



etb

Bord Oideachais agus
Oiliúna Dhún na nGall
*Donegal Education and
Training Board*



Donegal ETB 2021 FET Student Voice Roadshow

**Quality Assurance
Support Service**

Acknowledgements

The 2021 Student Voice Roadshow would not have been possible without the efforts of FET Programme Coordinators, who facilitated engagement with students; teachers, tutors and instructors, who assisted students who needed help to access the online sessions that were held; and the students themselves, who generously gave up their time to participate in the online sessions and contribute data which is of great value in identifying improvements and enhancements that can be made to Donegal ETB's FET Service. In addition, the assistance of our FET Student Support Officers was essential in organising and facilitating the online sessions held throughout the week of the event. The Quality Assurance Support Service gratefully acknowledges and expresses appreciation to all who contributed to the success of this event.

Contents

Context.....	4
Format and Methodology.....	5
The Student Voice.....	7
Health and Wellbeing	10
Information and Communication	14
Additional Comments	18
Conclusion.....	20

Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Composition of Student Voice Roadshow participants by FET programme	5
Figure 2: Responses to question about how best to listen to the student voice.....	7
Figure 3: Graphic illustration of proposed FET Student Governance and Management.....	8
Figure 4: Participant views on proposed FET Student Voice Governance and Management Forum	8
Figure 5: Responses to question about how proposed FET Student Governance and Management Student Forum might be improved	9
Figure 6: Responses to question about support in returning to classroom learning.....	10
Figure 7: FET student awareness of Public Information and Communications Policy.....	14
Figure 8: Ratings for how accurate, up to date and easy to find published information regarding Donegal ETB courses is.....	15
Figure 9: Ratings for statements on communication experiences of FET students.....	16
Figure 10: FET students' experience of Donegal ETB's website	16
Figure 11: FET students' awareness of Donegal ETB's presence on social media	17
Figure 12: Assessment schedules	17
Figure 13: Information on assessment techniques	17
Figure 14: Feedback on assessments	17
Figure 15: FET course inductions.....	17
Figure 16: Additional comments	19
Table 1: Star-rating System.....	14

Context

The Student Voice Roadshow, which took place during the week commencing 29th November 2021, was the second annual event organised by the Donegal ETB Quality Assurance (QA) Team to canvass the views of students on their experience of Donegal ETB's Further Education and Training (FET) Service. The first of these events was the Student Voice Forum, a one-day event held on 11th February 2020. In the intervening period, Donegal ETB underwent its inaugural statutory review of quality assurance, carried out by an independent panel of experts appointed by QQI. Preparing for the review provided an excellent opportunity for the Quality Assurance Support Service to learn more about the experience of staff and students in the everyday delivery of FET services throughout the county. The accumulation of information gathered through events such as these greatly assists the Quality Assurance Support Service in tailoring future interactions with stakeholders in the organisation, as well as informing the design of FET Service policies and procedures.

Format and Methodology

The 2020 Student Voice Forum was held at the Radisson Hotel, Letterkenny, prior to the introduction of restrictions on social gathering in response to the spread of COVID-19. Naturally, due to the pandemic, this format could not be used for the 2021 Student Voice Roadshow. However, it was termed a “roadshow” because it was initially intended that members of the Quality Assurance Support Service would visit FET centres across Donegal to conduct information-gathering activities face-to-face with small groups of students in each centre. Unfortunately, as the number of COVID-19 cases increased in November 2021, this approach was deemed unsafe, and it was decided to conduct the meetings through an online platform (Google Meet). Although video conferencing has proved exceptionally useful during the pandemic, it is the aim of the Quality Assurance Support Service to increase face-to-face interaction with FET staff and students when conditions allow, in line with feedback received in the course of preparations for the recent statutory review process.

