

FET IN FOCUS 2021

A STUDY INTO  
FURTHER EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING IN  
IRELAND

# WOMEN IN FET

Based on female participants  
in further education and training  
in Ireland in 2019

By Amelia Dulee-Kinsolving  
and Selen Guerin

**SOLAS**  
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Further  
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# Women in FET

All data is sourced from the Programme and Learner Support Systems (PLSS) database. PLSS collects and processes the personal data of the FET learners who are enrolled in SOLAS funded programmes. Please note that apprenticeship and eCollege data are currently not included in the 2019 PLSS database.

The Data Analytics Unit would like to acknowledge the assistance of the ETB staff involved in submitting data to SOLAS.

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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.

//

–Janice Kane, Community Education learner

# Key Findings

## FET supports females in many ways

- > In 2019, over 60% of the FET learner population were female. The fields of study that had over 60% female enrolments were education, health and welfare, business, administration and law and generic programmes and qualifications.

## FET supports flexible learning for females to enable work-life balance

- > Among females, 63% were enrolled in part-time courses, whereas 36% were enrolled in full-time courses.
- > Part-time programmes that had over 60% female enrolments included Community Education, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) groups, English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Other Funding programmes.
- > Among full-time programmes, female enrolments were concentrated in Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) and Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) programmes, programmes that offer a number of additional supports, including childcare and financial.

# Enrolments

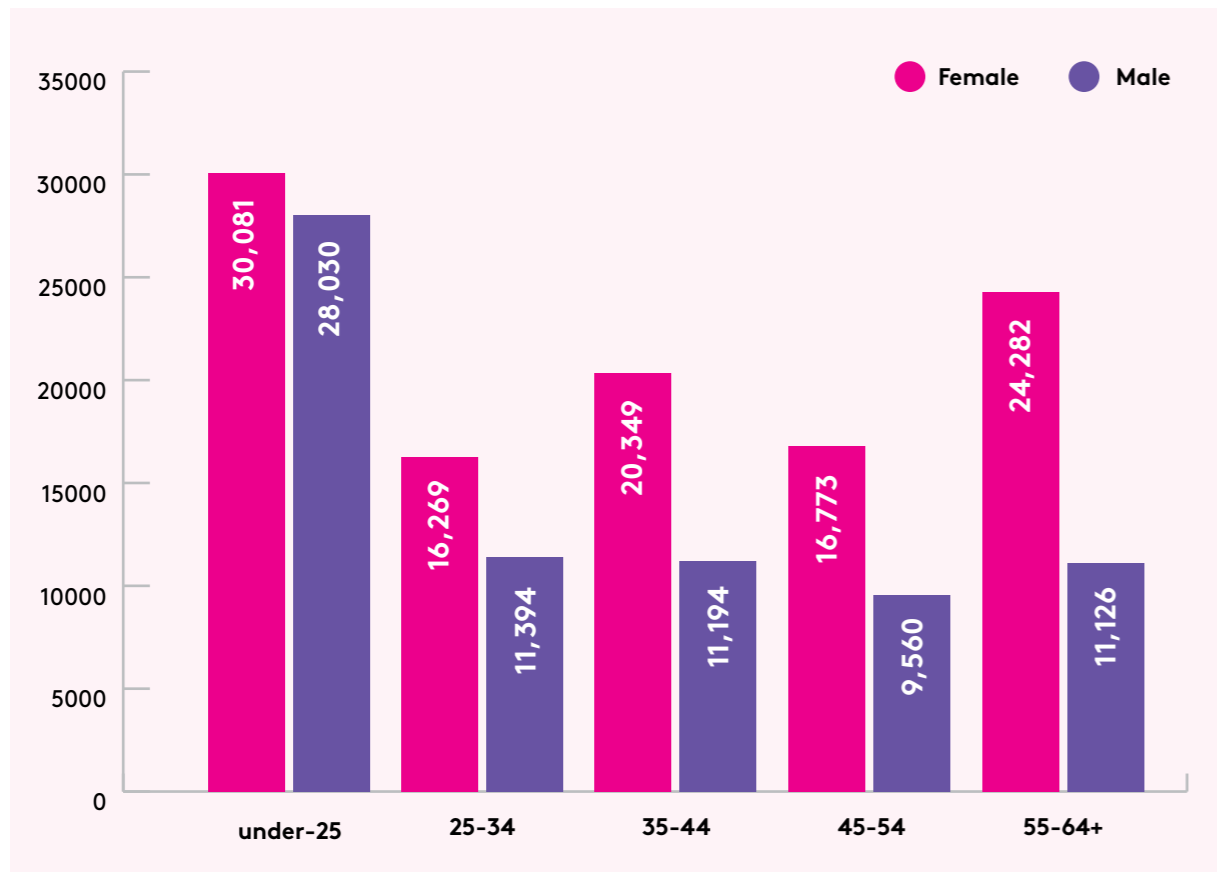
Female Learners

60.2%

Male Learners

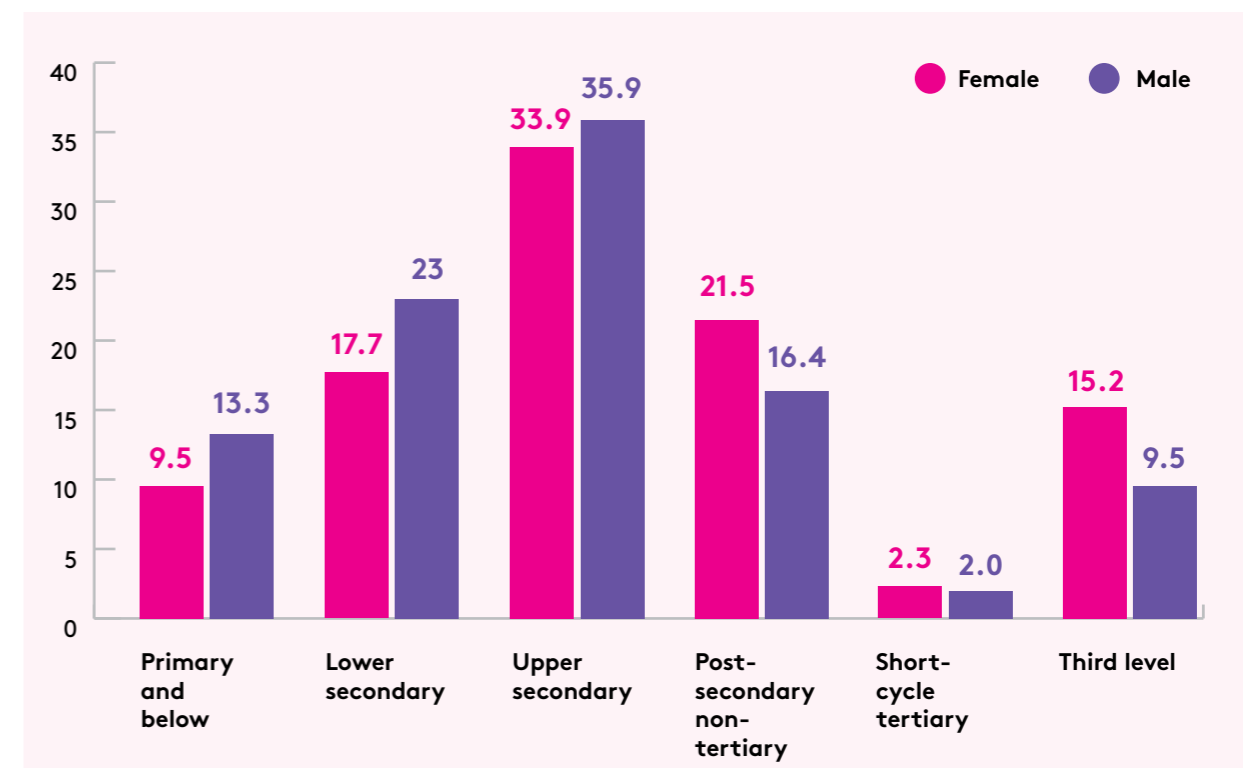
39.8%

## Start Age



In 2019, 60.2% of the population of FET learners were female. The proportion of females within each age band was also consistently higher than that of males.

