



# TRANSITION FROM FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO HIGHER EDUCATION

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**NATIONAL FORUM**  
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education*

## **Transition from Further Education and Training to Higher Education**



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## Foreword

Given the fact that the research carried out in the further education and training (FET) sector is sparse in Ireland compared with other sectors, it is great to see this report emerge from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

The FET landscape has been undergoing tremendous structural change in recent years with the establishment of the 16 Education and Training Boards, SOLAS, QQI and the National Skills Council. It is therefore timely to explore the transition experiences of those students who undertake FET prior to entering higher education. The two key goals of FET programmes are to enable students to gain meaningful employment or to progress to higher education. With the excellent progression opportunities available now, it is important to examine these experiences to see what can be learned by both student and practitioner.

This evidence-based report examines student motivations and decisions prior to entering higher education, their perceptions of FET preparation, the challenges faced by FET students versus Leaving Certificate students and the factors influencing the transitions of FET students to higher education. The report is an important first step in understanding the transition from FET to higher education.

A key finding is that the majority of students found that their FET experience had prepared them well for higher education, building their confidence and self-belief to excel in higher education. There are other findings which FET and higher education practitioners need to observe, such as the challenge of mathematics requirements in transitioning, time management, engaging in college life, and the challenge of taking part in group work with students who may have different approaches to learning.

The report also outlines useful recommendations which could form the basis of a guide of good practice of transitioning from FET to higher education.

**Pat Maunsell**

**Director, Limerick College of Further Education (LCFE)**

## Chair's Preface

A key focus of the work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education has been on how teaching and learning can improve transitions into and through higher education for all students. There is still much work to be done to gain a strong understanding of the particular and often distinctive perspectives of those students entering higher education from the further education and training (FET) sector. This report represents part of that work. I am especially pleased that it represents a strong and constructive collaboration between the higher and further education sectors, and I am confident that the clear messages it contains will help to inform policies and strategies for supporting student success across all disciplines.

Educators, educational managers, leaders, students and prospective students should find it encouraging to reflect on the evidence gathered for this report which shows strongly that FET students generally feel well prepared for and confident when they enter higher education. Many of the experiences among FET students provide a very sound preparation for the challenges of higher education learning. But we should also pay attention to some of the identified challenges that FET students encounter.

The National Forum is committed to building, and to facilitating the building of, a stronger evidence base for informing teaching and learning enhancement. This report adds in important and timely ways to the growing body of research aimed at enhancing the learning experiences of students in Irish higher education.

**Professor Sarah Moore**

**Chair, National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**

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## Key Insights

### Motivations and Decisions

- FET students enter higher education because of personal motivation, their focus on career development and their interest in learning a particular subject. Encouragement from family and FET staff often impacts their decision.
- Respondents indicated that the most effective source of information in the decision-making process for FET students was learning from the experience of students already in higher education.
- Respondents referred to the numerous practical arrangements they had to make prior to entering higher education and referred to many related concerns, the most frequently cited of which was financial.

### FET Preparation

- 83% of participants felt their FET had prepared them well for higher education.
- There was an overall sense that the FET experience built the confidence and self-efficacy of students, giving them the skills and self-belief to succeed in higher education.

### Challenges Faced

- Among the most challenging aspects of transitioning to higher education for FET students were mathematics requirements, time management and engaging in college life outside the classroom. Group work (in mixed groups where some members came straight from school and were often seen as having a different approach to learning) could also be challenging. In contrast, students coming directly from Leaving Certificate were more challenged by participating in lectures, time management, researching topics for themselves and being able to critically assess materials. Financial constraints were challenging to both groups.
- Being proportionally older than their peers and having more external responsibilities influenced the transition experiences of many FET students.
- To overcome challenges, FET students sought advice from staff, availed of institutional supports and drew on their own perseverance and life experience.

### Aspects of Successful Transition from FET to Higher Education

The data suggests that FET preparation is most effective when:

- FET teachers and staff focus on building the confidence and self-efficacy of students, particularly with regard to study skills and various types of assessment.
- There is a strong link between the course content in FET and that on the programme of study in higher education.
- The level of challenge experienced in FET prepares students for the rigours of higher education.
- Students receive a good introduction to the higher education institution, and are informed about procedures and supports.

## Introduction

The first enhancement theme of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (National Forum) focused on transitions into and through higher education. As part of this enhancement theme, the National Forum commissioned a series of research projects on the transition of students into higher education. Among these was the focused research project *Transition from Second Level and Further Education to Higher Education* (National Forum, 2015b). This report indicated that the experiences of transition of second level students and further education and training (FET) students were different. In partnership with the FET sector, the National Forum set out to explore the particular transition of FET students into higher education.

This research begins to fill an important gap in our understanding of transitions, and it captures the often substantially different experiences of those entering higher education from school, and those entering from the FET sector. The research is timely in the context of an ongoing national debate on the links between FET and higher education. QQI and SOLAS, in implementing the *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019* (SOLAS, 2013), are currently collaborating on a project which aims to document existing pathways to higher education from FET. The Higher Education Links Scheme has been audited and some characteristics of effective practice identified. Additionally, the local links with Education and Training Boards participating in a broader SOLAS pilot project are being examined with a view to better understanding the purposes, processes and consequences of providing clear progression pathways for FET students to higher education. The results of this pilot project will be published by the end of 2016.