Between Monday 29th November and Monday 6th December 2021, a total of 147 FET students participated in the Student Voice Roadshow online sessions. This group comprised students representing the Apprenticeship, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Contracted Training, In-Centre Training, Learning for Living, Night Class, Post-Leaving Certificate

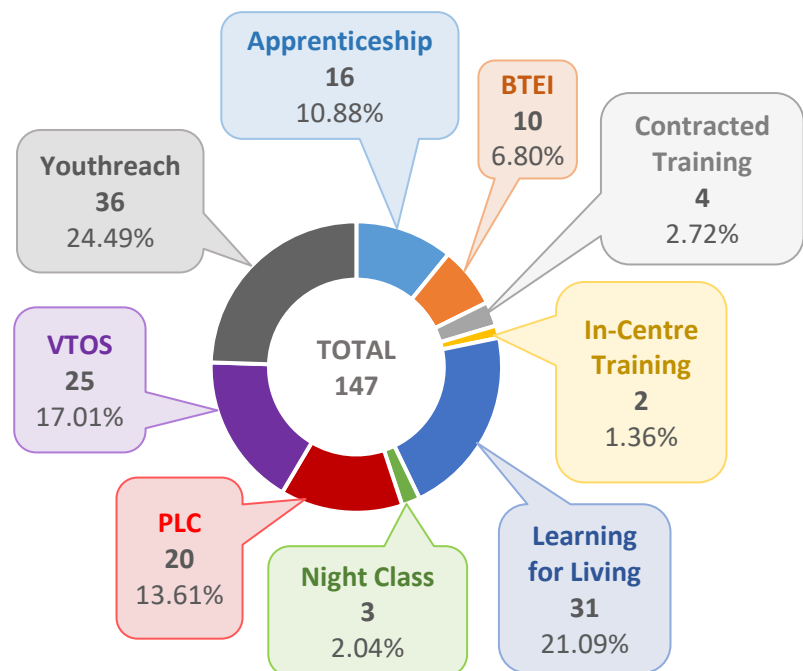


Figure 1: Composition of Student Voice Roadshow participants by FET programme

(PLC), Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and Youthreach programmes, as shown in Figure 1.¹

The material for the online sessions was compiled using the presentation and survey tool Mentimeter. Each session began with an introduction, during which the aims of the Quality Assurance Support Service in conducting the Student Voice Roadshow were outlined and information concerning the actions taken to address issues raised during the 2020 Student Voice Forum was provided. The remainder of each session was divided into three sections which covered the following areas:

1. The Student Voice
2. Health and Wellbeing
3. Information and Communications

Participants were invited to use internet-connected devices, such as tablets, smartphones or computers, to respond to questions presented through Mentimeter. Their responses were displayed anonymously in real-time, forming word clouds or speech bubbles in the case of qualitative data and graphs or charts for quantitative data. (During previous events, the Quality Assurance Support Service has found that this interactive aspect of live survey platforms such as Mentimeter has helped to increase the engagement of participants). Participants were restricted to a single response for closed-ended questions (which yielded quantitative data). For open-ended questions (which yielded qualitative data), multiple responses were permitted. While most of the comments made by participants represented genuine attempts to provide useful information, some were less serious or light-hearted, and the usefulness of responses to the open-ended questions varies.

The data gathered was imported from spreadsheets that were automatically generated for each session and collated in a single spreadsheet, which was used in the compilation of this report.²

¹ Following consultation with community education providers, it was decided that a separate student voice event will be held to meet the needs of community education students and providers.

² QA Team members were unable to access Mentimeter during one of the online sessions, which was conducted with 5 VTOS students based in Letterkenny. As a result, data gathered during this session was handwritten by the QA Team members in attendance and manually added to the aggregate spreadsheet used as the basis for this report.

Before being asked for their views through the Mentimeter survey, participants were shown a graphic which provides a visual illustration of the proposed Student Governance and Management forum structure.

FET Student Governance and Management Forums

- A **student voice** in FET Governance and Management
- **Feedback** from FET Governance and Management **directly to students**
- Student representation from **all programmes and NFQ levels** delivered by the FET Service
- An opportunity for FET students to **share information** with **future students**

