literacy learners and 180 of these are family literacy learners. Table 6 below provides more detail on family literacy provision in this ETB in terms of hours, staffing, courses, accreditation options and so on.

Table 6: Waterford and Wexford ETB in numbers

| Category | Total |
|--|-------|
| Total number of adult literacy learners | 1,800 |
| Total of family literacy learners | 180 |
| Family literacy hours per week | 50 |
| Paid family literacy tutor hours in 2017 | 800 |
| Family literacy organiser hours in 2017 | 100 |
| Family literacy courses in 2017 | 50 |
| Hours of family literacy in 2017 | 600 |
| Accredited options on offer | Yes |
| QQI Levels | 1-3 |
| Course completers | 118 |
| Progression to more learning | 39 |

Family learning tends to promote an image of close affective relationships where smiling parents and contented children participate in fun learning. This is often the case, and during our fieldwork we have seen ample examples of such excellent learning practices. We have also repeatedly heard about the difficulty that ETBs have in attracting 'target', 'reluctant' or 'hard to reach' adults whose prior learning experiences and present life circumstances keep learning low on their personal and family agenda. No family learning is ever wasted, but there are priorities of need. Often, trusting relationships with community organisations, help services to contact those in greatest need.

WWETB work closely with Focus Ireland and Respond to provide for learners experiencing homelessness and mental health issues – issues that make it harder for learners to be consistent in how they deal with family learning demands. In New Ross, we met with a group of learners, women and men, and their tutor and discussed the benefits they had reaped from family learning and their advice for attracting others in from the margins.

Ethos

WWETB does not have a defined family literacy ethos, but it operates a learner-centred provision that aims to engage adult learners and support them to identify their own learning trajectory. A community development perspective is clear in the data with requests from a host of agencies being positively received and responded to collaboratively. The AEO made it clear that they work from a socially situated view of literacy and carry this through to their family learning provision.

The WWETB endeavours to offer a broad range of subjects in order to encourage those with the lowest levels of literacy to engage with the Service. In this context, the word Literacy is used in the broadest sense. This helps to avoid the stigma, which some people attach to it and helps to overcome earlier negative educational experience.

WWETB AEO

We met with a family learning tutor who exemplified the success of this approach. She had begun as a family literacy learner and progressed to qualify as a family learning tutor. Her empathy with the learners was evident and, her relationship with them is based on a special and recent understanding of the learner experience.

Because I came through the same journey, I understand where learners are. I don't judge anyone. I struggled myself and when I went back to education at fifty my knees were shaking. I don't know how I went in through the door that first day. I take that into consideration, and I'm also aware that I am learning from people as well. I have four different groups I do cooking with. A lot of my groups are people who aren't working. They like the homeliness of the classes. The atmosphere is very good during classes. The last thing you need is a school type environment when it is your first time coming back. **WWETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Inevitably learners appreciated this tutor's approach, as it helped them to feel relaxed and receptive to learning.

That's a big change for me too... when we were young education was completely different. There was no connection between the teachers and the pupils. It's far more relaxed now. **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

One man had tried a number of mainstream classes with different tutors before settling with this particular tutor. His reasons for not staying in two previous classes were discomfort that he had not made his literacy issues known to tutors, and he rapidly became lost in both the computer class and cookery class he had joined. He told us he felt liberated by the adult learning ethos and the recognition and respect he experienced when his tutor understood his issues.

Yeah and it's not so strict, you can have a laugh but you also learn and you do take it serious. It's not

like we are in class, sitting down. We're adults and we're treated like adults. **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

Collaboration

WWETB works with a large number of agencies mostly in an *ad hoc* manner. There is no family learning coordinator, but part of the role of the Adult Literacy Organiser is to make contact with every agency in their area where some form of literacy support may be needed. Work is also ongoing with some DEIS schools HSE teachers, HSE and Waterford Institute of Technology. WIT has a module of Family Literacy tutor training is well established.

WWETB, like all ETBs, has a protocol with the library and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), where formal meetings and reviews take place at AEO and Director level. WWETB is represented by the AEO at the interagency refugee meetings in the county where ESOL/Literacy plans, including ESOL family learning activities, are discussed.

Discussions acknowledged the contribution of partnership agencies to the smooth running of family learning.

But, I mean, a lot of the programmes wouldn't succeed without the supports of the agencies. And you do need the agencies maybe to encourage, you know, send around a text message the night before to say, look, you know, remember class is going on at 9 o'clock in the morning, whatever. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Focus Ireland and Respond Facebook pages were cited as evidence of how social media can be a useful point of information exchange. With more than a hundred users, the page is an important means of engaging new learners through a trusted community of practice.

Family learning practice

Some of the family learners we met told us of **additional difficulties** they had in returning to learning. These included mental health issues. They knew what they were expected to do – learn, progress and move into employment. However, they were painfully aware of how their **mental health issues** made them afraid to hope for this outcome and they felt limited by their issues.

When you're on your own its hard, and it's not nice being labelled. 'You're on the dole and your child is old enough and you should be out working', but they don't know what a mental health patient goes through on a daily basis. I wish I had the confidence to go out and work and to make sure my child is ok but when you do your medical card gets taken off you and your rent goes up and its difficult if you are married or in a relationship you know...and it's embarrassing going down and collecting your money in a small town ... queuing up outside the post office and everyone knowing your business.

You're labelled and I hate that. I don't want to suffer with my mental health. I want to make sure my kids are ok and looked after ... sorry I get a bit emotional. **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

From the outset, family learning providers were careful to assure people that engagement in learning would entail **no hidden costs**. Even the fear of hidden costs can mean a learner doesn't return the second week.

So like the first days of family learning we would actually outline, you know, that say if it was held on nutrition, like, that we'd provide the ingredients. All those kind of things that will actually encourage them to come back. **WWETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Learners, in turn, described being given a positive introduction to a particular tutor by friends - and finding the experience with that tutor life changing. From a position of isolation and unmet literacy needs, one learner became engaged in a family cookery class. She felt more confident working on literacy and became conscious of her ability to learning and the new skills she was acquiring. Paramount in all of this was the basic capacity to leave the home and become integrated in a supportive learning environment.

I'm the type of person who stays home, you know? I'm not good at reading or writing. I joined the family learning class and with her you don't have to read anything ... she'd help you along and explain everything and how to do this or that. Sometimes there is writing, but I'm kind of getting confident with that now ... and she's with you every step of the way, and I can read the scales now ... and I could never do that before. I just love it ... getting out and going down there. It's like home from home when you go over there! **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

The level of empathy that the tutor showed during these very personal exchanges was telling. She integrates literacy and numeracy where she can, but, most importantly, she is consciously and effectively scaffolding personal esteem and igniting a new learner identity. There are material benefits too in the cookery class. The parents also get to take home what they cook, which is often a treat!

I'm in school with the parents and they have school going children. I came from a catering background. I like to get stuck in and to try and find 'teachable moments'. I work the literacy of cooking into the classes. We all eat together at the end of a session, and we evaluate it and prepare for the coming week. **WWETB Family Literacy Tutor**

And we all agree that together. And we take home leftovers and the kids have that and they tell their friends about it especially when I make buns! **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

Learners explained the factors that inhibit their participation in adult learning, and how easily it is to put off by their own lack of resources or even fear of being unable to meet hidden costs. Those parenting alone were limited by childcare demands and the timing of courses.

A lot of people I've spoken to say childcare are the main issue. They have young kids and they can't get to classes because of that. Also the registration form is a bit personal you know? I don't know why they need our PPS numbers. I think that is personal.

WWETB Family Literacy Learner

Times, childcare, cost ... they all stop me. I have no one else to depend on. Her father passed away, and I have to be there for her when she comes home ... and, I can't afford childcare to go to a class ... and so that means I can't go unless the times suit.

WWETB Family Literacy Learner

Outcomes

Despite sizeable barriers to reengaging with learning, the people we met had positive things to say about their social, health and learning outcomes. The data strengthen the evidence that **all** parents want the very best for their children and to have a better life than their own. The gains in one woman's life were clear: family learning outcomes in terms of modelling good learning practices with her daughter, increasing her love and interest in school and intensifying the amount of family learning activity. The relationship between parent and child is also stronger and more joyful. Nonetheless, she qualifies all this with regret that she cannot, as socially expected, become a breadwinner at this time.

I honestly don't have the confidence to work at the moment. I do suffer with my mental health. Seeing my little one happy at me going out-doing it – means a lot to me. The meals I've made here I've made at home with my daughter, and she loves it and we're doing it together and I wouldn't have been able to do that unless I went to the classes and it gives me quality time with her.

And she loves school now, and I think I have given her more interest in it. She doesn't miss a day. I'm trying to encourage her. I left school very young and it's now that I'm regretting it so I don't want her to feel that ... I want her to see the good side.

WWETB Family Literacy Learner

The challenge for children in having a parent, and possibly a lone parent, with mental health issues can impair their entire life experience, including the ability to deal with the demands of school. Engaging those with mental health issues and multiple disadvantages in family learning can transform the lives of children and parents in ways that are difficult to capture in annual returns. One mother described the layers of satisfaction prompted by her return to family learning.

My little one was delighted. I started the cooking ... she asks me when I go out to ask the teacher to make fairy cakes. She'd be really excited you know, and it's great for her to see that mammy wasn't just sitting at home doing nothing and that I was out.

WWETB Family Literacy Learner

The school remarked on the increased presence of one mother in the school and her obvious involvement in her child's learning. Others were aware of parents who, through family learning programmes, had begun volunteering as a Reading Buddy in school, joined the school Management Board or merely been seen more often in the community. These were signs of family learning success that the learners had witnessed first-hand.

The wider cultural shift that takes place in families means that family learning is impacting on cycles of educational disadvantage, and, where successful, family learning disrupts these cycles.

