

December 2022

FET IN FOCUS 2022

A STUDY INTO  
COMMUNITY  
EDUCATION IN  
IRELAND

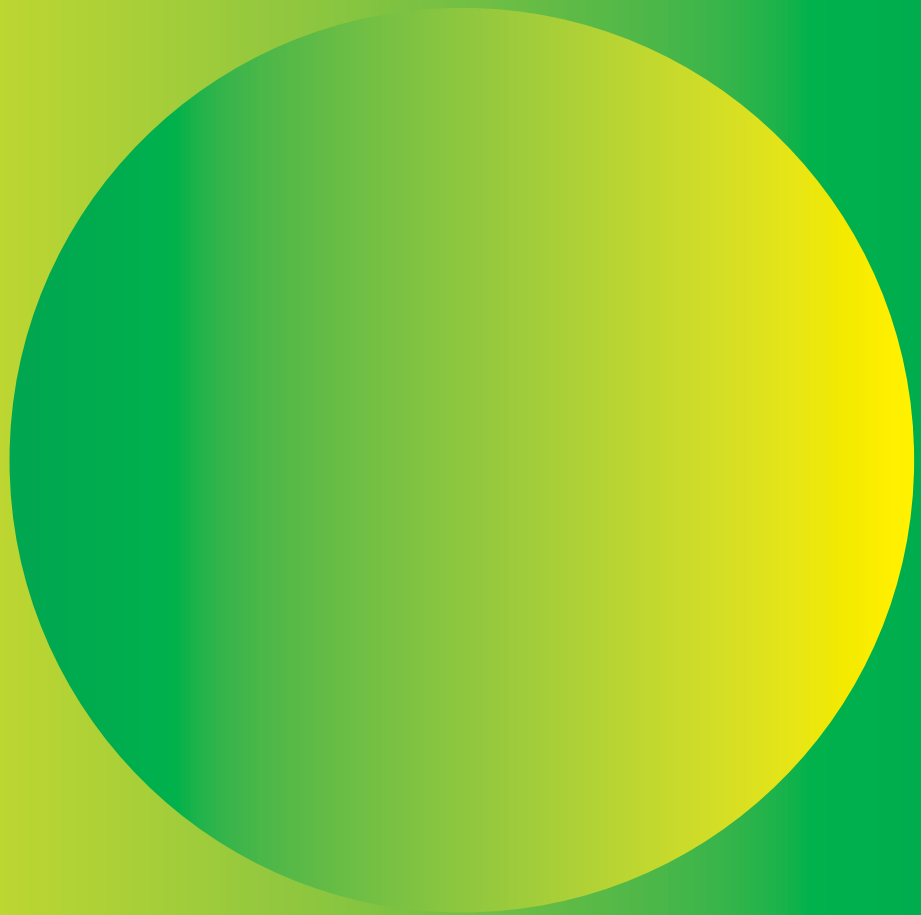
# COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN FET

Based on Community  
Education in FET in 2019

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and Selen Guerin

**SOLAS**  
learning works

Further  
Education  
& Training



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.

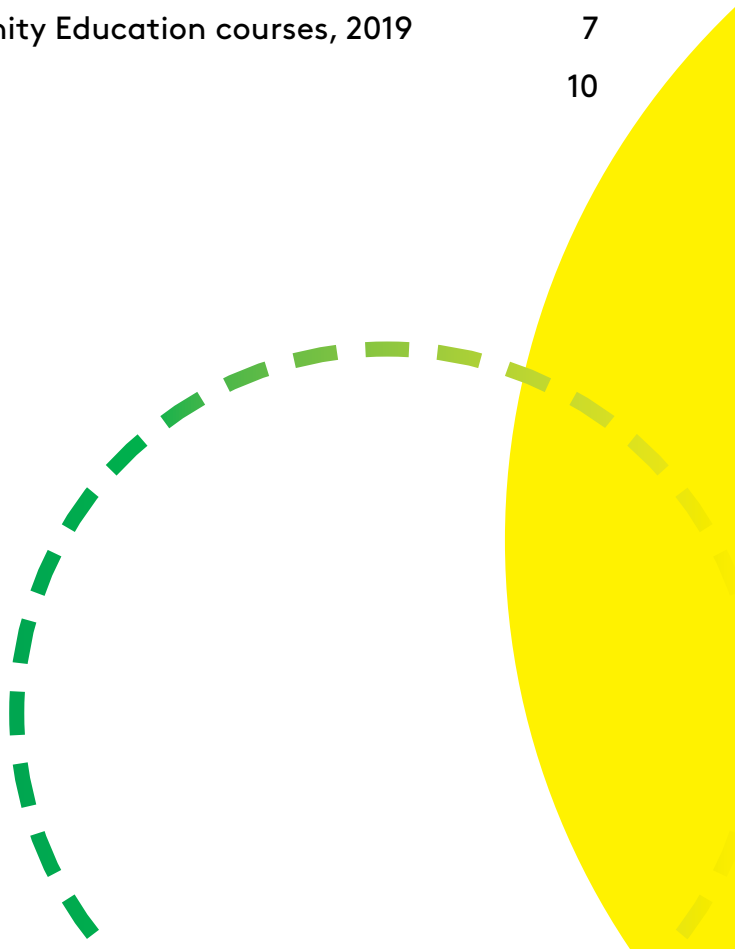
The Data Analytics Unit would like to acknowledge the assistance of the ETB staff involved in submitting data to SOLAS.

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# Community Education in FET 2019

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“This group has been a blessing. It has given me my first step back into education. It has given me the opportunity for a brighter future. I have the confidence in myself to go back into education. I have now applied for healthcare level 5 with Tipperary Education and Training Board in the next few weeks.”

Cindy, Community Education Substance Misuse Group, Tipperary

# Key Findings

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## Community Education provides access to learning opportunities for older females.

- > In 2019, 77% of Community Education learner enrolments were female with over half (55.8%) of females in the 55-64+ age group.

## Community Education plays an important role in providing supports for the social inclusion of learners across Ireland, particularly retirees and inactive learners.

- > Among the ISCED broad fields of study, 98% of Community Education learner enrolments were in generic programmes and qualifications, with 89.5% of these learners enrolled in social inclusion and thematic learning courses in 2019.
- > Approximately, one third (32.9%) of Community Education learner enrolments reported their Principal Economic Status (PES) as retired in 2019.
- > Of all Community Education learner enrolments that reported a PES in 2019, 42.7% reported they were inactive.

# Enrolments

In 2019, there were 33,046 learner enrolments in SOLAS funded Community Education. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Community Education was substantial, with a 36% decrease in learner enrolments in 2020 and a gradual recovery of learner enrolments in 2021. Therefore, this Community Education report uses 2019 as the base year for this learner profile analysis.