## Highest Level of Formal Education

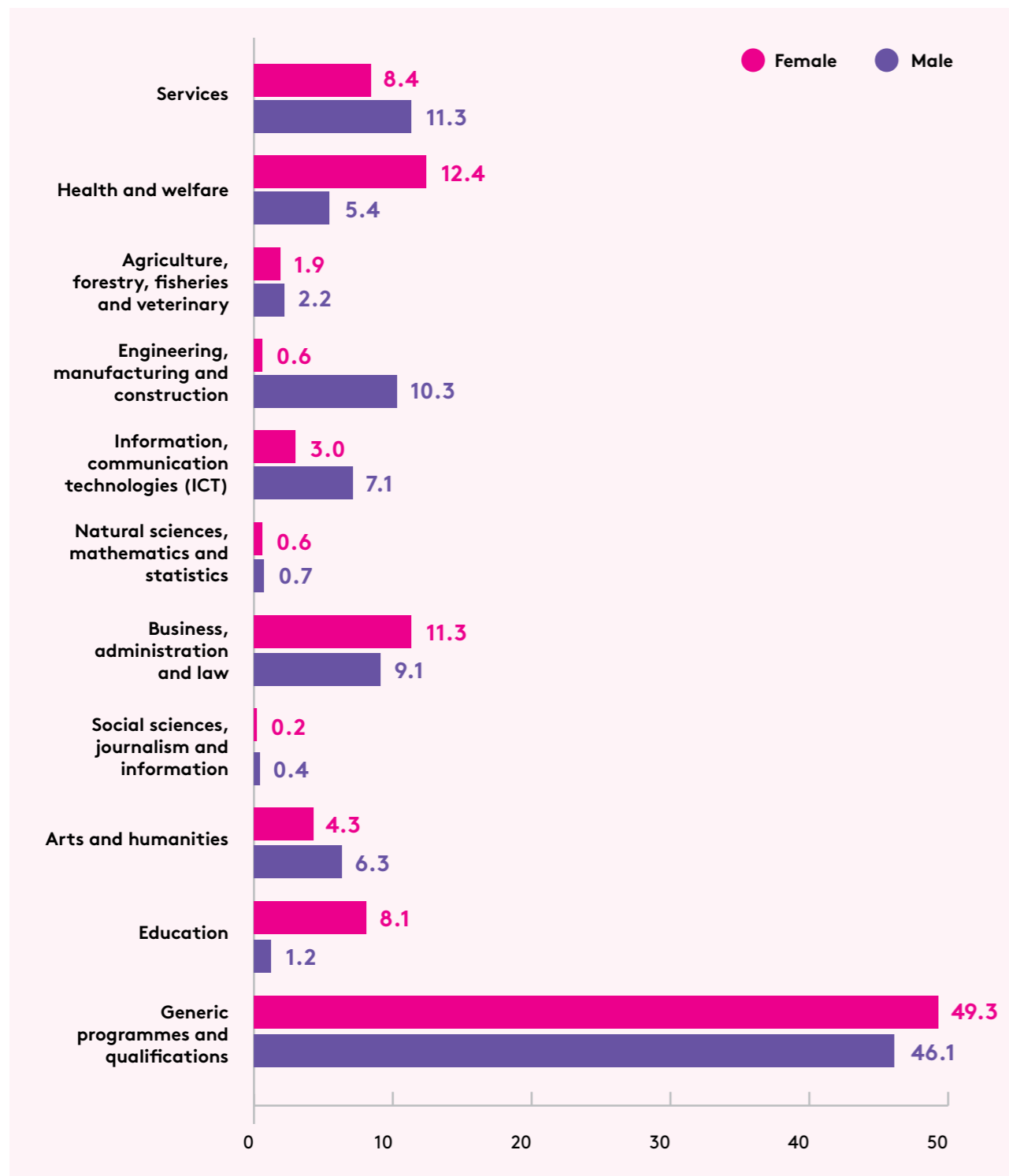


Among females, 27.1% of learners reported they had a lower secondary education or below when enrolling in a FET course in 2019, whereas 33.9% had an upper secondary education.<sup>1</sup> The figure also shows that 21.5% of female enrolments reported they had a post-secondary non-tertiary education, an education group primarily comprised of individuals enrolled in FET level 4-6 courses (e.g. Post Leaving Certificate and Back to Education Initiative). In addition, 2.3% of female learners had a short-cycle tertiary or a third level non-degree education and 15.2% of learners had a third level education when they enrolled in a FET course.

Among males 36.3% of learners reported they had a lower secondary education or below when enrolling in FET courses in 2019, whereas 35.9% had an upper secondary education. The figure also shows that 16.4% of males had a post-secondary non-tertiary education and 2% had a short-cycle tertiary or third level non-degree education. In addition, 9.5% had a third level education when they enrolled in a FET course. Overall, the distribution of highest levels of formal education within each gender category illustrates that among females, slightly higher education levels were reported than among males, upon enrolment in a FET course.

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this calculation includes only those cases where previous levels of education were captured.

## Field of Study (Broad ISCED)



Among ISCED broad fields of study, female enrolments were concentrated among generic programmes and qualifications, health and welfare, and business, administration and law, whereas male enrolments were concentrated among generic programmes, services, and engineering, manufacturing and construction.

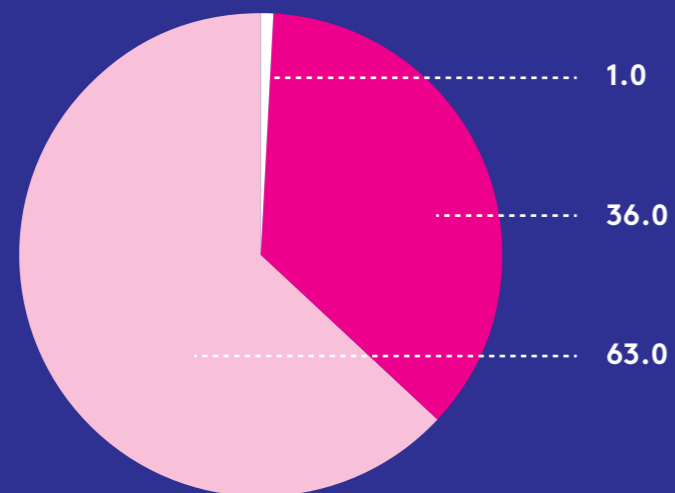
Field of Study (Broad ISCED)	Female	Male
Generic programmes and qualifications	61.8	38.3
Education	91.3	8.7
Arts and humanities	50.4	49.6
Social sciences, journalism and information	44.2	55.8
Business, administration and law	65.1	34.9
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	55.7	44.3
Information, communication technologies (ICT)	39.1	60.9
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	7.8	92.2
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	56.4	43.6
Health and welfare	77.8	22.3
Services	53.1	46.9

