

Report on Active Citizenship Voter Education Project

October 2024



Context:

This report outlines the project from March 2023 since taking over the delivery of the Active Citizenship Voter Education programme from The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. It includes overall information on who we reached, the impact of the training for participants (both train the tutor groups as well as adult education and community groups worked with). The report also includes the results of a survey sent in July 2024 to gather some quantitative and qualitative results from organisations, students, tutors we have worked with.

Background:

The Active Citizenship Voter Education is based on sound principles of justice and equality. The VPSJ (Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice) delivered the programme over three decades with many community groups in Dublin and all over Ireland. DALC was delighted to take over the delivery of the Active Citizenship/Voter Education programme as it has provided a valuable resource for adult education and community leaders and for all who are committed to addressing the situation in disadvantaged areas where a relatively small number of people vote in elections. As a consequence their views are not taken into consideration by many of the political parties as they formulate and implement their policies.

The course content is varied and includes a variety of group exercises that give people the tools to engage with voting. It is non-party political: it shows people the importance of voting, how to vote but crucially not who to vote for. It helps participants clarify their issue of importance and to identify their values. It makes people think about who and how people hold power and more importantly, brings the participants through the process of registering to vote. Moreover, the course is about making the system of voting and democracy more inclusive and more equal for all our citizens.

Specifically, the course comprises four units. Unit 1 explores with people the reasons to vote and demonstrates how to register and how to vote. Unit 2 considers ways of taking an informed stance on important issues facing people today. Unit 3 outlines a process

for evaluating election manifestos in the light of a more just society and presents an approach to choosing candidates on an informed basis. Units 4 focuses on the functions of local government. DALC has also devised resources targeted at adult literacy and ESOL students to support the course and voter engagement in general. These resources include content on EU Elections, Referendum, participation and engagement in society and around elections.

Strategic Rollout, Collaboration and Delivery:

Many organisations who were familiar with the work of the Vincentian Partnership and therefore sought demand for training from DALC. As 2024 is a year with so many electoral events, there was much interest in the training. In total 12 separate train the tutor groups took place. Much of DALC's work this year has been training tutors and community workers to deliver the course in their own setting. 145 tutors were trained who work in a variety of settings. In total, DALC delivered the course to 36 adult education participants (3 separate groups) over the year. In more detail;

- **Aontas** secured funding to deliver the tutor workshops back in Maynooth University Feb 2024, organised by Conor Thompson (Policy and Development Officer). Many tutors were trained by DALC from a variety of community and adult education organisations such as Belmayne Community Group Women's Collective, Rehab Group (Sligo and Dublin) HACE, LYCS, An Cosan, Dublin South City Partnership and Longford Women's Link.
- **ETB Delivery**- Fergus Craddock (FET Inclusion Manager for ETBI) sent out an expression of interest to all EOIs nationally to garner interest from ALOs and tutors, to be returned by March 22nd. 38 ETB tutors expressed an interest in participating in the training. Their enrollment was voluntary and many had an interest in the training as the issues around voting, political unrest and tensions had arisen in the classroom. Many felt creating a positive space and a structured course would help to include those groups who felt outside the system of voting and democracy. As the interest came from all ETB areas, four regionalised training sessions were scheduled to meet the demand - in Limerick, Cork and

two in Dublin. Each training session had a maximum of 12 participants, as recommended to ensure best practice of delivery. The training groups included some participants from SICAP and other community organisations.

- Limerick: The training took place over two days on 18th and 19th April (with a follow up session on Zoom) in Further Education and Training Centre Kilmallock Road Campus, Limerick V94Y6H3. In total, **7** tutors from LCETB attended the training.
 - Dublin - The training took place over two days on 25th April and 2nd May (with a follow up session on Zoom) in DALC, 3 Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1, D01H426. In total, **5** tutors from CDETB, DDLETB and LOETB attended the training.
 - Dublin - The training took place over two days on 16th and 17th May in DALC, 3 Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1, D01H426 In total, **4** CDETB and 2 DLETB tutors attended.
 - Dublin - The training took place over two days on 6th and 13th of June in DALC, 3 Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1, D01H426 **12** people completed this training, from DALC, LOETB, Tipperary ETB and CDETB.
 - Cork - The training took place over two days on 9th and 10th May in Cork College of FET, Rossa Ave, Bishopstown, Cork, T12 EE94. In total, **9** tutors from CETB attended the training.
 - Athlone - Training took place on 5th and 6th July in LWETB. In total, **5** tutors from attended the training.
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- Training was sought on demand from organisations, such as National Learning Network Wicklow, SICAP Wexford, Northside Partnership, Focus Ireland, Kildare County Council, Monaghan Libraries.