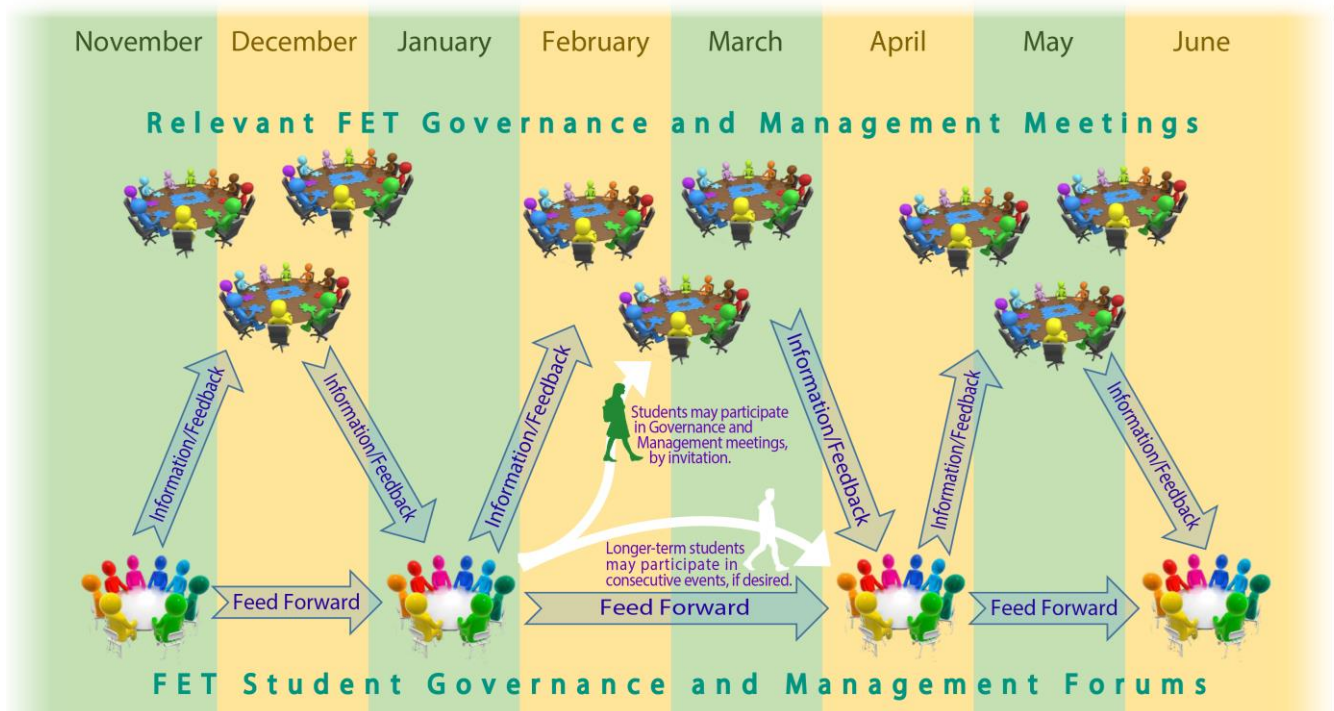


Figure 3: Graphic illustration of proposed FET Student Governance and Management Forum

Having viewed this graphic, participants were asked whether they thought the proposal was a good idea. Across all sessions, a total of 131 responses were submitted to this question, most of which were positive, as shown in Figure 4.

Do you think the Student Voice Governance and Management Forum is a good idea? Will it work?

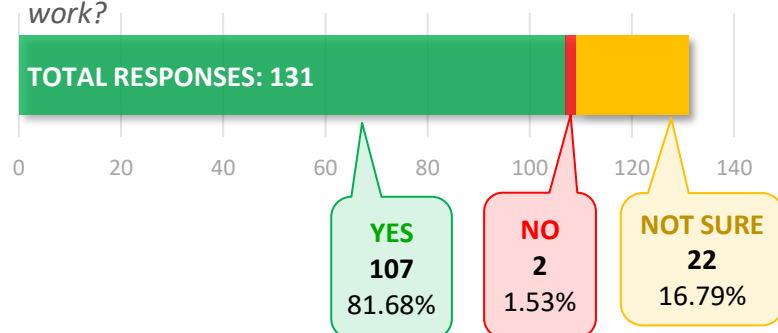


Figure 4: Participant views on proposed FET Student Voice Governance and Management Forum

Health and Wellbeing

This section of the survey contained just two questions, the first of which was:

What is Donegal ETB currently doing to support you in returning to classroom learning?

Five themes emerged from analysis of the 174 responses received for this question.

Teaching and Learning

Many comments highlighted how supportive FET Service staff have been, especially in helping students with assignments and giving feedback on how they can improve. Participants reported that they have encountered a good balance between theory and practice and expressed gratitude for opportunities to provide feedback in class about what works for them. A small minority of respondents suggested that more time should be spent on learning rather than being focused on assignments.




Figure 6: Responses to question about support in returning to classroom learning

Social Aspect

Many participants mentioned their happiness at returning to the classroom with their peers and teachers, tutors and instructors. They feel supported by those around them and remarked that this helps with their confidence. They also welcomed the routine of being back in the classroom, which they regard as a safe space.

