

Collaboration between SETU and Tiglin from the 2022 HEA Performance Funding PROJECT REPORT 2023-2025

South East Technological University



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FOREWORD

This report outlines one of the most impactful and pioneering outreach collaborations undertaken by South East Technological University (SETU) to date. In partnership with Tiglin, Aiséirí, Tinteán, Treo, and the Irish Prison Service, the University has been privileged to bring higher education into spaces that have traditionally been excluded from it, addiction recovery centres, homeless services, and custodial settings. The work described in these pages speaks not only to educational access, but to dignity, inclusion, transformation and hope.

The initiative reflects SETU's mission to be "a catalyst for innovation, transformation and opportunity", as articulated in our Strategic Plan 2023–2028. It also exemplifies our commitment to lifelong learning, a core pillar of the plan and of the SETU Strategic Plan for Lifelong Learning, which prioritises reaching adult learners in

flexible, responsive, and socially impactful ways. Through this project, we have challenged traditional models of higher education delivery, embedded accredited learning into recovery and justice pathways, and created opportunities for learners and staff to grow in confidence, competence, and aspiration.

As we continue to evolve as a university, projects like this ensure we remain grounded in the needs of our communities, particularly those most often left behind. I want to extend sincere thanks to all the learners, partners, and staff who made this work possible. Their commitment, courage, and vision have not only shaped this project, but have helped shape SETU as a university for all.

Dr Helen Murphy

Head of Faculty of Education and Lifelong Learning



1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Since 2016, South East Technological University (SETU), through its Faculty of Education and Lifelong Learning, has worked in collaboration with Tiglin, a registered charity supporting individuals overcoming addiction, homelessness, and other life-controlling challenges.

This partnership demonstrates the transformative power of education to change lives and strengthen communities.

Supported by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) through Systems Performance Funding, SETU received €833,333 in 2023, after producing a case study on their collaboration to deliver higher education programmes for Tiglin service users and staff, as well as for individuals in other regional addiction recovery and social reintegration services.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Commencing in January 2023, SETU, through HEA Systems Performance funding, has led a ground-breaking higher education outreach initiative, designed to widen access for communities traditionally excluded from higher education. Delivered in partnership with four organisations: Tiglin, Aiséirí, Tinteán, Treo, and the Irish Prison Service. The project offers accredited programmes to both service users and staff in addiction recovery, homelessness, and custodial settings.

A major milestone in this initiative has been the delivery of a Level 6 Major Award programme within Portlaoise Prison, a maximum-security facility, marking the first delivery of its kind in Ireland. In addition, SETU has implemented an innovative in-person higher education model embedded

directly into residential addiction recovery programmes. Research to date has identified no equivalent initiative either nationally or internationally, positioning the project as a pioneering model of educational intervention within recovery journeys.

Over three years, the project has delivered a substantial number of accredited programmes across all partner organisations:

- 315 service users from Tiglin completed 29 certificates
- 3 volunteers within the Tiglin community completed 3 certificates
- 3 residents/staff from Jigginstown completed 6 certificates
- 45 Tiglin staff completed 6 certificates
- 7 Tiglin staff completed 6 Major Awards



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 3 staff completed 3 Minor Awards
- 33 Aiséirí service users completed 4 certificates
- 2 students with Tinteán/Treo completed 1 certificate
- 20 staff of Aiséirí and Treo completed 2 certificates
- 21 students at Portlaoise Prison completed 7 Certificates, equating to 62 certificates overall. Many students completed numerous certificates, with 4 students completing a full 60 credit award at Level 6.

In 2025, SETU conducted a survey of service users from both Tiglin and Aiséirí to better understand the personal and professional impact of the programme. Results show strong development in key academic, communication, and employability skills, even after limited exposure for some learners.

Combined Skill Development – Tiglin and Aiséirí service users:

- Written communication skills were reported as developed by 76% of Tiglin learners and with 71% of Aiséirí learners.
- Listening skills were reported as developed by 73% of Tiglin learners and 43% of Aiséirí learners.
- Verbal communication skills showed similarly strong results, with 83% of Tiglin and 86% of Aiséirí learners reporting development.
- Non-verbal communication and self-confidence were developed by 73% of Tiglin learners and 71% of Aiséirí learners.
- Organisational skills, including time management and goal setting, were developed by 74% of Tiglin learners and 57% of Aiséirí learners.

- Collaboration and teamwork skills were developed by 74% of Tiglin learners and 86% of Aiséirí learners.
- Engagement techniques, such as the ability to give and receive feedback, were developed by 79% of Tiglin learners and 71% of Aiséirí learners.
- Critical thinking skills were developed by 80% of Tiglin learners and 71% of Aiséirí learners.
- Research skills were developed by 81% of Tiglin learners and 57% of Aiséirí learners.
- Ethical decision-making skills were developed by 74% of Tiglin learners and 71% of Aiséirí learners.

The slightly lower overall development scores reported by Aiséirí learners are likely due to their having had fewer opportunities to complete multiple programmes or modules compared to Tiglin participants. Despite this, the outcomes remain strong, particularly in areas such as verbal communication, collaboration, and critical thinking, where Aiséirí learners reported equal or higher rates of significant development. This highlights both the transformative power of a single learning experience and the amplified impact of sustained educational engagement over time.

In addition to reflecting on their learning, service users at Tiglin were asked which skills they would most like to develop in the future. Their responses revealed a strong appetite for continued personal and professional growth. The most frequently selected areas included mental health and resilience (63%), preparation for working life (69%), and verbal and written communication skills, with over 60% expressing interest in improving their verbal

communication. Learners also highlighted a desire to improve research skills, teamwork, and IT skills, indicating motivation to further build both academic and life skills. Only a small proportion (15%) indicated no interest in further skill development, suggesting high levels of ongoing engagement and ambition.

As part of the wider project, SETU also delivered CPD programmes for Tiglin staff, focused on professional development, leadership, and communication. Feedback from participating staff showed consistently high levels of skill development:

- Written communication and verbal communication were reported as developed by over 84–92% of staff.
- Listening and collaboration skills were significantly developed by more than 50%.
- Critical thinking, self-confidence, and leadership skills saw strong development, with many reporting significant gains.
- Knowledge base development was particularly notable, with 62% of staff reporting significant growth.
- No respondents reported any area of no development.

These results reflect the project’s dual focus on supporting service users and frontline staff, and reinforce the broader

organisational impact of embedding higher education within recovery and social care settings.

The project’s success has also been recognised at national level, having been shortlisted for the Irish Education Awards in 2024 and 2025 in the category of ‘Best Outreach Collaboration’. In addition, a 15-minute video archive was produced to document and showcase the SETU collaboration with Tiglin and to capture its impact from the perspective of participants, staff, and stakeholders. The creation of this video fulfilled important dissemination and advocacy objectives, providing a lasting, accessible record of the project’s innovation and human impact.

This executive summary presents a compelling case for the continuation and expansion of this model of outreach education. The evidence shows that SETU’s work in partnership with frontline organisations has delivered not only scale, but deep personal transformation, professional growth, and national innovation. By embedding higher education directly into recovery and custodial environments, the project has redefined what truly inclusive, transformative education can look like in Ireland and beyond.



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EIMEAR'S STORY

TIGLIN

My relationship with addiction has been a long one. I was born into an alcoholic home and grew up around addictive behaviours, even

though my father got sober at the Rutland Centre when I was four. I had my first drink at 11, and as life went on, alcohol kept resurfacing. When COVID hit, everything fell apart completely. Recovery, for me, is a daily battle. I thank God I no longer have the urge to use but coming to terms with the people I've hurt and the relationships I've lost remains part of the process. My journey with Tiglin has been gradual — I came in broken and was slowly rebuilt. Aftercare was a turning point. It was there that I began to rediscover myself — a better, sober version of me.

I've volunteered in the youth sector for over 20 years and always enjoyed it, but I never found the time or commitment to pursue formal studies. When I joined the SETU "Foundation in Adult Learning" course, I wasn't fully on board at first, but something clicked. It ignited a spark in me that made me want to learn more.

Honestly, Tiglin made that first step happen. I didn't have much choice initially, but I'm grateful I did it because it opened up new possibilities. After

spending more than three decades in one industry, I finally had the time and space to explore something different. Credit has to go to Lara McElroy for giving me that push.

Getting back into education wasn't easy. My biggest challenge was memory retention — it felt like that part of my brain had gone to sleep. I was impatient with myself at first, but Jerry, my first tutor at Tiglin, showed incredible patience, explaining things as many times as I needed.

I struggled with the discipline of study — assignments, essays, and referencing were all daunting at first. But Tiglin's tutors always believed in me, even when I doubted myself. Jerry, Carmel, and John met each of us where we were, with no "one-size-fits-all" approach — something that made a real difference, especially for people in recovery.

Education has played a huge role in my recovery. Through SETU, I discovered a passion for the youth sector and am now studying Child and Adolescent Mental Health. It was during John Balfe's Community Development course that things really clicked — his interactive teaching style inspired me. On a visit to a local resource centre, I thought, "I could do this."

Carmel's emphasis on critical analysis, which I once found frustrating, has become a tool I use every day — in

STUDENT STORIES

my personal life, recovery, and even in my media career. It's helped me think strategically, plan ahead, and stay grounded.

Completing my courses boosted my confidence immensely. I started to believe in myself again. I realised I could balance my career while pursuing a new path — and that's exactly what I'm doing now. Since returning to education, new doors have opened. I'm currently studying Child and Adolescent Mental Health and working part-time in a youth group. Along the way, I've built friendships and professional connections that extend beyond my recovery circle — some of my closest friends today were introduced to me by Senator Aubrey McCarthy.

I've also gained practical everyday skills — from health and wellbeing to community awareness. I've learned that even in the most affluent areas, hidden struggles exist.

That understanding drives my passion for youth work: if you can reach young people early, you can help change their lives.