It [family learning] encourages parents to be more proactive with their children's education and to be more involved in what they're doing. And, I think that has a long-term impact. I think it is that modelling behaviour as well. If they see their parents doing something, they see their parents engaging with material and resources and things like that, and that becomes part of their everyday lives. It's just accepted, you know. **WWETB literacy worker**

Family learning had produced a whole range of outcomes in the lives of groups of learners. Their sense of personal achievement and the impact on their relationship to their children's learning development is evident. While for some the steps back to learning may be faltering, others have become firmly engaged as adult lifelong learners who would like more learning opportunities in the week and whose sense of well-being is positively affected. I'd love if there were more classes for me during the week. It really benefitted me and my mental health. **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

These learners' affirmation was clear in their instinct to spread the word more widely about such learning opportunities and the power they hold to transform marginalised lives.

I feel like there isn't enough information out there about what is happening. Maybe it's there and I'm not hearing it? I think mental health is a big topic now and there's a lot of people suffering with it and there should be more there for people now than just going to the doctor and having tablets thrown at you. The best answer is getting out and learning, meeting people and building confidence. **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

Conclusion

Much like the previous two case studies, in WWETB the learned-centred ethos of family learning provision provides the solid foundation from which every other aspect of the programme can then develop and thrive. An emphasis on the affective dimension of learning encourages learners to come, take part, persist and flourish. Learners who very often face multiple and complex barriers to learning are supported both with sound adult learning principles and relevant learning and also, most importantly, empathy and care from tutors, organisers, centre staff and peers.

Protocols for interagency cooperation, coupled with the efforts of ETBs staff and other relevant agencies, are managing to reach adults and their families with most to gain from a family learning programme. WWETB shows both ingenuity and tenacity in developing and maintaining these links.

The visit to WWETB and discussions with learners and WWETB staff provided rich evidence of the wider impacts of adult learning for the learner themselves, their family, schools and communities.

Summary remarks on case studies

The findings in this chapter are based on data collected in relation to three ETBs: Limerick and Clare - LCETB, Kilkenny and Carlow - KCETB and Waterford and Wexford - WWETB. The evidence was gathered from interviews with staff (AEOs, ALOs, Project workers and tutors), stakeholders and learners. Further evidence is from our observations of family learning activities and close reading of documentary evidence and published papers and reports on provision in relevant areas. All interviews and field notes were transcribed, coded and analysed using MAXQDA, a software package that supports rigorous and systematic data analysis.

In our analysis, we have been mindful of the Further Education and Training Strategy and the specific goals established for literacy and numeracy, including family learning. We can say definitively that **family learning is effective** in engaging learners who have not hitherto participated in lifelong learning. Once engaged, these parents respond well to the adult learning approach commonly used in the literacy scheme. Taking part in adult learning upgrades parents' skills, affording some learners the possibility of accreditation from Levels 1-3, which can be a popular option with learners, particularly those without qualifications. Many progress to other courses and some move into employment training or work. All of this activity is in line with active inclusion policy and goals and might be able to deliver further on these targets with a more supportive structure and increased investment.

Finally, we found clear evidence that family learning delivers on the objectives of positively impacting children's experience of school, the benefits they derive from education and the development of their learning identity. This evidence was collected from family learners, their tutors, HSCL teachers and a Head Teacher. We participated in some learning activities and so we were also able to talk to some children who affirmed the evidence already given.

The case studies elaborate **key aspects** of family learning:

- how to use an integrated approach to literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in family learning activities,
- how to reap maximum benefit from partnerships between a DEIS School, the HSCL teacher and the ETB literacy service, and
- how to use family learning activities to engage and retain the most marginalised adult learners.

This case study evidence helps to sketch the national picture of family learning in ETBs in some detail. It also reflects some of the ways this approach to lifelong learning can become even more valuable for active inclusion.



Chapter 6

Conclusion

In the six months between September 2018 and February 2019, we have gathered comprehensive evidence that further education and training (FET) family literacy activities have a significant and positive impact on adult learners and their families.

Socially-situated literacy in action

While we opt for the term family literacy, much of the practice we have seen is presented as family learning, and we respect the terms used in different places. In this study, we have taken a socially situated understanding of literacy as proposed some decades ago by New Literacy scholars (Hamilton et al, 2000). Family learning is different from community education in that family learning has the specific intent to improve literacy learning for both adults and their children. As such, we view family literacy and integrated family learning as part of the same learning continuum. This is the same perspective that we see at work in the current focus on integrated or embedded literacy in vocational training (Casey et al, 2006; Hegarty and Feeley, 2009).

Vocational skill, oral and written language and numeracy components can all be learned together in their specific social and vocational context. Integrated or themed family literacy uses a similar pedagogical approach. In family literacy, the basic skills are integrated into a host of topics that allow adult learners to re-engage with learning and, thereby, enable them to better support their children's experience of schooling.

Literacy helps when viewed through an equality perspective

Alongside a socially situated view of literacy, we have included an equality perspective (Baker et al, 2004). Although it is not always recognised as the case, our position is that unmet literacy needs is closely related to intergenerational educational inequalities. In turn, these correlate to wider structural inequalities: economic, cultural, political and affective (Ibid., 2004; Feeley, 2014). For this reason, we conceptualise the barriers and solutions to good practice within a framework that focuses on the four overarching and interconnected elements of equality:

1. resource,
2. cultural,
3. relational, and
4. systemic.

Like other studies, we show evidence that family literacy in Ireland clearly contributes to widening participation in lifelong learning (Carpentieri, 2011; NIACE, 2013a). Parents repeatedly state that they are prepared to engage in learning for their children rather than for their own immediate learning needs. They are concerned for their children's future well-being and prepared to face their own demons about education to help their children's life chances.

Parents establish a new learning identity and become integrated into a solidary parent groups and often into the wider community. Children too benefit in terms of the attitude and skills they acquire from a richer family learning culture. They are reportedly happier and more engaged in school, more attentive when doing their homework and more consistent in terms of school attendance and participation.

We learned that the school culture, where family learning activities take place, has changed to embrace the role of parents as co-facilitators of their children's learning development. This is a substantial improvement on a situation where many parents felt unwelcome and disregarded in their child's school (Hegarty and Feeley, 2010).

Life-changing learning opportunities in key documents

Providing these life-changing learning opportunities is written into the strategic documents of a number of government departments (DCYA, 2014; DES, 2005; 2011; 2017; SOLAS, 2014; DRDC, 2018). In turn, SOLAS strategic goals reflect those of the EU2020 Strategy (EU, 2013) and the UNESCO Family literacy policies (UIL, 2015; 2017). Family literacy shows itself to be an effective tool in delivering on the strategic goals of national government plans as well as European and global educational objectives.

First mapping exercise – and more measurement will further help understanding

This is the first mapping exercise of FET family literacy activities in Ireland that has taken an all-inclusive approach – one where all ETB providers of family literacy were consulted. Our fieldwork involved visits and qualitative data collection in the 16 ETB areas. There was a 100 percent response rate to the survey of quantitative and administrative data for 2017. Despite this full cooperation, precise data are limited by the absence of separate classification for family literacy on the PLSS data system. This situation has now changed since 2019, and full family literacy data will be available from 2020 onwards. Data-based decisions about the delivery and outcomes of family literacy will be a significant change to the current *ad hoc* situation. It is vital that clear

measurement is used to improve monitoring, evaluation and implementation of family literacy. A reductive focus on quantitative administrative data is unhelpful.

Robust data will allow the complexity of family literacy interventions to be more clearly understood. Accurate measurements will enable appropriate resourcing, and this will – as all ETBs indicated – allow growth in family literacy provision. As a consequence, there will be benefits for families, schools and communities, as well as a boost to the strategic objectives of child and adult literacy learning targets.

Excellent provision but more support needed

We conclude that there is excellent family literacy activity in the FET sector, and that it would benefit from additional resources and a more formal structure. Providers told us that they lacked the financial and human resources to reach the numbers of pre-schools, schools and families who would benefit from family literacy provision. The coordination of family literacy is most often part of the wider adult literacy responsibility of one or more ALOs or project workers.

Family literacy needs dedicated people locally

Making family literacy development a more focused position was suggested by every ETB. They felt that the development of vital connections with stakeholders needed to be held by one or two people who would lead, and be accountable for, family literacy in an ETB area. Coordination would include recognition that beyond the ETB, family literacy is part of pre-school, school, library and community areas of interest and common ground can usefully be established and collaboratively developed.

Core local family literacy groups needed

We learned that collaborative partnerships between FET providers, DEIS schools and HSCL teachers were the basis of good family literacy provision. In addition, public libraries and CYPSCs have common objectives with education providers in that they in offer rural and community literacy development and assistance for children, young people and their families that are in need of multiagency supports. These four partners, led by the ETB, should form a core local family literacy group that audits community need and develops a family literacy strategy. Other agencies can be co-opted as required, and their local networks with parents in need will increase the reach of the core group without the partnership becoming too unwieldy.

Excellent training in place and lots of demand for training

Training of family literacy tutors takes place in Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) and in Clare Family Learning. Practitioners found these beneficial, as were NALA family literacy conferences (annual). These conferences allow for networking across ETBs and with HSCL teachers and others.

Other training was suggested to enhance understanding amongst the different education sectors that collaborate on family literacy. In fact, considerable opportunities exist in collaborative partnerships for structured, as well as informal, cross-organisational learning. School personnel would find it useful to take part in awareness training about adult literacy and adult education approaches. Family literacy staff would equally benefit from awareness training about the school curriculum.

Collaboration would be enriched by these cultural exchanges. However, building collaborative partnerships in most ETBs is currently left to chance. Resourcing awareness training would enable tighter strategic planning and more culturally aware cooperation in delivering on a negotiated joint strategy.

