

THE
B!G
iDEA

FET Conference

2025



Innovation for Lifelong Learning

The ETBI National FET Conference 2025 hosted an inspiring workshop that brought together approximately 60 attendees to explore ways to break barriers to lifelong learning. Facilitated by The BIG Idea, the workshop embodied collaboration and innovation as attendees from diverse sectors, including educators, policymakers, and community leaders, gathered at the Radisson Blu Hotel, Sligo. The goal was to identify challenges to lifelong learning and brainstorm creative solutions to empower individuals and communities.





The workshop kicked off with a **barrier brainstorm** activity, where participants worked in small groups to identify challenges to lifelong learning. Using a structured "barrier map", attendees explored **personal, social, and systemic barriers**, such as lack of confidence, financial constraints and limited access to technology.

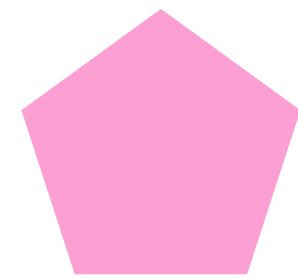
The room buzzed with energy as participants shared their experiences and insights, highlighting the need for inclusive, flexible and innovative approaches to lifelong learning.



“The B!G Idea’s passion for fostering creativity as a key competency resonated deeply with our delegates, reinforcing the importance of equipping learners with the skills to adapt, innovate, and thrive in an ever-evolving world.”

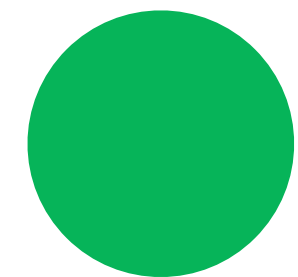
Dr Joseph Collins,
Director of Further Education and Training
Education and Training Boards Ireland

Participants identified a wide range of barriers to lifelong learning, including:



Personal Barriers:

Fear, lack of confidence, self-limiting beliefs, mental and physical health challenges, family commitments, and lack of motivating role models.



Systemic Barriers:

Lack of funding, complex application processes, limited access to technology, geographic barriers, inflexible eligibility criteria, and lack of inter-agency collaboration.



Social Barriers:

Stigma, discrimination, peer pressure, gender stereotypes, cultural expectations, and isolation.

These themes highlighted the multifaceted challenges faced by learners, from internal struggles like fear and self-doubt to external obstacles like systemic inequities and social stigma. The discussions underscored the need for holistic, inclusive, and innovative solutions to make lifelong learning accessible to all.



Personal Barriers:	Systemic Barriers:	Social Barriers:
Family Circumstances	Lack of Diverse Educators	Peer Relationships
Lack of Support	Complex Systems	Addiction
Childcare	Transport (Lack of)	Gender Stereotypes
Lack of Value on Education (Cultural)	Application Process (PLSS)	Arranged Marriage
Family (Single Parent Career/Commitments)	Funding	Stigma
Finance	Lack of Inter-agency Collaboration	Discrimination
Mental Health	Lack of RPL Opportunities	No Technology
Language	Eligibility Criteria (Exclusivity)	Housing Stress
Confidence	Structure of Awards	Knowledge Poverty
Self-Limiting Beliefs	Family History	Living Environment
Lack of Motivating Role Models	Disability Accessibility (Hidden + Visible)	Challenging Status Quo
Identity Challenges	Flexibility and Change	Grief System



The second part of the workshop focused on the **Innovation Challenge**, where participants worked in groups to develop creative solutions to the barriers they had identified. Using a variety of prompts as a framework, teams brainstormed innovative ideas such as gamified learning apps, community skill-sharing hubs, and flexible online courses.

Groups presented their solutions in a lively conclusion to the workshop, showcasing their creativity and commitment to breaking barriers. Attendees left inspired to take these ideas forward and champion lifelong learning in their communities.

The workshop exemplified The B!G Idea's mission to spark meaningful conversations and inspire people to work towards a future where learning is accessible, inclusive, and empowering for all. By bringing together diverse perspectives and fostering innovative thinking, the event generated actionable ideas to transform lifelong learning in Ireland, demonstrating the power of collaboration and creativity in addressing complex challenges.



Thank You
For Having Us!