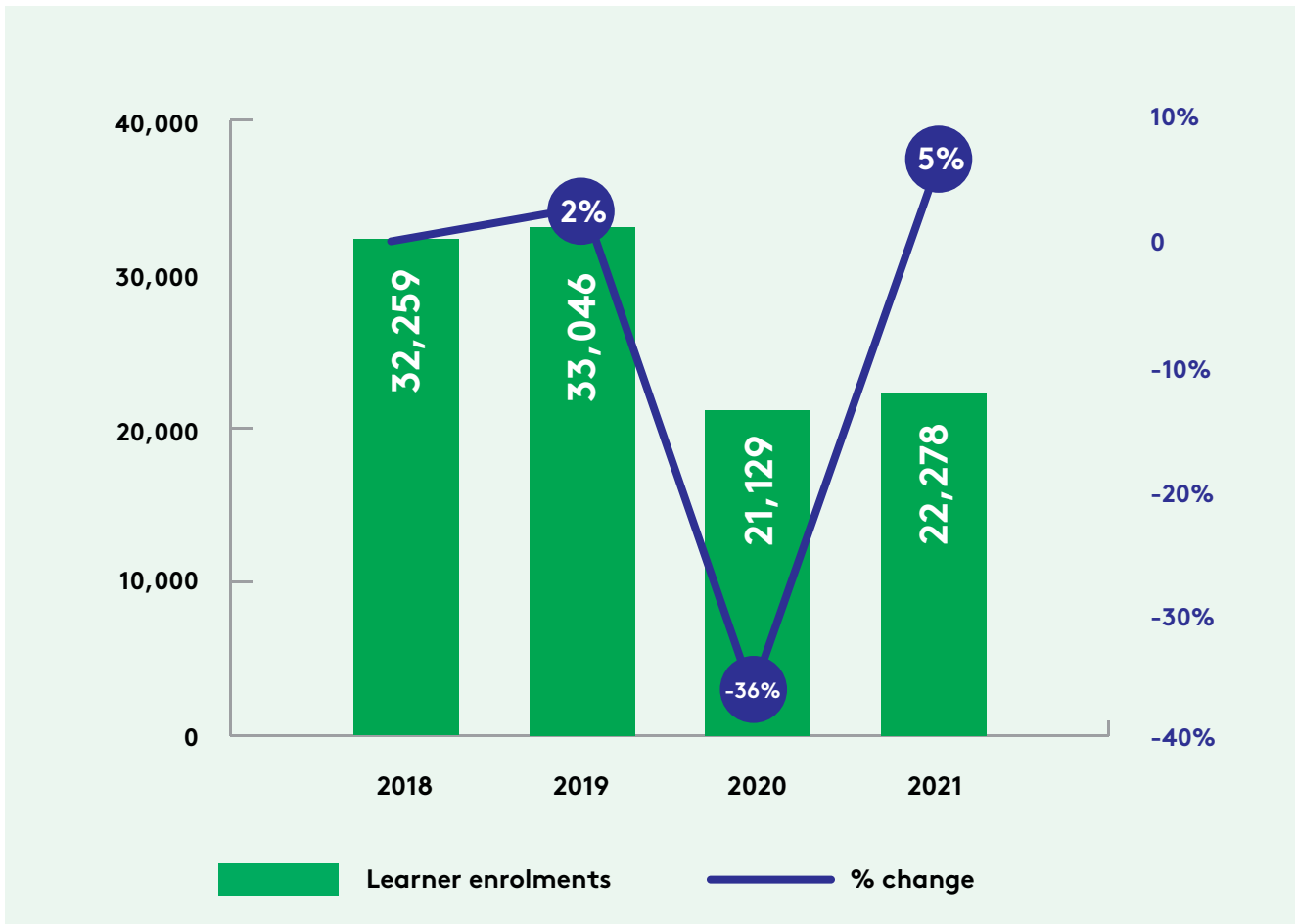
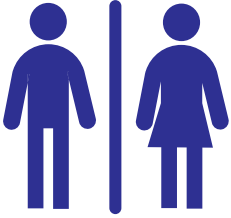


Figure 1 Enrolments, 2018-2021



Among 2019 Community Education learner enrolments, 77% were female and 23% were male. This diverges from the overall population of FET learner enrolments which has consistently been approximately 60% female and 40% male.

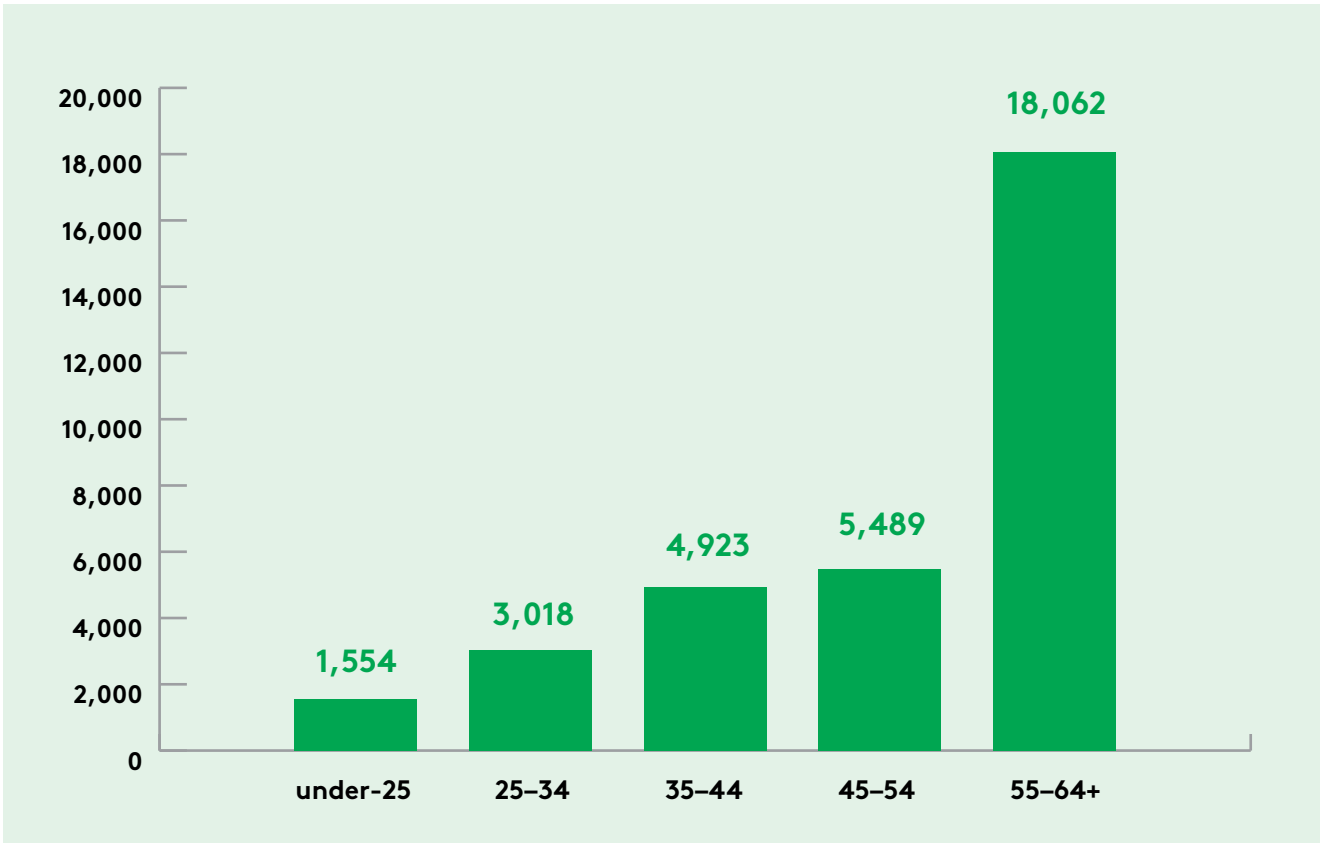


Figure 2 Start Age, 2019

Over half (54.7%) of Community Education learner enrolments were concentrated in the 55-64+ age group, whereas only 20% of the overall population of FET learner enrolments fell within this age group in 2019. The lowest concentration (4.7%) of Community Education learner enrolments was in the under-25 age group. This contrasts with the overall population of 2019 FET learner enrolments, where the highest concentration of learner enrolments was in the under-25 age group (32.5%). Therefore, in 2019, Community Education learner enrolments tended to be older than the overall population of FET learners.