Outcomes:

- The courses proved very positive as the methodology for delivery was very participative. It provided a space for the groups to collaborate in the exercises and consider how the same course could be delivered with the students and in their settings.
- Each group was encouraged to join an initial **Community of Practice** meeting on Zoom, which will be ongoing (2 or 3 monthly/on demand) facilitated by Sinéad Hawkins of DALC. The idea is to provide tutor support for anyone delivering the training.
- On completing the training, many facilitated a voter registration day for their local groups, either organised separately or as part of the National Voter Registration Day on 30th April.
- Many are planning to incorporate the training in their settings and with their groups from September and in advance of the General Election.

Evaluation:

Each participant was asked to complete an evaluation having completed the course. Here are the questions and a snapshot of the feedback below:

1. Why did you do the course and was it what you expected?

- *Better than I expected. Loved the interaction and the hands-on approach.*
- *I did it in order to add to my toolkit as a community development worker. It exceeded my expectations.*
- *I am very interested in politics and firmly believe anyone who has a vote should vote.*
- *I did the course so I could deliver it in my own setting. It was more interaction than I had expected and also more interesting.*
- *I want to encourage young people to vote.*

2. What was the key learning for you in this course? About yourself as a citizen, voting and Irish Politics?

- *The importance of having one's voice heard. Don't leave it up to everyone else.*
- *The history of voting and the profile of candidates.*
- *It is important to get the information before voting.*
- *Voting procedures, why do we have to vote and various perspectives about political parties in Ireland, local elections and candidates.*
- *That I have a voice which is much more significant than I previously expected.*
- *I learned that unless you have someone to explain things plainly, the political landscape can be nebulous. Personally, it cemented my liberal leanings.*
- *I am more interested in the political process than I thought I was! As a citizen I am delighted that I was able to share my knowledge with others less knowledgeable - in terms of the political process - than me (our migrant learners with low level English).*

3. Is there anything you would change about the course and/or its delivery?

- *No. It was the right balance of interactive, self reflective and informative.*
- *No, excellent facilitation and the content was varied, relevant and engaging.*

4. If you have used the training, please describe your experience of using it.

- *I used a variation of the handouts on a group of young people I work with. The session went really well and the young people really bought into the message.*

- *I organised 3 Voter Registration Days. I shared and explained the resources to other ESOL tutors. I reached out to the Council for more Limerick specific resources. It was all a wonderful experience.*

5. If you are yet to use the training please let us know what your future plans are and also any barriers you foresee that may prevent you from using it.

- *Now that the registration process is finished, I am hoping to talk more about the roles of our elected representatives and the functions of the bodies.*

6. What would you like to see happen in your organisation (ETB and Sicap etc.) to support work in this area? All suggestions welcome.

- *That we really promote this course and make part of our provision especially in disadvantaged areas.*
- *Great support!*

7. Any further observations or reflections from the course that you would like to share?

- *We could probably have done with more tutors from LCETB involved. There were learners that I didn't reach in terms of the registration process.*

Survey:

In July 2024, we sent out a google form survey to garner some quantitative and qualitative data on the project. In total, 76 emails were sent to individuals and organisations, and 26 people responded. Below are the results:

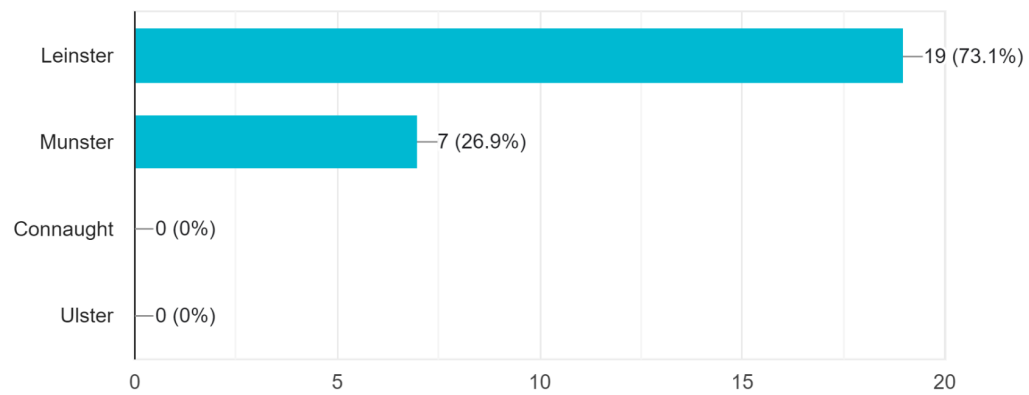
Question: What organisation/centre do you work in?

