



VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING IN EUROPE

IRELAND

SYSTEM DESCRIPTION



VET IN EUROPE 2022

Cedefop; SOLAS - Further Education and Training Authority (2022). Vocational education and training in Europe - Ireland: system description [From Cedefop; ReferNet. Vocational education and training in Europe database].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/ireland-u2>

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CHAPTER 1.

Summary of main elements and distinctive features of VET

Summary of main elements (1)

Ireland's education and training system is divided into four sectors: primary, secondary, further education and training (FET), and higher education (HE). Further education in Ireland covers EQF levels 2-5 (NFQ levels 3-6) with some higher apprenticeships at EQF level 6 (NFQ levels 7/8). The main providers of VET are the 16 education and training boards (ETBs). SOLAS is the Government agency responsible for funding, planning and coordinating FET provision in Ireland. A newly established Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is responsible for policy, funding and governance of Higher and Further Education. The national further education and training strategy, *Future FET: transforming learning 2020-24* outlines the vision for the system to 2024.

FET programmes range from post-leaving certificate (PLC) provision, traineeships, workplace training options, apprenticeships, and community education. Having undergone several years of reform, FET is making a valuable contribution to a more collaborative and cohesive tertiary education system for Ireland. In this context, the tertiary education system comprises FET and HE. Clear progression routes into higher education allow learners to make the transition from EQF levels 3 and 4 (NFQ levels 4 and 5) to EQF levels 5 and 6 (NFQ levels 6, 7, 8) and beyond. It is estimated that 21% of school leavers are enrolling in FET and from the 2017 cohort of 33 017 FET learners, 16% progressed to higher education. Vocational education and training (VET) programmes within FET include:

- apprenticeships: the range of apprenticeship opportunities has diversified in recent years. There are currently 62 national apprenticeship programmes available. All apprentices are employed and each programme includes a minimum of 50% on the job training which spans both FET and Higher Education (2). Apprenticeships are included in the following sectors: engineering, construction, motor, electrical, finance, hospitality and food, biopharma, logistics, property services, recruitment, sales and ICT;
- traineeship is a programme of structured training which combines learning in an education and training setting and in the workplace, aiming to improve recruitment and employment outcomes for participants. Traineeships range from EQF levels 3-5 (NFQ levels 4-6) and are predominantly focused on employment. There are currently over 75 traineeship programmes available;
- many learners enrol on a post-leaving certificate (PLC) programme (EQF levels 4/5). PLC provision has two overarching aims: to provide successful participants with specific vocational skills to enhance their employment opportunities or to facilitate their progression to additional education and training.

Specific skills training (SST) courses span both initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET) and are delivered by the ETBs and are designed to meet the needs of industry and business across a range of occupations at EQF levels 2-5 (NFQ levels 3-6).

eCollege is a leading learning platform that delivers online training courses to those who are employed as well as those already enrolled on FET programmes.

Courses are designed with the flexibility of response to the specific skills needs of individuals who require certified training to assist return to or progression in the labour market.

Other FET programmes, delivered mainly by ETBs, include wider community education provision. Community education plays a critical role, supporting participation and re-engagement in education and training, with around 50 000 learners across FET each year.

Distinctive features (3)

VET in Ireland is not usually offered within the second level system (neither lower secondary (NFQ 3, EQF 2, ISCED 244) nor upper secondary (NFQ 4/5, EQF3/4, ISCED 343/344)). Therefore, most learners are aged at least 16 or over. Active inclusion and community development have always been central tenets of the work of education and training boards and FET providers, with an extensive reach into and across local communities. FET balances the needs of skills for work with the just as critical skills for life; supporting citizenship and prosperity across communities and developing social capital.

The National skills strategy 2025 (4) outlines several key objectives, placing a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy. The strategy also aims to engage employers to participate actively in the development of skills and make effective use of skills in their organisations to improve productivity and competitiveness.

The strategic performance agreements between SOLAS and each of the 16 ETBs sets out the context, strategic priorities and individual ETB contributions to the achievement of key national FET sector targets (5).

In July 2021 SOLAS prepared a new 10-year literacy, numeracy and digital skills strategy, which is a key commitment in the governmental programme (6).

Considering the future world of work, information technology and digital creativity are growing in popularity. Courses and pathways are available to learners who wish to train as software professionals, network engineers, digital marketers and cybersecurity experts. There are new apprenticeships in ICT which include a focus on female-only cohorts.

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- [1] Based on Cedefop (2021). Spotlight on VET - 2020 compilation: vocational education and training systems in Europe. Luxembourg: Publications Office.
<http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/667443>
 - [2] <https://content.apprenticeship.ie/f/83224/x/d49bf7317b/list-of-apprenticeships.pdf>
 - [3] Based on Cedefop (2021). Spotlight on VET - 2020 compilation: vocational education and training systems in Europe. Luxembourg: Publications Office.
<http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/667443>
 - [4] <https://assets.gov.ie/24412/0f5f058feec641bbb92d34a0a8e3daff.pdf>
 - [5] <https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2019/02.pdf>. See also Cedefop; ReferNet (2021). VET REF: developments in vocational education and training policy database. [Unpublished].
 - [7] https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf
 - [8] <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1feaf-pathways-to-work-2021/>

CHAPTER 2.

Main challenges and policy responses

The further education and training strategy (FET) 2020-24 (7) sets out a five-year roadmap for the sector which is built around three key pillars of building skills, fostering inclusion and creating pathways; it aims to address (8) the economic and societal challenges faced over the coming years. FET planning must ensure agility to respond to a large base of unemployed people, or vulnerable workers in need of upskilling and reskilling to re-join or remain in the workforce. This need is currently exacerbated by COVID-19 and the serious potential economic risks of Brexit.

FET Policy responses to the challenging circumstances brought about by COVID-19 include Skills to compete - a initiative to support those who have lost their jobs as a result of COVID-19 in returning to the workforce - eCollege, and the apprenticeship incentivisation scheme, a current package of financial support for apprenticeship employers.