### Aims of this Report

The purpose of this report is to explore the transition experiences of those who undertake FET prior to entering higher education. This report combines new and existing data on Irish FET students' transitions to higher education in order to:

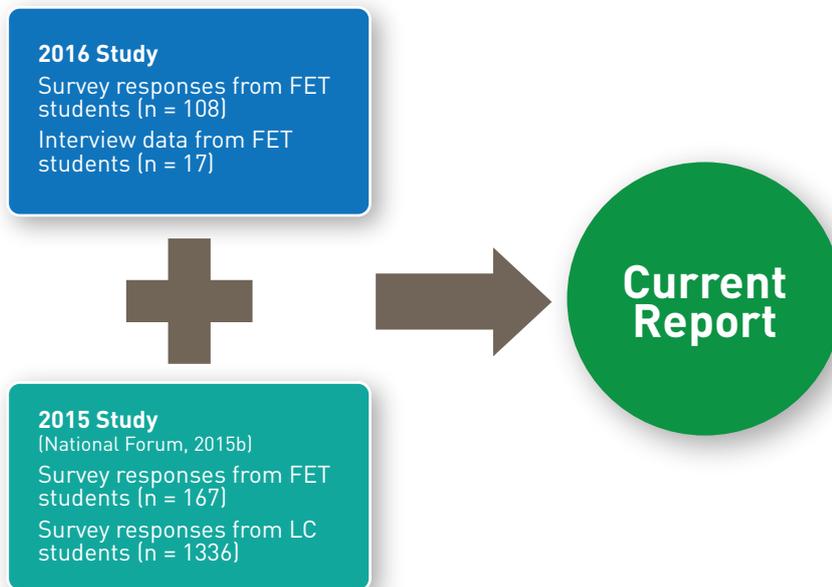
- Further our understanding of the decision-making processes of those who choose to embark on higher education following engagement with further education.
- Compare the transition experiences of FET students to those entering higher education directly from the Leaving Certificate.
- Examine the effectiveness of FET programmes in preparing students to participate successfully in higher education.

## Participants and Data Sources

The report focuses on data from a survey of 108 FET students carried out in 2016 and individual follow-up interviews conducted with 17 of those survey respondents. The survey link was circulated among all FET institutions nationally via key staff, who were encouraged to publicise the survey among those FET students entering higher education. The link was also publicised through the National Forum website and social media accounts and through flyers distributed at relevant FET events.

The data from the 2016 survey and interviews is supplemented in this report with data from the survey used in the 2015 study of transitions from second level and FET to higher education (National Forum, 2015b). For comparison purposes, data was extracted from those 2015 survey respondents who responded yes to having undertaken further education (n = 167) and those who answered yes to having entered higher education directly following the Leaving Certificate examination (n = 1336). (Figure 1)

A full breakdown of participants from whom data was drawn in this report can be found in the Appendix. Further detail on the methodology, analysis and findings from the 2015 study can be found in the published report (National Forum, 2015b).



**Figure 1 Data sources drawn upon for current report**

## Data Analysis

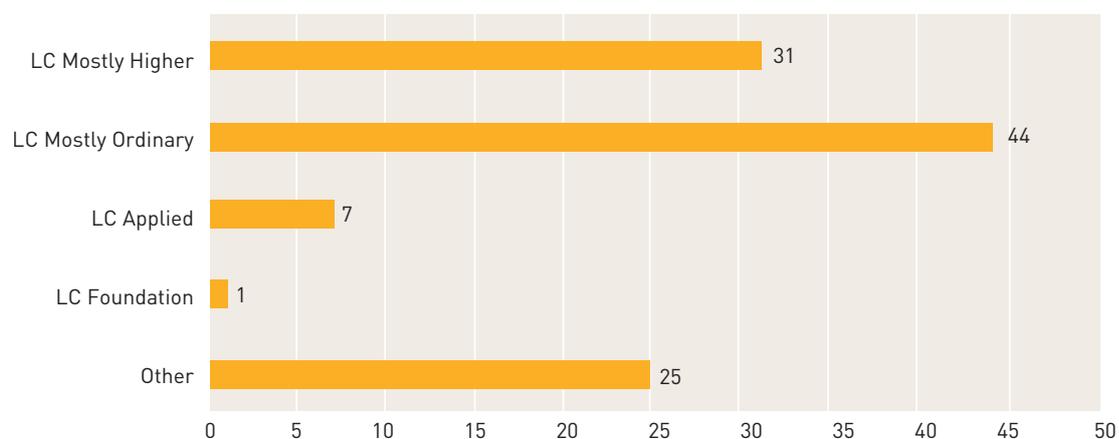
Descriptive analyses of quantitative survey data were carried out using Excel. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and the resulting data along with open-ended survey responses were categorised according to the general topics being discussed, e.g. motivations, FET preparation, higher education experience, etc. Within each category, the data was then coded inductively according to what was being said about each topic. The final stage of qualitative analysis involved looking within and across codes and categories to identify trends and patterns in the dataset.

## Findings

In reporting the findings, the first sub-section outlines the period prior to FET students entering higher education, examining their motivations and decision-making processes. The second sub-section describes FET students' perceptions of the effectiveness of their FET preparation. In the third sub-section, the levels and types of challenge faced by FET students are compared to those experienced by students who came straight from the Leaving Certificate. The circumstances which impact the effectiveness of FET provision are examined in the final sub-section. All included quotes are from participants in the 2016 study, unless otherwise stated.

### Motivations and Decisions Prior to Entering Higher Education

The majority of participants in the survey had completed a PLC course or a VTOS programme. Most had completed the Leaving Certificate (the majority had studied mostly ordinary level subjects) and many had additional qualifications such as additional FET qualifications and in some cases previous higher education qualifications (see Figure 2). One third of participants were the first in their family to enter higher education.



**Figure 2 Qualifications of participating FET students (n = 100, 2016 study)**

## Motivations

The main motivations students had for entering higher education were personal. Most had always wanted to go to higher education and held a strong desire to have a third level qualification but some had left school early or had not had the opportunity to enter higher education when they were younger due to work or other commitments. Other common motivations were future career opportunities and interest in learning more.

For many, reaching a critical point in their lives (e.g. unemployment, redundancy, illness) caused them to consider embarking on further education and the encouragement from family and FET staff was instrumental in them continuing to higher education.

## Informing Decisions

The majority of students chose where to study either according to which institutions offered a given programme, the institutional location or the institutional reputation. The most popular information sources FET students relied upon when deciding what and where to study were programme information, institution websites and open days. Advice from students already engaged in higher education was considered very effective.

*Speaking to students who had completed the course I am now studying really gave me a [desire] to get into it and prove to myself I was capable of doing it.*

**Survey respondent, female, 18-21 years**

Indeed, a number of participants suggested that more visits to FET institutions by current higher education students might be helpful.