One of the biggest changes education has brought to my life is balance. I chose to step back from full-time work in my lifelong career to focus on study and gain hands-on experience in the youth sector. There were tough moments, of course. The tutors and staff were incredibly encouraging — often staying after class to help me understand difficult material. I was also blessed with two amazing key workers, Nathalie and Brian, who supported me through the frustrations that sometimes came with learning something new.

If I could offer one message to anyone considering going back to education, it would be this:

Jump in — no, dive in. It could change your life. It's definitely changed mine!

GER'S
STORY
AISÉIRÍ

My name is Ger, and I'd like to talk today about my experience so far in returning to education. I "left" school at 13 years of age, I have no junior cert or leaving cert and up until recently I had no desire whatsoever to return to education, I don't ever remember giving it a second thought. My experience in school was not good. I found it very hard to focus in class and felt stupid, I didn't feel my teacher was very patient or understanding and 3rd class was especially difficult as I had a teacher who was a disciplinarian to put it politely; this was a time when getting a slap around the back of the head was very normal. I wasn't a bold child at that time. I just daydreamed

a lot in class, and just felt confused a lot. In the 1980s this was seen as disrespectful and a type of misbehaviour. I spent many mornings not wanting to go to school and would beg my mother to leave me stay at home. When I was in 4th class, I had a teacher called Mrs. Comerford, who, despite my challenges, always had a smile for me when I brought my copybook up to be corrected, she would always tell me how I had such beautiful handwriting, and how much of an amazing artist I was and ask me to draw pictures for her. Mrs Comerford was an amazing teacher. I remember how happy I felt in her class and I improved so much because I didn't fully appreciate then, but looking back now I know she was filling me with confidence so I could believe in myself and challenge myself.

Unfortunately, as I grew into teenage years, my disconnect from education only grew stronger, and my life had deteriorated into addiction and crime. By the age of 14 I was in court and sent away, at 16 sent to prison and I spent the next 24 years in addiction and most of it in prison. I was last released in April 2022 and the only thing I knew was I never wanted to go back. I was 40 years of age, and I had no education, no job or work experience, no direction. Although I did manage to stay out of prison, I had made a commitment to myself that crime would no longer be part of my life; addiction was still a problem, but I had still yet to even recognise it as a problem. I was blessed to have the support and love of my mother, sister and girlfriend. I had tried to hold down a job but ended up losing my job and my drinking was out of control. My loved ones were worried sick; I'd end up doing what is always done - go back to prison to run away from responsibility and thoughts of trying to build a life from scratch.

In April 2024, 2 years after my release from prison, I arrived at the Aiséirí treatment centre. My family, girlfriend and probation officer had supported me to the point where I had to admit I was an addict, and unless I addressed my this, nothing else would work.

I went to Aiséirí with no expectations. For me, I had yet again reached the end of the road, and my life had become unmanageable, and this was something

I felt I had to do because I had no other options. Mentally, I was more broken than at any point in my life, because I had no self-esteem, was crippled with guilt and shame for everything that had happened. My daughter was a young person who never had a father. I had left a long trail of destruction. All I knew was I had enough pain and I didn't want to hurt people anymore. My mental health was also as bad as it had ever been and emotionally, I had a lot of self-hatred, fear, which I'd known all my life, and was the reason I never had to courage to take responsibility and challenge myself to grow. While in Aiséirí and after speaking with Gerry Carroll, he offered me a chance to go to Céim Eile, a secondary treatment in Waterford. My experience in Aiséirí had been a wakeup call for me in the sense that I finally came to the realisation that addiction wasn't the problem, it was my solution; just like comfortably spending my life in prison was my solution to running away from responsibility. Aiséirí opened my eyes to the fact that putting down the drink and drugs and staying out of prison was only the beginning; in a way it was the easy part. What I learned I now had to do was be honest, open minded and willing to address all my shortcomings, defects of character and most importantly I had to confront fear, because I was consumed with fear, about my past, but especially about my future. At this point I knew I had no choice but to carry on, and that's what scared me because I truly believed I would not be

STUDENT STORIES

able to fix the damage I did to myself and everyone else.

Arriving in Céim Eile was a huge adjustment for me, there was a structure and routine to the week which involved recovery and personal growth, 2 weeks in and I left, sitting in an I.T class was my breaking point. I had been struggling since I got there and sitting in front of a computer that I genuinely didn't know how to turn on, made me feel stupid and angry. I left Céim Eile and very nearly relapsed. I got back to Céim Eile after walking around for a couple of hours feeling hopeless. I then started a level 4 personal interpersonal skills I went for a few weeks and once again I felt stupid because I couldn't use the computers and got really stressed and frustrated every time I tried.

I then had a chat with Marilyn in the mall about doing a level 6 Certificate in Learning to Learn with SETU. I felt I didn't want to, I felt I just wanted to get some work and earn some money and stay clean and sober. The idea of further education was frustrating me, I really believed it wasn't for me. If I'm being honest, I said I would do it because I was on the progression scheme, and I had a huge amount of gratitude for Céim Eile and the progression programme in the mall, which meant I did want to make an effort to engage with what was being offered. On my first day of Learning to Learn, after 1 hour, I walked out! I was in a group, and I felt very self-conscious and had no confidence. I left the class, and I told Marilyn it wasn't for me; education was something I never felt I could do and I don't have any interest. Marilyn offered me understanding and patience and stayed positive and focused on other options, this made me feel comfortable, as I felt

understood. She asked if I would have a chat with Sarah Bates from SETU who was doing the course with us. Sarah explained to me that she could work around any issues that made me feel uncomfortable and find solutions, whether it was IT skills, anxiety or feeling uncomfortable in group discussions. I was able to go back into the class, because I felt there was no pressure or expectations and my stress and anxiety settled. We had a lot of discussion in class around how to discuss issues, and I was surprised that I engaged.

Sarah went out of her way to give me a lot of feedback on where my strengths and told me I had huge ability and potential, I really feel without Sarah I wouldn't have had the confidence to carry on, looking back at it now, I can see how truly amazing Sarah is as a tutor, she done for me what Mrs. Comerford had done for me in 4th class, she engaged with me in a really kind manner and was able to identify my strengths and encourage me to believe in them. Because of this I stopped seeing it as a classroom and a teacher and started to feel like it was a safe space where I could take a chance on discovering what I might be capable of and having Sarah there to back me and offer every support possible meant I had huge gratitude and respect for Sarah, which meant I wanted to believe what she was telling me.

Looking back on my experience now I can see Sarah done the same thing Mrs Comerford did for me in 4th class which was to highlight my strengths and be patient and understanding, which in turn made me feel like I wanted to listen to what she had to say, and to speak to me on a level that was genuine and really made me believe in my ability, I started to engage

and because of the positive feedback I was able to open my mind up to the idea that I could do this and I started to try and being able to email Sarah and get some reassurance and different stages it allowed me to progress. I did start to use the computer and type, and I finished my assignment for Learning to Learn, and I received really good marks. This experience changed my whole perception of education and how I engage with it, it was the right place, with the right people and the right place was the mall, Waterford, SETU and the right people were the staff at the mall, Marilyn, and Sarah believing in me until I was able to believe in myself.

I am currently doing a level 5 social studies and I'm much more comfortable in groups, I'm not anxious about expressing my opinion on an issue or engaging in a group discussion, my IT skills have definitely improved and even though I still get a pain in my head at having to source references(joke), I now know how to do it and why it's important. I'm able to understand how it all works now, so it's not so scary anymore. I genuinely believe I can keep progressing in education!

I'm back with SETU doing another level 6, Group Work and Facilitation Skills. In the future I would like to work with people in addiction in a treatment centre and I have plans to get my degree in social care to make this possible. I have a huge, learned experience in this area and I have a passion

to give back and help people and believe in them just like people have helped and believed in me. When I look back at my past and what happened in my life and the person I was, there's a lot there that I feel guilt and shame for, I can't change any of it, but I can use my lived experience to change who I am in the future and the effect it can have on people who also want to change, I was up until very recently completely ignorant of the fact that education would facilitate that growth and change in a way it could never have imagined.

My mindset is now open to a whole new world. I see education as an opportunity for endless growth and the chance of a career, and an opportunity I feel truly blessed to have in my life. I have so much gratitude to all the people involved in making this possible for me. My family, my mother and sister and girlfriend are so proud of me for the change I've made in my life, and for them to see me get back into education is beyond their wildest dreams. My daughter who is 20 years of age and for a very long time, didn't have the father she deserved, is also back in my life and so happy and proud that I have the goals and ambitions to pursue a career and to be back in education to make that happen.

I want to say thank you for this opportunity.

**HAROLD'S
STORY****PORTLAOISE
PRISON**

Since the moment I was nominated by Laois and Offaly ETB (LOETB) and South East Technological University's (SETU) lifelong learning department to be supported by their

joint pilot initiative, "A Footbridge to the Pathway" and be fully engaged in their "Community Leadership and Development" programme. IT MASSIVELY CHANGED MY LIFE! It's like having a reliable star that exists as a guide to be able to alter my initial heading/course and be re-routed to a better journey. I wish for this support to be accessible for more people. I would like to mention that this programme has been nothing short of transformative. I did not just learn facts with each face-to-face discussion. It did not just enhance my skills in delivering presentations, but it also helped me rediscover myself. Each distinction, achievement or moment of growth has allowed me to regain my self-worth and confidence; reinforcing the value of education and re-igniting my passion to contribute to society. But more than accolades, it's the connection that matters.

Every update I share at present brings pride and joy to my family and friends. The regular 6-minute phone call would now be more than the usual Hi, hello, how are you, and what's happening over there? Our conversations are now filled with scholarly articles and global community issues and solutions. Because of my experience with this programme, I am happy to share with you that I was also able to influence my siblings and colleagues to pursue their tertiary degrees too! . In prison, it helped me build my image and identity of someone that can be trusted, earning the respect of not only the population but also the officers and educators who look after our custody with dignity. Resulting for others in here to follow me in the same pathway. The programme enabled me to build friendships across diverse backgrounds, support others in overcoming bad habits, and help foster a culture of learning and personal responsibility. It redefined my limitations, by seeing myself not only as a prisoner, but also a person with infinite potential who can still be a part of the world. Significantly, The Footbridge to the Pathway programme gave me more than education.

