

An evaluation of the Focus Ireland PETE programme, Dublin – a pivot to online service provision

Kathyan Kelly
Independent Research Consultant

**Challenging
homelessness.
Changing lives.**

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Ireland



‘From a girl that walked around town all day depending on Social Welfare for two years ... and then my life changed ... all in the blink of an eye. Went back to work and college. I feel normal. I feel like a mother. That I’m doing something good for my child.’

Maria, lone parent aged under 26 years, describes the impact of engaging in the PETE programme in 2021

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Glossary of Terms Used

DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
DRHE	Dublin Region Homeless Executive
ETB	Education Training Board
ECRS	Electronic Client Record System
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ETHOS	European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion
FEANSTA	European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless
HAP	Housing Assistance Payment
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NoT	Notice of Termination
PETE	Preparation for Education, Training and Employment
PSW	PETE Support Worker
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SICAP	Social inclusion Community Activation Programme
SLI	Support to Live Independently

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Kathyan Kelly

Independent Researcher



Executive Summary

Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE) is a Focus Ireland service that operates in Dublin, Waterford and Limerick and is designed to respond to labour market exclusion that is both a symptom and contributing factor to homelessness for many people experiencing homelessness. It does this by adopting a customer-centred approach which responds to the challenging circumstances of people experiencing homelessness, a mixture of 'soft skills' and 'hard skills' supports and a strong belief in the potential of every participant.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, and with the financial support of JP Morgan, the PETE service in Dublin was able to implement a remote learning and digital inclusion programme which started in 2021. Funding enabled the employment of a full-time remote education worker who co-ordinated online support for PETE customers and staff. It also enabled infrastructure implementation which allowed for digitisation of the service as well as ongoing maintenance. Laptops were provided to staff and customers as well as additional training which increased outreach services to those with no online access.

This evaluation seeks to assess the implementation, service provision and impact of the PETE programme in Dublin as it transitioned to online service provision in 2021. It covers a wide range of issues, such as labour market exclusion, digital exclusion, the impact of Covid-19 on the PETE programme in Dublin and how the pivot to online supports was negotiated by staff and customers. It also includes consultation with PETE staff, as well as former and current PETE customers in the form of a survey and four case studies.

The report's main findings are outlined below.

Pivot to Online Supports During Covid

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions, the PETE programme pivoted to online supports and ensured continuity of the programme. Consultation with PETE staff found that there were several benefits to online service provision. These include the development of new tech skills for customers, easier access to employment and training and education courses, flexibility in taking part in certain training and education

courses as well as an opportunity for the PETE programme to reach a wider geographical area. However, there were also challenges, which include: attending courses virtually from unsuitable or overcrowded accommodation; childcare responsibilities; exclusion of customers if they didn't have access to the right IT equipment; lack of confidence with technology as well as the isolating nature of online courses and support sessions (particularly for those customers who were learning English or were living alone).

Customer Engagement Levels and Profile

173 customers were supported by the PETE programme in 2021. Out of this number, 95 (55%) were men, and 78 were women (45%). 49 (28%) were between the ages of 18–26, and 124 (72%) were aged 27 and over.

Employment Outcomes

Employment secured by PETE customers rose from 32 in 2018 to 47 in 2021, with a steady increase year upon year, albeit with a slight decrease in 2020 due to the difficulties associated with the pandemic. In 2021 PETE Support Workers provided nearly 570 one-to-one job support sessions over the year, 72 job interviews, and 47 jobs were secured. Full time work was secured by 27 people (57%) and the remaining 20 (43%) secured part-time work. 30 (64%) jobs were secured by males and 17 (36%) by females.

Education and Training Outcomes

The number of people who progressed to further external education or training increased from 12 customers in 2016 to 121 customers in 2021. PETE Support Workers provided 276 education/training support sessions and 91 training certificates were issued in 2021. Of the total number of people engaged in Education and Training (n=121), 23 (19%) were under 26 years of age and 98 (81%) were over 26 years of age.

Soft Skills and Personal Outcomes

PETE customers reported gaining soft skills in three key areas: *Confidence*, *Goal Setting* and *Self-efficacy* with 88% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had developed these soft skills outcomes because of taking part in the PETE programme. *General Work* and *Education Readiness* followed closely behind at 85%, and *Communication* skills at 80%. *Literacy and Numeracy* and *Connection with Others* scored the lowest with 77% of participants feeling that these needs had been met because of the PETE programme.

Analysis of the four customer case studies provides powerful insight on the impact a programme like PETE can bring about for someone living in adverse or difficult circumstances, particularly amongst people who have experience of homelessness and housing insecurity. While each story is unique, they share several characteristics including the level of support provided by PETE and the flexibility and adaptability of that support when needed. While each customer had different needs and goals, they were supported to achieve them, and this resulted in a greater level of personal empowerment.

Recommendations

Regularised Funding

- › Secure funding for resourcing related to: communications technology and WIFI for PETE customers.

PETE Referrals and Partnerships

- › Explore a formalised referral process with other Focus Ireland services to engage with the PETE programme including customers of the Support to Live Independently (SLI) housing service and long-term housing services.
- › Explore potential partner organisations in employment sectors that can provide reliable and straightforward employment pathways for PETE customers.
- › Introduce a process of supported employment where customers receive ongoing financial and/or social support as part of the PETE programme.

Outcomes Tracking

- › Embed a process of outcomes tracking in the PETE service. Outcome tracking processes should include a measurement based on the individual's journey throughout the PETE programme capturing outcomes such as courses completed, job supports obtained, interviews secured, and employment secured.

Research

- › Investigate further the causes of the lower engagement levels of women and young people in the 18–25 years age group in securing employment and taking part in education and training.
- › Create a simplified consent form for the participation of customers in research projects using principles of plain English.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Service

Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE) is a Focus Ireland service that operates in Dublin, Waterford and Limerick and is designed to respond to labour market exclusion that is both a symptom and contributing factor to homelessness for many people experiencing homelessness. There are significant differences in the approaches of the three services, reflecting not only regional patterns of homelessness and unemployment but also reflecting the different patterns of provision by mainstream employment and training services. All three services have in common a customer-centred approach which responds to the challenging (and sometimes chaotic) lives of people experiencing homelessness, providing a mixture of ‘soft skills’ and ‘hard skills’ supports and a strong belief in the potential of every participant. The funding structure of each of the PETE services is also distinct with core support from the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in Waterford and Limerick, while in Dublin, the City of Dublin ETB funds particular courses and core funding has been provided by fundraised donations. This report examines the Dublin PETE service.

Homelessness in Ireland

Homelessness can be caused by “individual” factors such as job loss, marital breakdown, domestic violence, mental ill-health, substance/alcohol misuse or “structural” factors such as high rents and a lack of affordable housing options. Often these factors are interconnected and overlap meaning pathways into homelessness for individuals and families can be complex (Fitzpatrick, 2005).

As of August 2022, there were 10,805 people in Ireland accessing homeless emergency accommodation (DHLGH, 2022). Of this number 7,585 (70%) were adults, and 3,220 (30%) were children with their families. For the last seven to eight years there has been a marked increase in homelessness in Ireland. Between August 2015 and August 2022, the total homelessness figure increased by 122%.

The most recent patterns in homelessness (2014–2022), have been characterised by a stark increase in family and child homelessness, most notably that of lone parents. Between 80–90% of lone parent families are female-led and experience unequal access to the labour market, lower wages, a higher propensity to be in part time work/more precarious jobs as well as unaffordable childcare costs. This has made it extremely difficult for these parents to take part in meaningful employment, training or education and upskilling (REGAL, 2020).

Individuals and families from migrant backgrounds are also more susceptible to housing insecurity and homelessness. They may also struggle with accessing employment, training, and education programmes. Difficulty accessing health and social services coupled with limited or no proficiency in the language of their adopted home, as well as family insecurities, leaves them particularly vulnerable to homelessness and housing unsuitability (Kaur et al 2021).

Lastly, another trend of homelessness and housing precarity is the increase in youth homelessness (18–24 years). Between April 2015 and April 2022 there has been an increase of 151% in young people accessing emergency accommodation. Many of these pathways into homelessness are caused by leaving state care, breakdown in family relationships and an unaffordable rental market (Mayock and Parker 2017; Norris and Quilty 2020).

While the official monthly homeless figures published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage only captures people living in emergency accommodation, the information collected does provide a comprehensive and detailed overview of trends in homelessness in Ireland over the last number of years. This body of data was collated and further developed through Focus Ireland’s ‘Focus on Homelessness’ series of reports (O’Sullivan, Reidy and Allen, 2021) providing a longer-term overview of individuals and families moving in and out of homelessness. These reports found that 38,000 unique adults experienced a period of homelessness in emergency accommodation over the period Q1 2014 to Q1 2021.

There are also those individuals and families who experience ‘hidden homelessness’ and are not counted in the official monthly homelessness figures. A more inclusive definition of homelessness has been developed by European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANSTA), known as the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS). It takes account of homelessness as being not just without a roof (i.e. sleeping rough) but also those in temporary or emergency accommodation, those in insecure housing (staying with friends/family or under threat of eviction) and those in inadequate housing (DRHE 2019; FEANSTA 2014). While the official monthly figures and subsequent data collation and analysis point to trends and patterns in homelessness in Ireland, there are still experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity that remain unknown and unaccounted for.

Homelessness and Accessing Employment and Training

There is strong evidence that homelessness and housing insecurity causes major difficulties in accessing employment, training, and educational programmes. The last census data in 2016 revealed that for those individuals who were in the labour force and were experiencing homelessness, 69% (n=2,016) were unemployed. The unemployment rate for the general population was 13% (CSO, 2016). In this census 1,606 people who were

considered homeless did not have an educational qualification beyond lower secondary (38%). Out of this group only 581 were educated to primary level.

Education or employment has a positive impact on people with experience of homelessness. In a recent study in 2020 by Johnston, research participants who were currently homeless or at risk, reported that once they had gained employment there were improvements to their housing situation, social integration, self-esteem, identity, and the ability to manage problematic use of alcohol, drugs, or gambling. While taking part in employment and education can promote social integration as well as independence and a way out of poverty, there are also many barriers to homeless people accessing these institutions such as low levels of education and formal training, lack of social support and integration, as well as more practical issues such as lack of affordable childcare and access to reliable transport (Swami, 2018; Murphy et al 2019).

However, just providing generic employment and education supports is not sufficient for those individuals experiencing homelessness and exclusion from employment and education. Research in 2016 (Martin et al) found that employment supports that recognised the issues of homelessness and provided tailored supports to address the multiple levels of exclusion were more successful in obtaining meaningful employment. This research is also supported by Hoven et al's (2016) study into the impact of job coaching in obtaining and sustaining employment for homeless people. This study found that clients who had been supported by a job coach had significantly higher chances of gaining employment than those not being supported, with those in the young age-group particularly benefiting from this level of support. Results from this study indicate that job coaching improved clients' chances of successfully sustaining employment.

Many people experiencing homelessness are motivated to work, and indeed it can be a major catalyst for positive life changes, but instrumental in this leap to employment, particularly for individuals who have experience of homelessness and housing precarity, is being ready for the job and having all the relevant information and skills needed (Hough, Jones and Rice, 2013).

Employment, training, and education supports should be seen as part of a framework of supports offered on an ongoing basis to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. These supports not only help a person to gain meaningful education and employment opportunities, but also helps with housing stability overall. Higher education and qualifications contribute to higher levels of self-support, and a better chance of obtaining better paid jobs to keep pace with housing and living costs (Bassuk et al, 2010).

