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Precarious professionalism

A review of the experiences and employment status of graduates of the Higher Diploma in Further Education at Maynooth University's Department of Adult and Community Education (2013-2017)



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The relationship between adult education, adult educators, and Further Education and Training (FET)

One challenge in presenting a report such as this is how to best reflect the diversity of adult education activity, domains and values in Ireland. After trying out, and testing, various acronyms that might capture this heterogeneity, we have settled on an approach that differentiates between *adult education as a philosophy*, and the sectors or settings within which it might be located.

For us, **adult education** isn't simply 'teaching adults' but is an approach to education that is dialogic and problem-posing rather than instructional and solution providing. Although there are different philosophical orientations within this (for example humanistic and radical), most adult education seeks to understand how each of us are shaped by powerful experiences both personal and social. The philosophy of adult education that we lean on interprets knowledge as co-created through our engagement with others, and not fixed in the minds of particular experts or the pages of certain texts. We believe that education is a fundamental human right and collaborative, critical adult education has the power to transform individuals and change society for the better.

Adult educators are practitioners who seek to create learning communities that embody the principles outlined above. These spaces challenge traditional divisions such as teacher/learner and educated/un-educated.

Further Education and Training (FET) as one of many sectoral locations where adult educators might work. Other settings include: community education, workplaces, social movements, Higher Education Institutions, youth projects, some schools, and, in fact, anywhere where the educators seek to embody the philosophical approach we refer to above. In our experience, this approach to adult education is often the exception to the norm, particularly within traditional education spaces such as schools and colleges.

As we will touch upon throughout this report, there has been much contestation in the naming of the space of education of adults in Ireland (Murray, 2015) – this semantic tension reflects, and is part of, a deeper, and ongoing, ideological and political struggle to name and claim the legitimate purpose and character of adult learning in Ireland.

Executive summary

The landscape of adult education in Ireland has undergone significant structural, funding and discursive change in the last decade. At the start of the century an emerging adult educator professionalism seemed to be moving towards embracing the richness and diversity in a heterogeneous field of practice that encompassed non-accredited and critical adult and community education; early-school leaver education; women's education; right through to the structured, accredited, and vocational programmes of an emerging Further Education (FE) sector (Government of Ireland, 2000).

Yet, a perfect storm, fuelled by a transnational recession and an increasing fetishisation of quality, professionalism and employability as the means with which education would 'fix' ailing economies like Ireland increasingly foregrounded outcomes based, employment-oriented Further Education and Training (FET) as the dominant mode of adult education. More radical and community adult education spaces became less visible and diminished through a series of cuts and a 'rationalisation' of the field. This rationalisation took place on a number of fronts: existing local education boards, hitherto organised at county level, were reconfigured into a smaller number of regional, but larger, entities. The Community Sector experienced significant downsizing, with many organisations that traditionally provided grass-roots adult education shut down (Harvey, 2012).

Standards and accreditation bodies across FE and Higher Education (HE) were merged into a new national organisation called Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). Crucially, the state-founded professional body with responsibility for the regulation and standards of school-based teachers, *The Teaching Council*, extended its orbit of authority to include an emerging, and not unproblematic, professionalism for those working within Further Education and Training.

The Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) who had an established practice, research base and interest in adult and further education responded quickly to the new professional reality that

was emerging and, by 2013, eight of the HEIs had their, mostly, post-graduate Initial Teacher Education programmes ratified by the Teaching Council under the stream, “route 3 - Further Education”.

The Department of Adult and Community Education (DACE) at Maynooth University, the only dedicated academic adult education department in the country, had, since its foundation in 1975, developed a local, national and international reputation for critical and transformative approaches to education. DACE had been providing a post-graduate adult educator training programme for years, but on a model and approach that was informed by critical pedagogy and social justice, rather than the more conventional, and conservative, philosophies and practices of the compulsory sector. As such, the challenge in a new era of professionalisation for practitioners, specifically, for DACE was to adapt its existing Higher Diploma programme for a new FET-infused, Teacher-Council accredited professionalised reality. This current course is not the first iteration of this programme rather a redesign of a higher diploma in adult education that DACE has been delivering since the 1990s and which has a strong reputation of producing radically oriented adult educators, many of whom have shaped adult and community education in Ireland.

The first students of DACE’s Higher Diploma in Further Education (HDFE) graduated in the autumn of 2013. Since then the programme has grown in numbers and reputation. However, after five years, and 178 graduates, the HDFE programme staff, who kept closely connected to graduates, were increasingly conscious of the growth of precarity in education and, especially, within spaces where those registered through route 3 would typically seek employment. Amidst this context, the time was right to conduct a review on graduate outcomes of the programme.

In November 2017 a survey was sent to all the graduates of the HDFE since it first commenced in 2012/3. One hundred and ten HDFE graduates completed the survey which focused, primarily, on graduates’ current occupational status with some opportunities to relate their experiences of the programme to their graduate outcomes. A follow-up focus group was conducted with a small number of graduates to explore some of the issues emerging from the survey in more depth.

A significant finding is that many research participants describe their experience on the HDFE as transformative. However, what is immediately striking is the extent to which many face significant occupational challenges. Only 10% of the respondents are in full-time permanent employment within the Further Education and Training (FET) sector and a significant proportion are not working in the education at all (38%). This raises questions about the capacity for the FET sector to sustain the amount of adult educators entering the field. There is also a concern about the lack of transparency in terms of career entry trajectories and processes – particularly with the main employers, the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). Much more support and clarity of recruitment practices is sought as well as a stronger focus on programme and modular planning that is relevant to the sector.

This short research project has significance at various levels and contexts and if it has achieved anything it may be just some further clarity on the questions which the sector and graduates need to be asking: how do HDFE graduates reconcile and nurture a nascent adult educator identity in a broader occupational field that, on the surface, offers limited opportunities for career progression? How does an adult education department committed to social justice develop a programme that is so central to its identity and autonomy while, at the same time, see some graduates leave with significant debt (often incurred or exacerbated by substantial fees) and limited opportunity for stable work within the publicly-funded FE sector? What can be done to ensure that all Teaching Council-accredited educators have the same opportunities for early career development and induction? Who is, or should be, advocating and safeguarding the rights and distinct, yet diverse, professionalism of adult educators at a sectoral and national level?

These questions can only be addressed through further work within, and across, the field. However, there are a number of tentative recommendations which emerge from this research which include:

- More research into the experiences and outcomes of graduates of the Teaching Council Approved – Further Education Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

- More collaboration with, and engagement, with ETBs, ETBI in terms of illuminating recruiting practices; the position of adult educators seeking working within the FET sector; and opportunities for support for career and professional development.
- More collaboration and engagement with the Teaching Council to elucidate the opportunities and standing of those registered by the TC via route 3 both in FET and, in the interest of professional equity, across education sectors.
- More research and engagement with trade unions about the quality and resources dedicated to representation of those registered via route 3.
- Explore possibilities for the development of critical and sustainable communities of practice across graduate cohorts.
- Review recruitment practices and programme delivery model for HDFE programme and explore part-time, practitioner-only model.
- Review programme content to ensure that it is relevant and useful for the broad field of further, community and adult education field.
- Draw on departmental expertise in adult guidance to enhance student capacity for confronting occupational transitions.

Acronyms/Abbreviations

AONTAS	Adult education association and adult learner advocate organisation
CID	Contract of Indefinite Duration
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DACE	Department of Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University
DATI	Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (historic)
ETB	Education and Training Board – one of the sixteen regional state bodies responsible for the provision and management of primary, post-primary and post-secondary education.
ETBI	Education and Training Board Ireland
HDFE	The Higher Diploma in Further Education
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
MU	Maynooth University
PME	Postgraduate Masters in Education (post-primary school ITE teacher qualification)
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SOLAS	Further Education and Training Authority
Route 3	Teaching Council registration domain for FE practitioners (Route 1 and 2 being primary and secondary education sectors respectively)
TC	The Teaching Council
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
The relationship between adult education, adult educators, and Further Education and Training (FET)	iii
Executive summary	v
Acronyms/Abbreviations	ix
1. Introduction and scope of report.....	1
2. A contested professional space: professional recognition for adult educators.....	3
2.1 Introduction	3
2.2 An historical perspective on the professional recognition for adult educators.....	3
2.3 A shift to top-down professionalization	5
2.4 The response of the universities	7
2.5 Maynooth University's Higher Diploma in Further Education	9
2.6 Why this research and why now?	11
3. Method.....	13
3.1 Purpose and focus of research.....	13
3.2 Mixed-method approach.....	13
3.3 Ethics.....	14
3.4 Limitations.....	14
4 Findings	17
4.1 Introduction	17
4.2 Survey	17
4.2.1 Graduate year	17
4.2.2 Graduate occupational status	18
4.2.3 Type of employer organisation	20
4.2.4 Further academic study.....	22
4.2.5 Experiences of CPD since graduation.....	23
4.2.6 Perception of career impact of HDFE.....	23
4.2.7 Impact of HDFE on earnings.....	24
4.2.8 Reflections on progression from HDFE	25
4.3 Focus group	39
4.3.1 Status of HDFE.....	40
4.3.2 Qualified/unqualified, contracts and rates of pay	40
4.3.3 Subject specialism	44
4.3.4 Inequality of access to post-qualification induction and CPD.....	44
4.3.5 Facebook as an emerging but delineated community of practice.....	45
4.3.6 The need to focus on sector specific job-seeking skills.....	46
4.3.7 More work on practical curriculum/programme skills	48
Conclusion.....	50
5. Discussion.....	51
5.1 Emerging themes	51
5.1.1 A transformative learning space	51
5.1.2 Precarity and uncertain occupational futures	53
5.1.3 Sector recruitment practices.....	54

5.1.4	Professional inequity.....	55
5.2.5	Reviewing programme content.....	56
5.2	Significance for stakeholders.....	58
5.2.1	HDFE graduates.....	58
5.2.2	Significance for HDFE at DACE.....	59
5.2.3	Significance for Initial Teacher Education for Further Education.....	60
5.2.4	Education and Training Boards.....	60
5.2.5	The Teaching Council of Ireland.....	60
5.2.6	Trade Unions.....	61
6	Recommendations.....	63
7.	Conclusion.....	65
8.	Bibliography.....	67
9.	Appendices.....	71
Appendix one	Providers of Route 3 TC approved ITE as of Jan 2018.....	71
Appendix two	Survey questions.....	73
Appendix three	Participant information and consent form for focus group.....	77
	About the researchers, CRALE and DACE.....	79

1. Introduction and scope of report

This report outlines research conducted by the Department of Adult and Community Education (DACE) at Maynooth University into the occupational experiences and career destinations of graduates from the department's professional, and Teaching Council-accredited, qualification, the Higher Diploma in Further Education (HDFE).

The main purpose of the research is to find out how graduates from the programme are faring in their attempts to develop a sustainable career as educators in adult, community, further education and training settings. The need for this research emanated from many conversations since the inception of the HDFE amongst a broad community of practice that included the researchers, their colleagues, students and graduates of the HDFE and a wider practice and scholarship community. The research was also precipitated by the work of the researchers into practitioner experiences in community and adult education (Fitzsimons, 2017; O'Neill, 2015) and research into experiences of graduate employment for non-traditional students more generally (Finnegan and O'Neill, 2017). The primary research activity focused exclusively on the experiences of graduates of the HDFE programme. The research adopted

Following this short introductory chapter, a second chapter provides an outline of the development and current contexts of professionalism and professional training for those registered with the Teaching Council as Further Educators. The third chapter outlines the methodology and method employed in the research namely a sequential mixed method research approach with a small focus group following on from an online survey which was distributed to all graduates. Chapter four presents the findings from the survey and the focus group. Chapter five synthesizes the findings into a number of emerging themes and discusses significance for the research for students and graduates of the HDFE; the HDFE programme itself; ETBs; The Teaching Council; and unions. Chapter six offers some tentative recommendations before a short conclusion in Chapter seven.

2. A contested professional space: professional recognition for adult educators.

2.1 Introduction

The entire landscape of adult education; its location, structures, policies and discourse, have gone through an extended and deep process of change over the past 15 years or so. A cursory glance may suggest that the training and professionalization of adult educators has emerged out of this recent period of change. However, this assumption may be challenged if we take a more historical perspective on the development of adult education with particular emphasis on the heterogeneous spaces within which practice is located.

2.2 An historical perspective on the professional recognition for adult educators.

As Murtagh (2015a) points out in his fine study of the development of formal, and in particular, vocational education for adults, the first government initiative to support and regulate educational provision for adults can be traced back to 1900 with the establishment of the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Industry (DATI). As vocational education grew in a fragmented fashion with the emergence of the new state, so too did the training for those responsible for teaching adults. For many years, this proto-professional educator training took the form of voluntary summer schools and, indeed, it wasn't until just after the establishment of the adult learner organisation, AONTAS, in 1970, that Thomand College of Education was set up as the first HEI-based training programme for teachers of adults (Murtagh, 2015a; p.17). However, the uneven state response and relationship to vocational, and adult education in general, meant that an ambiguity persisted for many years towards school-based teacher education, and tutor training for those working with adult learning groups.

As Murtagh asserts

The net effect of the low status of FET was that it was invisible to the rest of the Irish education system. [...] The low status was further demonstrated by the fact that most of the FET staff employed in 1997 were appointed on a part-time basis.