FET Centres

A large majority of respondents remarked that they feel safe and welcome on returning to their respective centres. It was noted that the centres are warm and clean and follow COVID-19 guidelines effectively with physical distancing, smaller class sizes, sanitiser availability and the wearing of face masks. A small minority suggested that the amount of canteen seating should be increased, but, in general, a good atmosphere in FET Centres was reported.



“At present, for us older people, everything is working great. It is a dual benefit to us aged, as we are learning how to use the internet and also we are socialising...”

Staff

Participants commented that FET staff have been supportive and flexible, understanding when students need to be late or take time off due to COVID-19. They felt that FET staff members had helped them to readapt to classroom life. Overall, the feedback received in relation to FET staff was extremely positive.



“The staff in the ETB are so friendly and welcoming. The centre is always clean and warm”

Resources

There were positive comments in relation to the availability of resources such as pens, paper, folders, laptops, etc. In addition, many participants referred to the support they have received from the Adult Guidance Service in the form of counselling and careers advice.

The second question asked during this section of the survey was:


How can Donegal ETB further improve the learning environment and support you as you return to learning (e.g., comfort, facilities, resources, health)?

There was a total of 150 responses to this question, analysis of which yielded four themes.

Resources

Comments in relation to resources referred to the need to update laptops and PCs and to improve internet access. Some respondents suggested that they would benefit from larger desks and tables in classrooms, along with more comfortable chairs and better lighting. Many also expressed a desire for the availability of a coffee machine and shared areas for tea and

coffee. Reference was also made to a shortage of car-parking spaces and the need for enhanced dietary provision, including vegetarian and vegan options.



“Last time I was in school was twenty years ago. Staff and facility are excellent. The interaction through technology is extremely helpful”


Support

Respondents mentioned potential supports outside the classroom, such as DVDs or online video clips that could support learning. Some also suggested a need for

improved communication about resources, counselling services and feedback on assignments. A considerable number of participants would like increased break times, which would provide relief from long periods of sitting down, as well as opportunities to go for a walk or smoke. A small number of participants perceive a need for enhanced support at the beginning of courses, especially for older students who are returning to learning.

Teaching and Learning

Some participants commented that their assignments are repetitive and that they need to be explained more clearly. There were also some who remarked that they would appreciate assignment schedules with information on when assignments are due. There were requests for longer face-to-face classes and different activities to support learning.



“ETB continue to be supportive, to understand that some students are worried about starting course, do everything to make sure it is a welcoming environment...”

Others suggested a mix of face-to-face and online learning to provide flexibility and meet the needs of students who are not always able to attend class.

Communication

Respondents referred to the need for improved communication between teaching staff and students. For example, students would like to be informed as soon as possible if a member of staff is going to be absent, as there have been occasions on which students have only discovered that classes were being cancelled for this reason when they had already travelled to their FET centre.

Information and Communication

The last section of the survey consisted exclusively of closed-ended questions concerning various aspects of information and communication in Donegal ETB’s FET Service. Most of these provided participants with a choice of “yes”, “no” and “don’t know” responses, but there were also two groups of three which required students to rate how strongly they agreed with specific statements.

The first question was designed to assess awareness among students of Donegal ETB’s Public Information and Communications policy. Responses indicate that this is quite low, with almost 58 percent (of a total of 133 responses) indicating that they were unaware of the policy.

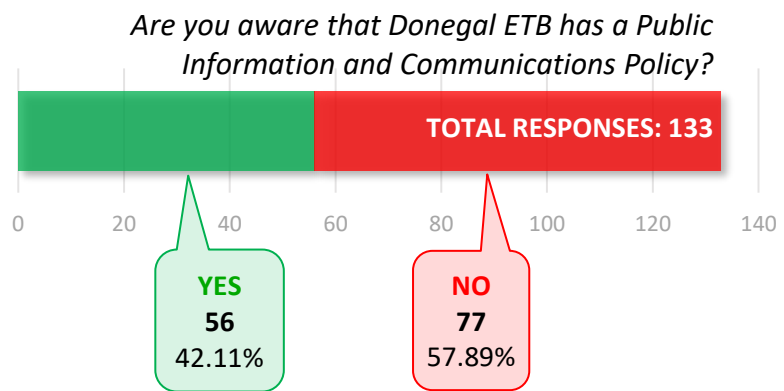


Figure 7: FET student awareness of Public Information and Communications Policy

Following this, participants were requested to rate how strongly they felt that information published by Donegal ETB in relation to FET courses is:

