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CHAPTER 1. External factors influencing VET

1.1 Introduction

The Republic of Ireland comprises twenty-six of the thirty-two counties of the island of Ireland. The remaining six counties make up Northern Ireland which is part of the United Kingdom. The total area of the Republic of Ireland is 84 421 km². The major centre of population is Dublin (city and county) and the other major cities are Cork, Galway and Limerick.

Overall responsibility for education and training lies with the Department (Ministry) of Education and Skills (DES): a number of bodies, operating under the aegis of the DES, have responsibilities for different aspects of the education and training system; these include, among others:

(a) the Higher Education Authority (HEA), which is responsible for the effective governance and regulation of tertiary education institutions and the tertiary education system;

(b) SOLAS, which is Ireland’s Further Education and Training (FET) authority, responsible for planning, co-ordinating and funding FET in Ireland

(c) Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), which has a range of responsibilities including:
   • maintaining the ten-level National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
   • making awards and setting standards for FET programmes and some tertiary level education programmes (outside the university sector)
   • reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance in FET and higher education providers in Ireland;

(d) the National Skills Council (NSC) was set up in 2017 by the Department of Education and Skills to assist Ireland in anticipating and responding to skills needs across economic sectors;

(e) the expert group on future skills needs, which is based in the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, advises the Irish government on current and future skills needs of the economy and on other labour market issues that impact on Ireland’s enterprise and employment growth.
1.2 Population

Table 1 shows the estimated Irish population classified by sex and age group in April 2017. All percentage figures refer to the total population. The table indicates that 21% of the population are less than 15 years old, while 13% are aged 65 years or older. This gives a total dependency ratio of 52%, and an old age dependency ratio of $\frac{13}{66} = 20\%$. The Irish old age dependency ratio $(1)$ has been projected to rise sharply over the coming decades and reach almost 45% by 2050 $(2)$.

Table 1. Estimated population (‘000s) classified by sex & age group, April 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons years</th>
<th>Total ‘000s</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>Males ‘000s</th>
<th>Males %</th>
<th>Females ‘000s</th>
<th>Females %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–4</td>
<td>324.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>166.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>158.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9</td>
<td>359.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>183.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>176.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14</td>
<td>323.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>165.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>157.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19</td>
<td>308.5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>157.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>151.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24</td>
<td>276.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>140.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>135.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–29</td>
<td>292.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>144.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>148.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–34</td>
<td>347.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>166.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>181.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–39</td>
<td>394.6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>192.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>201.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–44</td>
<td>363.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>180.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>183.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–49</td>
<td>333.1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>166.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>166.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–54</td>
<td>303.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>150.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>153.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55–59</td>
<td>274.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>135.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>138.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–64</td>
<td>242.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>120.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>121.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65–69</td>
<td>211.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>104.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>106.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70–74</td>
<td>169.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75–79</td>
<td>116.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80–84</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85+</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4791.7</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>2372.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2420.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Central Statistics Office (CSO) statistical release, Population and Migration Estimates, 2017

$(1)$ The ratio between the number of persons aged 65 and more over the number of persons of working age (15-64).

$(2)$ Eurostat, proj_15ndbims [extracted on 24.01.2019]
Ireland’s population is 4,838,259 (2018) (3). Figure 1 compares the population aged 0-74 years in 2012 and 2017. The overall population in Ireland has increased over this time period. Individuals in the cohorts aged between 20 to 34 years declined, a reflection of both a decreased number of births in earlier years (from the mid-1980s onwards) as well as high outward migration observed among young people during the recession. Those aged 5 to 19 years observed an increase in population over this time period, due mainly to an increase in the number of births in earlier years. As many learners enter the VET system from the age of 18 onwards, it is likely this increase in the young population will impact on the number of upper secondary school completers entering the VET system and increase the demand for places across all sectors of the education and training system, including VET. Those aged 0-4 have observed a decrease in population.

Figure 1. Population (000s) by age group, 2012 and 2017

Figure 2 shows net migration estimates by age group (0-64 years). While total migration over the period 2011-15 remained negative, in 2016, those aged 25-44 and 45 - 64 saw the first positive change in migration. Outward migration is shown to have negatively affected those aged 15-24 and 25-44 far more than any other age group. According to figures produced by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), over the period of 2012-17, net outward migration among Irish Nationals

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(3) Eurostat, tps00001 and proj_15ndbims; provisional data as of 1 January [Extracted on 28.01.2019 and 24.01.2019].
observed a decrease of 88.5%. Net inward migration of Irish nationals was estimated to be +23 200 in 2017.

Figure 2. Net migration estimates (000s) by age group (0-64), 2011-2017

![Net Migration Estimates by Age Group](image)

Source: CSO Population and Migration Estimates April 2017
Estimated Migration (Persons in April) by Age Group, Sex, Inward or Outward Flow

1.3 The labour market

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a large-scale, nationwide survey of households in Ireland. It is designed to produce quarterly labour force estimates that include the official measure of employment and unemployment in the state (ILO basis). This survey is conducted by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The LFS replaced the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) from quarter 3 2017.

1.3.1 Labour market status of the population

Figure 3 shows the labour market status of persons living in Ireland. In quarter 4 2017, the working age population (persons aged 15-64) was 3 million. Of these, 1.98 million persons of working age were in employment. Approximately 1 million persons of working age were not in employment. Of the working age population not in employment, just over 146 600 were unemployed and 891 600 were economically inactive.\(^{(4)}\)

\(^{(4)}\) Economically inactive are defined as persons who are not in employment or unemployed (actively seeking work).
Figure 3. Irish population by age & economic status, quarter 4, 2017

- Population: 4,700,100
  - Children (<15): 1,045,300
  - Working age population (15-64): 3,018,600
  - 65 and older: 636,200
  - In employment full-time: 1,564,200
  - In employment part-time: 416,300
  - Not in employment: 1,038,200
  - In employment full-time (39200 full time): 6,7700
  - Not in employment: 568,500
  - Unemployed (ILO): 146,600
  - Inactive: 891,600
  - Seeking full-time employment: 12,800
  - Seeking part-time employment: 19,100
  - Seeking employment as self-employed: 4,600
  - Student: 338,300
  - Ill health/disability: 119,200
  - Other: 102,900
  - Home duties: 271,900
  - Student: 338,300
  - Retired: 59,400

Source: Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) analysis of CSO (QNHS) data (from National Skills Bulletin 2017)

Figure 4 shows trends in Ireland’s labour force over the period 2012/18. There were over 2,375,200 persons in Ireland’s labour force in quarter 4, 2017. This is an increase of 1.9% on the same quarter in 2016. Ireland had been adding almost 20,000 persons to the labour force up to the start of 2008. The economic downturn in Ireland witnessed a decline in inward migration which had a negative demographic effect until quarter 1, 2014. Figures have been increasing from quarter 2, 2014 resulting in a positive demographic effect and a positive change in the labour force.

Following sharp declines since the onset of the economic crisis, the numbers in employment have been increasing since 2013. The employment rate (15-64 years) in quarter 4, 2017 was 68.3% compared to 67.1% in the same quarter in 2016. This is almost at figures observed in 2007 (69.2%) prior to the economic downturn.
Unemployment levels in Ireland increased sharply at the beginning of the economic crisis, going from approximately 100,000 persons in 2007 to almost 317,000 in 2011; since then, however, unemployment levels have been decreasing. In quarter 4, 2017, there were 144,100 unemployed persons in Ireland. Ireland’s unemployment rate (15-74) currently stands at 6.7% (5), a slight decline from the same quarter in 2016 (7.2%). This is a considerable change from quarter 4 2011 where Ireland’s unemployment rate stood at 15.3%.

Figure 4. Labour force, employment & unemployment (000s), annual averages

Table 2 shows the number participation and unemployment rates along with the numbers of unemployed persons and those in the labour force over a 4 year period. Participation rates have steadily increased over each quarter. Unemployment rates and the number of unemployed persons observed a sharp decrease between quarter 4 2014 and quarter 4, 2016. Unemployment continued to decrease to quarter 4, 2017, however with a less pronounced change. Numbers in the labour force have steadily risen over the time period.

Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (QNHS data)

(5) Eurostat, tps00203 [Extracted on 25.01.2019]
Table 2. Labour force, Unemployed, Unemployment rates, participation rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014Q4</th>
<th>2015Q4</th>
<th>2016Q4</th>
<th>2017Q4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ILO Participation Rates (15 years and over) (%)</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO Unemployment Rates (15 - 74 years) (%)</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>235.3</td>
<td>206.8</td>
<td>167.6</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In labour force</td>
<td>2260.5</td>
<td>2292.2</td>
<td>2331.1</td>
<td>2374.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (QNHS data)

1.3.2 Labour force by education attainment levels

Figure 5 shows the breakdown of Ireland’s labour force by highest education level attained. In quarter 4, 2017, 47% of Ireland’s labour force held third level qualifications; 14% held post-secondary non-tertiary level education, and 36% held higher secondary or below.

Figure 5. Ireland’s labour force (000s) by highest level of education(6), Q4 2017

![Pie chart showing percentage distribution of education levels in the labour force]

Source: CSO (QNHS) supplementary tables

*In Ireland, there are two types of bachelor degree: an honours bachelor degree (NFQ 8) or an ordinary bachelor degree (NFQ 7). Both honours and ordinary bachelor degrees have been referenced to the European Qualifications Framework at EQF level 6.