It gave me hope!



3 PROJECT BACKGROUND



SETU, through its Faculty of Education and Lifelong Learning, had established a strong foundation of trust and shared purpose with Tiglin since 2016. Both organisations recognised the transformative impact of education on recovery and reintegration and sought to expand this model to reach

more learners in structured and sustainable ways. From 2016 to 2021, SETU (formerly Institute of Technology Carlow) successfully funded 60 credit level 6 programmes in Marketing with Social Media Skills and Purchasing strategy, Quality Management and Lean Six Sigma (Figure 1).

Figure 1: SETU level 6 including a 60 Credit programmes delivered to Tiglin students

LEVEL 6 PROGRAMMES DELIVERED TO TIGLIN STUDENTS	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2020-2021	2021-2022
Certificate in Marketing with Social Media Skills	21				5	
Certificate in Purchasing Strategy, Quality Management and Lean Six Sigma		17	10	10	33	0
Certificate in Preparation for Working Life						23

In 2022, SETU prepared a comprehensive case study for the Higher Education Authority (HEA), showcasing the outcomes of the pilot programmes and the significant impact on participants' personal and professional development. As a result, SETU was awarded €833,333 in Systems Performance funding to develop and expand on the pilot with Tiglin and other organisations.

The project officially commenced in January 2023, with an implementation period of three years to 31st of December 2025. The overarching aim was to create inclusive, accessible,

and empowering educational pathways for individuals in recovery, enabling them to gain new qualifications, build confidence, and access further study or employment opportunities.

The project was designed around five strategic pillars as detailed above and below:

1. Delivery of Tailored Programmes – creating bespoke educational opportunities to meet the needs of Tiglin service users and similar communities.
2. Onsite Learning and Enhanced Technology – equipping Tiglin

3 HOW THE PROJECT CAME ABOUT

centres with the tools and infrastructure to host higher education courses onsite.

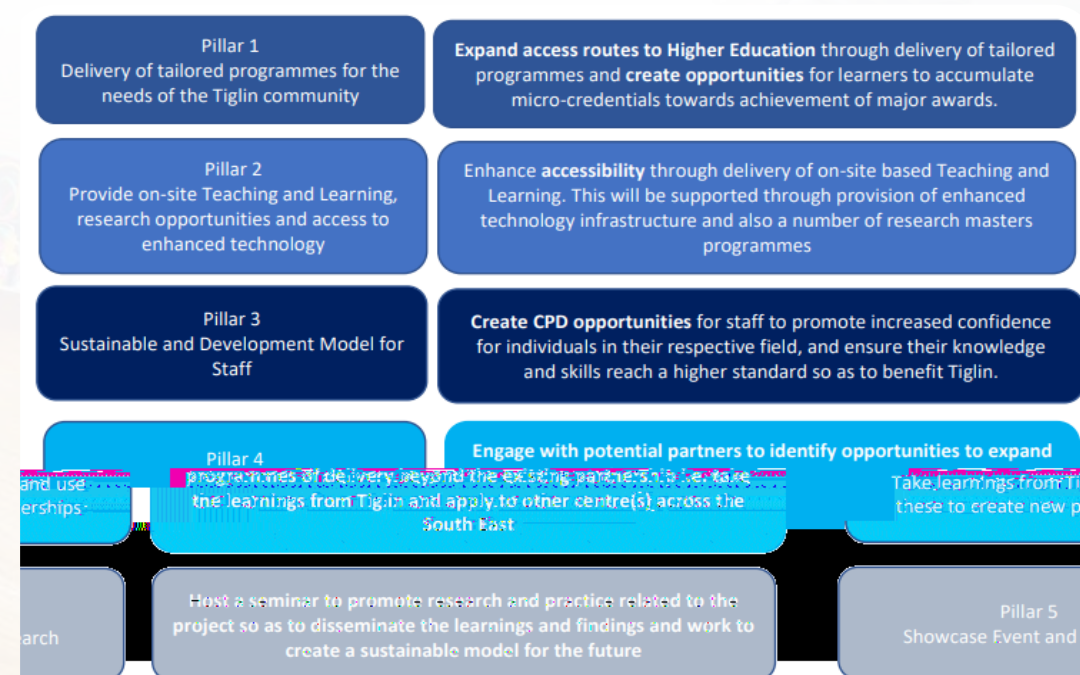
3. Staff Professional Development – supporting Tiglin staff through continuing professional development (CPD) and accredited programmes.
4. Developing Partnerships – extending collaboration to other organisations and centres across the South East.
5. Showcasing Impact and Research – sharing findings, experiences, and

outcomes through public dissemination and formal reporting.

Each pillar was designed to build sustainability into the model, ensuring that the initiative could continue to support learners and practitioners beyond the project's funding period.

4 PROJECT PILLARS: PURPOSE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Figure 2: Project Pillars



PILLAR 1: TAILORED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES FOR THE TIGLIN COMMUNITY

Purpose

To design and deliver bespoke higher education courses that expand access and opportunity for Tiglin residents, supporting recovery, skills development, and social reintegration.

Achievements

- 10 Level 6 Certificates delivered in Year 1 to 92 service users
- 10 Certificates in Year 2 to 112 service users
- 9 Certificates in Year 3 to 111 residents.

315 total participants from Tiglin completed the following 29 SETU programmes between January 2023 and December 2025:

- Certificate in Foundations of Adult Learning (times delivered = 6)
- Certificate in Communication (times delivered = 6)
- Certificate in Health and Wellbeing in Social Care Practice (nr of times delivered = 6)
- Certificate in Community Development (times delivered = 6)

4 PROJECT PILLARS: PURPOSE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- Certificate in Critical and Ethical Thinking in a Changing World (times delivered = 3)
- Certificate in Social Analysis (times delivered = 1)
- Certificate in Introduction to Psychology (times delivered = 1)

In addition to the Tiglin residents, courses from the SETU suite of programmes were also offered to members of the Ukrainian community residing at Coolnagreina in Greystones.

In year 1, three participants successfully completed Certificates in areas such as:

- Digital Marketing
- Entrepreneurship
- Python Programming.

Furthermore, 3 volunteers within the Tiglin Community enrolled in 3 Certificates including:

- Sustainable Supply Chains
- Energy Sustainability
- Python Programming.

6 other residents and staff from the Tiglin centre in Jigginstown, participated in Certificates in

- Organisational Psychology and Behaviour
- Introduction to Psychology

- Meeting the Challenge of Challenging Behaviour
- Food Health & Nutrition.

Further Information

At the start of the project, management at Tiglin and SETU met to discuss the delivery of a suite of tailored programmes for service users of the three residential centres in Tiglin. The chosen courses were as follows:

- Certificate in Foundations of Adult Learning
- Certificate in Communication
- Certificate in Introduction to Community Development
- Certificate in Health & Well Being in Social Care Practice
- Certificate in Introduction to Psychology
- Certificate in Critical & Ethical Thinking in a Changing World
- Certificate in Working with Individuals, Groups & Volunteers
- Certificate in Social Analysis.

Over the three years of the project 315 students from Tiglin completed 29 Certificates which were delivered onsite at the Men's Centre in Ashford, the Women's Centre in Brittas Bay, and the Aftercare Programme at Coolnagreina in Greystones.

Figure 3: Programme completion 2023 - 2025	
PROGRAMME	NO OF RESIDENTS COMPLETED
2023	
Certificate in Foundations of Adult Learning (Men's)	10
Certificate in Foundations of Adult Learning (Women's)	5
Certificate in Communication (Men's)	16
Certificate in Communication (Women's)	8

PROGRAMME	NO OF RESIDENTS COMPLETED
2023 (continued)	
Certificate in Introduction to Community Development	9
Certificate in Health & Well Being In Social Care Practice (Men's)	12
Certificate in Health & Well Being In Social Care Practice (Women's)	11
Certificate in Introduction to Psychology	5
Certificate in Critical & Ethical Thinking in a Changing World	8
Certificate in Working with Individuals, Groups & Volunteers	8
	92
2024	
Certificate in Foundations of Adult Learning (Men's)	14
Certificate in Foundations of Adult Learning (Women's)	7
Certificate in Communication (Men's)	15
Certificate in Communication (Women's)	7
Certificate in Health & Well Being in Social Care Practice (Men's)	14
Certificate in Health & Well Being in Social Care Practice (Women's)	12
Certificate in Introduction to Community Development	11
Certificate in Critical & Ethical Thinking	14
Certificate in Working with Groups, Individuals & Volunteers	8
Certificate in Introduction to Community Development	10
	112
2025	
Certificate in Foundations of Adult Learning (Men's)	11
Certificate in Foundations of Adult Learning (Women's)	5
Certificate in Communication (Men's)	20
Certificate in Communication (Women's)	7
Certificate in Critical & Ethical Thinking in a Changing World (Aftercare)	14
Certificate in Social Analysis	11
Certificate in Health & Well Being in Social Care Practice (Men's)	23
Certificate in Health & Well Being in Social Care Practice (Women's)	10
Certificate in Working with Individuals, Groups & Volunteers	10
	111
Total Numbers Residents Completed since 2023	315

4 PROJECT PILLARS: PURPOSE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Figure 4: Frequency of delivery of programmes

PROGRAMMES DELIVERED FROM JANUARY 2023 TO DECEMBER 2025	NO OF TIMES DELIVERED	LOCATION
Certificate in Foundations of Adult Learning	6	Ashford & Brittas Bay
Certificate in Communications	6	Ashford & Brittas Bay
Certificate in Health & Well Being in Social Care Practice	6	Ashford & Brittas Bay
Certificate in Introduction to Community Development	3	Greystones
Certificate in Introduction to Psychology	1	Greystones
Certificate in Working with Individuals, Groups & Volunteers	3	Greystones
Certificate in Critical & Ethical Thinking in a Changing World	3	Greystones
Certificate in Social Analysis	1	Greystones
Number of times programmes delivered over a 3-year period	29	

In year 1 from January 2023 to December 2023, 92 residents completed 10 Certificates at Level 6. Along with the residents in the three centres 6 certificates were offered to the Jigginstown Aftercare in Naas, Co Kildare, and to the Ukrainian community residing at Coolnagreina in Greystones. In year 2, 112 completed 10 Certificates at Level 6 and in year 3, there were 111 registered, completing 9 programmes.