*Get people in for talks who have gone to FET and successfully gotten into higher education institutes. I think seeing is believing and it gives people a boost to see people like themselves.*

**Survey respondent, female, 18-21 years**

*It may be helpful to hear more first-hand experience from people who have been through the further education system.*

**Survey respondent, male, 22-29 years**

Some data indicated that the higher education pathways available to FET students might benefit from being advertised more widely.

*I only found out about the course through a friend rather than direct information from the college itself. Most of my friends from the PLC last year didn't even know the course was available to them.*

**Survey respondent, male, 22-29 years**

Also, although the majority of students understood how their formal qualifications might be recognised by prospective institutions, many did not have a clear understanding of how their work and life experience (non-formal or informal learning) might be recognised.

## Arrangements and Concerns

Many FET students needed to make practical arrangements prior to entering higher education. These included arranging finances, childcare, work commitments, accommodation and transport.

*My family needed to be committed with me to a long-term (4-year) plan. I froze 50% of my mortgage for these years to pay for travel instead.*

**Survey respondent, female, over 30 years**

*Had to move to [place of study] full time. And cut out days going back and forth to see my daughter.*

**Survey respondent, male, over 30 years**

The main concern shared by FET students as they embarked on higher education was financial. Other concerns centred on programme workload and content, the level of academic skills that would be required, balancing life and study and adjusting to college life.

## Perceptions of FET Preparation

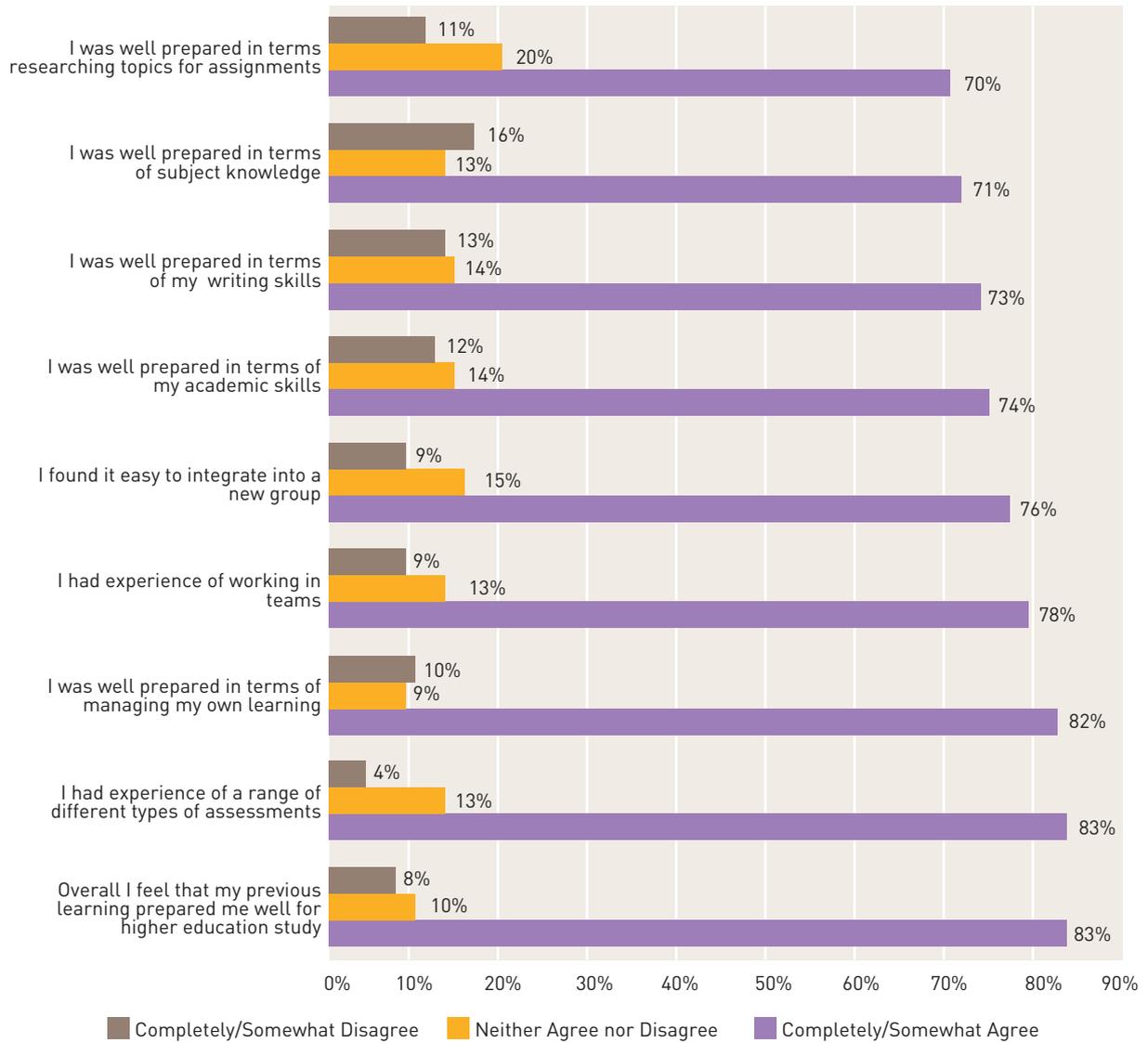
Overall, 83% of FET students reported feeling well prepared for their higher education experience (see Figure 3). FET equipped students with many of the skills they would later find important in higher education by giving them experience of different types of assessments and building their general academic skills.

*The most important [thing I learned in FET] I think was learning how to do an essay of a standard that's acceptable in college. Learning to research. Learning to reference. Reading as much on the particular subject as you can. Not reading a book from cover to cover, knowing what's the important bits to read. And getting somebody to proof read it, and editing, and keeping within your word count. Those skills are important.*

**Interview participant L, female, over 30 years**

*My classmates would be getting kind of like, stressed, or maybe a bit confused . . . but I would have kind of been shown, you know, what the lecturers would be looking for, and what you need to focus more or less on, and yeah, I just think I had a bit more of an understanding of how to go about doing assignments compared to the people that just would have come in from Leaving Cert.*

**Interview participant K, female, 18-21 years**



**Figure 3 FET students' perceptions of how well FET prepared them for higher education (n = 92, 2016 survey)**

There was an overall sense of the FET experience building the confidence and self-efficacy of students, giving them the tools and self-belief to succeed in higher education.