When analysing the gender profile *within* ISCED broad fields of study, it becomes apparent that female and male enrolments were more represented in some fields of study than others. Over 60% of enrolments within generic programmes and qualifications, education, business, administration and law, and health and welfare were female, whereas the reverse was true for engineering, manufacturing and construction and ICT fields of study with over 60% male enrolments. These gender profiles broadly reflect the gender profiles within Ireland's economic sectors, with higher percentages of females employed in the education and human health and social work activities sectors, and higher percentages of males employed in the information and communication sector.<sup>2</sup>

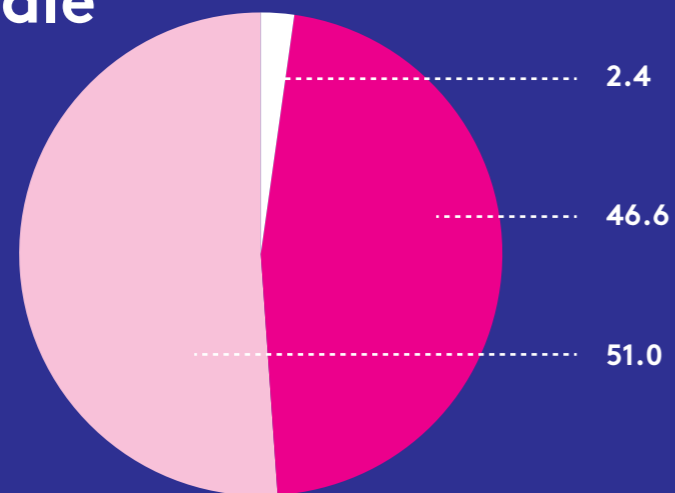
<sup>2</sup> CSO. 2016. Ireland and EU: Employment by economic sector. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-wamii/womenandmeninireland2016/employment/>

# Programme Delivery Type

## Female



## Male



When analysing gender by programme delivery type,<sup>3</sup> a higher percentage of females were enrolled in part-time courses than full-time courses. This compares to males, where males were almost equally enrolled in full-time and part-time courses.

<sup>3</sup> Learners here are unique within programmes, but not necessarily across programmes.

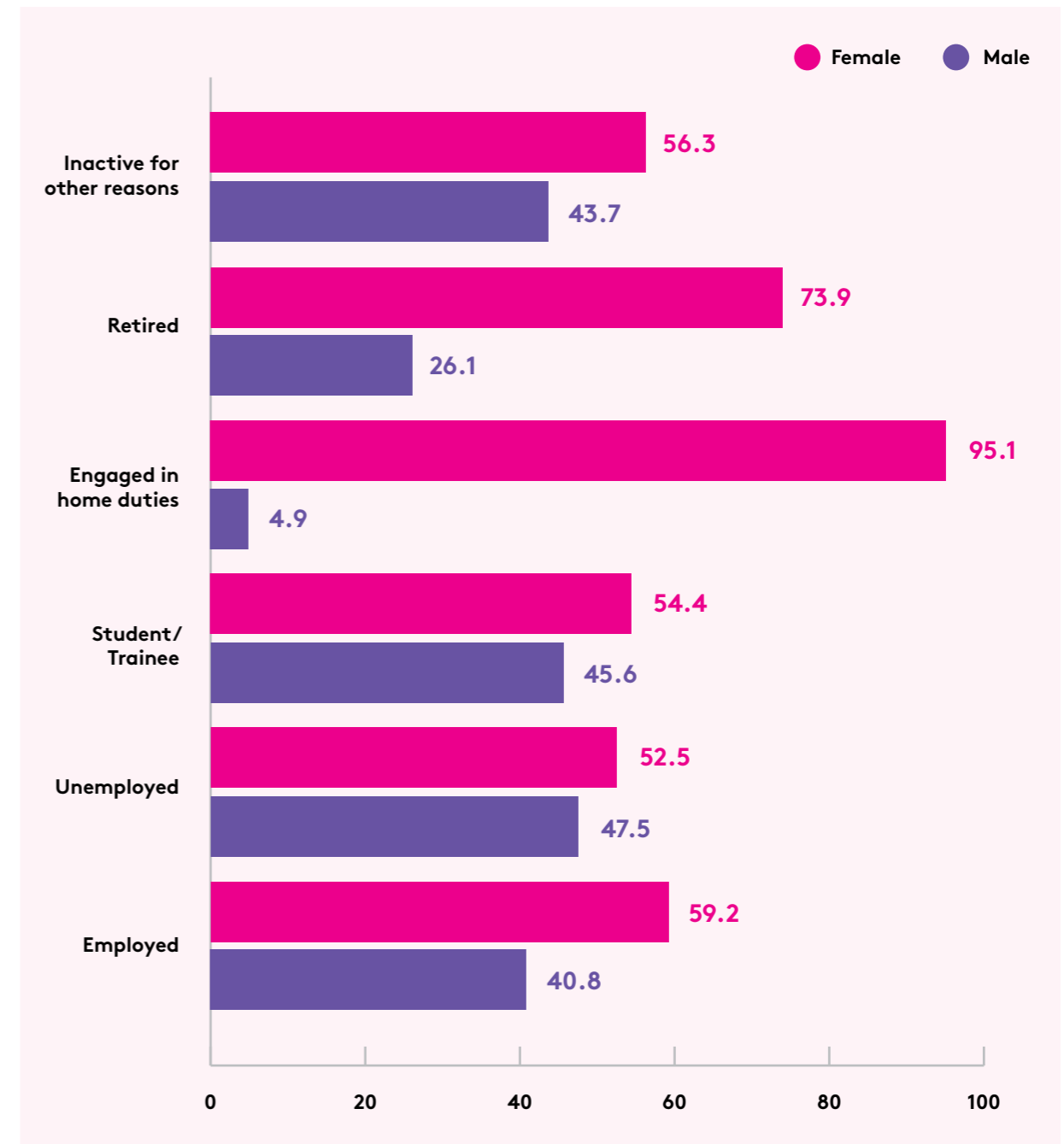
## Programme Category

Delivery Type	Programme Category	Female	Male	
Full-time	Blended Training	267	256	
	Bridging and Foundation Training	227	327	
	Community Training Centres	1,203	1,505	
	Justice Workshop	36	182	
	Local Training Initiative	1,266	1,690	
	PLC	29,463	18,421	
	Specialist Training Providers	1,324	1,888	
	Specific Skills Training	2,369	6,020	
	Traineeship Employed	427	240	
	Traineeship Training	2,313	2,443	
	VTOS Core	3,048	1,968	
Youthreach	2,014	2,567		
Part-time	Adult Literacy Groups	14,534	10,822	
	BTEI Groups	16,136	5,894	
	Community Education	25,437	7,609	
	ESOL	8,084	4,181	
	Evening Training	6,374	6,438	
	FET Cooperation Hours	1,182	1,871	
	ITABE	847	738	
	Other Funding	1,756	800	
	Refugee Resettlement	356	337	
	Skills for Work	1,946	1,938	
	Skills to Advance Dispersed	5	6	
	Voluntary Literacy Tuition	347	402	
	Undefined	Recognition of Prior Learning	31	195
		Skills to Advance	1,183	1,687

When analysing the gender profiles within programme categories,<sup>4</sup> it becomes apparent that programme delivery and category may play a role in the likelihood that females or males enrol in certain courses. Among the full-time programmes, the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) Core and the Traineeship Employed programmes each had over 60% of female enrolments. For part-time programmes, over 60% of female enrolments were within Community Education, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) groups, English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and Other Funding programmes. The concentration of females among part-time programmes may emphasise the importance of FET as a source of flexible learning provision for females. PLC and VTOS Core programmes also have high concentrations of females, despite being full-time. This may be partly explained by the number of additional supports provided in these programmes for career guidance, class tutors, counselling and disability services, financial supports, student unions and childcare. The Traineeship Employed programme also provides additional training allowances and income supports for some unemployed groups, including those in receipt of a one parent family payment or a jobseeker's transitional payment.