Students from Tiglin were able to study in a familiar, safe, and secure learning environment on their own premises. This setting supported the development of strong, professional relationships with their lecturers, which had a positive impact on their overall learning experience.

A key aspect of programme delivery involved securing qualified lecturers who

could teach onsite at multiple locations across Ireland, including Wicklow, Waterford, and Portlaoise. SETU was uniquely positioned to meet this need, providing experienced lecturing staff whose contributions were consistently praised by project partners. All lecturers involved brought the necessary skills and sensitivity to effectively engage learners who may have had negative prior educational experiences, and many of whom were early school leavers.

Impact

These accessible, no-cost programmes—funded entirely through HEA support—removed previous barriers to participation and allowed learners to earn micro-credentials contributing toward major awards.

“It’s not too often in our careers that we are given the opportunity to be part of something as meaningful and transformative as this collaboration with South East Technological University.

Together Tiglin and SETU created opportunities through education for individuals facing immense challenges such as homelessness, addiction, and other life-controlling problems. Individuals who arrived with little or no belief in themselves completed certificate courses, rebuilt their self-esteem, secured employment and in some cases went on to degree level studies.”

– Gary O’Heaire, Chief Operating Officer, Tiglin

“As an SETU lecturer, my Tiglin teaching experience is not only about sharing knowledge, helping to develop skills and competencies but also about inspiring confidence and a love for learning. It is a shared journey that has enriched my own life in so many ways, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to be able to contribute to making a positive impact on the students’ lives. I am a better person now”

– Associate Lecturer, Carmel M O’Neill (Chartered Work & Organisational Psychologist)

PILLAR 2: ONSITE TEACHING, LEARNING AND ENHANCED TECHNOLOGY

Purpose

To strengthen infrastructure and access to digital learning across Tiglin’s sites, enabling blended and onsite learning delivery.

Achievements

- Comprehensive technology audits across Tiglin facilities
- Installation of four 75” display screens, video conferencing systems, and display stands in Ashford, Brittas Bay, Greystones, and Naas
- Distribution of 40 laptops from SETU’s loan scheme and 13 donated laptops.

Impact

The introduction of high-quality digital equipment transformed access to learning resources and made real-time teaching possible across multiple centres.

“The equipment provided and installed has greatly improved our ability to provide quality services to all our students and staff. It allows everyone to have access to state-of-the-art technology.”

– Tiglin Management

4 PROJECT PILLARS: PURPOSE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

PILLAR 3: SUSTAINABLE STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND CPD

Purpose

To empower Tiglin staff through Continuing Professional Development (CPD), enhancing skills, confidence, and knowledge to better support residents.

Achievements

- Year 1 - 25 staff completed three accredited Certificates
- Mental Health: Building Resilience and Promoting Positive Change
- Counselling & Motivational Interviewing
- The Nature and Context of Addiction
- Year 2 - 15 staff completed two Certificates
- Meeting the Challenge of Challenging Behaviour
- Advocacy
- Year 3 - 5 staff completed one Certificate
- Group Work & Facilitation Skills.

Staff also pursued individual higher awards up to Level 8, including Higher Diploma in

Digital Marketing with Analytics, Effective Leadership & Change Management, and Higher Certificate in Business.

Impact

Survey feedback found 100% of participants applied their learning directly in their professional roles, reporting improved communication, confidence, and reflective practice.

Research Pathways

Two staff members progressed to master's by Research under SETU supervision, strengthening the academic-practice link in addiction and recovery education. In addition, two PhD students have commenced work related to the project and both are currently ongoing.

"Our mission is to reach out to communities, understand their challenges, and provide educational solutions that make a tangible difference."

– Dr Helen Murphy, Head of Faculty of Education & Lifelong Learning, SETU

in July 2024 which outlined Stage 1 of the programme "A footbridge to the pathway" with Portlaoise Prison on behalf of SETU Lifelong Learning.

1. This is a first in Ireland for higher education major award pathways in a prison context
2. Seven certificates' programmes delivered to 24 prisoners
3. Of the 24, four participants completed all six offered programmes which will result in these students receiving a 60 credit Minor Award Level 6, Certificate in Leadership and Community Development.

Aiséirí (Waterford) is a not-for-profit organisation with treatment centres in Waterford, Wexford and Tipperary. They provide community and residential treatment services to help adults and young people and their families who are dealing with alcohol, drug and gambling addiction.

- Pilot of Certificate in Learning to Learn at Third Level (7 completions in 2024)
- Second and third rollouts of Certificate in Learning to Learn and Certificate in Advocacy in 2025 (8 and 10 completions respectively)
- Growing student confidence and progression to further courses.
- Students travelled onsite to SETU Waterford campus for Certificate in Advocacy.

"For the past 2 years, we at the Aiséirí Progression Programme have collaborated with South East Technical University. This collaboration has involved modules delivered to both our participants and staff. This collaboration, for us, has been truly life changing for so many of our clients. While our clients have experience within the FE sector through our programme, the prospect of learning in third level institutes can be overwhelming for some. This collaboration has well and truly dispelled the myth that 3rd level education is only open to the chosen few. We have seen client's confidence grow both in themselves and in their potential as students at third level. Working with SETU has been a real pleasure, and each of their tutors brought their own unique teaching style and skillset to make the groups experience a memorable one. We are very grateful to Rosie, Elaina and the whole team for making this happen!"

— Michael Fortune, Operations Manager, Aiséirí Progression Programme

Tinteán – Tinteán Housing in Waterford provide services such as housing provision, housing advice and information, help people move out of homelessness, care and case management services including issues arising from homelessness, legal matters, with access to health and emotional support.

PILLAR 4: DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

Purpose

To expand the SETU model of inclusive, community-based higher education to new organisations and contexts.

Achievements

- Partnerships established with Portlaoise Prison, Aiséirí, Treo Port Lairge, and Tinteán Housing
- 14 certificates delivered (Levels 6–8) to 117 learners across new sites.

Impact

Portlaoise Prison – Maximum security facility based in Portlaoise Co Laois for males of 17 years upwards. A pilot collaboration between SETU, LOETB, Portlaoise Prison and the Irish Prison Service to connect people in custody to higher education in Ireland. SETU's Higher Education Strategic Project Lead has acted as the primary liaison between the prison and the project team. Her input on delivery to this cohort comprises an interim report

4 PROJECT PILLARS: PURPOSE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Treo – Treo Port Lairge CLG is a community-based organisation that works with individuals ages 16 and upwards in Waterford. Their main aim is to facilitate positive lifestyle choices by participants, reduce criminal activity and encourage progression to further education, training and or employment. The organisation has been engaging with the community since 2000.

Treo & Tinteán – (combined student delivery)

- Delivered Certificate in Learning to Learn at Third Level (Level 6) (2 successful completions).

Treo & Aiséirí – (combined staff delivery)

- Staff CPD courses in Certificate Challenging Behaviour and Health & Wellbeing in Social Care Practice (Level 8) completed by 12 and 7 staff respectively.

“Both courses gave staff practical tools and a better understanding of how to respond calmly and effectively in difficult situations... it has provided motivation to pursue further education.”

— Danny Murphy, CEO, Treo Port Lairge CLG

PILLAR 5: RESEARCH, DISSEMINATION AND SHOWCASE

Purpose

- To highlight the impact of the collaboration through research, celebration, and policy influence.

Achievements

- Creation of project video. Link to Video: <https://youtu.be/bX42UrKPa7w>
- Dissemination through video launch at the Whale Theatre, Greystones in January 2024 attended by Tiglin, SETU and ministerial dignitaries
- *Link to press release SETU | Empowering Lives: SETU and Tiglin celebrate the transformative - from SETU website*
- Integration of findings into SETU-HEA reporting and ongoing research dissemination
- Education Awards – Ireland’s most prestigious event celebrating excellence in education, recognising achievement and innovation, and impact across the sector. The SETU-Tiglin project

was shortlisted in 2024 and 2025 in the category “Best Education Outreach Award”. This was an excellent opportunity to showcase the project and enhance our visibility within the education community.





5 RESEARCH

i. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research was to explore the impact of the project *Using the power of transformative education through inclusive education, leadership and enterprise to end the cycle of addiction*. The primary research question was:

Did completion of higher education programmes impact project participants?

Using quantitative research, project participants (research subjects) were invited to provide insights on their experience of engaging in higher

education programmes. Ethical approval for this study was secured from the SETU Ethics Committee in accordance with the SETU Open Research Policy (SETU, 2025). and by anonymised surveys sent out to all participants from Tiglin, and Aiséirí. The study involves three cohorts of research participants who satisfied eligibility criteria:

COHORTS	RESPONDENTS
Tiglin service users	59
Tiglin Staff	13
Aiséirí service users	7

ii. LITERATURE REVIEW

A recent report by the World Health Organisation (WHO), based on 2019 data, indicates that approximately 400 million people live with drug and alcohol addiction globally (WHO, 2024). This already alarming number is further compounded by the number of deaths per year attributable to addiction, globally estimated at 3 million, of which 2.4 million are men (WHO, 2024). It is no surprise then, that the United Nations (UN) has aligned recovery from addiction with many of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN in 2015 for achievement by 2030 (WHO, 2024).

Along with other interconnected objectives, SGD goal 3.5 aims to “strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol”. However, the recent *Global status report on alcohol and health and treatment of substance use disorders* (WHO, 2024) indicates that the global target will not be met by 2030. Recovery from addiction is complex (Witkiewitz and Marlatt, 2007) and dynamic (Goshorn, Gutiérrez and Dorais, 2023) and requires more than the cessation of drug or alcohol consumption (McLellan, 2018).