*I had considered going straight into college but my fear of going straight into college was that I hadn't done schoolwork since I did my Leaving Cert when I was 17. The FETAC helped in a sense that it got me back into thinking, it got me back into, you know, writing, having to write essays, and I noticed from the beginning of my FETAC to the end of my FETAC just how much confidence I had gained.*

**Interview participant B, female, over 30 years**

Most FET students have a smooth transition to higher education, as outlined in Figure 4.

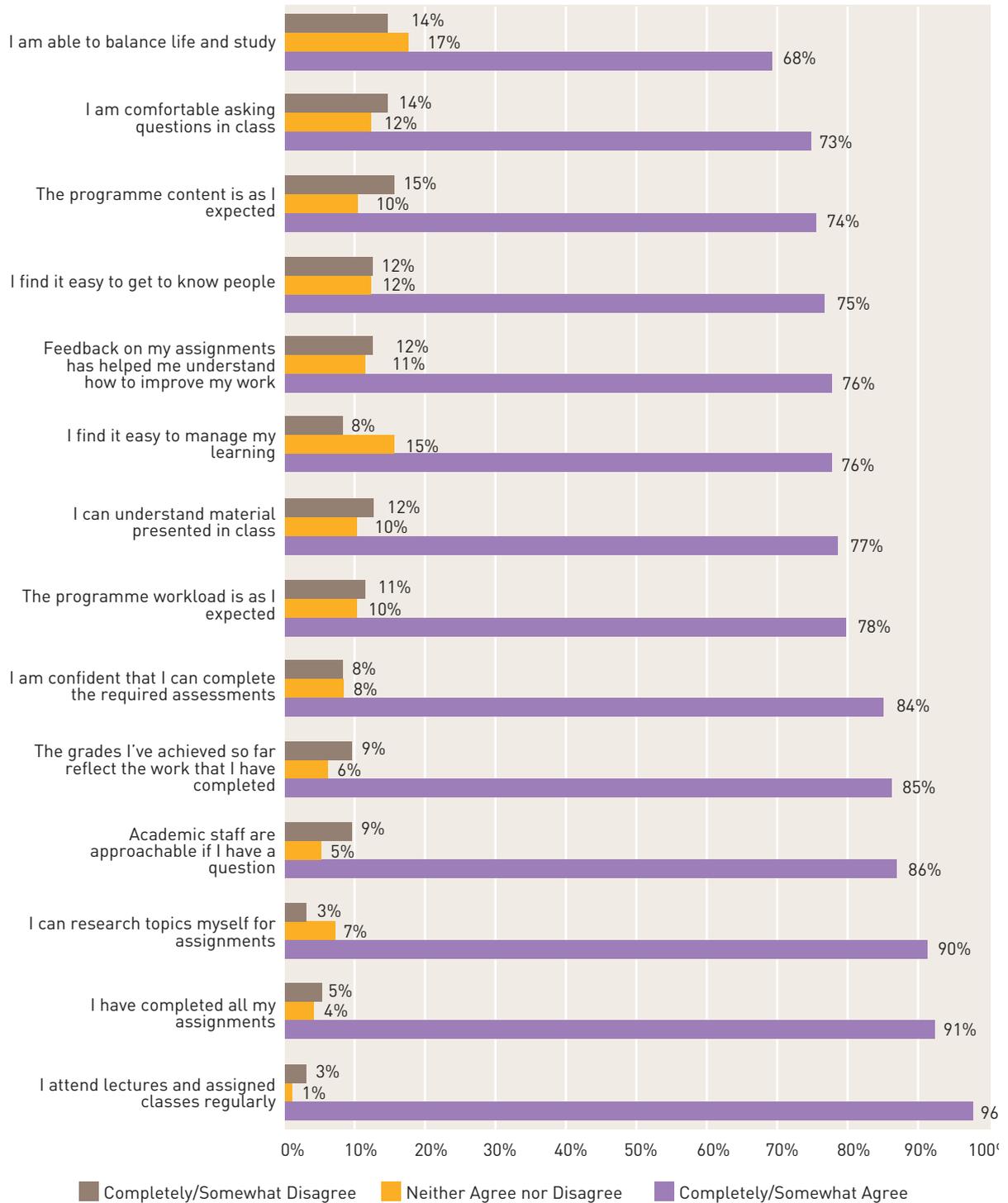


Figure 4 FET students' experience of higher education (n = 97, 2016 survey)

Figure 5 displays a word cloud of participants' responses when asked what single thing from FET prepared them most for their transition to higher education. Experience of completing assignments, the opportunity to build academic skills and the related confidence gained featured strongly in responses.

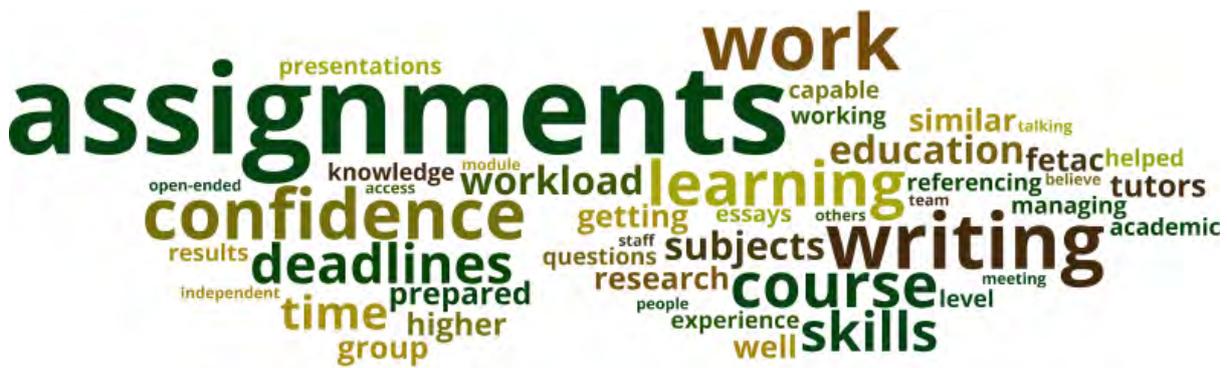


Figure 5 Word cloud of responses regarding the single thing that prepared FET students most for transition to higher education (2016 survey)

