

March 2021

A CELEBRATION
OF REAL LIFE
STORIES OF
WOMEN WHO
CHOSE FURTHER
EDUCATION
AND TRAINING
IN IRELAND
AND THE
DIFFERENCE
THAT MADE
FOR THEM.

WOMEN IN FET

SOLAS
learning works

Further
Education
& Training

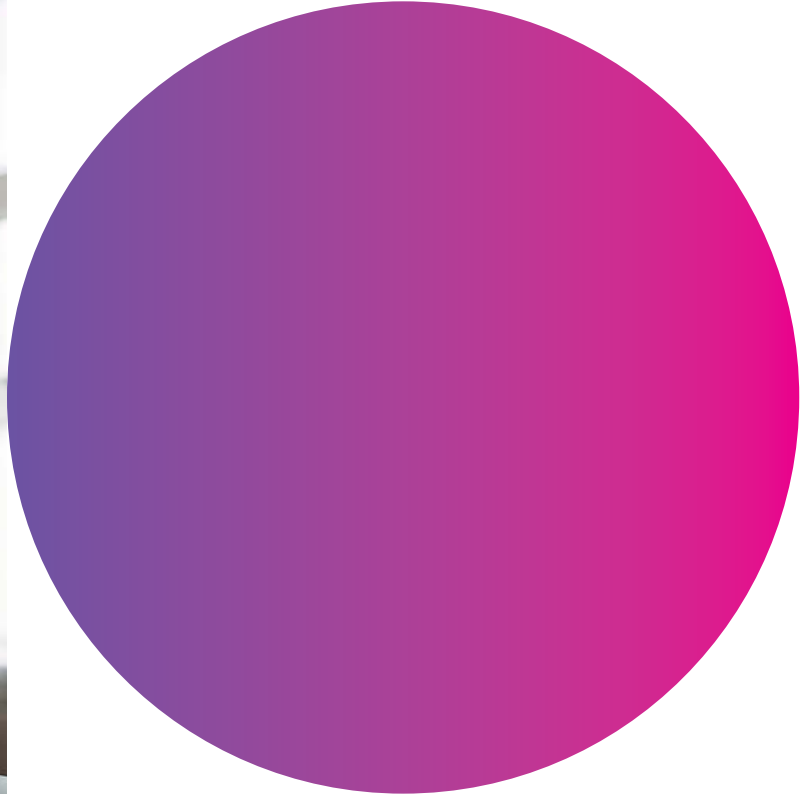
**ON AVERAGE
60% OF
LEARNERS
ARE FEMALE**

FET is for everyone and is available in every community in Ireland. It offers multiple pathways and a range of options leading to certification at Levels 1-6 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications.

What makes FET unique though, in many ways, are the real stories told by learners on the difference choosing FET made to their lives.