4 Learners here are unique within programmes, but not necessarily across programmes.

## Principle Economic Status



In 2019, there were some notable differences between males and females in terms of the principle economic status<sup>5</sup> they reported prior to enrolment. Among those learner enrolments who reported they were retired, 73.9% were females, whereas among those learner enrolments who reported they were employed, 59.2 % were females. The most notable difference was among those learners who reported they were engaged in home duties, with 95.1% of females reporting they were engaged in home duties. The dominance of females engaged in home duties broadly reflects the most recent 2016 Irish Census which found that 98% of those looking after the home or family were female.<sup>6</sup>

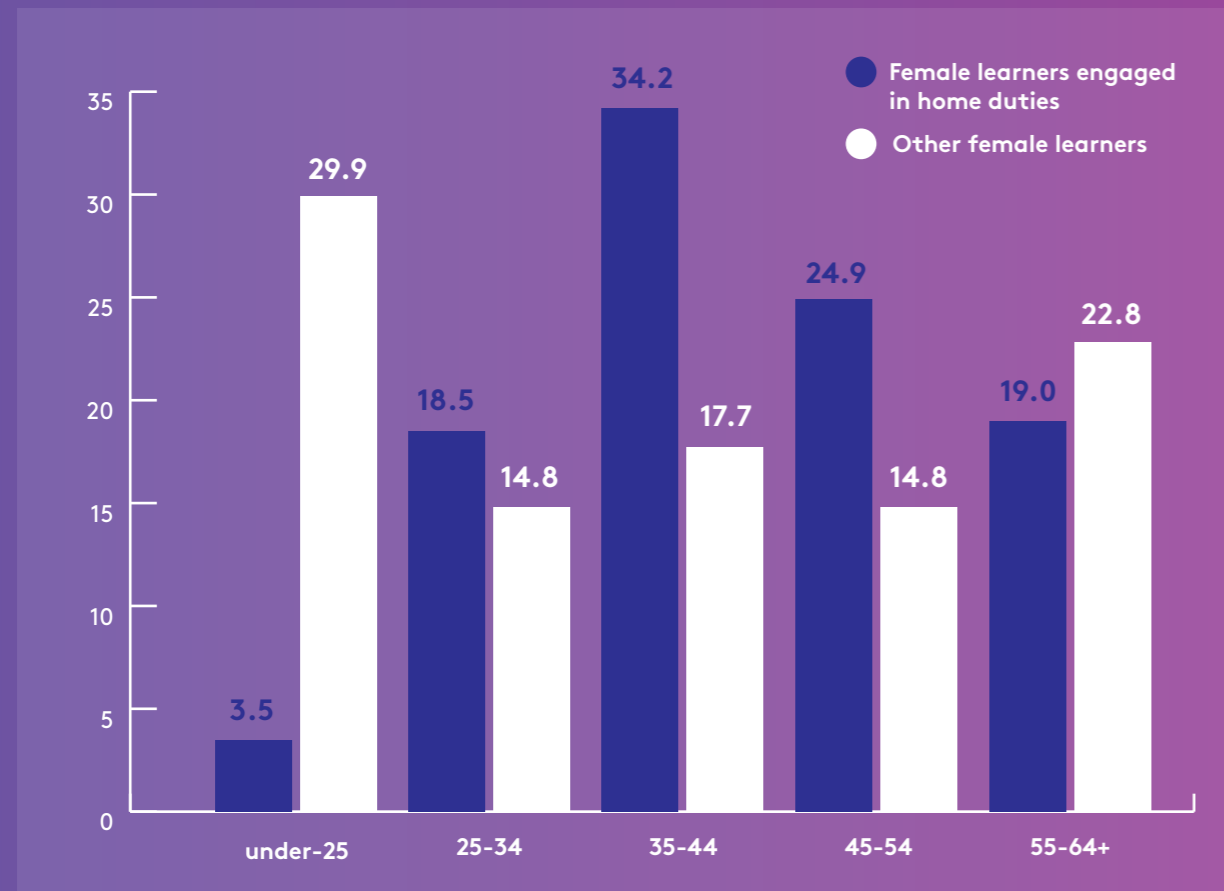
5 It should be noted that this calculation includes only those cases where previous economic status was captured.

6 CSO. 2016. Women and Men in Ireland, Social Cohesion and Lifestyles. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-wamii/womenandmeninireland2016/socialcohesionandlifestyles/>

# FOCUS STUDY: Females Engaged in Home Duties

## Start Age: Females Engaged in Home Duties

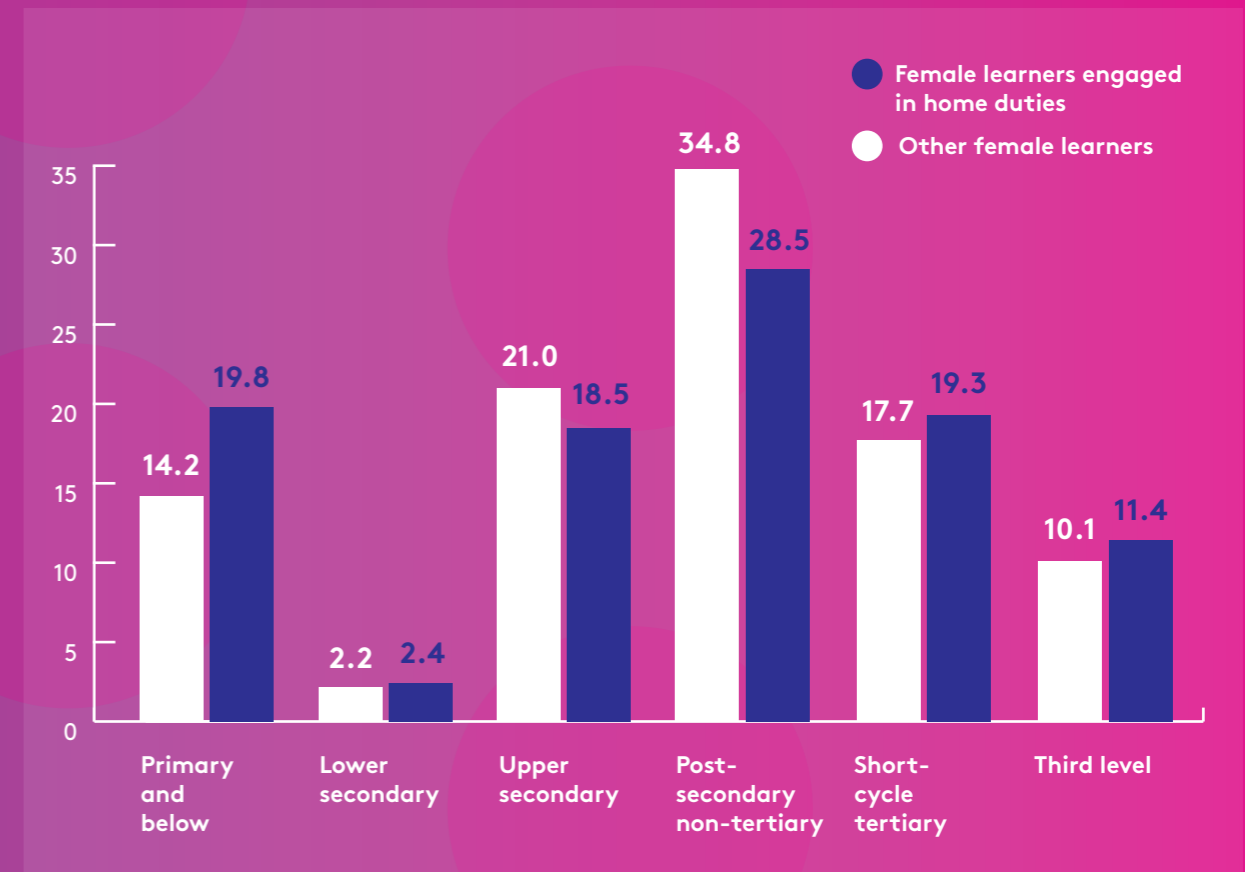
The gender gap between males and females who reported their principle economic status as engaged in home duties is wide, with 95.1% of female enrolments reporting they were engaged in home duties and only 4.9% of male enrolments. While the explanatory factors are diverse, the focus here is to further unpack key differences between the cohort of female enrolments who declared they were engaged in home duties and the remaining population of female enrolments.<sup>7</sup> Age and education levels are two key differences examined.