### Challenges Faced by FET Students Versus Leaving Certificate Students

Although FET students reported having been well prepared for the transition to higher education, their transitions were not without challenges. Figure 6 illustrates the levels of challenge faced by FET students in the 2015 study across various aspects of the transition to higher education.

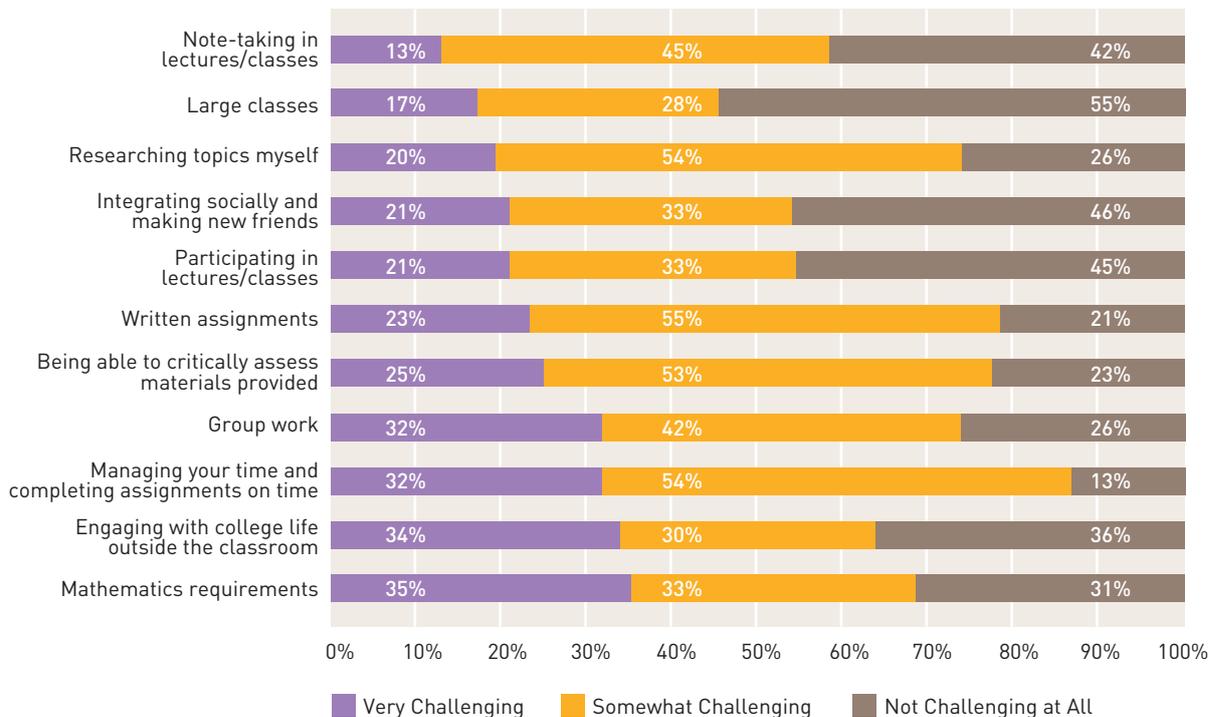
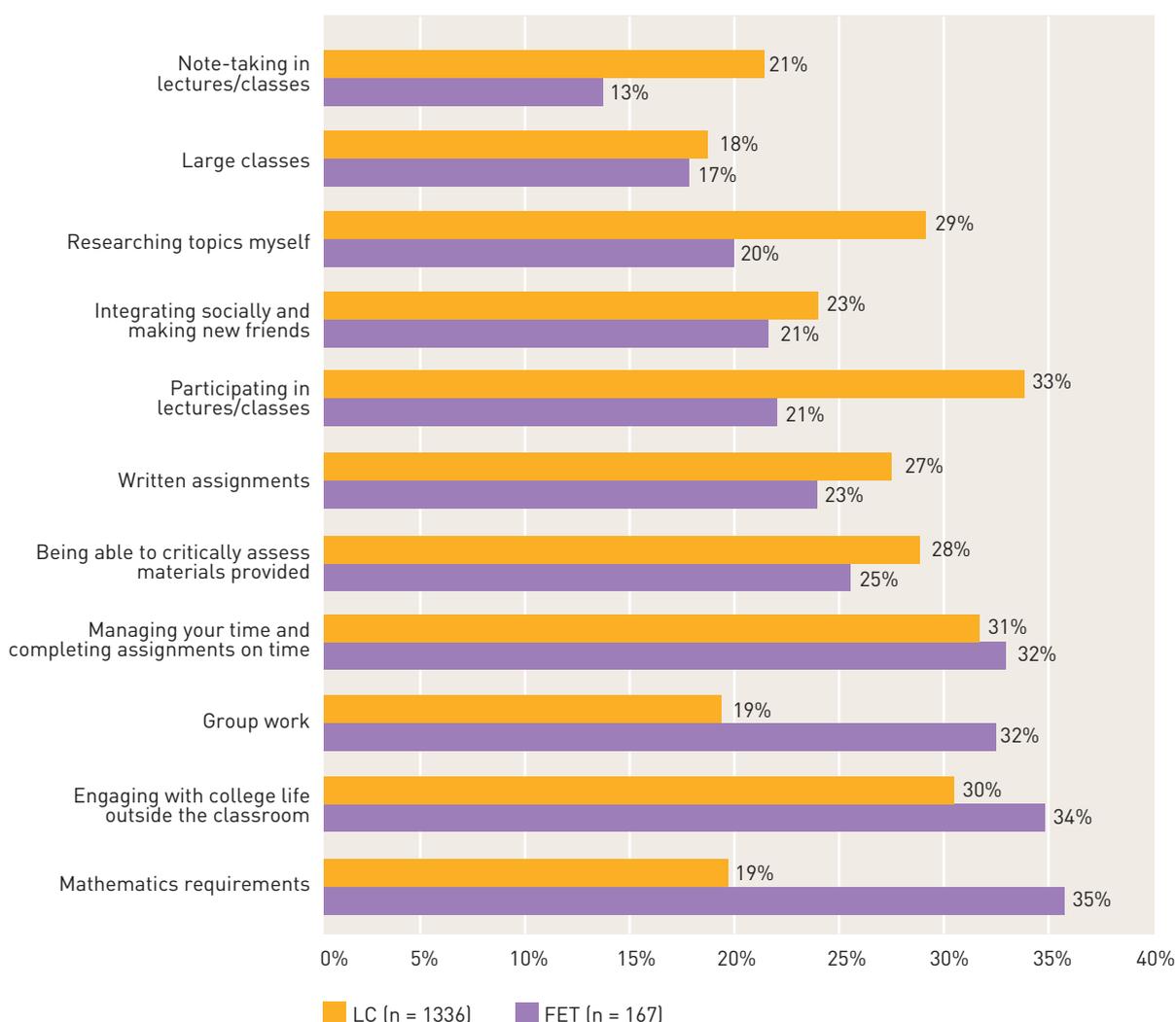