Within the FET Strategy 2020-24 there is a vision for transforming learning, and for future FET provision to be shorter, more agile and targeted to specific skills areas. Within FET, flexibility and agility is already evident in relation to extending registration dates and enabling digital technologies to deliver and support priority learners, including but not limited to people with disabilities, new migrants, the long-term unemployed, ex-offenders and women. Teaching and learning is also now offered through online and blended approaches. The challenge for FET practitioners is to adapt to new ways of teaching and learning, going beyond online platforms to consider pedagogical approaches and concepts (9).

In 2021 the Irish Government published a strategy to get people back to work post-pandemic. The *Pathways to work 2021-25 strategy* (10) is designed to drive employment in Ireland as the economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. Key points in this strategy include:

- to help 75 000 long-term unemployed into work;
- subsidies of up to EUR 10 000 for employers who take people off the live register;
- new work placement experience programme to provide 10 000 paid, quality placements;
- special package of supports for young people; youth unemployment.

The Irish government recently launched the *Economic recovery plan* (11) for rapid job creation and economic growth after the pandemic. The recovery plan emphasises upskilling, providing targeted support for those sectors most impacted. The SOLAS recovery skills response programme, which is a component of the national recovery and resilience plan, will provide a range of FET programmes rolled out as part of Skills to compete and the establishment of the SOLAS Green skills action programme focusing on providing training to address climate and zero carbon economy issues.

[9] Based on Cedefop (2021). Spotlight on VET - 2020 compilation: vocational education and training systems in Europe. Luxembourg: Publications Office.
<http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/667443>

[10] <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1feaf-pathways-to-work-2021/>

CHAPTER 3.

External factors influencing VET

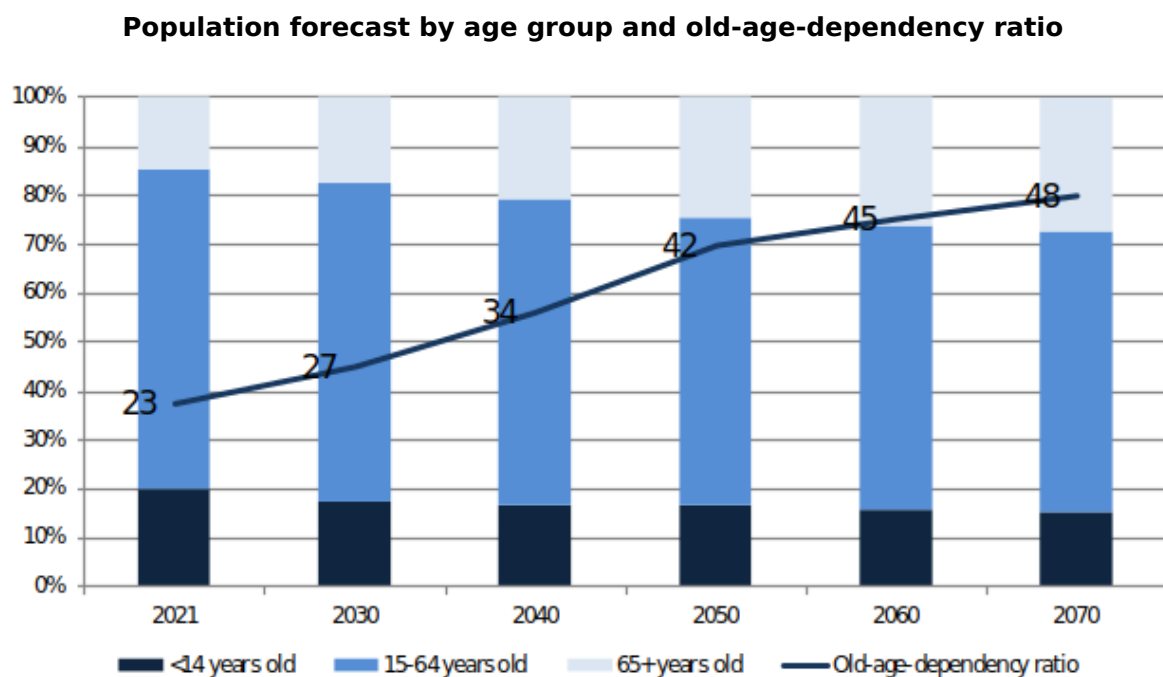
3.1 Demographics

Population in 2020: 4 964 440 (12).

It increased by 6.1% since 2015. This is due to the combined effect of positive net migration and natural increase (where the number of births was greater than the number of deaths).

As in many other EU countries, the population is ageing.

The old-age-dependency ratio is expected to increase from 23 in 2021 to 48 in 2070 (13).



Source: Eurostat, proj_19ndbi [Extracted on 7.5.2021].

The cohort of those aged 15 to 19 years continued to grow, increasing by 11% between 2014 and 2020, due mainly to an increase in the number of births in recent years (14). As many learners enter the VET system from the age of 18 onwards, it is likely that the increase in this cohort will impact on the number of upper secondary school completers entering the VET system, and will contribute to further growth in the demand for places across all sectors of the education and training system, including VET.