<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that this analysis only includes those cases where previous economic status was captured among females.

Among female learners who reported they were engaged in home duties prior to enrolment, only 3.5% were under-25 years of age, with approximately 96.5% between 25-64+ years of age. Hence the age profile of the women on home duties in FET mirrors the overall age profile of the women and their motherhood age. According to the CSO statistics, the average age for first time mothers is 31.3 years of age.<sup>8</sup>

## Highest Level of Formal Education



Among female learners who reported engagement in home duties prior to enrolment, 40.7% reported they had a post-secondary non-tertiary education or higher, while 37.4% of other female learners had a post-secondary non-tertiary education or higher. Notably, among female learners engaged in home duties, higher percentages reported short-cycle tertiary and third level education, than that reported among other female learners. This shows the significant role FET plays in bringing these females back into education and training and a step closer to the labour force.

<sup>8</sup> CSO. 2019. Vital Statistics, Quarter 1 2019. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-vs/vitalstatisticsfirstquarter2019/>



# Completions

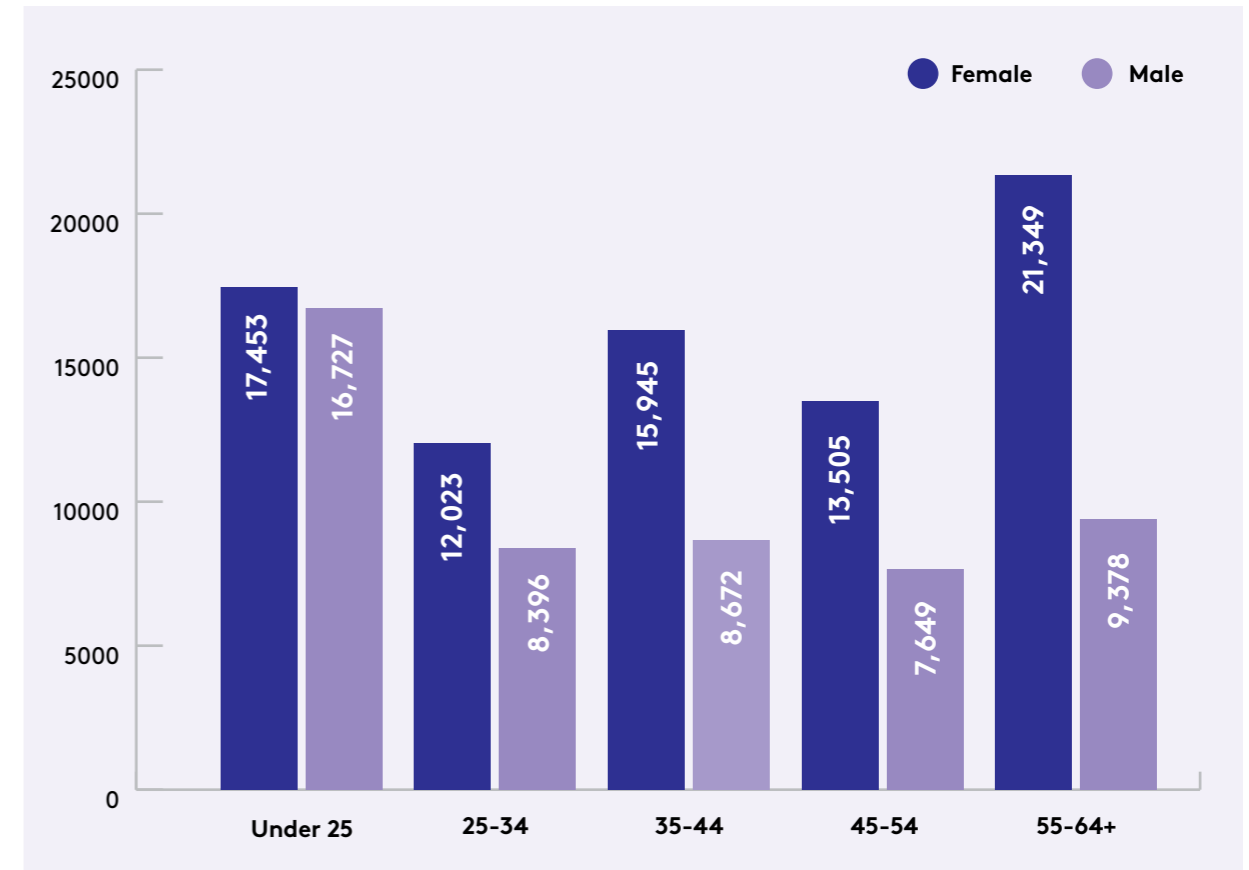
Female Learners

61.2%

Male Learners

38.8%

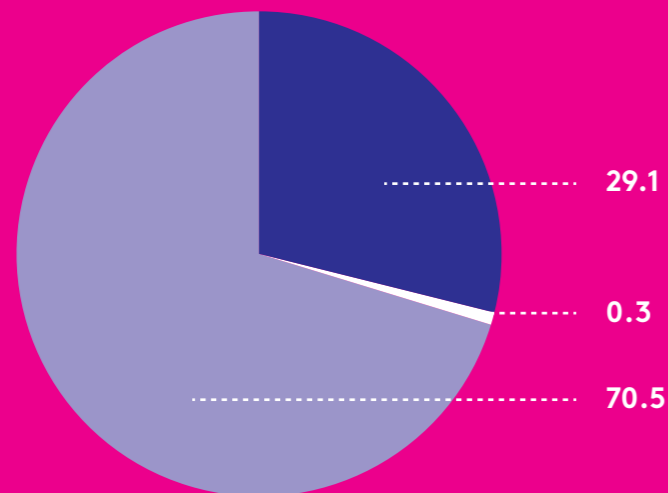
## Start Age



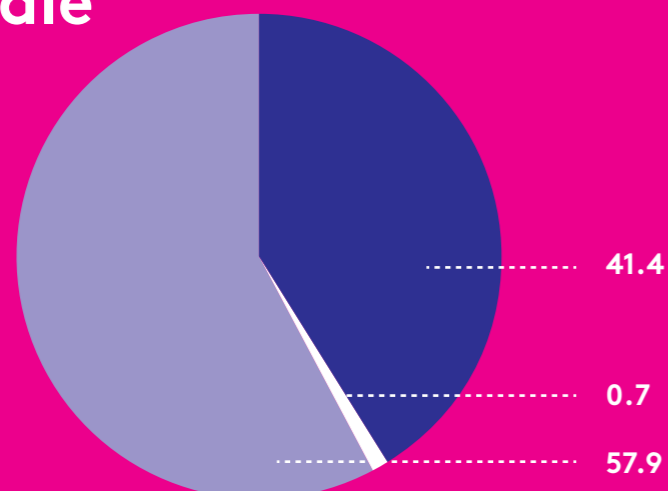
In 2019, 61.2% of learner completions were female, whereas 38.8% were male. Among females, the highest number of enrolments were in the 55-64+ age group, whereas among males the highest number of enrolments were in the under-25 age group. Overall, the proportion of females within each age band was consistently higher than that of males.