- Accurate
- Up to date
- Easy to find

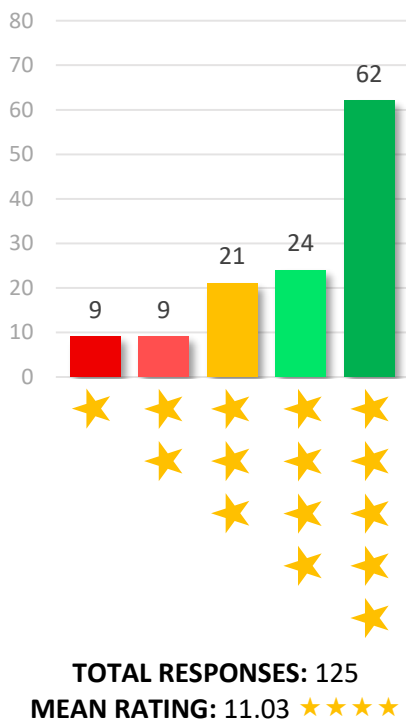
To achieve this, the Mentimeter interface allowed each respondent to provide a rating between 0 and 15 to indicate their level of agreement, where 0 indicates complete disagreement and 15 indicates full agreement. For the purpose of reporting the data generated by these questions,

Stars	Response Range
★	0-3
★ ★	4-6
★ ★ ★	7-9
★ ★ ★ ★	10-12
★ ★ ★ ★ ★	13-15

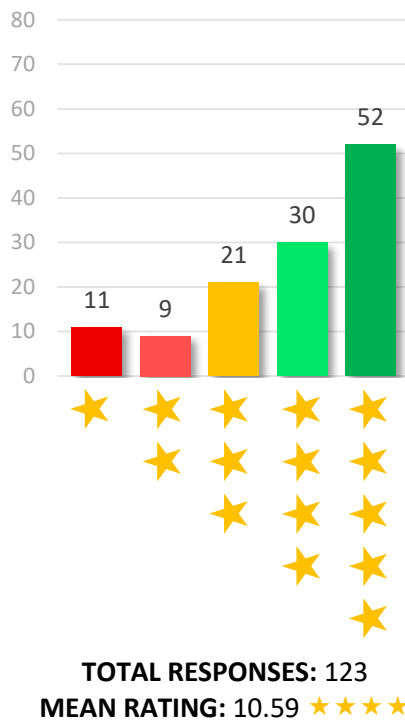
Table 1: Star-rating system

responses have been grouped together to form a star-rating system, as shown in Table 1. The graphs below show the number of responses in each of the five categories defined in the table.

*Please rate how strongly you feel the information we publish about Donegal ETB courses is **accurate**.*



*Please rate how strongly you feel the information we publish about Donegal ETB courses is **up to date**.*



*Please rate how strongly you feel the information we publish about Donegal ETB courses is **easy to find**.*