1.3.3 Participation in the labour force by education attainment

Figure 6 shows the labour force participation rate by education attainment. In general, labour force participation rates increase with greater educational attainment: individuals with third level qualifications are more than twice as likely

(6) Education data is presented according to ISCED (2011) levels of education attainment; 3rd level non-honours degree programmes typically lead to qualifications spanning national framework of qualifications 6-7 (EQF level 5-6); 3rd level honours degree programmes typically lead to qualifications at national framework of qualifications 8-10 (EQF levels 6-8).
to be in the labour force compared to those with, at most, primary level qualifications. In addition, those with post-secondary non-tertiary education (where most VET graduates are classified) have a higher than average participation rate.

Figure 6. Labour force participation rate (%) by education attainment, Q4 2017

![Bar chart showing labour force participation rates by education attainment]

Source: CSO (QNHS) supplementary tables

Figure 7 shows the labour force participation rate by gender and education attainment in quarter 4, 2017. Participation rates for females with a low level of educational attainment are almost half that of males with the same level of education. While participation rates for males and females increase with the level of education, labour force participation of females remains less than their male counterparts.
1.4 The economy

1.4.1 Performance of the Irish economy: longitudinal trends in GDP and GNP

Economic growth in Ireland in 2017 observed an increase in both Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) (see Table 2 above). GDP increased by 7.2% in constant prices while GNP rose by 4.4% in 2017, all sectors in the Irish economy observed growth with construction and ICT observing the highest increases at 15.2% and 16.0% respectively.

According to the Irish Central Bank (7), the Irish economy has continued to grow solidly and this is supported by the strength of activity on the domestic side of the economy.

The outlook for the Irish economy remains positive according to the central bank (8) analysis in quarter 3, 2018. GDP growth for 2017 was 7.2% with

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a forecast of growth in 2018 at 4.7% and moderating to 4.2% in 2019. GNP is also expected to expand, with projected growth of 4.2% in 2018 and 4.0% in 2019. The modified Gross National Income in 2017 observed growth at 3.0% in 2017. Employment is expected to grow by 1.8% in 2017 according to the central bank forecasts.

Table 3. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Gross National Product (GNP) Gross National Income (GNI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(% change) Real Economic Activity</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018f</th>
<th>2019f</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross Domestic Product GDP</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross National Product GNP</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Central Bank quarterly bulletin Q2 2018

1.4.2 Employment by economic sector

Figure 8 shows national employment by broad economic sector in Ireland in quarter 4 2017. The highest numbers of persons were employed in wholesale & retail, human health and industry, making up 13.8%, 12.8% and 12.6% of national employment respectively. The vast majority of those employed in industry are employed in the manufacturing sector; the remainder are employed in utilities and extraction and mining. In quarter 4, 2017, 89.3% of industrial employment was in manufacturing (250 600) with utilities and extraction / mining accounting for 9% and 2% respectively. When manufacturing employment is further broken down by technological intensity, low technology manufacturing accounted for 39% of total manufacturing employment, followed by high technology (26%), medium-high (19%) and medium-low (16%) (9).

(9) High technology: pharmaceuticals, computers, etc. (NACE 21,26); Medium-high: chemicals, electrical equipment, machinery, medical instruments, etc. (NACE 20,27-30); Medium-low: petroleum products, rubber and plastic, other non-metallic mineral products, fabricated metal products etc. (NACE 19,22-25,33); Low technology: food, beverages, textiles, leather, wood, paper, printing, etc. (NACE 10-18,31,32).
1.5 Regulation of the labour market

1.5.1 Introduction

In terms of labour market regulation, Ireland’s regulatory framework compares more with other flexible labour markets such as that of the United Kingdom or Denmark than with labour markets such as France and Germany. Based on a set of labour regulation indicators (e.g. hiring, working hours, redundancy rules, and costs), Ireland was ranked in 2018 by the LFMI’s (10) Employment Flexibility Index as one of the most flexible labour markets in the EU. This is illustrated in a number of indicators, including among others the fact that in Ireland there:

- are no restrictions on the duration of fixed-term contracts, except for minimum wage;
- is no restriction on overtime, night work and work on a weekly holiday;
- there are no restrictions on redundancy rules; while redundancy dismissals are allowed by law, although there is a requirement to notify and consult a third part before dismissing a group of nine redundant employees.

Ireland, however, has a statutory minimum wage. From January 2018, the statutory minimum wage is EUR 9.55 per hour. This is an increase on the EUR 9.25 observed in 2017. When the cost of living and purchasing power parity (PPP) are considered, Ireland’s minimum wage (expressed in US dollars) was fifth highest amongst EU countries in 2017 (latest data available), as ranked by the OECD and outlined in Table 4.

Table 4. Real minimum wages – hourly (in 2017 US dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Hourly Wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak Republic</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD Employment database. Labour market policies and institutions (statutory minimum wages at 2017 USD PPP); data extracted on 27 Aug 2018

1.5.2 Welfare and employment policies relating to VET

1.5.2.1 Pathways to work
Pathways to work (11) is a government strategy designed to reverse the dramatic rise in the numbers of unemployed jobseekers on the live register (12) that occurred during the recession. It is designed to complement the action plan for

(12) Unemployed persons registering for unemployment benefits or allowances (and some other statutory entitlements) must be registered at local public employment services offices. This register is known as the live register.
jobs (13) as part of a twin-pronged approach to tackling the jobs crisis that emerged in the final years of the last decade. In January 2016, the second phase of the strategy, Pathways to work 2016–20 (14), was launched, laying out actions for this government priority over the next five years. Pathways to work 2016–20 contains six key strands involving 86 dedicated actions to build on the employment progress to date under previous Pathways strategies.

While the Action plan for jobs (15) prioritises stimulating employment growth, pathways to work is focused on making sure that as many as possible of these new jobs, and other vacancies that arise in the economy are filled by people from the Live Register. Pathways to work is coordinated by the Department (Ministry) of Social Protection, working together with a number of other government departments and agencies.

Pathways to work 2016-20 aims to enhance employment, education and training services for jobseekers, and to increase engagement with employers to provide greater opportunities for those seeking work. There are six strands outlined in the pathways to work 2016-20 initiative:

(a) strand 1: enhanced engagement with unemployed people of working age;
(b) strand 2: increase the employment focus of activation programmes and opportunities;
(c) strand 3: making work pay – incentivise the take-up of opportunities
(d) strand 4: incentivising employers to offer jobs and opportunities to unemployed people;
(e) strand 5: build organisation capability to deliver enhanced services to people who are unemployed;
(f) strand 6: building workforce skills.

1.5.2.2 Action plan for jobs

The Action plan for jobs is the government’s plan to improve the conditions for creating new jobs. It is a whole-of-government initiative under which all government departments and 60 agencies work together to support job creation and protection. In 2018, the action plan for jobs (16) set out four key aims, one of

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(13) The Action plan for jobs is the government’s plan to improve the conditions for creating new jobs. It is a whole-of-government initiative under which all government departments and 60 agencies work together to support job creation and protection.


Dublin: Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

which was to ensure that those entering, re-entering or already in the workforce have the required incentives and skills to prosper. In addition to the action plan for jobs, there also exist nine regional action plans.

1.5.2.3 Employment support scheme (ESS)
The Employment support scheme (ESS) (17) is a programme offered to jobseekers aged between 18 and 24 years. It is co-ordinated by Ireland’s defence forces, the department of employment affairs and social protection, the department of defence and Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board (ETB) (further education and training provider). This programme, which began in the second quarter of 2018, lasts 10 weeks and aims to equip the jobseeker with enhanced social and team work skills, an increased sense of confidence and discipline, as well as practical skills and qualifications (including word processing, first aid, manual handling). Participants also receive a certificate of participation and a reference from the defence forces and the department of employment affairs and social protection. Participants must be registered job seekers on the live register; they are selected, through interview, by the department of employment affairs and social protection in conjunction with the defence forces. The programme is co-funded by the Irish government and the European Union.

1.5.2.4 Springboard+
The Springboard+ (18) programmes offers learners the possibility to enrol on third level courses (at certificate (NFQ level 6; EQF 5), degree (NFQ levels 7/8; EQF 6) and masters (NFQ level 9; EQF level 8) in order to gain a qualification in key growth sectors of the economy; initially Springboard+ was known as Springboard and was designed to provide unemployed persons with the opportunity to upskill or re-skill in an area of identified skills shortage; however, with the economic recovery, the Springboard programme was opened up to those who were economically inactive in 2011 and subsequently selected groups of the employed and homemakers in 2017 who wished to upskill or reskill to meet emerging skills needs in a number of sectors including ICT and Biopharma/Med Tech. Examples of third level courses that are funded under the Springboard+ programme include cloud computing, data science & analytics (CIT). All springboard courses include a certain amount of work-based learning or work experience.

(18) https://springboardcourses.ie/
1.5.2.5 FET Professional development strategy 2017/19

The FET Professional development strategy 2017/19 (19) stems from a commitment set out in the Further education and training strategy 2014/19 (20). This reflects the strong link between professional development within the sector and the quality of the education and training provided. This coincides with the international practice of FET professional development.

CHAPTER 2. Provision of VET

2.1 Ireland’s education and training system

In Ireland, education is compulsory between the ages of 6-16 years. Ireland’s education system is divided into four sectors, primary, secondary, further education and training (FET), and tertiary education (See Figure 9). As summarised in Table 5, there were approximately 563,500 children enrolled in primary education, 357,400 in secondary education (lower and upper), 85,000 in FET and 218,000 in third level in the academic year 2017/18 (2016/17 for tertiary).