Figure 6 Percent of FET students experiencing various levels of challenge across aspects of the transition to higher education (of those for whom aspect was applicable) (n = 167, 2015 survey)

When the levels of challenge were compared between FET students and those students coming straight from the Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate students were shown to be more challenged than FET students across a number of aspects (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7 Percent of FET and Leaving Certificate (LC) students very challenged by given aspects of the transition to higher education (of those for whom aspect was applicable) (2015 survey)**

The strong sense of personal motivation FET students felt in wishing to enter higher education and their interest in their subject area impacted upon their attendance and approaches to learning.

*I was at every lecture and every tutorial . . . I remember I actually missed one lecture, they had changed the time and I said it to some [students who had come straight from Leaving Certificate], ‘Oh my God, I missed a lecture’, and they said to me, ‘You missed one lecture?’ and I said, ‘Yeah’. I was devastated that I’d missed one, you know. But no, they’ve missed lots.*

**Interview participant L, female, over 30 years**

*In the exam [what we were asked was], rather than look at the theory, to talk about the criticisms [of the] theory and where the criticisms came from. Now within the textbook we had there was maybe one mention of the criticisms but I knew the criticisms because I've read around an awful lot and I was kind of going 'oh I never thought about that', you know, that kind of stuff. That's why I could answer the question . . . people came out of the exam freaked out and 'oh my God, they can't do this' but yeah they can, it's perfectly within the bounds of what we did.*

**Interview participant A, female, over 30 years**

*I challenge myself, I set important goals, I've attended the lectures, I spoke to the lecturers and said, right, there is an assignment due on such and such a date so every two weeks prior to the deadline, every draft, I printed it out, I gave it to the lecturer to make sure that the content, the aspect and the referencing and all that was in order.*

**Interview participant D, male, over 30 years**

The challenging aspects of managing time, completing assignments on time and engaging with life outside of the classroom appeared to be explained by FET students having numerous responsibilities outside of higher education.

*I have to start my assignments almost the day I get them, I can't be sort of like, some of the girls in the class can go at it at 12 o'clock the night before, you know, pull an all-nighter, because I don't know whether my kids are going to be sick or, you know what I mean.*

**Interview participant Q, female, over 30 years**

*Managing time has been the most challenging thing about third level. The timetable is quite demanding. Outside responsibilities like family are also time consuming, leaving very little time for study and research required for assignments.*

**2015 FET survey respondent, female, over 30 years**

*My story is a small bit different than the young ones as I find it challenging to balance home life with wife and child and doing the requirements to succeed in college.*

**2015 FET survey respondent, male, over 30 years**

Being mature students also affected the transitions of many FET students. Indeed, the practical challenges they mentioned were tied up with being at a later stage in their lives and having different responsibilities and motivations to those coming directly from Leaving Certificate. The group work challenge, noted from Figure 7, was explained by a number of participants as relating both to the difference in motivations and in age between FET students and those who came directly from the Leaving Certificate.

*I would rather do an exam over a group assignment. I just found that some of the younger guys wouldn't try really, it was all just a big joke to them. And you were kind of carrying them along.*

**Interview participant R, male, 22-29 years**

*I found the kids very frustrating to deal with because we had to do a lot of teaming up and partnering up and, I don't know, maybe it's because I'm around the same age as their mother but they kind of run and hide when they see me coming, you know, you're just so not cool.*

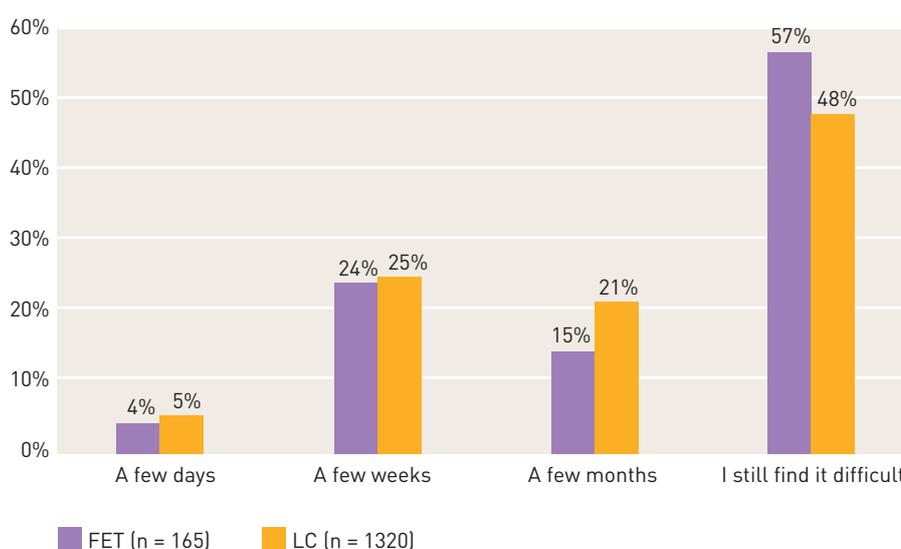
**Interview participant G, female, over 30 years**

Some also experienced the feeling of a social divide between younger and older students.