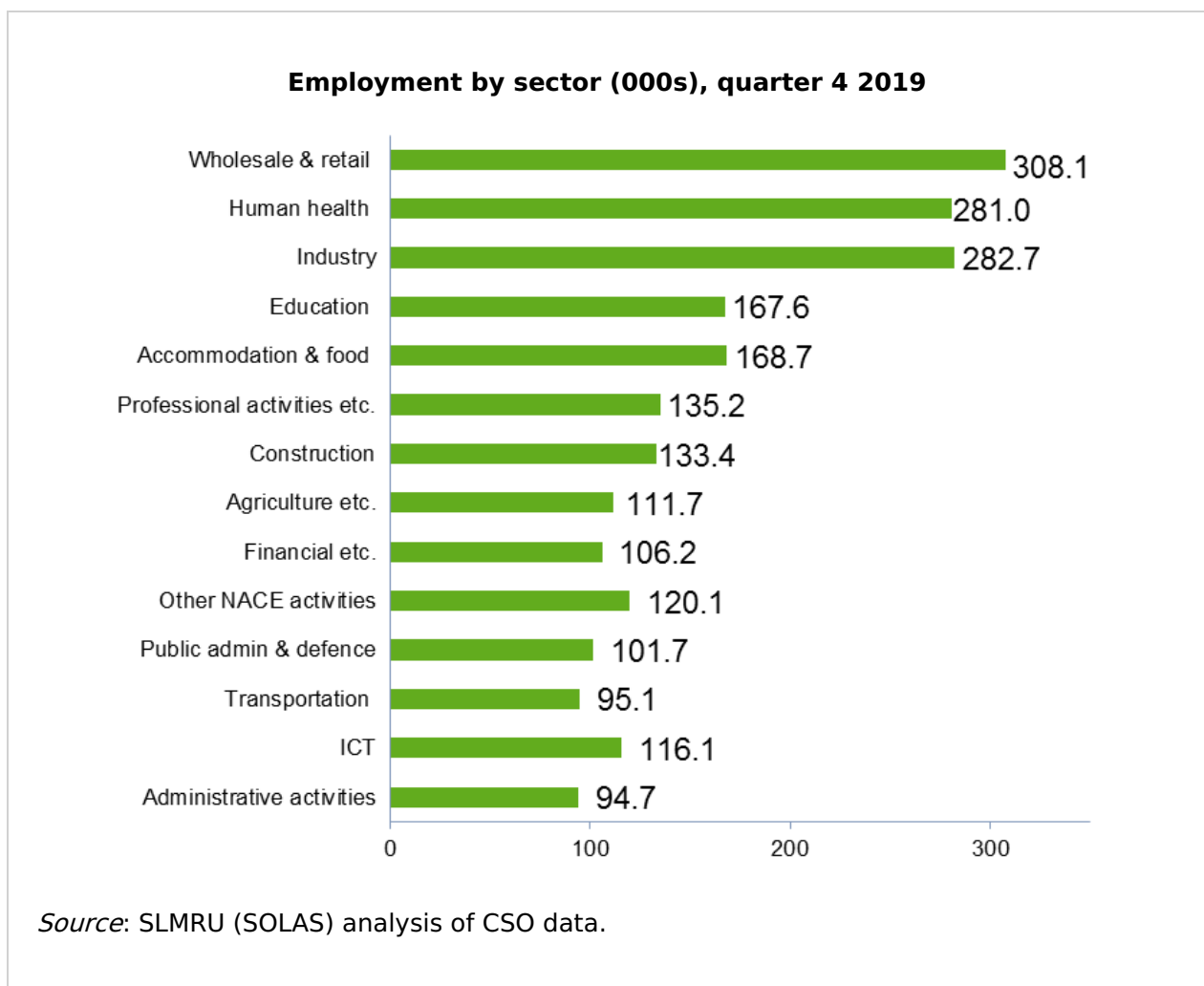
3.2 Economics

In 2019 (latest data available), micro enterprises made up 92% of the total enterprise

population in Ireland. In terms of persons engaged, however, 25.6% were in micro enterprises, 20.5% were in small enterprises, 20.3% were in medium enterprises, and 33.6% were in large enterprises (15).

The top 10 economic sectors in terms of employment are:

- wholesale and retail;
- industry;
- human health;
- education;
- professional activities, etc.;
- ICT;
- construction;
- accommodation and food;
- finance, insurance and real estate
- public administration and defence;



These sectors are not linked to VET qualifications.

The main sectors associated with VET qualifications are construction, industry, and more recently and to a lesser extent, ICT, transportation, accommodation and food (i.e. hospitality),

and finance.

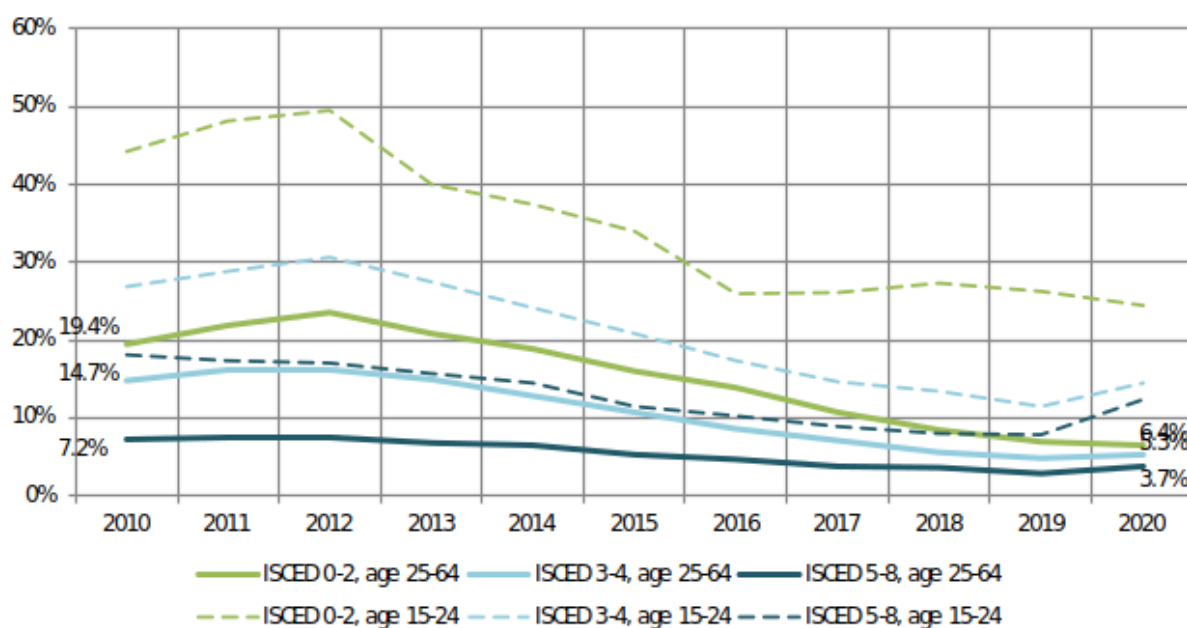
3.3 Labour market

In terms of labour market regulation (16), Ireland's regulatory framework has more in common with other flexible labour markets such as those of the United Kingdom or Denmark than with labour markets such as France and Germany. There are comparatively few occupations for which a VET qualification is a prerequisite for employment (notable exceptions include electrician, gas installer).