Table 5. Full-time enrolments in Irish education and training system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Number of enrolments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary*</td>
<td>563,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
<td>194,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
<td>118,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further education &amp; training**</td>
<td>85,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education***</td>
<td>181,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *DES (2017/18); **SOLAS (2017 Jan-September only); ***HEA (2016/17)

Figure 9 shows how three of the four main sectors (primary, secondary and tertiary) of Ireland’s education and training system interact. The FET sector incorporates post-secondary non-tertiary education, and second chance/adult learning.

2.1.1 Primary education

Primary education is compulsory from the age of 6 years, although the vast majority of pupils enrol between the ages of 4 and 5 years; for example, in 2017/18, 98% of all children enrolled in the first year of primary education were aged 5 years or under. Primary education in Ireland is eight years in duration.

2.1.2 Secondary education

Secondary education usually lasts five to six years and is divided into lower secondary education (3 years) and upper secondary (2 years). Some pupils may also undertake the transition year programme – a one year programme that acts as a bridge between lower and upper secondary education.

(a) lower secondary: the junior cycle (i.e. lower secondary education) is a generally oriented programme of approximately three years’ duration and leads to the junior certificate examination, which students usually take at the
age of 15 or 16. The junior certificate award has been placed at level 3 on the national framework of qualifications, which corresponds to EQF level 2 (ISCED 244). The vast majority (almost 97%) of second level pupils sit the junior certificate examination;

(b) upper secondary: the senior cycle (i.e. upper secondary education) takes two years and leads to the leaving certificate examination which students usually sit at the age of 17 or 18. Approximately 92% of all those who entered lower secondary education in September 2009 sat the leaving certificate examination in either June 2014 or June 2015. There are three types of leaving certificate programme: a broadly balanced Leaving Certificate Established (LCE), a Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) (21) and a Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) for learners not catered for in the first two. Only learners who achieve the LCE and LCVP may proceed directly to third level education. The LCA, in contrast, is designed to prepare learners for either entry to the labour market or progression to further education and training. While the vocational dimension is stronger in the LCA than the other two types, it is nonetheless regarded as general education. In 2017, 71% of all leaving certificate candidates took the LCE programme, 24% took the LCVP and 5%, the LCA. The leaving certificate award (regardless of type) has been placed at levels 4-5 on Ireland’s NFQ, corresponding to levels 3-4 on the EQF (ISCED 343,344).

2.1.3 Further Education and Training (FET)
Since FET in Ireland comprises post-secondary non-tertiary education (22) as well as second chance education/training, the FET sector is characterised by a high degree of diversity in terms of the type, level and learner:

(a) FET programmes can be general, vocational or mixed;

(b) they lead to awards across several levels on the EQF (levels 1-5 on the European qualifications framework (EQF), or levels 1-6 on Ireland’s national framework of qualifications(NFQ));

(c) target groups include young people who have recently completed upper secondary education, adult learners, early school leavers, the

(21) Contrary to what the programme title may indicate, the LCVP is not considered to be vocational education and training. Rather, the programme aims to lend a vocational dimension to the leaving certificate established programme by allowing pupils to select subjects that complement one another and develop vocational skills. For example, students may choose to study construction studies and engineering, or home economics and business.

(22) 28% of all those who complete upper secondary progressed to FET courses (DES 2016)
employed, the unemployed, asylum seekers, learners with special needs, among others;

(d) VET programmes within the FET sector are mostly related to apprenticeship and traineeship programmes. Learners on apprenticeship programmes must first obtain employment, and hold an employment contract. Traineeships are open to all learners (including the employed, the unemployed and those who have recently completed upper secondary education);

(e) Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programmes are aimed primarily at those completing upper secondary education, but are also open to older learners; programmes are often general in nature, but also include VET programmes such as motor technology;

(f) second chance learning opportunities within the FET sector include VET opportunities for the unemployed (specific skills training and VTOS programmes).

FET is funded, co-ordinated and planned centrally by SOLAS. FET is delivered in training centres and schools/colleges by ETBs; there are 16 ETBs nationwide. Most vocational education and training (VET) in Ireland occurs within the FET sector, although since 2016, a number of apprenticeship programmes have been proposed, developed and rolled out within the tertiary education system.

2.1.4 Tertiary education

Over a half of those who complete upper secondary school transfer directly to third level education on completing upper secondary education (DES 2016). Students can opt for third level education in a university, institute of technology, or college of education. There are also a small number of private, independent providers of third level education (mostly business and related disciplines). Undergraduate third level courses are of various durations, ranging from two years for a higher certificate (NFQ 6; EQF 5; ISCED 665) to three/four years for an honours bachelor degree (NFQ 8; EQF 6; ISCED 666). Some programmes, such as medicine or architecture require up to five years. Postgraduate programmes range from one year (e.g. taught masters (NFQ 9; EQF 7; ISCED 667)) to three years or more for doctoral programmes (NFQ 10; EQF 8; ISCED 864).

Traditionally, programmes at tertiary level are not officially designated as being VET or general, although, many programmes at third level are designed to qualify learners for work in specific occupations (e.g. teacher, architect, doctor, engineer). In this regard, tertiary education in Ireland does lead to VET related
qualifications. However, in 2016, for the first time in Ireland, an apprenticeship programme became available at third level (insurance studies). Learners must hold upper secondary education and be in employment. Nonetheless, currently apprenticeship training at tertiary level is not a typical feature of the sector.
Figure 9. VET in Ireland’s education and training system

NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Ireland.
2.2 Government regulated VET

Vocational education and training (VET) is provided primarily within the FET sector (comprising post-secondary non-tertiary and second chance education). However, since 2016, the apprenticeship system has been expanded and includes new programmes which are delivered not only within the FET sector, but also in tertiary level institutions. (Graduates, however, have yet to emerge from these programmes). Most VET takes the form of apprenticeship training, and to a lesser extent traineeship and specific skills training (for the unemployed); an increasing number of PLC courses are also considered to be VET oriented as some prepare learners for work in specific occupations (e.g. secretarial, childcare), although the work-based learning component tends to be much smaller than that in the apprenticeship and traineeship programmes. Table 6 shows the characteristics of the main VET programmes in Ireland.

Table 6. Characteristics of main VET programmes (current) in Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main VET Programmes</th>
<th>Typical duration</th>
<th>Awards</th>
<th>Typical fields of learning</th>
<th>No of enrolments</th>
<th>Provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-2016 Craft-Apprenticeship</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>NFQ 6 EQF 5</td>
<td>Engineering &amp; construction</td>
<td>7 000</td>
<td>ETB &amp; institutes of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 2016 apprenticeship</td>
<td>2-4 years</td>
<td>NFQ 5-10</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>ETBs, institutes of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traineeship</td>
<td>6 months - 2 years</td>
<td>NFQ 4-6 EQF</td>
<td>Health/welfare; services</td>
<td>4 500</td>
<td>ETB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traineeship for the employed</td>
<td></td>
<td>NFQ 4-6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ETB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Skills Training</td>
<td>6 weeks – 24 weeks</td>
<td>NFQ 4-5 EQF</td>
<td>Engineering &amp; construction</td>
<td>15 400</td>
<td>ETB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC courses</td>
<td>1 - 2 years</td>
<td>NFQ 5-6 EQF</td>
<td>Health/welfare; services; business</td>
<td>32 000</td>
<td>ETB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTOS</td>
<td>Varies; typically 1-2 years</td>
<td>NFQ 4-6 EQF</td>
<td>Business; services</td>
<td>8 900</td>
<td>ETB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SOLAS

2.2.1 Apprenticeship

Until 2016, formal apprenticeship training was restricted to 27 trades, mostly concentrated in the construction and engineering sectors. However, following a
review of the apprenticeship system by the Department (Ministry) of Education and Skills in 2013 (23), a decision was made to expand the apprenticeship system to other sectors of the economy. The qualifications, durations and economic sectors of the new apprenticeships differ somewhat to the earlier apprenticeships, and as a result, formal apprenticeship training falls into two programme types:

(a) pre-2016 craft apprenticeship and
(b) post 2016 apprenticeship.

In both apprenticeship programme types, apprentices are considered to be part of the employed population and pay the appropriate level of employment insurance. They sign an employment contract with the employer and therefore have the legal status (and associated rights and responsibilities) of employees.

A national apprenticeship council oversees apprenticeship in Ireland. SOLAS (Ireland’s further education and training (FET) authority) is the lead agency responsible for apprenticeship on behalf of the government. It collaborates with the Higher Education Authority (responsible for tertiary education), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), industry and education and training providers across both the FET and third level education system. It is the responsibility of SOLAS to maintain a national register of employers approved to take on apprentices and a national register of apprentices.

The national apprenticeship system is funded through the National Training Fund (NTF) (24) and from the Exchequer.

In 2016, Ireland’s National skills strategy 2025 (25) set a target to significantly expand the apprenticeship system, both in terms of the numbers of learners and the occupations and sectors in which apprenticeships would be available. The action plan to expand apprenticeship (26) outlines the plan to increase the number of apprenticeship places over the period 2016-20 to 31,000

(24) The National Training Fund (NTF) was established with the National training fund Act 2000. The NTF is funded mainly by the imposition of a levy on employers. The levy is 0.7% of reckonable earnings. The levy is collected through the PAYE/PRSI system and funds are transferred monthly to my Department by the Department of Social Protection. It’s income also includes European Social Fund refunds and European Globalisation Funds. http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/41/enacted/en/html
(up from approximately 12,000) and to increase the number of apprenticeship programmes to more than 70 (up from 27). These increases are expected to be rolled out incrementally to 2020.