Skilled tutors - but training and HR issues need to be addressed

Skilled family literacy tutors were essential to the development and delivery of programmes, but there was concern at the lack of security in employment status for many tutors. We hope that the availability of reliable data about tutor hours and enrolment figures will assist in the human resource decisions in the future.

Not all tutors were trained. This was due to factors like:

- their part-time status,
- their availability for CPD, and
- the question of who bore the costs of training for those not in full-time employment.

Tutor availability was a challenge for those coordinating provision. They struggled at times to find an appropriate tutor for a short course. Part-time staff inevitably favoured longer courses as these gave a greater job security.

Accreditation should be optional

It was clear that accreditation should remain optional, especially for those engaged in family learning in schools where children were also participants. QQI components were not thought to capture the very context specific skills that parents acquire, including their facilitation role in children's learning and their often significant contribution to the school community.

One-off and short-family literacy activities were not considered appropriate for accreditation.

Evidence shows the effectiveness of family literacy activities

We conclude from the evidence gathered that family literacy activities are effective in engaging adult learners and contributing to the raising of literacy skills levels across generations. Mental health and well-being are also enhanced by participation in adult learning.

Many of the positive contributions of family literacy merit closer scrutiny, and research on, and evaluation of, new structures will be helped by better data collection and clearer organisational structures.





Chapter 7

Recommendations

We hope that the following evidence-based recommendations enable family literacy activities to reach a greater number of families who will most benefit from them. Literacy inequalities are detrimental to individuals, families and communities, and the data collected in this study strongly suggest that every interested sector can reap rewards from cooperation in FET family literacy delivery.

The recommendations are designed to extend and strengthen current practice and enable the expansion of the collaborative endeavour that is the key element of good family literacy.

1.0 Collaboration

1.1 Promote Interdepartmental Collaboration

An interdepartmental government group that is concerned with family literacy objectives should be set up to steer the development of national family literacy policy. The group should be representative of practitioners and community stakeholders. They should be family-literacy champions and encourage the equality outcomes that intergenerational learning can deliver.

1.2 Build collaborative family literacy partnerships

To facilitate a more systematic approach to family literacy, core collaborative family literacy partnerships should be built. These would allow FET, DEIS, public libraries and CYPSCs to develop provision that harnesses all their skills, resources and contacts with parents who will most benefit from family literacy. These core groups should meet with other stakeholders and develop a local, needs-based family literacy strategy. Other stakeholders will need to participate less frequently and as local circumstances dictate. The partnership building process should be meaningfully resourced and supported.

1.3 Collect data about local family literacy partnerships

Data collection about local family literacy collaborative partnerships should gather information about all elements of the partnerships:

- engagement in adult learning,
- measured and observed impacts in schools,
- changes in use of public libraries, and
- observed impacts on families using CYPSCs services.

1.4 Establish a national repository for family literacy resources

A national repository should be established for family literacy research, learning resources and course outlines. These can be shared amongst practitioners. The ETBI digital library which is currently being developed may form part of this facility.

1.5 Develop a digital hub

A digital hub to facilitate tutor and learner dialogue should be established.

2.0 Planning and delivery

2.1 Focus provision on literacy content

Whether it is called family literacy or family learning, the essence of provision should be literacy focussed in content and intergenerational in the scope of learning.

2.2 Ensure an equitable spread of programmes

ETB strategic planning should ensure that family literacy is available to interested parents and schools across the catchment area. Those in greatest need should be prioritised where limited resources do not allow all requests to be answered.

2.3 Facilitate meaningful and constructive evaluation

Recognition of the long engagement process into literacy learning should be recognised when evaluating and measuring family literacy.

2.4 Value strengths-based and learner-centred approaches

The Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024 should continue to emphasise the value of strengths-based and learner-centred approaches to family learning. This ethos should be recognised and articulated as the underpinning culture of family literacy.

2.5 Provide adequate resourcing

Family literacy coordination and delivery should be adequately resourced. All ETBs suggested ring-fenced funding for family literacy. This is something to be addressed between ETBs and SOLAS. Data should be collected as a separate category from other literacy provision. This will provide evidence to inform future planning.

2.6 Honour learner ambitions

Accreditation should remain an optional aspect of family literacy. Measures of the 'soft skills' that family literacy facilitates should be developed and used to build evidence about diverse and unmeasured outcomes. Those wishing to develop family literacy accreditation should be supported and resourced to do so.

2.7 Keep knowledge and evidence fresh

Ongoing research and evidence gathering is needed about family literacy/intergenerational learning (where possible as part of wider longitudinal studies). Studies might usefully include:

- the impact of home-based family literacy,
- the gendered nature of learning care work,
- the impact of homelessness on family literacy practices, and
- how to ensure the greater inclusion of other underrepresented groups.

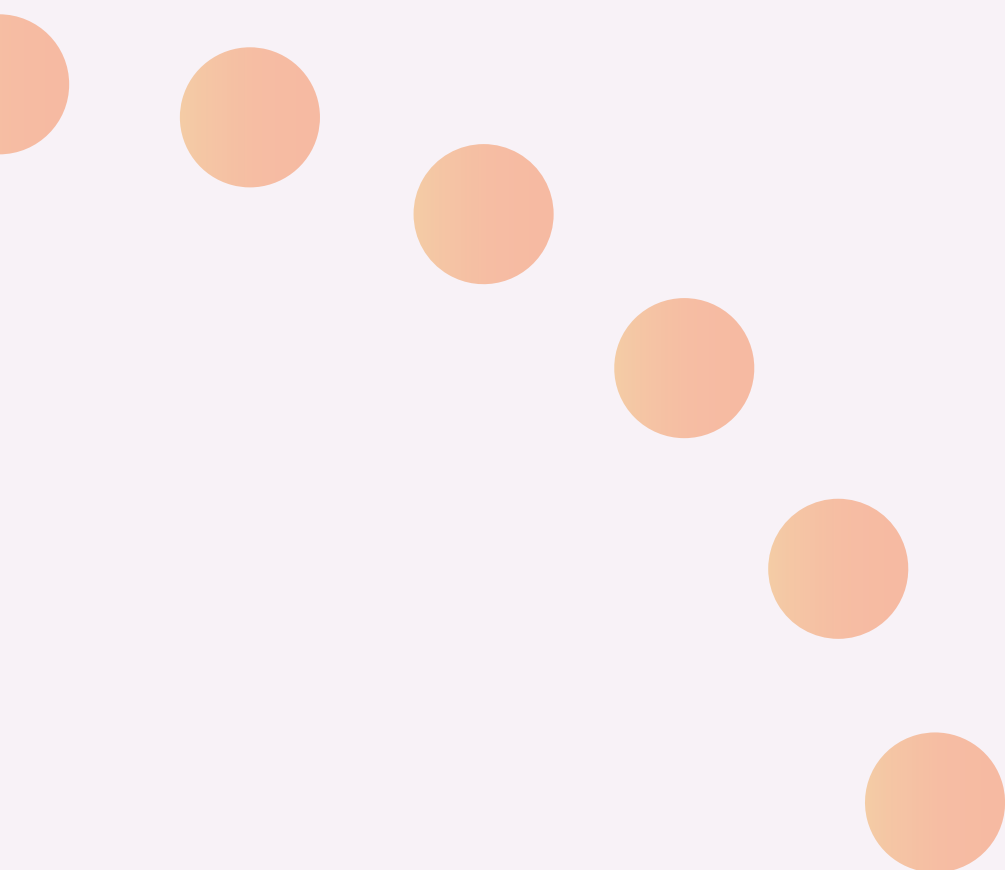
3.0 Training and Development

3.1 Continuing professional development for core partners

Continuing professional development (CPD) about childhood and adult learning should be available to core partner members so that they better understand the nature of their collaborative task.

3.2 Training for all family literacy staff

All family literacy staff should have access to family literacy and integrated literacy training and support for the development of innovative approaches to themed family literacy.



Chapter 8

Guidelines for good family literacy practice

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Paulo Freire, 1972: 3)

Introduction

These guidelines are created based on the learning from all aspects of the study of FET family literacy (Hegarty and Feeley, 2019) and an assumption that the systemic recommendations in the report are agreed. The suggestions for a structure that might support good family literacy practice are not prescriptive. They are 'draft' guidelines' to be interpreted in each ETB as part of a process of reviewing and strengthening local provision. The guidelines are written from a **New Literacy Studies perspective** that proposes that literacy varies according to the social context in which it is practised and needs to be reinterpreted in each new location (Hamilton et al, 2000). For example, literacy is not *performed* in the same way at home as it is in a more formal setting like the workplace. The language and punctuation we use in a *literacy event* like a text message are not the same as we might use in a formal letter to a child's schoolteacher.

Literacy is socially situated, and we all need to constantly learn to adjust to the expectations of each different *literacy context*. Some people think of there being not one but many different literacies (Street, 2003). We prefer to think of developing a **literacy toolkit** that allows an individual to deal appropriately with a diverse literacy demands. In a rapidly changing world, we will need to add to this toolkit as language and literacy evolve to incorporate such things as changes in language, digital technology and online communications.

Role of each ETB

So, each ETB, must reflect, discuss and decide what structure and processes will best support family literacy in its catchment area. What follows are 14 draft detailed guidelines around which that discussion might usefully take place. An 'at a glance' set of the guidelines follows after.

Guidelines for Good Family Literacy Practice

1. Taking time to think about family literacy

Guideline 1.1 Retain a learner-centred ethos that values parents' role

Whether we recognise it or not, we all have a set of beliefs that underpin how we view the world and how we act in it. In the field of adult literacy, adopting an *adult learning approach* is usually seen as the most appropriate. Sometimes known as *andragogy* (Knowles 1984) there are four basic precepts to an adult approach to facilitating learning that will ensure it is engaging and beneficial.