Homelessness and Digital Exclusion

Schejter et al (2015), describes digital exclusion as unequal access to use of information and technology communications to participate in society fully. The drivers of homelessness and associated social exclusion are complex, and while digital exclusion may not be the main driver, it still nonetheless adds to an already marginalised and difficult set of circumstances. Research has shown that those who are socially excluded are less likely to have access to and benefit from the Internet (Martin et al, 2016).

In a 2020 FEANSTA policy paper, it was found that homeless service providers were trying to address this gap in access to digital and ICT (information and communications technology) resources through the provision of tech equipment, such as laptops, smart

phones, and Wi-Fi, as well as building tech skills and confidence levels as a matter of good practice. The promotion of digital inclusion in hard-to-reach populations requires a multi-faceted approach to not only encourage the use of digital technology but to also ensure that this use is sustained, meaningful and consistent with the needs of users so that they are motivated to continue its use (McGillivray et al 2017).

In the last number of years there has been an increased reliance on online resources and large-scale digitisation of government and other everyday services, such as job vacancies and educational programmes, which necessitates connectivity and access to computer and internet (Humphry 2019). However, people experiencing homelessness may not have access and a suitable space with privacy to avail of online sources, there may be a lack of functional devices, affordability issues for both services and internet data, and a lack of equipment in homeless service organisations (FEANSTA, 2020). Digital inclusion amongst people who are homeless is incumbent upon access to Wi-Fi and tech resources in public spaces, such as libraries, and public Wi-Fi hotspots. While this may address some of the exclusionary aspects of digital access, there is still a lack of privacy and space for people to conduct their business, make applications for jobs, or take part in online courses and training (Dyce, 2019). This is where homeless service organisations can provide a safe and welcoming space with access to all tech amenities and supports to bridge this gap (Lemos and Crane, 2015).

1.2 The Focus Ireland PETE Programme in Dublin

Focus Ireland runs a flexible education programme in Dublin designed to meet the needs of people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. The programme, PETE (Preparation for Education, Training and Employment) was developed to address gaps in training, education, and employment pathways from homelessness into independent living. In doing so, it provides several supports to assist people in their first step on their training, education or employment pathway as well as supporting those who are returning to education or work.

Originally designed as a face-to-face service run entirely onsite providing in-person assessments, support work and accredited courses, the PETE programme faced significant threat at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic with closure of many of the buildings that participants access for in-person support. As a result of the pandemic, the Focus Ireland PETE programme pivoted to an online programme for most of its supports.

In restructuring the PETE programme to an online service there was concern that those with high needs would face several barriers in engaging with online learning, with disadvantaged/marginalised people and English language learners especially at risk. These barriers include access to technology as well as capacity. However, the programme experienced a marked increase in engagement in 2021 – up by 20% on the previous year.

Recognising that a digital PETE service had potential to reach more customers, Focus Ireland sought funding for an online version on a more permanent basis. With the financial support of JP Morgan, the PETE Team at Focus Ireland was able to implement a remote learning and digital inclusion programme which started in 2021. Funding enabled the employment of a full-time remote education worker who co-ordinated online support for

PETE customers and staff. It also enabled infrastructure implementation which allowed for digitisation of the service as well as ongoing maintenance. Laptops were provided to staff and customers as well as additional training which increased outreach services to those with no online access.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

The following report is an evaluation which seeks to assess the implementation, service provision and impact of the PETE programme as it transitioned to the online provision of a remote learning and digital inclusion programme in the period 2021. The evaluation is based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered from PETE staff and customers. Specifically, the evaluation aims to:

- Explore and understand the benefits and challenges experienced by PETE staff and customers as the service responded to Covid-19 and the introduction of a remote learning and digital inclusion programme.
- Analyse PETE customer 'hard' outcomes in terms of programme engagement in education, training, and employment.
- Analyse PETE customer 'soft' outcomes in terms of gains in personal and professional skills, including the case studies of four customers.

1.4 Report Structure

The following section of the report details the methodology used in the evaluation. Section 3 provides an analysis of the quantitative data that was gathered. Section 4 details findings from consultation with staff, while Section 5 focuses on consultation with customers. Section 6 offers a discussion of the main findings of the evaluation. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are drawn from analysis of the data in Section 7.

2 Methodology

This evaluation used a mixed methods approach with both quantitative and qualitative components.

2.1 Quantitative Data

There were two elements to the quantitative data used to measure both hard and soft outcomes of the PETE programme during 2021.

Focus Ireland Datasets

Focus Ireland maintains an Electronic Client Record System (ECRS) enabled by a bespoke internal data system named ORION. PETE staff also maintain a comprehensive database of PETE customers in Excel format. The combined databases provided statistics on the following:

- › Age
- › Gender
- › Employment
- › Further education secured
- › Completion and non-completion rates
- › One-to-one engagements with PETE Support Workers (PSWs).

My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool

Developed by the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)¹ the *My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool* is a validated tool measuring soft skills relevant to personal development, education, training, and employment. It enables customers and staff to work together to identify personal goals and to identify progress over time. It measures five soft skill areas:

- Literacy and numeracy confidence
- Confidence, goal setting and self-efficacy
- Communication Skills
- Connection with others
- General work readiness

It is a statistically valid tool which uses 27 questions on a seven-point Likert Scale (See Appendix 1). It is ideally used at the start and end of engagement. For the purposes of this evaluation, the *My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool* was used as a method of collecting data at the end of the customer's engagement with the PETE programme.

When discussing methods for data collection with the PETE team it was initially envisaged that an online survey could be used. However, feedback from the team suggested that this would be problematic for two reasons - language barrier (for those with limited literacy or competency in the English language) and digital barrier (most customers do not have email addresses or do not check them regularly). As a result, a decision was made to conduct this survey by phone.

Customers were initially contacted by phone by PETE Support Workers (PSWs) and asked if they wished to participate in the survey. If they consented, they were then contacted by either a researcher employed by Focus Ireland or the independent evaluator. In total, 30 PETE customers who had accessed the service during 2021 agreed to take part in the phone survey. A decision was made to contact each of these customers a maximum of three times. At that stage, if they were not contactable, they were deemed to be unresponsive. A majority (n=26) responded, and a time and date were arranged to conduct the survey. The researchers used a pen and paper format to fill in the questionnaire. This data was then transferred into a specifically designed Excel database with several drop-down options to reduce data error. Data was inputted and analysed by the external evaluator.

¹ SICAP is a targeted social inclusion programme which works with people to support them holistically in personal development and well-being, employment, and lifelong learning. The focus is on working with people who are often furthest from the labour market and experience both economic and social disadvantage (SICAP 2020).

2.2 Qualitative Data

The qualitative data for this evaluation consists of data collected from both PETE staff and customers. The staff data centres on semi-structured interviews with the four PSWs who provide support to PETE customers (See Appendix 2).

The customer input came in the form of semi-structured interviews with four participants who had engaged with the PETE programme in 2021. These form the basis of the case studies in the evaluation.

PETE staff assisted with the recruitment of customers for participation in the research. The criteria for participation consisted of the following:

- Be over the age of 18 years
- Have experience of engagement with PETE during 2021
- Have the capacity to give informed consent

For the interviews, participants were given a Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) and a consent form (See Appendix 3). While basic principles of accessibility were used for both, feedback from the PSWs suggested that the consent form was difficult for those with limited English. As a result, it was further revised (See Appendix 3).

2.3 Data Collection

Data collection for both qualitative and quantitative elements of the evaluation took place between November 2021 and February 2022.

Interviews with four PSWs were conducted using Zoom and recorded using a separate recording device. The interviews with the PETE customers were conducted using phone and recorded using a separate recording device.

The quantitative data was provided from the Focus Ireland ORION ECRS and PETE databases, which are fully anonymised. The *My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool* was conducted by phone using a pen-and-paper form and fully anonymised.

Statistical analysis of the database gave an overview of the numbers using the PETE service (see Section 3.1 for further details). Responses to survey questions were entered into a separate specifically designed Excel database created by the external evaluator to provide statistical analysis.

Qualitative interviews were transcribed verbatim and any identifying information was removed. Each participant was assigned an alpha-numeric code and all data was fully anonymised. Analysis used NVivo (a qualitative software tool) for initial coding and data was then processed using content analysis. Participants were assigned culturally relevant pseudonyms for inclusion in the report.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

This evaluation adhered to the Focus Ireland Ethical Research Guidelines.² Both process and explicit consent was used throughout this evaluation to ensure that participants fully understood what was being asked of them in terms of their participation. Participants were given an explanation of the aims of the research study as well as a consent form and given a period of time to decide if they wished to participate, allowing for explicit consent to be sought. Process consent was used throughout the interviews or surveys and participants were told that they could stop the interview or survey questions at any time and that there would be no negative consequences for them if they chose to do so. They were also informed that they could refuse to answer any questions at any time. No payment was offered for taking part in the evaluation.

2.5 Challenges with the Study

Several challenges arose because of lack of face-to-face contact. While the participants agreed to interviews by phone for the qualitative element of the evaluation, in the case of three of the four customers, English was not their first language. As a result, questions had to be simplified and the interviewer took care to speak slowly and often repeat back to the interviewee what they said to ensure it was understood correctly.

Some consideration was given to an online survey. However, on reviewing contact details, the PETE team felt that an online version would exclude more than two-thirds of the people who had accessed the programme during 2021. The primary reasons were that people had no email addresses or did not access their emails regularly and people who had poor levels of literacy and/or English proficiency would be excluded. As a result, a decision was made to conduct the survey by phone.

² See <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Ethical-Guidelines-for-Conducting-Research.pdf>

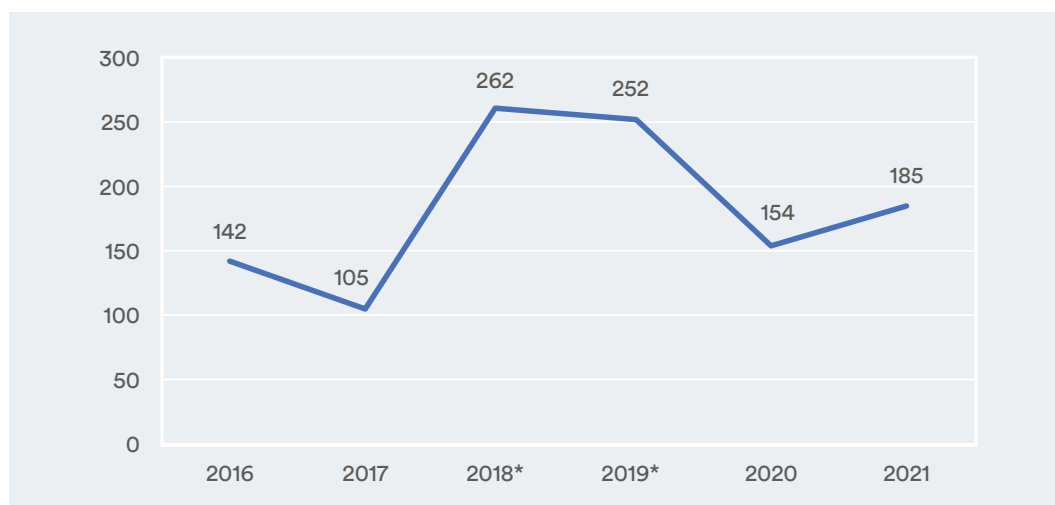
3 Data Analysis

This section provides an analysis of the quantitative data gathered for the evaluation. This data is provided in two sections. The first section gives an overview of PETE engagement patterns over a five-year period which is sourced from the Focus Ireland ORION ECRS system (as discussed in Section 2.3). This is useful in setting the context for PETE programme engagement levels and provides a baseline to analyse and compare trends in the 2020–2021 timeframe and the impact of the pandemic. The second section provides analysis of customer engagement and outcomes in the PETE programme in 2021, which is sourced from a database maintained by PETE staff.

