

# A Digital Library for the Irish FET Sector

A user-focused service to support learning and teaching

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Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) is developing an online, user-focused library service that helps fulfil ETBI's support of learning and teaching in the ETB further education and training (FET) sector. It takes the form of a website that provides access to resources, guides, and tutorials and offers a number of benefits to the sector: efficiency, economies of scale, and a shared space.

Library provision across the Irish further education and training (FET) sector does not compare to the higher education sector. Because Education and Training Boards Ireland's (ETBI) remit includes providing supports to Education and Training Boards (ETBs), there is a compelling argument for ETBI to provide a library support to the ETBs. Such a service is good and useful for several reasons, including:

- It helps validate courses by helping assure qualification standards agencies that learners are being provided with supports and resources.
- It can be a useful marketing tool for an institution, enhancing its credibility and gravitas.
- Interaction with the library service helps with student retention (Murray et al., 2016) and success (Hughes, 2015; Thorpe et al.; 2016).

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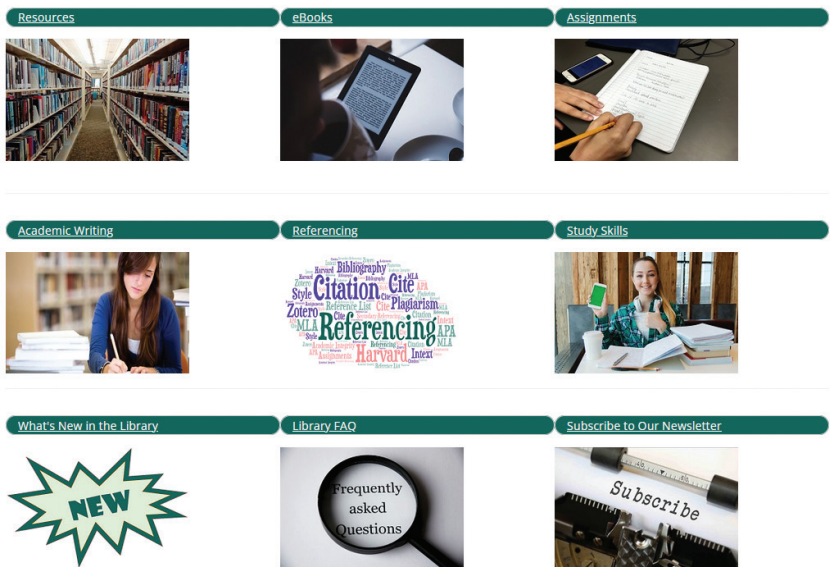
## The library website

A library is more than a collection of resources. One cannot simply acquire resources, make them available, then say to users, 'Here, have at it.' Some instruction must be given in what the resources are, why they should be used instead of general internet sources, and how they are searched. After that, some guidance must be provided on citing and referencing sources, which also leads to discussion on how to avoid plagiarism.

When there is no physical library, it becomes necessary to have guides on searching, referencing, and so on online – through a website. Most libraries – certainly nearly all libraries of educational institutions – have a website, and it makes sense for ETBI's Digital Library to take this form. The Digital Library site is intended as a one-stop shop for hosting resources for the FET sector.

The Digital Library website is similar in structure and content to other academic library websites. Many FET learners will progress to higher education, and it will be useful for them to be aware of the requirements of academic writing and to have previous experience of academic library websites.

At the same time, it is well understood that FET learners come from a broader variety of backgrounds, so the Digital Library includes sections on core skills such as grammar, information sources and study skills, and links to resources, for example other useful websites in these areas.



## Resources

It is fair to say that many resources aimed at academic libraries are geared towards higher education, but the ETBI library works with subject-matter experts to identify resources suitable for use in the FET sector.

Many practitioners fill the resource gap by developing their own teaching resources. The Digital Library would be a good way of disseminating these resources to a wider audience, and perhaps also of promoting cooperation between practitioners in different ETBs. There is a large and impressive corpus of work compiled in the ETBs, and the Digital Library can showcase

and promote it. Sixteen ETBs can potentially mean the wheel being invented 16 times over; the Digital Library can prevent that.