Total unemployment (17) (2020): 4.4% (6.2% in EU-27); it fell by 2.8 percentage points since 2016 (18). However, official unemployment data do not fully capture the number of people who were out of work due to the public health restrictions imposed as a result of COVID-19; the COVID-19 adjusted measure of unemployment for Ireland was estimated at 21% at the end of 2020.

Official unemployment estimates for Ireland show that the higher the education level, the lower the unemployment level, regardless of age. At 24% in 2020, those aged 15-24 with, at most, lower secondary education had the highest unemployment rate, while those aged 25-64 years with tertiary education had the lowest unemployment rate, at 3.7% (19).

Unemployment rate (aged 15-24 and 25-64) by education attainment level in 2010-20



NB: data based on ISCED 2011; breaks in time series

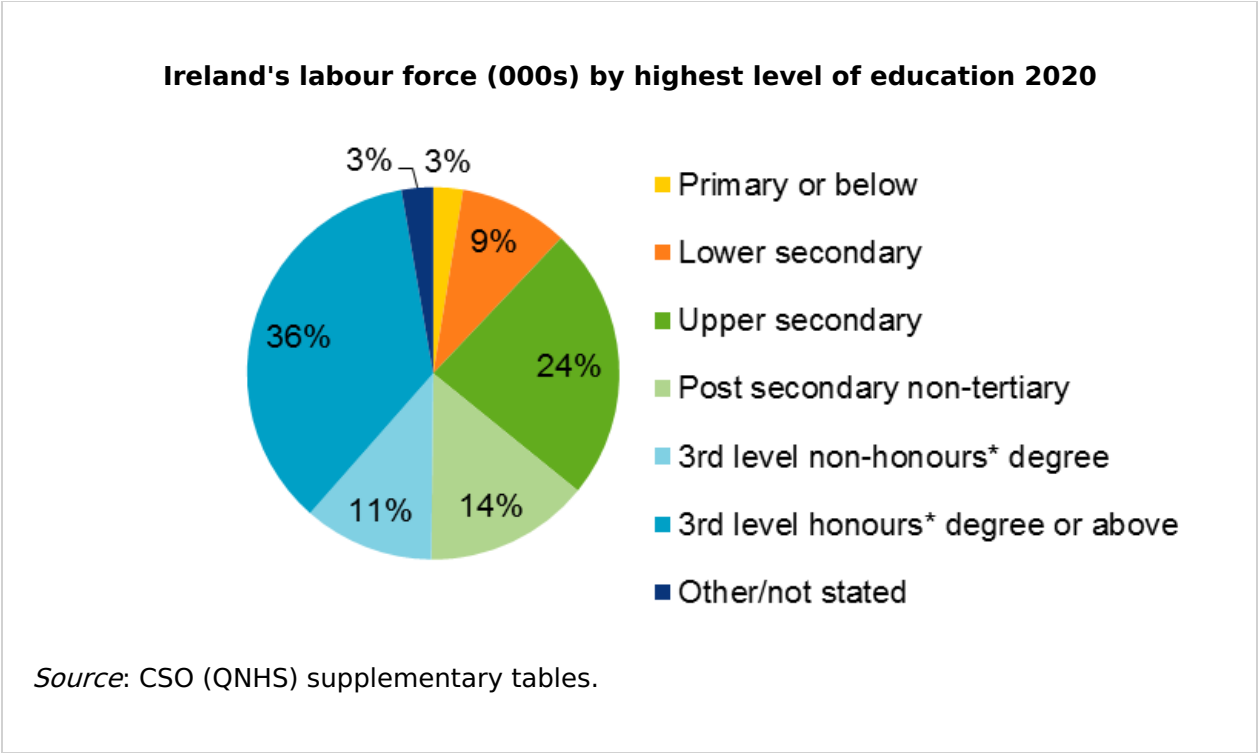
ISCED 0-2 = less than primary, primary and lower secondary education

ISCED 3-4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education

ISCED 5-8 = tertiary education

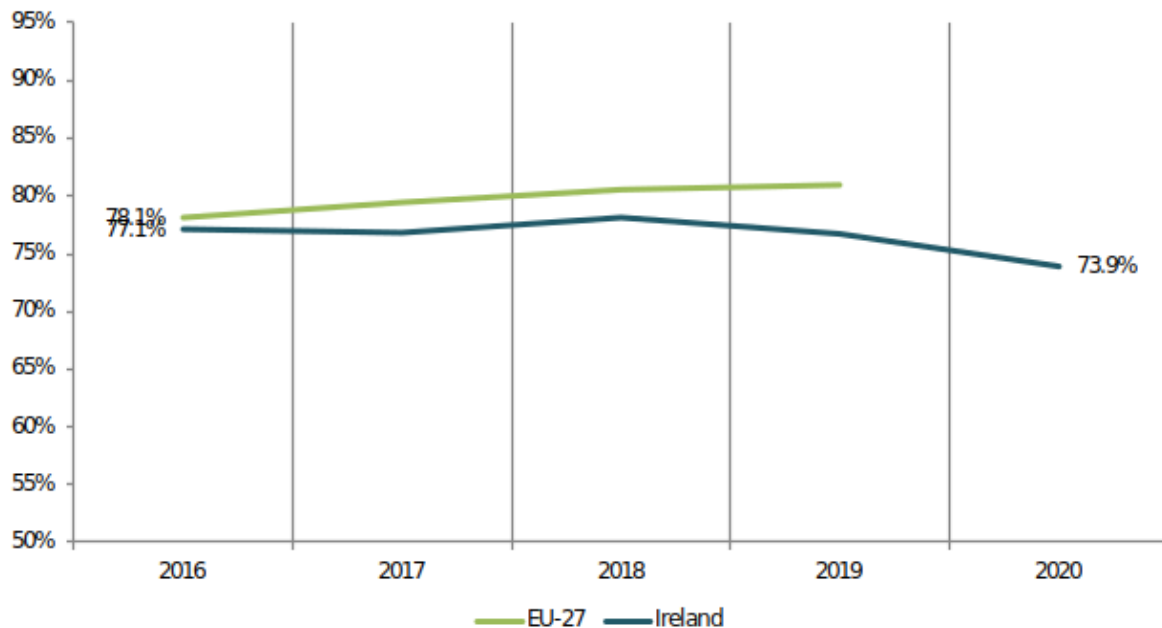
Source: Eurostat, Ifsa_urgaed [Extracted on 6.5.2021].