3.1 Focus Ireland ORION ECRS Dataset Results 2016–2021

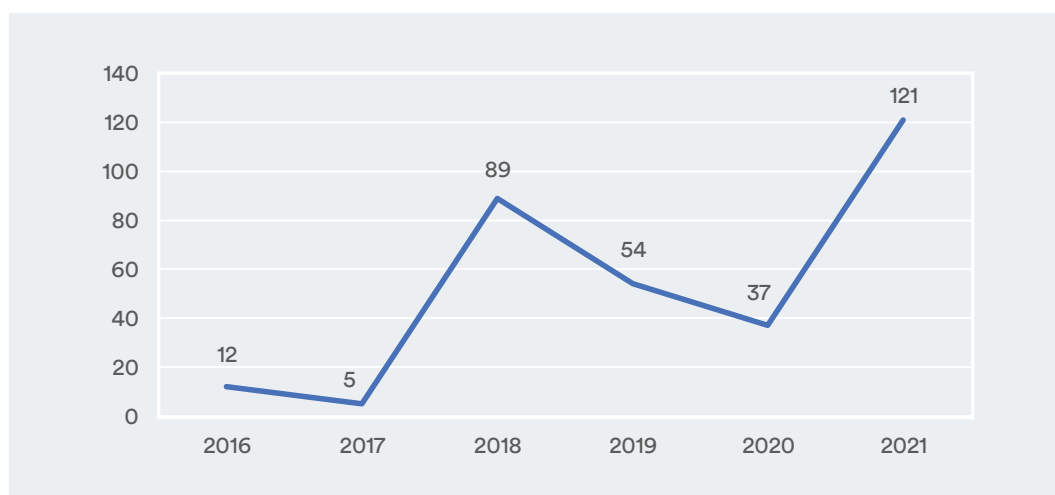
Analysis of **PETE engagement during the period 2016 to 2021** shows an overall **increase from 142 customers in 2016 to 185 in 2021 (see Graph 1 below)**. However, this does not convey the full picture of PETE customer engagements over this six-year period. Engagements decreased from 142 to 105 in the period 2016–2017. Following an evaluation of the PETE programme in 2017/2018, the remit of the programme expanded to include referrals to external training and education programmes, job supports to customers, and significantly the age range broadened to include young people 18–25 years. In addition, recommendations from this evaluation were adopted in regards to referrals for more progression paths into education, training, and employment. As a result of these changes to the PETE programme, and a new funder coming onboard which enabled the hiring of more staff, engagement rates increased significantly in 2018 and 2019 (262 and 252 respectively). A 39% decrease in engagements was experienced in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing by 20% in 2021 as a result of the pivot to online service provision.

Graph 1: PETE customer engagement levels, 2016–2021



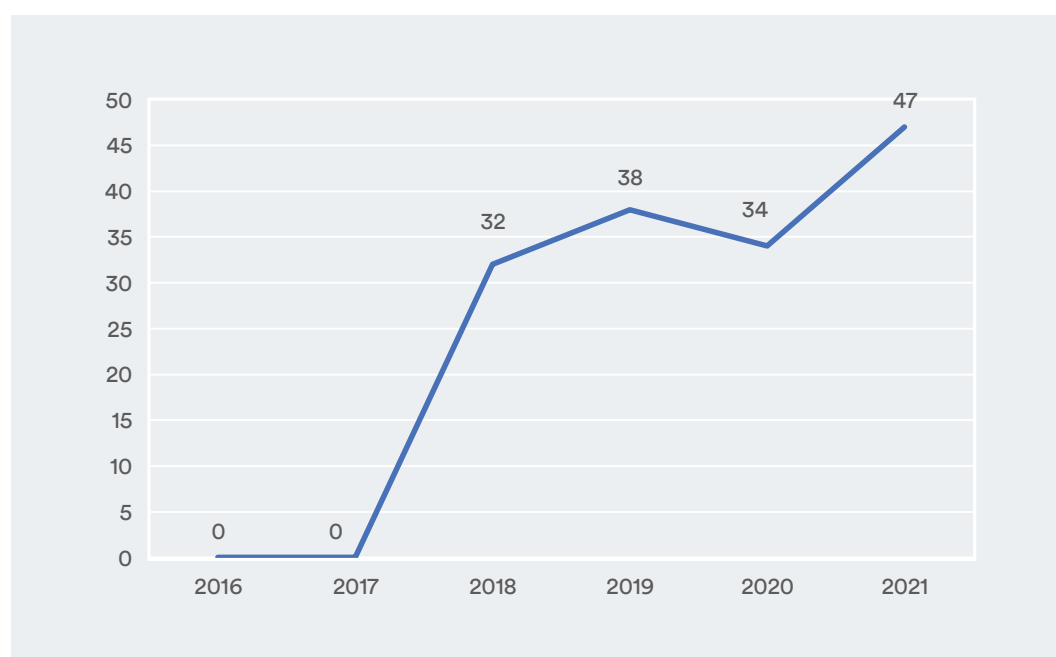
The number of people who progressed to further education or training in the community (Graph 2 below) has increased from 12 customers in 2016 to 121 customers in 2021. However, similar to overall levels of engagement reported above, there are fluctuations over this time period again because of the evolution and broadening of the PETE programme remit from 2018 onwards. There was a marked increase in the number of people progressing to education or training in 2018 compared to 2017 - up from 5 to 89. In 2019, this number dropped to 54. The decrease in 2019 may be due to more PETE customers being interested in obtaining employment, and progressing into paid employment, or PETE may have been running more onsite courses that year (for example ESOL). A further decrease was experienced in 2020 and this was due to training and education programmes being cancelled due to the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. For example, there were no on-site construction courses (safe pass certs), no security courses, and no adult education on site courses in 2020. In 2021, as education and training courses reopened after rigid restrictions, the number of people progressing to further education or training increased from 37 to 121.

Graph 2: PETE education and training in the community, 2016–2021



The number of jobs secured (see Graph 3 below) was not recorded in 2016 or 2017, as this was not part of the remit of the PETE programme. However, as was mentioned earlier, after the last PETE Evaluation in 2017/2018, the scope of the PETE programme was broadened to include support in obtaining employment. **Employment secured by PETE customers rose from 32 in 2018 to 47 in 2021**, with a steady increase year upon year, albeit with a slight decrease in 2020 due to the difficulties with the pandemic. The increase between 2020–2021 is due to a number of factors including the opening back up of society after restrictions, and the intensive job support sessions provided by the PETE programme, which included both in-person and online sessions.

Graph 3: Employment secured by PETE customers, 2016–2021



**Data was not recorded for jobs in 2016 and 2017*

Of note is the ability of the PETE team to increase the proportion of ‘closed positive’ compared to ‘closed unplanned’ cases between 2016–2021 (see Table 1 below). Listing an engagement as ‘closed unplanned’ indicates that the customer disengaged with the PETE programme and did not complete it. This is not indicated in each case but may be for physical health/mental health reasons, personal circumstances, family issues or change of accommodation. If an engagement was considered ‘closed positive’ this meant that the customer had achieved all or some of their goals to obtain employment, or a training or education programme of their choice.

In 2016, ‘closed positive’ only accounted for **18% of service closures**, and by 2021 this had **increased to 65% of service closures**. There was a slight dip in ‘closed positive’ cases, from 69% in 2020, to 65% in 2021.

Table 1: PETE programme case closures, 2016–2021

Year	No of 'closed unplanned'	No of 'closed positive'	Total no of closures	% of 'closed unplanned' of all service closures	% of 'closed positive' of all service closures
2021	46	84	130	35%	65%
2020	32	70	102	31%	69%
2019	87	116	203	43%	57%
2018	106	102	208	51%	49%
2017	48	18	66	73%	27%
2016	102	22	124	82%	18%

3.2 Focus Ireland PETE Programme Achievements in 2021

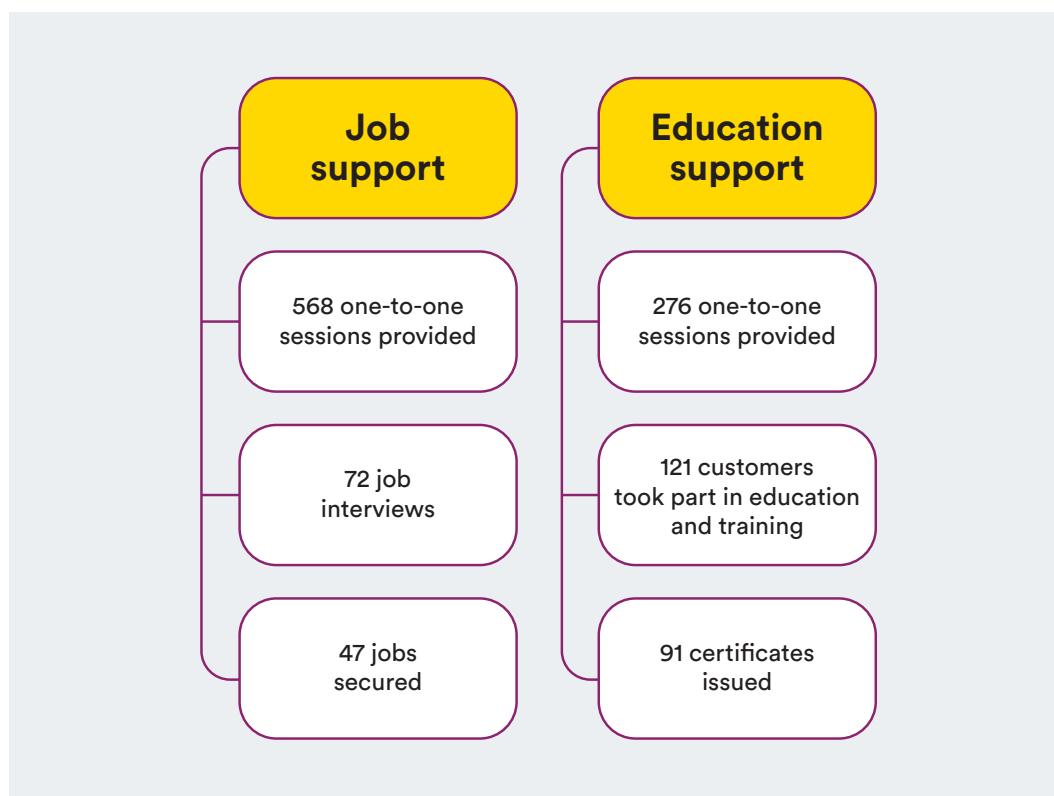
A database is held by the PETE Team that records customer intervention in greater detail. The total amount of customers recorded in the database for 2021 was 173. Out of this number, 95 (55%) were men, and 78 were women (45%). There is no detailed age breakdown for PETE customers who engaged in 2021. However, those that are over-26 years and under 26 years is recorded and 49 (28%) were between the ages of 18–26 years, with 124 (72%) 27 years and over.

Due to missing data for 5 customers, a total of 168 customers were included in the analysis for this section. 121 (72%) customers took part in education and training and 47 (28%) customers secured jobs because of engagement with the PETE programme.

