

This article explores a collaboration between CDETB and TCD that has resulted in the first postgraduate certificate course in Diversity and Inclusion, designed specifically for FET. It highlights the rationale for the course design, and outlines how it will contribute to professional learning and development, learner experience, and the sector as a whole.

What?

In May 2020, Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB) officially met for the first time to discuss the potential of a new level 9 postgraduate certificate in Diversity and Inclusion, specifically for further education and training (FET). This collaboration was part of the vision of CDETB's director of further education, Blake Hodgkinson, who recognised that the needs of those who educate and provide support in the FET sector are as diverse and unique as those of the learners we work with. The course was intended to be responsive to and inclusive of the many different workers in FET, not just educators. The overall aim was to make each FET student's experience as valuable, empowering, and consistent as possible.

After several meetings between CDETB and TCD, a design team led by Dr Keith Johnston was established to explore the possibilities of this vision. Representing CDETB were Carrie Archer, professional learning and development coordinator, and Dr Anne Costelloe, head teacher in Mountjoy Education Service to Prisons. From TCD, expertise was engaged from Dr Joanne Banks, programme coordinator, and Prof. Michael Shevlin.

A three-module blended programme was designed. Module one addresses theories underpinning equality, diversity, and inclusion, and module two explores inclusive classroom practices through the lens of universal design for learning (UDL). The final module, titled 'Speaking to Diversity', focuses on the transformative nature of inclusive practice and explores how the group can support each other into the future to ingrain what they've learned into their specific context and into the CDETB as a whole.

Postgraduate Certificate in Diversity and Inclusion in FET

A collaborative and transformative endeavour



Carrie Archer

Professional Learning and Development Coordinator, City of Dublin Education and Training Board



Dr. Keith Johnston
Trinity College Dublin

"The course design is underpinned by principles of inclusion and accessibility and the blended learning format helps enable course participants to balance studying part-time with the demands of their busy professional roles."



During the consultation phase for the development of CDETB's Statement of Strategy 2021–2025, staff identified some target areas as organisational strategic priorities. These include people and pedagogy, for which key themes are staff development, teaching,

learning and assessment, student supports, and andragogy (the theory and practice of adult learning).

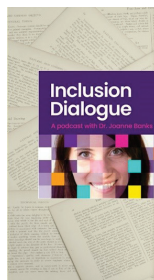
CDETB is a place to learn, grow, and develop, both individually and collectively. Staff are encouraged and supported to engage with continuous, contextual learning and development through active engagement with both accredited and non-accredited activities and processes. Through experimentation, implementation, evaluation, and reflection, professional learning and development will result in enhancement of practices and personal and professional growth. This collective growth will result in agility to respond to the needs of CDETB and its wider community.

This working definition of professional learning and development in CDETB underpins the rationale for and design of this course.

So What? The wider context

SOLAS's Professional Development Strategy 2016–2020 was compiled to develop a strategic approach to professional learning and development (PLD) in FET and to identify target areas for support to FET practitioners. Evidence from FET staff consultation highlighted a need for coordinated, quality-assured, strategically focused, and consistent PLD opportunities in the sector. FET practitioners said that a key challenge with current PLD provision is that courses tend to be too general, not appropriate for the FET context, and not relevant to their specific requirements.

Consequently, one of three strategic goals identified was to increase FET sector capability through relevant, targeted professional development. A key priority under this goal was to target development interventions for working with and supporting FET learners, because practitioners' confidence was lowest in related areas, including dealing with challenging behaviours, addressing literacy and numeracy in the learning environment, and engaging and supporting learners with diverse needs (SOLAS, 2019).



Dr. Joanne Banks
Trinity College Dublin

"By emphasising the importance of pedagogical approaches like Universal Design for Learning, this course provides an exciting opportunity to promote inclusive and equitable education in further education settings in direct response to growing student diversity"



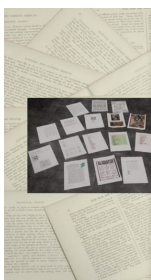
The FET Strategy 2020–2024 is built on three strategic pillars: Building Skills, Fostering Inclusion, and Facilitating Pathways. Fostering Inclusion recognises that rooting FET in the community, targeting priority cohorts, providing consistent literacy and

numeracy supports, and providing consistent learner supports with a universal design approach underpinning learning development and delivery are integral to the delivery of a quality educational experience for all FET learners (SOLAS, 2020).

CDETB serves the area covered by Dublin City Council and has 16 FET colleges, 10 Youthreach centres, two training centres, and an adult education service in five separate areas across the city. It also provides education in seven prisons, and it funds many community training centres (CTCs) and local training initiatives (LTIs). Not only are our learners diverse, but our staff are too.