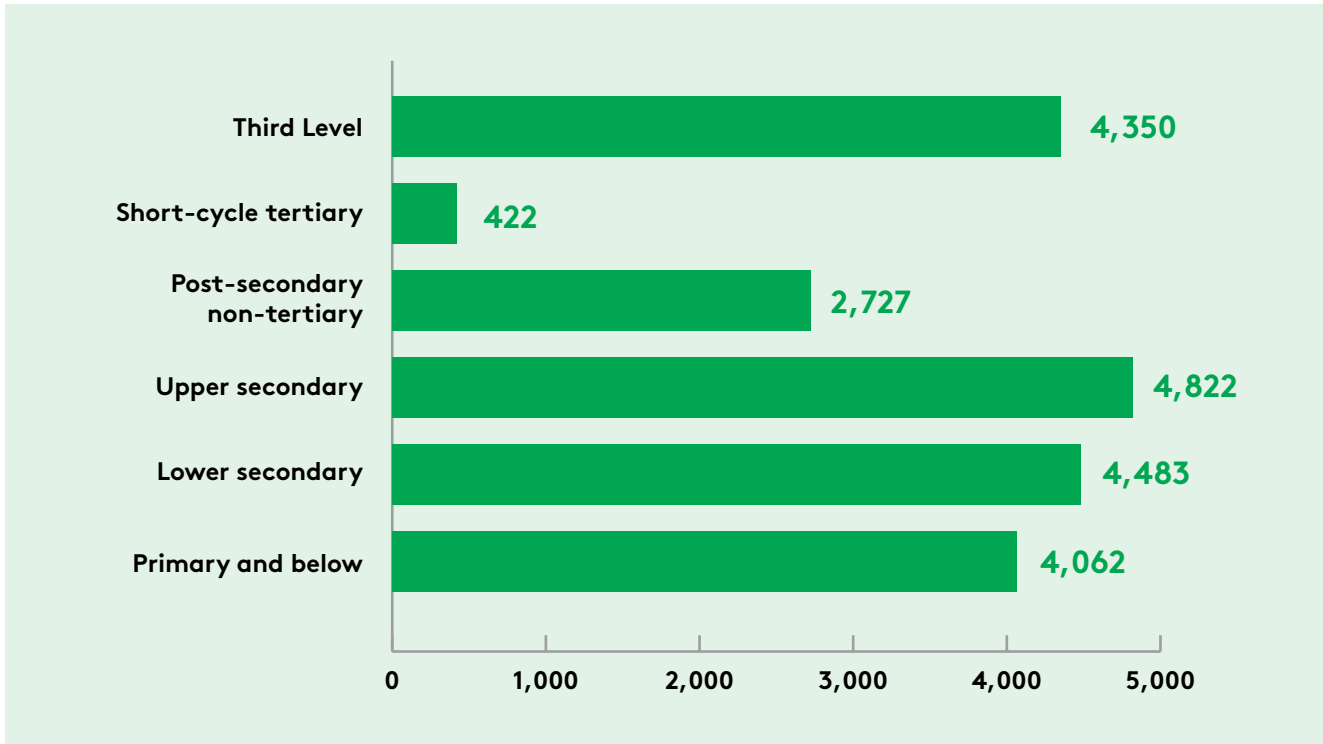


Figure 3 Highest Level of Formal Education, 2019

Among Community Education enrolments, 4,822 (23.1%) had an upper secondary level of education and 4,350 (20.9%) reported they had a third level education.<sup>1</sup> This compares to the overall population of 2019 FET learner enrolments, where only 12.9% reported they had a third level education. At the lower levels of education, among Community Education learner enrolments, 41% (8,545) reported they had a lower secondary or below education level, whereas among the overall population of FET learners, only 30.8% reported they had a lower secondary or below education level. Therefore, Community Education learner enrolments had higher levels of third level education and higher levels of primary and below education compared to the overall population of FET learners.

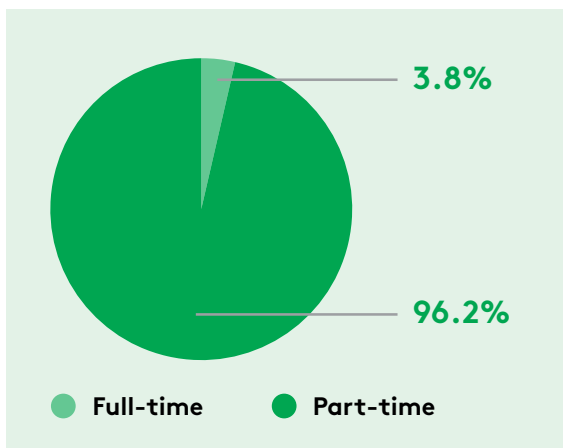


Figure 4 Delivery Type, 2019

Most Community Education learners were enrolled in part-time courses (96.2%), with only 3.8% enrolled in full-time courses. This reflects the Community Education course offerings, the majority of which are part-time.

<sup>1</sup> The response rate for the highest level of formal education among Community Education learner enrolments was 63.1% in 2019.



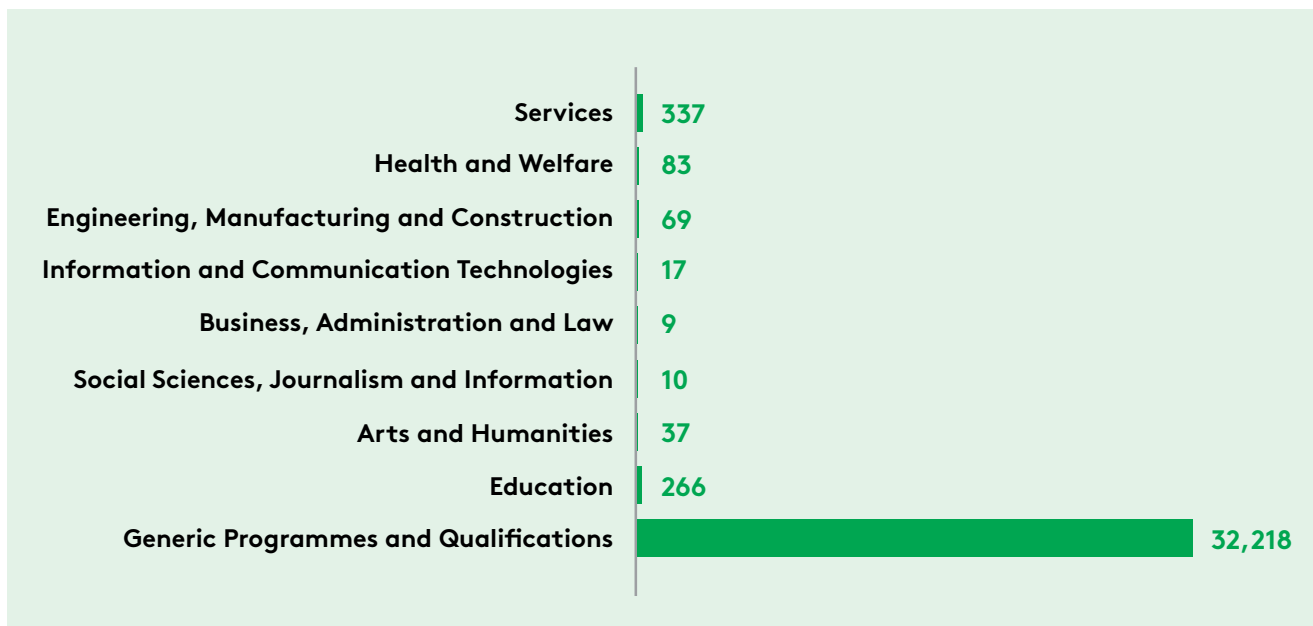


Figure 5 Field of Study (Broad ISCED), 2019

Among ISCED broad fields of study, 98% (2,218) of learners were enrolled in generic programmes and qualifications in 2019, with 89.5% of these learners enrolled in social inclusion and thematic learning courses. This was followed by services (1%) and education (.8%) ISCED broad fields of study. Within the services field of study, 41.3% of learners were enrolled in EHA1-Primary Certificate in Food Safety courses and within the education field of study, 44.8% of these learners were enrolled in Early Childhood Care and Education courses. The percentage of Community Education learner enrolments found in the ISCED broad field of study, generic programmes and qualifications in 2019, was nearly double (48%) that found in the overall population of FET learners in 2019.