Looking at the type of engagements in Diagram 1 below, the data indicates high levels of continuing support for those engaging with the PETE programme, especially in relation to securing work, with PETE Support Workers providing 568 one-to-one sessions over the year. In total, 72 interviews and 47 jobs were secured. Conversion rates for job support sessions which led to job interviews was 13%, and the **rate for job interviews leading to securing employment was 65%**. Fewer education support sessions were provided (276). However, this needs to be viewed in the context of additional education support being provided by external agencies (e.g., NALA³). A total of 121 PETE customers took part in training and education courses and 91 certificates were obtained by PETE customers in 2021.

³ The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent charity committed to adult education.

Diagram 1: Total PETE engagement, 2021



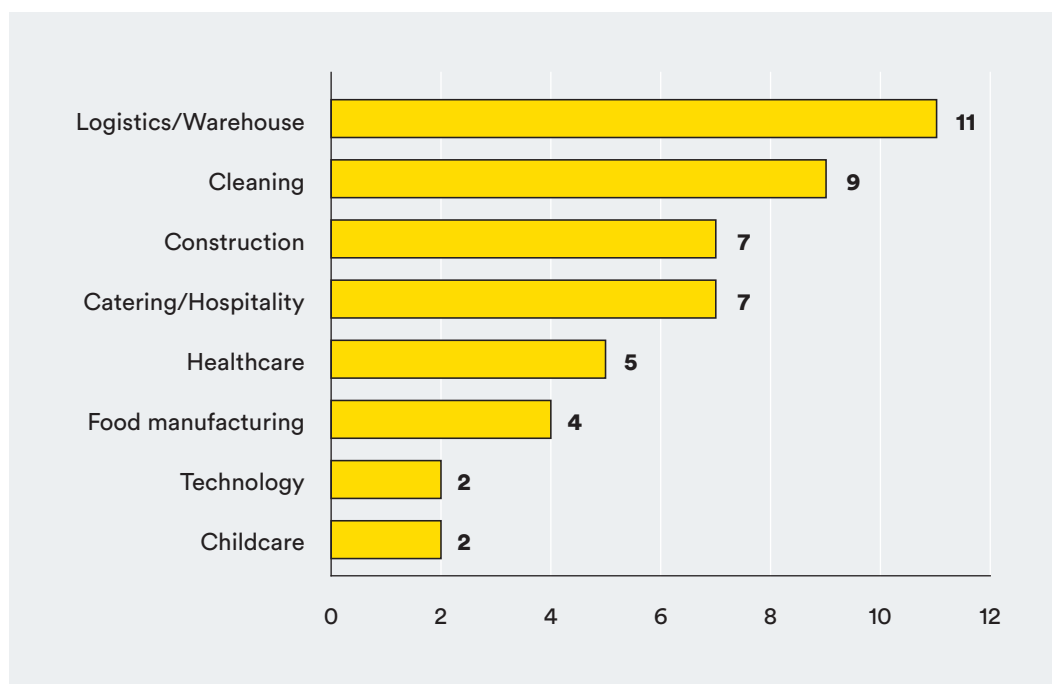
3.3a Job Type

The 47 jobs that were secured by PETE participants were grouped into eight main employment areas: logistics/warehouse; cleaning; catering/hospitality; construction; healthcare; food manufacture; technology and childcare.

As shown in Graph 4 below the largest number of jobs were secured in logistics/warehouse with 11 customers (23%) employed in this area. This was followed by cleaning for 9 customers (19%) and 7 customers (15%) secured jobs in both catering/hospitality and construction, while healthcare jobs accounted for 5 (11%). Food manufacture jobs were secured by 4 customers (9%), and technology and childcare jobs accounted for 2 (4%) each. Full time work was secured by 27 people (57%) and the remaining 20 (43%) secured part-time work. More than a quarter (26%) were aged under 26 years.

Of the 47 jobs secured, 30 (64%) were secured by males and 17 (36%) by females. Following traditional employment patterns, no males secured work in the areas of childcare or healthcare, while no females secured work in construction.

Graph 4: Number of jobs secured by employment area, 2021



3.3b Education and Training

PETE provides a wide variety of courses in education and training. For the purposes of analysis, these courses were arranged into specific education and training groupings (See Table 2). For example, workplace training refers to any course undertaken that is specifically required prior to employment.

As seen in Table 2 below, the **majority of PETE customers (n=58, 48%) took part in specific workplace training**, with 19 (16%) taking part in IT skills training, 17 (14%) in general education, and 10 (8%) in each of art and design and personal/interpersonal skills courses, while 7 (6%) took courses in healthcare.

Table 2: Education and training courses for PETE customers, 2021

Education and Training Type	Courses Included	No of PETE customers	Percentage
Workplace Training	Manual handling, Safe pass, Barista, First aid, Health and safety, Food safety (HAACP), Reception skills	58	48%
IT Skills	Computer literacy, Digital media, Internet skills, Excel, and Graphic design	19	16%
General Education	Leaving Cert, Access Programmes, ESOL, NALA	17	14%
Art and Design	Art and Crafts, QQI Art, Graphic design	10	8%
Personal/ Interpersonal Skills	Interview preparation, Communication, Personal effectiveness	10	8%
Healthcare	General healthcare, Paramedic, Community work, Childcare	7	6%
Total		121	100%

While detailed age breakdown was not available the PETE database was able to supply an age range of PETE customers under 26 years and over 26 years. Of the total number of people engaged in education and training (n=121), 23 (19%) were under 26 years of age and 98 (81%) were over 26 years of age.

4 Staff Consultation Findings

This section examines the experiences of staff in the Focus Ireland PETE service as they navigated the change from in-person to online training and education programmes during the COVID-19 restrictions. It examines pre-and post-COVID service use, particularly in relation to specific aspects of the programme including education support; support towards employment; and literacy and language proficiency supports. Finally, this section explores the views of staff on the benefits and challenges of the pivot to an online service for their customers and what they feel is needed going forward to support people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity towards employment, training, language proficiency and interpersonal skills.

4.1 The PETE Programme pre Covid-19

Even before the onset of Covid-19 the pathways into homelessness had been changing, with more people presenting to the PETE service experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity because of economic difficulty. This was and is especially true of migrants as well as younger people and families. After an evaluation of the PETE programme in 2018, and to address the changing needs and demographics of PETE customers, the scope and parameters of PETE expanded to include proactively engaging with young people (18–25 years), providing more support around external education and training programmes in the community and supports with obtaining employment.

“Up to 5 years ago it might have been people who were ... entrenched in homelessness ... addiction, mental health issues. But now it’s broader – a third is from migrant groups, a third probably in the 18–24-year range. A huge proportion of what we’re doing now is around job seeking.”
(Margaret, PETE Support Worker).

“The end goal is to exit homelessness. A lot of our customers are economic homeless. So, they’re in family hubs (emergency accommodation). Their goal is to exit homelessness and sustain that exit.” (Maeve, PETE Support Worker).

The main feature of the PETE programme that changed due to Covid-19 was the introduction of a hybrid model of working online and in person supports. Prior to this, the PETE service was run entirely onsite, PSWs held in-person assessments followed up by support plans for either education or employment, including CV and interview preparation as well as job applications. Accredited Art courses and ESOL were also run onsite. Numbers in classes averaged ten people prior to the pandemic.

4.2 Navigating the Pivot to Online Support of Customers

Due to the sudden introduction of restrictions because of the pandemic, the PETE service had to pivot to online very rapidly and ensure that both customers and staff within the organisation were aware that support could be provided, initially by phone. PSWs were flexible and quick to take up new technology to support their customers through this transition and ensure continuity of service provision.

“Our classes were completely on hold ... but we still felt we needed to support our job support customers ... there would still have been employment in sectors such as cleaning and healthcare. We got to grips with Zoom and we had to gauge whether [customers] had a smartphone ... internet data.” (Maeve, PETE Support Worker).

“We had to lead in a different way and quite quickly ... picking up the phone and connecting with somebody ... We moved very quickly to NALA which had just revamped their online distance learning offering. They run a number of QQI courses that are very relevant to our client group – digital skills, communications, computers, interpersonal skills – the timing was perfect.” (Margaret, PETE Support Worker).

Despite many challenges and setbacks, the PETE programme continued to evolve and support as many customers as possible even given the challenges of pandemic restrictions and customers challenging housing situations. PETE Support Workers and their customers worked collaboratively to achieve positive outcomes.

“There was challenges, but they were all overcome because people who got referred to our service, they really, really do want to work or want to get back into education.” (Lauren, PETE Support Worker).

The PETE team also worked with other relevant agencies to deliver the services needed by their customers and made sure that these courses were accessible, and that the customer was supported, particularly in the beginning. One such example is the use of online NALA courses. Courses are run online, and people can choose the level at which they start and opt to progress if they wish. In many instances the support of the PSWs converted potential barriers into skill-building exercises for their customers.

“It’s a computerised system. They can log in with me or ... on their own time. I always set goals. For the first one, we do a demonstration to gauge the level that they’re at. A lot of people get sucked into the programme ... it’s very self-directed. (Emily, PETE Support Worker).

The PETE team provided a positive support framework during a very disruptive period to ensure inclusivity for as many customers as possible, particularly around essential training courses such as ESOL.

“For most of the guys we had to find them ESOL on site. So, nothing happened during COVID. We never really closed off anybody – we [continued to engage with them] with the once-a-month phone call “How are you getting on? The minute something opens, we’re going to get you back on-site.” (Emily, PETE Support Worker).

4.3 Benefits of Moving to Online Supports

While the sudden lockdowns and major changes in ways of working were disruptive and unsettling, there were benefits to the move to online supports and these are discussed below.

Extra Resourcing for IT

Margaret explained that a combination of funding in 2021 and upskilling by staff enabled a transition that otherwise would not have been possible and allowed PETE to overcome several barriers. These extra resources enabled customers to continue with education and training and eventually upskill with the ultimate goal of obtaining employment and secure a home in the private rented sector.

“We wouldn’t have had any funding for upscaling without the external funds. There’s no budget in Focus for any of that [manual handling, safe pass, online health care, Easter revision courses], or the books, manuals for college or the college registration fee. So, by people becoming upskilled they were becoming employed at a much faster rate. We’re able to do things instantly and keep the momentum going for people. You’re not setting up another barrier. And people who have got jobs get into private rented [accommodation] faster because a landlord will see that they have a job.”
(Margaret, PETE Support Worker).

This extra funding also enabled more resources for the PETE team, such as Wi-Fi in their office and rooms where they provided one-to-one education and job support sessions. Funding was also available for laptops for the PETE team and again this enabled PSWs to react quickly in supporting customers with education and training programmes as well as work. These laptops proved vital in the pivot to online support work and continuity of the service and benefited not only the customer but also PSWs as well. These extra resources and the impact they had on certain PETE customers being able to complete their courses is highlighted in the quotes below from PETE staff.

“For ESOL ... a smartphone will do. But some people don’t have that, or the internet data might be a barrier. A lot of these customers were in hostels ... and they didn’t have the technology or equipment to continue with a class.”
(Emily, PETE Support Worker).

“We got Wi-Fi in our service and that was funded – that’s been huge because for customers that don’t have a laptop or smartphone or internet access they can now come on-site and use our laptops to do Manual Handling [courses] or NALA – which is only online. A lot of customers have been able to come on site and use the laptops and the Wi-Fi in our service to do that.” (Maeve, PETE Support Worker).