*When we went into college we were mixed with 17- and 18-year-olds, and I'm 28, so I didn't really have a lot in common – I don't go out drinking or anything like that. And I just found that, because I didn't, that I wasn't really a part of the group.*

**Interview participant P, female, 22-29 years**

Figure 8 illustrates how long it took FET students and those coming directly from Leaving Certificate to overcome challenges. Overall, FET students were more likely to have challenges persist beyond a few months.



**Figure 8 Time taken to overcome challenges (2015 survey)**

The differing nature of challenges faced by each group may explain this finding. Practical challenges cited by FET students, such as family and work responsibilities, were of a more persistent nature than some of those mentioned by those who came straight from Leaving Certificate, such as balancing college and social life, moving away from home, making friends and becoming more self-directed.

The strong determination of FET students to complete their studies provided an overarching motivation to overcome challenges:

*I'm just determined to do it. There's no options for me to drop out, so it doesn't matter what they throw at me, I'm just going to do it.*

**Interview participant R, male, over 30 years**

FET students mentioned getting advice from staff, availing of institutional supports and using their perseverance and life experience to navigate challenges:

*[To overcome difficulty with study skills:] There actually is loads of supports in [the university], you know, there is lots, there is a science centre and writing centre and all that, and I made use of what I could.*

**Interview participant Q, female, over 30 years**

*I suppose I'm a bit cheeky and I'll go in and talk to people or, you know, obviously I know how to work with the system.*

**Interview participant G, female, over 30 years**

*[To overcome exam difficulty:] When I was younger I would have said to myself, you know, I failed an exam, I can't do it, I don't want to do it . . . and now I'm mature enough to know, you know, you can flip that and make it into a positive and try avoid from failing in the future, you know what you need to do and change, and move on from it, you know.*

**Interview participant O, male, over 30 years**

The one challenge common to both groups which was particularly difficult to overcome was that of financial constraints:

*I don't get a proper grant, and I wasn't able to find work this summer, or last year either, so it is, it's a struggle, but you just kind of have to manage your money, make sure you're not spending it on the wrong things, so.*

**Interview participant K, female, 18-21 years**

*The amount of money I needed to attend [university] was quite substantial and I did not receive a grant from Susi. If it wasn't for help from my extended family I would not have been able to attend any third level institution.*

**2015 LC survey respondent, female, 18-21 years**

## Factors Influencing the Transitions of FET Students to Higher Education

**FET preparation was shown to work particularly well under certain circumstances.** These included the following:

- Where FET teachers and staff focused on building the confidence and self-efficacy of students, particularly with regard to study skills and various types of assessment:

*I think the most important thing it gave me was confidence that I could go forward, that I could move on, that I was only beginning my educational journey. I thought the FETAC course was, you know, that was the achievement. And they said 'no, no, this is only your baby steps, we're pushing you out into the real world after this'.*

**Interview participant D, male, over 30 years**

- Where there was a strong link between the course content in FET and that on the programme of study in higher education:

*I'm not saying it all came easily to me, but I wasn't as terrified of the theory of literature as I could have been if I hadn't had that course and the same with classical studies. Classical studies, we got a taster of drama, of playwrights from ancient Greece, Euripides, Sophocles. We got Homer, we got a little bit of history, we got a little bit of Roman history, so I was very comfortable in that as well, I loved that subject. It was basically the FETAC course only and exclusively made my life, my first year in college much easier.*

**Interview participant F, female, over 30 years**

- Where the level of challenge experienced in FET prepared students for the rigours of higher education:

*[Someone said to me about the effect of my FET]: 'you were thrown in at the deep end and you were at the frontline of a war, you were being shot at every day, and then this year you're a sniper'. The training that we got, the experience through FETAC of that constant work, constantly striving to improve what you were doing, to improve your methods, to improve your writing was invaluable it has to be said for getting me to where I am now.*

**Interview participant A, female, over 30 years**

- Where students received a good introduction to the higher education institutions, and were informed about procedures and supports:

*The FETAC course is run in partnership with [the university], we had been very comfortable, they had brought us to orientation days, they had introduced us to past FETAC students who had used the facilitated route into [the university] and they introduced us to the students who were maybe in their second, third years. It was just an extraordinary, you know, to hear people say without the FETAC, telling us what, you know, we kind of knew even though the FETAC course is really difficult.*

**Interview participant F, female, over 30 years**

**The data suggested a number of areas where there may be a level of inconsistency in the nature of the preparation students receive within and across both FET and higher education institutions.**

Consistency appeared particularly important in the following areas:

- In introducing FET students to higher education institutions and available supports.

Students entering the same higher education institution reported different induction experiences which impacted on the success of their transition. The following quotes are from two FET students who attended the same higher education institution from different FET institutions and had vastly different transition experiences.

*[The mature student summer school my FET advisor advised me to attend] was very, very useful because the way the timetable was set we had [subjects directly related to my programme of study]. We had basic maths classes because some of us are not good at maths and we also had a communications module because some of us are not very good with communications. We had presentation styles. It was phenomenal . . . Then two weeks later induction day arrived and I know the induction day everyone was so nervous around me and I turned around and I said, 'well I'm used to it, I was in college two weeks ago, you know, so this is like a duck to water'.*

**Participant C, male, over 30 years**

*I definitely didn't know what [supports were] there, it was only at the end of the year I found out that there was a writing course that would help me with my referencing and stuff like that . . . I couldn't even tell you anything that I learnt at the induction day. And I know that probably sounds awful, but I was there and I did everything that needed to be done. But no, it didn't, it didn't help at all.*

**Interview participant P, female, over 30 years**

- In the clarity and detail of information students receive regarding their prospective higher education course.