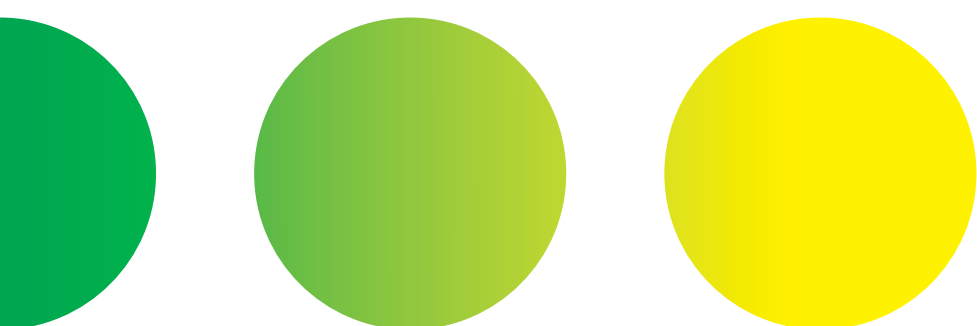


Table 1 illustrates the diversity of 2019 Community Education course examples found within each ISCED broad field of study.

Field of Study (Broad ISCED)	Community Education course examples
Arts and humanities	Art
	Film and Television Production
	Media Production
Business, administration, and law	Manual and Computerised Payroll and Bookkeeping
Education	Early Childhood Care and Education
	Early Childhood Education and Care Support
Engineering, manufacturing, and construction	Engineering Skills
	Safepass - Sponsored Training
Generic programmes and qualifications	Access to Further Education and Training (FET) and Employment
	Employability and Employment Skills
	English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL)
	General Learning and General Studies
	Information and Communication Technologies
	Key Skills
	Social Inclusion and Thematic Learning
Health and welfare	Community Development
	Social and Vocational Integration
	Youth Work
Information and communication technologies (ICTs)	ECDL - Online - Tutor Support and Workshops
	ICS - Computer Skills Basics
Services	EHA1 - Primary Certificate in Food Safety
	Employment Skills: Barista, HACCP and Retail Skills
	First Aid Responder PHECC (Evenings)
	Leisure Employability Skills
	Regional Tour Guiding
	Tourism with Business
Social sciences, journalism, and information	Information Advice and Advocacy

Table 1 Field of Study (Broad ISCED) by Community Education courses, 2019

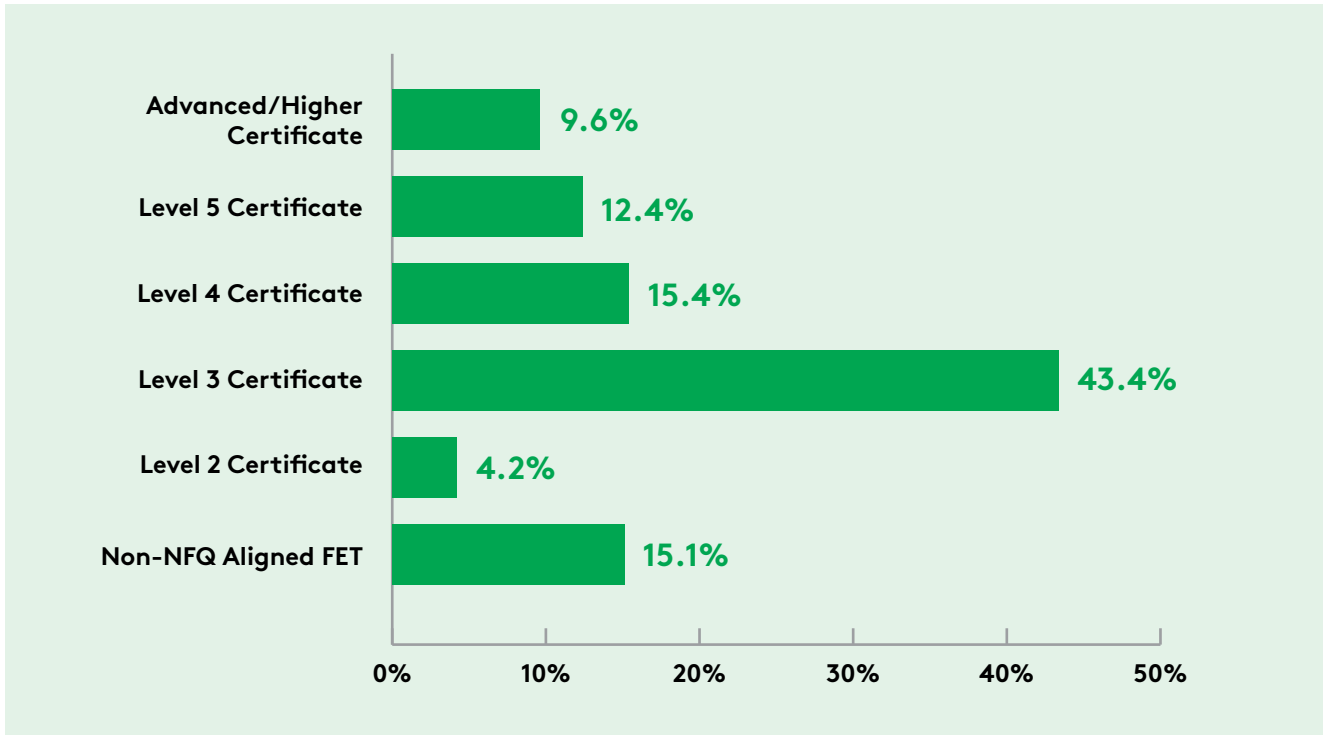


Figure 6 Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or Equivalent, 2019

The majority of Community Education learners were enrolled in uncertified courses (94.2%), with 92.5% of these learners enrolled in a social inclusion and thematic learning course. Figure 6 shows that of those who were enrolled in certified courses, 43.4% were enrolled in a level 3 course, of which 92.2% were enrolled in a general learning course. The next highest concentration of learner enrolments was in level 4 (15.4%) and non-NFQ aligned FET (15.1%) courses. Among those learners enrolled in a Community Education course at level 4, 75.7% were enrolled in a general learning course. Among those learners enrolled in non-NFQ aligned FET, 92.8% were enrolled in EHAI - Primary Certificate in Food Safety and First Aid Responder PHECC courses. This compares to the overall population of FET learners in 2019, where almost half (46.6%) of learner enrolments were in level 5 courses. Overall, Community Education learners tended to be enrolled in uncertified courses, with those who are enrolled in certified courses primarily concentrated in level 3 courses.