Development of New Tech Skills for PETE Customers

Another benefit in accessing this vital equipment is that PSWs were able to support their customers in learning technological skills, which are a necessary requirement for many training, education, and employment opportunities. PSWs spent time supporting customers in understanding how to use a laptop, send emails and fill in online applications, which empowered them to use these newfound skills outside of the PETE programme.

“One customer only really knew how to use a smartphone. So, I talked her through the different job websites (on a laptop), how to send an email to an employer, attach documents. So, the laptops come in very handy.” (Lauren, PETE Support Worker).

Many government bodies and institutions as well as employers have made a transition to online processes, and this could have been very problematic for some of the PETE customers. However, this was overcome with the support of PETE staff and the new resources available to the team. Again, new skills were taught to PETE customers to empower them for future similar experiences.

“Once someone is in work, we would make sure their Revenue is set up. A lot of interviews now with employers are going to be online. So, if they’re not hugely comfortable with it, we’ll ... go through it as many times as we need to. At the beginning it can be kind of ... intimidating ... but now a year on everyone is comfortable with it.” (Lauren, PETE Support Worker).

And when starting work, that support was also evident as Lauren continued. *“People were starting work and had to do the process online of the on-boarding ... that definitely took a little longer if people had very basic computer skills.”*

Education and Training Opportunities

Benefits of the move to online support was evident for customers who were looking to gain new qualifications through different levels of education and training. This includes completing their Leaving Certificate, gaining access to a Third Level institution, apprenticeships, and gaining new qualifications to change job path. While extra support was required in some instances, and the experience of the pandemic created complexity, there were nonetheless successful outcomes for customers.

“It was a tough year for her [PETE customer doing her Leaving Cert online] ... it was 100% remote. She’s in homeless accommodation and was struggling in a couple of her subjects but [because of external funding] we were able to source grinds for her. We got her ready to apply to TU Dublin Access programme and she got accepted onto that course and she’s there now.” (Maeve, PETE Support Worker).

“She [PETE customer] is now doing her full QQI Level 5 Major Award remotely and has acquired full time permanent work in a nursing home. Her goal was to get work in a nursing home.” (Maeve, PETE Support Worker).

Flexibility and Convenience of Online Supports and Courses

There were also other benefits in the pivot to online supports that were not just exclusive to the PETE programme and have been reported across many different sectors and industries. This includes the convenience of being able to access a course or support session online without having to commute or arrange childcare. This degree of flexibility and remote learning was particularly beneficial for lone parents with childcare responsibilities. The PETE programme was also able to reach a wider geographical area, and it was easier to work around PETE customers schedules and responsibilities. It also meant that PETE staff could use their time more efficiently if a customer was unable to make a meeting and they could support more of their case load.

“Typically, somebody with childcare needs wouldn’t be able to drop everything and come in for an appointment with us. Online they have full flexibility ... if their child was in the same room or having a nap ... they could have their one-to-one interview prep without leaving where they were.” (Margaret, PETE Support Worker).

“It saved people the commute, having to arrange childcare requirements – so it actually worked out really, really well once we realised that if a customer didn’t know how to use Zoom or Teams, we could quite easily talk them through how to download it onto their phone or laptop.” (Lauren, PETE Support Worker).

4.4 Challenges with Online Supports Only

Lack of Suitable Accommodation and Privacy

While PETE staff embedded the transition to online quickly, it became evident that customers experienced a few unique challenges. These difficulties and challenges were not just caused by a lack of access to laptops and reliable Wi-Fi, there was also the issue of space and privacy in unsuitable and temporary accommodation for them to contend with. Some PETE customers also had children to take care of and careful planning was needed to schedule these calls and meetings.

“I wouldn’t do a call with someone if they were ... in their bedroom with somebody else there. If the hostel is too loud, they might go to a park.”
(Lauren, PETE Support Worker).

“I have people with young kids as well and sometimes Zoom isn’t always the best thing for them if they feel there’s kids running around in the background [and may prefer a phone call]. I might send information to them through an email so that they can look over it themselves in their own time.” (Lauren, PETE Support Worker).

Differing Levels of Support Needs

There were differing levels of need amongst some PETE customers who benefited more from face-to-face interaction rather than online support sessions. This could have been due to learning style, literacy and learning difficulties, lack of computer skills or access to the relevant equipment as well as learning English as a second language.

“There were some people for whom online didn’t work and that could be several factors. Some people just prefer face to face. They don’t like the whole video call thing, or English may have been a barrier or IT was a barrier. They may not have general IT skills, or they don’t have access to a smartphone or laptop.” (Maeve, PETE Support Worker).

“And of course, you’re missing the interaction. Just talking to people across the screen – you’re missing the body language. you’re missing [being able to build up] the confidence by just having a nice word with them and making them feel relaxed.” (Margaret, PETE Support Worker).

Isolation

Some PETE customers worked better having that interaction in real life and for others a PETE course was a source of social interaction and human contact. Also, due to the nature of online learning (particularly for those customers who were trying to learn to learn or improve their English) the experience was quite isolating. Some of the PETE customers were single and may not have had a wide support network around them, and they struggled with the isolation and restrictions caused by the lockdown.

“Across the board, people with no English – that’s the person who needs to be on-site. You can’t do that remotely.” (Margaret, PETE Support Worker).

“A good few [customers] are single. So, it’s great that they engage but you realise that you’re probably the only person speaking to them. And they were locked up in their own apartments for all those months. And they have [like everyone else] developed some issues like being back in groups or getting back into the community. It’s a long time to be by yourself.” (Emily, PETE Support Worker).

Table 3: Summary of benefits and challenges of PETE transition to online

Benefits	Challenges
More IT resourcing (Wi-Fi, laptops)	Not all customers had access to relevant IT equipment
Development of new tech skills for customers	Some customers worked better with face-to-face interaction
Better access for customers to online government institutions/forms, and employers	Not all customers comfortable using technology/had the necessary skills
More access to online courses for PETE customers	Online courses more difficult for those customers learning English
More flexibility to take part in training courses (no commute, no need for childcare, complete it in their own time)	Unsuitable/overcrowded accommodation which was not suitable for online learning
Able to reach a wider geographical area	Isolation and loneliness of some customers

4.5 Future of the PETE Programme – A Blended Approach

All of the PETE Support Workers talked of the benefit of employing a hybrid model with both online and on-site access to education and training opportunities where appropriate and depending on the needs of the customer and the type of training or job support on offer.

“We definitely need both. We need on-site and remote. If we didn’t have remote, we would lose a certain cohort and if you don’t have on-site, you lose another selection online.” (Maeve, PETE Support Worker).

“Job searching and applications ... are quicker and easier online. Jobs are turning over quicker now it’s better to be live with it.” (Emily, PETE Support Worker).

In order to keep this service running into the future there is the need for funding to be maintained and expanded. The service is focussed on employment and education outcomes that are empowering for customers. As discussed previously the PETE programme has been proactive since its last evaluation in 2018. It has employed another PETE worker and engaged in other activities such as external training and education as well as broadening the customer age range. This has been successful with evidence of improved levels of engagement across numbers enrolled in education and training courses, as well as employment secured. From 2018 to 2020 there were increases in these various PETE activities, with a slight dip in levels in 2020 due to the pandemic.

“What’s important is maintaining funds to ensure that we can continue to meet the demand that’s coming in. We really do need to continue with a team of three project workers to meet as many people as we can. And the upskilling fund [is really critical] even if it’s a small amount – it’s to get someone over the line quickly.” (Margaret, PETE Support Worker).

5 Customer Consultation Findings

This section outlines the customer consultation element of the evaluation. The data for this section comes from two sources - survey results and case studies. The survey results of the *My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool* (as outlined in Section 2.1) was conducted with 26 PETE customers by phone. The case studies (See Section 2.2) were drafted following telephone interviews with four customers who had been supported by PETE during 2021.

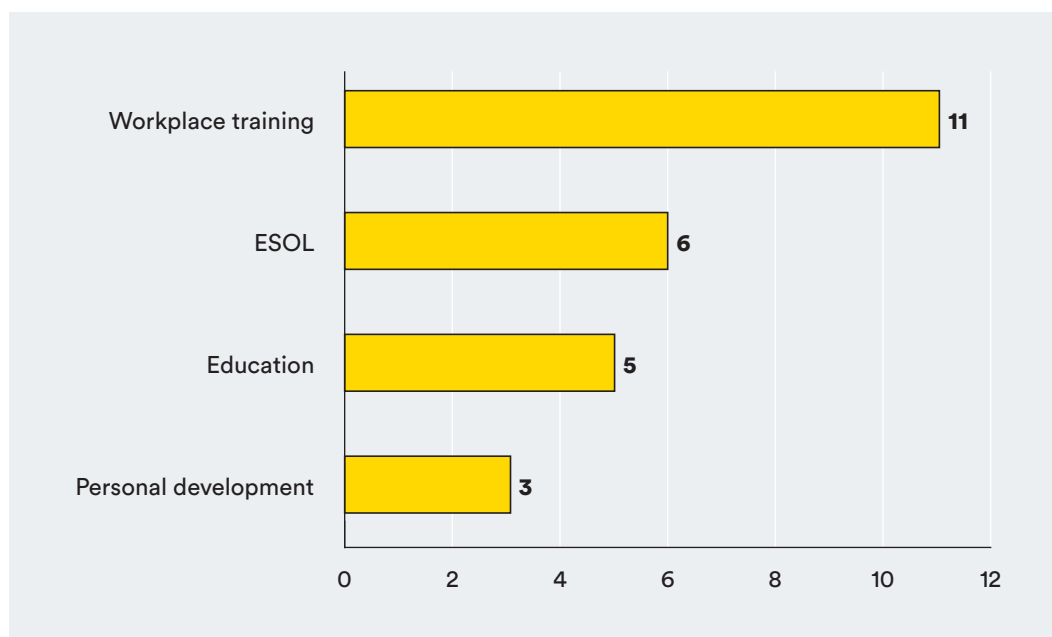
5.1 My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool Survey Results

As discussed earlier (See Section 2.1) The *My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool* is a validated tool for measuring soft outcomes to evidence the progress of customers engaging in holistic person centred supports towards social inclusion (SICAP 2020).

As such, this tool is ideally used at the beginning stages of engagement. However, for the purposes of this evaluation, it has been used as a follow-up survey for customers who engaged in the PETE online service during 2021. In doing so, it provides an overview of soft outcomes for 26 customers who took part in the phone survey and has allowed Focus Ireland and the PETE programme an opportunity to find a potential means of measuring soft outcomes for the programme going forward.

Of the 30 customers initially contacted, 26 were available to take the phone survey. Of that number, nearly half (n=11) had engaged in job training, 6 in ESOL programmes, 5 in education programmes and 3 in personal development programmes (See Graph 5 below). Data was missing for one customer. Customer ages ranged from 21 years to 52 years with an average age of 32.7 years.