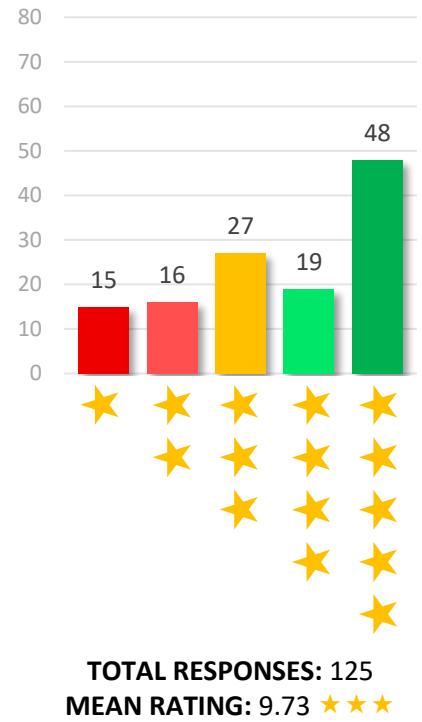


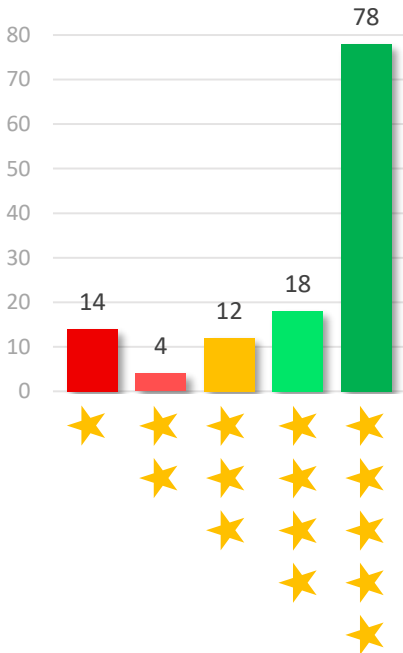
Figure 8: Ratings for how accurate, up to date and easy to find published information regarding Donegal ETB courses is

Next, participants were asked to use the same rating system to express how strongly they agreed with the following statements:

1. Donegal ETB is good at communicating with students.
2. I have the opportunity to share my views about my course.
3. Donegal ETB communicates with me in a way that suits my needs.

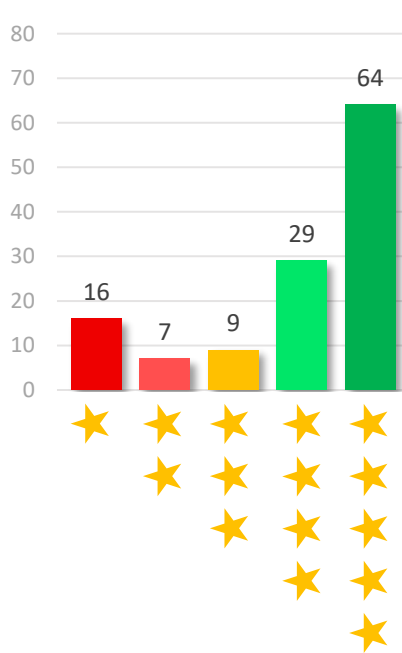
Analysis of the responses is shown in the graphs in Figure 9.

Please rate how strongly you agree with the statement: "Donegal ETB is good at communicating with students".



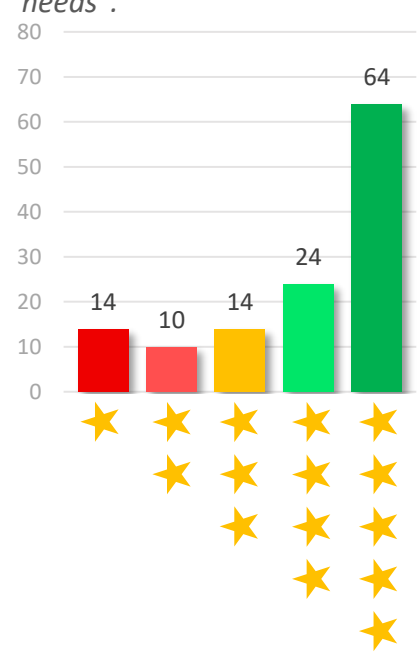
TOTAL RESPONSES: 126
MEAN RATING: 11.74 ★★★★★

Please rate how strongly you agree with the statement: "I have the opportunity to share my views about my course".



TOTAL RESPONSES: 125
MEAN RATING: 11.05 ★★★★★

Please rate how strongly you agree with the statement: "Donegal ETB communicates with me in a way that suits my needs".



TOTAL RESPONSES: 126
MEAN RATING: 10.86 ★★★★★

Figure 9: Ratings for statements on communication experiences of FET students

Participants were asked about their experience with Donegal ETB’s website and their awareness of Donegal ETB on social media channels.

Notably, over half of all 139 respondents indicated that they have never used the Donegal ETB website.

In addition, while a majority of 136 respondents were aware of Donegal ETB’s presence on social media, a very substantial minority were not.

Do you find the Donegal ETB website easy to navigate?