**PREPARE TO
BE INSPIRED!**

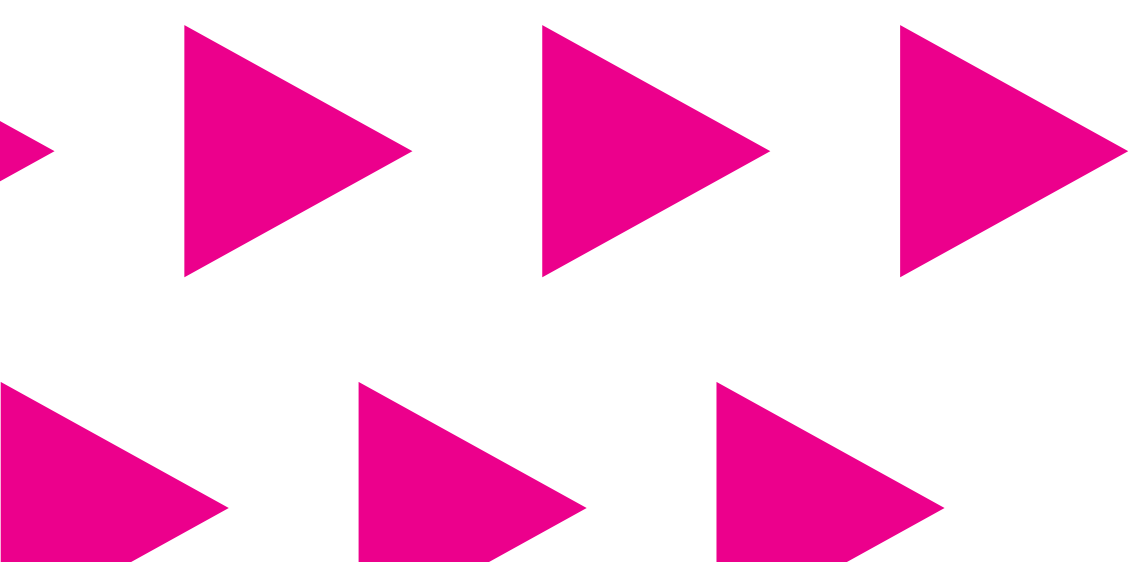


THIS MAGAZINE WILL SHOWCASE SOME OF THE STORIES OF FEMALE LEARNERS IN FET

Celebration Stories

The stories featured include women from different backgrounds who chose FET at different times, for different reasons. They all however include similar themes - ambition, well-being, progression and fun.

We hope the stories will reach out to women all across Ireland, who may be thinking of taking a step towards further education or fulfilling a dream that FET can help them achieve.



I hope more girls and women consider apprenticeship



Zoe Fitzgerald

Accounting Technician apprentice working for Cork City Council who was the woman to break the 1,000th woman apprentice threshold in Ireland.

I sat my Leaving Cert in 2015, achieving 505 points, and went on to study Science Education. During my 2nd year, I knew it wasn't really for me but I finished out the course, graduating in 2019. I then took a gap year to decide on what I wanted to do and started to look at my different options.

Apprenticeship as a study route wasn't really presented to me when I was at school; the focus was very much on going straight to college to gain a degree.

I didn't know of anyone doing an Apprenticeship at the time and it was never presented to me as an option for after the Leaving Cert.



When my brother started his Aircraft Mechanics Apprenticeship, and was really enjoying the combination of a work placement and attending college, I started to further research Apprenticeships for myself. At school, I really liked science and business, taking them for the Leaving Cert, as well as Accounting. I also enjoyed maths, figures and numbers, so when I saw the Accounting Technician Apprenticeship, it appealed to me and seemed like a great fit.

The structure of the programme, with its four days working – in my case with Cork City Council – and then studying with Cork College of Commerce the one day, is a really good balance. For me, the most important thing when studying is to be able to apply your knowledge.

Cork City Council have been great and supported me immensely.

I have a main mentor who is a financial accountant and the whole team are really helpful. They regularly check-in on me, making sure I have everything I need.

Among my own friends and class at school, I think I am the only person to have done an Apprenticeship. It's great that as an option, Apprenticeship programmes are working to achieve a better gender balance. It's not something I would have thought much about before becoming the 1,000th female apprentice to be registered. If anything, I hope more girls and women consider it as worthwhile option for them to progress in their own studies and careers.

FET FACT

In 2019, female enrolments represented over 10,000 additional Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) places compared to male enrolments.

Join us in celebrating Joanne McGuigan, the first woman sheet metalworking apprentice in Ireland in 17 years.



Joanne is one of the over 1,000 women now working and training in an apprenticeship role across the country.

Joanne, who is expecting a baby in June says,

“everyone should get the chance to do whatever they want, no matter who they are. Just do it and don’t be afraid to stand out.”

From County Monaghan, Joanne explains why Apprenticeship was a good fit. “I was really interested in learning on and off the job. Everything was new to me when I started, but, I quickly got the hang of it and your confidence grows as your skills develop. My instructor has been really helpful and kind. To be a sheet metal worker you need to be well-organised and have strong practical skills. I enjoy drawing and this has helped me enormously in following engineering plans which are an important part of the work. At the minute I am helping to prepare detailed programmes for laser cutting machines. It is precision work and involves a lot of staff interaction.”