(Murtagh, 2015b, p. 22)

Murtagh (2015b, p. 20) goes on to argue that a lack of knowledge or, maybe the lack of a sustained interest and commitment, on behalf of the state meant that 'FET in Ireland was left with a flawed institutional architecture'.

More broadly, much adult education practice emerged from the bottom-up and in response to the needs of those it encountered such as communities, industry, and social justice movements. As a result, many early practitioners emerged from within these population groups with community educators often emerging from within disadvantaged communities where adult education was practiced. For vocational education, some practitioners emerged from the professions themselves; be these hairdressing, plumbing, or child-care. As a result of these bottom-up trajectories, many adult educators, although skilled practitioners, lacked specific 'teacher-education'. Yet, commencing with the practice-based Murphy (1973) and Kenny (1974) reports, we can see the very slow emergence of state interest in supporting adult education systematically at a national level and an accompanying developing awareness of the role of HEIs in supporting sector development through teacher and tutor training and development.

This slow move started to crystallise towards the end of the century with the emergence of the Green paper *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning* (Government of Ireland, 1998), and then White Paper *Learning for Life*, (Department of Education and Science, 2000) which precipitated an increased state focus on the development of adult education in Ireland. The Green and White Papers reflected a rising awareness of the import of adult and community education which may be seen within a wider European engagement with lifelong learning (Fitzsimons, 2017, pp. 136-141). Yet this heightened interest in adult education coincided with a growing state and popular discourse which stressed the human capital

functions of education and, in particular a growing tendency to align education with employability (Finnegan & O'Neill, 2016; Grummell, 2014; Hurley, 2015). This employability discourse was the ideological impetus for a re-organisation of public provision of vocational education including apprenticeships, post-compulsory education outside of HE, and community education; collectively organised into one FET sector.

2.3 A shift to top-down professionalization

As the resulting tensions were working themselves out in the early years of this century, an initial influx of funding into the sector facilitated the development of adult education as full-time career option for some and an associated acknowledgement of the need for teacher training and development for Further Education and Training. Adult educators have, for many years, sought professional recognition for their work. In fact, the Green paper, written in consultation with lead adult educators, called for an inter-agency group to make recommendations on how best to recognise adult education qualifications. It also suggested a practitioner forum for adult and community educators and requested the development of in-service training and career progression (Government of Ireland 1998: 112–113).

Learning for Life, the White paper on Adult Education supported these recommendations calling on the inter-agency working group “to progress the issue of formal recognition of qualifications in adult education” by representing a range of agencies in the field, identifying practitioner needs, exploring flexible approaches to third-level adult education qualifications (Department of Education and Science: 151). Both Green and White papers argue any process of professionalisation should recognise the diversity of adult educator backgrounds’ and the expertise held by those with no previous qualifications. Regrettably, these recommendations were not advanced. Although an inter-agency group did meet, this was suspended soon after its inception and there were no real outcomes from the process (Fitzsimons, 2017: 204).

At the same time, much change was happening in response to local, national and international forces. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) emerged as the FE/HE

accreditation body. This coincided with the decline of FÁS as the state vocational training service amidst a loss of public confidence in its governance and organisational culture; the emergence of SOLAS from the ashes of FÁS to take over and steer FET nationally; the 'rationalisation' of county-based VECs into 16 larger more regionally-based ETBs; the emergence of The Teaching Council in 2006 to articulate, safeguard, legitimise, and ultimately, gatekeep teacher education programmes and standards; and the associated enactment of a range of legislation relating to the training of educators and the development of the FET sector (Education and Training Boards Act, 2013; Further Education and Training Act, 2013; Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012; The Teaching Council Act, 2001; The Teaching Council Amendment Act, 2006)

These shifting structures, policies and discourses were all happening in a boom and bust socio-economic context in Ireland. As the country slipped into a deep and enduring recession, the attractiveness of the alleged employability function of education and work-orientating education of vocational training gained purchase and was regarded as a panacea for economic ills (Grummell, 2014; Finnegan & O'Neill, 2016). Accompanying this emerging, but increasingly dominant, discourse of education for employment was a state-sponsored near abandonment, in terms of focus and funding, of the hitherto well-regarded community and voluntary sector (Fitzsimons, 2017).

It must be said that Ireland was not alone in witnessing the growth of labour activation education. There was, in broader terms, a shift to an employability agenda across all education sectors throughout Europe (Jütte & Lattke, 2015). One of functions of the dominance of this new discourse was the swift, policy-led, colonisation of all adult education by the term 'Further Education' (Murray, 2015) which later evolving into 'Further Education and Training' (FET).

Further Education or 'FE' hasn't the historic purchase and clarity that it has in the UK and the term is often used clumsily in Ireland to refer to the broad and diverse range of post-compulsory educational spaces other than HE. This negatively-defined definition is problematic on a number of levels but not least for rendering invisible the significance, presence and values of community and adult education. It may be no wonder then, that, out

of this contested space emerges 'a contested profession' for adult, community, and further education practitioners (Grummell & Murray, 2015). As the policy language of Further Education and Training (FET) sought to replace expressions like 'adult education' and 'community education', the democratising, critical, emancipatory principles of adult education were held firm within the academy, and in the hearts, minds and actions of many adult educators across the country.

The increased focus on accountability and quality mechanisms across sectors, asserts, not unproblematically, connections between high quality education and professionalism. In Ireland, the UK and in a broader European context, there was an intensity of focus on the professionalization, and quality of, teacher education outside of school and university settings (Murphy, 2015; Research voor Beleid (Alpine), 2008).

As mentioned above, The Teaching Council was established in 2006 to set the standards and principles of teacher education. One of the Teaching Council's primary, and early, functions was to evaluate and validate Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes which were being offered by HEIs. Although The Teaching Council's primary focus is on primary and secondary education sectors, the Further Education sector soon came into its orbit and the Council took on responsibility for validating the development of further education teacher training and registration.

2.4 The response of the universities

The university departments in Ireland with an interest and commitment to further, adult, community education and training responded swiftly to the new reality of an emerging, albeit 'contested', professionalism. Most departments with a lineage in some dimension of adult education, such as Maynooth University's Department of Adult and Community Education (DACE), had long provided high quality professional development and training for practitioners already working in this diverse educational field. However, the establishment of the Teaching Council's power to gate-keep aspects of the practitioner landscape through mandatory registration for work within the public sector and their associated power to

accredit (or not) further education ITE programmes heralded new models of occupational insertion and learning for adult educators. Now, for the first time, universities, through Teaching Council-accredited ITE programmes, would be able to offer, in theory at least, professional entry routes into careers working with adult learning groups outside of university settings. This front-loaded professional education model which has long-defined the process of practitioner professionalization for the compulsory education field, presented significant philosophical and curricular challenges for departments, like DACE, that valued the importance of practitioner experience as part of the curricular content and processing of becoming an adult educator.

The HEIs that offered, and continue to offer, these Teaching Council-accredited programmes are: Dublin City University; Maynooth University; Mary Immaculate College; Marino Institute of Education; National College of Art and Design; National College of Ireland; NUI Galway; and Waterford IT. These HEIs which, interestingly, are all located either on, or south, of a line cutting across from Galway to Dublin either developed new or re-designed existing programmes which went through a rigorous Teaching Council accreditation process. Although two of these are undergraduate programmes, most are postgraduate programmes (see Appendix one). While each institution and department have their own ethos, approach and, for some, historic engagement within the practice of adult education, a certain cross-institutional collegiality and community of practice has developed through the emergence of a HEI-FET Forum. The Forum meets three times a year to explore ways to enhance FET initial teacher education programmes and, more generally, to work with stakeholders in FET to achieve the strategic objectives of FET (SOLAS, 2014).

One feature of the involvement of the Teaching Council that has been an anomaly which we will return to later in this report. At the moment, TC registration rules allows secondary school teachers to teach as qualified practitioners in the FET sector, whilst conversely, route 3 registered Further Education teachers are not recognised as qualified practitioners, even in the senior cycle, in secondary schools - a sector that we believe, could hugely benefit from adult education methodologies.

Although, registration guidelines initially suggested FET practitioners could register with the Teaching Council based on appropriate and documented practice experience, guidelines have recently changed. From January 2019, all route 3 applicants must hold a post-graduate qualification from a recognised ITE programme such as the HDPE. To address the legacy circumstance where many FET practitioners do not hold formal teaching qualifications, the TC advise,

Where an appropriate teacher education qualification is not held but all other requirements are met (...) applicants will be registered with the condition of 'Teacher Education Qualification (TEQ)' and given 3 years to fulfil the condition¹

2.5 Maynooth University's Higher Diploma in Further Education

The Department of Adult and Community Education (DACE) at Maynooth University is the only dedicated academic adult education university department in the country. Established in 1975, it has developed a community, national and international reputation for its critical and radical philosophy and practice. DACE is well-matched to its institutional setting as the university proves to consistently attract high rates of mature students and students from disadvantaged background. DACE works closely with Maynooth Access Office (MAP) which is at the cutting edge of widening participation initiatives in the country.

For many years DACE ran an National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level 9, *Higher Diploma in Adult and Community Education* for adult and community education practitioners already working in the field. The diploma was grounded in transformative and critical educational philosophies and practice which placed a high value on experience, critical reflection, dialogue, group work and the social-change imperative of education. This programme either had a placement element integrated as a core part of the programme, or deliberately recruited practitioners. The core principles and practices of this earlier Higher Diploma have been integrated into the department's new award; the Teaching Council-

¹ taken from <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/News-Events/Latest-News/Teacher-Education-Qualification-requirement-under-Route-3-%E2%80%93-Further-Education.html>

recognised *Higher Diploma in Further Education* (HDFE) which took its first intake of students in September 2012.

The HDFE is now in its sixth year and five sets of graduates, 178 in total, have completed the programme up until 2016/2017. Table 1 below reveals the growth in numbers from 18 in its first year to stabilise at 40+ in the last three years.

Academic year	Students graduating
2012/13	18
2013/14	28
2014/15	41
2015/16	46
2016/17	45
Total to date:	178

Table 1 Graduate numbers of HDFE to date

DACE's commitment to critical reflection and meaningful action, has ensured that the HDFE has evolved somewhat year-on-year both in response to listening to students, placement partners and the reflections of programme staff.

At the heart of the programme is a year-long placement learning experience of a minimum of 100 hours in two distinct QQI-accredited centres. Although, initially, students received five supervised observation visits, from 2016/2017 this was reduced to three with an increased emphasis on peer and reflective learning and the introduction of video technology to enhance such processes.

Students are required to attend classes in Maynooth on a Monday evening and all day on a Tuesday. The academic modules covered in Maynooth include: history and policy of adult education, adult education methodologies; sociology of adult education; philosophy of adult education; curriculum and assessment theory and design; reflective practice; and counselling.

The course fee for the period under research was €5, 000, although from 2018 onwards the fee is now €6, 2000. Many student's avail of Student Universal Support Grants (through SUSI) or Back to Education Allowances.

2.6 Why this research and why now?

As the HDFE has been running for five years now it seems like an appropriate time to conduct some evaluation of the outcomes of graduates of the programme. Indeed, as the SOLAS FET strategy reaches its mid-way point and as they conduct their own mid-way evaluation process, it may be timely to engage in a similar exercise in the small, but significant, hamlet of graduates represented by the HDFE. The findings and significance of this research may well prove useful for larger-scaled policy reflections on the development of practitioner professional development.

However, maybe more pressingly, this modest research was initiated by a growing concern for staff and practitioner community involved with the HDFE programme of the growth of occupational precarity in education in general, but also in the Further Education field in particular. As the graduate population of the HDFE continues to grow the researchers, through professional networks and other research projects, have heard many stories regarding the challenge of securing meaningful and sustainable work in the field. Precarity for adult educators may be more extensive at the moment but it is certainly not a new occupational condition and is alluded to in the Green paper, White paper and the Murphy report of 1973. However, there has been much more focus in recent years on precarity and its impact across occupational fields (Bobek, et al., 2018; Courtois & O'Keefe, 2015; Nugent, 2017; Standing, 2011). Although a phenomenon originally associated with low-status unqualified work, precarious work has spread to what were once regarded the once 'safe and stable' professional fields such as teaching (Bobek, et al., 2018). There has been some response to precarity in Ireland by unions and activist groups and there is a small but growing body of literature around graduate precarity. However, less is known or written regarding the working conditions of adult educators.

Precarity is often discussed and conceptualised as a socio-economic condition related to pay, conditions and contractual structures (or lack of). There are very real social impacts to precarity which have been identified by a recent cross-sector report and which include barriers to accessing healthcare and, for many, much-needed supplementary social welfare (Bobek, et al., 2018).

Precarity can also be understood, as Worth (2016), drawing on Butler (2004), sees it, as a psychosocial phenomenon or condition that has profound impact on the internal world which leads to the development of precarious subjects – subjects that, in many ways, are positioned in deep tension to subjects of the hope-focused and transformative projects of adult education.

It was hoped, thus, that the research would not only take stock of the graduate outcomes and experiences of the re-formed Higher Diploma but would also get a sense of the quality of work that graduates were, if at all, moving into.