5 RESEARCH

Various treatment strategies have emerged over the years from traditional pharmacological approaches using medical methods, to therapeutic strategies for healing, such as spiritual and psychosocial (Angres and Bettinardi-Angres, 2008). However, challenges to the prospect of long-term recovery in the first year of treatment mean that risk of relapse, defined by Witkiewitz and Marlatt (2007) as “the return to previous levels of symptomatic behaviour”, remains high (Cloud and Granfield, 1999). Although addiction crosses all social boundaries (Cloud and Granfield, 2008), the evidence demonstrates that mortality and morbidity from alcohol consumption is highest in lower socio-economic groups (Grinspoon, 2021) and equally so with drug addiction outcomes (Altekruse et al., 2020; WHO, 2024). This therefore constitutes a social justice problem.

Considering these poor outcomes, factors to assist *sustained* recovery have been researched extensively from various perspectives as mentioned; medical, psychological, spiritual; with various studies demonstrating a link between lower academic achievement and increased risk of relapse (Greenfield et al., 2003; Blum et al., 2014; Crutchfield and Güss, 2018). In keeping with this, research on individuals in recovery (n=195) carried out by Crutchfield and Güss, (2018), concluded that those who achieved higher levels of education following recovery, remained in recovery for twice as long as those who did not, findings which the authors refer to as a “neglected component of research in recovery from addiction”.

US colleges have paved the way through Collegiate Recovery Programs (CRPs) for students recovering from addiction since the 1980s (Harris et al., 2014). Provision of CRPs for individuals “in college and in recovery” (Laudet et al., 2016) have grown exponentially since their inception (Watts, Chowdhury, and Holloway, 2018) offering students on-campus recovery support during their time in college (Harris et al., 2014). According to White and Cloud (2008) this reflects the “paradigmatic shift” in recent years towards a recovery model and away from the pathological approaches of the past as mentioned above.

However, despite their widespread presence in US and European colleges today, researchers maintain that CRP efficacy is under-explored (Laudet et al., 2016; Hennessy et al., 2022). While there is evidence that support provided through CRPs is beneficial to recovering students (Laudet et al., 2014), they rely on the individual attaining access to college in the first place! This is an issue for individuals who may not have the resources, internal and external, to access higher education. To date, there appears to be no other programme, either Irish or globally, which embeds higher education participation as a deliberate intervention as part of the recovery program, within the recovery setting, and its potential impact and prospect of sustained recovery.

It is hoped that this project and associated research will inform future Irish national drugs strategy and higher education strategy to identify areas where intersectional policy could support a recovery focus for individuals who want to recover.

iii. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Survey Results – Tiglin students

In 2025 a total of 59 respondents engaged with this research.

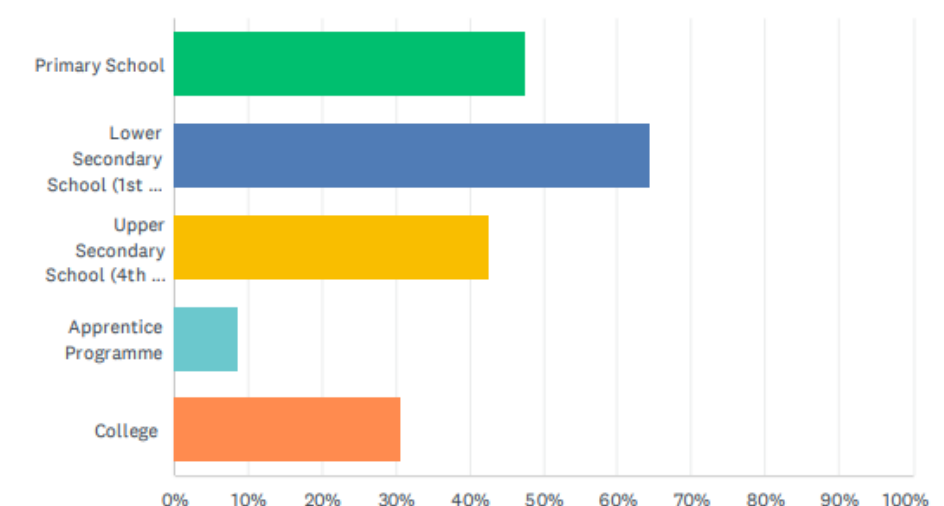
Figure 5: Gender breakdown of Tiglin students surveyed

FEMALE	MALE
20	38
	

Of the 59 respondents, 20 identified as female and 38 as male (Figure 5).

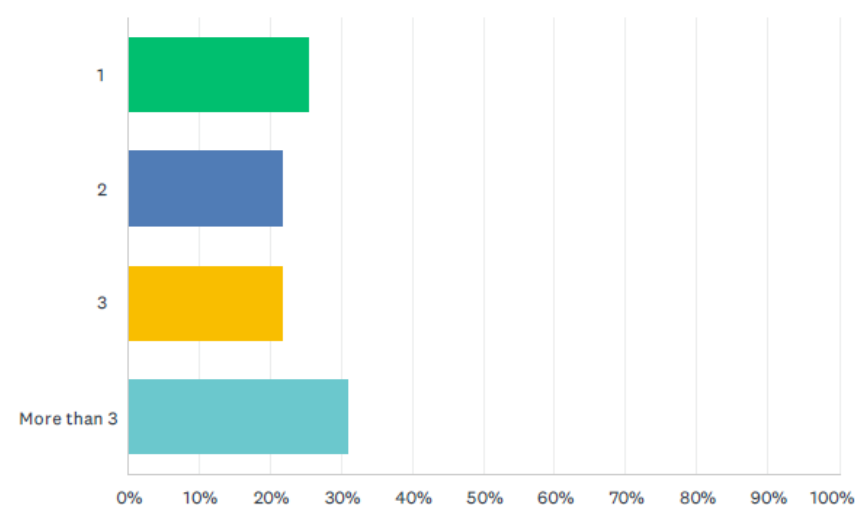
Most respondents (64%) had completed lower secondary education prior to entering Tiglin, Figure 6, while less than half (42%) progressed to upper secondary. Around one third (30%) had completed some form of college or third level education, indicating that higher education was less common among participants. Notably, only a small percentage (8%) had engaged in apprenticeship training. These findings suggest that educational completion among the residents, is generally below third level, with significant drop-off occurring after junior cycle.

Figure 6: Prior education attainment of Tiglin students



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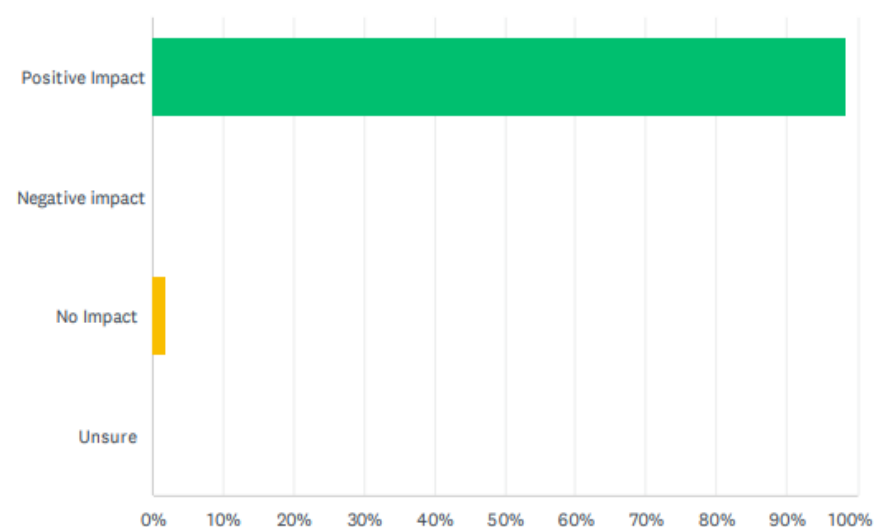
Figure 7: Number of programmes completed by students



Over the past year, 55 respondents shared their perspectives regarding participation in SETU courses, revealing a strong level of engagement (Figure 7). The largest group, nearly one-third (32%) of participants completed more than three courses. Additionally, around 25% completed one

course, while roughly 21% each completed either two or three courses. Overall, the data shows that many participants actively engaged with the courses and took advantage of the opportunities provided to enhance their professional skills.

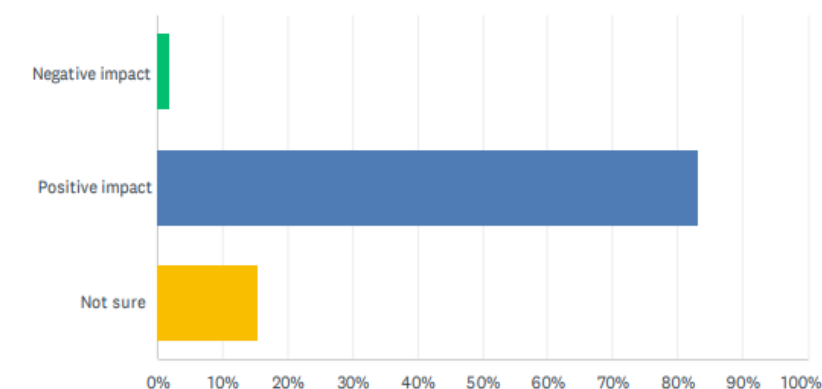
Figure 8: Impact on self-confidence of course participants



Nearly all respondents (98%) reported that completing a higher education course had a positive impact on their self-confidence and belief in their abilities (Figure 8). This indicates that even limited participation in higher education can have a significant and empowering effect.

As no respondent reported a negative impact, it would indicate that education has played a major part in rebuilding their self-esteem and self-belief.

Figure 9: Impact on well-being of course participants



Of the 59 respondents, 49 (83%) stated that completing a higher education course had a positive impact on their overall well-being, including stress levels and sense of fulfilment, (Figure 9). One (2%) stated

it had a negative effect and 9 (15%) stated that they didn't have an opinion or weren't sure. This indicates that the programmes have been effective for most of the participants.