*[A person came to our FET institution from the university and she] gave us a synopsis, you know, gave us the outlay and what's to be done and all the subjects you can choose from in first year . . . so it was grand.*

**Participant C, male, over 30 years**

*Some of the subjects were just very hard and no matter what, it was a common year between a few courses, and no matter what course I did I was going to do some of those subjects and they weren't subjects I wanted to do and I knew I wouldn't do well in them because I wasn't interested in them. When I'm not interested in something, in a subject, I'm not going to get good at it.*

**Interview participant I, male, 18-21 years**

- In the information received regarding the academic rules and procedures across FET and higher education.

*Within essays, particularly within the scientific sphere, in social sciences, you don't ever quote someone, ever, you just don't do it, that just wastes word count . . . Whereas we were told 'no, you have to quote and this is how you have to do it' . . . being told 'no, it's this way and this is the only way' and then going into university and then no, it's actually not. You're kind of going 'right, okay, fair enough'.*

**Interview participant A, female, over 30 years**

- In the level of challenge students experience across FET and higher education.

*[In FET], you're mammied. Basically, somebody is there over your shoulder to guide you nearly every step of the way. There is somebody there to read over your stuff if you want it read over, you know, there is all of that. When you enter into college it's a total different ballgame, you're left to do it yourself.*

**Interview participant B, female, over 30 years**

*[In FET], you've kind of a bit more, you learn how to kind of do more work for yourself as well I think, like you're not expecting everything to be handed to you. You know you have to do that little bit extra work if you want to get your assignments done well, and done properly.*

**Interview participant K, female, 18-21 years**

## Recommendations

### Consistency in FET and higher education provision

The data suggests that the FET sector may benefit from the evident good practices experienced in some institutions being replicated by FET providers nationwide. Such practices have a substantial impact on student learning and on effective transitions into and through higher education. Successful FET provision was characterised by a strong link between the content and procedures on the FET course and those on the subsequent higher education course, and the academic workload and range of assignments being pitched at the appropriate level. Equally, successful induction and support services in higher education could be replicated across the sector.

### Connectedness between FET and higher education institutions

The level of connection between FET and higher education institutions appears to be important for students' smooth transition. FET institutions should have structures and initiatives in place to introduce students to higher education institutions. Before entering higher education, students benefit from more communication between FET and higher education institutions regarding areas such as course expectations, academic expectations, the level of challenge anticipated and institutional supports available. Providing FET students with information at the right time in the right amount is key to a successful transition.

### More focus on educational pathways open to FET students

Many participants in this study mentioned a need to publicise more widely progression routes through FET to higher education. In addition, many FET students were unaware of how their prior life and work experience might be recognised by a prospective institution. These findings support the call from a recent overview of recognition of prior learning (RPL) in Irish higher education for clear information for potential applicants regarding the availability of RPL within institutions and how it can be accessed (National Forum, 2015a).

### Addressing the particular challenges of FET students

Now that more is known about the transitions experiences of FET students in higher education, it may be possible to tailor higher education supports to cater for the specific challenges faced by this cohort. This may include, for example, pre-entry preparation in mathematics, supporting students to balance the demands of home, work and study, and facilitated opportunities to discuss working in groups to promote shared understandings and approaches.

### Tracking of FET learners entering higher education

A challenge in accessing participants in this study was that many higher education institutions do not keep a record of which students enter from FET. In addition, FET institutions do not always track students after they finish their programmes. This poses a difficulty for those attempting to gain accurate insights into the higher education experiences of these students. It also poses a barrier for those attempting to ensure appropriate supports are in place to ease the transition of such students. Being able to track which learners enter higher education from FET would also allow for more accurate monitoring of the completion rates and outcomes of FET students within higher education.

### Building partnership

It may be beneficial to allow time and space for stakeholders within the FET and higher education sectors to come together to promote a shared understanding of the goals and potential benefits of capturing the experiences of transition of FET students on an ongoing basis, and to put frameworks in place which would allow this to happen.

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## Limitations of this Study

The acknowledged limitations associated with a self-selecting participant group apply in this study.

## References

National Forum. (2015a). A current overview of recognition of prior learning in Irish higher education. Dublin: National Forum.

National Forum. (2015b). Transition from second level and further education to higher education. Dublin: National Forum.

SOLAS Further Education and Training Authority. (2013). Further education and training strategy 2014-2019. Dublin: SOLAS.

## Appendix: Participant Breakdown

	2015 survey		2016 Survey	2016 Interviews
	Straight from LC	FET Students	FET Students	
<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>1336</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	855	106	65	8
Male	480	60	43	9
Unspecified	1	1	0	0
<b>Age</b>				
18-21 years	1174	48	35	2
22-29 years	158	55	18	2
30 years or over	4	63	55	13
Unspecified	0	1	0	0
<b>Registered disability</b>				
Yes	-	-	8	3
No	-	-	100	14
<b>First in family to enter HE</b>				
Yes	-	-	35	5
No	-	-	73	12
<b>Leaving Certificate (LC)</b>				
LC Applied	-	-	7	0
LC Foundation	-	-	1	1
LC Mostly Ordinary	-	-	44	7
LC Mostly Honours	-	-	31	2
No LC	-	-	23	7
<b>Institution Type</b>				
University	1147	81	28	7
Institute of Technology	102	74	59	9
Other	87	12	14	1
Unspecified	0	0	7	0
<b>Student Status</b>				
Full-time	-	-	98	17
Part-time	-	-	9	0
<b>FET Preparation</b>				
PLC	n/a	93	80	12
VTOS	n/a	4	20	5
Community Education	n/a	5	5	0
Apprenticeship	n/a	3	1	0
Other	n/a	61	2	0
<b>Total Participants</b>		<b>1503</b>	<b>108</b>	



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