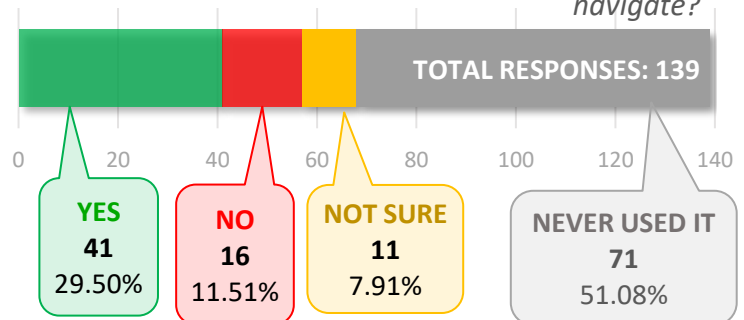


Figure 10: FET students’ experience of Donegal ETB’s website

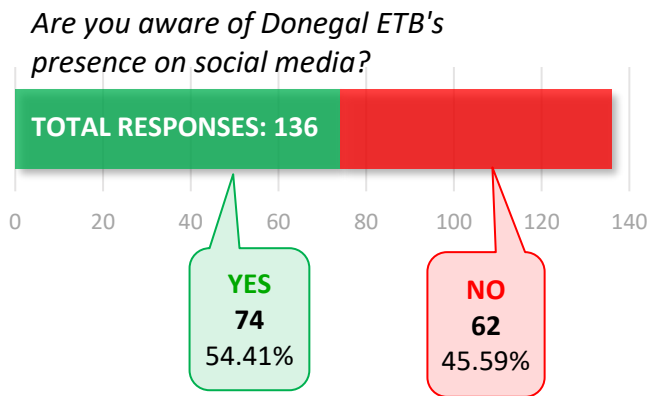


Figure 11: FET students' awareness of Donegal ETB's presence on social media

The final four questions in this section of the survey concerned information about assessments and the provision of course inductions. Responses to these questions were more positive, with almost three-quarters stating that they had been provided with an assessment schedule, while almost all had received information on exam techniques and feedback on their assessments. Meanwhile almost 9 out of 10 respondents reported having received a course induction.