Figure 10: Impact on skills development

	SKILL NOT DEVELOPED AT ALL	SKILL DEVELOPED A SMALL BIT	SKILL DEVELOPED A GOOD BIT	SKILL DEVELOPED SIGNIFICANTLY	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Written communication skills (e.g. essay writing)	1.72% 1	22.41% 13	51.72% 30	24.14% 14	58
Listening skills	1.79% 1	28.57% 16	39.29% 22	32.14% 18	56
Verbal Communication skills (e.g. presentations; one-to-one or team discussions)	0.00% 0	18.97% 11	46.55% 27	36.21% 21	58
Non-verbal Communications (e.g. self-confidence; how you present your ideas and thoughts)	0.00% 0	27.12% 16	49.15% 29	23.73% 14	59
Organisational skills (e.g. time management; prioritisation of tasks; goal setting)	3.45% 2	24.14% 14	41.38% 24	32.76% 19	58
Collaboration skills (e.g. team work)	1.72% 1	24.14% 14	44.83% 26	29.31% 17	58
Engagement Techniques (e.g. ability to give and receive feedback; working with others)	1.72% 1	18.97% 11	53.45% 31	25.86% 15	58
Critical thinking skills (ability to analyse; problem solve; think logically)	0.00% 0	20.34% 12	47.46% 28	32.20% 19	59
Research skills (ability to find good sources of information and use them or analyse them)	0.00% 0	20.69% 12	53.45% 31	27.59% 16	58
Ethical decision making skills	5.17% 3	22.41% 13	46.55% 27	27.59% 16	58

Figure 10 shows how participants rated their development across various key skills after engaging with the programme. Between 56–59 responded depending on each skill which was rated on a scale from “Skill not developed at all” to “Skill developed significantly”.

The survey results indicate strong overall skill development among participants across all assessed areas, with over 70% reporting that their abilities improved “a good bit” or “significantly.” The greatest progress was seen in verbal communication, research, critical thinking, and engagement techniques, where more than three-quarters of respondents noted substantial growth. Written communication, ethical decision-making, organisational,

and collaboration skills also showed notable improvement, with 70–75% of participants experiencing meaningful development. Overall, the findings highlight consistent improvement in key skill areas, particularly in analytical, communication, and research-related areas. These outcomes suggest that the programmes are effectively supporting participants’ professional and personal growth, equipping them with skills that are both practical and transferable.

Figure 11: Future Skills Development

	TOP CHOICE	SECOND CHOICE	I WOULD ALSO BE INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING THIS SKILL FURTHER	I AM NOT INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING THIS SKILL FURTHER	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Writing Skills	29.41% 15	15.69% 8	41.18% 21	23.53% 12	51
Verbal Communication Skills	20.41% 10	10.20% 5	61.22% 30	18.37% 9	49
Research Skills	19.57% 9	21.74% 10	50.00% 23	15.22% 7	46
Team Work	12.24% 6	28.57% 14	38.78% 19	26.53% 13	49
IT Skills	19.23% 10	28.85% 15	34.62% 18	25.00% 13	52
Mental Health Resilience	46.30% 25	16.67% 9	31.48% 17	16.67% 9	54
Preparation for working life, e.g. Careers talks	43.64% 24	9.09% 5	36.36% 20	21.82% 12	55
None of the above	15.00% 3	15.00% 3	40.00% 8	40.00% 8	20

When asked what areas they would most like to develop in the future, Figure 11, most respondents demonstrated high motivation to develop a range of personal and professional skills. The top priorities indicated were *mental health resilience and preparation for working life* (e.g., Careers Talks). These had the highest top choice selections, indicating strong immediate interest and recognition of their importance. There is also a notable interest in improving verbal communication and research skills, with many respondents indicating that they would be interested in developing these further. *Writing skills, teamwork, and IT skills* received moderate response rates, suggesting they may already be areas of some confidence for

respondents. Only a small group selected ‘*None of the Above*’, implying that the listed skills are generally of interest to most participants.

When asked to expand on how completing SETU courses has impacted them, positively or negatively, in areas such as research skills and problem-solving (Figure 9), 21 respondents shared a range of reflections. Overall, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with participants highlighting gains in confidence, communication, teamwork, and academic skills. Several respondents noted that completing SETU courses gave them the confidence to move forward in their careers and encouraged them to continue their

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educational journey. Others emphasised the practical skills they developed, such as improved writing, typing, and assignment completion abilities, which helped them feel more prepared for further study. Many also reported personal growth, stating that the courses enhanced their communication skills, computer literacy, and ability to work effectively as part of a team. A recurring theme was the boost in self-belief, with one participant expressing that the experience helped them to realise that “it’s possible to keep going and make something” of themselves. Overall, the responses suggest that SETU courses have had a significant positive impact on learners’ confidence, skills, and motivation to pursue further education and career development.

In response to the question, *if at all, how do you think you might use what you have learned on your SETU courses in your personal or professional life*, 40 responded. A strong theme throughout the comments is personal growth and self-improvement, particularly in areas such as communication, confidence, and emotional awareness. Many respondents described using the skills and insights gained “daily” suggesting that the courses have had a sustained and practical influence on their behaviour and mindset. Several participants specifically mentioned wellness and communication components of their courses as being transformative. One respondent said “*I learnt a huge amount personally in the wellness course and used some of the info daily*”, Another describing how a class presentation allowed them to reconnect with family and seek understanding, which is a clear example of the wider personal

impact of learning on the participants. The data suggests that the programme has succeeded in supporting both personal recovery and professional reintegration, confirming its holistic impact on learners’ lives.

When asked if they would undertake more course in the future out of 57 respondents, the majority (79%, 45 people), answered *yes*. A small proportion 9% (7 people) answered that they would not like to undertake courses, and 12% (7 people) were undecided. Overall, this is a positive outcome, suggesting that the likelihood of participants pursuing another course or further study is significantly higher than those who would not.

Finally, in response to an open-ended question inviting comments about their experience of completing a course with SETU, the majority of respondents shared overwhelmingly positive feedback, highlighting the personal value and impact of their participation. Many highlighted feelings of gratitude for the opportunity to engage in higher education and described the courses as personally transformative, helping them to grow with confidence and develop skills in literacy and communication. Several said that higher education had inspired new motivation and future goals, with many feeling more capable and optimistic about continuing their educational journey.

Survey Results – Aiséirí students

In 2025 a survey was sent to students at Aiséirí; 7 responded and of that 3 identified as female and 4 identified as male.

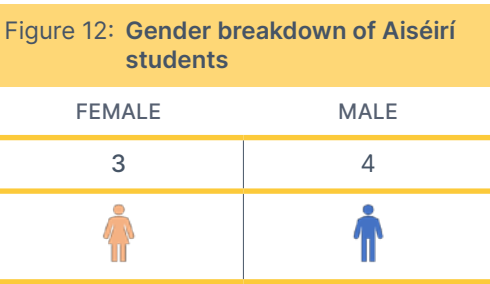
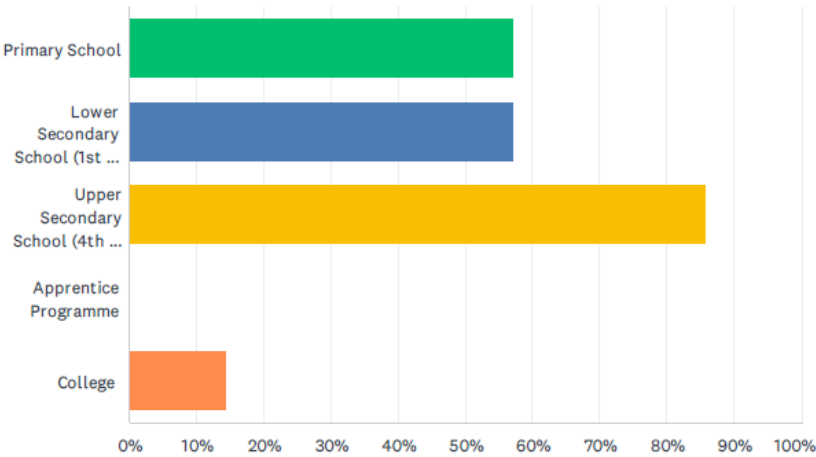


Figure 13: Prior educational attainment of Aiséirí students

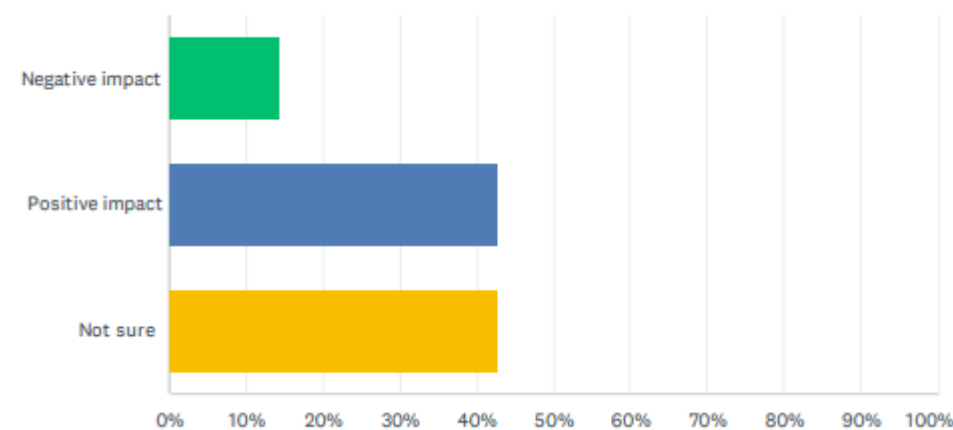


Most respondents (86%) are associated with Upper Secondary School, making it the most common education stage among participants (Figure 13)

Only one respondent identified with college, and none with an Apprentice

Programme. The data indicates that most participants are concentrated at the upper secondary education level, with very limited engagement beyond secondary school.