# Programme Delivery Type

## Female



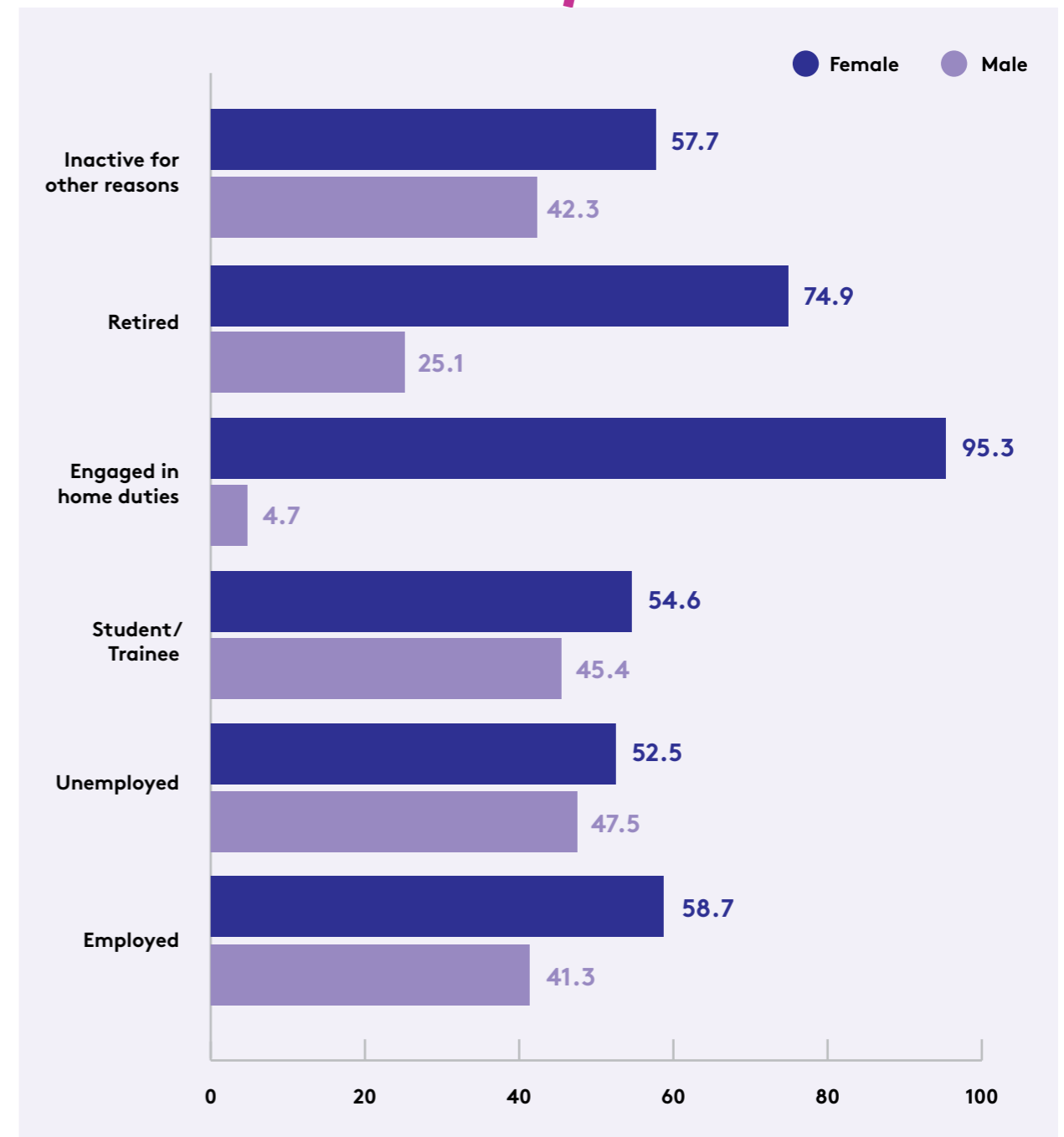
## Male



When analysing gender by full-time versus part-time courses, 29.1% of all females completed full-time courses, whereas 70.5% completed part-time courses. Among males, 41.4% of males completed full-time courses, whereas 57.9% completed part-time courses. Therefore, gender and programme delivery type<sup>9</sup> appear to also play a role in the likelihood that a male or female may complete a course.

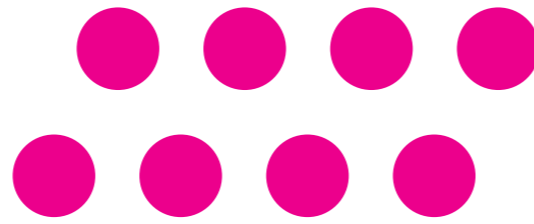
<sup>9</sup> Learners here are unique within programmes, but not necessarily across programmes.

# Principle Economic Status



Overall, the difference between male and female completions by principle economic status were similar to enrolments. Among those learner completions who reported they were retired, 74.9% were female. In addition, 58.7% of females who completed a course reported they were employed, whereas only 41.3% of males who completed a course reported they were employed. In line with the gender divisions among learner enrolments by economic status, 95.3% of female completions reported they were engaged in home duties, whereas only 4.7% of male completions reported they were engaged in home duties.