In 2020, those with post-secondary non-tertiary education attainment (where most VET graduates are classified) at 14% are one of the smallest groups in Ireland's labour force, as the figure below demonstrates (20). Just over one half (51%) of the labour force holds a tertiary (or third) level qualification (EQF 5-8/ NFQ 6-10, ISCED 544-864), which is amongst the highest shares observed across the EU-27 countries.



Employment rate of VET graduates aged 20 to 34 declined from 77.1% in 2016 to 73.9% in 2020, although a break in time series occurred in 2017.

Employment rate of VET graduates (20 to 34 years old, ISCED levels 3 and 4)



NB: Data based on ISCED 2011; breaks in time series.

ISCED 3-4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education

Source: Eurostat, edat_lfse_24 [Extracted 6.5.2021].

The fall (-3.2 pp) in employment among VET graduates aged 20 to 34 (ISCED levels 3 and 4) is higher compared to the fall in employment of all graduates of that age (all ISCED levels) (-2.5 pp) in the same period in Ireland(21).

[12] NB: Data for population as of 1 January Source: Eurostat, tps00001 and proj_19ndbi [Extracted 07/05/2021]

[13] Old-age-dependency ratio is defined as the ratio between the number of persons aged 65 and more over the number of working-age persons (15-64). The value is expressed per 100 persons of working age (15-64).

[14] <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-plfp/populationandlabourforceprojections2017-2051/populationprojectionsresults/>

[15] <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/bd/businessdemography2019/>

[16] In terms of the FET sector as a whole (general and VET), 84% of employers have indicated that they are happy with the quality of FET graduates. Source: HEA; SOLAS; QQI (2019). Irish national employer survey: final report, January 2019.

<https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/01/21-01-19-J8961-Irish-National-Employer-Survey-Final-Report.pdf>

[17] Percentage of active population, 25 to 74 years old.

[18] Source: Eurostat, une_rt_a [Extracted 06/05/2021]

[20] 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.

[21] NB: breaks in time series. Source: Eurostat, edat_ifse_24 [Extracted 06/05/2021]

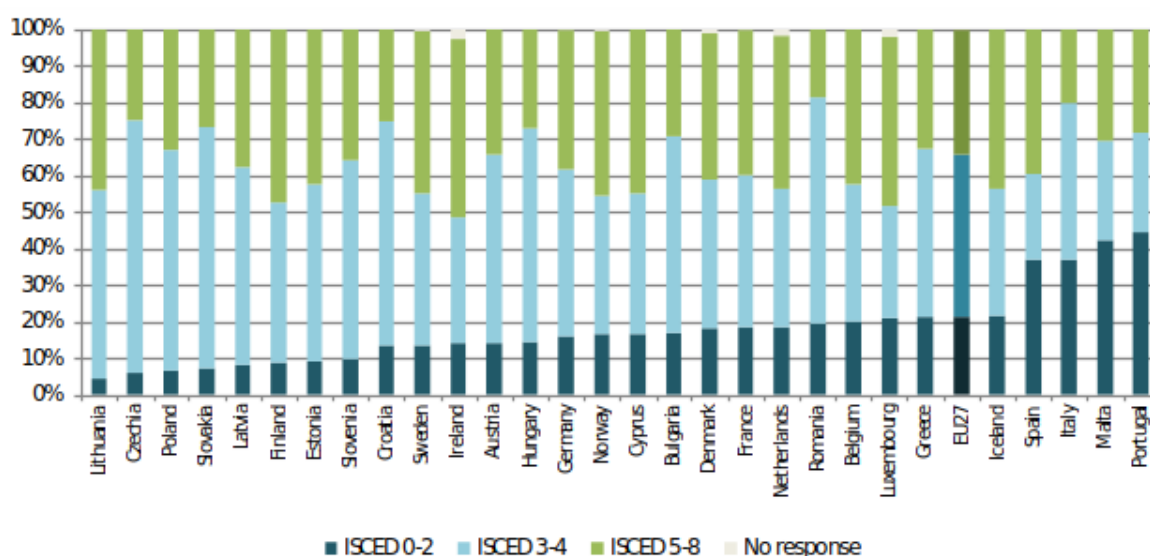
CHAPTER 4.

Education attainment

4.1 Share of high, medium and low level qualifications

Education is highly valued in Ireland. The share of population aged up to 64 with higher education (48.6%) is higher than in any other EU Member State and above the EU-27 average (34%). The share of those with, at most, a lower secondary qualification, or without a qualification, is 14.1%, well below the EU-27 average of 21.3%; Amongst EU-27 countries, Ireland had the 11th lowest share of persons with lower secondary qualifications or below).

Population (aged 25 to 64) by highest education level attained in 2020



NB: Data based on ISCED 2011. Low reliability for 'No response' in Czechia and Latvia

ISCED 0-2 = less than primary, primary and lower secondary education

ISCED 3-4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education

ISCED 5-8 = tertiary education

Source: Eurostat, Ifsa_pgaed [Extracted 15/06/2021].

4.3 VET learners by level

Upper secondary education programmes in the formal second level system in Ireland are classified as general programmes only. However, some programmes in the FET sector offer opportunities to adults; while most of these programmes occur at ISCED level 4 (i.e. post-secondary non-tertiary), a share is also provided at ISCED level 3 (i.e. upper secondary). In 2019, the share of students at ISCED level 2 who were following VET-oriented programmes was 27.6%; most of these were aged 18 years or over, given the theoretical starting age for learners on these programmes.