3. Method

3.1 Purpose and focus of research

The purpose of this research is to gain some understanding about the occupational status and experiences of graduates from DACE's Higher Diploma in Further Education from (HDFE) 2012/13 to 2016/17.

There is also an evaluative and reflective dimension to this research which has been conducted by staff associated with the HDFE as part of an ongoing process of critical programme evaluation.

3.2 Mixed-method approach

The researchers were keen to reach the entire graduate population of the HDFE to get a broad sense of occupational status and experiences. But they were also keen to delve deeper into some of the experiences of graduates. As such, a sequential mixed-method approach utilizing a survey followed by a focus group was adopted.

Mixed method approaches allow philosophical, theoretical and sociopolitical issues to be embraced in a way that draws from qualitative and quantitative methods as appropriate to the way in which the study unfolds (Fitzsimons, 2017, p. 29; Tashakkori & Teddie, 2010).

An online survey was designed via Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) with a combination of closed and open questions relating to graduates' status, experiences and thoughts about the HDFE programme (Appendix two).

The survey was circulated via email to all the graduates (n178) of the HDFE programme on 15 September 2017. The survey was closed on 15 December 2017 by which time 110 graduates or 62% of the total graduate population, had completed the survey.

At the end of October, the entire graduate population were contacted again and invited to a focus group to discuss some of the emerging findings from the survey and discuss their own occupational experiences since graduating.

On 05 December 2017 a small focus group was facilitated by a DACE adult educator who has no connection with the HDFE programme.

3.3 Ethics

This research is grounded in the ethics and practice of a humanist and critical adult education approach to working with adult learners and the researchers work within the ethical and methodological framework of CRALE, Maynooth University's ethics policy and the British Education Research Association (BERA).

The survey did not gather any personal details to ensure the anonymity of the responses. Although anonymity was somewhat compromised for those attending the focus group, the group discussed the importance of maintaining confidentiality throughout the process.

An information and consent form, cohering to Maynooth University Ethics and BERA ethical guidelines was distributed and signed by each participant before the focus group commenced (Appendix three).

3.4 Limitations

Although the survey was completed by a significant proportion of the HDFE graduate population (62%), we are conscious a survey will always only give us a partial window into participant experiences. Considering the high response to the survey, attendance at the follow-on focus group was small (n5), however, the researchers were not too perturbed by this as the contributions were rich and the small size of the group allowed participants to engage deeply and fully with a variety of dimension of their graduate experiences.

As stated at the outset, this research focused exclusively on HDFE graduates – there was no research engagement with other stakeholders (i.e. programme staff; HEI partners; The Teaching Council; ETBs; unions). A larger research project would be well advised to consider broadening the participant base to include these cohorts.

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to identify the occupational and professional outcomes and experiences of HDFE graduates since it commenced in 2012/13.

The online survey, which we will consider first, provided some useful data on occupational outcomes and, in the more open questions, experiences. The issues and themes which started to emerge from the survey (4.2) were explored in more detail in the focus group which followed (4.3).

The total graduate population of the HDFE programme from 2012/13 – 2016/17 is 178. 110, 62% of the total graduate population, completed the survey out of which five attended a follow-up focus group.

4.2 Survey

This section of the report outlines the main finding from the online survey.

4.2.1 Graduate year

The first question (Figure 1) was aimed at identifying the year in which respondents graduated from the programme. The results are recorded overleaf.

1 When did you complete the Higher Diploma in Further Education

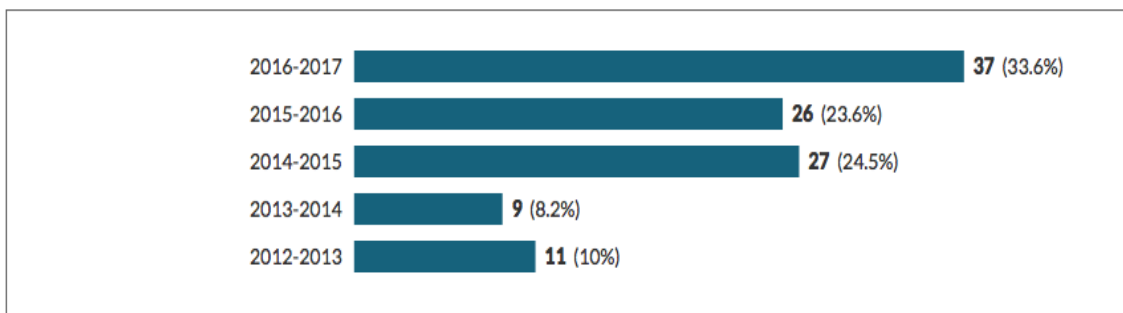


Figure 1

The survey response was high but loaded towards more recent years. This was, in no small part, attributed to the increase in cohort intake from 2014 onwards (see Table 1, Sec. 2.5).

4.2.2 Graduate occupational status

The next question provided data on graduates' current occupational status (Figure 2 and Table 2):

2 What is your current occupational status?

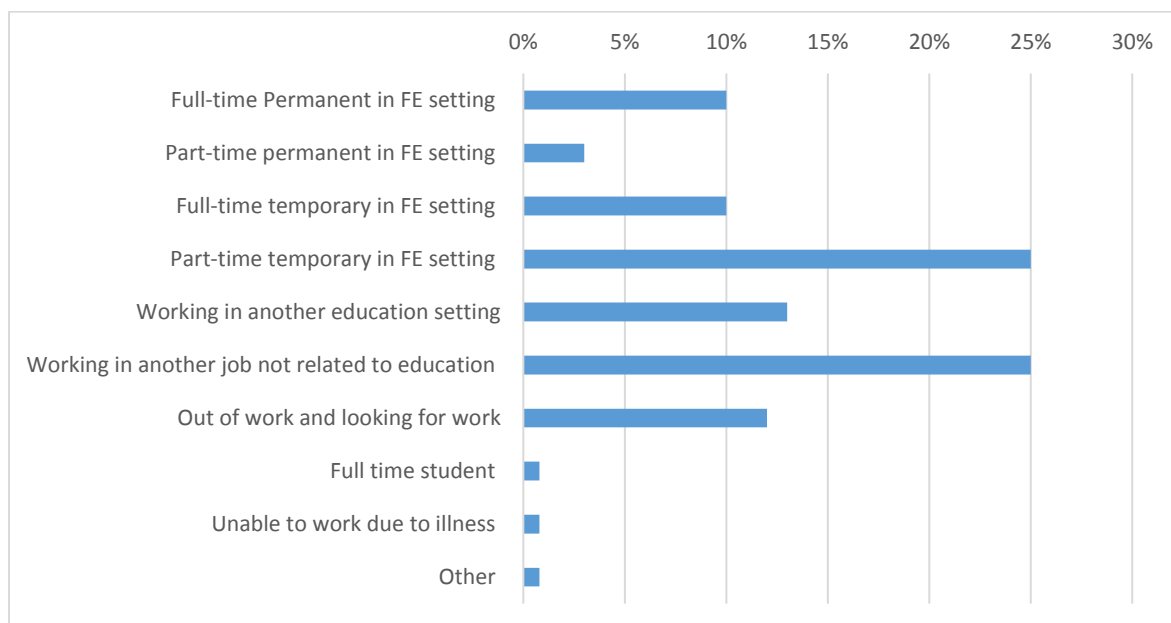


Figure 2

Full-time Permanent in FE setting	10%	11
Part-time permanent in FE setting	3%	3
Full-time temporary in FE setting	10%	11
Part-time temporary in FE setting	25%	28
Working in another education setting	13%	15
Working in another job not related to education	25%	28
Out of work and looking for work	12%	14
Full time student	0.8%	1
Unable to work due to illness	0.8%	1
Other	0.8%	1
TOTAL RESPONSES		113

Table 2

Although 48% of the respondents are working in an FE setting, only 10% (n11) of these are in full-time permanent employment within the sector. It may even be possible that some of these respondents were in positions before undertaking the HDFE – however, questions regarding employment status prior to undertaking the programme were not asked so this will need to be left as conjecture for now. There are exactly the same number of graduates working full-time under temporary contracts in the sector and an even higher proportion, although just slightly, working part-time, temporary contracts in FE.

What is striking from the response to this question is the relatively high proportion of graduates who are ‘working in another job not related to FE’ (25%) and, worryingly, the significant proportion (12%) out of work but actively looking (n14).

The responses to this question also provided data on various dimensions of part-time work for graduates in FE settings (Figure 3 and Table 3). Nearly half (n12) are working between 10-20 hours a week, while just as many again (n12) are getting less than 10 hours a week teaching.

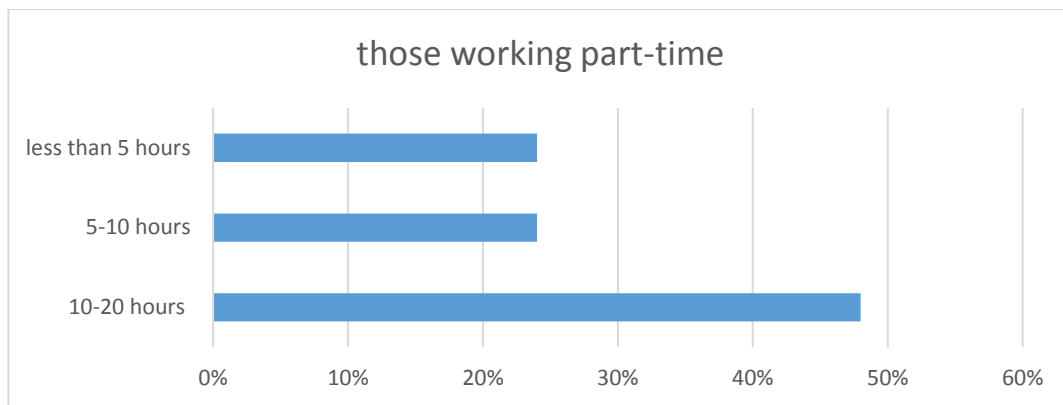


Figure 3

10-20 hours	48%	12
5-10 hours	24%	6
less than 5 hours	24%	6

Table 3

There is also one person working in another education setting (school or college) who is working 10-20 hours and one person working in another education setting who is working 5-10 hours.

Respondents were asked, in a sub-question, if they were working part-time by choice. The vast majority, 75% (n33), indicated that they were not working part-time by choice.

4.2.3 Type of employer organisation

One question inquired into the type of organisations past-students are working within. This result is quantified in figure four which follows:

3 If you are currently working in the FE sector, what type of organisation are you currently working for?

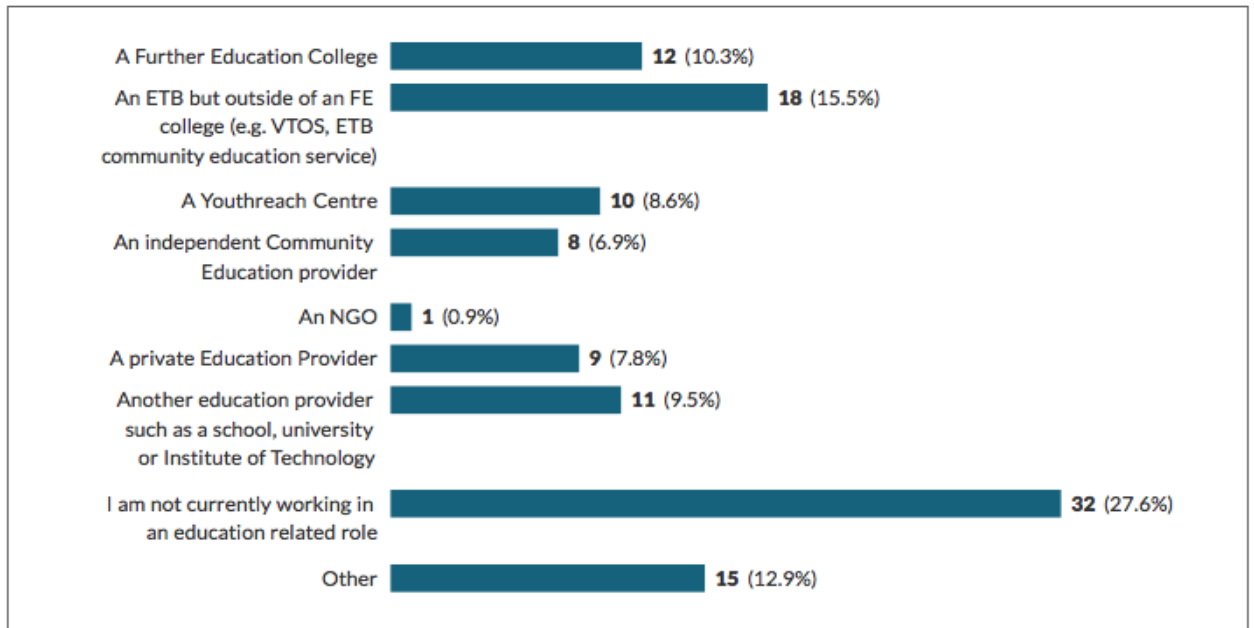


Figure 4

Responses from this question, and its sub-questions, reveal the following destinations for HDFE graduates (listed in descending order):

- Not working in education (n32)
- ETB (not FE colleges) (n18)
- FE college (n11)
- Other educational (school, university, IT) (n11)
- Youthreach (n10)
- Private education institution/company (n9)
- Independent community organisation (n8)
- Employment services (n3)
- National Learning Network, disability organisation, other (n7)

What is most striking, again, about the results here is that, by far at 27.6% (n32), the highest proportion of graduates are 'not currently working in an education related role'. This represents almost a third of the graduates who completed the survey and a high proportion of the overall graduate population.