Graph 5: Survey response by engagement type, n=25



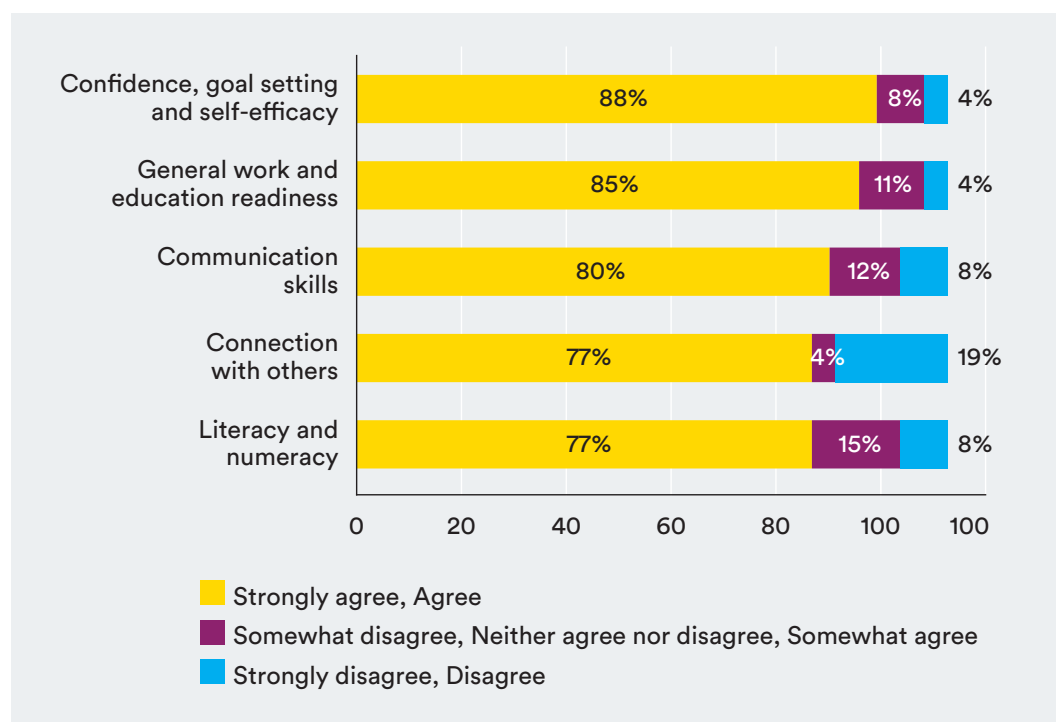
The tool used is a seven-point Likert Scale questionnaire which includes response options ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree. Each of these points was entered into a specifically designed database that assigned a numeric value starting with the number 1 for strongly disagree and 7 for strongly agree. For the purposes of reporting the points on the scale were grouped thus: strongly disagree and disagree (1 and 2); somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree (3,4 and 5); and agree and strongly agree (6 and 7).

All the statements used in the *My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool* are positive (See Appendix 1). The highest scores were recorded in two categories: **Confidence, Goal Setting and Self-efficacy** with 88% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had developed these soft outcomes because of taking part in the PETE online programme. **General Work and Education Readiness** followed closely behind at 85%. While **Communication Skills** also scored highly with 80% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that their soft skills target had been met. Communication Skills also had one of the highest rates of mid-point scores (somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree) at 12%, and one of the highest scores for participants strongly disagreeing or disagreeing that their support needs had not been met by the PETE programme at 8%.

Literacy and Numeracy and **Connection with Others** scored the lowest with 77% of participants feeling that these needs had been met. Literacy and Numeracy had the highest rate of mid-point scores, at 15%. These two categories also had some of the highest scores for participants strongly disagreeing or disagreeing that their support needs had been met by the PETE programme at 8% for Literacy and Numeracy and 19% for Connection with Others.

While these results would suggest that many of the soft skill targets that the customers need to progress have been met, the outcomes for Connection with Others, Literacy and Numeracy and Communication Skills perhaps need to be examined in more detail and explore how the PETE programme can better support customers with these soft skills.

Graph 6: Survey response scores by competency area



5.2 Customer Case Studies

As discussed earlier (Section 2.2), the following case studies were developed from interviews conducted with four PETE customers who had engaged in the online programme during 2021. The participants were engaged in three different aspects of the PETE programme – ESOL, workplace training, and education. Their stories give an insight into their experience of homelessness as well as the support and engagement of the PSWs.

Case Study 1:

Samia – Learning to Belong

“I want to learn English so that I can understand the world that I live in.”

In the quote above Samia describes her motivation for engaging in the PETE ESOL programme. Already fluent in Arabic and French, Samia says that English for her is a new opportunity. Samia moved to Ireland over ten years ago and describes herself as a housewife with four children. She has a third level degree from her home country, but now looks after her children full-time.

The family lost their accommodation following a notice of termination of their tenancy from their landlord and subsequently spent two years in hotel room emergency accommodation which she describes with mixed feelings. On the one hand being grateful for having accommodation, but also recognising the challenges in not having her own space and kitchen.

“Two sides – I have a roof – that’s good. And the bad is you know, you can’t cook. But that is in the past. Focus Ireland has been helping so much.”

When Samia and her family moved into their apartment during the pandemic, she was contacted by Focus Ireland to ask if there was anything she needed. Samia had basic English, having learned at a community centre prior to the pandemic. This closed with the restrictions and classes proved problematic when childcare had to be considered. However, due to the flexibility of the ESOL classes and with online support from PETE she was able to start these classes in May 2020 and has been studying online continuously since. She has a genuine enthusiasm for knowledge and is highly motivated.

“I want to learn more – more is good. It’s helped a lot. I like learning – it keeps my brain working.”

While she does not have access to a laptop, she can use her smart phone. Samia enjoys the atmosphere of the class and finds the tutor supportive and helpful, and the interaction is beneficial. Her response also highlights how important it is for her to be able to study at home while trying to balance childcare responsibilities.

“If I have problems I can go to the teacher – sometimes I use Google or YouTube but it’s better to ask the teacher. And I can repeat the class if I want. I can learn at home with my son ... he’s at home and it’s good. It’s warm and it’s helped so much.”

Samia’s other children are in primary school and the family like learning together as a group. The access to online ESOL classes has enabled her to improve her English language skills and has allowed her to spend quality time with her family and help them to grow and learn.

“I can help them. And with them, I learn more English. I have opportunities to read with them. I help them and they help me.”

Samia, aged 26+ years

Case Study 2:

Maria – Making a Better Life for her Child

‘From a girl that walked around town all day depending on Social Welfare for two years ... and then my life changed ... all in the blink of an eye. Went back to work and college. I feel normal. I feel like a mother. That I’m doing something good for my child.’

Maria is describing how she feels about her life having engaged with the PETE programme. Maria had married young and *‘tried to have a life that I wanted but it just didn’t work.’* She became homeless at the age of 17 and was working in childcare while studying for a qualification. When she subsequently had her baby, she was unable to complete her childcare course or work as childcare was too expensive and her baby had medical issues.

She described her five years in homelessness accommodation as chaotic and unstable, including financial precarity and poverty.

“At the start it was hostels and then when I had the baby it was night-to-nights. Queuing up for soup runs, getting baby food and nappies ... and clothes from people that I don’t know ... we got moved again and again. My life was on a rollercoaster.”

Maria was put in contact with the PETE service through her health care nurse and keyworker. She was adamant that she wanted a better life for herself and her child, and when she was told she could have funding for college to progress her childcare qualification, and upon completion would have a job, she said it was life changing for her.

“It was like a dream come true. It was something I thought would never happen.”

The online PETE service provided support to secure employment, helping with CV and interview preparation. The service also helped her to find a creche for her two-year-old child. She purchased a laptop which would allow for internet access, and it was at this stage that she heard she had been accepted to college and that her fees were being covered.

Attending college during lockdown meant that everything was online. Feeling daunted at first, Maria's Support Worker was available if Maria needed extra support.

“College was straightforward ... and if I got stuck on something and couldn't contact the college, I could ring anyone in the PETE service.”

She says she now thinks the online option works better for her as it allows her to work around her childcare needs. ‘I would prefer a sit-down college, where you could go in and ask questions ... but then with a baby ... you can't say “I can't go into college tomorrow because my child is sick.”

Maria has settled well into a new job and is hoping to continue with her studies as her manager wants her to apply for a supervisory role. She is hoping to find her stable home soon.

Maria, aged under 26 years

Case Study 3:

Antoni – Working towards his Goals

Antoni moved to Ireland seven years ago seeking a different life. Having worked in construction in his home country, he hoped that he would be able to retrain to work in graphic design in Ireland. He has had many different jobs since he arrived and has been in and out of homelessness during that entire time. He described having been alcohol free for five years, but a combination of job loss coupled with subsequent homelessness triggered his alcohol use. *‘The drink ruins everything’* says Antoni.

Antoni entered a community detox programme run by the Dublin Simon Community and was anxious to get working again.

“I want to work in construction to start – for that little bit of money. If I work on a construction site [to be able to buy] my computer and graphic tablet ... for drawing and graphic design.”

The online PETE programme offered Antoni both Safe Pass and Manual Handling courses. He had looked at funding these himself but found he could not afford the fee from his Social Welfare payment.

“I did an interview and happy days you know. Because Focus found some donations for Safe Pass for people like me, so I do not have to buy from my dole.”

Both courses were run online and while Antoni found them hugely beneficial, he describes having difficulty communicating online and described how he preferred in person support.

“I just don’t like communicating with people online – I have no confidence. I’d rather sit beside somebody and talk.”

He describes his period during lockdown as an opportunity to review his life and to plan for his goals for the future.

“It was time for thinking – what you want to do with your life and what’s important for you.”

Completing both courses online enabled Antoni to get work in construction straight away. This new structure gave his life some meaning and motivation to take better care of his health and finances.

“[The PETE programme] was very quick and without any problems. [The support worker] was very easy to get on with and very supportive. I started working and I am happy without drink ...I have enough ... I have my own money and can buy what I want and not go drinking.”

He is hoping that in the future he can enrol on a part time graphic design course. *‘Maybe if I get an extra job part time – or even a few projects in my free time.’* Antoni has moved from a recovery house to temporary hostel accommodation. He is currently hoping to apply to HAP to secure his own rental accommodation.

Antoni, aged 26+ years

Case Study 4:

Ifeoma – A Journey to 3rd Level Education

Like many Irish students, Ifeoma found herself studying over the two-year Leaving Cert cycle mostly online. However, unlike most Irish students, Ifeoma was without any family and living in hostel accommodation during that time.

Having returned to Ireland in 2019, Ifeoma had planned to sit her Leaving Certificate and progress to study medicine at college. Her first hostel had limited access hours, so she would have to leave at 9am and only return at 6pm. This did not deter Ifeoma, and she displayed a lot of motivation to continue with her studies, despite the many obstacles in her way. Eventually through the Citizens Information service she got in contact with Focus Ireland.

“I was independent, and I needed help in terms of just getting through school. And the PETE programme helped me through all of that. They’re still helping me actually.”

Ifeoma says that PETE helped her financially with a fund to complete her school studies, and that she has recently moved to a different hostel, which has 24-hour access and more privacy so that she is able to study properly. *“This has more privacy. I was full time in school, and I had a part time job as well.”*

The PETE programme paid for Ifeoma’s courses, but she also received online support for college applications.

“We would apply for stuff together [CAO, Access] so it made it much easier and more organised for me. PETE paid for the course. They covered anything that had to do with schools. Especially in terms of money. [PETE] were very helpful and able to be fast.”

While Ifeoma is an Irish citizen, because of residency rules she cannot apply for a SUSI grant until next year. And although medicine was her first choice, she is now studying pre-law through an Access programme. Despite the instability and having to take care of herself at a relatively young age she was successful in her Leaving Cert results.

“I did really well [in the Leaving Cert] the only thing that stopped me was maths. Everything else I excelled in.”