“Doing an Apprenticeship is a great way to get qualified in the area you’re interested in,” she adds. “It’s a collective effort and you are moving forward and growing all the time. At college you get to learn from great tutors and at work you get to test your knowledge with people who are at the top of their game. My experience of Apprenticeship has been very positive, and I hope it’s not too long before I say hello to the next woman Sheet Metalworker Apprentice in Ireland.”

Women are becoming a big part of the 21st Century Apprenticeship story

With a

114%

increase in women in Apprenticeship in the last 2 years, and numbers growing year-on-year, women are becoming a big part of the 21st Century Apprenticeship story.

The figures speak for themselves

2015	26
2016	60
2017	145
2018	341
2019	665
2020	730
2021	1,000+

"As the mother of a pre-school child, having the chance to work and earn money while studying was a real benefit. My salary was sufficient to pay the creche and meant I could continue to study and work. At times, the learning was challenging but I knew that with perseverance and patience I could reach my goal."

— Software Development apprentice, Alina

"Apprenticeship programmes are working to achieve a better gender balance. I hope more girls and women consider it as worthwhile option for them to progress in their own studies and careers."

— Accounting Technician apprentice, Zoe

"At the start I thought being a girl in a male dominated job was going to be tough, but I was totally wrong. The lads I work with treat me the very same as anyone else and I'm at no advantage by being a girl. The job can be physically tough at times but its great, its like a gym session and nothing is ever impossible."

— Electrical apprentice, Avril

"My experience of apprenticeship has been very positive and I hope it's not too long before I say hello to the next woman sheet metalworker apprentice in Ireland."

— Sheet metalworker apprentice, Joanne



EILEEN FLYNN HAS MADE HISTORY AS THE FIRST WOMAN FROM THE TRAVELLER COMMUNITY TO SIT IN THE SEANAD

The new Senator said she had worked all her life to “break barriers” and will now use her role to help Travellers and other marginalised communities. Senator Flynn, who grew up on a Travellers’ halting site in Dublin, was one of 11 new Senators appointed by Ireland’s An Taoiseach Micheál Martin.

Senator Flynn got a place on an access course at Trinity College Dublin and later studied at Ballyfermot College of Further Education before earning a degree from Maynooth University.

Senator Flynn hopes to inspire success in young Travellers, especially women and FET can play a key role in achieving that.

FET FACT

Females who enrolled in FET in 2019 had slightly higher education levels than their male counterparts. More than 15% of female enrolments had a third level qualification, compared to just over 9% of male enrolments.

MAGS MEETS...

A Series of Women in FET Stories



WE'RE DELIGHTED TO LAUNCH A SERIES OF VIDEOS AND STORIES CELEBRATING WOMEN IN FET.

This International Women's Day, we want to celebrate and give recognition to all the wonderful women around Ireland who are participating or have completed a FET course. We also want to encourage anyone else thinking about doing a course to just go for it. It really can change your life and have a positive impact both personally and professionally.

SOLAS' own Margaret Byrne or Mags as we know her, chats to women about their FET journey and the difference FET has made to their personal and professional lives.

CHOOSING FET WAS THE REAL BEGINNING FOR ME!

Mags meets Jacqui in this inspiring video story. Talking about the difference that FET made for them both!

[Watch the interview here >](#)

BREAKING BARRIERS

Mags meets Senator Eileen Flynn and discusses education and the important role it plays in society. Senator Flynn shares her own education story which includes her time at Ballyfermot College of Further Education.

[Watch the interview here >](#)

UPSKILLING DURING COVID-19

Mags meets Marie Ryan who works in the Travel industry. Having been put on reduced hours Marie decided to use her free time to learn new skills. Marie chose to complete an eCollege course.

[Watch the interview here >](#)

FET is available in every community in Ireland. The impact community education has on people's lives is invaluable. Mags chats with two inspirational women who returned to education as adults.

MAGS MEETS...

LORRAINE

I am absolutely delighted to be speaking to Lorraine Kavanagh today. She is a truly inspiring mother of six children who is now participating in a FET course.

Can you tell me a little about your upbringing and a little about your life.