Interestingly, despite the strong emphasis on FE on the programme, most graduates working in the sector are not working in a FE college as such, and, instead are working within the ETB on VTOS programmes; the community education services; or with a Youthreach Centre.

In fact, there are nearly as many (n11) graduates working in schools, universities or ITs, as there are in a FE college (n12).

4.2.4 Further academic study

The survey, in this question, attempted to identify the extent to which HDFE graduates have gone on to further study (Figure 5).

4 Have you completed any further academic studies since completing the HDFE?

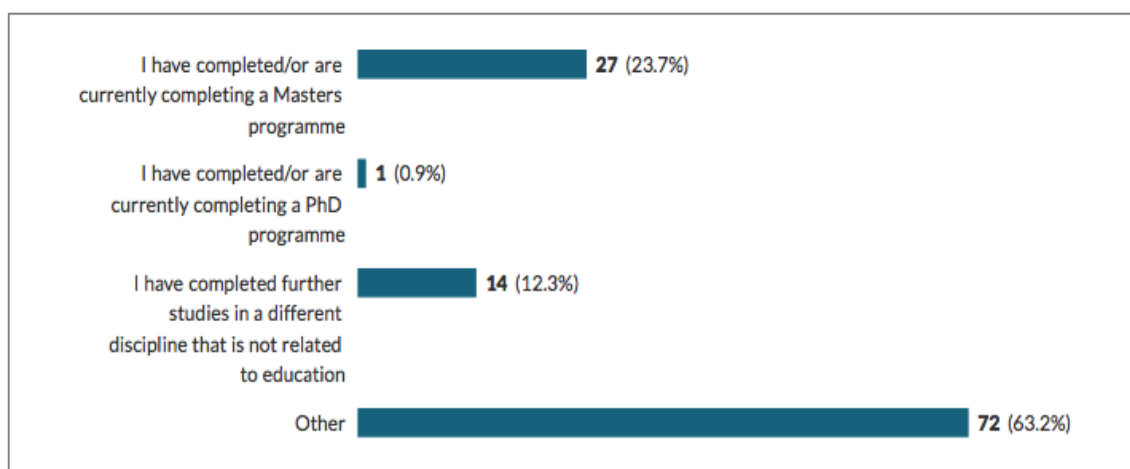


Figure 5

The responses here show that around a third of graduates from the HDFE went on to further study – a significant proportion of these (n14/12.3%) completed studies in a discipline unrelated to education.

The relatively high-proportion who responded 'other' in this question can be explained by a slight flaw in the survey design as no option was provided for 'no further study'. Many in this

category selected 'other' instead and indicated in the comment section that they were not engaged in further study.

4.2.5 Experiences of CPD since graduation

Question five asked survey respondents about their experience of continuous professional development (CPD) since graduating from Maynooth University.

5 Have you completed any Continuous Professional Development (CPD) since completing the HDFE. Examples of this could be further training in groupwork, assessment methods, team building, IT systems etc.

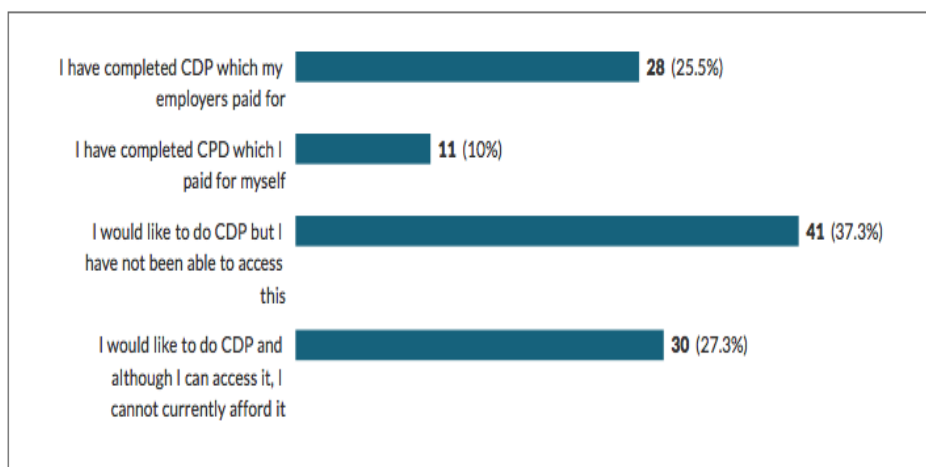


Figure 6

Although there is significant Continuous Professional development (CPD) activity in evidence for over a third of the graduates, over 64.6% (n71) express an interest in engaging with CPD but are prevented from doing so due to financial or access issues.

4.2.6 Perception of career impact of HDFE

Notwithstanding earlier assertions that identify the wider benefits of the higher diploma in Further Education beyond employability, respondents were asked to consider to what extent the HDFE put them on a 'desired career path' (Figure 7).

6 The HDFE has put me on my desired career path and I am now working in a job that I enjoy.

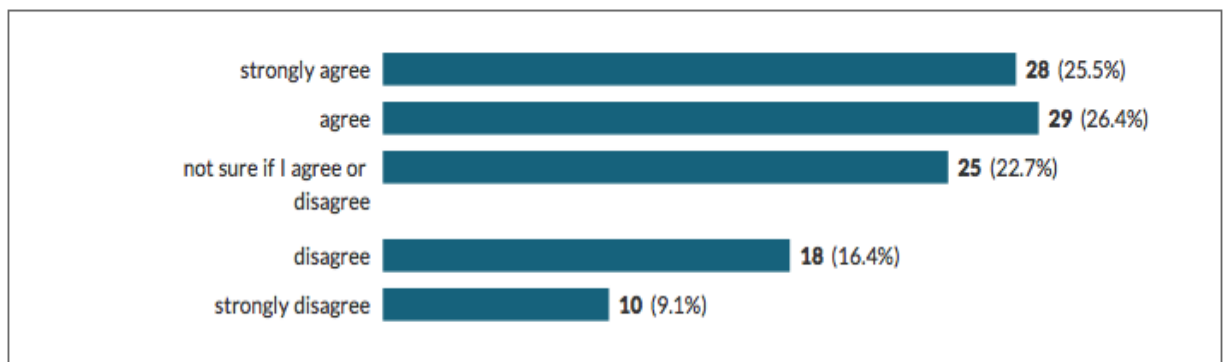


Figure 7

The perception of the impact of the HDFE on supporting graduates pursue their desired career is distributed across the scale. Over half agree or strongly agree that the programme has put them on their desired career path. About a quarter of respondents are, as yet, unsure. However, as many of the respondents have recently completed the programme, it is understandable that it may be too early for some to make that judgement with any sense of conviction. Nonetheless, over a quarter also disagree or strongly disagree that the HDFE has put them on their desired career path.

4.2.7 Impact of HDFE on earnings

Respondents were asked to what extent they felt that the HDFE programme has enabled them to earn a 'reasonable wage'.

7 The HDFE has enabled me to earn a reasonable wage

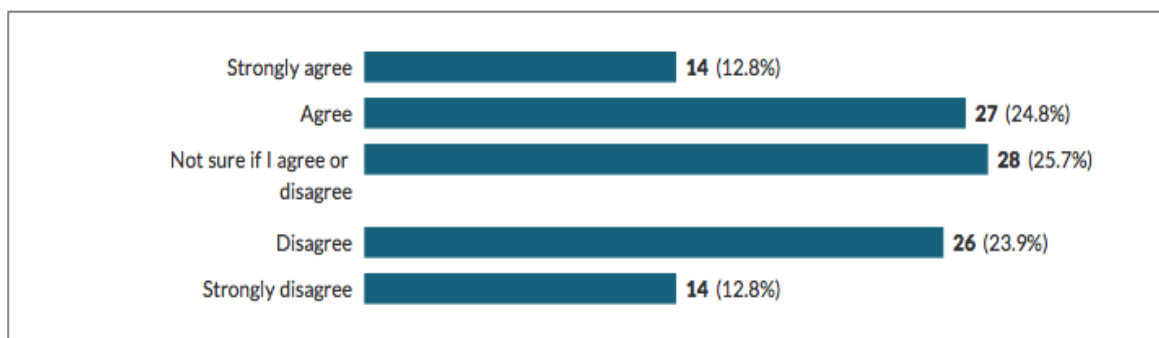


Figure 8

Graduates' views on the efficacy of the programme in enabling them to earn a 'reasonable wage' is very mixed with responses clustering around the neutral centre. As many people strongly agree as strongly disagree with this statement (n14/12.8%) and those who agree (n27) outnumber those who disagree (n26) by just one. The highest proportion are, as yet, unsure. Again, the respondents to this research are relatively newly qualified and, if working at all, in the early stages of their careers. Previous responses suggest the diversity of working hours and conditions and it is not unreasonable for graduates to be reticent in providing any definitive response to this question yet.

4.2.8 Reflections on progression from HDFE

The final question in the survey invited graduates to comment openly on anything else they would like to say about progression from the HDFE. Seventy one of the 110 respondents responded to this open question. There was no restriction put on word count and some respondents wrote at some length.

Some comments were quite extensive. The comments, partially as preparation for the focus group that followed, were analysed for, and grouped together in, thematic associations. After several readings, a number of tentatively-defined themes emerged:

- Precarity and conditions of work as barrier
- ETB recruitment practices
- Networking
- Standing of HDFE in sector
- Importance of FE-friendly subjects
- Transferable skills enabling progression to other fields of work

These thematic clusters are used to present the responses from this final question which are reported below extensively.

Precarity, limited opportunities and conditions of work as barrier

One of the strongest themes to emerge from this open question at the end of the survey was the extent to which HDFE graduates are experiencing occupational precarity and, what many regard as poor pay, in their working lives in FE:

I found the HDFE qualification and training to be very beneficial. However, it does get somewhat disheartening when many of the contracts of employment in this sector are precarious. It is also somewhat annoying that a person with a "Train the Trainer Course" can still command a position within many areas of Further education over that of someone with an Honours Degree and a Teaching H-Dip. (2)²

It's just so hard to get permanent work, therefore stability is a struggle. (5)

The HDFE was a good course but it is nigh on impossible to get full time hours year round working in this sector hence the reason for me looking to work with unemployed, as there is greater job security (7)

FE jobs are few, currently working less than 5 hours per week as a learning support teacher. I have no contract & I can be called in last minute. No job security (11)

Some respondents linked contractual precarity with low rates of pay and poor contractual conditions:

Employers want you to work as a tutor freelance and pay you for tutoring only - no preparation time/money, no payment for corrections. The hourly rate is not covering all this. There is no job security that is why I had to leave the FE sector. (18)

² The numbers in parentheses following each quote refers to numeric identifiers assigned to each of the 71 responses to this question.

A forty-hour week on just above minimum wage is not a fair condition of work and is an erosion of both student care and the rights of teachers. (3)

Lower pay scales means I am earning less than in my previous non-education post. Difficulty with temporary contracts and the [institution] I work for insisting on re-interviewing means I have interviewed 8 times in just over 2 years, often with the same interview panel. The confidence I gained during the HDFE is being eroded by this process and making me re-consider my decision to move to education (21)

I was recently offered six weeks full time work in Youthreach but due to financial reasons I couldn't leave full time work for only 6 weeks work. (34)

Many respondents associate precarity with the lack of long term jobs or limited opportunities to develop a stable career in the sector:

I am also very disappointed with the lack of job opportunities. More than disappointed, I am distressed. It will be a struggle for me to pay my rent in the coming months. I feel the time and money spent on the HDFE was wasted. The HDFE has not enhanced my life in any way. In fact my already precarious existence has become even more precarious. I do not know where to go from here, but I certainly won't be taking any more courses in Maynooth. (28)

Almost impossible to get full time permanent work in this sector. At the moment, that suits me, but would like it to be an option in the future. (31)

Very difficult to get work. (32)

The HDFE has equipped me with the knowledge and tools to pursue my chosen career in FE. However the uncertainty of the sector in terms of lack of permanent contracts and substitution pay is challenging. (33)

I gained some contract temporary hours however the prospect of long term work is questionable. The choices of employment are limiting and this is an aspect that I find very disappointing. (39)

The employment climate in 2014 was not conducive to obtaining any sort of sustainable employment in HDFE which would give a reasonable standard of living - - because this was not a viable option I explored other options. (40)

So far I have been a little disappointed about my progression from the HDFE as I have been unable to find work. I have applied for many positions but have been unsuccessful so far. (41)

The HDFE is a very good course. However the FE sector is not up to date with qualifications. There are no full time jobs. I would feel lucky now to be offered a few hours work which is a shock to me after the cost and effort of the HDFE. [...]. In my opinion the only jobs open to us are on an hourly basis with absolutely no security. I hold out no hope that i will find the rewarding career that I was so excited about on commencement of the HDFE. (43)

There are not many FE posts for more than 5-10 hours currently but more hours become available. I was offered 5 hours with the promise of more. But I took a job in adult special needs education in X. It is permanent full-time post (44)

The uncertainty of set hours per term means that you cannot plan your year. (49)

I didn't go on to complete a masters because of the insecurity of work in further education. (51)

I was successful in getting 4 hours teaching in FE sector after completing the HDFE. It was impossible to live on this wage. (53)

I have noticed that there is a distinct gap between what is learnt on the HDFE course

and requirements to gain liveable employment in FE sector. There is no induction from qualification into the ETBs so leading to a loss of skills and knowledge over time. This needs to be addressed immediately in order for qualified FE tutors to practice their newly learnt skills. (55)

I was offered non-teaching jobs in the education setting but I [am] waiting for an official teaching contract to come up. This was a risk and more difficult as I had to be 2 years with my own teaching hours before I was given permanency. But this was worth it in the end. I have now 22 permanent teaching hours (6)

I was successful in an interview to get onto a panel for part-time FE teaching work and am hopeful of getting some teaching hours this year. (29)

ETB recruitment practices

Another theme which emerged from this final, open question related to the graduates' sense of frustration in relation to recruiting practices, especially within ETBs. Some respondents, drew attention to the need for more support and information on the application and recruitment process on the HDFE programme.