1. Adults need to be involved in planning and evaluating what they learn.
2. Experience (including mistakes) is the basis for adult learning.
3. The content of learning should be immediately relevant to the adult's life.
4. Learning should be problem-centred, or situational, rather than content orientated.

Paulo Freire approached adult literacy from a similar but more radical, egalitarian or critical viewpoint, and many adult literacy tutors approach their work from a Freirean perspective. If literacy is socially situated then the unequal state of that social context is relevant to the content and processes of literacy work. Critical learning theorists like Freire focused on creating anti-authoritarian, interactive and emancipatory learning experiences (Freire, 1972; Apple, 2012; 2015).

Social inequalities are central to critical literacy and inform its content, learning relationships and outcomes. Like andragogy, critical literacy develops person-focused learning experiences that are characterised by active, socially and culturally authentic investigation rather than passive assimilation of detached and prescribed wisdom. The adult learning approach aims, therefore, not to be the purveyor of knowledge but to facilitate its discovery and rediscovery and to learn more clearly how to enable that to happen.

Unlike the 'banking' form of learning decried by Freirean pedagogy (Freire, 1972), critical literacy and andragogy both implicitly propose an approach to learning where learners actively create knowledge rather than passively absorbing knowledge created by others.

Wherever we are on the ideological continuum, we are never neutral. Our position always has its impact on our work. Each ETB needs to examine what an adult-learning approach means in their context so that every aspect of provision is informed by an adult-learning ethos.

In the case of family literacy, we respect that parents are experts in their own child/ren and put them and their concerns at the centre of the work. In that way, learners will quickly come to understand that they are respected and viewed equally. Family literacy can become a new beginning where previous, possibly damaging experiences of learning can be left behind.

Provide provision that is learner-centred

Delivery of family literacy should be sensitive to learners' needs and the learning environment should be comfortable, relaxed and accessible. Much family literacy takes place in contexts where learners, schools and communities have direct experience of social disadvantage and multiple inequalities. For that reason, tutors and other ETB staff need support around the degree to which they become critical pedagogues concerned with challenging the contextual injustices within which their work takes place (Apple, 2012; 2015).

Consider and plan collaborative partnerships

Michael Apple identified 9 tasks for the critical educator or organic intellectual. He suggests that the role of a tutor should:

1. Expose exploitation
2. Indicate spaces for change
3. Support community-led actions for change
4. Deploy intellectual skills for the purpose of change
5. Defend and extend the role of radical critical traditions
6. Maintain focus and accessibility for multiple audiences
7. Get off the balcony! (meaning move on from observing to acting)
8. Embody the role of critical researcher and activist
9. Use privilege to extend the reach of education to those without a voice. (Apple, 2012; 2015)

These are ideological suggestions that will not coincide with all viewpoints, but they suggest that discussions about ethos are intricately connected to delivery. As such, they merit consideration in developing a collaborative partnership so that partners are each clear about terms of engagement.

The ideological tradition of critical literacy has strong roots in community-based adult learning (Freire and Macedo, 1987) and tutors and others are constantly challenged to balance tensions between ideology and policy. The degree to which inequality and social disadvantage are implicated in adult literacy and family learning is a significant part of the complex environment within which ETB work takes place.

Guideline 1.2 Identify and agree terms used in family literacy strategies

The background research underpinning these guidelines provides guiding definitions to help develop local family literacy strategies. Definitions are diverse and important for who and what they include or omit. Some of the definitions below are from published material, and some are devised or adapted for this document. The intention is to include and respect all types of families. These definitions of types of literacy recognise the idea that family or school literacy practices may be in diverse languages including Irish, English and a wide range of other mother tongues used in families.

Literacy involves listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. However, it includes more than the technical skills of communication. It also has personal, social and economic dimensions. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change (NALA, 2011b).

Digital literacy is the ability to use various digital platforms to find, evaluate, create and communicate information in a range of text, visual and auditory media. These may include mobile phones, tablets, laptop computers, PCs and televisions. Digital literacy combines technical and cognitive skills and has many applications for leisure, health, work, individual and family learning.

Family is a unit of people bound by special affective relationships; these may be multi-generational, historic and rooted in biological bonds or lifetime commitments of love, care and solidarity (Hegarty and Feeley, 2010).

Family literacy describes the uses of literacy and numeracy within families and communities, especially activities that involve two or more generations. Family literacy also denotes education programmes that help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context (NALA, 2004: 8).

Family literacy ESOL is the opportunity to learn and practise English in the context of becoming included in the community and supporting children's schooling. Family literacy ESOL may include literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, but it has a primary focus on oral language acquisition.

Integrated/themed family literacy is the process of developing language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in the context of, and at the same time as, learning a new skill. Parents and children may learn the new skill together or parents may learn how to support the child in learning both the skill and the integrated literacy element at home. Integrated family literacy helps support parents to identify literacy learning moments as part of everyday family life.

Guideline 1.3 Focus on the value of learning relationships and resource this work

Relationships are fundamental to the organisational structure for family literacy proposed here. The work that develops and sustains learning care relationships should be recognised as time consuming work (Feeley, 2014). Recognising the value of learning relationships is fundamental to adequately resourcing this core element of the work. ETBs need to support those that negotiate and sustain the relationships that underpin the delivery and outcomes of family literacy work. Well-resourced learning relationships will translate into more extensive and effective family literacy delivery and ultimately contribute to reaching national and EU targets in lifelong learning.

Guideline 1.4 Celebrate achievements in learning and other outcomes

A particularly joyful part of the adult learning process is celebrating achievements. There are many occasions when family literacy celebrations can happen. At the end of an activity or course when parents (and children) are satisfied with the learning they have achieved. It may be that learners have completed an evaluation and have recognised the extent of their learning. It may be when an accreditation is completed. Celebrations may be a way of acknowledging a successful collaborative partnership or an opportunity to raise awareness of family literacy and attract new learners.

2. Developing and delivering learner-centred programmes

Guideline 2.1. Provide a range of relevant and accessible courses for learners

Family literacy activities should be designed with learners at local level and draw on existing course outlines.

Each ETB will have its menu of family literacy activities that is published in ways that make them accessible to prospective learners. As an adult learning approach suggests, family learners should be involved in establishing the detail of their own learning experience. This does not mean every activity is completely new. A body of existing course outlines exist, and they are accessible through NALA's Tutors' Information Hub section of the NALA website²³ and through [fetchcourses.ie](https://www.fetchcourses.ie). Many course outlines are adapted to meet the needs and interests of particular groups and communities. Clare Family Learning also has several publications that include resource guides and all of which are available online.²⁴

Trained family literacy tutors are adept at course development and learner-centred literacy delivery. These activities for learners will be closely related to family, school and community interests. Communities may be geographical or special interest groups of parents and carers with whom course content and delivery can be negotiated.

Guideline 2.2. Use a central repository of family literacy resources

Developing and piloting new family literacy activities is a local matter.

Share resources

Sharing material family literacy resources is possible through the online *Tutors' Information Hub* on NALA's website. Some ETBs have developed short video resources and use of these may be negotiated directly. The ETBI digital library which is currently being developed may contribute to this collaboration. A repository for all family literacy materials should be developed and centrally managed so that the provenance of ideas and materials is clear and safe storage ensured.

Guideline 2.3. Prioritise access for learners with greatest need

Learners with greatest need should have **priority access** to family learning opportunities. This is a long engagement process. Those who are reluctant to return to learning, because they have lost their trust in the system of education, need the greatest effort invested in their reengagement. They need to be convinced that family literacy will make a positive contribution to their family life and make their children more secure and successful in their schooling and in later life.

Publicise provision

ETB networks, school, libraries, childhood and youth networks can be used to publicise family literacy provision. Community groups and agencies are well placed to connect learners with available learning opportunities. Children and other family literacy learners are amongst the most convincing advocates for family learning. Campaign assets from [takethefirststep.ie](https://www.takethefirststep.ie) can also be used at the local level to promote the benefits of family literacy.

Design strategies to reach underrepresented adults

Strategies to engage underrepresented groups in family literacy, in particular men, should be designed with partners so that the benefits are extended to all family members. Available learning opportunities across the country can be posted on the [helpmykidlearn.ie](https://www.helpmykidlearn.ie) and regularly updated.

²³ www.nala.ie/tutors accessed 22 February 2019.

²⁴ [Clare Family Learning Resources](#) accessed 22 February 2019.

Guideline 2.4 Establish clear and agreed ways to measure – and track – success at local level

Locally-developed criteria are best

Establishing criteria for success will be part of **each** local family literacy strategy.

Adult and childhood gains with accreditation as an option

These guidelines recommend that accreditation remains optional and not a core target of family literacy. Accreditation targets were considered by many as inappropriate for family literacy. National policymakers recognise the complexities of engaging those who are multiply disadvantaged, and, as such, accreditation should not be demanded in this context as a measure of success.

Criteria for successful family literacy must have congruent measures of success, and this may not involve QQI accreditation. At the same time, family literacy is a form of adult education and not solely for the benefit of children. Family literacy is a prime motivating factor in adult engagement and adult learning aspirations are valid and important. A balance between adult and childhood gains is not difficult to achieve and the evidence strongly suggests that everyone can be a winner in family literacy.

It would be interesting to gather more evidence of the short- and longer-term gains of children involved in family literacy. This data might be gathered at a local level or through inclusion in larger longitudinal studies. What the children say about family literacy promises to give another perspective on the benefits of family literacy practice.

Where there is an interest in accredited family literacy and a dearth of appropriate QQI modules, these may be developed using the expertise of practitioners. The potential for devising short QQI modules or elements of modules that match family literacy's purpose and delivery should be resourced. Accumulating credits from short courses may be attractive to some learners and tutors.