Figure 14: Impact of well-being of course participants



The results suggest that participation in higher education courses is generally viewed positively, with nearly half of respondents identifying a positive effect on their well-being (Figure 14). However, an equal proportion expressed uncertainty, indicating that some participants may not yet have seen clear personal benefits or may have mixed experiences. Only a small

minority (14%) reported a negative impact, suggesting that while higher education engagement can be demanding, it is largely associated with positive or neutral outcomes. Overall, these findings imply that continuing education may support well-being for many participants, though additional support could help ensure that all learners experience positive outcomes.

Figure 15: Impact on skills development

	SKILL NOT DEVELOPED AT ALL	SKILL DEVELOPED A SMALL BIT	SKILL DEVELOPED A GOOD BIT	SKILL DEVELOPED SIGNIFICANTLY	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Written communication skills (e.g. essay writing)	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	28.57% 2	42.86% 3	7
Listening skills	0.00% 0	57.14% 4	14.29% 1	28.57% 2	7
Verbal Communication skills (e.g. presentations; one-to-one or team discussions)	0.00% 0	14.29% 1	57.14% 4	28.57% 2	7
Non-verbal Communications (e.g. self-confidence; how you present your ideas and thoughts)	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	42.86% 3	28.57% 2	7
Organisational skills (e.g. time management; prioritisation of tasks; goal setting)	0.00% 0	42.86% 3	28.57% 2	28.57% 2	7
Collaboration skills (e.g. team work)	0.00% 0	14.29% 1	57.14% 4	28.57% 2	7
Engagement Techniques (e.g. ability to give and receive feedback; working with others)	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	14.29% 1	57.14% 4	7
Critical thinking skills (ability to analyse; problem solve; think logically)	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	28.57% 2	42.86% 3	7
Research skills (ability to find good sources of information and use them or analyse them)	14.29% 1	14.29% 1	28.57% 2	42.86% 3	7
Ethical decision making skills	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	28.57% 2	42.86% 3	7

Respondents reported strong skill development, with around 70% indicating their abilities improved a good bit or significantly, Figure 15. The most progress was seen in engagement techniques, verbal communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. Written, research, and ethical decision-making skills were particularly improved, while listening skills showed the least growth. The results indicate that participants believe that the programme was effective by strengthening participants communication and teamwork skills.

In response to a question about whether their course(s) at SETU had made an impact and to provide an example, one participant shared: “My group work skills have improved massively, and my confidence in education has increased after successfully completing the Learning to Learn module.”

When asked about using what they have learned in their personal or professional life, 4 participants responded positively stating that they would use the confidence gained to help with future studying and that

communication played a big part and this could be transferred to family life skills.

Responding to a question on interest in continuing to study, 100% answered “yes”. This suggests that participation in the current programmes have built skills not only in confidence but fostered a lasting enthusiasm for lifelong learning. All Aiséirí students who completed the survey stated their intention to continue studying, thus indicating that all participants had a clear and positive experience, and view education as a valuable part of their recovery and personal development journey.

Survey Results – Tiglin Staff

Of the 13 participants that responded, 5 identified as female and 8 identified as male.

Figure 16: Gender breakdown of Tiglin Staff

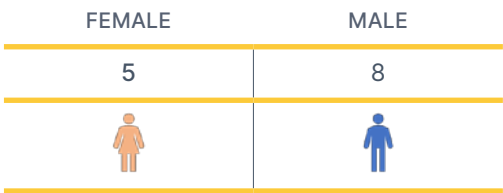
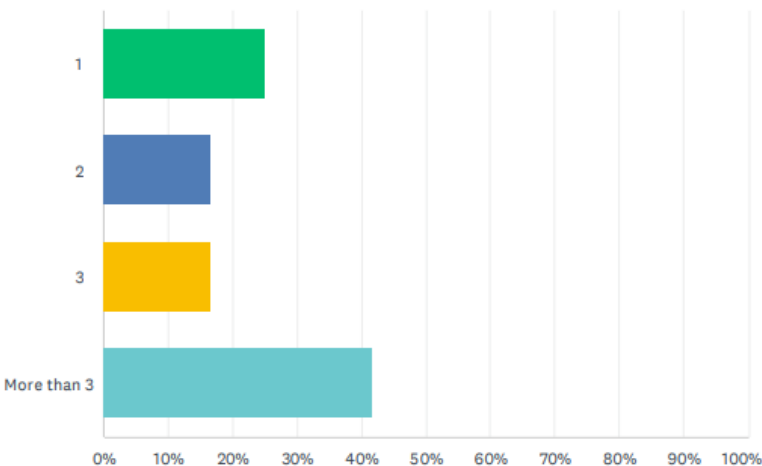


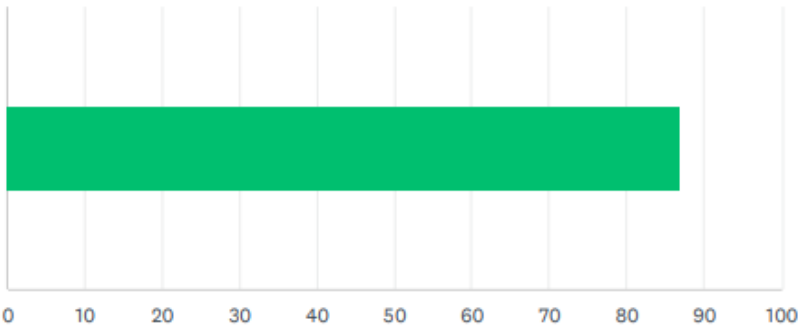
Figure 17: Programme completion



Over the past three years, engagement by Tiglin staff with SETU courses has been notably strong among respondents, Figure 17. The majority (42%) reported completing more than three courses, indicating a high level of commitment and ongoing participation in SETU’s educational programmes. Smaller proportions (17% each) completed two or three courses, while a further 25% completed one course. This pattern suggests that many

learners not only begin but continue their educational journey with SETU, demonstrating satisfaction with the quality, relevance, and impact of the courses offered. Overall, the data reflects a positive trend of continuous learning and re-engagement, highlighting the success of SETU’s partnership initiatives in encouraging continuous professional development.

Figure 18: Impact on professional development and competence, having a negative or positive effect, above in %



When asked to rate the impact of SETU course completion on professional development on a Likert scale from 1 to 10 (low to high), Figure 18, all 13 responded giving average score of 8.7 out of 10,

which reflects high levels of perceived professional or competence development. The high score demonstrates that learners view their SETU experience as directly applicable to their work.

Figure 19: Impact on skills development

	NOT AT ALL	A SMALL BIT	A GOOD BIT	SIGNIFICANTLY	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Written Communication Skills (e.g. report writing; email; writing care plans)	0.00% 0	15.38% 2	38.46% 5	46.15% 6	13
Listening Skills	0.00% 0	9.09% 1	36.36% 4	54.55% 6	11
Verbal Communication Skills (e.g. meetings; conflict resolution; presentations; one-to-one)	0.00% 0	7.69% 1	61.54% 8	30.77% 4	13
Non Verbal Communications Skills (e.g. confidence)	0.00% 0	7.69% 1	46.15% 6	46.15% 6	13
Organisational Skills (e.g. time management; prioritisation of tasks)	0.00% 0	7.69% 1	69.23% 9	23.08% 3	13
Collaboration Skills (e.g. team work; team dynamics)	0.00% 0	7.69% 1	38.46% 5	53.85% 7	13
Engagement Techniques (e.g. ability to give and receive feedback; working with others)	0.00% 0	7.69% 1	46.15% 6	46.15% 6	13
Leadership skills and/or willingness to take on a leadership role	0.00% 0	15.38% 2	46.15% 6	38.46% 5	13
Critical thinking skills (ability to analyse; think logically; problem solve)	0.00% 0	7.69% 1	38.46% 5	53.85% 7	13
Self confidence	0.00% 0	7.69% 1	38.46% 5	53.85% 7	13
Knowledge Base	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	38.46% 5	61.54% 8	13

The data above, Figure 19, provides further detail on the perceived skills and competences developed. The greatest perceived improvements were seen in knowledge, listening, critical thinking, self-confidence, and collaboration skills. Overall, the programmes have effectively strengthened participants’ ability to think critically, communicate well, and work

together, demonstrating the positive impact of SETU’s education on those working within Tiglin recovery services. In an accompanying open text question, respondents were asked to expand and comment on how undertaking the course(s) has impacted them, either positively or negatively if at all. Many respondents reported significant increases

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in confidence, with several noting that the courses helped them overcome fears such as public speaking and build greater self-assurance in both educational and work settings. Participants also emphasised the career benefits of completing these programmes, describing how the learning improved their professional competence in fields such as rehabilitation and reintegration. Others shared that the

courses provided valuable pathways for educational progression, enabling them to advance from Level 6 qualifications to higher-level degrees in areas like addiction studies, counselling, and business. Several respondents also mentioned gaining greater awareness of mental health and how it affects their own wellbeing. Approximately 75-80% of respondents selected yes that the course(s) they

completed with SETU, had a strong impact on their ability to reduce job-related stress and enhance their overall well-being (Figure 20). A large majority reported clear benefits with minimal negative or uncertain responses.

Most respondents indicated that they have applied their SETU learning directly in their client work, with almost all selecting “Yes.” Only a small minority chose “No” or “Not applicable,” and none selected “Not sure” or “Other” (Figure 21). This demonstrates that the practical relevance and transferability of the SETU courses are very strong, as most participants found meaningful ways to integrate new knowledge, skills, and approaches into their professional practice. The results suggest that the courses not only enhanced

personal understanding but also positively influence professional effectiveness and client outcomes.

