



## Introduction:



### Briefing: Letters For Learning Campaign



## Our Key Asks:


**1** That the HSE and ETBs provide core funding for NLN programmes at rates appropriate to 2023 costs. The STP fee remains at €14,956 while the HSE rate varies from €13,800 to €15,000.

**2** There is no clarity in Budget 2024 around funding for 2024. We urgently need an indication of the funding amount available to NLN for 2024.

**3** The inflationary funding provided in 2023 must be provided in 2024. Capital Funding needs to be provided to ensure modern fit for purpose services are provided.

**4** Funding to meet pay increased for staff employed by NLN and STP Providers must be provided to bring salaries for staff employed in the provision of these services on behalf of the state to same level of those employed directly by the state.

- On 7 December a group of students from the National Learning Network (NLN) brought their "Letters for Learning" campaign to Leinster House today, presenting elected representatives with **hundreds of heartfelt letters urgently calling for support for the training provider.**
- National Learning Network (NLN) is Ireland's **leading provider of supported training and education** opportunities for people aged 16-66 with disabilities or with additional support needs.
- NLN, has played a **transformative role in the lives of over 2,600 students with disabilities since 2020**, providing crucial support for education and employment.
- NLN is primarily funded by the HSE, Solas/16 ETBs and several Higher Education Organisations.
- It provides education and training services in **every county in the Republic of Ireland.** All provision is QQI accredited, and students achieve positive progressive outcomes to higher levels of education, training and to employment.
- NLN provides a **comprehensive range of supports** needed to approximately 6,500 students across HSE funded, Solas/ETB funded, and Higher education funded initiatives each year. The primary objective of HSE and Solas/ETB funded services is to facilitate students' progress into mainstream education and/or employment.
- As the primary provider of Specialist Training and Rehabilitative Training, **we are experiencing significant funding challenges at present across both HSE and Solas/ETB funded services.** This is impacting on our ability to provide current services and to plan for future provision.
- There are significant issues in relation to funding from the HSE and Solas/ETBs training fee which **has not increased in 12 years since 2011.**
- Moreover, the utilisation model of funding **does not take cognisance of the core costs in providing the courses.** This makes it difficult for us to draw down all the funding available for Specialist Training Provision or Rehabilitative Training.



## Specialist Training provision Funded by DFHERIS/Solas/16ETBs:

- Solas commenced a review of Specialist Training Provision (STP) in 2020, but to date, this has not been completed or published. Funding for Specialist Training Provision has not been reviewed or increased since 2011. The same per-capita fee for service rate has not changed since 2011 but costs have increased substantially during this period. **STP providers are now in a very difficult position with a funding model which has not moved to meet inflationary or staffing cost increases over a twelve-year period.**
- Furthermore, the model used to STP provision is extremely onerous as it is based on a utilisation fee for service per capita funding mechanism. **This means a provider is only paid if students attend and has no means to cover core staffing and infrastructural costs.** Providers are also operating on short term contracts with no security of tenure and are operating with no clarity on the future position of STPs within FET.
- **There is no funding for Capital projects since EU funding ceased in 2001.** Buildings and systems which were fit for purpose at that point are now in need of substantial capital investment to ensure services are safe and fit for purpose.
- Staff employed to deliver STP services are seeking pay increases in line with the Building Momentum agreement. **Providers are experiencing huge difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff to deliver services as their salary scales are no longer competitive.**
- STP providers welcome the Review of the FET Funding of July 2022. However, we were disappointed that there is no specific reference to Specialist Training Provision in the terms of reference. We believe that **the Review does offer an opportunity to examine the similar challenges faced in providing these services.**
- We have been meeting with Solas over the past two years to negotiate a viable funding stream, but despite positive engagement **no resolution has been found to date**, although we understand some funding amelioration has been agreed by Solas Board for 2023. **A longer-term approach covering 2024 onwards needs to be agreed as a matter of urgency.**
- As Further Education and Training sector moves forward with a new growing eco-system it is **important that people with disabilities are not left behind.**



## HSE funded Rehabilitative Training and School Leaver Services:

- The HSE provides funding for Rehabilitative Training (RT). They announced a review of Rehabilitative Training in 2023, but again this will take **at least 12 to 18 months** to complete with possible further delays before the report is finally published.
- It is also worth noting that RT funding fee has been reduced during period of austerity and is **below 2011 levels.** The fee differs across many CHO areas from a low of €13,800 in one CHO to €15,000 in another with an average fee of €14,000 per training place per year. This must cover all costs including transport infrastructure staffing etc. **There is no cost rationale for differentiated funding across CHOs and this level of funding is no longer tenable.**
- Conversely HSE funding for school-leavers places which provides similar services starts at €18,000 and can go up to €55,000 dependent on needs assessed. This is a fit for purpose funding model and is welcomed by providers.
- The HSE provided an increase of 3.5% inflationary funding in 2022 but it was made clear that this was on **a once-off basis.**
- There is **no funding for capital investment projects** in Rehabilitative Training provision although some small capital projects are funded through School Leaver funding.