Identify, measure and certifying of soft skills gains

Whether or not QQI accreditation is being pursued, there is scope for to capture the wider benefits of learning such as:

- aspects of social and emotional intelligence
- listening
- communicating
- flexibility in groups
- people skills
- empathy

Identifying the skills in family literacy activities and measures that affirm learners' progress is an alternative to formal accreditation. ETB/FET certification for

soft skills and attendance would be encouraging for participants and provide a measure of positive outcomes other than accreditation.

In collaborative family literacy partnerships, success should be measured across the partner groups. Success may lie in engagement, retention, and progression or in some positive indicator of family literacy having been an effective intervention. Alongside FET gains, DEIS schools, libraries, CYPSCs and others should track the successes attributable to family literacy so that an inclusive result can be captured.

Guideline 2.5 Involve family literacy tutors, organisers and learners at all phases of the design, delivery and promotion.

Family literacy tutors and organisers are best placed to support learners as they begin to identify the next steps they wish to take. Educational guidance workers are available by appointment and will speak to groups or individual learners.

We have seen in the review of ETB family literacy practice that introducing adult learners to new learning locations and staff is a way of creating a bridge to the next stages of the learning journey. It is worth reminding learners that they are the most influential form of publicising family literacy to other parents. Word-of-mouth recommendations are a trusted means of information sharing particularly where people are wary of reengagement in education.

3. Future-proofing for flexible, responsive and appropriate family learning

Guideline 3.1 Remain familiar with, and contribute to, policy and research

Family literacy is mentioned in a range of policies at national, European and global level. Core childhood and adult educational policy has a strong focus on improving levels of literacy. There are a number of governmental departments with a mandate to support families and a range of agencies operating at regional and local levels who link with adults and families in greatest need of support. Keeping abreast of developments relating to family support in areas that are complementary to education can pave the way for timely interactions with colleagues in other organisations and departments with a mandate for family support.

Feeding into policy development is also an important consideration for the development of family learning. The FET sector provides valuable information to assist with reporting to the European Social Fund for literacy, family literacy and lifelong learning. This is one of the reasons why substantial amounts of data is collected during the FET registration process. Good reporting can shape better policies into the future.

While much research undertaken at national and European level relating to family learning is at the macro

level, there is a need for more research which tells the nuanced stories of engagement, outcomes and progression at the local level. ETBs may wish to engage such research during the next²⁵, and subsequent FET strategies.

Guideline 3.2. Create and maximise family literacy strategies that meet local needs and get the most value from funding

There are choices to be made about the organisation of family literacy in each ETB area. Here are some points to consider when making these choices.

Coordination for family literacy

All ETBs supported coordination for family literacy. They suggested that family literacy **coordination** is a responsibility that needs to be held by professionals who organise the consultation from which the family literacy strategy emerges.

An emphasis on coordination will develop and maintain collaborative relationships and manage a programme of family literacy events that meet local needs. Coordination of family literacy will include planning provision, collecting accurate data that presents an accessible picture of overall delivery, and evaluating provision. In geographically large areas, the ETB may decide that a number of people share this task and collaborate closely to ensure cohesion and best use of resources.

The coordination and management of family literacy should be rooted in a local plan and based on clear structures rather than the actions of an individual.

Coordination of FET family literacy in each ETB will have the following areas of responsibility:

- curricular,
- personnel, and
- budgetary management.

Each of these areas will take place within the parameters of ETB policy and guidelines. Most important is the underlying **relational area** of the organisational structure that involves making good learning relationships across a wide range of colleagues and stakeholders. The position should reflect the breadth of skills and responsibility required.

Collaborative partnership

Collaborative partnership was also thought important. Research has shown that key to a family literacy organisational structure is the task of building, developing and sustaining a collaborative partnership. Research also confirms that an interagency approach is key to accessing those parents who, because of previous unhappy experiences, may be unlikely to return to the education system (Carpentieri, 2011; NIACE, 2013a).

Core partners in family literacy work are:

- the DEIS schools,
- HSCL teachers,
- local libraries, and
- Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSCs).

Each of these has a **departmental policy imperative (and budget)** to apportion to family literacy. Each in turn will have a **network of stakeholders** who may be drawn upon to extend the reach of this area of literacy.

Led by the ETB, the core collaborative partnership should meet regularly to maintain momentum and share the work. A wider group of interested partners should meet at least twice a year to plan and review the effectiveness of the year's programme of family literacy activities. A record should be kept of the actions agreed at each partnership group meeting, so that family literacy is sustainably organised and necessary information is available.

Other supports at national and local levels

A development stage of each core family literacy group should be resourced so that an ethos, mission and strategic plan can be agreed.

Necessary Service Level Agreements (SLAs) or protocols will be put in place at departmental level and an interdepartmental group, and they should support and champion the work in ETBs.

An annual national **conference** will provide an opportunity to showcase and debate innovative and controversial areas of family literacy work.

The community of family literacy workers and learners may devise **other ways** to maintain the structure and network opportunities with colleagues and peer learners. Websites like helpmykidlearn.ie and magazines like NALA's *Literacy Matters* may be used to support communication and information exchange about family literacy.

Cost neutral innovations

Opportunities to have family learning programmes supported by other relevant organisations should be explored. There are many schemes in place which aim to foster a love of reading in children of all ages. For example, partnerships for book-gifting could be explored within or across ETBs so that all children and parents can have age-appropriate books in their home.

Because literacy is local, as well as generic, each ETB will create its own structure within the available resources and strategic imperatives.

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Guideline 3.3 Ensure there are sufficient learner supports

Network with other parents

Family literacy learners got support and satisfaction from the solidarity they discovered from relationships formed with other parents. Recognising learners' needs to network and facilitating this may be possible for some ETBs.

NALA's online *Students' Corner* may be of interest to some learners, as may the possibility to become a Student Ambassador and attract other learners to family literacy.

Promote information provision

Career Guidance and Information Services are also valuable resources to learners, and learners should be reminded of their availability. We have seen evidence that book-gifting is a valuable resource and a way of ensuring that all families have books available in the home. ETBs could consider investigating local sponsorship schemes in this regard and collaboration with local libraries will ensure families learn that there is a ready supply of books available to them and their children.

Address childcare and transport barriers

Childcare and transport were cited as barriers to learning and local solutions to these issues can be investigated. Again, partnerships with childcare providers and local link bus services may be formed that may provide some solutions.

Guideline 3.4 Ensure there are sufficient tutor supports

Create networking opportunities

Adult and family literacy tutors need to network with each other. Tutors often work part-time and some can be relatively isolated when working with groups, as they don't have regular contact with peers. Sustaining communications with tutors is an important aspect of learning relationships and needs to be planned into individual ETB structures. Tutors should be encouraged and supported to avail of any relevant networking opportunities. ETBs should consider ways to support tutors to avail of such opportunities while avoiding any financial or time-related cost to the tutor.

Provide CPD and other support

In the same way that networking opportunities are important for family literacy tutors, so too are other supports, including continuing professional development. Again, ETBs should consider ways to support tutors to avail of CPD opportunities while avoiding any financial or time-related cost to the tutor.

Tutor solidary networks should be encouraged and promoted so that all staff have a sense of belonging and sharing in the local family literacy strategy.

Guideline 3.5 Ensure reliable data is gathered in a user-friendly way – and reported on to track learning outcomes

SOLAS, ETBI and ETBs will agree the data collection system for future FET family literacy.

This data will be important in tracking the full extent of family literacy delivery and outcomes. Obligations to report on family literacy, as part of ESF funding, are at the root of much of the learner registration process. Strategies to make cumbersome ways of recording data more user-friendly and less time-consuming are currently being developed.

Where family literacy providers find alternative ways to record achievements these should be shared with ETBI and SOLAS so that the potential to capture all positive learning outcomes, as well as those for administrative purposes, is fully explored.

Revision of guidelines

These guidelines provide a focus for discussion on how to develop a local family literacy FET strategy. These Guidelines will be updated periodically to reflect developments in the family literacy context.

Conclusions

These guidelines for family literacy organisation, practice and positive outcomes are intended as an initial indicator for how FET family literacy might be more tightly structured and supported. They are rooted in the data collected from FET staff, parents and other family literacy stakeholders.

They are a beginning rather than a limitation and should be used by ETBs to establish and develop their own family literacy culture. We know that this is the surest way to engage new family literacy learners to positively impact children's schooling and to begin to redress cycles of educational disadvantage.

Our research provides robust evidence that family literacy is a multi-faceted approach to learning that brings substantial benefits to families, schools and communities. The goal is to strengthen family literacy so that it reaches as many families as possible and bit-by-bit contributes to more literacy equality for adults and children in Ireland.