Describing her pre-law course, Ifeoma says that she is enjoying it. *‘I like every subject so far. The maths is easier too. I don’t need to do advanced maths or anything.’*

The experience of online learning was an isolating one for Ifeoma, and she missed interacting with people. For a young person who is not from Ireland and doesn’t have an immediate support network around them this is not surprising. *“I missed school life. I got along with people.”* Ifeoma is hoping to get a grant to enable her to continue to enrol as a law student for the next academic year. She has just secured a part time job and hopes to find alternative accommodation that would give her more security. *“I wouldn’t mind – preferably a studio apartment – just anything that’s available really.”*

Ifeoma, aged under 26 years

6 Discussion

From the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data there are a number of positive elements to the PETE programme as well as some possible gaps in service that may need further investigation or development. These are discussed below.

PETE Programme Response During Covid-19

While the PETE programme adapted and responded as quickly and efficiently as it could at the onset of the pandemic, there was an impact on engagement levels, which is to be expected. Indeed, these decreases were mostly out of the control of the PETE team, due to restrictions and lockdowns. However, as discussed in the case studies, the support that was provided has been impactful in supporting PETE customers to complete their education, training, and employment goals.

A reduction in enrolment levels in the PETE programme was experienced in 2020 due to the onset of the pandemic, but there was an increase in 2021 with the opening back up of society and easing of restrictions. The decrease in the number of people who progressed to further education or training in the community in 2020 was due to courses and programmes being cancelled because of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. For example, there were no on-site construction courses (safe pass certs), no security courses or adult education on site courses in 2020. There was a significant increase in 2021 due to external education and training courses opening back up again after restrictions. There was a steady increase in numbers obtaining employment between 2018 to 2021, with a slight decrease in 2020, again due to complications brought about by the pandemic and subsequent restrictions. The provision of online supports for both education and employment ensured that there was still some level of support afforded to PETE customers during the pandemic, and these were continued into 2021, along with in person meetings.

The rates of ‘closed positive’ customer cases have increased over the last six years, starting at 18% of case closures in 2016 and increasing to 65% in 2021. This means that a higher rate of PETE customers achieved their education/training and or employment goals and completed the PETE programme. The increase in the rate of ‘positive’ closures for PETE customers over the last five years shows the level of support and skill of the PSWs in helping their customers to achieve better outcomes and goals. There was a slight

decrease between 2020–2021, however considering that this was the first year of the pandemic and many community and education programmes closed completely, this is still a high level of engagement. Efforts in this area should continue, and perhaps further enquiries as to why some customers disengage before completing the programme and what can be done to support them. As mentioned in Section 1 of this report, obtaining meaningful training, education or employment opportunities can act as a protective measure for people experiencing homelessness and mitigate against some of the more negative aspects of this situation, while also providing meaning and motivation.

Achievements and Gaps in Service

173 customers were recorded as having been supported by the PETE team in 2021. Out of this number, 95 (55%) were men and 78 were women (45%). More attention may need to be paid to the needs of men and women as there was a notable difference in the ratio of men securing employment compared to women. Of the 47 jobs secured, 30 (64%) were secured by males and 17 (36%) by females. While securing employment may not have been a goal for some women taking part in the PETE programme, this does need to be investigated further to ensure that women are not being excluded due to childcare issues or other structural barriers impeding their employment progression. As mentioned in Section 1 of this report, lone parent homeless families are normally female-led and have been adversely affected by the homelessness crisis in Ireland. Pathways into homelessness for this group are for the most part due to economic reasons, and many of these families would have relatively stable housing histories in the private rented sector but have had to leave due to ‘no-fault’ evictions (Long et al, 2019).

Another group that may need further support in obtaining employment is the 18–25 year age group. Just over a quarter (26%) of those aged under 26 secured employment, and their education and training rates were only 19% in 2021, which is cause for concern. As this group generally face multiple levels of exclusion it is important that every effort is made to engage and support them. This age group has also faced increasing levels of homelessness in the last number of years and their pathways into homelessness can include a history of living in State care. However, this age group has only been proactively engaged with by the PETE programme since 2018, and pandemic restrictions may account for the lower levels of enrolment for this age group.

Employment and Education Supports

Nearly 570 job support sessions have been provided by the PETE team in 2021, with 72 job interviews completed and 47 jobs secured by PETE customers (57% full time). Data indicates that significant time, effort, and resources are required to support this group in obtaining interviews as well as employment. The data evidences the intensity of this process, and there may be an opportunity for greater levels of collaboration and partnership with employers to ensure that there is a straightforward employment pathway for PETE customers. These partnerships with external employers, particularly in the areas of logistics/warehouse, cleaning, catering/hospitality, and construction, could be incentivised to support PETE customers and referrals could be made so that more PETE customers are supported into these employment areas.

In relation to the education and training supports provided by PETE in 2021, there were 276 education support sessions carried out, 91 certificates issued, and 121 customers took part in an education and training course of their choice. Unsurprisingly Workplace Training had the highest rate of attendance with nearly half (48%) of customers taking part. This complements the job types secured, with logistics/warehouse, cleaning, catering/hospitality, and construction the top four industries where PETE customers obtained employment. While IT skills training was the next highest in attendance, it was one of the lowest sectors where employment was secured by PETE customers, which may require further investigation. General education, healthcare and art and design courses appear to cater for a wide range of needs and interests for PETE customers, and there was relatively high rate of certificates issued to customers. As discussed by the PETE staff some of the customers who take part in these courses do so for a range of reasons including upskilling, improving their CVs and job prospects, as well as for social and emotional connections.

The Benefits and Challenges of Providing an Online Service

Consultation with PETE staff found that there were several benefits to online service provision. These include the development of new tech skills for customers, easier access to employment and training and education courses, flexibility in taking part in certain training and education courses as well as an opportunity for the PETE programme to reach a wider geographical area. However, there were also challenges, which include: unsuitable/overcrowded accommodation; childcare responsibilities; exclusion of some customers if they didn't have access to the right IT equipment; lack of confidence with technology as well as the isolating nature of online courses and support sessions (particularly for those customers who were learning English or were living alone). Clearly there were elements that should be retained into the future, such as the flexibility that online supports and courses can offer, and the development of technical skills for PETE customers. It should not be assumed however that online will suit all customers and support sessions will need to be tailored to suit their individual needs. It is evident that the PETE programme already engages customers in this way and this approach should continue.

The Impact of PETE on Customers' Lives

For those customers who had completed the PETE programme and took part in the *My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool* (n=25), 11 (44%) of them had taken part in Workplace Training, followed by 6 (24%) in ESOL, 5 (20%) in Education, and 3 (12%) in Personal Development. These past PETE customers were also asked to rate certain soft skills they felt they had achieved through taking part in this programme, and the top three highest scoring areas were: Confidence, Goal Setting and Self-efficacy (88%), General Work and Education Readiness (85%), and Communication Skills (80%). This is partly to be expected as nearly half of this group had taken part in workplace training in PETE. An area of concern is that of Connection to Others, with 19% of participants stating that their support needs had not been met in developing these skills. This finding may need to be incorporated into future PETE courses to ensure that customers' needs are met in preparation for joining the workforce if that is their choice.

An analysis of the four customer case studies provides powerful insight on the impact a programme like PETE can bring about for someone living in adverse or difficult circumstances, particularly amongst people who have experience of homelessness

and housing insecurity. While each story is unique, they share several characteristics including the level of support provided by PETE and the flexibility and adaptability of that support when needed. While each customer had different needs and goals, they were supported to achieve them, and this resulted in a greater level of personal empowerment. Two of the four were mothers with childcare responsibilities and in both cases they were better able to support their families after achieving their goals with PETE. There was also a recognition of the structural barriers that can prevent a single parent from accessing courses or employment such as lack of affordable childcare. Evidence shows the PETE team provided a range of supports, including a creche placement, so that the customer could complete her education, gain a qualification, and obtain better paid employment.

For another PETE customer his goal was to become a graphic designer, but he needed access to courses to be able to work in construction that could eventually fund his goal of upskilling to this profession. PETE provided financial assistance coupled with general support and this in turn gave Antoni a sense of structure and routine and a feeling of pride and contentment in earning his own money and having a purpose. In the last case study, Ifeoma - a young person who did not have the support or stability of a family network in Ireland - was determined to complete her Leaving Cert and go on to study Medicine at University. In this instance the PETE programme provided not only financial support but also advice and information to Ifeoma on her particular circumstances and entitlements, which could have been very complex for a young person to navigate on their own. She has now completed her Leaving Certificate and excelled in her results and is looking towards a bright future.

Underpinning these successful PETE customer journeys was the importance and impact of the online supports of the PETE programme. For Samia her online ESOL course and support from PSWs acted as the catalyst for her studying trajectory. For the other three case studies in this report the pivot to online supports provided by PSWs enabled these customers to either start or finish their online courses and/or education and progress further onto their next goals. All four customers talked about how life changing this was for them, and despite a global pandemic the PETE programme delivered the appropriate support by quickly adapting to online service provision. In enabling their customers to continue in education and training online, PSWs assisted them both in achieving goals and in the development of new digital and tech skills. While the PETE programme provided these customers, and many like them, with emotional support and guidance, financial assistance, encouragement as well as practical advice and information, the dysfunctional housing system in Ireland still proved problematic and a source of stress for these customers. For three out of the four case studies in this report, they were still trying to find more permanent accommodation in a highly competitive and under-supplied rental market. That they achieved their goals under such circumstance's points to high levels of determination and motivation.

7 Conclusion and Recommendations

The data gathered as part of this evaluation provides strong evidence that the PETE programme in Dublin was successful in its transition to an online service during 2021. This was evident in terms of increased levels of engagement, retention and positive customer outcomes. This has not been achieved without a high level of support provided by the PETE Support Workers to their customers. It is equally clear that securing additional external funding from JP Morgan was central to this success, firstly in providing funding for an additional staff member on its small team, as well as provision of internet access, laptops, and smartphones across the PETE service. Post Covid, and as homelessness figures continue to rise, it is essential that this service continues to be adequately funded, particularly considering the increased reach of online service provision. The PETE service operates in a flexible, tailored way with a key emphasis on targeting the individual needs of their customers in a timely manner and should continue in this way with some minor changes.

Identifying the reasons that less women than men secure employment in the PETE programme and examining the lower rates of enrolment amongst the 18–25 years age group should be a priority for the PETE service going forward. This would allow for the creation of specifically targeted interventions for these excluded cohorts. The development of soft skills such as communication and the ability to connect with others should also be a part of future tracking of PETE customer needs, as these were some of the lowest scoring skills on completion of the programme as reported by customers in the survey. These issues were also captured in some of the customer case studies.

This report shows that the programme supports many customers in need and helps them to achieve their goals, enabling positive and empowering choices in their careers, education, and daily life. Responses to the *My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool* showed that former PETE customers strongly agreed or agreed that they were more confident in their Goal Setting and self-efficacy (88%); General Work and Education Readiness (85%); and Communication skills (80%). These positive outcomes are again evidenced in the four case studies. All four of these customers were supported through their own unique journeys to complete training and education courses as well as help in looking for employment. All these customers received tailored supports and PETE staff were quick to respond to their requests for support, and each had moved on in positive ways. Also, it

was found that of those PETE customers who obtained a job in 2021 (n=47), 57% of these jobs were in full-time employment. The rate of certificates obtained by PETE customers in 2021, is also to be lauded with 91 certs issued. Such rates of engagement in both education and training and employment deserve recognition, occurring as they did during the last phases of restrictions because of Covid-19.

The following recommendations for the PETE service are drawn from analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data contained in this report.

Regularised Funding

- › Secure funding for resourcing related to: communications technology and WIFI for PETE customers.