- DALC
- DDLETB
- Dublin Northwest Partnership, Finglas/DCU, St Pats campus Drumcondra
- LCETB Youtreach
- Wexford Local Development
- Rehab Group
- Fermoy FET Centre
- DALC, 3 Mountjoy Square
- FET Centre, Ennis Campus
- WLD
- Newbridge FRC, Kildare
- Leixlip Youth Project / InSync Youth and Family Services
- LCETB OCAC
- Wexford Local Development
- Belmayne Community Group
- Dublin South City Partnership
- Kildare County Council
- KCC
- Dalc
- South Inner City AES, Dublin City ETB based in Liberties College
- Cork ETB, Q Centre, Mallow, Co Cork
- Dublin & Dún Laoghaire ETB
- cdetb 84
- Parnell AES
- West Limerick Resources, Newcastle West, Co. Limerick

Question: What area do you work in?

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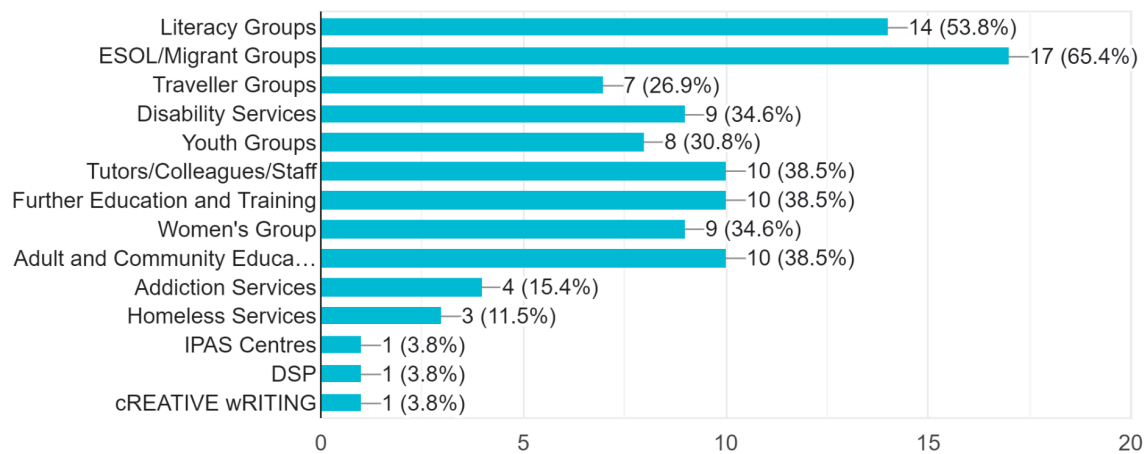
26 responses



Question: What groups do you work with?

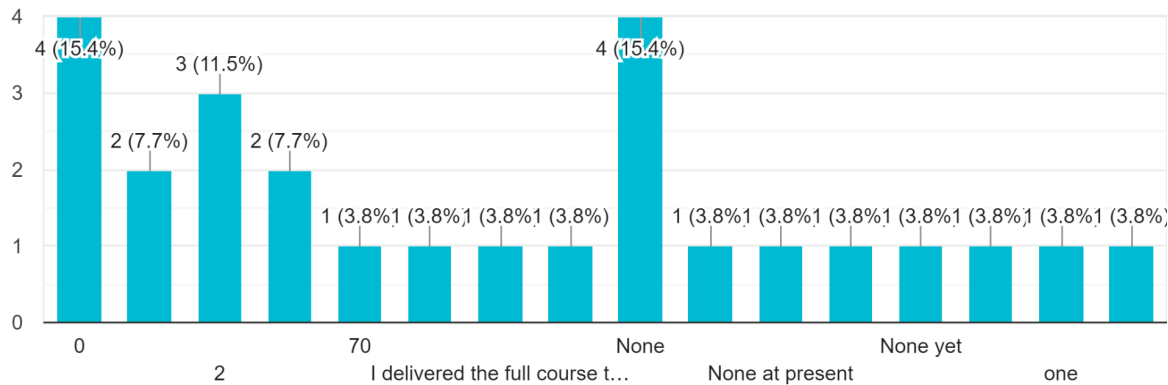
The groups I work with (tick all relevant)