### 2.2.1.1 Pre-2016 craft apprenticeship

The apprenticeship system in Ireland is governed by the 1967 industrial training Act (27) and is organised by SOLAS (FET funding and planning authority) in cooperation with the Department (Ministry) of Education and Skills, employers and unions. The pre-2016 craft-based apprenticeship programmes normally consist of seven phases: three off-the-job and four on-the-job. Phases 1, 3, 5 and 7 take place with the employer, while Phases 2, 4 and 6 take place at an ETB (phase 2) or an institute of technology (phases 4 and 6)(28). The total duration of off-the-job phases is approximately 40 weeks. The employer pays the apprentice for the on-the-job phases, while the State pays a training allowance to apprentices during the off-the-job phases. On completion of apprenticeship training, a qualified apprentice receives a craft certificate (NFQ 6 or EQF 5, ISCED 544,554).

For pre-2106 craft apprenticeship training, the formal minimum entry requirement for in Ireland is the junior certificate or equivalent (NFQ 3 or EQF 2 qualification). In practice, however, the vast majority (three quarters) of new apprentices hold higher levels of education, typically a leaving certificate (NFQ level 4/5 or EQF level 3/4). Learners who do not meet the minimum education entry requirements may be registered as apprentices by an employer if they have either successfully completed an approved pre-apprenticeship course or if they are over 16 years and have at least three years’ approved work experience. Some apprenticeships also require applicants to pass a SOLAS-approved colour vision test (e.g. electrical apprenticeship, painter and decorator apprenticeship).

In order to register as an apprentice, a learner must first secure employment in the trade s/he wishes to undertake.

### 2.2.1.2 Post 2016 apprenticeship

Since the expansion of the apprenticeship system in 2016, several new apprenticeship programmes have become available. As of August 2018, there were 23 additional formal apprenticeship programmes being run, many of which are delivered at tertiary level institutions; they span a range of sectors, including hospitality (e.g. chef de partie), finance (e.g. insurance practice), and engineering

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(27) Industrial training Act 1967.  
(28) Despite the fact that training occurs in an institute of technology (i.e. at tertiary level), the qualifications obtained on completion of an apprenticeship is not classified as a third level qualification; instead, it is considered to be a FET qualification.
(e.g. polymer processing technology). These new apprenticeships must be a minimum of two years in duration; they lead to awards spanning levels 5-8 on the national framework for qualifications (EQF levels 4-6).

In addition, there are a number of apprenticeships at various stages of development; the proposed national framework for qualifications levels for these apprenticeships range from national framework for qualifications levels 5-10 (EQF levels 4-8), and have proposed durations of two to four years. They include, among others, retail practice, arboriculture, and HGV driver.

The employer pays the apprentice for the duration of the apprenticeship.

For post 2016 apprenticeships, the entry requirements vary, depending on the specific apprenticeship programme, although a leaving certificate is generally the minimum. Furthermore, for entry to apprenticeship programmes at third level, learners often need to meet certain academic requirements (e.g. for the insurance practice apprenticeship, learners must hold minimum grades in at least six subjects (including mathematics and English or Irish)).

Generally an apprentice does not pay fees. However, a student contribution is levied on all students (including apprentices) attending institutes of technology (i.e. phases 4 and 6 of apprenticeship training). The maximum rate of the student contribution for the academic year 2016-17 is EUR 3 000, although in practice the amount is typically lower than this. (Student contributions only apply to learners on apprenticeship programmes delivered at an institute of technology; some apprenticeships, such as accounting technician or commis chef are not delivered at an institute of technology, and so are not subject to the student contribution).

In order to register as an apprentice, a learner must first secure employment in the trade s/he wishes to undertake. Apprentices are not eligible for a student grant.

2.2.2 Traineeships

Like the apprenticeship system, the traineeship system has undergone substantial change in the last number of years in Ireland. Most of the development of the traineeship system has been the result of recognition of the need to develop the skills of the employed, as outlined in the National skills strategy 2025 (29). Consequently, while most traineeships programmes had previously been available only to unemployed persons, they have, since 2017

also been open to school leavers and the employed. There are no age restrictions for trainees, and they free of charge to participants. Some unemployed trainees may also receive a training allowance.

Traineeships combine workplace training with formal off-the-job tuition in an ETB training centre. Traineeships vary in duration from six to twenty-four months, depending on the scope of the curriculum, the skill requirement of the occupation and the entry level of the trainees. At least 30% of learning takes place on-the-job. Traineeships lead to awards at national framework of qualifications levels 4-6 (EQF levels 3-5; ISCED 253, 353, 453)

Traineeships involve employers and ETBs working together in a dual system of occupational training leading to a qualification. The training content and occupational standards are based on employer consultation and development of a traineeship programme is triggered by the identification of job opportunities within a sector.

In 2018, the traineeship (30) was expanded to include any learner interested in participating in the programme. Until then, traineeships had mostly been aimed at the unemployed and as such learners had to be officially unemployed. The minimum education entry requirement for traineeships in Ireland varies according to the type of traineeship; while a qualification at NFQ level 3 (EQF level 2) is usually the minimum, most entrants hold at least a Leaving Certificate (NFQ level 4/5 or EQF level 3/4). In addition, for traineeships (e.g. childcare, healthcare) where the learner may be in contact with vulnerable people (e.g. children, adults with disabilities) Garda (Police) vetting is also required (31). Courses are free to the unemployed.

2.2.3 Specific skills training

Specific skills training (32) courses allow people who have lost their job to learn new job-related skills. The courses on offer vary from year to year with different levels of certification. The training content and occupational standards are based on the consultation process involving employers. Certification achieved on course completion ranges from levels 3-5 on the NFQ (or levels 2-4 on the EQF). The courses differ from traineeship in that they tend to be shorter (four to five months), with a shorter on-the-job phase; in addition, the employer does not play a role in recruitment.

(30) http://www.traineeship.ie/
(31) Garda vetting is conducted in respect of personnel working in a full-time, part-time, voluntary or student placement capacity in a position where they have unsupervised access to children and/or vulnerable adults.
(32) http://learningandskills.ie/specific-skills-training/
Like traineeships, specific skills training courses are aimed at the unemployed and learners are therefore officially classified as unemployed prior to beginning training. The minimum education entry requirement is a qualification at NFQ 3 (EQF 2). All courses are free to the unemployed.

2.2.4 Post Leaving Certificate
Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses are aimed at learners who have completed the leaving certificate examination at the end of upper secondary education. They are full-time courses which last between one and two years. PLC courses provide integrated general education, vocational training and work experience for young people; however, PLC courses are also an option for mature learners (in 2015, 47% of those enrolled on PLC programmes in 2015 were aged 21 or over). As such, PLC courses provide important lifelong learning opportunities for adult learners.

While some PLC courses are vocational in nature (e.g. training in beauty therapy, healthcare, security studies), others are general (e.g. general studies, art, design, etc.). Most PLC courses have a work experience component. The work based component varies, and while it can be up to a quarter of the course, there is no statutory minimum requirement. Completion of a PLC course leads to awards at EQF 4 or 5 (ISCED 453/443; NFQ 5 or 6). PLC courses aim to prepare learners to enter the labour market or to progress to tertiary education, although in practice, the numbers progressing to tertiary education via the PLC qualifications is comparatively small.

Entry to PLC courses usually requires the applicant to hold a Leaving Certificate qualification or equivalent (i.e. a qualification at levels 4/5 on the NFQ or 3/4 on the EQF). Adult learners (i.e. those aged 23 or over) without Leaving Certificate qualifications may also access PLC courses if they have sufficient work experience. Garda Vetting may also be required, depending on the course. A participant contribution of EUR 200 per year is also required, although this fee may be waived under certain circumstances (e.g. those in receipt of a means-tested student grant, those in receipt of social welfare payments, etc.).

2.2.5 Vocational training opportunities scheme courses
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) (33) consists of a range of full-time courses (EQF 2-5, ISCED 353) designed to meet the education and training

(33) The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), is run by the Department of Education and Skills. Sometimes courses can take as long as two years. They can lead
needs of unemployed people aged 21 or over. It is offered by the 16 ETBs throughout the country. Participation in VTOS is in two modes as follows:

(a) as a ‘core’ VTOS learner participating in a group of up to twenty other VTOS students in a VTOS centre or adult education centre;

(b) as a 'dispersed' VTOS learner participating in a group of learners some of whom may be VTOS learners and some of whom will be studying through other schemes/programmes (e.g. PLC course).

VTOS programmes offer a wide choice of subjects and learning activities. Certification is available at a range of levels:

(a) basic education courses in literacy, numeracy, study skills, personal development and, generally, practical subjects such as woodwork or art;

(b) foundation courses leading to junior certificate or equivalent (NFQ 3; EQF 2);

(c) leaving certificate courses based on a range of subjects, almost always including English (NFQ 4/5; EQF 3/4);

(d) PLC courses;

(e) portfolio courses where participants ‘mix and match’ from a range of subjects and levels to put together their own learning package.

In addition to the above, the majority of VTOS participants also receive tuition in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), where such learning is not part of their chosen course.

VTOS courses are provided free of charge to eligible learners; eligible learners continue to receive a social welfare payments or receive a training allowance in lieu of a social welfare payment.

VTOS programmes are second chance learning opportunities for unemployed adults. As such learners are aged at least 21 years and have been in receipt of social welfare payments for at least six months prior to enrolment.