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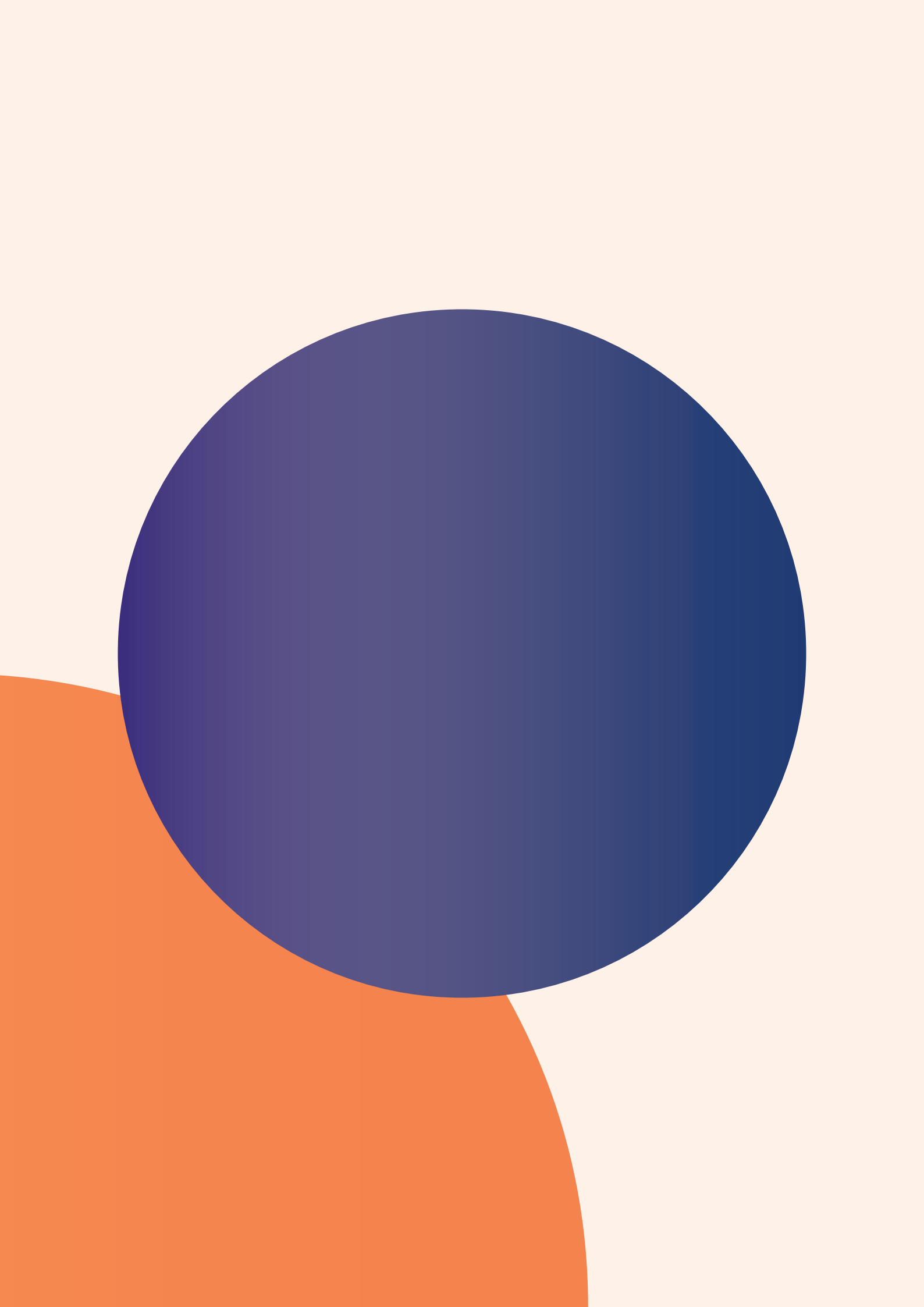
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Tools - Interview schedule; information leaflet; consent form

Developing best practice for family literacy activity in Ireland

A research project undertaken by Dr Ann Hegarty and Dr Maggie Feeley

Between October 2018 and February 2019 a national research project will take place into best practice in family literacy activity. The study was commissioned by SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority and is supported by NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency. Dr Ann Hegarty and Dr Maggie Feeley will conduct the research.

This study seeks to establish how family literacy activity can best contribute to government policy in improving literacy and numeracy amongst adults and children in Ireland. It will do this by identifying current best practice in the 16 Education and Training Boards' (ETBs) and by drawing on national and international research in the field. The ultimate goal of the study is to provide research-based evidence that will guide the future development of family literacy practice in Ireland.

Benefits and risks in research participation

By taking part in the study, you will add your voice to a project that aims to improve the effectiveness of family literacy practice in Ireland. The research process will be informal and relaxed. Additionally, a list of support organisations and agencies will be distributed to all participants should you wish to seek further advice or support at a later date. Data collected from ETBs will clearly identify them and their work. Learners who participate in the research process will be assured of anonymity and confidentiality in every aspect of their contribution.

What will happen to the information?

All of the data gathered during the study will inform the final report. Research participants will be asked to give their permission for interviews and focus groups to be recorded and transcribed. Before this happens all personal details will be removed and confidentiality will be assured to all learners who take part. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary.

The interviews with individuals and the focus group discussions will inform the final report and will ensure that the voices of those with lived experience of family literacy will be central to the outcomes, conclusions and recommendations.

Generic focus group schedule – facilitated by the researcher

(Questions to be selected as appropriate depending on the group make-up/ parents/ AEOs/ ALOs/ HSCL)

Ethos

What would you say is the ethos/ value base that informs FL?

When you think of FL what is the first thing that comes to mind?

What is the thinking behind providing FL in this location?

What would you say is a mother's role in supporting FL?

What would you say is a father's role in supporting FL?

What would you say is the purpose of FL?

How does FL address adult's literacy needs?

How does FL address children's literacy development?

Is there any recorded evidence available to substantiate such developments? How is it recorded?

Programmes/Activities

Can you tell me how FL programmes/activities are developed?

Are programmes piloted beforehand? Are there a range of different programmes/activities... can you describe them.... 'off the shelf' or developed with learners?

What's included in FL here?

Do you ever teach parents specific techniques about how to support their children's literacy/ numeracy?

Do you ever gift books to parents?

Thinking about family literacy here and from your experience what has worked well?

Why do you think that is?

Are there programmes/ activities that you have run/ have been involved in that did not work?

Why do you think that is?

From your experience is accreditation important/ relevant in this context?

What can you say about how families receive FL interventions?

Access

How do participants access FL activities?

Is there a formal procedure?

How are participants chosen? Do you have priority parents?

How do you ensure that both men and women can access your courses?

How did you first hear about FL activity? What made you decide to enrol?

Assessment

Is there an assessment process in FL interventions?

How is that done?

When is it done?

Formal/ informal?

Recruitment

How are participants recruited?

What has worked well? Why do you think that is?

What did not work?

What strategies have you used to recruit men to programmes?

How have they worked?

What are the barriers to participation faced by participants?

What might encourage more people to participate?

Delivery

What happens during a FL session?

How does that happen?

What are the elements that make activities/ programmes run smoothly?

What are the blocks?

What would you say is the tutor's approach to parents?

From your experience do you use different strategies when working with men only?

From your experience do you use different strategies when working with men and women?

How would you describe your relationship with your tutor?

How would you describe the relationship amongst the group?

What has contributed to developing those relationships?
What have been the challenges?

Evaluation

How do you evaluate FL?

Is there a written record of evaluations?

Progression

From your experience what are the progression options for parents who participate in FL?

Other courses/ employment

How is data gathered about progression?

Tutors

What qualities, skills and knowledge do tutors need to work well in FL?

What training do FL tutors have?

Can you tell me about opportunities for professional development that are available for FL tutors?

Have you any ideas for training that might further support tutors in their practice?

Partnerships

What local community partners are involved in FL in this area?

Schools/ Libraries/ HSCL/ DEIS/ Health visitors/ Barnardos/ NALA

How are they involved?

What's working well? What are the challenges?
How could relationships be strengthened?

What are the benefits of such partnerships to participants? To the ETB itself?

FL benefits

From your experience how do **parents** benefit from participating in FL programmes/activities?

Literacy and language development/
Numeracy/ ICT/ Irish

Other – confidence, friendships, school relationships, community involvement. Any specific examples? Anecdotal outcomes?

Any attitudinal changes noted re education?
Are there any changes about expectations of children's educational attainment?

From your experience how do **children** benefit from their parents' participation in FL programmes?

Literacy and language development/
Numeracy/ ICT/ Irish

Other – confidence, friendships, family relationships, school relationships

Any specific examples? Anecdotal outcomes?

Increase in children reading to themselves?

Is there any evidence available about improved child attendance in schools?

Homework completion?

Are there wider benefits associated with FL activities for **families, for schools and communities**?

Are there benefits for the **ETB** itself?

Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't?

Is it Ok to contact you again if I need to clarify something?

Developing best practice for family literacy activity in Ireland

A research project undertaken by Dr Ann Hegarty and Dr Maggie Feeley

Principal Investigator: Dr Ann Hegarty

Between October 2018 and February 2019 a national research project will take place into best practice in family literacy activity. The study was commissioned by SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority and is supported by NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency. Dr Ann Hegarty and Dr Maggie Feeley will conduct the research.

What is family literacy and why is the research needed?

Family literacy is the name given to all the literacy learning work that is done with children to help develop and support them in learning literacy and numeracy. The OECD Survey of Adult Skills shows that about 18%, or one in six Irish adults struggle with some aspects of literacy and 25% have some difficulties with numeracy. This means that they are not as equally resourced to support their children's learning as parents with strong literacy and numeracy skills and so inequalities in learning can persist throughout generations. Family literacy programmes, organised in conjunction with adult literacy services in Ireland, are based on an understanding that everyone can be supported to participate fully in learning that takes place in the home and community.

What is the purpose of the research?

In the context of further education and training (FET) Strategy (2014-2019), the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People (2011) and the DEIS plan (2017) the study will seek to establish how family literacy activity can best contribute to government policy in improving literacy and numeracy amongst adults and children in Ireland. It will do this by identifying current best practice in the 16 Education and Training Boards' (ETBs) and by drawing on national and international research in the field. The ultimate goal of the study is to provide research-based evidence that will guide the future development of family literacy practice in Ireland.

Specific objectives include:

- A summary of the historical policy and practice context in Ireland
- A review of national and international research in family literacy
- A survey of the range and depth of current family literacy activity in the 16 ETBs
- A collection of case studies of best practice in family literacy

Who will take part in the research?