26 responses



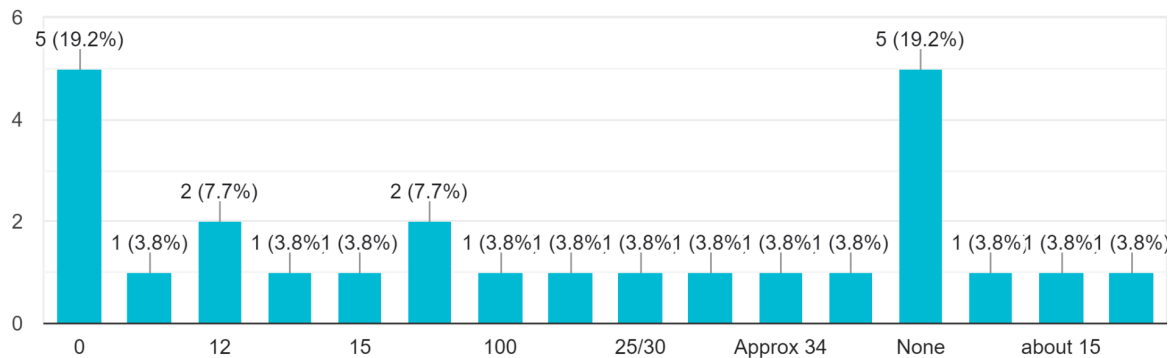
Question: How many groups did you deliver the course to since you have been trained?

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26 responses



Question: Overall, how many people have you delivered the course to?

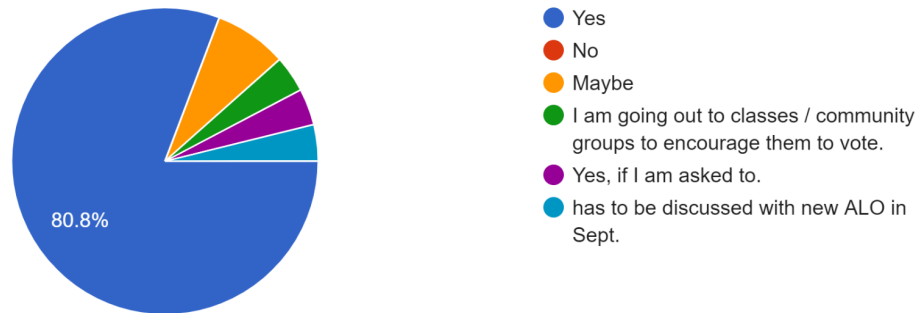
Overall, how many people have you delivered the course to?
26 responses



Question: Are you planning to deliver this course in the coming months/year as part of your ongoing education program?

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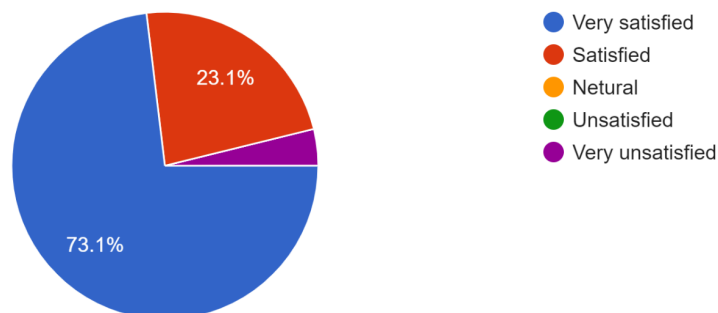
26 responses



Question: Rate the overall impact of the course on you, your group and your centre.

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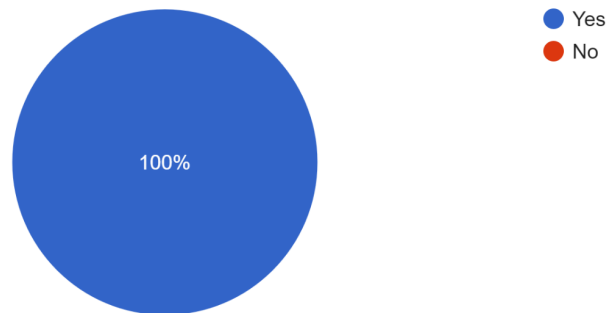
26 responses



Would you like to keep in touch about further events, information and updates?