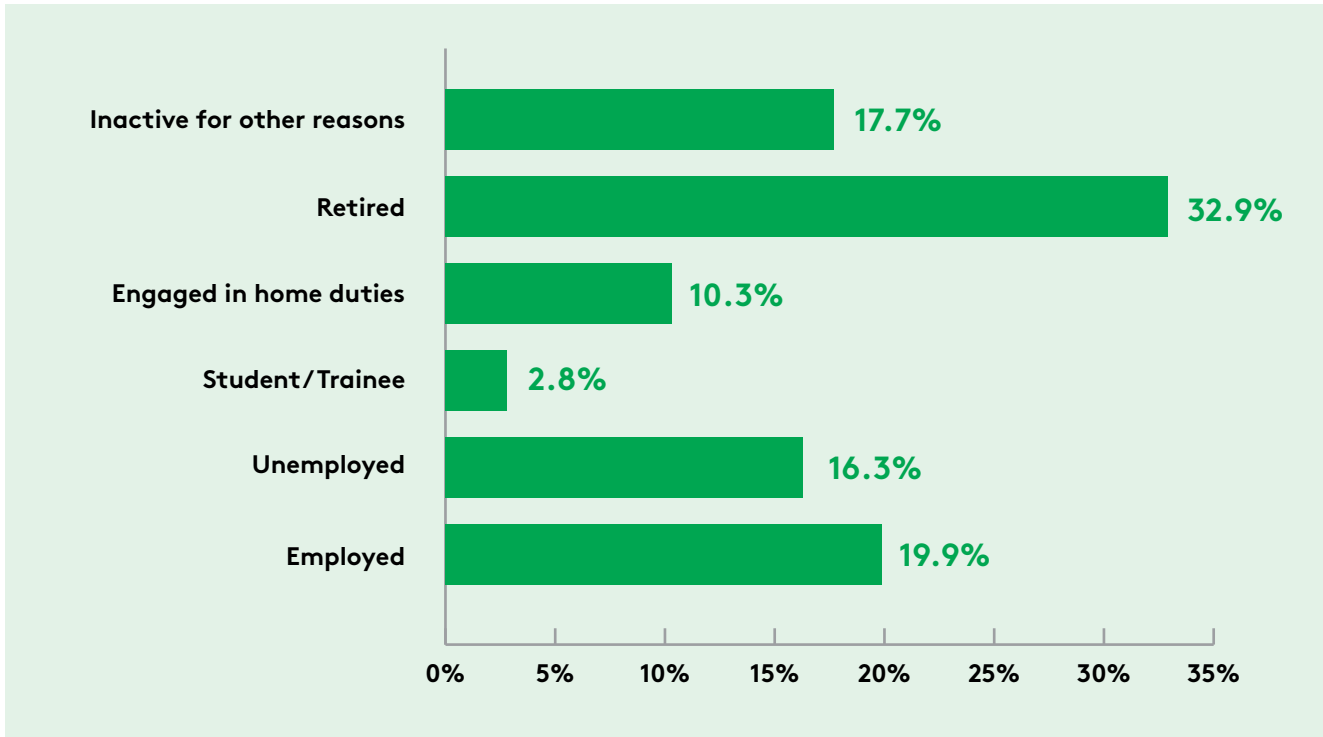


Figure 7 Principal Economic Status, 2019

Approximately one third (32.9%) of Community Education learners reported their principal economic status (PES)<sup>2</sup> as retired prior to enrolment. This compared to only 8.3% of learners in the overall population of FET learners in 2019. Overall, the total percentage of learners reporting a PES as inactive was considerably higher among Community Education (63.7%) learner enrolments compared to the overall population of FET learners (42.7%) in 2019. In contrast, Community Education learner enrolments that reported a PES as employed (19.9%) or unemployed (16.3%) were much lower than the overall population of FET learners that reported they were employed (26%) or unemployed (31.3%) in 2019. Overall, prior to enrolment in a Community Education course, most learners reported a PES as inactive, with a high concentration of these inactive learner enrolments reporting they were retired. Therefore, Community Education plays an important role in providing support and inclusion for retirees and inactive learners across Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> The Principal Economic Response (PES) response rate was 67.7% for Community Education learner enrolments in 2019.

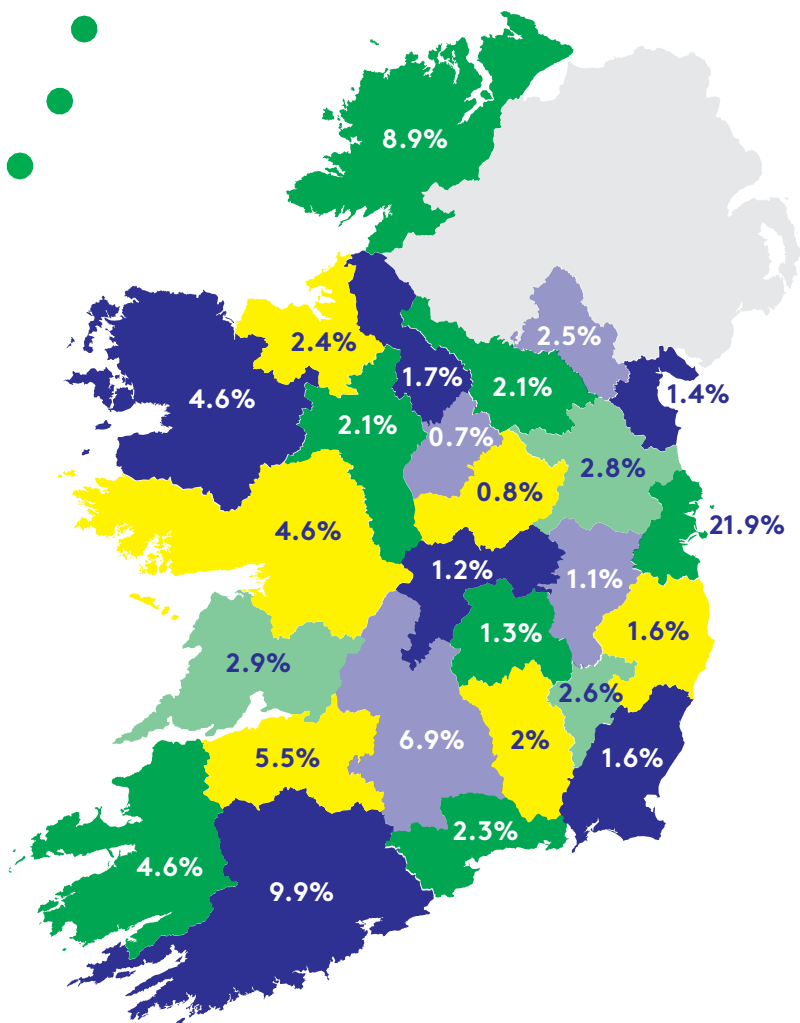


Figure 8 County of Residence, 2019

Counties	Learners	Percent	Counties	Learners	Percent
Dublin	7,150	21.9%	Waterford	754	2.3%
Cork	3,224	9.9%	Roscommon	690	2.1%
Donegal	2,924	8.9%	Cavan	672	2.1%
Tipperary	2,269	6.9%	Kilkenny	647	2.0%
Limerick	1,813	5.5%	Leitrim	548	1.7%
Galway	1,512	4.6%	Wexford	513	1.6%
Mayo	1,511	4.6%	Wicklow	509	1.6%
Kerry	1,494	4.6%	Louth	473	1.4%
Clare	938	2.9%	Laois	435	1.3%
Meath	929	2.8%	Offaly	381	1.2%
Carlow	856	2.6%	Kildare	367	1.1%
Monaghan	818	2.5%	Westmeath	267	0.8%
Sligo	789	2.4%	Longford	228	0.7%
			<b>Total</b>	<b>32,711</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 2 County of Residence, 2019

The top five counties of residence that were reported by Community Education learner enrolments were Dublin (21.9%), Cork (9.9%), Donegal (8.9%), Tipperary (6.9%) and Limerick (5.5%).<sup>3</sup> Overall, this did not vary greatly from the overall population of 2019 FET learner enrolments, with the top six counties being Dublin (22.8%), Cork (9.6%), Galway (5.1%), Limerick (4.9%), Donegal (4.4%) and Tipperary (4.4%). Similar to the overall population of FET learners in 2019, approximately one third of Community Education learner enrolments reported their county of residence in Dublin and Cork.