Managers, literacy organisers, practitioners and parents will all be included in the research process. This will happen through an online survey of all ETBs, interviews and focus groups in different areas of the country and conversations with other stakeholders who contribute to family literacy activity. These may include librarians, teachers, health visitors and others who make a contribution to developing adult and child literacy and numeracy in a range of ways.

Benefits and risks in research participation

By taking part in the study, you will add your voice to a project that aims to improve the effectiveness of family literacy practices in Ireland. The research process will be informal and relaxed. Additionally, a list of support organisations and agencies will be distributed to all participants should you wish to seek further advice or support at a later date. Data collected from ETBs will clearly identify them and their work. Learners who participate in the research process will be assured of anonymity and confidentiality in every aspect of their contribution.

What will happen to the information?

All of the data gathered during the study will inform the final report. Research participants will be asked to give their permission for interviews and focus groups to be recorded and transcribed. Before this happens all unnecessary personal details will be removed and confidentiality will be assured to all learners who take part. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary.

The interviews with individuals and the focus group discussions will inform the final report and will ensure that the voices of those with lived experience of family literacy will be central to the outcomes, conclusions and recommendations.

Researcher biographies

Ann Hegarty has been actively involved in adult literacy as a practitioner and researcher for over 30 years. During her career, she has had the opportunity to work across diverse contexts including: women's education, integrating literacy, workplace literacy, distance learning and family literacy. Her research interests include literacy, gender and social justice and she has a strong commitment to democratic and creative research processes. Ann has published widely in national and international journals. Her PhD examines the relationship between the construction of masculinity and fathers' involvement in family literacy.

Maggie Feeley has worked in adult literacy as a volunteer, a tutor, an organiser and manager. She has carried out ethnographic research about literacy and care with survivors of abuse in Irish industrial schools and proposed an egalitarian perspective on literacy rather than a deficit model that is commonly adopted. Her research interests include education and equality; gender justice and all aspects of adult literacy. Maggie is a Research Fellow in the School of Social Policy, Social work and Social Justice in UCD.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Developing best practice for family literacy activity in Ireland

Dr Ann Hegarty and Dr Maggie Feeley have been commissioned by SOLAS/NALA to undertake a study of family literacy in Ireland. The study will begin in October 2018 and will continue until February 2019. The goal of the study is to provide robust evidence of best practice in family literacy that will inform future work in this area in Ireland.

I, (full name) _____ received information on the study and I understand what the research is about. I understand that I will be taking part in a discussion with the researcher/s (Dr Ann Hegarty and/ or Dr Maggie Feeley) and that the information I have given will be written up in a report and included in other published materials. I can decide what questions I want to answer and up until the point where my contribution has been anonymised, I am free to withdraw from the research.

If you have any further questions about the research please Ann Hegarty or Tina Byrne at NALA (01-4127917).

Full Name: _____

Signature: _____

Today's Date: _____

Appendix 2: The survey schedule

(Formatting of the online survey does not transfer offline)

National survey of family literacy provision in ETBs in Ireland

1. Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. It is part of a wider study that aims to map current provision of family literacy activities in Ireland and to capture evidence of good practice. An information leaflet about the study has been sent to you separately. You will have the chance to clarify and expand on the detail collected here when we carry out in depth interviews/ focus groups in the different ETB areas. Those conversations will happen between now and the end of February. Throughout the study, we want to gather data about the range, delivery and outcomes of family literacy interventions with a view to informing future family literacy strategy. If there is a published report of family literacy in your ETB area we would be interested to receive a copy so that we can include the detail in our account of current practice. **Answers relate to one ETB.** We understand that approaches may vary within an ETB area and we would like if you could try to capture and explain that in your single response. We use the terms family literacy and family learning interchangeably here. Nonetheless, our focus is on adult literacy learning with a view to increasing the skills base of families. We expect therefore that activities where the literacy element may be integrated or embedded in a wider family learning opportunity will also be part of your responses here. For example a First Aid course is not necessarily delivered with a family literacy approach. If the First Aid course aims to extend the adults' learning of literacy, First Aid and how to use these new skills and knowledge in a family situation, then it comes within our sphere of interest. The detail in this questionnaire refers to the year 2017 – in other words the last full calendar year of family literacy provision. It should correspond to the data returned to SOLAS in your annual return for 2017. It would probably help to read the whole document before you begin!

We hope the questions are all clear but if you have any queries you can contact Dr Ann Hegarty .

We will be happy to answer any questions.

1. ETB Details

Name of ETB:

AEO email:

AEO phone:

Family literacy coordinator (if different to AEO) email:

Family literacy coordinator phone:

2. Does your ETB have an agreed family literacy ethos, mission and/or strategy?

Yes/No

3. If you answered 'yes' above please outline here. If not, please explain the range of perspectives and delivery of family literacy in your area.

4. Adult literacy hours and costs

What was the total number of adult literacy learners in your ETB area in 2017?

How many learners attended family literacy?

How many hours of family literacy are there in your ETB area per week?

How many paid tutor hours went into family literacy in 2017?

How many family literacy coordination hours were paid in 2017?

Is there a separate coordinator for family literacy in your ETB? Yes/No

Does supply of courses meet demand? Yes/No

If no, with what additional resources could you run more family literacy activities?

How many family literacy courses were run between September/December?

How many family literacy courses were run between January/April?

How many family literacy courses were run between May/August?

What was the total ETB budget for 2017?

What was the ETB budget for adult literacy in 2017?

Is family literacy a distinct budget heading in your ETB?

If yes, what was the family literacy budget for 2017?

What funders, apart from the ETB, did you use for family literacy?

How much funding for family literacy came from sources other than the ETB?

5. Which of the following family literacy learning opportunities do you provide? (Tick as appropriate)

Parenting skills course focused on language and literacy

Adult family literacy learning group

Parents and children learning language and literacy together

Parents and children learning numeracy together

Parents learning how to support socio-emotional development

Parents learning how to support pre-school children's literacy learning

Parents learning how to support primary children's literacy learning

Parents learning how to support secondary children's literacy learning

Literacy learning opportunities inclusive of gift books and other resources

Parents learning to support children learning in Irish

Parents learning to support children's digital literacy

Parents learning to support children's numeracy

The family literacy website www.helpmykidlearn.ie

6. What other family literacy options do you provide?

7. Programme duration

How many hours of family literacy provision did you have in 2017?

How long does a family literacy course last on average?

Do you have drop-in/roll on roll off family literacy?

Do you organise one-off family literacy activities?

8. By which of the following methods are participants recruited/referred? (Tick as appropriate)

Through advertised programme of adult learning activities

Referral from ALO

Through local community centre

Through NALA telephone helpline

Through HSCL/DEIS school

Through a health visitor/social worker

By word of mouth

9. Do you recruit people to family literacy by means other than those mentioned above?

10. Have you gathered **quantitative** evidence of any of the following outcomes from family literacy activities? Tick if you have gathered evidence of any of the following.

Adults progress into other adult learning

Adults progress into employment

Parents become more confident about their role in children's schooling

Parents spend more time listening to children read

Parents and children develop a stronger bond

Parents become more confident/empowered

Parents become involved in community activity

Children's literacy improves

Children's attendance at school improves

Children's homework is completed more often than before

Children's self-esteem and motivation improved

11. Have you anecdotal evidence of any of the following outcomes from family literacy activities?

Adults progress into other adult learning

Adults progress into employment

Parents become more confident about their role in children's schooling

Parents spend more time listening to children read

Parents and children develop a stronger bond

Parents become more confident/empowered

Parents become involved in community activity

Children's literacy improves

Children's attendance at school improves

Children's homework is completed more often than before

Children's self-esteem and motivation improved

12. Programmes assessment and accreditation

Are family literacy courses accredited? Yes/No

If Yes, at what QQI level?

Is initial assessment a part of family literacy? Yes/No

If yes, who carries out the assessment?

Is summative assessment a part of family literacy? Yes/No

If yes, who carries out the assessment?

13. Are family literacy programmes evaluated regularly?

Yes/No

Sometimes

14. Who participates in evaluations? Tick as appropriate

Course participants

Course tutor/s

Partnership members

Others

15. If others are included in course evaluations please specify.

**16. Do any of your family literacy programmes target/attract particular groups?
(Tick as appropriate)**

Parents with literacy needs

Parents without qualifications

Parents in employment

Unemployed parents

Lone parents

Irish Traveller parents

Migrant parents

Low-income parents

Parents of children with special learning needs/disabilities

Gael Scoil parents

No. Open enrolment for all courses

17. If you deliver family literacy to another specify group of parents please specify.

18. Participant numbers

How many adults attended family literacy in 2017?

How many parents/carers attended family literacy with children in 2017?

What is the maximum number of participants per group?

How many participants completed a family literacy course in 2017?

How many **family** literacy participants progressed to other adult learning in 2017?

How many **adult** literacy participants progressed to other adult learning in 2017?

19. Participant gender

How many men attended family literacy in your ETB in 2017?

How many women attended family literacy in your ETB in 2017?

Do you offer provision for specific gender groups? Yes/No (please specify e.g. Dads and lads)

20. Participant ethnicity

How many family literacy participants came from ethnic minority groups in 2017?

How many Irish Travellers attended family literacy in 2017?

How many migrant/refugee/asylum-seeking parents/carers attended family literacy in 2017?

For how many family literacy participants in 2017 was English not a mother tongue?

21. Do you organise family literacy activities in partnership with other groups?

Yes/No

22. With which of the following do you work in making family literacy activities available? (Tick as appropriate)

Local school

HSCL/DEIS School

Health visitor

Social worker

Barnardos

Local library

Local community group

Direct provision centre

Other

23. With what other partners do you collaborate to make family literacy available in your area?

24. Which of the following are involved in family literacy delivery?

Full-time literacy tutors

Part-time literacy tutors

Voluntary literacy tutors

25. Training

Is training available for family literacy tutors? Yes/No

What percentage of those working in family literacy has received training?