Would you would like to keep in touch about further events, information and updates? Thank you for your responses.

26 responses



Question: Please supply if possible some quotes/testimonies or comments from students you delivered the course to.

- The students said that they looked forward to the session every week, they loved the interactive nature of the workshops.
- I haven't looked at any evaluations but I can try and ask for some quotes and email them on
- Some people were surprised with all the things the council is responsible for. Some felt strongly about voting and were keen to get their voice heard.
- Most of them were surprised they were able to vote in Ireland, so there were positive reactions all across the board.
- I felt really important walking into the voting station.
- I am living in Ireland 23 years and I never knew I could vote. (ESOL learner)
- Interesting, useful, empowering, supportive and helpful
- "I was surprised at how much I learned and how much I enjoyed it". "I thought I knew everything but I learned loads". "I never realised the importance of preference voting and how that works". "Meeting the local councillors made me

change how I am going to vote." "It is so important to have local people representing us, people who have a vested interest in the area and not just running to fill a seat for a party." "It is important to have people representing you, who have been through similar life experiences." "Getting to know your candidates and what they stand for is so important."

- 'It was very informative and straight to the point'
- 'It was a brain grinder, remarkably challenging of my thoughts on voting and politics and society as a whole'
- Very informative and well delivered session, information will be of practical use
- Was well delivered .
- With low level esol groups it was great for them to participate in the election and have their say
- 'I even got my husband to register!'

Question: Please describe the impact the Active Citizenship Voter Education course had on you, your students and your work

- I intend to deliver this course as part of our literacy programme in Sept 2024.
- I think the course has provided a platform in our organisation to bring the importance of active citizenship to life.
- The course had a huge impact on me. Some canvassers for the recent elections were just dropping leaflets in the door and I followed them out and asked to speak to them. I asked searching questions. I also reviewed my stance on the tradition of voting for a political party and studied the individuals more.
- This was one of the most valuable pieces of work we have done in a long time as it opened doors to conversations about so much more than voting. The whole programme culminating in a Community Voice event in each LEA built capacity, awareness and solidarity within marginalised communities. It also ensured that candidates were aware of frontline issues facing these communities.
- Empowering, a fun and relatable way to engage with politics.

- Made me aware of the importance of every vote.
- The course keeps the information relevant, and I can bring it into day to day interactions with students. Both my teenage daughters registered to vote and voted. I had done the course with the Vincentian partnership 20 years ago and delivered it to students then but you learn so much yourself every time you do it and as I have a general interest in politics myself it gives an opportunity to bring this into everyday conversations. The course works very well delivered as a stand alone but also using the material in everyday classes.
- I found the Active Citizenship Voter Education course very interesting and would love to deliver it to our learners. I think that it's very empowering to realise you have a voice and that you can make a difference. I believe that there is a huge need for this training, particularly in the current climate where there is so much false information to deal with. This kind of training helps to get people thinking and develop their critical thinking skills.
- The activities are such a smart way to inform and interact with people. It's such an easy way to get people to engage and get their attention.
- Empowered Young People to be more conscious voters.
- Hugely positive impact on me personally and also for the learners in LCETB. It promotes active discussion about real life experiences. It helps integrate our learners into their own community.
- Empowering.
- This was part of a wider social inclusion voting campaign we were rolling out in Belmayne. I am delighted to say it has helped raise awareness of the importance of voting and working with our elected representatives to get resources in our area. We are also in talks with Cluid Housing, one of the largest social housing organisations in the Country about rolling it out on a bigger scale throughout Dublin.
- Provided an important opportunity for us as an organisation, and for our students to extend our programme in the area of active citizenship.
- Greater knowledge about the voting system and a clearer understanding of the process.