## E-books

The Digital Library has access to two e-book platforms

- EBSCO eBooks for FE Subscription Collection; full-text access to over 7,000 e-books used in the UK FET sector
- ProQuest eBook Central, a catalogue of close to 2 million e-books that are available for purchase. The library is happy to accommodate purchase suggestions from subject-matter experts.

## Open educational resources

There is much unhappiness with the cost of textbooks and other educational resources. This, and moves towards open knowledge, collaboration, and sharing, have led to the development of open educational resources (OERs). These are freely accessible, openly licensed text, media, and other assets that are useful for teaching and learning. In an Irish FET context, OERs would be good for supplementing subscription resources or replacing such resources that are primarily aimed at higher education libraries.

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## Benefits of the library

### Sharing

The Digital Library has collaborated with the ETBI Supports for Apprentices Group on making a series of workbooks entitled *Maths for Trades* into OERs (ETBI Digital Library, 2022). These are publicly available through the library website and are open to modification, reuse, and redistribution through a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 Licence.

Creation of OERs like the *Maths for Trades* series will hopefully raise the profile of FET and encourage other practitioners to develop OERs for use in the FET sector and beyond. The workbook series provides a concrete example of how the Digital Library can be a catalyst for cross-ETB collaboration.

### Efficiency

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has seen an influx of displaced Ukrainians into Ireland, many of whom have little or no English-language skills. The FET sector is at the forefront of providing them with courses on ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages).

The Inclusion section of ETBI created several factsheets on FET in Ireland and had them translated into Ukrainian and Russian. These and other materials (Adult Education Officer contact details; ESOL worksheets) were added to a 'FET Resources for Ukrainians in Ireland' section of the Digital Library, whose URL was sent out to the ETBs for dissemination. Without the Digital Library, these materials would have to have been sent to each ETB to process individually. The Digital Library provides efficiencies by doing work that would otherwise have to be done by each ETB.

#### *Economies of scale*

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In September 2021, new Early Learning and Care programmes at QQI levels 5 and 6 began in 14 ETBs. During the rollout, the Digital Library worked with the programme coordinators to provide access to video, e-book, and full-text resources to practitioners and learners. Without the Digital Library, each ETB or perhaps each college would have to look at buying resources for themselves.

The library therefore can be a FET equivalent of higher education's IReL (IReL, 2022), providing ETBs with access to licensed e-resources that otherwise would have to be bought individually.

#### *Shared space*

In addition to the public-facing pages which compose most of the Digital Library's content, there are several private sections (not indexed by search engines, and available only through the URL) that are used to share information and resources between staff at different ETBs. There is, for example, a private Supports for Apprentices group section where members share resources, and an Early Learning Care course coordinators' community of practice.

### **Growing the intellectual footprint**

#### *Repository*

Most higher education institutions have repositories where work published by staff and students is stored and made publicly available. These repositories sometimes also include high-quality student work, which has two benefits for students:

- Having work available in this way is good for a student's CV.
- It shows new and current students not only how their work should look but also what level of work is required to get a good mark.

The FET sector had no equivalent, but the Digital Library has established EOLAS (ETBI, 2022), an online repository for capturing, storing, and

displaying the work of the sector. The repository was launched at the ETBI FET Conference in October 2022, and it is currently being populated.

### Journal

The Irish FET sector is huge, and a lot of great work is done by FET practitioners. There is space to develop and manage an open-access peer-reviewed journal to publish work on and in the FET sector. Having a forum to publish and therefore disseminate work will raise the profile of both practitioners and the sector. A journal-publishing platform has been procured and, at the time of writing, an editorial board is being assembled before a call for papers is issued.

### State of play

The ETBI Digital Library went live shortly after the Covid-19 lockdown began in March 2020, and it currently consists of around 400 publicly available pages across 60 sections, with links to over 1,200 websites and resources.

The Digital Library has full-text access to around 7,500 e-books and has acquired a small but growing number of subscription resources. The size and reach of the FET sector ensures that the Digital Library still has great potential for expansion. The library can be found at <https://library.etbi.ie/>.

ETBI FET Digital Library

Take your learning further



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