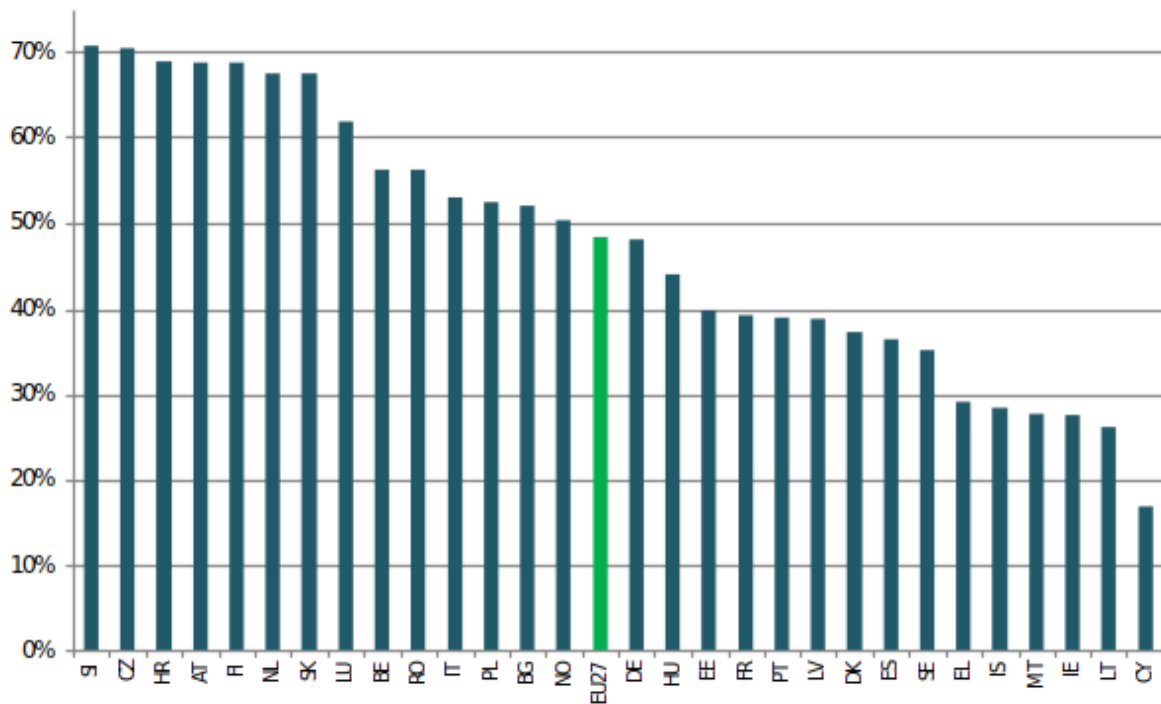
Share of learners in VET by level in 2019

lower secondaryupper secondarypost-secondary

NB: Data based on ISCED 2011. 100%

Source: Eurostat, educ_uoe_enrs01, educ_uoe_enrs04 and educ_uoe_enrs07 [Extracted on 6.5.2021]

Share of initial VET learners from total learners at upper secondary level (ISCED level 3), 2019



NB: Data based on ISCED 2011.

Source: Eurostat, educ_uoe_enrs04 [Extracted on 6.5.2021].