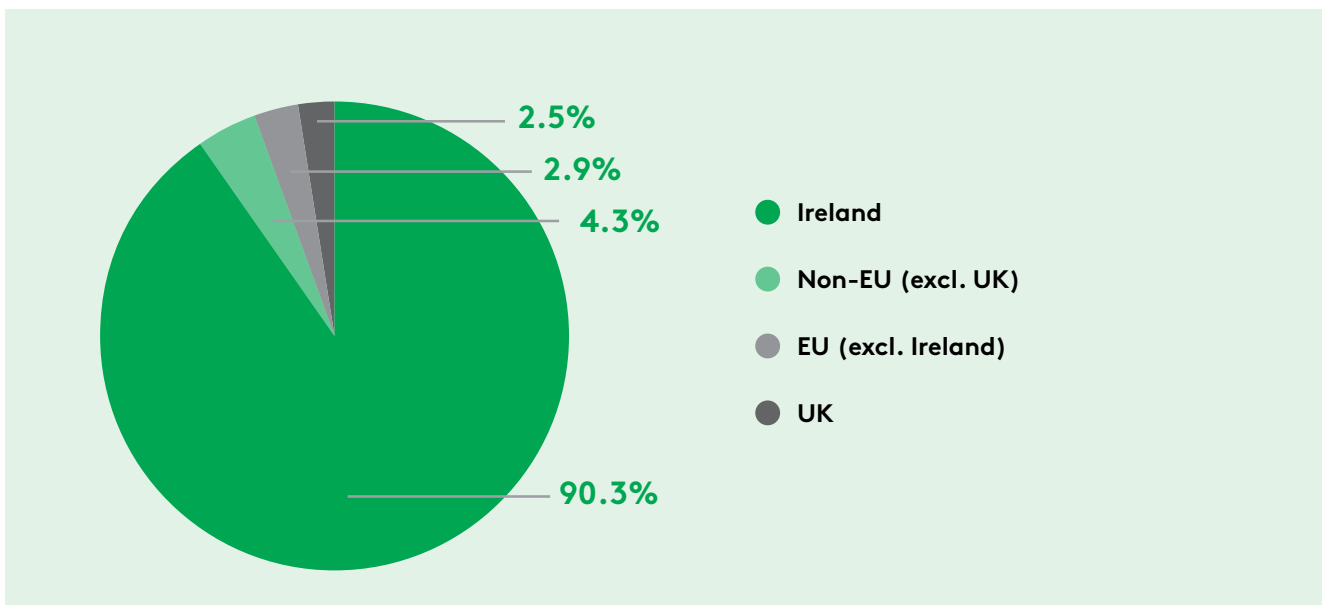


Figure 9 Nationality, 2019

The majority of Community Education learner enrolments were nationals of Ireland (90.3%).<sup>4</sup> This was followed by Non-EU (4.3%), EU (2.9%) and UK (2.5%) learner enrolments. The percentage of Community Education learner enrolments that reported they were nationals of Ireland was considerably higher than the overall population of 2019 FET learner enrolments that reported they were Irish (78.1%). In contrast, the reverse was true for EU (10.2%) and Non-EU (9.4%) nationals in the overall population of 2019 FET learner enrolments, with lower percentages of learner enrolments compared to Community Education. On the other hand, the overall population of 2019 FET learners that reported they were UK nationals (2.3%) did not vary greatly from Community Education learner enrolments that reported they were nationals of the UK. Overall, Community Education learners were primarily Irish nationals.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that this calculation is an estimate and excludes non-responses, unknown responses, and those learners that report a county of residence in Northern Ireland. While taking into account these exclusions, the response rate was 99% for county of residence Community Education learner enrolments in 2019.

<sup>4</sup> The nationality response rate was 83.5% for Community Education learner enrolments in 2019.

# FOCUS STUDY: Community Education and Females 55-64+ years old

The majority of Community Education learner enrolments in 2019 were female (77%). Among these female learner enrolments, 55.8% were in the 55-64+ age group. This section looks at this cohort of Community Education learner enrolments.

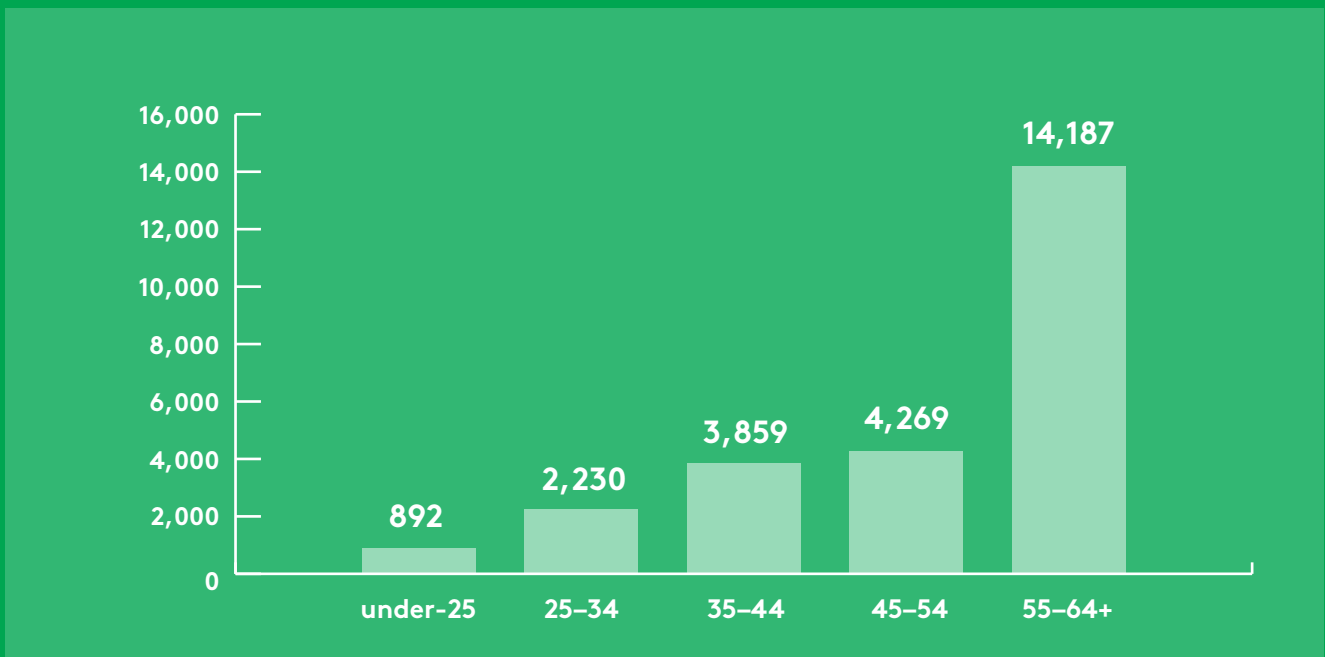


Figure 10 Community Education Females by Start Age, 2019

Among the Community Education female learner enrolments aged 55-64+ that reported a Principal Economic Status (PES), 58.9% reported they were retired. The remaining Community Education learner enrolments reported they were inactive for other reasons (13.7%), employed (12.7%), engaged in home duties (7.8%), unemployed (6.5%), and a very small percentage reported they were a trainee/student (.3%). Thus, overall, Community Education plays an important role in fostering inclusion among female retirees in Ireland.

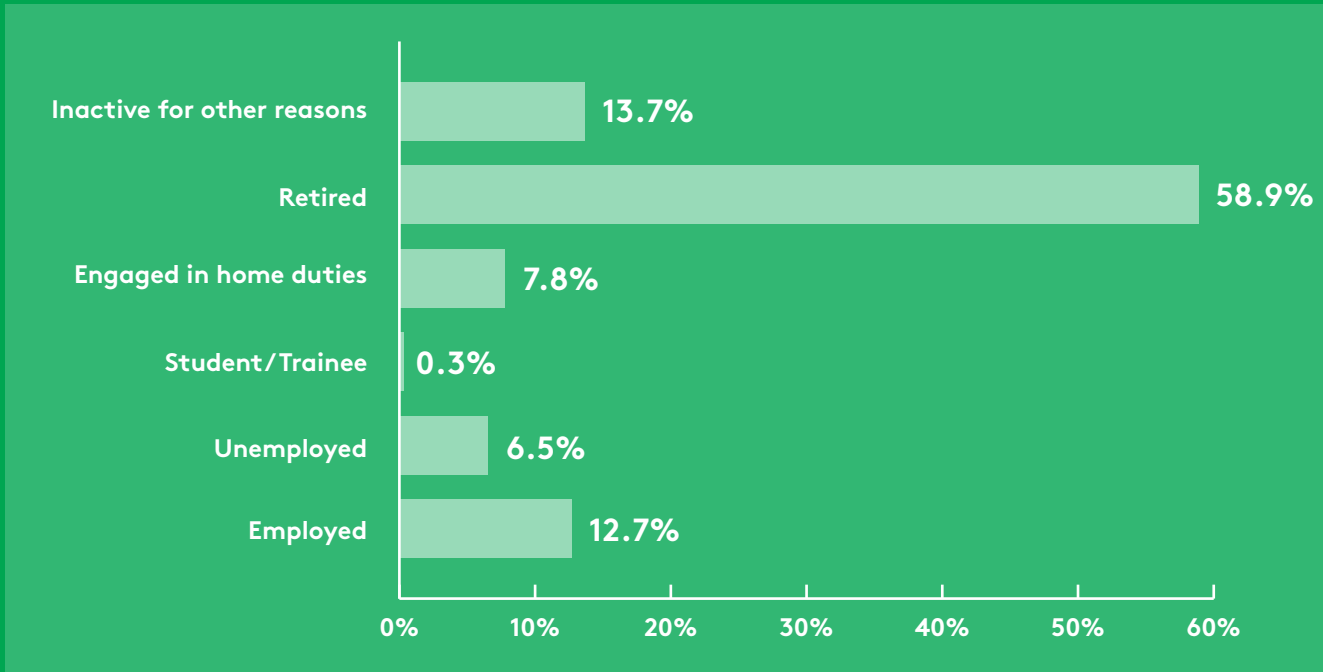


Figure 11 Community Education Females 55-64+ years of age by Principal Economic Status, 2019