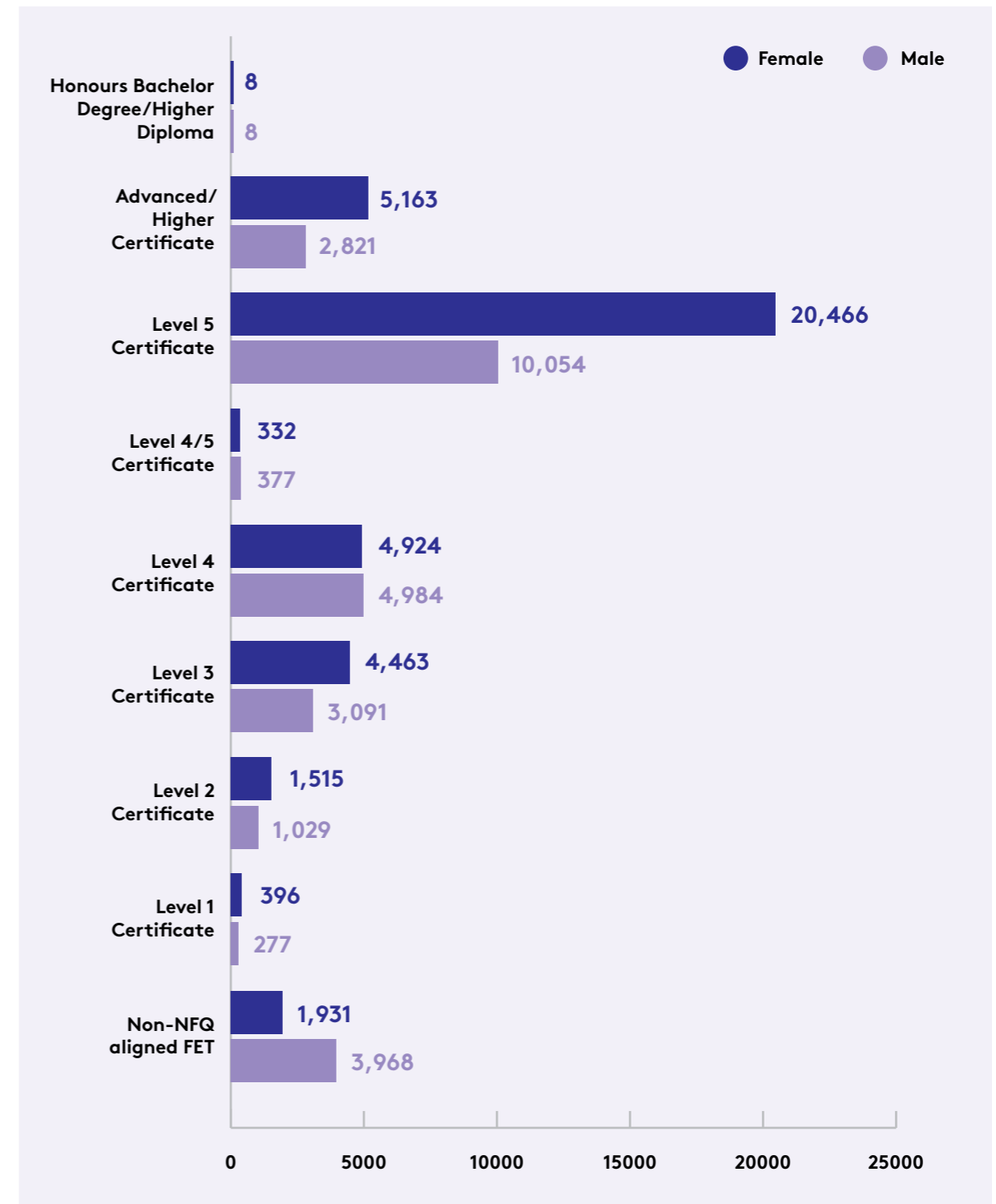
# Certified Completions



	Female	Male
Fully certified	61.1	55.0
Partially certified	16.2	18.5
No certification achieved	18.0	21.0
Waiting for certification details	4.7	5.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

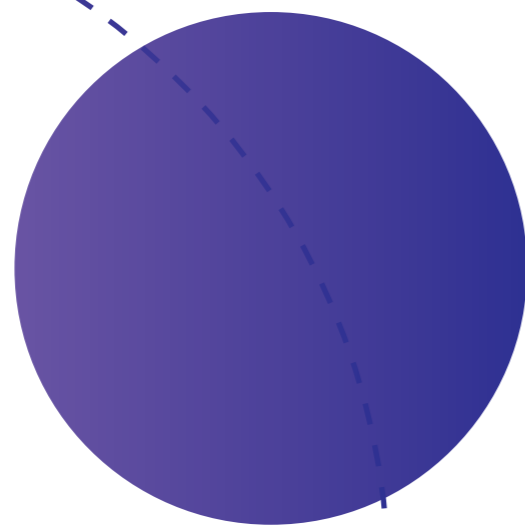
In 2019, the certification rate (fully + partially) among females (77.4%) was slightly higher than that among males (73.5%). This compares to the total national certification rate which was 75.8%. Therefore, women have a slightly higher certification rate than the total national certification rate.

## Certified Completions by Award Level



Among females, over half (52.2%) of certified completions were in level 5 courses. This was followed by certified completions at advanced/higher certificate level, level 4 and level 3.

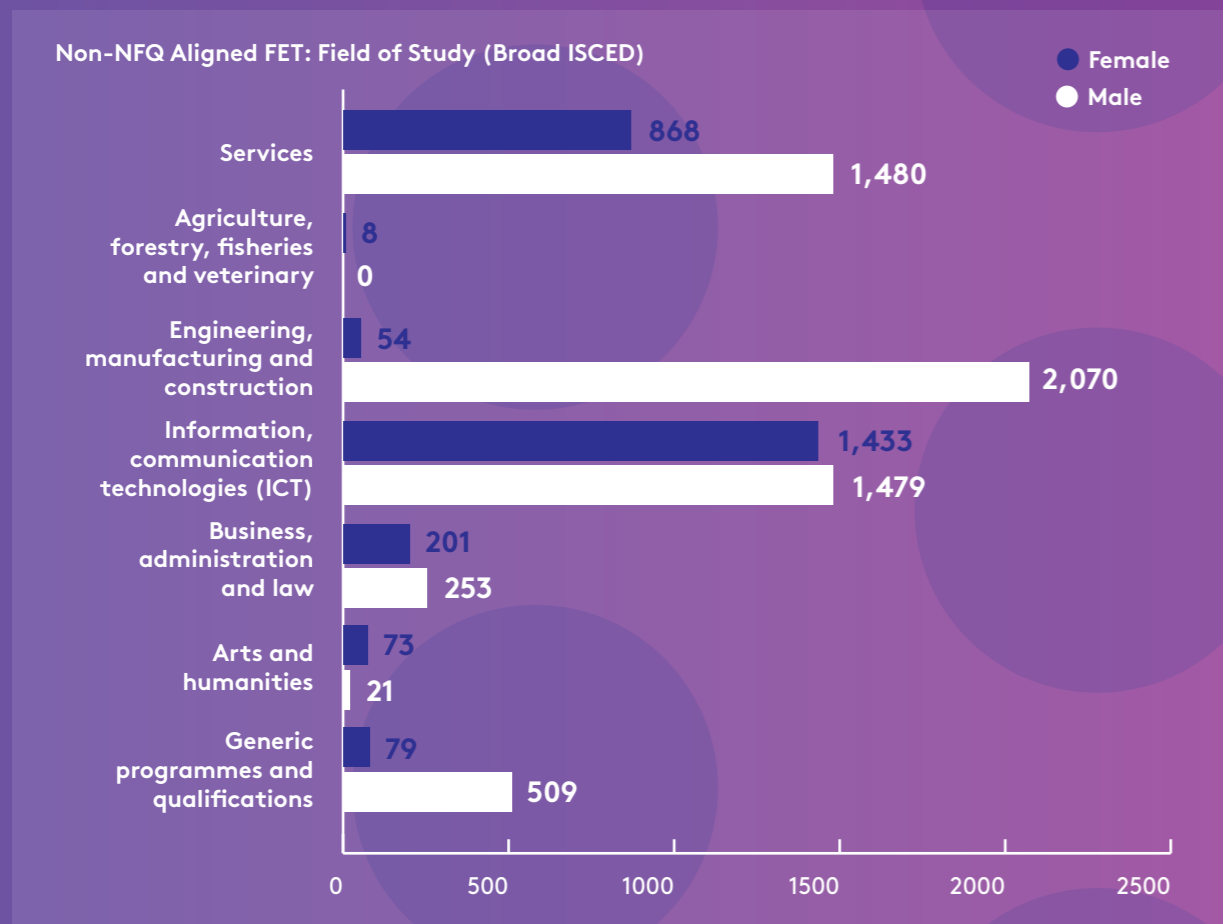
Among males, 37.8% of certified completions were in level 5 courses. This was followed by certified completions at level 4, level 3 and advanced/higher certificate courses.