I would like to see more transparency by ETB's, particularly in relation to interviewing candidates for posts that may or may not exist. I am happy to interview for a post if there is a real and competitive chance of employment, but more and more I am seeing it being used to satisfy a legal requirement while behind the scenes they redeploy existing staff or do whatever else they want. (2)

Having found the course both challenging, confusing and enjoyable in the same breadth, and having gained excellent results from the course, I have been left bewildered with the chance to actually find a job. I knocked on many doors and even as recently, as last week, I approached an ETB to ask how do I get in to further education. The lovely lady told me, the chances of this are very difficult. As I finished

the course in the summer of 15/16 I really tried. I remember doing an interview for a job delivering a QQI level 5 healthcare course for 1 hour a week. There was a panel of 4 people in front of me and kept me barely 10 minutes. I didn't even have time to do a bad interview. Before the interview I thought I had a brilliant chance of getting the job as I had 4 years' experience in the healthcare field. A week later I got an email back saying I didn't get the 1 hour job. At the time I thought nothing of it, but as time wore on and the more doors were being closed on me, the more I began to wonder what am I just after putting my family through for the last year. I found myself now in a career of necessity rather than choice. With a young family I had to take up a team leader position guaranteeing me a wage, not something that earns me 3 hours pay for 10 weeks. I am angry and annoyed that I have been so let down by lack of job opportunities. I want to teach. I believe I would be brilliant at it. Yet I am not allowed to do it. (4)

So far no jobs in FE have come up despite the size of the city. I have noticed jobs advertised nationwide that still state qualifications needed are experience and/or train the trainer. I have approached every educational institution available to me but I have never been offered work in a teaching role. I am constantly checking for FE jobs and despite having my own business I would love a teaching role and can facilitate it if it came up. I feel as though I am losing touch with my chosen career path (26).

A number of graduates indicated that they would like to have seen more job-orientated supports and processes tailored to opportunities within Further Education on the HDFE programme:

It would have been a great support to have had some time allocated during the course to filling out application forms, advice on interviews and updating C.V. s with relevant experience gained through the course, collaborative job hunting and guidance as to the potential avenues available to HDFE students. Felt somewhat at a loss as to how to find work potential avenues available to HDFE students. Felt

somewhat at a loss as to how to find work and secure employment as an inexperienced but highly qualified F.E. teacher. (8)

It is difficult to break get a foot in the door of FE settings. I think it will take a couple of years to build up enough teaching experience in order to be considered for decent hours or an actual contract of employment. The interview process for employment with ETB's also seems to be quite difficult, I would suggest that some time is given on the HDFE course to preparing students for interviews as a lot of my colleagues (myself included) felt unprepared for the type of questions being asked at interview. Having said that, a lot of the interviews seem to be for the purpose of appearing to conform to requirements, as the jobs would appear to have been allocated prior to interview. (10)

The HDFE did not adequately prepare students for FE job searches, applications and interviews. There should be a stronger focus on this area going forward. (12)

It is very difficult to gain entry in to an FE Setting. I have applied for numerous positions but nothing has happened yet. I am working in a second level school doing substitute teaching. I apply to FE institutions all the time. (38)

I feel maybe applying for work should be covered and interview techniques like the type of questions that would be asked as I feel it would help students to feel more confident. (42)

Jobs in FE are very sparse and I got very few interviews. In Y [county] there is simply no jobs advertised at all. I heard a panel of substitution was put together by Y-ETB last year and all jobs will be filled by this panel for the next 3 years. (47)

Networking

The importance of networks, or social capital, also emerged as a significant theme:

The HDFE prepared me to facilitate learners to the best of my ability with confidence in my knowledge and methodology. However, many of my peers can't find work and I know that most of what I'm doing work wise came about because I have worked in the centre as a volunteer. It seems to be difficult, regardless of qualifications, if you do not have contacts. (9)

I find it disappointing that there are platforms in place for other teaching graduates but nothing in place for graduates of HDFE. (14)

I located work through contacts so I believe networking is very important in this field. (17)

Because of the course I was able to experience working in different further education settings to find the type which suited me best. It resulted in me finding work that I enjoy (35)

Some identified the importance of the HDFE placement as a networking opportunity that they could capitalise on once they graduated:

I got this job in NLN nearly 2 years ago thanks to my Hdip placement. So that was rather positive. It has been a very rich experience, full of learning, but I have never earned teacher wages (15 euro an hour). (47)

For some, there was a strong sense of nepotism associated with securing work:

I feel that there is favouritism in the sector which needs to be addressed as there are tutors who deserve to be given the opportunity to work in this sector who are overlooked in favour of friends. (49)

It's difficult to find work in Further Education unless you are lucky at times and had previously worked there as part of teacher training, or know somebody. (50)

Standing of HDFE in sector

There was some sense, in the survey responses, that the HDFE standing within the sector has less 'employability' value than secondary teacher training qualifications, and even in some instances, the Level 7 certificate course, *Train the Trainer*.

I don't think the HDFE holds any standing for helping me get a job. I have found people looking for Train the Trainer even more so, and that breaks my heart. With those who have done it, laughing at what I put myself through. Why are people with secondary school qualifications getting in before us? This is what those involved in the ETBs are telling us, "they take on secondary school teachers quicker". That makes my blood boil. More regulation is needed. A lot of the ETBs want 4 years teaching experience! how do I get it? (4)

The HDFE does not possess the standing that it needs to with HR divisions and AEOs of the ETBs. Many regard it as the 'poor relation' and look on it less favourably as we are not able to deliver educational material in mainstream second level schools. (7)

I would love to have gained work in FE and was interviewed and put on a panel but never called. I'm not sure if it's recognized here in the Midlands or even taken into consideration by the ETB. (45)

I also feel those who completed this [HDFE] are restricted in where they can get jobs as post primary qualifications may be favoured over further ed (51).

Importance of FE-friendly subjects

A number of respondents drew attention to the importance of subject specialisation in terms of employability.

I was given the impression that my degree subjects would enable me to teach in the FE sector, this has proved unfounded. It appears that a social care, psychology or sociology background would have been more beneficial. Very disheartening to put your heart and soul into the Hdip and then be unable to secure employment. The work that is available appears to be very part time and insecure. It would be beneficial if the HDFE had clear links with Plc colleges or community groups to perhaps enable participants to access meaningful employment. (20)

I feel that the HDFE was a good grounding in philosophy, psychology and sociology of working in FE but the reality of my job is far removed from my HDFE experience. This is both advantageous and disadvantageous. (27)

Unfortunately the work available was only limited hours due to my degree and having one subject. Because specifically for VEC work hard to get into due to lack of open positions also, so moved back to office work (36)

Those teaching my subjects are either secondary school teachers or people with no relevant qualifications.(43)

More FE-specific skills

A number of respondents felt that their capacity for gaining employment in the sector would be enhanced if the HDFE programme developed more FE-relevant training – particularly relating to programme design and quality assurance processes.

The course in itself was enjoyable and very informative the modules while useful overall in understanding the sector, the 'adult classroom' and the challenges the sector faces, I think employers are looking for specific skills. For example, assessment and grading, evaluation, QQI accredited teaching experience, QQI application procedures, funding applications, outcomes of teaching, continual assessment and statistics. Adult and further education especially look for these skills (19)

Transferable skills enabling progression to other fields of work

A number of respondents commended the HDFE programme for enabling them to develop a range of high-level skills which they have used in a range of occupational contexts.

At times I did not see how the HDFE would set me up for work as it seems so far from my experience and perceived capabilities. It turned out that the HDFE set me up and enabled me to embark on a road I never could of envisaged. I loved the HDFE and how it challenged yet guided my growth as a professional [sic]. I would say going forward it would be useful to have more 'real' life on the ground information such as module design and QQI submission as this is a practical aspect which I have found does help when it comes to getting work. (14)

The HDFE has given me a lot of tools in terms of engaging learners. Although I work in Higher Education I am constantly using some of the transferable tools for engaging and hearing the learner voice. Thank you for that. (46)

The HDFE course is extremely useful in terms of growth and learning regarding the blend of teaching practice and academic and practical modules covered on the course. It has really helped me to learn so much about learning and facilitation. So much so that three years later I regularly re-use a lot of what I have learned on the course especially in blended learning and transformative learning. I could not have been more happy to have participated on the course. (48)

Even though I am working in a primary school I now feel qualified. (52)

The HDFE course is extremely useful in terms of growth and learning regarding the blend of teaching practice and academic and practical modules covered on the course. It has really helped me to learn so much about learning and facilitation. So much so that three years later I regularly re-use a lot of what I have learned on the course especially in blended learning and transformative learning. I could not have been more happy to have participated on the course.

Positive impact on career and personal development

It is important to acknowledge the several extremely positive reflections from respondents regarding the impact of the HDFE programme on their lives and careers.

Fantastic programme. Now working in a job that I love (23)

The HDFE was pivotal to changing my employability in education (24)

It was an amazing year. Everything I learned in that I am using today in my lesson and in my approach to the learners (25)

It has given me a chance of a whole new life and is the best choice I've ever made. (30)

I was fortunate enough to find full time work almost immediately after completing the course in May earlier this year. The role is co-ordinator and tutor for a local training initiative and is funded by XETB. The experience and knowledge gained during my two work placements was invaluable and most definitely gave me the confidence to apply for the role in the first place. (37)

From a personal and professional perspective, I would not be where I am today without the guidance from the HDFE, and I am eternally grateful that I engaged with the course. (54)

4.3 Focus group

As detailed in section 3.2, the HDFE graduate population (as opposed to the survey respondents) were approached again in November 2017 and invited to attend a focus group to discuss the initial survey findings and explore, in more depth, graduate experiences. The email asked those interested in attending to complete the survey. All five graduates who attended the focus group completed the survey.

The focus group was held on the 05 Dec 2017 and was facilitated by an experienced adult educator who, although a member of staff with DACE, has no association with the HDFE programme.

Five graduates attended the session, who we will name here as Liz, Orla, Emma, Hannah and Tom. Two of the participants had graduated from the HDFE in 2016 and the other three in 2017. Three of the five live and work in the greater Dublin area, while two live and work in the midlands.

After introductions and discussions about the ethical dimensions of the research, the facilitator briefly presented some of the themed findings emerging from the survey as a way of opening up and extending a deeper conversation and understanding of graduate occupational experiences.

A number of issues emerged in the focus group discussion:

- status of the HDFE
- qualified/unqualified status and rates of pay
- subject specialism in FE
- inequality of access to post-qualification induction and CPD
- Facebook as an emerging, but delineated, community of practice
- The need to focus on sector-specific job seeking skills
- More work on practical curriculum/programme skills

Each of these themes, which extend and diversify the themes emerging from the survey, are outlined in more depth below.

4.3.1 Status of HDFE

The status of the HDFE and of those with Teaching Council registration status particular to FE was a dominant theme in the discussion.

I had to apply for my job today and the criteria was either the HDip or Train the Trainer (Level 7) ... and so you know ... they're on a par (Emma)

I don't think its valued as it should be considering that we've put the time and effort into it ... and the crossover with the sectors, we can't teach post-primary, and they [post-primary] can teach in FE ... their skills are more transferable and you can see why – if that centre closes down, you know, they can put them in a school they can switch them around ... you can see in my centre, and I know it's a legacy issue, most of them are post-primary. (Orla)

4.3.2 Qualified/unqualified, contracts and rates of pay

A significant part of the focus group discussion gravitated around conditions of work, contracts and pay and conditions for HDFE graduates as they entered the educational workforce.

I do some substitute work in a post-primary, special school ... I am allowed to work in the school because I'm on the Teaching Council. I would only be allowed to work four days a week and I am getting the unqualified rate. I am down as an unqualified teacher which ... this is my first job that I went into after this and it was just .. aw god .. unqualified ... I could have done this before I did the HDip ... but then I probably

wouldn't have got an interview but I know that the HDip benefits me so much in the work that I do in this school – this is a special education school. You don't follow a curriculum like you do in primary or secondary school and you need to be very adaptable and it's all about life skills. It's hugely beneficial and I just find it slightly annoying that I have to put down 'unqualified' and get paid less than someone who, I would consider, if you did a pure secondary school programme that you would be less able than someone with the HDFE to teach in special educational contexts. (Hannah)

And the reason that we are getting those jobs [in special educational schools and non-FET jobs] is that they are screaming for teachers ... we wouldn't have been looked at three years ago (Orla).