- It has been an excellent addition to my practice.
- Very positive and empowering. Brings a clarity to the process and rationality.
- Be able to make a more formed choice on who to vote for.
- Reminded me of the value of my vote. I would like to impart that to others.
- The course was excellent. It was very well structured with lots of variety and thought provoking pieces. I hope it will encourage many of our students to register to vote and to vote.
- Really informed me about Voter Ed in general and has inspired me to try to integrate the topic into the ESOL classroom.
- Empowering.
- I was already passionate about voting but it is great now to have an effective and concise way of imparting that knowledge that encourages others to participate in their communities.
- Created a huge awareness about the importance of having a vote and using it.
- It had great impact and really made me appreciate the privilege of the vote. It made it clear why it is important to vote and illustrated the practical impact it has on our daily lives. Great discussions with the other participants. It encourages you to think outside the box and to ask questions.
- We plan our courses 6-12 months in advance, at least.
- Planning to deliver programme in September. Given the time of the academic year in which we completed the training; the logistics of booking space and organising groups we have not yet delivered the programme. We look forward to rolling the programme out from September 2024.
- The course was excellent, however the time of year was too busy with students preparing for exams so it wasn't feasible to get it delivered. Also I noted that the election day was in the middle of state exams and the Leaving Cert students had a very long day of written exams on June 7th which, if it was me, would have been too exhausted to get out and vote. This is the cohort of people that we need to engage so thought should have been given to the run up and date for voting.
- Thank you to DALC, really excellent quality programme, excellent delivery & the impact was immense. A lot more of this training is needed in communities right

across Ireland in the face of growing disillusionment in the political system; one of the best investments in upholding democracy that I can think of.

- Planning on rolling out these workshops to more centres around the country ahead of the General Election.
- I plan on delivering the course in September.
- I really enjoyed the training and I really enjoyed the opportunity to meet tutors from other centres. The course and the facilitators make it so relevant and interesting so thank you. I think it is a lot easier to deliver with tutors as so many students are very disillusioned or indifferent to voting.. The reason I haven't delivered it with students is that many of them have done the course already. I am excited to hear that some people might deliver it to youth groups.
- I put it out that I wanted to deliver in other centres but nobody took me up on it. It is difficult to get people to engage with voter education. I think there is a huge apathy around politics.
- Everything was great, enjoyable and a lot of new and useful information from the course.
- Very insightful course.
- The plan for me doing this course was to educate our learners on their entitlement to vote, to register them and to encourage them to vote on June 7th.
- The course was well received the visual photos on the wall were a big hit and really got groups talking especially the women's groups
- We are a small, completely voluntary community group, this is why we only rolled it out once but we are hoping by doing a collaboration with Cluid Housing we can arrange for it to be rolled out on a much larger scale.
- Target group was ESOL on both occasions. Because of the complexities in the lives of asylum seekers / refugees, there was high drop-out on the course. For example, without warning, 2 participants were moved accommodation from South Dublin to Mosney, Meath IPAS centres.
- This will be included in the programme plan for 2024/25.
- It was a great training and the facilitator did a wonderful job.
- Hadn't the opportunity.

- Just did the registered part. Planning to run the course prior to the General Elections.
- Course probably not delivered yet, as it was near end of the school year when we completed the course.
- Timing. I did the course on the 16th and 17th of May. I think this would be a wonderful addition to our service in the Autumn.
- Re the image of the Kuwaiti woman with the hijab, I didn't have an issue with that per se although I think in certain quarters (for example if one was to deliver the training in a mosque or in a predominantly Muslim setting) this image may be questioned by the participants as to why it is being used as a symbol of oppression. I'm not suggesting that was the intention but it might be perceived like that. I could be wrong.
- Re the use of the adjective "Islamic" before government, I would definitely take that out. It's unnecessary and again could be perceived in a predominantly Muslim setting as equating backwardness with Islam.
- The materials are amazing! The way the groups are facilitated is very effective
- It is a terrific empowering course. I would like to see it delivered throughout our scheme.

Recommendations:

- Upcoming training in DALC.. More sessions can be organised should demand arise.
- Community of Practice meetings are ongoing as well as DALC providing any other support such as fielding questions and queries by email, sharing resources, our newsletter, logging any insights or feedback on the course or its delivery by anyone who participated.
- DALC are planning a Voter Voices conference in the autumn whereby ETB tutors who attended the training could perhaps showcase the work they have been doing in this area.

- The ongoing collaboration between DALC and other organisations will continue, linked in with our steering group committee. This steering group was set up in January 2024 to spearheading and drive the overall project. It has 8 members from the organisations DALC, ETBI, Aontas, NALA and The Electoral Commission.
- Hoping to identify 'voter champions' within the ETB network, ie. anyone who attended the training and could be a key person of contact in their area/location/province to support and deliver the training. More discussion needed on this.

Conclusions:

Fionnaigh Connaughton-O'Connor & Sinéad Hawkins

Date: October 2024