Provision in CDETB is delivered by over 3,200 staff to almost 30,000 learners (12,000 full-time, 17,500 part-time), including:

- early school leavers
- learners with intellectual disabilities
- learners with additional needs
- learners with low educational attainment
- asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants
- offenders and ex-offenders
- learners who are homeless
- learners with low literacy or numeracy levels
- learners from the Traveller community
- learners with English as an additional language.



Dr. Anne Costelloe

Head Teacher Mountjoy
CDETB Education Service to Prisons

"Prison educators can often feel isolated and somewhat 'different' from other FE teachers because of the prison's unique context, engagement on a course like this lessens that sense of isolation and allows for a shared understanding across a range of educational services."

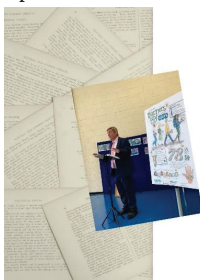


In 2019, of the 13,098 learners nationally who reported at least one disability, 2,237 (17%) were enrolled in the City of Dublin ETB. This course acknowledges that to accommodate the diversity of learners in FET, the best pedagogical practices must be embedded in everyday practice (Dulee-Kinsolving & Guerin, 2020).

Now What? What does this course mean for the sector?

The FET Strategy 2020–2024 strongly upholds that FET is for everyone; central to this is ensuring a consistent learner experience. FET is committed to embracing the wider benefits of learning and its core values of lifelong learning, social justice, active citizenship, and economic prosperity. Empowering and enabling FET practitioners to respond to the increasing diversity of learners in the sector underpins their capacity and potential to meet strategic goals and goes beyond (SOLAS, 2020).

Teacher professional learning is a complex, recursive process. Two key themes underpinned the



Blake Hodkinson

Director of Further Education and Training
CDETB

"The more that we have considered how best to include students and meet their needs the better we can deliver our service. For CDETB, with 35 staff on the course, I am hoping this will start conversations and actions that will transform our delivery."



design of this course. First, there was acknowledgement of each participant's individuality and the initial conditions they start with. Second, there needed to be a long-term focus on five drivers of professional learning: the ability to 'self-organise and interact; reflect and inquire; identify and negotiate boundaries; consolidate, challenge and create; and make connections' (Keay, et al., 2019, p. 232).

It is imperative that professional learning occurring on the course be implemented and embedded long-term in CDETB, so the course was carefully constructed to be participative and transformative as opposed to transmissive. Each of the three blended modules builds on the others and is open to interpretation by the person, depending on their initial conditions and context. 'Personal purpose is the route to organisational change,' writes Fullan (1993, p. 14), and at all stages participants will be challenged to explore their 'why': that is, their purpose (Sinek, 2009). Participants are supported and facilitated to acknowledge any unconscious biases and to use personal purpose to motivate them to consciously contextualise and then embed learning into practice.

“ There is recognition and appreciation that collaborative and reflective dialogue pushes for improvement in student learning.

Both design and delivery aim to ensure that collaborative group work results in participants learning more about other areas of CDETB and FET provision and that relationships and cross-service awareness will support and sustain autonomous professional learning. There is recognition and appreciation that collaborative and reflective dialogue pushes for improvement in student learning (Newmann et al., 2000). Reflective dialogue occurs when 'colleagues in an institution listen to each other carefully and question their beliefs and feel eager to change these beliefs in a candid and unbiased way' (Hirsh & Hord, 2010, cited in Dogan et al., 2019, p. 232).

Reflective, collaborative dialogue can effect greater change in educational practice (Kruse et al., 1995, cited in Dogan et al., 2019). Reflective dialogue also informs lecturers further about FET and its complexities, bridging the theory-practice divide (Jackson & Burch, 2016). Ongoing, meaningful evaluation is crucial, and evaluation of the impact of this professional development opportunity will include affective reactions, participant learning, instructional changes, and impacts on learners (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019) as lecturers and participants work together to effect real change in the FET sector.

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Winners of Enterprise Ireland's 2021 Student Entrepreneur of the Year Award



L-R: Tim Farrelly, Bachelor of Engineering student at Trinity College Dublin; David Deneher, BA in Computer Science and Business student at Trinity College Dublin and Omar Salem, Master of Aerospace Engineering student at Queen's University Belfast.

Students from third-level institutions nationwide, who have an innovative business idea with real commercial potential, are invited to apply to this year's Student Entrepreneur Awards.

This is the 41st year of the Student Entrepreneur Awards, co-sponsored by Cruickshank, Grant Thornton and the Local Enterprise Offices. The awards are part of a campaign to encourage students from all academic disciplines to start their own business as a career option.

Ten finalists will be selected to compete for several awards including the Cruickshank High Achieving Merit Award, the Grant Thornton High Achieving Merit Award and the Local Enterprise Office ICT Award.

The overall winner will share in a €35,000 prize fund and receive mentoring from Enterprise Ireland to develop the commercial viability of their concept.

The other award winners will also receive expert advice and mentoring support from Enterprise Ireland and programme sponsors to assist them in turning their ideas into commercial realities.