Tom has had a similar experience in gaining employment recently in a SEN post-secondary school.

The same thing happened me and another job came up in a special school as well and I was thinking with my qualification would that work - I rang the Teaching Council and I was told 'you are a qualified teacher – you can teach in primary, post-primary, further education. It all depends on the Principal and the ETB. But you are a qualified teacher ...

At this point in the Focus Group Tom is challenged on this assertion by other participants. But Tom explains that ...

This is what the Teaching Council told me last Friday ... and I think it comes down to they are screaming for teachers and they are overlooking this now. ... And the principal said that they would put in a special case to the ETB to get me there ... I suppose the point is if you are looking for work, don't overlook this area. (Tom)

Liz reflected that she is out of work now and that this conversation has enlightened her to other opportunities and that she will broaden her scope as she had only been looking in the FE sector as she thought that was the only sector she was allowed to work in.

Significant time was spent discussing qualified and unqualified rates. It was pointed out that 150 hours were needed to earn the qualified rate but that, according to one ETB, these hours must accrue without a break with one centre (in the case discussed by one participant, a Community Training Centre).

There was substantial confusion amongst the focus group participants regarding subject specialism registration with The Teaching Council and the associated implications for the right to earn qualified and unqualified rates.

Indeed, there was a general agreement that confusion regarding rights and conditions of employment characterised the feelings of all participants as they entered the field in the search for work.

There is a lot of uncertainty in general about jobs and pay to be honest. (Hannah)

The whole sector is fragmented ... its no wonder (Hannah)

It was all a bit all over the place. I didn't know what was going on [in terms of pay and conditions]. (Liz).

I'm finding that too with pay. It's a minefield. You're not told until you start. I didn't know whether I was qualified or unqualified. I just arrived down there and met the caretaker and off with you. (Orla)

You could be on minimum wage and you wouldn't know. (Liz)

I discovered I was on [unqualified] tutor rate but however I will finish it out and another thing, I'm there nearly eight weeks and I haven't got paid ... how can people survive? (Orla)

It emerged from the discussion that there are different pay cycles for different status workers in different ETBs. It also emerged that permanent staff are paid fortnightly and temporary staff paid monthly.

But the problem that two centres within the same ETB can do contracts and pay very differently. It's very hard to say what it will be like. (Tom)

The graduates of the HDFE, according to the participants, would benefit with a lot more information and knowledge about rates of pay, contracts, and rights as they enter the field and possibly even before they enrol on the programme.

There was also discussions and a consensus that ETBs are not keen to develop opportunities for educators which may lead to permanency.

ETB make it clear that they don't make you CID. (Orla)

The principal told me that the ETB only do agency hours and that they will move you on after three years so that they don't have to give you CID. (Tom)

My contract is just the part-time, tutor panel – so you're entitled to nothing. If you get hours, you get hours, but you're not entitled to anything – it's a zero-hour contract basically ... and then whoever has CID hours will be contacted first – so you could be brilliant at your job, but if someone has CID hours, they'll have to get that first – then it's your turn, if there's anything left ... crumbs. (Hannah)

Towards the end of the session, and because so much of the conversation was dominated by the apparent professional inequities in terms of career opportunities and contractual

discussions, the facilitator asked if anyone saw a role for more union involvement. There was general agreement but, again, the sense of a fragmented sector meant that participants were unsure what could be done. However, there was agreement with Tom's comment that

There needs to be more FE tutors represented within the unions. (Tom)

4.3.3 Subject specialism

The graduate participant conversation also turned, more than once, to the issue of subject specialism. Unlike the secondary school sector, curriculum areas and subject specialisms are less defined and delineated. This was a cause of some concern when, not for the first time, graduates compared themselves less favourably to their secondary school teaching colleagues.

I ticked certain subjects like English ... but whose registered with TC to teach Mindfulness or Personal Effectiveness? (Hannah)

Liz talks, as a graduate with Irish, that there are very little opportunities for her to teach Irish within FE Colleges. However, as she has developed post-qualification experience in communications and customer service, she has contacted The Teaching Council about getting these on her recognised subject list. She is unsure about the status of that despite having written to The Teaching Council. More generally, there was uncertainty about how subjects can be added to a Teaching Council teaching profile – or if this is even possible for those registered via route 3.

4.3.4 Inequality of access to post-qualification induction and CPD

Hannah raised another dimension of professional inequity between the education sectors. She became aware that primary and post-primary teachers are supported through a range of programmes in their early career. In particular, she referred to The Teaching Council's

Droichead induction programme for newly qualified secondary school teachers and the broader framework, *Cosán*, for teacher professional learning (The Teaching Council, 2015). However, as Hannah pointed out, the early-career experiences of those registered via route 3 is very different. Learning and career development opportunities are stunted by precarious working conditions and a lack of any genuine opportunity to be integrated into established communities of practice. Despite membership of the Teaching Council, there is no, as Hannah pointed out, equivalent professional induction programme or supports.

But a lot of us are the same in that we are in different places [centres/colleges] ... there's a lot of different places and you don't really settle as much than if you are in one place. It's a huge advantage if you have your colleagues but a lot of people are just going in and delivering and off you go somewhere else ... you don't have that continuity to build relationships with colleagues and also learn from them ... especially as a new teacher. I'm always trying to grab the coordinator if I see her – five minutes – because there is so much I have to learn and that is another thing that I've seen in some primary and secondary schools ... they have a new teacher programme for newly-qualified teachers ... they have a programme with CPD for the first year ... there is no doubt that in the first year you learn so much and you hit the ground running and you are expected to know so much – and you don't – and secondary sector has those [post-qualification] programmes with mandatory CPD hours. I don't even know if we have any ... I mean where would we even go? There are no organised things ... (Hannah)

4.3.5 Facebook as an emerging but delineated community of practice

In the absence of an institutional community of practice, the graduates talked about the value of their Facebook group which they developed as students during their HDFE year as a post-graduate space for support and development.

There were many times we went back to our little Facebook group from the HDip and there was great solace there – and at least you could express yourself and ask questions ... and be relaxed and ask a question and not feel stupid. (Emma)

It's nice to know that others are feeling the same too. (Liz)

It's so nice when someone posts 'I know this is a stupid question ...' and it's not ever (Hannah).

It would be great to link up the Facebook pages from every year, everyone has their own Facebook group page, there is so much information, and the new group is going to ask the same questions as last year ... and we have so much information now. (Tom)

4.3.6 The need to focus on sector specific job-seeking skills

A significant part of the conversation related to the complex and inconsistent recruitment practices in the sector – particularly in relation to the ETBs. Participants reported being overwhelmed and confused in navigating the career-entry landscape of FET and other spaces where adult education are typically employed. For example, finding job postings; application forms; and interviewing, etc.

I found it very hard to sell myself and recognise all the skills that I have simply because I came back to college as a mature student and I'm only a few years working on a new career ... so maybe a little bit of attention to ... interview skills, applying for jobs ... I think some depends on your own self-determination and self-belief ... They asked me at the interview why I wanted this job and I said 'I need a job. I really need a job' and that was from the bottom of my toes. Maybe it sounded a bit desperate. But I think it helped me. (Emma)

But you're right – that is the answer to that question ... that's exactly what's going through my head (Liz)

The facilitator asked if anyone engaged with Careers when they were students at Maynooth University but the responses suggested that the Careers Service is not really set up for mature

students with tight time schedules and that, furthermore, the service really didn't know much about opportunities in FET or community education.

And nothing was ever taught here about the application forms ... and every ETB is different ... and we never heard once about where any of the jobs would be advertised – we had to work that out ourselves. And then there are jobs outside ETB and you have to search for them. (Tom).

I think it would be very important to teach that. (Hannah)

And especially the questions they ask on the forms – they are mind blowing. (Tom)

Oh my god, I was forty six hours filling out an application form once for an ETB ... And loads of people in the class got interviews and I didn't. ... I think that that definitely needs to be brought into the HDip – how difficult these forms are. (Liz)

As well as challenges with the logistics of applying for jobs, there were also a sense of general exasperation with ETB recruitment practices and, in particular, the uncertainty, even if participants were on a panel, if there would be work after a summer term.

We finished in June and I started work in November ... there's no way that most people could wait that time waiting for work ... so they end up working somewhere else (Orla).

The X ETB were very late in looking for tutors (Hannah).

As well as the uncertainty over available hours, participants also raised issues such as networks and age in the search for more stable work.

There was a girl I was working with in X FE College in Dublin and she told me that she's never got a job before September – September that's when the jobs come out. ... Doing the HDip, you're told that you're going to be the leaders of the field ... you're

told all that ... it's your fault if you believe it and its probably said in good faith but the reality is that you are the bottom rung and you are just going to have to pick the crumbs off until the time comes until you move up. I think that should be emphasised to people in the HDip – look you're not going to walk into a job - you'll slowly accumulate hours ... but you might have to work at the unqualified rate, you might have to work part-time ... but that's how it's going to work until you're networked enough until you can call the shots (Tom)

I found my age to be a big factor ... em when I was in the Community Training Centre ... I'm twenty-six and I felt that a lot of the teachers there talked to me like I was one of the students and it was patronising to be really honest. I would come up with ideas about what I wanted to do in the class and they'd be like 'Ah, look at the ideas she's coming up with' ... I struggled with my age ... another job I went to they told me that I didn't have enough years' experience ... so it was my age again. (Liz)

I can relate to that experience there of teachers who are there a very long time are quick to belittle you ... but I think it's good, coming back to what Tom said about being the leaders, I'd see that positively and I think it's good to remember that. And I think the HDFE was very rich – I think that it felt that you were tapping into something special and, you have to remember that. (Emma)

4.3.7 More work on practical curriculum/programme skills

One aspect of the HDFE that all five participants felt could be enhanced related to practical programme planning skills that were specific to QQI contexts.

I thought the HDip was too theory-based ... when you go into FE settings they will have set subjects ... the curriculum should be more linked to what FE is teaching ... so, for example, if a module descriptor was handed to people [HDFE students, who are asked then to ...] put that together and teach that to the [HDFE] class - because that is what's going to happen. But that really didn't happen. It was very theory-

based – you were left to your own devices ... Bring the jobs into the classroom ... (Tom).

It would have been great if the HDip said that these [maths, communications, English] are your core subjects. Go and put a class together for these – here are your descriptors - rather than sitting for days in a class theorising curriculum for nothing (Tom).

Everyone says the same thing ... I'd love to see more of that in the classroom. You're handed the descriptor and ... how would you put that together if I sent you into a class with that and asked how would you start – that would be great. It would also be benefit when you go for interview because your first question is 'have you any experience of delivering a QQI module?' You really are left to your own devices (Liz).

There was a lot of learning after we finished the course especially regarding QQI and putting things together (Hannah).

I think we did touch on it in one of [The Learning Methodologies] classes she [the lecturer] showed us an example how she would break it down ... maybe if we did a small module around that with the core modules (Orla).

... [names lecturer]'s module was a big, long theory-based module ... I don't think there was a need for that ... I presume that was a box-ticking exercise for the Teaching Council but I think [lecturer] could have incorporated more working with [QQI] modules (Tom).

As Orla pointed out, some of the programme and module planning and design knowledge was developed on placement. However, 'it did depend on the quality of the placement as well' (Orla).

Conclusion

When we look across the findings from the survey and the focus group, it is clear that there is an issue and not insignificant anxiety about career prospects in the sector and associated frustrations in negotiating the complex and highly-localised differentiations in recruitment practices across, in particular, ETBs. Although the research was not, primarily, focussed on programme evaluation (there are existing practices and structures in place for this), there are a number of issues raised which will be of interest to the HDFE programme to reflect upon.

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses the most significant themes that emerged from a synthetic analysis of both the survey, and the focus group data.

5.1 Emerging themes

Five distinct, yet in reality often overlapping, themes emerge - namely the transformative nature of the educational experience, uncertain, precarious occupational futures, sectoral recruitment practices, a sense of professional inequity, and the potential to review programme content.

5.1.1 A transformative learning space

It is clear that for many of the research participants that the HDFE programme provided them, with a significant and transformative learning experience. At times, as encapsulated by one of the survey respondents, this transformative dimension of the programme was not fully appreciated until some time after graduation:

At times I did not see how the HDFE would set me up for work as it seems so far from my experience and perceived capabilities. It turned out that the HDFE set me up and enabled me to embark on a road I never could of [sic] envisaged. I loved the HDFE and how it challenged yet guided my growth as a professional. (14)

Of course, the programme staff and DACE in general have worked hard over the years to create and sustain spaces for such learning and all would, no doubt, admit that their scholarly output (Connolly, et al., 2007; Finn, 2016; Finnegan, 2016; Fitzsimons, 2017; Fleming, 2004; Grummell, 2014; McCormack, 2007; Murray, et al., 2015; Ryan, 2001) is just one dimension, possibly the tip of the iceberg, of their important and often, counter-hegemonic practice-orientated work. It became clear the department needed to review their existing Higher Diploma in light of significant new professional regulations and gate-keeping which came with

shifting structures, processes and discourses and, more specifically, with the associated growth of influence of the Teaching Council in registering practitioners. DACE was committed to recalibrate the Higher Diploma into a new programme that could maintain a transformative learning experience for students while, at the same time, meet, and surpass, external measures of standards and quality. In this regard, and as suggested by the experiences and perceptions of HDFE graduates involved in the research, DACE appears to have done well – it has held its social justice and transformative pedagogic and ideological ground.