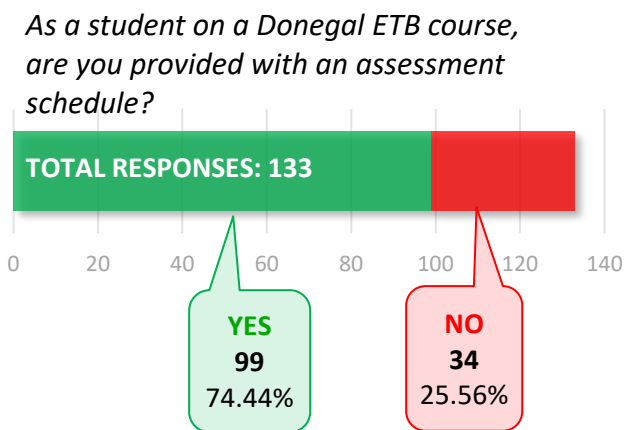


Figure 12: Assessment Schedules

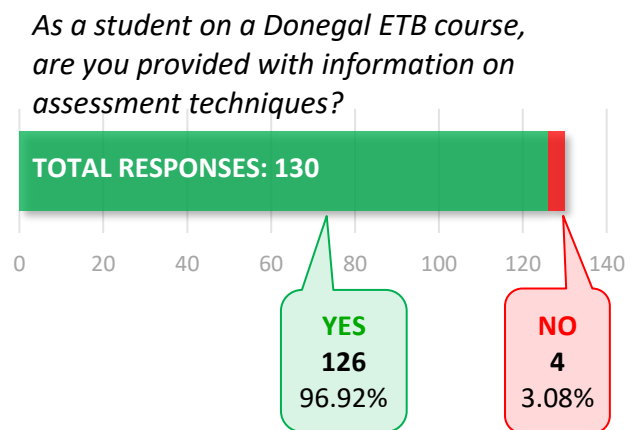


Figure 13: Information on assessment techniques

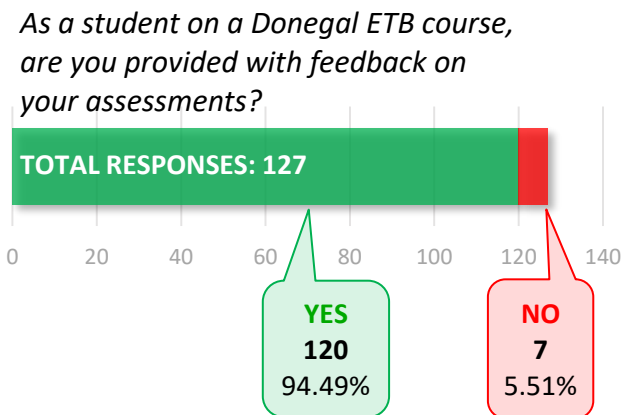


Figure 14: Feedback on assessments

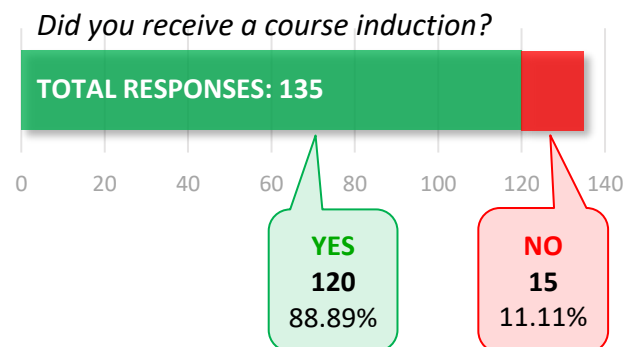


Figure 15: FET course inductions

Additional Comments

To conclude the survey, participants were asked for any additional comments they would like to add. A total of 176 responses were received for this question. Unsurprisingly, some were light-hearted, but many were genuine, and most were positive, especially in relation to staff.

"A good course and excellent tutor"

"All of our tutors are great, but they could be more understanding when students are stressed or confused"

"...Youthreach is wonderful"

Rose inspired me and didn't give up until I was on my course"

"Everything is going well... we can't fault anything... we have a great teacher....and the coffee is great!!!!"

"I found the laptop loan scheme really helped me and without it I don't think I would have been able to complete my course"

"Most of us are elderly and the present courses have given us an appetite to embrace the computer/internet. So more classes and access to more technology and new skills. It also is great meeting like-minded people"

"The whole experience has been great. Staff, facilities and teaching has been excellent."

Conclusion

Throughout the Student Voice Roadshow sessions, participants were motivated and engaged. They provided valuable insights, made relevant and important contributions, and were broadly positive about their experiences as Donegal ETB FET students. The large volume of feedback collated indicates that many students take considerable pride in completing a FET course, but also that they have high expectations of Donegal ETB's FET Service, staff, programmes and facilities, and that they recognise instances where they feel improvements should be made.

It is clear that FET students regard communication as fundamental to their learning experience. In common with participants in the 2020 Student Voice Forum, this cohort of students described how they value opportunities to make their voices heard within the organisation. They continue to seek face-to-face interaction, either in person or online, and embrace opportunities to provide feedback and make their voices heard through various student voice activities.

Being listened to and receiving updates about actions taken in response to their feedback is very important to FET students. Participants across all sessions in this event responded well to the proposal of a FET Student Governance and Management Forum as a means of expressing their views and opinions about developments in quality assurance. They provided excellent examples of what may need to be considered in establishing the forum structure.

Overall, the FET Service's ability to communicate with and listen to its students at every level—in one-to-one interactions with staff, within programmes and within management—will be critical in implementing a strong, integrated quality assurance system and delivering the high-quality learning experience that students desire.

Participants highlighted the support received from their teachers, tutors and instructors, as well as from their peers. References were also made to the support provided by the Adult Guidance Service, in the form of counselling and career and progression advice. Many participants also expressed happiness at returning to the classroom setting, noting that the feeling of support from those around them helps to build their self-confidence. They enjoy the routine of attending their respective FET centres, which were described as safe spaces.

Overall, feedback relating to teaching and learning was largely positive, and it appears there is generally a good balance between the delivery of theory and practice. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that a small number of respondents suggested that too much time is focused on assignments and that more time should be spent on learning instead. Other suggestions for improvement included a hybrid version of delivery, comprising face-to-face and online teaching, enhanced with resources such as video clips. Participants also noted that sitting for long periods is not always conducive to learning and expressed a desire for some longer break times.

FET students feel they are being provided with good resources, and appreciation was expressed for the opportunity to borrow IT devices to facilitate learning at home. However, upgrades to internet access and updates to PCs and laptops were referred to as areas for improvement. In addition, classroom furniture was the subject of some feedback, which included suggestions of larger desks, more comfortable seating and improved lighting. It was also suggested that canteen facilities should be augmented with more seating and enhanced menu options for vegetarians and vegans.

The findings from this report will inform ongoing quality assurance developments and improvements. Actions will be identified and included in the wider QA action plan as part of the current Donegal ETB self-monitoring and evaluation process.