Respondents were asked to expand and comment on how they have used their learnings from the courses into practice; 8 responded and shared many examples of how they have applied the learnings from SETU courses in their day-to-day work. Several spoke about becoming more confident in advocating for clients and supporting service users more effectively. Others highlighted the value of skills such as motivational interviewing, group facilitation, and managing challenging behaviour, which they now use regularly in their professional roles. Several participants also reflected on how the courses helped them to be more mindful and self-aware

Figure 20: Impact of course on how to reduce job-related stress or well-being

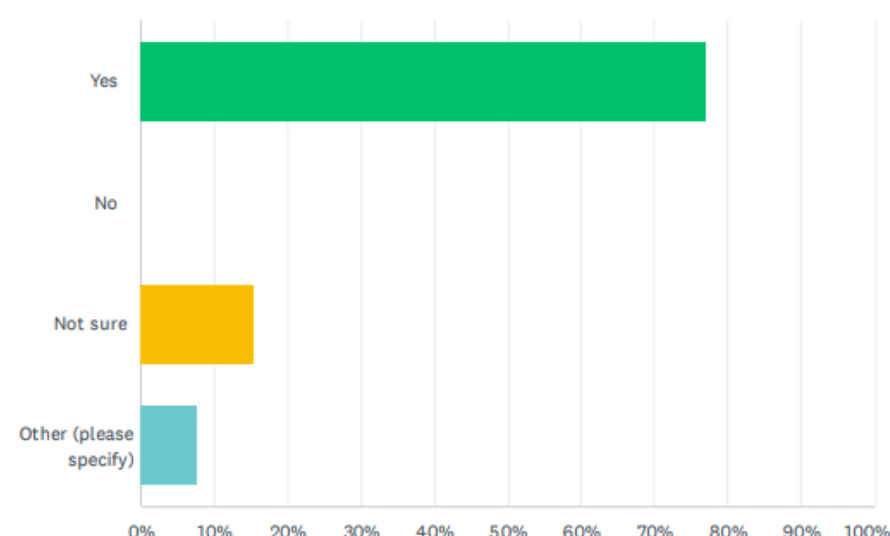


Figure 21: Application of learnings in practice with clients

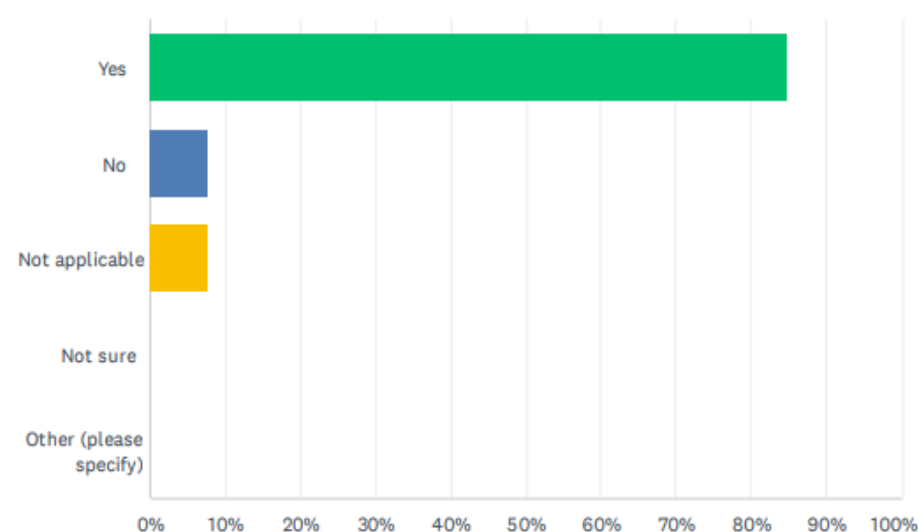
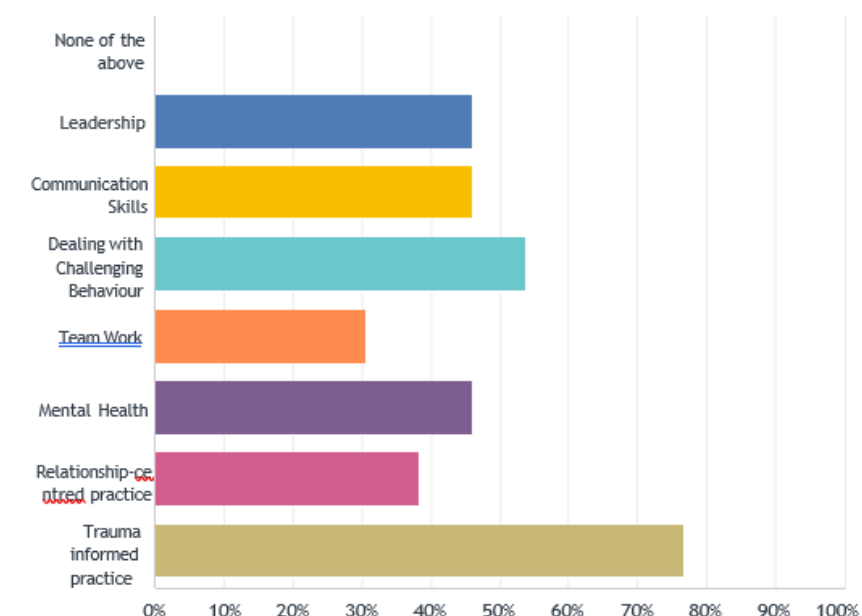


Figure 22: Areas to help further professional development



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when working with clients. Overall, their feedback shows that the learning has made a real difference, helping them feel more capable, reflective, and equipped to deliver high-quality support within addiction recovery services.

When asked about future professional development, Figure 22, all participants identified at least one area in which they would like to grow further. The most common was trauma-informed practice, (77%) followed by dealing with challenging behaviour (54%), Leadership, communication skills and mental health (46% each). These responses suggest a strong commitment among participants to enhance their practical and interpersonal skills, and a practical interest in how to support clients who have complex needs.

Finally, when asked for any other comments in relation to provision of courses by SETU to Tiglin staff for Staff CPD, 6 responded. Participants expressed strong appreciation for the SETU courses, describing them as valuable, enjoyable, and beneficial for both staff and clients. Several highlighted the importance of continued funding support and expressed interest in further and higher-level learning opportunities, particularly in areas related to addiction and social care. Overall, the feedback reflects high satisfaction and a clear desire for ongoing collaboration and professional growth.





6 RECOMMENDATIONS & INSIGHTS

This research demonstrates the positive impact of the partnership between SETU and Tiglin in delivering accessible, tailored education to individuals in recovery and community development settings. The continued participation and achievement of the students, reflect the success of providing higher education in supportive, recovery-focused environments that promote confidence, engagement, and lifelong learning.

Survey results confirm that participation in SETU programmes significantly enhanced learners' self-confidence, well-being, and professional skills. Nearly all Tiglin participants reported increased belief in their abilities, improved communication and teamwork skills, and greater readiness for future study or employment. Many described the courses as transformative, supporting both personal growth and practical skill development.

Outcomes from Aiséirí participants echo these findings. All respondents indicated improvements in confidence, communication, and teamwork, and expressed intent to continue studying. This indicates the programmes' motivational and growing impact.

The outcomes for the students at Portlaoise Prison similar to Tiglin and Aiséirí. Of the 24 participants originally registered on individual modules of a 60-credit Level 6 programme, four successfully completed all six modules to receive a Minor Award. This result demonstrates the high level of commitment, perseverance, and academic capability among the participating learners. Despite challenges inherent studying in a custodial environment, the students displayed strong motivation and engagement throughout the programme. The outcomes affirm the importance of access to higher education in prison settings as a means of promoting personal development and rehabilitation, and positive reintegration into society.

Feedback from Tiglin staff highlights the wider organisational benefits. Participants reported growth in critical thinking, collaboration, and self-awareness, directly applying new skills in their client work. This demonstrates the programmes' effectiveness in strengthening professional competence and service delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Scale and Expand the Model

- Identify and engage new partner organisations working in addiction recovery, homelessness, and criminal justice (e.g. additional ETBs, supported housing, probation services, community justice projects).
- Explore expansion into youth justice, refugee support services, and post-release community reintegration programmes.
- Formalise a partnership framework that other services can opt into, outlining expectations, supports, and routes to accredited delivery.
- Seek opportunities for cross-border or EU partnerships to explore transnational models of inclusive higher education in marginalised settings.

2 Strengthen and Deepen the Research Base

- Support the two current PhD research projects underway, ensuring their findings inform insights for policy and practice.
- Develop a longitudinal study tracking learner progression and outcomes post-programme (e.g. education, employment, reduced recidivism).
- Initiate qualitative research capturing lived experience, focusing on personal transformation, identity, and recovery journeys.
- Consider research collaboration focused on addiction studies, criminology, or public health to widen the impact.

3 Disseminate Findings to Influence National Policy

- Develop targeted policy briefs based on research findings, tailored for departments such as:
 - Department of Health (recovery and addiction policy)
 - Department of Justice (custodial education and reintegration)
 - Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
- Share findings with relevant national bodies such as the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT), drugs strategy committees, and SOLAS.
- Engage in strategic dissemination through:
 - National conferences (e.g. IASIO, AONTAS, education and recovery forums)
 - Peer-reviewed publications
 - Stakeholder roundtables with service providers, policymakers, and learners.

4 Enhance Programme Delivery and Flexibility

- Develop more modular and stackable pathways, allowing learners to progress toward major awards over time, with clear guidance and recognition.
- Expand blended delivery options for recovery or post-release settings that may benefit from a mix of in-person and online learning.

- Embed employability and digital skills more explicitly, responding to learner interest in areas like IT, CV development, and communication.
 - Ensure ongoing CPD pathways for staff, recognising their dual role as practitioners and co-facilitators of learning.
5. Secure Long-Term Funding and Institutional Commitment
- Seek multi-year funding to embed the project within SETU's core access and outreach provision, aligned with the SETU Strategic Plan for Lifelong Learning.
 - Explore funding from:
 - The Higher Education Authority (HEA)
 - Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)
 - National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP - for recovery integration)
 - European Social Fund or Erasmus+ (for international expansion)
 - Philanthropic donations
 - Advocate for formal recognition of this model in national access plans, and potentially as a funded pilot intervention under policy frameworks related to justice or health.

6. Build a Community of Practice and National Dialogue

- Create a Community of Practice across providers engaged in delivering HE in non-traditional spaces.
- Host an annual symposium on higher education, recovery, and reintegration, led by SETU, bringing together academic, policy, and practitioner voices.
- Involve learners and graduates as co-presenters, advisors, or peer mentors to deepen authenticity and learner voice.

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