2.2.6 Access/Routes to VET
Access to VET varies according to the programme type and learner category and are summarised in Table 7 below (see Section 2.2.1-2.2.5).

to qualifications such as junior certificate, leaving Certificate and further education and training awards council (FETAC) certificates. The main objectives of the scheme are: to give unemployed people education and training opportunities that will help them find a job; to prepare people to go to paid employment or to further educational opportunities leading to paid employment.

VTOS courses are free; books and materials may be provided free of charge.

http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Vocational-Training-Opportunities-Scheme.aspx
Table 7. Summary of access to VET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Prior education attainment</th>
<th>Minimum age on entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship (both types – pre-2016 craft and post 2016)</td>
<td>School completers; older learners may apply</td>
<td>Depends on the programme Junior Certificate or equivalent (NFQ 3; EQF 2); most learners hold a Leaving Certificate (NFQ 4/5; EQF 3/4)</td>
<td>• 15-16+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traineeship</td>
<td>School completers, unemployed and employed; older learners may apply</td>
<td>NFQ 3 (EQF 2) or higher, depending on the course</td>
<td>• 18+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Skills Training</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>NFQ 3 (EQF 2)</td>
<td>• 18+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Leaving Certificate (PLC)</td>
<td>School completers; adult learners</td>
<td>Leaving Certificate (NFQ 4/5; EQF 3/4) for school completers</td>
<td>• 18+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTOS</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td></td>
<td>• 21+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SOLAS

2.2.7 Progression from VET

Learners completing programmes in VET typically have a number of options: they may continue their studies in VET, progress to tertiary level education (in an institute of technology) or enter the labour market. Until recently, monitoring of VET outcomes was carried out through surveys and individual projects have focused on some groups (the results of which are discussed below). Most are not carried out on an annual basis, and due to differences in methodologies, are not comparable with each other.

In order to address this data deficit, SOLAS and the ETBs (providers of FET and VET training) have developed a data infrastructure to allow for the systematic identification of outcomes (further study, employment, unemployment etc.) for learners who had engaged in FET in general, including VET\(^{(34)}\). Thus far,

\(^{(34)}\) The system is known as the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) and is comprised of three elements, one of which is the National Learner Database. The National Learner Database is a student records system for data collection in relation to learners (e.g. education level prior to enrolment on a course), learner course activity (e.g. education level prior to enrolment on a course), learner course activity (e.g. education level prior to enrolment on a course), learner course activity (e.g. education level prior to enrolment on a course), learner course activity (e.g. education level prior to enrolment on a course), learner course activity (e.g. education level prior to enrolment on a course), learner course activity (e.g. education level prior to enrolment on a course).
a number of pilot projects have been carried out, and work began on tracking FET graduates to employment, unemployment, further studies within the FET system, or third level education. Initial results are expected in 2019.

The most relevant studies undertaken in relation to monitoring progression from VET programmes in Ireland at present include:

(a) a survey of a sample of learners who had previously been enrolled on selected training courses (SOLAS 2017)\(^{(35)}\);
(b) a tracking study monitoring the destination of a single cohort of learners who had completed PLC courses (unpublished, DES: 2016);
(c) a tracking study of learners who received QQI certificates in further education and training courses (including VET courses) (QQI 2014)\(^{(36)}\).

Each of the three projects cited above focus on the measuring the learning outcomes associated with completing either courses (or qualifications). Given the economic situation at the time, economic status was a key measurement in courses designed to prepare the learner for entry (or re-entry in the case of the unemployed) to the labour market. Nonetheless, due to differences in data collection methods and outcomes classifications, the findings of these studies are not comparable with one another.

2.2.8 The SOLAS follow-up survey 2016
The SOLAS 2016 follow-up survey \(^{(37)}\) contacted a representative sample of the total number of learners who had completed certain types of training courses between January and March in 2016. Only VET related programmes are considered here. As shown in Table 8, approximately one third of learners were unemployed. However, it should be borne in mind that these programmes are

\(\text{whether the learner completed the course or obtained certification}, \text{ and learner outcomes (e.g. whether the learner progressed to further study or employment). Since April 2017, the PLSS has been used across all ETBs to collect and report on learner data.}\)

\(\text{Follow Up Surveys of FÁS Programme Participants. Prior to 2013, FAS was responsible for the running of a variety of training and education programmes, including the VET programmes focussed on in this study: traineeship, specific skills training, Momentum and Apprenticeship. The latest follow-up survey is available at:}\)


\(\text{Dempsey, R.; O'Neill, R.; Tickner, N.;}(2013). \text{Where do FETAC (QQI) award holders go?}\)
http://edepositireland.ie/bitstream/handle/2262/85946/QQI%202013%20Where%20do%20FETAC%20learners%20go%20for%20web%2021aug13rd%20rhona%20Doc.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

\(\text{SOLAS (2017). 2016 Follow up survey of FET programme participants.}\)
specifically aimed learner groups that had already been highly vulnerable to unemployment. In fact, almost four in ten of FET learners who were unemployed prior to beginning their course were in employment when survey.

Table 8. Current economic status of training course completers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Completers</th>
<th>Specific Skills Training (Long)</th>
<th>Specific Skills Training (short)</th>
<th>Traineeship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive/Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a scheme*</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: SOLAS
*Refers to government employment support schemes which encourage unemployed persons to take up employment

2.2.9 Post leaving certificate (PLC) completers research

Research conducted by the Department (Ministry) of Education and Skills (DES) tracked individual learners, using a unique personal identifier (a protected identifier key based on the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN)), to link learner data to other data sources that were available at the time (e.g. employment data, third level enrolment data.). Although the study was carried out in 2016, the latest available data for tracking purposes pertained to learners enrolled in the 2010/2011 academic year. Table 9 shows that the majority of those completing PLC courses in 2011 had enrolled in further studies, either within the FET sector or at third level: 25% re-enrolled in a PLC course, almost 5% enrolled in other FET training courses, and almost 10% were studying at a tertiary level institution.

Table 9. PLC Students classified by destination in 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other FET training</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third level</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social welfare (unemployed)</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data unavailable</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: DES (2016)*
2.2.10 QQI (FET) learners

As in the case of PLC completers, this study tracked individual learners, using an anonymised identifier derived from the PPSN. The data shows that of those who obtained a QQI (FET, formerly known as FETAC) certificate in 2009, 56% were in employment the following year (Table 10). It is not possible to disaggregate in the data those learners who had followed VET programmes from general learning programmes.

Table 10. Destination of QQI (FET) certificate holders in 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QQI (FET) awards</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To employment</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To unemployment</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To QQI (FET) course</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To tertiary education</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Self Employed 2010</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not recorded</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: QQI 2014

Note: the shares are not exclusive and therefore may sum up to more than 100% (i.e. a person may have been both unemployed and employed at different points in the same calendar year).

2.3 Other forms of training

Outside of the formal education and training system, most VET opportunities occur within the context of Skillnet (38) training. Skillnet is a national agency which aims to promote the workforce learning. It works with business in Ireland to address their current and future skill needs by providing high quality, subsidised training through a number of training networks (currently 66 networks) in a range of regions and sectors. Networks are composed of private sector businesses in the same sector and/or region that have come together to carry out training-related activities that may not be possible on their own. Member businesses, and their employees, are directly involved in the identification, design, delivery and evaluation of training. Skillnet is actively supported by employer and employee bodies such as the Irish Business and Employers Confederation, Small Firms Association, Construction Industry Federation, Chambers Ireland and receives funding from the NTF through the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Participating businesses also make a financial contribution. While initially designed for employee training, in light of high unemployment levels in Ireland during the recession, Skillnet has, since 2010, also offered training to the unemployed.

(38) https://www.skillnetireland.ie
The main Skillnet programme types are:

(a) Training Networks Programme (TNP): Subsidised quality training programmes focused on the small-medium enterprise (SME) sector. Examples of training programmes include lean manufacturing (8 days); Care of the older person (4 days); Cold calling for telesales (1 day);

(b) Finuas Networks Programme (Finuas): Subsidised quality training programmes in the international financial services (IFS) sector covering banking/asset financing, corporate treasury, investment management, aviation finance, securitisation, reinsurance and related professional services;

(c) ManagementWorks: A subsidised management development training and mentoring programme available to businesses (SMEs and owner-managers) in all sectors, to assist them to grow in terms of sales, output and employment. One day courses include business growth, business leadership and Lean business;

(d) Job-Seekers Support Programme (JSSP): Skillnet supports the needs of job-seekers by focusing on integrated training with enterprise, dedicated conversion courses and work placements in areas of high employment potential. Examples of courses for job seekers include customer service training (2 days + work experience).

In 2017, Skillnet provided training to more than 49,200 employees across 15,000 participating companies (average training duration was six days). Of these, 3,700 were unemployed trainees. More than half of the trainees held third level qualifications at NFQ level 7 (EQF level 6) or above. The majority of courses (59%) do not lead to certification.

2.4 VET funding

In 2018, the Further education and training services plan (39) provided for a total budget allocation of EUR 647.6 million to SOLAS for the provision of further education and training programmes. Included within the funding allocated for FET is the funding for VET programmes. The funding is received from two main sources, the Exchequer and the NTF. Most of the funding is allocated through SOLAS to the ETBs. Of the EUR 647.6 million allocated to SOLAS, EUR 366.8 million comes from Exchequer funding and EUR 277.5 comes from the NTF; the remaining EUR 3.3 comes from SOLAS generated income.

In the past 70% of funds were spent on programmes for jobseekers. A change in economic circumstances in Ireland has observed a shift in spending to programmes for those in employment and upskilling those in employment. SOLAS are moving towards a performance funding model. It is envisaged that data gathered in programme and learner support system, in conjunction with CSO data, will enable SOLAS to capture learner data on the FET system and as they progress on to higher education, into employment or revert back on to the live register.