4.4 Female share

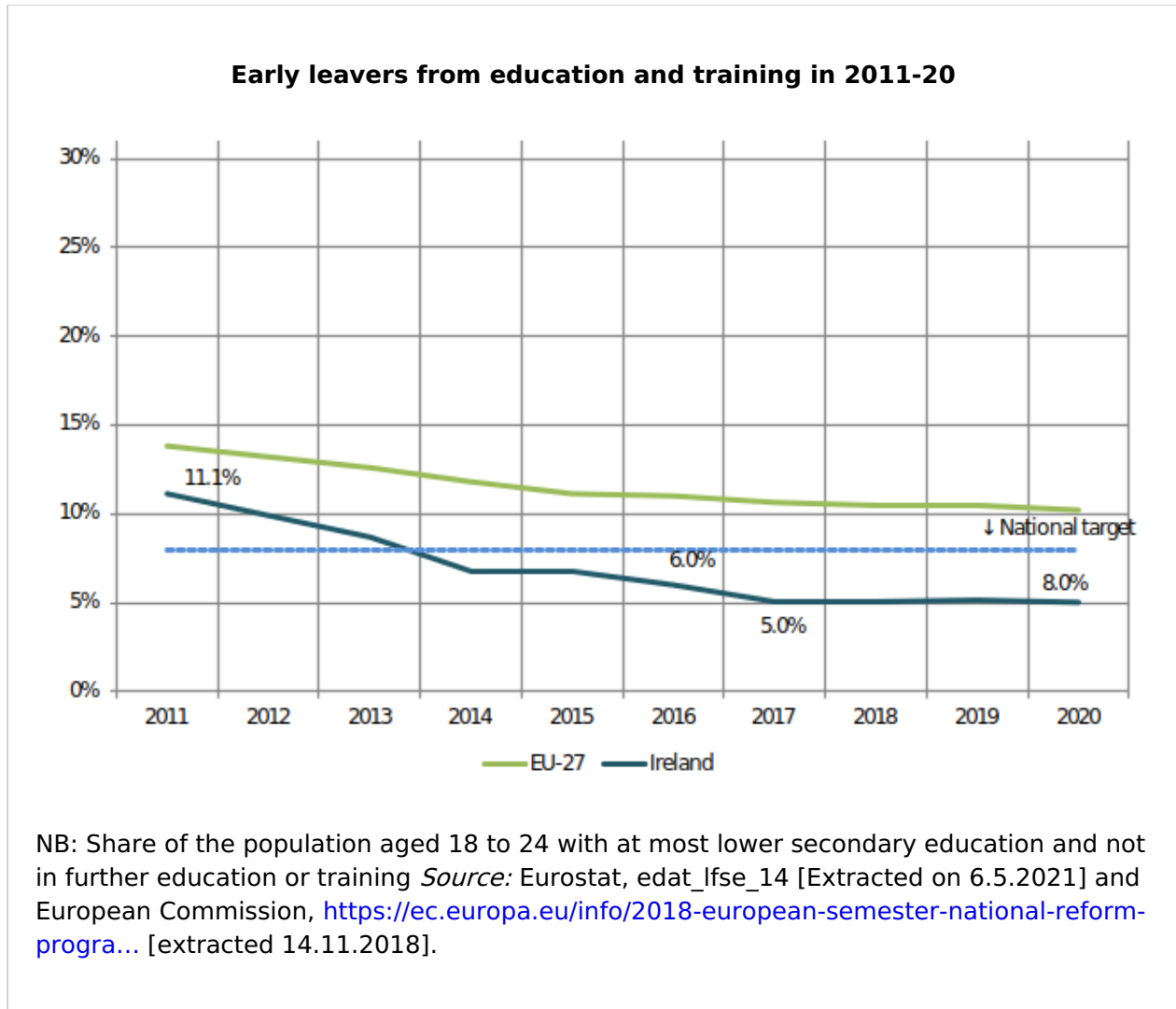
Information not available

4.5 Early leavers from education and training

The share of early leavers from education and training has decreased from 11% in 2011 to 5% in 2020. This places Ireland below the EU-27 average of 10.2% and marks a success as this percentage is also below the national objective for 2020 (no more than 8%). Although the share of early leavers is smaller for females than for males, the gender gap narrowed considerably since 2011: in 2011 the gap between males and females was 5.5 percentage points, compared to 0.7 percentage points in 2020.

The data and analytics team in SOLAS has recently carried out research on early leavers in FET

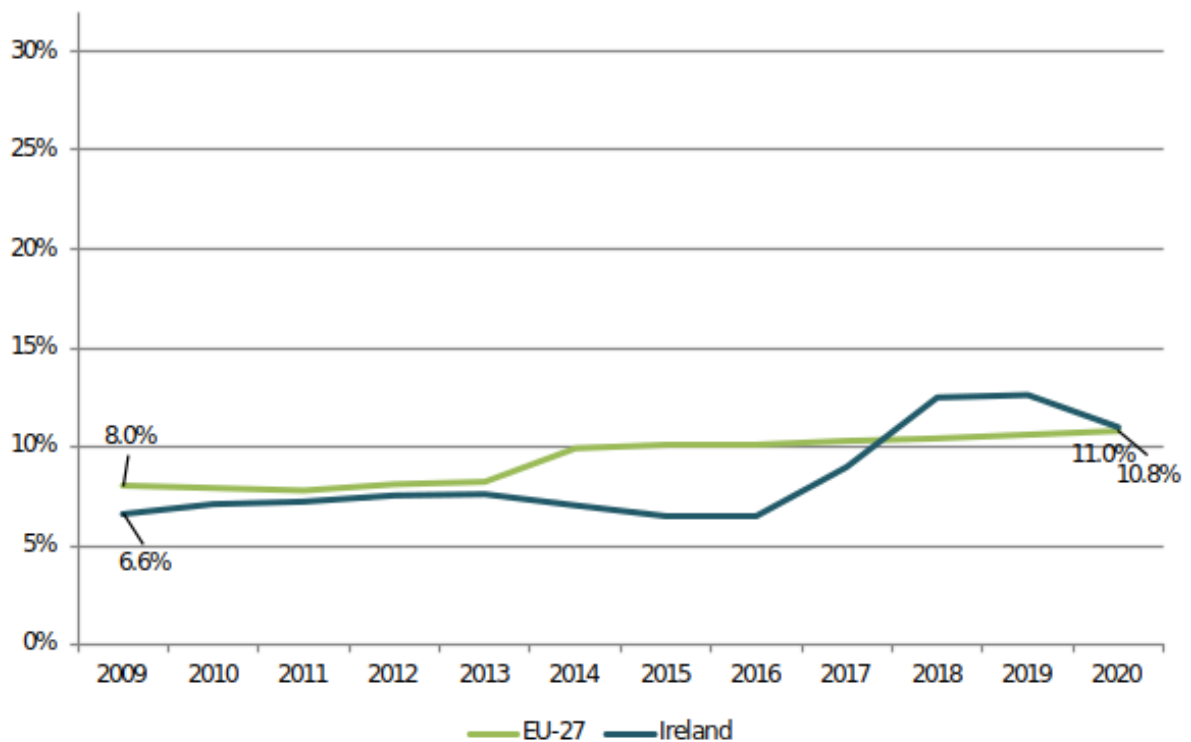
and is due to publish the findings in early 2022.



4.6 Participation in lifelong learning

Lifelong learning offers training opportunities for adults, including early leavers from education.

Participation in lifelong learning in 2009-20



NB: Share of adult population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training; break in series.