However, the sense which graduates report positively on their learning and development cannot be disassociated from the space where that learning positions them afterwards, and for the many who struggle to find work, there may be a developing uneasiness as they review their learning experiences on the HDFE in the harsh light of limited employment spaces. Hope, a central part of a critical pedagogy, can seem ever more diminished for those graduates who are struggling to find high quality, paid employment as adult educators.

Yet, it must also be said that, in tandem with the DACE's ethos, other participants take a wider perspective in terms of occupational and personal growth and come to see the broader and deeper learning that they developed on the HDFE which opens up a wider field of practice than a more narrowly imagined ITE professional-insertion model. For these graduates, the skills and knowledge which they have developed are not limited to the classroom and DACE, the report helps DACE illuminate and articulate the deep and wider learning which the programmes facilitates. Such learning has, it seems, allowed graduates to feel less constrained to one narrow professional field and, instead, have shown remarkable capacity to move into and thrive in diverse professional and occupational spaces. One sobering point is that such diverse mobility is increasingly influenced by a lack of sustainable career pathways for many adult educators. Nevertheless, the wider learning focus which the HDFE facilitates may serve as a model for other professional postgraduate programmes whose graduates step into uncertain occupational futures – widening, rather than narrowing, educational experiences and developing deep reflective and critical skills may, it could be tentatively argued, be very useful skills, not just for a competitive and fluid graduate labour market, but for graduates seeking to live and work an ethical life.

5.1.2 Precarity and uncertain occupational futures

Undoubtedly one of the strongest themes to emerge from this research is the extent which occupational precarity is experienced by HDFE graduates; a phenomenon discussed in detail in section 2.6. A significant proportion of the research participants are struggling to find stable and secure work and very few are in permanent, full-time positions.

A significant proportion of the HDFE student population are mature students – the programme attracts students to teach in a sector that often played a significant part in their own adult education path. As a recent transnational biographical research project (EMPLOY) from DACE has shown, mature graduates, and the non-traditional graduate population in general, face an additional set of barriers in their quest for the decent work that traditional graduates access with more ease (O'Neill & Finnegan, 2016; Valadas, et al., 2017). Lack of access to social networks or capital; caring responsibilities; financial hardships; geographic immobility can conspire to contract development opportunities for many non-traditional graduates. The experiences of HDFE graduates and the barriers they face are not dissimilar to many of the experiences from the non-traditional graduate participants involved in the EMPLOY research project. Of course, an obvious qualification to make is that, outside of Higher Education, the educational opportunities for adults in Ireland is under-resourced in many ways. Within Further Education Colleges in particular, very few jobs, and quite possibly no permanent jobs at all, are advertised for new entrants to the field.

Many of the HDFE graduates are very keen, anxious even, to get work – after several years of education which often includes as much in a pre-HEI adult education route as their undergraduate and postgraduate there is often a familial, personal and financial imperative to start earning. There is an understandable expectation for many that after years of personal and financial struggle, culminating with the award of a postgraduate professional qualification, that a visible and attainable career path should be, if not a right, at least a possibility.

5.1.3 Sector recruitment practices

Another major theme that emerges across the findings is the sense of complexity, confusion and localised nature of recruitment practices across the sector and within ETBs in particular. Research participants, and this was particularly highlighted in the focus group, stressed the frustration and the sheer quantity of work that is involved in engaging with ETB recruitment processes. ETBI (the national representative body for Ireland sixteen ETBs) have recently published work on the professional development of those working in public sector FET settings. This is a very welcome development - it is heartening to see that ETBI, and by extension, we might assume ETBs, are thinking carefully and developing practices to support cultures and structures for CPD (ETBI, 2017). This will, or should, address some of the concerns of HDPE graduates who are working, but are unsure of what CPD opportunities are available to them.

The purpose of this strategy is to build on and further develop this culture by providing future-focused and targeted professional development, while creating the supports and structures required for an integrated, consistent and strategic approach.

(ETBI, 2017, p. 1)

If, as the introduction, quoted above, to the ETBI's CPD strategy states, that the sector is committed to attending to the future of professionalism, part of that thinking and process, must, we assume, attend to the full-life cycle of the adult educator – and this includes, of course, pathways into the sector.

As it is though, and despite an acknowledgement of an aging workforce (p. 20), the ETBI strategy seems to be written for existing staff of ETBs. There is little attention given to professional and sector sustainability and growth on a longer time scale despite the focus on the notion of the continuum of professionalism for teachers. It is unclear, from the ETBI strategy, how new graduates can start their next steps in the development of such a professionalism. It is this sense of what Sennett (1998) calls the 'futureless' occupational spaces of precarious work that makes the current condition for so many newly qualified practitioners incompatible with the future-orientated nature of professionalism.

Furthermore, as was pointed out by one participant, there seems to be much more focus and support for professional development existing in post-primary ITE and NQT programmes. Without an attendance to a CPD continuum that recognises the significance of entry and, the often tricky, transition points into ITE, out of ITE to NQT and onward, then the future and the quality of professionalism is, it seems, far from secure. Despite the rich and positive learning experiences of the HDFE programme many graduates, unwillingly, are currently set on the 'outbound trajectories' that Bathmaker and Avis (2013) refer to in their analysis of the career paths of FET practitioners in the UK.

5.1.4 Professional inequity

In our discussion of the lack of transition spaces from training to early careers above, we noted that there are structures in place, such as *Droichead* and, the broader framework of *Cosán*, for those training in post-primary education (The Teaching Council, 2015). This point, highlighted by one participant, touches on another theme which was not insignificant in the research. Many of the participants expressed a sense that they felt that, in terms of the Teaching Council, they were regarded unequally to their post-primary peers and, in turn, questioned the standing, or the professional capital, of the HDFE in the broader field of education. We have already mentioned that for many non-traditional graduates a lack of social capital is a major barrier for graduate career progression (Finnegan & O'Neill, 2016). An inequity in the professional capital between two Teaching Council-accredited programmes will have a significant impact on the career progression capacity of HDFE graduates.

Of course, the ETBs are in a powerful position here as the main employers of those working in Further Education, but also as a significant employer for many second level schools. The tightening of resources and culling of many non-CID educators in recent years marked a shift where many ETBs, it seemed, looked at adult education provision differently. Practitioners report a shift away from adult education practitioners being chosen and matched to the needs of the group, and towards a more managerial approach which looked at ensuring that

CID hours were covered (O'Neill, 2015). This may well have led to a shift in provision where, sometimes, unsuitable educators and irrelevant modules are being offered to learners to meet the bureaucratic targets relating to CID entitlements. As such, there is greater mobility across the fields of practice within ETBs and, a Teaching Council-mandated weighting to post-primary educators over route 3 practitioners is always in danger of making the former more attractive to managers and recruiters who are focused on bureaucratic demands rather than learner needs.

So many HDFE graduates sit uneasily and unequally at the back of the broad, but hierarchical, church of educational professionalism as this is, in some respects, defined and managed by the Teaching Council and ETBs. It seems that, in the evolution of adult educator professionalism, practitioners must join existing professional bodies like the Teaching Council rather than being afforded the opportunity to establish their own, as was proposed within the Green Paper on Adult Education in 1998 and re-iterated in the White Paper of 2000.

Similarly, there is no dedicated union organisation that represents, exclusively, those working in FET settings. In the absence of this, some adult educators join existing unions, such as the TUI, who have historically, and whose main body of work, represents post-primary teachers. The recent TASC report points out that precarious working conditions thrive in areas of weak worker representation (Bobek, et al., 2018) and although it can hardly be argued that teachers have weak representation, those working in the FET field, without a dedicated union, may have justified concerns about the centrality of their concerns within a large secondary school teachers' union such as the TUI. Indeed, it is hard to see how the diversity and difference of adult education values and pedagogy will ever be best served by professional and representative bodies who in many ways struggle to see that difference and, indeed, appear to look upon HDFE graduates, and indeed graduates from other ITE graduates across Ireland as a kind of under-developed secondary school teacher.

5.2.5 [Reviewing programme content](#)

There is it seems some pause for reflection for the HDFE programme staff emerging from this piece of research. Our suggestion is a re-orientation in terms of how we ourselves think and

talk about the programme. This research confirms its commitment to certain philosophies of adult and community education; a way of working that positions education as dialogic, participatory, democratic and, importantly, committed to social justice. A common criticism of traditional models of education focuses on an outcomes approach that reduces the process of learning to its end product; and, in FET, these outcomes are increasingly framed through the lens of employability. The Department of Adult Education has for many years resisted this approach to education and, whilst recognising the very real difficulties graduates face in securing decent work for decent pay, interpret employability as just one of a number of outcomes from our education programmes. DACE resists attempts to interpret adult education as something that exists within the boundaries of a particular sector. Instead DACE think about its philosophies and methodologies as beneficial in a range of contexts where adults congregate and learn – within social movements, places of employment, voluntary and community organisations and so on. The capacity to register with the Teaching Council (route 3) is thus, we suggest, just one of a range of outcomes from the HDFE.

Many of the participants felt that more could be done on the HDFE programme to prepare them for the transition to working in the field. This may involve the programme team looking more closely at partnerships and collaborations with ETB recruitment staff and teaching unions. But it seems clear that some useful and practical input on the realities, challenges and strategies involved in finding work in the sector would be worth considering. As indicated above, the researchers are conscious, and wary, of, the move to integrate ‘employability’ uncritically across all sectors of learning – they are particularly resistant to notions that learners, and in particular, adult learners’ struggles to gain employment are in some way associated with under-developed soft skills. Rather, we would argue that many of the HDFE graduates have demonstrated considerable focus and strength in their often long and very difficult educational journeys and that their struggles to gain employment are often of a structural nature – jobs and, importantly sustainable career paths must exist for them in the first place. However, that said, some focus on, in particular application and interview skills which highlight the HDFE graduates’ many strengths would be welcome.

There was also some desire expressed amongst participants for more of a focus on the programme and module development skills which match the realities and practices of what

HDFE students on placement and graduates face. This is, in many ways linked to graduates' capacity for employment, as many reported being asked, and struggling to respond to, interview questions relating to demonstrations of experience of module and programme planning. This does not mean, necessarily, that HDFE programme should focus primarily on designing programmes or modules from scratch. Although these design skills, and the conceptualisations which underpin them, are important, HDFE students and graduates' first tasks as practitioners will be to interpret module descriptors to match the needs and contexts of a group. As such they need to be able to develop a scheme of work with associated, but responsive and non-rigid, session plans which meet internal and external quality assurance standards, reflect the needs and desires of the learning group, and are true to the HDFE graduate's own values and approach to teaching.

5.2 Significance for stakeholders

The following sections consider the significance of the research for the various stakeholders.

5.2.1 HDFE graduates

One issue to emerge from both the survey and the focus group is the high levels of professional precarity and underemployment for HDFE graduates. Not only does this have serious implications, personally, occupationally and financially, for each of the graduates, but the normalisation of such conditions serves to undermine and marginalise the field.

For graduates, more support is needed in making the transition into employment. A lot of that support needs to come from elsewhere, however there are some things which current HDFE graduates could attend to themselves. For example, graduates have shown considerable capacity to use their peers as a source of learning and professional development – graduates should continue to develop professional relationships and networks and extend these beyond the specific group of colleagues whom they completed the HDFE. Furthermore, organising and politicising as a distinct professional community of practitioners

would assist HDFE graduates start to see themselves positively defined against secondary school colleagues.

However, it is also important to point to the positive themes emerging from the findings. A significant proportion of graduates claimed that the HDFE programme was a transformative experience which provided them with a broad set up skills which they could apply to a range of occupational contexts. In some sense, then, the HDFE graduate should pause to reflect on the deeper skills and knowledge which they have developed through the programme that can be applied to progress in a broader employment market than a secondary school teaching qualification might allow. As discussed in 5.2.5, programme organisers must attend to this also by re-orientating the programme in a way that better showcases the transferability of the programme.

5.2.2 Significance for HDFE at DACE

This research may raise some questions for the HDFE programme coordinators and for DACE itself. It is clear that the HDFE, in terms of student numbers and demand, is a popular and expanding course. However, there are a number of issues emerging from this piece of research which the HDFE programme leadership would be wise to reflect on. As stated above, and clearly throughout the research findings, there are substantial concerns amongst the HDFE graduate population regarding sustainable employment and equity of access to early careers professional development in comparison with the colleagues graduating with a secondary school qualification. It is difficult for HDFE programme team to create opportunities for work that do not exist, but there are possibly supports and resources that they could develop, by drawing on other stakeholders, to help students make that transition to a graduate with some hope of securing decent work. It also seems important that the HDFE team review aspects of the programme content to ensure that HDFE students and graduates are as well prepared as they can be to deal with the practical realities of working with curricula and, in particular, QQI module interpretation and planning.