2.5 VET governance

Responsibility in taking decisions and implementing further education and training (FET), which includes most VET provision in Ireland lies with SOLAS in conjunction with sixteen ETBs. Both SOLAS and the ETBs are agencies of the Department (Ministry) of Education. This remit was established under the Further education and training Act 2013, which was signed into law in July 2013. The Act required SOLAS to submit a five-year strategy for FET provision in Ireland. The FET Strategy (40) (published in 2014) guides the provision of FET in Ireland (including VET, such as apprenticeship, upskilling initiatives for the employed, among others). The FET strategy compliments other government strategies such as the National skills strategy 2025 (41) and the Action plan for jobs (2017).

2.6 VET teachers, trainers and tutors

Given the diverse nature of FET and VET programmes offered to learners in Ireland, there are several categories of teaching and training professionals working in VET. The main VET teacher/trainer categories are outlined in Table 11. In general, VET teacher/trainer categories are distinguished by the programmes they deliver, their technical and pedagogical qualifications required, and the funding mechanisms.

Teachers work in ETBs, in schools or colleges of further education that deliver PLC courses and/or VTOS programmes. Although FET teachers deliver FET (including VET) at ISCED level 4 (and leading to awards at NFQ 5-6; EQF levels

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4-5), they are, for administrative purposes, considered to be and indeed registered with the Teaching Council as second level teachers; in order to register, teachers must hold an honours bachelor degree (at NFQ 8; EQF 6; ISCED 665,666) and an approved initial teacher education qualification (postgraduate diploma at NFQ 8 or 9 (EQF 6 or 7); alternatively, a teacher may hold a concurrent degree qualification in post-primary initial teacher education (NFQ 8; EQF 6) which combines the study of one or more curricular subjects with teacher education studies.

**Apprenticeship instructors** work in ETBs in training centres which deliver the first off-the-job phase of apprenticeship (phase 2). At present there is no requirement for instructors on classroom based apprenticeship programmes to hold a pedagogical qualification, but they must hold a craft certificate (NFQ 6; EQF 5), plus 5 years' experience

**Apprenticeship lecturers** work in institutes of technology, which are third level institutions, delivering training on the remaining two phases (4 & 7) of the apprenticeship programme. Apprenticeship lecturers must hold a degree (NFQ 7/8; EQF 6) or equivalent in the subject area or hold a craft certificate (EQF 5) and have three years postgraduate experience.

**Work based tutors** are employed, in both private and public sectors, in craft occupations. They are responsible for overseeing the work and training of apprentices during the on-the-job phases of the apprenticeship programme (phases 1, 3, 5 and 7). Employers must employ a suitably qualified and relevant craftsperson who has been approved by SOLAS to act as

(a) the workplace assessor. The assessor must have completed the SOLAS assessor and verifier programme provided by the ETBs. This course lasts approximately one day and is not aligned with the national framework of qualifications;  

(b) the workplace tutor. The tutor must be competent and qualified (a holder of a national craft certificate EQF 5) to train apprentices. The tutor and assessor can be the same person provided they hold the relevant qualification

**Tutors/trainers** work on VET programmes or on general learning programmes in ETBs. They deliver training (other than apprenticeship) or education (e.g. adult literacy), often on programmes aimed at the unemployed (e.g. specific skills training or other VET programmes), or early school leavers (general education). For other types of VET training in the FET sector the qualifications and professional standards of trainers vary. In general programmes leading to a QQI

[(42) Recognition of prior learning (including the compilation of a portfolio of work) may be accepted in the absence of certification.]
award require a subject matter qualification (usually one level higher than that of
the course being taught), a pedagogical qualification (usually at third level) \(^{(43)}\)
and 5 years’ industry experience. For all other training e.g. computing,
accounting, trainer profiles tend to vary depending on the awarding body, the
subject matter being taught and the provider. However pedagogical qualifications
are increasingly in demand for these types of courses.

Trainers other types of training programmes are generally required to hold
a technical qualification at a level that is one step above the programme being
delivered. In addition they must also hold a minimum amount of relevant work
experience. Increasingly however there is a demand for these trainers to hold a
pedagogical qualification.

Other trainers work in a variety of FET settings, including ETBs, Skillnets
(providing training mostly although not exclusively to the employed) and private
sector providers. More information is available in the Cedefop ReferNet thematic
perspective on teachers and trainers \(^{(44)}\).

Table 11. Summary VET teacher/trainer categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Programme delivered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Honours bachelor degree (NFQ 8/EQF 6) (any subject) and a recognised initial</td>
<td>Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course VTOS courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teacher qualification at postgraduate level or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honours bachelor degree (NFQ 8/EQF 6) concurrent degree qualification in post-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>primary initial teacher education which combines the study of one or more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>curricular subjects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Apprenticeship training phase - 2 classroom based</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Apprenticeship training phases 4 &amp; 6 - classroom based</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work based</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tutor</td>
<td>Apprenticeship training phases 1, 3, 5 &amp; 7 - work based</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>Various; depends on the type and level of course</td>
<td>VET for the unemployed (traineeship, specific skills training, etc)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SOLAS

\(^{(43)}\) In some cases however where technical competence is required, the tutors are not
third level graduates and not necessarily eligible to undertake the standard post-graduate pedagogical qualifications.

\(^{(44)}\) Burke, N.; Gordon, N.; Supporting teachers and trainers for successful reforms and
quality of vocational education and training: mapping their professional development in
the EU-Ireland. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series.

CHAPTER 3. Shaping VET Qualifications

3.1 Anticipating Skills Needs

3.1.2 The National Skills Council
Following publication of the National Skills Strategy 2025 (45), the system for the identification of skills needs in Ireland was re-configured. Skills needs identification is now overseen by a National Skills Council, which was established in 2017. The National Skills Council is chaired by Ireland’s Minister for Education and Skills and is made up of representatives (usually senior civil servants or chief executive officers) from a number of government Departments (Ministries), their agencies, and employers. Included on the Council are representatives from the following:

(a) Department of Education and Skills
   • Higher Education Authority - responsible for planning and funding third level institutions
   • Further Education Authority (SOLAS) – responsible for planning and funding further education and training (including most VET)
   • Quality and Qualifications Ireland
   • Science Foundation Ireland - funds research in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
   • ETBs Ireland - representative body for the main providers of FET in Ireland
   • Irish Universities Association - representing universities in Ireland
   • Technological Higher Education Association - representing institutes of technology (providers of higher education)

(b) Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation
   • Industrial Development Agency (IDA) - responsible for attracting inward foreign direct investment
   • Enterprise Ireland - responsible for indigenous, exporting companies

(c) Department of Public Expenditure and Reform - manages public spending

(d) Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

(e) Employers – a range of employers including ICT companies, food/beverage processing, and machinery manufacturers. Figure 10 summarises the composition of the National Skills Council.

Figure 10. Composition of Ireland’s National Skills Council

Source: SOLAS

The work of the National Skills Council is informed by the research and employer engagement activities of a number of bodies, as shown in Figure 11.
3.1.2. The expert group on future skills needs

The expert Group on future skills needs (established in 1997) is based in the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. It is chaired by the Irish Business Employers Confederation (IBEC) – a lobby group representing Irish business) and is made up of representatives from government ministries and their agencies (primarily business and education related. The expert group on future skills needs advises the Irish government on skills needs at sectoral level.

3.1.3. The Skills and Labour Market Research Unit

The Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) was established in 2001 and monitors the supply and demand for skills at occupational level. In 2002, the SLMRU set up the National Skills Database (NSD). The NSD is an electronic database which stores all data produced by the public authorities in Ireland which is relevant to the issue of skills supply and skills demand. In general, occupation title is used as a proxy for skill, while for education & training data, field of learning and NFQ level (where available) are used. Figure 12 summarises some of the most important datasets included in the NSD.
The national skills database facilitates the use of a range of indicators and models to assess potential imbalances between the demand and supply of skills from more than 100 occupations.

The findings of three additional SLMRU projects are also used to further interpret the data in the NSD.

(a) transitions data: using the Labour Force Survey (including employment and unemployment data), it is possible to track the number of people moving in and out of employment,
unemployment and inactivity at occupational level, and thereby identify job churn and job replacement demand;

(b) occupational projections: this data provides projections of employment demand at occupational level up to 2020, in order to estimate the extent to which economic growth is likely to impact on employment demand at occupational level. The report supports decision-making in the areas of education and training provision, labour market policy, immigration policy, and career guidance;

(c) apprenticeship forecasts. Apprenticeship forecasting aims to provide policy makers with a broad indication of the anticipated annual apprentice recruitment requirement for industry for the coming years. They are also used to estimate the training provision required for each trade.

Drawing on the data held in the NSD, the findings of the employment projections and the transitions data, the SLMRU produces a number of publications annually: the National skills bulletin, Vacancy overview, Monitoring Ireland’s skills supply and the Regional labour market bulletin. These reports assist the national skills council, the expert group on future skills needs, the nine regional skills fora, and other policy makers in the early identification of skills needs in Ireland. The information is also used to inform other areas such as labour market activation measures and, increasingly, education/training provision.

3.1.4. The regional skills fora

In 2016, the Department of Education and Skills, in line with the actions outlined in the National skills strategy 2025 (46), set up a regional skills forum in seven of the eight NUTS (47) 3 regions in Ireland. In the eighth region (the Border), two regional skills fora were established, reflecting the economically diverse composition of Ireland’s border region. The aims of the regional skills fora are to form a link between employers and education providers at local level, thereby assisting employers identify their skills needs, and to facilitating collaboration between education providers and employers with a view to achieving greater alignment between employers’ needs at local level and the course content offered by education and training providers.