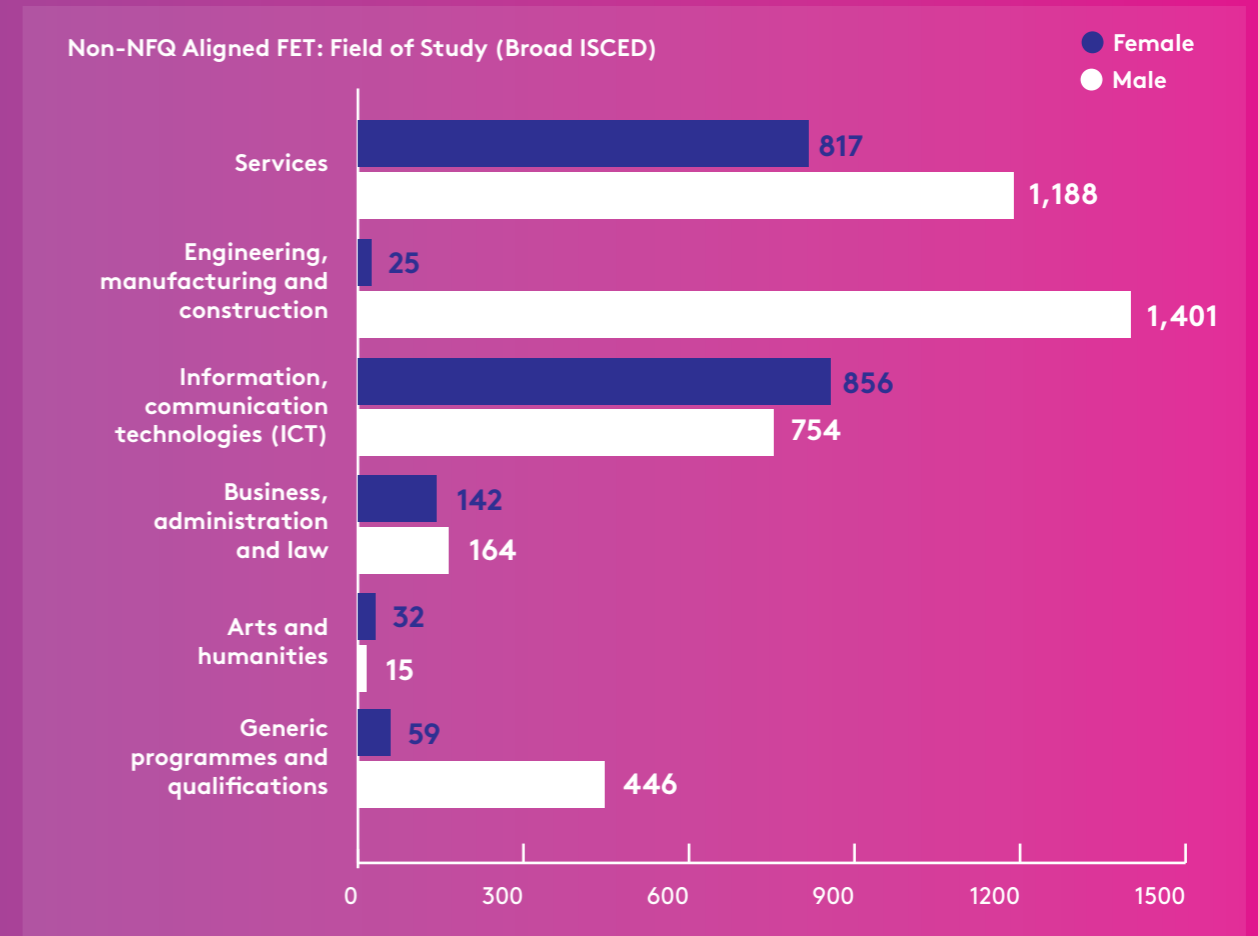
# FOCUS STUDY: Unpacking Non-NFQ Aligned FET

Non-NFQ Aligned courses in FET are interesting to highlight when examining gender differences. Overall, 68.2% of enrolments were male and 67.3% of certified completions were male among the non-NFQ aligned FET courses. When further examining this cohort of learners, it becomes increasingly apparent that the field of study mattered in terms of the gender profiles. Overall, male enrolments and certified completions outnumbered females in all fields of study except for arts and humanities and agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary. The largest differences were among the engineering, manufacturing, and construction field of study, where males represented almost all enrolments (97.5%) and certified completions (98.3%).

## Enrolments



## Certified Completions



One positive aspect among non-NFQ aligned FET courses, is the more even distribution of males and females among the ICT field of study. Females represented approximately a little under half (49.2%) of all enrolments and slightly over half (53.2%) of all certified completions in the ICT field of study, whereas males represented a little over half (50.8%) of all enrolments and a little under half (46.8%) of certified completions. This representation of males and females in the ICT field of study among non-NFQ aligned FET courses contrasts the larger gap in gender distribution that exists for the overall population of FET enrolments in the ICT field of study.

# Definition of Terms

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## Activity

The sum of learners multiplied by the number of courses which they have been enrolled in or completed within a programme or across different programmes, or providers during 2019.

## Certified Completions

In the FET sector, not all learner completions lead to an award through a recognised awarding body in the FET sector. Therefore, certified completions refer only to the total number of certified completions in 2019.

## Certification Rate

The sum of only full and partial learner completions that gained an award through a recognised awarding body in 2019.

## Completions

Total number of learners who have a finish date of a course (regardless of whether the course is certified or not) in 2019. Completions include partial and full completers, but exclude early leavers.

## Enrolments

Enrolments are defined as learners who are on course or have completed a course during 2019.

## Field of Study

This is defined and categorized by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Both broad (2-digit) and detailed (4-digit) fields of study are used for categorising Further Education and Training course fields of study.

## Full Completions

Learners who have completed 90 per cent or more of the course and its requirements in 2019.

## Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

This is a framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way. The many different types and sizes of qualifications included in the NFQ are organised based on their level of knowledge, skill and competence. In some cases, where awards have not been placed on the Irish NFQ, equivalent levels are assigned based on the document 'Qualifications can cross boundaries' and the level assigned to the award on the relevant country's framework (e.g. Cf. Ofqual, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, etc.).

## Learner

A unique individual who has progressed onto a course in the application process. The total number of learners is the sum of all unique individuals in Further Education and Training in 2019.

## Non-NFQ Aligned courses

This includes completions with certification not aligned with the NFQ.

## On Course

This refers to those learners who were still on course as of December 31st, 2019.

## Partial Completions

Learners who have completed more than 25 percent but less than 90 percent of a course and its requirements in 2019.

## Post-secondary non-tertiary


This refers to Post Leaving Certificate NFQ Level 4 or 5, Advanced Certificate NFQ Level 6, other non-NFQ aligned FET, Certificate NFQ Level 4, or Certificate NFQ Level 5.

## Short-cycle tertiary education

This refers to third level non-degree courses and includes higher certificate NFQ level 6 courses and diploma NFQ level 7 courses. These courses are usually of one year in duration and are often vocational in nature.

## Third Level

This refers to Ordinary Bachelor's degree, Honours Bachelor degree, Professional, Post-Graduate, Doctorate or Higher degree courses.



Alongside this research paper SOLAS has also published a magazine to celebrate Women in Further Education and Training which is available on the SOLAS website.

**For further information,  
please contact:**

Helen Garner  
Data Analytics Unit, SOLAS  
Block 1, Castleforbes House  
Castleforbes Road, Dublin 1  
[helen.garner@solas.ie](mailto:helen.garner@solas.ie)

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