PETE Referrals and Partnerships

- › Explore a formalised referral process with other Focus Ireland services to engage with the PETE programme including customers of the Support to Live Independently (SLI) housing service and long-term housing services.
- › Explore potential partner organisations in employment sectors that can provide reliable and straightforward employment pathways for PETE customers.
- › Introduce a process of supported employment where customers receive ongoing financial and/or social support as part of the PETE programme.

Outcomes Tracking

- › Embed a process of outcomes tracking in the PETE service. Outcome tracking processes should include a measurement based on the individual's journey throughout the PETE programme capturing outcomes such as courses completed, job supports obtained, interviews secured, and employment secured.

Research


- › Investigate further the causes of the lower engagement levels of women and young people in the 18–25 years age group in securing employment and taking part in education and training.
- › Create a simplified consent form for the participation of customers in research projects using principles of plain English.

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Appendix 1



my journey
DISTANCE TRAVELLED TOOL

IRIS ID. _____

This tool will help you to better understand your personal and professional skills and to think about aspects of your life you would like to improve. If you repeat this tool a few times it will show any changes you may have made in these areas.

Please respond to the statements below from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' thinking about how you have been feeling in the last month.

NAME _____

I voluntarily agree to fill out the tool and understand that it will be kept confidentially in my SICAP file and collated in an online system, and that the information (with my personal details removed) may be used to improve programme delivery. I understand I can withdraw my permission for the use of my personal data from My Journey at any time.

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

TITLE STATEMENTS

☹️

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

☺️

Strongly agree

01	I can confidently complete forms and applications	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
02	My reading and writing are good enough for everyday life	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
03	My maths is good enough for everyday life	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
04	I am a confident person	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
05	I know what I am good at	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
06	I feel comfortable around people in a formal setting like work or education	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
07	I can achieve things I set my mind to	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
08	I am happy with some of the things I have achieved in my life	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
09	I am comfortable trying new things	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
10	I feel I can make changes in my life	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
11	I feel I can work out most challenges that come my way	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

PLEASE TURN OVER



TITLE STATEMENTS		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
12	I feel ready to take the next steps towards my goals (for example in work or education)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13	I know what I would like to do in the next few years	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14	I have activities or hobbies I enjoy doing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15	I have opportunities to spend time with others doing things I care about	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16	I feel part of a social group, club or community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17	I have someone I can count on for support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18	I know people that I can ask for advice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19	I am comfortable speaking in a small group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20	I am good at expressing my views	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21	I am comfortable talking to people I do not know very well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22	I am comfortable speaking to people in a position of authority (for example a boss or tutor)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23	I ask for help when I need it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24	I am good at being on time for appointments, work or other activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25	I feel I have the right skills to find a job if I want one	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26	I feel I have the right skills to complete a course if I start one	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27	I know how to get the information I need to help me with jobs, courses or other areas of my life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



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Appendix 2

Staff Interview Schedule – PETE Evaluation

- **Thanks for taking the time to talk to me. I'd like to start by asking you a little bit about yourself and your role in Focus?**
(prompt: background, length of time, customer base, area of interest etc)
- **And now just to look at PETE and your involvement in it when COVID restrictions started?**
(prompt: job changes/reassignment; feelings about customers being unable to continue etc)
- **And now if I could just ask you about the process of moving from in-person to online/blended PETE programme from your personal perspective?**
(prompt: what was involved, when did work on this start, what were the issues that came up? Digital exclusion etc)
- **And how do you feel that customers have managed the change in PETE both prior to and following transition?**
(prompt: issues around technical skills; internet access; upskilling; outcomes; social isolation).
- **What do you think are the positive and negative changes that have occurred during and following the transition?**
(prompt: what has been most challenging/most beneficial)
- **How do you think PETE, as an online or blended learning environment, can best serve clients going forward?**
(prompt: do you envisage continuation of blended or back to in person only; what about funding?)
- **Is there anything else that you feel I should have asked?**

Customer Interview Schedule – PETE Evaluation

- **Thanks for taking the time to talk to me. I'd like to start by asking you a little bit about yourself?**
(prompt: background, housing situation, initial contact with Focus)
- **And how did you get involved with PETE?**
(prompt: route/pathway of referral; reasons for accessing the service)
- **And when you started working on PETE was it online only or blended?**
(prompt: what was involved, when did work on this start, what were the issues that came up? Digital exclusion etc)
- **And how do you feel that online worked for you?**
(prompt: issues around technical skills; internet access; upskilling; outcomes; social isolation).
- **What do you think are the positive and negatives about the PETE programme?**
(prompt: what has been most challenging/most beneficial; does online free up more time; social exclusion an issue?)
- **How do you think PETE, as an online or blended learning environment, can best serve people in your situation going forward?**
(prompt: would you like to see a blend/back to face-to-face only)
- **Is there anything else that you feel I should have asked?**

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me.

Appendix 3

Participant Information Leaflets and Consent Forms Staff Consultation

Staff Participant Information Leaflet

STUDY WORKING TITLE: PETE – The transition to online training during COVID-19 restrictions. A mixed-methods evaluation.

We are currently conducting an evaluation research study and would like your assistance

This study is a mixed methods evaluation of the process and outcomes of transitioning the existing PETE programme to an online and/or blended programme starting in January 2021. Quantitative data from the Focus Ireland database will provide the basis for the numeric data for the study. We are also hoping to interview you as part of the team that was involved in that transition.

Why am I being asked to take part?

As a person in the organisation who has been supporting individuals to access these services, we are asking you for your experiences of the transition from in-person to an online or blended version of PETE.

Specifically, we would like to unpack some of the following:

- › Some brief information on your role within the organisation and within PETE
- › Discover the process of moving from in-person to online/blended PETE programme from your personal perspective
- › Explore client engagement in PETE both prior to and following transition
- › Identify issues that have arisen (both positive and negative) during and following the transition
- › Develop an understanding of how PETE, as an online or blended learning environment, can best serve clients going forward.

By participating in this research, you will be helping us to get a clearer picture of both the successes and the problems that clients and the organisation has faced in making this transition, and how clients have been and can be supported towards training, education and/or employment now and in the future.

Who will we be talking to?

We are asking a number of staff members to talk to us in the form of an audio recorded interview.

What do you need me to do?

We would greatly appreciate your assistance with this research by agreeing to an interview.

How will the interviews be conducted?

The interviews will take on average 20-30 minutes and will be conducted at a place and time chosen by you. You may choose to be interviewed in person at a specific location, by phone or online using Zoom and the interview will be recorded using a separate recording device.

What information about me will be included in this study?

While your opinions will be included as part of the study, you will not be identified in any way when the report is being written. We will take care to ensure that any identifying information is removed.

What happens to my personal data?

Personal data will be processed only as necessary and with as few people involved as possible. Only anonymised transcripts will be held – recording data will be destroyed following transcription. All data will be stored with the Focus Ireland Research Team for a period of 7 years, after which it will be destroyed. Your information will be held in a separate document using an alpha-numeric code which ensures that you are not identified.

You have the right to view transcripts, change or delete any information you have given to the researcher, as well as the right to correct any errors.

Who is organising the study?

This study is being funded by a company which provided funding for the transition, as well as Focus Ireland and is being undertaken by an independent research team.

Is there any payment for taking part?

There is no payment for participation.

What happens next?

We have attached a consent form with this email so that you can take time to decide on whether or not to participate. We will contact you shortly to arrange a date, time, and place for the interview. If you do decide to participate, please sign the attached consent form, and return it to the email address below.

Kathyan Kelly, Researcher.

Staff Consent Form

As you know, we are currently conducting an evaluation of the process involved in transitioning PETE from an in-person to an online and/or blended support for clients accessing services in Focus Ireland.

We are asking for you to participate in this study, however participation is your decision entirely. If you do consent, this participation will take the form of a 20–30-minute interview which will be audio recorded. We will ask you some general questions about your role within your organisation, as well as questions about how the service operated before, during and after this transition. We would also like your opinion on how you envisage this transition going forward.

Your responses will be anonymous. You will not be named in any report. Your participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from participation at any time before, during or after your interview is completed.

Privacy

No information from which you could be directly or indirectly identified will be published. Data will be stored securely on a double encrypted computer and only the research team will have access to your transcripts. No names, contact or other personal details will be assigned to your responses. Data storage will meet the requirements of the Data Protection Acts 1988 - 2018 and the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All data will be stored for a period of 7 years and then destroyed.

Your input will be included into an overall research study, which will be made publicly available, but again anonymously.

Consent to participate:

Please tick as appropriate:

› I have read and understand the information leaflet for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to have any questions answered.	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I understand that this study is entirely voluntary, and if I decide I do not want to take part, I can stop at any time without giving a reason. I understand that deciding to withdraw or not participate will not affect my future support.	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I understand that I will not be paid for taking part in this study.	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I know how to contact the researcher if needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I agree to participate having been fully informed of the risks and benefits set out in the information leaflet.	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I understand that my data will be protected, and that I will not be identified and that my information will only be shared in the form of a report.	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study.	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I understand that I can stop at any time without giving a reason and refuse to answer any questions I do not like.	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I consent to audio-recording of the interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name:

Date:

Researcher Name and Date:

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Research Team.

Final Customer Participant Information Leaflet and Consent Form

Customer Participant Information Leaflet

PETE – The transition to online training during COVID-19 restrictions.

A mixed-methods evaluation

We are doing some research and would like your help

We want to ask you about the Focus Ireland PETE programme.

Why am I being asked to take part?

We would like to know the things you did and did not like about PETE

We will ask you some questions on the following topics:

- How you started
- How you managed online
- If you think PETE has helped
- What would make PETE better

Who will we be talking to?

We are asking some people who have done the PETE programme to talk to our researcher.

What do you need me to do?

We would like it if you would agree to an interview.

How will the interviews be done?

The interviews will take about 20 minutes. It can be done by phone or Zoom. We will record the interview.

What information about me will be included in this study?

We will make sure not to use your name or any personal details in the study.

What happens to my personal data?

Only the researcher will have information on you. This will be kept safely by Focus Ireland for 7 years and then deleted. All of your information will be kept safely.

You can ask for a copy of the recording or the typed notes and make changes if you wish.

Who is organising the study?

Focus Ireland and the company that is funding some of the PETE programme.

Is there any payment for taking part?

There is no payment for participation.

What happens next?

There is a consent form attached. If you read it, or have it read to you, and you are happy to take part, please let us know. If you can sign it that would be great but if not, we can do so over the phone.

Kathyan Kelly, Researcher.

Customer Consent Form

We are trying to find out how PETE has worked for you.

We would like to interview you and record that interview.

We will ask you some general questions about your yourself, as well as questions about how you found PETE. We will also ask if you think there are things we could do better.

You will not be named in any report. You don't have to take part at all, and you can change your mind at any time.

Privacy

We will make sure to keep all of you information very private and according to GDPR rules. We will not use your name or any information about you in any report.

Consent to participate

Please tick as appropriate:

› I understand what I am being asked to do	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I understand that this is something I can choose to do or not	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I understand that I will not be paid	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I know how to contact the researcher if needed	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I agree to take part having been fully informed of the risks and benefits set out in the information leaflet.	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I understand that my information will be kept private	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I understand that I will not be paid or benefit from taking part	<input type="checkbox"/>
› I understand that I can stop at any time without giving a reason and refuse to answer any questions I do not like.	
› I will allow the interview to be recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name:

Date:

Researcher Name and Date:

If you have any questions, please phone, or email the Researcher, Kathyan Kelly.

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