Would more staff like to have CPD in family literacy than is possible? Yes/No

If yes, why is CPD unavailable?

26. Do you have any other comments?

Appendix 3 – Family literacy courses

Art and Pyrography for parents and children

Caring for Children and Paediatric First Aid
QQI Level 3

Child and parent art programmes

Child Development and Play QQI Level 3

Dads and Lads

Driver theory classes

Dyslexia support for parents

Easy meals for special occasions

ESOL

Family Interpersonal Skills QQI Level 3

Family learning for Traveller groups

Fun Science

Getting ready for school

Health and fitness for parents

Healthy eating on a budget

Introduction to Project Maths

Irish

Literacy and numeracy through art and craft

Maths help for parents of Junior and Senior
Infants

My Baby and Me

Online safety

Play with your Junior and Senior Infant

Quick and easy meals

Settling into second level for parents of first
years

Story Sacks

Themed horticulture; cookery; budgeting;
sewing; Family Tree

Traveller Health

Appendix 4 – Other means of recruitment by sector

Health

HSE; TUSLA; Foster Care; Mental Health groups; hospitals; Maternity and Paediatric Health Nurses

Social workers

Speech and language therapists

Education

HSCL/DEIS; Principals in DEIS Schools

Community Support Workers

Family learning coordinators

Tutors

Family Resource Centres

Induction meetings with new parents in Primary Schools

ESOL Coordinator

Pre-Schools

Other

St Vincent de Paul

Local Traveller Project Group

Leader Partnership

Immigrant Support Groups

Libraries

MABS

Local Media

Data Annexe

Adult and family literacy (FL) hours and costs for 2017

Table 7: Adult and family literacy (FL) hours and costs for 2017

| | ETB 1 | ETB 2 | ETB 3 | ETB 4 | ETB 5 | ETB 6 | ETB 7 | ETB 8 | ETB 9 | ETB 10 | ETB 11 | ETB 12 | ETB 13 | ETB 14 | ETB 15 | ETB 16 |
|---------------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Total adult literacy learners | 2031 | 1822 | 5054 | 1764 | 2434 | 1800 | 5237 | n/r | 2466 | n/r | 1800 | 3562 | 1224 | 1529 | n/r | 2772 |
| Total family literacy learners | 30 | 80 | 453 | 174 | 300 | 220 | 215 | 60 | 123 | 111 | 180 | 813 | 86 | 185 | 146 | 183 |
| FL hours per week | 6 | 6-14 | 37 | 94 | 32 | 19 | 33 | 23 | 24 | 21 | 50 | 2-14 | 8 | 6 | 16 | 10 |
| Paid tutor hours in 2017 | 218.75 | 160 | 1567 | 150 | 1300 | 310 | 1088 | 322 | 540 | 264 | 800 | 380 | 208 | 380 | 555 | 365.34 |
| FL coordination Hours in 2017 | 75 | 0* | 0* | 0* | 37 | 0* | 0* | 0* | 0* | 0* | 100 | 0 | 0 | 218 | 336 | 0 |
| FL coordinator | yes | no | no | no | ** | no | no | yes | no | no | no | no | no | ** | yes | no |
| Does supply of FL meet demand? | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | yes | yes |
| FL courses in 2017 | 11 | 14 | 107 | 26 | 81 | 24 | 33 | 17 | 24 | 17 | 50 | 66 | 13 | 24 | 16 | 36 |
| Distinct FL budget | yes | no | yes | yes | no | no | no | yes | no | no | no | no | no | yes | yes | yes |
| FL budget | 18K | n/r | 67K | 11.38K | 42K | n/r | n/r | 20K | n/r | n/r | 30K | n/r | n/r | 30K | 37K | 18K |

Key: n/r – no response given; * Included in ALO/resource staff hours; ** hours differ across ETB

Family literacy programme duration

Table 8: Family literacy programme duration

| | ETB 1 | ETB 2 | ETB 3 | ETB 4 | ETB 5 | ETB 6 | ETB 7 | ETB 8 | ETB 9 | ETB 10 | ETB 11 | ETB 12 | ETB 13 | ETB 14 | ETB 15 | ETB 16 |
|--------------------------------------|--------|-------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|----------|---------|--------|---------|-----------|---------|--------|-----------|------------|----------|
| Family literacy hours in 2017 | 218.75 | 170 | 1567 | 150 | 1300 | 310 | 1088 | 322 | 540 | 264 | 600 | 380 | 210 | 380 | 587 | 365.34 |
| Length of courses | 35 wks | 6 wks | 6-8 wks | 4-6 wks | 3-6 wks** | 6-8 wks | 6-30 wks | 14 wks | 12 wks | 6-7 wks | 10-30 wks | 4-6 wks | 8 wks | 2-3 wks** | 5-6 wks*** | 10 hours |
| Drop-in or roll on roll-off | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | Yes | No |
| One off events | Yes | No | Yes* | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | In 2019 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Key: * seasonal events; ** various models: 84hrs for ITABE; 21 weeks for Level 3; 60 hours for Level 3

Family literacy assessment and accreditation

Table 9: Family literacy assessment and accreditation

| | ETB 1 | ETB 2 | ETB 3 | ETB 4 | ETB 5 | ETB 6 | ETB 7 | ETB 8 | ETB 9 | ETB 10 | ETB 11 | ETB 12 | ETB 13 | ETB 14 | ETB 15 | ETB 16 |
|---|----------|-------|-------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|------------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|--------|--------|
| Courses are accredited | Yes | No | No | No | Yes** | No | No§ | No | Yes | No | Yes** | No | No | No | Yes | No |
| Level of accreditation | 3 | | | | 1-3 | | 2-4 | | 2-3 | | 1-3 | | | | 3 | |
| Initial assessment takes place | Yes | No | Yes** | Yes** | Yes** | Yes | No§§ | Yes | Yes | Yes ESOL | Yes | No | No | Yes** | Yes** | No |
| Who assesses? | ALO FLC* | | Tutor RW*** | Tutor ALO | Tutor | Tutor | ALO | Tutor | ALO RW*** | ESOL Staff | RW*** | | | ALO Tutor | ALO | |
| Summative assessment takes place | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes** | No | No | Yes | No |
| Who assesses? | n/r | | | Tutor | Tutor | Tutor | ALO | | RW*** Tutor | | n/r | Tutor | | | Tutor | |

Key: FLC* – family literacy coordinator; ** sometimes; RW*** Resource worker; n/r – no response; § accreditation offered as progression route; §§ initial assessment takes place on progression

Participant numbers

Table 10: Participant numbers

| | ETB 1 | ETB 2 | ETB 3 | ETB 4 | ETB 5 | ETB 6 | ETB 7 | ETB 8 | ETB 9 | ETB 10 | ETB 11 | ETB 12 | ETB 13 | ETB 14 | ETB 15 | ETB 16 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Total FL In 2017 | 30 | 80 | 453 | 174 | 307 | n/r | 215 | 60 | 123 | 111 | 180 | 813 | 86 | 185 | 146 | 183 |
| Parents & children | 0 | 16 | n/r | 72 | 70 | n/r | 12 | 12 | 123 | 0 | 90 | 0 | 16 | n/k | 8 | n/r |
| Max per FL group | 20 | 8 | 10 | 8 | 12 | n/r | 10 | 9 | 8 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 8 | 15 | 20 | 10 |
| Completers | 30 | 70 | 453 | 172 | 300 | n/r | 215 | 60 | 114 | 103 | 118 | n/r | 6 | 172 | n/r | n/r |
| Progress to other adult learning | 12 | 15 | 161 | 6 | 160 | n/r | 10% -35%* | 4 | 87 | 38 | 39 | n/r | n/k | 37 | n/r | n/r |

Key: FL – family literacy; n/r - no response; * estimated figure; n/k – not known

Family learning participant gender

Table 11: Family learning participant gender

| | ETB 1 | ETB 2 | ETB 3 | ETB 4 | ETB 5 | ETB 6 | ETB 7 | ETB 8 | ETB 9 | ETB 10 | ETB 11 | ETB 12 | ETB 13 | ETB 14 | ETB 15 | ETB 16 |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Men | 10 | 15 | 48 | 40 | 38 | n/k | n/k | 8 | 32 | 25 | 45 | 72 | 12 | 21 | n/r | n/k |
| Women | 20 | 65 | 405 | 134 | 260 | n/k | n/k | 52 | 91 | 86 | 135 | 741 | 74 | 151 | n/r | n/k |
| Gender-specific courses | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Key: not known; n/r – no response given

Participant ethnicity/ESOL

Table 12: Participant ethnicity/ESOL

| | ETB 1 | ETB 2 | ETB 3 | ETB 4 | ETB 5 | ETB 6 | ETB 7 | ETB 8 | ETB 9 | ETB 10 | ETB 11 | ETB 12 | ETB 13 | ETB 14 | ETB 15 | ETB 16 |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Ethnic minorities | 9 | n/r | 49 | 12 | n/k | n/k | n/k | n/r | 26 | n/r | 25 | 30+ | n/k | n/k | n/r | n/k |
| Irish Travellers | 1 | n/r | 49 | 2 | n/k | n/k | n/k | 3 | 9 | n/k | 6 | 30+ | n/k | n/k | 6 | n/k |
| Refugee/Asylum seekers | 1 | n/r | 26 | 4 | n/k | n/k | n/k | 5 | 21 | n/k | 16 | n/r | n/k | n/k | n/r | n/k |
| ESOL | 10 | n/r | n/r | 4 | n/k | n/k | n/k | 9 | 21 | n/k | 45 | 30+ | n/k | 52 | 73 | n/k |

Key: n/r no response given; n/k – figures not known