Among females 55-64+ years of age enrolled in Community Education, 45% (3,881) reported they had a lower secondary or below education. In addition, one quarter (2,178) of learners reported they had an upper secondary level of education and 19.7% (1,698) reported they had a third level education. The remaining learners reported they had a post-secondary non-tertiary (734) or a short-cycle tertiary (127) education. Overall, the majority of Community Education female learner enrolments aged 55-64+ had at most upper secondary education level.

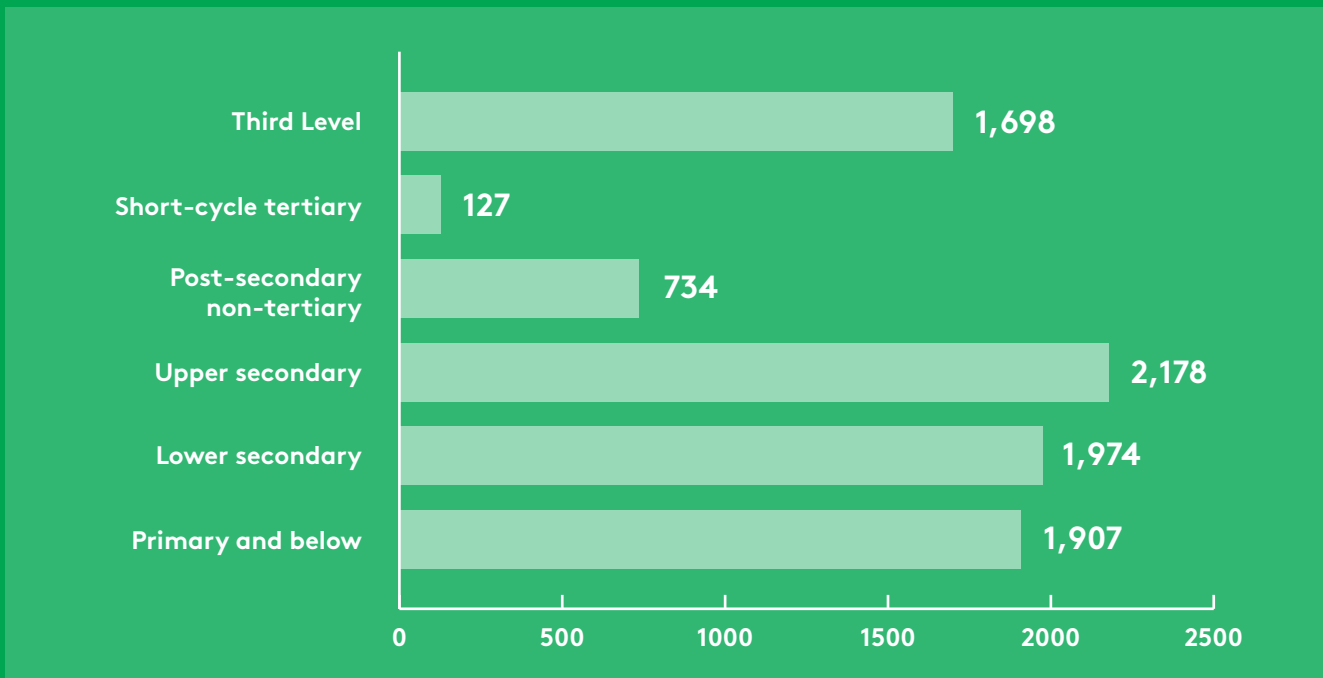


Figure 12 Community Education Females 55-64+ by Education Level, 2019



# Completions

In 2019, 30,856 learners completed a Community Education programme. Only 6.2% of these learners completed a certified course, with the remaining learners completing uncertified courses.

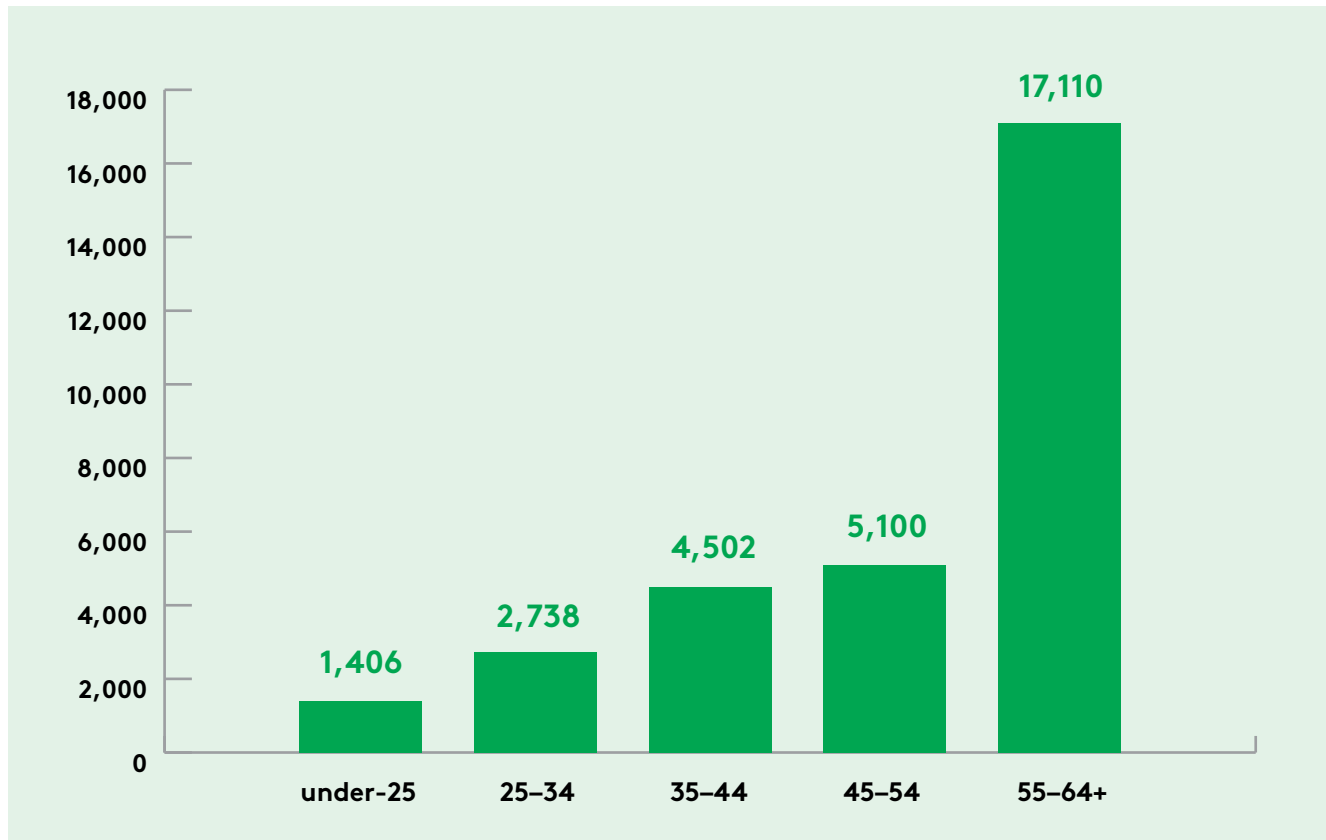
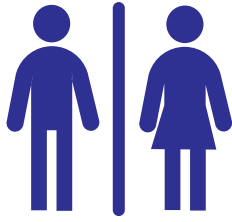
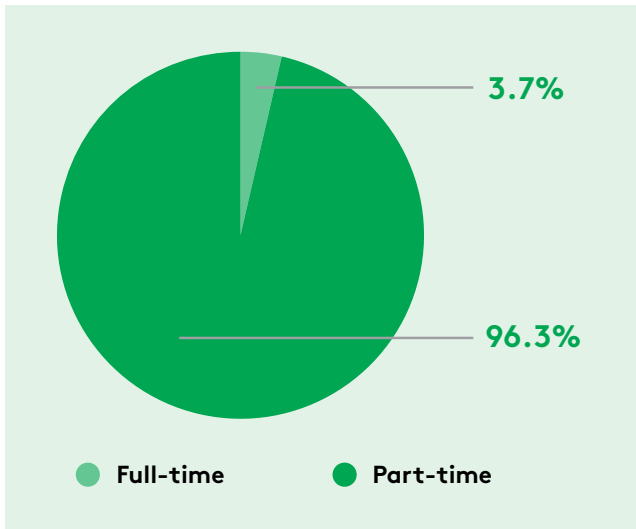