I came from a big family with me being the oldest. My childhood was not easy as I was always left babysitting my brothers. I hated school because the other kids were more social and I just didn't fit in but did have friends who I'm still in contact with.

What Further Education and Training Course you are doing?

I'm doing Business Administration at the moment and I'm absolutely loving it. I never thought it would be for me especially with having 6 kids.

Where did you hear about the course?

I heard about the course from *St Ultans I can* group. The group encourages women and women encourage each other to be yourself and building confidence.

What are you learning from the course?

I'm learning a lot about myself and technology. I never thought I'd be capable of creating spreadsheets or charts.

Has this course made a difference to you?

This course has made a huge difference. I do look forward to my Tuesdays and Thursdays. I do tell my girls, 12 and 13, it's never too late to return to education but do not leave school. The support alone and the women are just amazing this is only the beginning of my journey.

What would you like to do after this course?

After this course I want to do Addictions Studies. I've always had a big interest in it but thought I wouldn't have being able as I didn't do my Leaving Cert.

FET FACT

Over one third of female learners who reported being engaged in home duties in 2019 prior to enrolment in FET were between the ages of 35-44. In Ireland, the average age for first time mothers is 31.3 years of age. This may indicate FET is a platform to support the upskilling or the return to the workforce of females with young families.

MAGS MEETS...

JANICE

Can you tell me a little about your upbringing and a little about your life?

I had a very normal upbringing growing up in Dublin. My Mam was very strict when it came to education and she always pushed us to do well. Due to personal reasons, I left school just before completing my Leaving Certificate. I have always regretted it.

What Further Education and Training Course you are doing?

Now I am finishing off my QQI level 5 in Childcare I have four modules done and just finished the fifth one. I am doing this through Ballyfermot Partnership. I'm also doing a Business and Administration course 2 days a week with An Cosan based in the BSII which I find very interesting.

Where did you hear about the course?

I heard about the course from *St Ultans I can* group. The leaders from the group encourage women and women encourage each other to be yourself and building confidence.

What are you learning from the course?


When I was in school I was very good with maths and always loved book keeping so I am really enjoying this course - how to do office stuff on computers. At present we are doing a module of spreadsheets which I find very interesting.

Has the course made a difference to you?

This course and other courses I've done have been very interesting. They have made me have the self-confidence to change certain things that were wrong in my life. I'm a firm believer if one person changes everyone else will follow suit, as it is certain to have an effect on everyone in your life if you are willing to make some changes.

What would you like to do after this course?

I just want to be an independent woman doing something that I like earning my own money. I like meeting new people and I like to support and help people.



In 2019, Community Education, Back to Education (BTEI), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Other Funding Programmes had over 60% female enrolments. All of these programmes are part-time, thus emphasizing the important role FET plays in supporting flexible learning for females.

More than half of the female certified completions (65.4%) in 2019 were in FET courses at Level 5 or higher.

In 2019, over

60%

of the population of FET learners were female.

Over

90%

of the enrolments in the education field of study in 2019 were female, compared to only 39.1% of the enrolments in the ICT field of study.

A recent report on PLC outcomes found that for every 3 female PLC learners, there were 2 PLC male learners.

Read more about PLC outcomes by [clicking here](#)

Thank you so much to all our women learners for sharing their story. FET is for everyone regardless of where you are on your education journey and these inspirational women are proof of just that.

For anyone out there thinking FET is not for them just do it. FET is about transforming lives and can put you on the path to achieving your goals.

If you are interested in any FET course visit fetchcourses.ie to find a course for you or contact your local ETB. Follow @thisisfet on social media to keep up to date on what's happening across FET.

Alongside this magazine SOLAS have also published a Research Paper on Women in Further Education and Training which is available on the SOLAS website.

We also look forward to sharing more FET learner stories on thisisfet.ie

For more information on FET visit www.thisisfet.ie or to find a course for you visit fetchcourses.ie or contact your local ETB.

Further information on
Online courses is available at: eCollege.ie
Other upskilling options: gov.ie/therightcourse
Apprenticeship: apprenticeship.ie