(47) Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS)
3.1.5. The Skills Planning and Enterprise Engagement Unit

The Skills Planning Enterprise Engagement (SPEE) Unit is located within the Department of Education and Skills. It supports the work of the national skills council, in particular by co-ordinating the responses to skills needs across the different sectors of the education and training system. It also oversees the work of the regional skills fora, and is represented on the expert group on future skills needs.

3.1.6 Identified skills shortages in Ireland

Ireland’s skills needs architecture described in the sections above allows for the identification, at occupation level, of areas where job opportunities are arising. It also allows for the identification of occupations for which employers are finding it difficult to recruit suitably qualified persons (i.e. skills and labour shortages). The most recent edition of the National skills bulletin (48) (2018) identified the following shortages:

Table 12. List of shortages identified in Ireland 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupations</th>
<th>Shortage</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science &amp; engineering</td>
<td>Scientists (Chemists, Biochemists)</td>
<td>Skills shortage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engineers (e.g. electrical, chemical, automation)</td>
<td>Niche areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technicians (e.g. quality control, process)</td>
<td>Experience (5 years+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Project managers</td>
<td>Skills shortage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Software developers</td>
<td>(language skills required for technician roles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IT architects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Test/security engineers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business &amp; financial</td>
<td>Business/financial analysts</td>
<td>Skills shortage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data analysts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accountants with industry specific experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Doctors (emergency, anaesthetics, orthopaedic)</td>
<td>Skills shortage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nurses (staff, registered, clinical nurse managers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radiographers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Occupations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Civil engineers, construction project managers, Quantity surveyors, Shuttering carpenters, Shift managers, glaziers, steel erectors, curtain wallers, Scaffolders, pipe layers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Craft</td>
<td>Welders, Toolmakers, CNC programmers, Fitters, Deboners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>Chefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport &amp; logistics</td>
<td>HGV drivers, Other drivers (crane, forklift etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales, marketing &amp; customer service</td>
<td>Account strategists, Inside sales representatives, Product/account managers, Marketing specialists, Customer service representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture &amp; animal care</td>
<td>No shortages identified but labour issues relating to mushroom pickers, fruit pickers and in dairy farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Sports &amp; Tourism</td>
<td>No shortage identified but issues relating to animators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social &amp; care</td>
<td>No shortages identified but issues relating to care workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>No shortages identified but issues relating to secondary school teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National skills bulletin 2018 (SOLAS)

In most instances, the skills shortages refer to a demand for a small number of people in very specific, niche areas of expertise.

A key development in qualification and quality assurance in Ireland was the establishment in 2003 of the national framework of qualifications by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI)\(^{(49)}\). The NFQ is a ten level framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and

\(^{(49)}\) In 2012, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established as a new integrated agency, replacing the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB).
related to each other in a coherent way. The many different types and sizes of qualifications included in the NFQ are organised based on their level of knowledge, skill and competence. Because all NFQ qualifications are quality assured, learners can be confident that they will be recognised at home and abroad. In 2009, the Irish NFQ was referenced to the European qualifications framework, making qualifications easier to understand across different countries in Europe.

Under the Qualifications and quality assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, the government established Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). QQI operates under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills. It is both an awarding and a quality assurance body. While the remit of QQI extends to both general and vocational education and training awards, it plays a key role in setting standards and qualifications and standards in VET (a significant share of VET-related awards are made by QQI). The specific statutory functions of QQI include:

(a) promote, maintain, further develop and implement the NFQ;
(b) advise the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to national policy on quality assurance and enhancement in education and training;
(c) review and monitor the effectiveness of education and training providers’ quality assurance procedures;
(d) establish the standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners before an award can be made by QQI or by an education and training provider to which authority to make an award has been delegated;
(e) make awards or delegate authority to make an award where it considers it appropriate; review and monitor the operation of the authority so delegated.

3.1.7 Award standards
QQI sets standards for further education and training awards (including VET) and tertiary education awards made outside the university sector (50). It is also responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance in further and higher education and training providers in Ireland. This includes the universities,

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(50) The awards at tertiary level are made to learners at a variety of tertiary institutions including private independent colleges. Third level institutions such as most institutes of technology have received delegated authority from QQI to make their own awards. Universities and Dublin Institute of Technology act as their own awarding bodies.
institutes of technology, ETBs and private sector providers availing of QQI awards.

QQI awards standards are determined within the NFQ which comprises a grid of indicators, award-type descriptors and other policies, criteria, standards and guidelines that may be issued to support it. QQI determines awards standards for the education and training awards that it makes itself and that are made by providers to whom it has delegated authority to make an award (\textsuperscript{51}). Such standards are determined to be consistent with the NFQ’s award-types.

3.2 Quality assurance

Under the Qualifications and quality assurance (Education and training) Act 2012, QQI is required to develop and publish guidelines for providers for the quality assurance (QA) of their programmes and services. Providers are required by legislation to "have regard to QQI guidelines" in developing their own procedures for quality assurance. In some instances, e.g. programme validation, providers’ QA procedures must be approved by QQI as fit for purpose.

Therefore, the overall approach to QA in education and training means that providers are responsible for quality assuring their own programmes with reference to the guidelines and criteria issued by QQI. Given the variety of providers in Ireland, QQI has developed guidelines for a number of sectors including the further education and training sector. In its guidelines for FET providers, QQI notes they are directed to the EQAVET Framework, the European initiative for quality assurance in VET, designed to provide tools for the management of quality in vocational education and training. QQI is an active contributor to EQAVET’s work on a European level and these guidelines are designed to be complementary with it.

Programme validation is a key quality assurance process that QQI uses to approve new programmes proposed by providers of education and training. Validation in this context means that a programme meets minimum standards in terms of learning outcomes and NFQ levels. Programme validation therefore can assure providers and learners that successful completion of a programme

\textsuperscript{51} Universities and Dublin Institute of Technology are awarding bodies authorised by law to make awards. QQI does not determine awards standards for their awards. They are required by section 43(3) of the 2012 Act to ensure, in so far as is reasonably practicable, that each award that they make is recognised within the NFQ. In this context recognition within the framework of a designated awarding body’s (DAB) award means that the award standard is determined by the DAB to be consistent with the relevant NFQ award-type.
validated by QQI will lead to a specific NFQ awards. Programme validation is a two-stage process:

(a) approval of the provider’s ability to quality assure its programmes;
(b) validation by QQI of a specific programme(s). QQI does this by appointing independent expert(s) to compare provider proposals against the requirements of the particular NFQ award(s).

If the proposed programme meets QQI criteria, it can be validated for up to five years. If the criteria are not met then the programme cannot be offered as proposed.

3.2.1 Employability statements
The Action plan for education 2018(52) states that the education and training providers (in both the FET and higher education sectors) should provide employability statements for courses they offer to learners. Employability statements are based on the course content and course aims. The aim of the employability statements is to better inform learners (and their parents) in making their career choices. Within the FET sector, employability statements will be available for all courses that lead to an award at level 5 and above on the NFQ (EQF level 4); a number of courses leading to awards at NFQ level 4 (EQF level 3) will also have employability statements, particularly when they have a VET orientation or employment-specific purpose.

3.3 Recognition of Prior Learning
Under an EU Council Recommendation, Member States should have arrangements in place for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, no later than 2018 and under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012(53), QQI is required to establish policies on recognition of prior learning within the policies and criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP). While the legal basis for the development of RPL policies was established in the Qualifications Act 1999, and the NQAI published principles and operational guidelines in 2005, recognition of prior learning policy is currently being revised by QQI. QQI has consulted widely with relevant stakeholders in order to achieve a more cohesive approach to delivering RPL nationally. QQI aims to develop a comprehensive policy and operational procedures in line with legislation on the

basis of national collaboration, consideration of the current arrangements and identification of best practice nationally and internationally.

In 2017, a pilot programme was introduced in Donegal Education and Training Board (ETB), where members of Ireland’s defence forces (i.e. army) had their non-formal and informal learning validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). The process was adopted by a further nine ETBs in 2018. The main aim of the programme is to enhance employees’ literacy (including information technology and digital) skills.
CHAPTER 4. Promoting participation in VET

4.1 Incentives for VET learners

4.1.1 Financial Incentives to learners

In common with other sections of the Irish education sector, the provision of public vocational and education training is largely funded by the Exchequer and consequently VET programmes are provided free or at a minimal charge. As an example, the PLC programme is an important element of VET provision to young people who have completed their leaving certificate and to adults returning to education. Since the 2011/12 academic year, students on PLC courses pay a participant contribution of EUR 200 (prior to this students did not have to pay any fees). There may be other minimal costs i.e. registration and exam fee’s however these may vary according to the different colleges. Certain categories of PLC learners are exempted from this participant contribution - e.g. learners who qualify for a student grant do not have to pay the participant contribution. Colleges offering PLC courses may, however, levy a 'course charge' to cover such expenses as books, uniforms, student services, professional registration fees and examination fees. The cost of availing of FET courses is much less expensive than attending higher education courses in Ireland. Investing time in this education sector can be beneficial to learners especially due to the local availability of courses throughout the country in ETBs (In contrast to third level institutions, ETBs further education colleges and schools are found in many of the larger towns in Ireland, in addition to the cities).

There are numerous grants, supports and incentives available to individuals intending to avail of courses in the FET sector.