5.2.3 Significance for Initial Teacher Education for Further Education

Of course, the dilemma facing DACE must, it may be assumed, be shared to some extent with other ITE HEI providers. Such research should be regarded as contributing to the collegiate networks of HE-FE. This research should be used to open up the conversations about the experiences of graduates from the other HEIs in the FE-HEI network.

What are the experiences of graduates in the other HEIs? How common are the experiences of precarity? What can the network do to support graduates? Should HEIs liaise to stagger intakes of students to avoid flooding the graduate market?

5.2.4 Education and Training Boards

The Education and Training Boards (ETBs), as the main employer for adult educators, comes under a sharp spotlight in this research. There is an urgent need for ETBs and the ETBI to develop coherent and visible professional pathways for graduates from such programmes as the HDFE. Of course, ETBs must also be invited into a dialogue in which they can respond to some of the findings emerging from this report. In particular, ETBs should be given the opportunity to express the degree of their commitment to the distinct value of adult education programmes. If this commitment is not forthcoming, then, as things stand with Teaching Council regulations, it would seem that recruitment will always be loaded towards graduates with secondary school qualification. Furthermore, ETBs could assist the training and development of those registered via Teaching Council route 3 by enhancing the intelligibility, rationale and transparency of their recruitment processes.

5.2.5 The Teaching Council of Ireland

There is much in this report that the Teaching Council might reflect upon. It is, perhaps, a cliché now to say that adult and further education is often regarded as the Cinderella of the education sector (Hayes, et al., 2007). However, with the enduring professional inequity that is sustained by registration status, it is understandable that adult educators would not be

paranoid to see themselves cast as the Cinderella's in the teacher professional field. We believe, that practitioners trained and with experience in the critical and participative methodologies of adult education would have much to offer a secondary school sector which is struggling to reimagine and enact more progressive modes of education. One way to advance this for DACE to collaborate with its colleagues in Education so that reciprocal bridging-programmes can be designed from FE to secondary school, and from secondary school to FE. These programmes could be critically reflective in orientation, with participants reflecting on their practice whilst working in FET and school sectors respectively.

It also seems important, again in the interests of professional equity, that The Teaching Council work with employers, particularly in light of a demographic imperative of an aging workforce, to develop meaningful early careers induction programmes for those working in FET similar to that which exists for secondary school teachers.

5.2.6 Trade Unions

Much of what has emerged may be of interest to unions as so much of the survey and focus group data concentrates on conditions of work and professional injustice. It is clear the graduates of the HDFE are struggling on a number of levels and would benefit with focused and committed professional representation that genuinely valued the work that they do. In particular, such representation and advocacy should focus on equity and clarity on pay and conditions and equality in line with secondary school colleagues to inter-sector mobility and professional development and insertion.

6 Recommendations

This modest research provides just a partial survey of professional and occupational experiences of HDFE graduates at one institution. The obvious, and most pressing recommendation, is that more research needs to be done. Research into graduates experience needs to be both widened and deepened, particularly across the eight HEI and ideally drawing on existing networks and relationships to develop collaborative work. Such research, it might be tentatively recommended, should employ mixed methods to give a sense of occupational status across the graduate population but with opportunities for deeper, more focussed qualitative work. If such research were to be devised we would also recommend gathering data on graduates' position prior to their registration as, it may be, that a significant number may already be working in the sector.

It is also important that further research, and this may be a distinct piece of work to that described above, is tasked with an exploration of perspectives from other stakeholders such as HEI programme staff; ETBs; ETBI; the Teaching Council; and unions. It would be useful, for instance, to gain insight into ETB recruitment practices and their associated early teacher career and professional development supports and policies. It would be insightful to explore ETB organisational and management perspectives on the professional mobility inequities as reported in this research. It would also be important to explore the extent to which professional and representative bodies such as the Teaching Council and trade unions works to create professional equity between compulsory sector teachers and those working in FET and community education contexts.

There are of course, ways in which DACE may respond to some of the issues emerging from this research. The research seems to bear out the perceptions that it can be difficult for graduates of the HDFE to secure posts which lead to sustainable careers. As such, it may be an opportune time for the programme directors and DACE to consider reviewing recruitment practices for the HDFE. One possibility might be to more deliberately seek to recruit so – called 'unqualified' practitioners already working in the sector. This alteration would be

timely given the Teaching Council's recent directive giving existing practitioners a window of 3 years within which they must complete a recognised ITE programme to be employed in FET. Such a shift may necessitate the re-instatement of a part-time option over a two-year period to allow practitioners space to work and, crucially, the time to reflect and develop in response to their HDFE learning experiences.

Another issue that seems clear needs addressing is a review of programme content to support HDFE students make the transition to work in the sector. This may involve integrating and enhancing understanding about ETB recruitment practice (e.g. job portals; application forms; competency-based interview techniques). The department would be well-advised to draw on the expertise and experience of its adult guidance scholars and practitioners to explore ways in which the HDFE programme can support students in making effective transitions to the field. The programme also needs to reflect whether all aspects, and the integrated whole of, the HDFE curriculum is matching the needs of students. The evidence in this research suggests that some of the programme content needs to be more coherently aligned with current practice and demands of working as a teacher in QQI contexts (e.g. FET-specific programme and module planning). We recommend that curriculum related modules include comprehensive input from those with first-hand experience of working with QQI module descriptors and a working knowledge of the internal and external verification processes unique to QQI.

DACE also need to review what can be done to extend and support critical and sustainable communities of practice for graduates of the programme which extends beyond graduate cohorts and institutional boundaries.

7. Conclusion

It is clear that DACE's HDFE programme has had a life-changing impact on many graduates. Its critically reflective and transformative philosophy and approaches have created an experience for many students beyond that of achieving a professional qualification for adult educators. However, it is equally clear that there are a number of issues arising from this research that should stimulate some reflection on behalf of prospective students, students, graduates of the HDFE, DACE, its HEI colleagues delivering similar programmes, and, in particular, for powerful stakeholders such as ETBs, ETBI, SOLAS, QQI, The Teaching Council and trade unions.

Sectoral quality improvement cannot be dissociated from professional development and experiences of educators (James & Biesta, 2007; O'Neill & Cullinane, 2017). Yet the plans for ETBI's (2017) professional development will mean very little for those newly qualified graduates who have no sense of an occupational future to develop into (Sennett, 1998; O'Neill & Cullinane, 2017).

More research which could bring some professional clarity into, for example, the recruitment practices of ETBs would be beneficial. It would also be useful, in the interest of professional equity, to obtain clarity from the Teaching Council regarding equal recognition of professional status for post-compulsory and FET teachers. There are also significant questions relating to the development of spaces where adult educators typically work in Ireland which cannot ignore the abundance of evidence which associates such quality with genuine professional development opportunities for educators. And finally, each of the HEIs involved in recruiting and training practitioners should look closely at their own practices in terms of recruiting students for a professional qualification in the absence of hope for many students to develop a career.

8. Bibliography

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9. Appendices

Appendix one

Providers of Route 3 TC approved ITE as of Jan 2018

- Waterford Institute of Technology (undergraduate and postgraduate)
- Dublin City University (undergraduate only)
- National University of Ireland, Galway (postgraduate only)
- National University of Ireland, Maynooth (postgraduate only)
- Mary Immaculate College (postgraduate only)
- National College of Ireland (postgraduate only)
- Marino Institute of Education (postgraduate only)
- National College of Art and Design (postgraduate only)

(The Teaching Council, 2015)

1. When did you complete the Higher Diploma in Further Education * *Required*

- 2016-2017
- 2015-2016
- 2014-2015
- 2013-2014
- 2012-2013

2. What is your current occupational status? * *Required*

- I have a full-time, permanent contract in a FE setting
- I have a part-time, permanent contract in a FE setting
- I have a full-time temporary/fixed-term contract in a FE setting
- I have a part-time temporary/fixed-term contract in an FE setting
- I am working in another education environment (such as a school or university)
- I have between 10-20 hours per week in an FE setting
- I have between 5-10 hours per week in an FE setting
- I have less than 5 hours per week in an FE setting
- I am working in another job which is not related to FE
- I am currently out of work and I am looking for work
- I am currently out of work because of care commitments
- I am currently out of work by choice
- Other

a. If you selected Other, please specify:

b. If you are working part-time, is this by choice?

- Yes
- No

3. If you are currently working in the FE sector, what type of organisation are you currently working for?

* Required

- A Further Education College
- An ETB but outside of an FE college (e.g. VTOS, ETB community education service)
- A Youthreach Centre
- An independent Community Education provider
- An NGO
- A private Education Provider
- Another education provider such as a school, university or Institute of Technology
- I am not currently working in an education related role
- Other

a. If you selected Other, please specify:

4. Have you completed any further academic studies since completing the HDFE? * *Required*

- I have completed/or are currently completing a Masters programme
- I have completed/or are currently completing a PhD programme
- I have completed further studies in a different discipline that is not related to education
- Other

a. If you selected Other, please specify:

5. Have you completed any Continuous Professional Development (CPD) since completing the HDFE. Examples of this could be further training in groupwork, assessment methods, team building, IT systems etc. * *Required*

- I have completed CPD which my employers paid for
- I have completed CPD which I paid for myself
- I would like to do CPD but I have not been able to access this
- I would like to do CPD and although I can access it, I cannot currently afford it

6. The HDFE has put me on my desired career path and I am now working in a job that I enjoy.

- strongly agree
- agree
- not sure if I agree or disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

7. The HDFE has enabled me to earn a reasonable wage

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Not sure if I agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. What else would you like to say about progression from the HDFE? (please write as much as you wish)

Research into progression experiences and outcomes for graduates of Maynooth University's Higher Diploma in Further Education (HDFE).

1. Researcher name: Dr Jerry O'Neill
c/o Department of Adult and Community Education
jerry.oneill@mu.ie or jerryoneill@hotmail.com
2. The purpose of this research project is to explore the experiences and outcomes of graduates of the Department of Adult and Community Education's Higher Diploma in Further Education from 2011 to 2017. The research consists of an online, anonymous survey and a focus group.
3. Anonymised data from the survey will be available to the survey designer Camilla Fitzsimons and the researcher Jerry O'Neill. It is hoped that that focus group will be audio recorded. The audio recording and any subsequent transcription will be held exclusively and securely by the researcher, Jerry O'Neill. Data will be kept secured at all time in a locked cabinet. Electronic data will be held securely on the researcher's password-protected computer.
4. The results from the study will be used to: inform ongoing programme development and review of the HDFE; enhance support for graduates of the HDFE; inform sector-wide knowledge of any pertinent issues relating FE initial teacher training and progression; and lobby for enhanced status for adult and further education practitioners and sector. The anonymised results of the survey will/may appear in research reports and scholarly outputs such as academic articles, papers and presentations.
5. You may withdraw from the research at any time or you may withdraw your data up until the work is published.

6. Please be aware that, although the focus group may touch on a range of experiences, some of which may be challenging or difficult, that the session itself should not be construed as any kind of counselling. If you by any chance experience discomfort or stress from your engagement with the focus group session, or any part of your engagement with the research, you are strongly advised to seek counselling from a qualified counsellor. The following links should provide contact details of counselling services both within the university and elsewhere:

- <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/campus-life/student-wellbeing-support/counselling>
- <https://www.samaritans.org/>
- <https://www.irish-counselling.ie>

7. *If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.*

8. Participant's signature and date

About the researchers, CRALE and DACE

Dr Camilla Fitzsimons is a lecturer at the Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University. She is co-coordinator of the Higher Diploma in Further Education (HDFE) that is at the centre of this study. Camilla has worked in a range of adult and community education settings in universities, colleges of further education and community education settings. She has carried out other research in further education and quality assurance, community education, and the creation of diverse, inclusive learning environments.

See <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/people/camilla-fitzsimons> for more information and a list of publications

Contact: camilla.fitzsimons@mu.ie

Dr Jerry O'Neill is a lecturer with the Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University. He is the Teaching Practice Coordinator and lecturer on the HDFE programme. Jerry has extensive experience of teaching practice supervision both with DACE and with Waterford IT as part their undergraduate and postgraduate adult and further education teacher training programmes. Jerry has worked in adult, further, community, and higher education for over fifteen years in Scotland and Ireland. More recently, Jerry has been working on a number of research projects related to access and transitions for non-traditional graduates. He is particularly interested in educator development for adult, community and further education practitioners.

Contact: jerry.oneill@mu.ie

The Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education (CRALE)

CRALE is based at the Department of Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University. The centre works collaboratively with communities and researchers to bring about significant change in the conditions of disadvantaged communities who now turn increasingly to research as a form of social action. CRALE aims to:

- **Ask significant and critical questions pertaining to adult learning and education;**
- **Support the research activities of students and staff of the department;**
- **Support the research interests of policy-makers and practitioner in the field of adult and community education.**

<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education/our-research>

Department of Adult and Community Education (DACE), Maynooth University

DACE is renowned for the high quality of its courses and its rich and supportive learning environments based on active participation and open discussion.

The department are the leading centre for research on adult education in Ireland and have built an excellent international reputation for their work on further education, higher education, adult guidance, community development and transformative learning.

The department is firmly committed to equality and social justice. DACE believes that education is a fundamental human right and collaborative, critical adult education has the power to transform individuals and change society for the better.

Website: <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education>

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