Figure 13 Start Age, 2019

Similar to Community Education learner enrolments, over half (55.5%) of Community Education learner completions in 2019 were in the 55-64+ age group, whereas only 23.4% of the overall population of 2019 FET learner completions were in this age group. The lowest concentration (4.6%) of Community Education learner completions was in the under-25 age group. This contrasts with the overall population of 2019 FET learner completions, where the highest concentration of learner completions was in the under-25 age group (26.1%). Therefore, like enrolments, Community Education learner completions were older than the overall population of FET learners.



Among learner completions, 77.1% were female and 22.9% were male in Community Education. This diverges from the overall population of 2019 FET learner completions where 61.2% were female and 38.8% were male.



Similar to enrolments, most (96.3%) Community Education learners completed part-time courses, with only 3.7% completing full-time courses.

Figure 14 Delivery Type, 2019

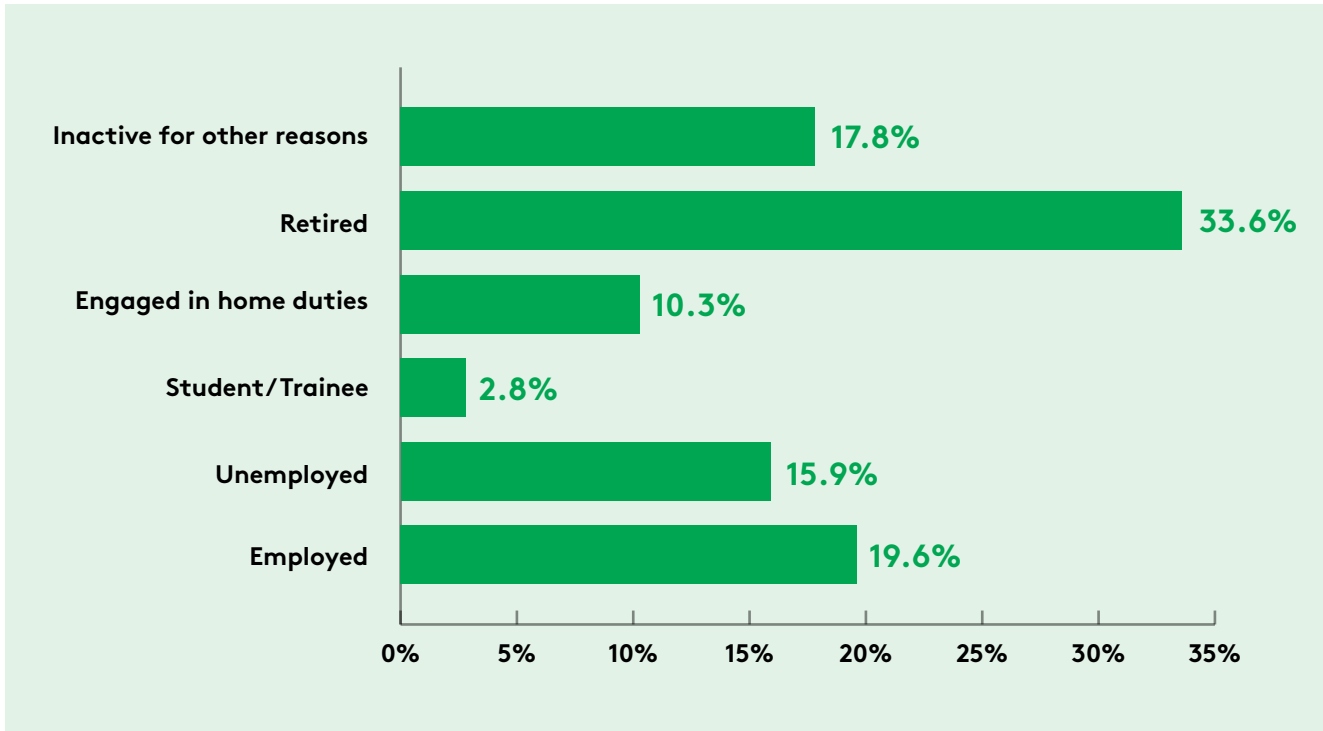
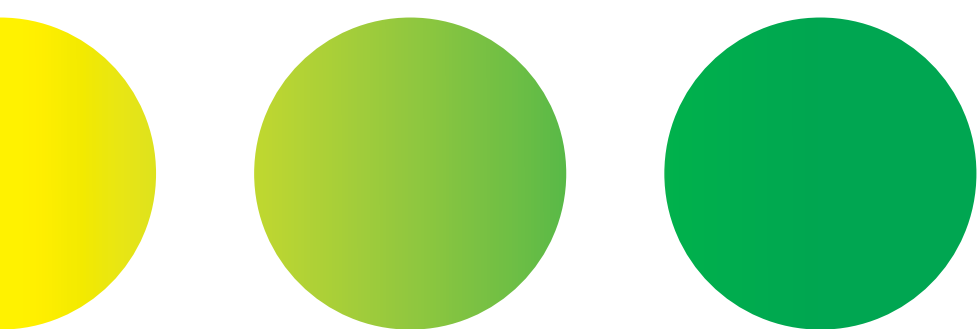


Figure 15 Principal Economic Status, 2019

Similar to Community Education learner enrolments, approximately one third (33.6%) of learners who completed a FET course reported their principal economic status (PES) as retired. This compared to only 10% of learners in the overall population of FET learner completions in 2019. Overall, the total percentage of learners reporting a PES as inactive was considerably higher among Community Education (64.5%) learner completions compared to the overall population of FET learners (43.1%). In contrast, Community Education learner completions that reported a PES as employed (19.6%) or unemployed (15.9%) were much lower than the overall population of FET learners that reported they were employed (26.3%) or unemployed (30.7%). Therefore, prior to completing a Community Education course, most learners reported a PES as inactive, with a high concentration of these inactive learner completions reporting they were retired.



# 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.

## Completions

The 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 percent or more of the course and its requirements in 2019.

## Inactive

This term is used according to the Eurostat and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition which defines inactive as individuals who are neither employed nor unemployed and are not working and not available or looking for work. Inactive in this report includes those learners engaged in home duties, retired, student/trainees, and those inactive for other reasons.

## **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. CFA 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's degree, Professional, Post-Graduate, Doctorate or Higher degree courses.



Alongside this research paper, SOLAS has also published a magazine on Community Education in FET which is available on the SOLAS website [solas.ie](http://solas.ie).

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