(a) the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is available to carers, people with disabilities, unemployed people and lone parents. This allowance provides these individuals with the opportunity to study in second-level or further and higher education while keeping their existing social welfare payments;

(b) Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) is targeted at over 16s who have not completed their leaving certificate and allows participants to combine family and work with a part-time further education programme;

(54) There are two elements to the student grant — a maintenance grant and a fee grant. A maintenance grant is a contribution towards a student's living costs. A fee grant can cover: (1) all or part of tuition fees; (2) all or part of the student contribution and (3) costs of essential field trips.
(c) CETS (Childcare Employment and Training Support) scheme provides subsidised childcare places for some applicants to further education and training courses including VET (specific skills training, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, and traineeships).

Other initiatives available to trainees include a training allowance which may be paid for the duration of the course (see Chapter 2); an accommodation allowance should the individual live away from home in order to attend the course; a travel allowance should the trainee live more than three miles from the ETB.

4.1.2 Positive employability outcomes
The first goal in the SOLAS corporate plan 2017/19 (55) is for FET provision to align with labour market and learners’ employability and lifelong learning needs. By striving to ensure positive employability outcomes for those undertaking FET (including VET) programmes, SOLAS aims to enhance the standing of FET amongst school leavers and other learners in Ireland. To this end, monitoring learner outcomes from FET course is a key function of SOLAS and this data, along with local labour market intelligence (also provided by SOLAS) informs the FET planning agreements SOLAS makes with ETBs as the basis for receipt of funding. These activities help to ensure that courses provided by ETBs are up to date and in conjunction with employer’s needs and that learners from VET oriented courses will be job ready. Currently, most monitoring is carried out through regular surveys. However, increasingly, administrative data sets will be used to monitor learner outcomes. Initial steps were taken in pilot programmes in 2016, with further work currently on-going.

4.2 Incentives for enterprises
In October 2018, SOLAS published its FET employee development framework, which aims to upskill and re-skill vulnerable workers. FET provision for these workers includes digital skills training, technical, socio-emotional and cognitive training. The target cohorts are older workers, those with low education attainment (less than NFQ 5/EQF 4), working in vulnerable occupations/sectors (e.g. elementary and operatives working in some low tech manufacturing). This is a dedicated initiative with dedicated funding allocated to it and builds on existing programmes by embedding the policy in this area.

Currently, briefing sessions are being held at ETB’s level, with efforts concentrating on developing ETB’s capacity, rolling out a promotional campaign and monitoring metrics.

The policy also supports small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in investing in their workforces. While responsibility for skills development of employees will continue to remain with employers, this policy aims to complement existing employer-based and State initiatives, through targeted support and investment by government. It is planned that, by 2021, over 40,000 workers will be engaging in State-supported upskilling; 4,500 SMEs (small and medium enterprises) will be supported through this initiative.

4.3 VET guidance and counselling

Guidance and counselling takes different forms throughout the VET sector. Learners generally access courses and services through self-referral or having been referred to courses and services through the Department of Social Protection. For example with regard to PLCs, school leavers or adults generally choose the course and apply directly by letter or online to the school or college offering that course. In some instances they will be called for an interview before final selection. PLC participants may receive in-house education and career guidance on the issue of vocational area choice, progression to work and progression through a special links programme to an Institute of Technology.

For young learners who join the Youthreach programme on leaving school at the age of 16 (or younger) counselling and psychological services are available as well as a guidance service, in recognition of the social and personal challenges experienced by many Youthreach participants. The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) has a role in the support and development of guidance in Youthreach and similar programmes. The remit of the NCGE which is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills is to develop and support quality guidance provision in the education sector as part of lifelong learning in accordance with national and international best practice. NCGE has collaborated with the Youthreach programme in the development of the Web Wheel Model (56), a core element of which includes the use of mentoring techniques to develop and guide one-to-one relationships between students and staff. This process uses a specific profiling tool, the Wheel, to assess student needs, to structure and guide the mentoring conversations and to review and monitor progress.

(56) More information on the Web Wheel Model can be found at the Youthreach web site: http://www.youthreach.ie/web-wheel/
SOLAS is working with NCGE to co-ordinate the Adult Education Guidance Initiative within the ETBs which provides nationwide guidance for learners before and after they participate in VTOS programmes.

The Institutes of Technology (IoTs) provide higher education and some VET and FET programmes. The majority of the IoTs offer a careers service to students. The main provision is targeted at final year students and recent graduates though some career services have started to provide careers education in the curriculum of undergraduate courses. The Careers Advisory/Appointments Office provides information on educational and employment opportunities. Universities and the IoTs are not statutorily required to offer careers services and the provision can differ across the sector. At present many of the Careers Services are involved in programmes promoting student retention in higher education and training.

With regard to apprenticeship, the person must first obtain employment as an apprentice in their chosen trade. The employer must be approved to train apprentices and must register the person with SOLAS as an apprentice within two weeks of recruitment. The registered apprentice is then called for training by SOLAS.

FET practitioners require reskilling throughout their careers to meet the changing needs of learners in FET. There are a number of organisations and agencies who are already providing development opportunities to FET practitioners i.e. Further Education and Support Service (FESS) in programme development and quality assurance, the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) for FET guidance personnel, the National Learning Network and the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) for disability, awareness, etc.
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[URLs accessed 01.11.2018]


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http://www.oecd.org/employment/onlineoecdemploymentdatabase.htm

*Qualifications and quality assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.*


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEGS</td>
<td>Adult Educational Guidance Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS)</td>
<td>Further Education and Training Authority</td>
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<td>BTEI</td>
<td>Back to Education Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAS</td>
<td>Common Awards System</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Central Statistics Office</td>
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<td>CTCs</td>
<td>Community Training Centres</td>
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<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>DBEI</td>
<td>Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEASP</td>
<td>Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection</td>
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<td>EGFSN</td>
<td>Expert Group on Future Skills Needs</td>
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<td>ETB</td>
<td>Education and Training Board</td>
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<td>FIT</td>
<td>Fastrack to Information Technology</td>
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<td>Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS)</td>
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<td>HEA</td>
<td>Higher Education Authority</td>
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<td>HETAC</td>
<td>Higher Education and Training Awards Council</td>
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<td>IBEC</td>
<td>Employers representative organisation (Irish Business and Employers Confederation)</td>
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<td>ICTU</td>
<td>Irish Congress of Trade Unions</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>JobSeeker’s Allowance</td>
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<td>Local Enterprise Offices</td>
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<td>Live Register</td>
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<td>Local Training Initiatives</td>
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<td>Long Term Unemployed</td>
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<td>NALA</td>
<td>National Adult Literacy Agency</td>
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<td>NCGE</td>
<td>National Centre for Guidance in Education</td>
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<td>NEET</td>
<td>Not in employment, education or training</td>
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<td>NESC</td>
<td>National Economic and Social Council</td>
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<td>NFQ</td>
<td>National Framework of Qualifications</td>
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<td>NQAI</td>
<td>National Qualifications Authority of Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>NSD</td>
<td>National Skills Database</td>
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<td>National Training Fund</td>
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<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>Skills and Labour Market Research Unit</td>
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<td>Specialist Training Providers</td>
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<td>Vocational Education Committees</td>
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<tr>
<td>VTOS</td>
<td>Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme</td>
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Annex 1

1.1 Demand indicators
(a) employment data: an analysis of employment data from the Central Statistics Office (Ireland’s national statistics institute) provides a profile of employment in Ireland by detailed occupation; other variables such as age, gender, education level, work type (full-time/part-time), among others are also available;
(b) immigration (Employment permits): employers, where necessary, employ workers from non-EU/EEA countries through employment permit schemes; the data on newly issued employment permits, provided by the Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation (Ministry for employment), may be used to highlight occupations for which employers experience difficulty in sourcing staff within the EU/EEA;
(c) recruitment agency survey findings: the SLMRU has conducted a recruitment agency survey every six months since January 2008; it is designed to gather the views of recruitment agencies in respect of the occupations for which vacancies, in their experience, are proving difficult to fill;
(d) job vacancy data: vacancy notifications from two sources, namely the Public Employment Service (PES) and IrishJobs.ie (private source of job vacancy data) provide an insight to areas in which employers are currently looking to recruit staff;
(e) job announcements: the SLMRU monitors announcements made in the media of new jobs expected to come on stream in the short-to-medium term; these are usually for large numbers of jobs.

1.2 Supply indicators:
(a) third level enrolment and graduation data (by course title, NFQ (EQF) level, field of learning); the data is used to monitor the supply of skills from the education and training system; applications for places on education and training courses are also analysed where available;
(b) third level first destination survey data; this data provides an indication of the destination (i.e. employment, unemployment, further studies etc.) of third level graduates in the nine months following graduation from third level institutions;
(c) FET awards data: this data shows the number of people gaining awards from QQI following a programme of study in the FET sector (which includes VET) by NFQ (EQF) level and field of learning;
(d) Training follow-up survey: the follow-up surveys establish the learning outcomes (i.e. employment, unemployment, further study, etc.) associated with learners from selected training programmes in the FET sector (including VET); SOLAS is currently exploring the possibility of using administrative data systems to link learner data across other data systems in order to establish whether, following completion of a FET course, learners secured employment, progressed to further study, were unemployed, etc. The project is currently on-going;

(e) Unemployment data: unemployment data (from the Central Statistics Office) is analysed by detailed age, gender, education level, and if applicable, previous occupation and sector worked;

(f) PES job seeker data: job seeker data is available on a monthly basis and shows the number of people looking and available for work.