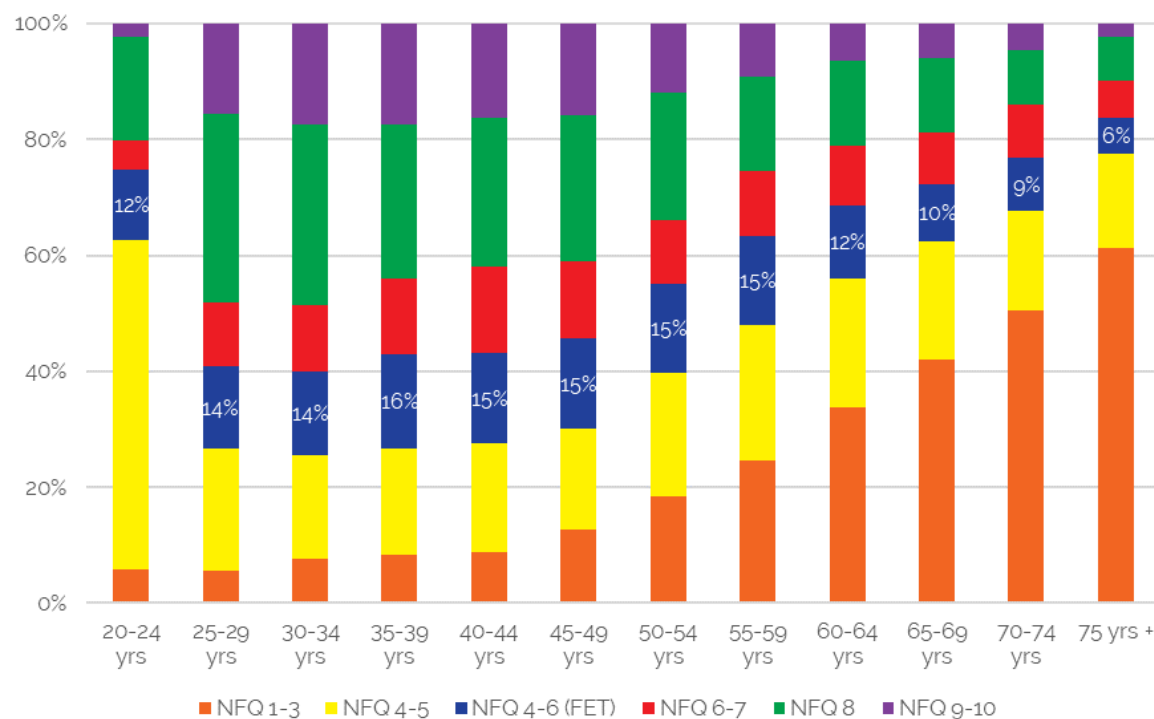
Source: Eurostat, trng_lfse_01 [Extracted on 6.5.2021].

Participation in lifelong learning has increased since 2009 (6.6%), although there was a break in series in 2017. In 2020, it is above the EU-27 average by 0.2 percentage points (11% Ireland, 10.8% EU-27).

4.7 VET learners by age

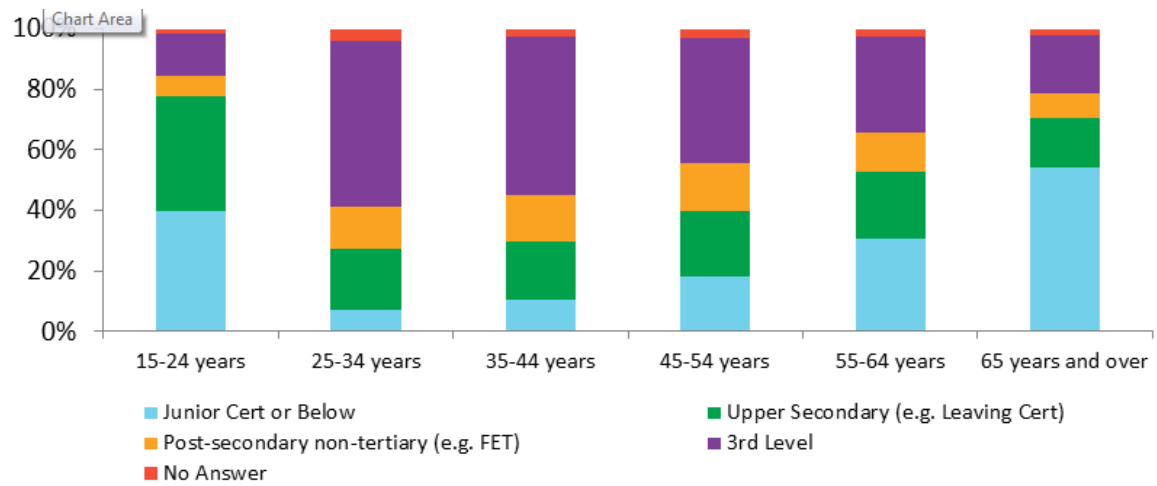
Information on VET learners, as distinct from other further education and training learners (where most VET occurs), is not available. However, the share of post-secondary non-tertiary learners in the population is slightly larger in the younger age cohorts compared to those aged 60 years and over.

Population (20+) by age group and education attainment level, quarter 2, 2020.



Source: SLMRU (SOLAS) analysis of CSO (LFS) data

Population (age 15+) by age group and education attainment level, quarter 2, 2020.



Source: SLMRU analysis of labour force survey data.

CHAPTER 5.

VET within education and training system

The education and training system comprises:

- primary education;
- secondary education, divided into lower secondary education (EQF 2) and upper secondary (EQF 3-4);
- further education and training (FET) non-tertiary education;
- tertiary 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. It consists of an 8-year cycle: junior infants, senior infants, and first to sixth classes. Most learners have completed primary education by the age of 12.

Secondary education usually lasts 5 to 6 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 1-year programme that acts as a bridge between lower and upper secondary education.

Lower secondary education: the junior cycle is a generally oriented programme of approximately 3 years' duration and leads to the Junior Certificate examination, which students usually take at the age of 15 or 16.

Upper secondary: the senior cycle (i.e. upper secondary education) takes 2 years and leads to the leaving certificate examination which students usually sit at the age of 17 or 18.

Further education and training in Ireland comprises post-secondary non-tertiary education, as well as second chance education/training. The sector is characterised by a high degree of diversity in terms of the type of programme, level and learner:

- further education and training programmes can be general, vocational or mixed;
- 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));
- target groups include young people who have recently completed upper secondary education, adult learners, early school leavers, the employed, the unemployed, asylum seekers, learners with special needs;
- 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;
- second chance learning opportunities within the further education and training sector.

Over a half of those who complete upper secondary school transfer directly to third level education on completing upper secondary education. Students can opt for higher education in a university, institute of technology or college of education (EQF levels 5-6, ISCED levels 544-554, 665,666). There are also a small number of private, independent providers of tertiary (or third) level education (mostly business and related disciplines).

Undergraduate higher education courses are of various durations, ranging from 2 years for a higher certificate (NFQ 6; EQF 5, ISCED 544,554) to 3/4 years for an honours bachelor degree (NFQ 8; EQF 6; ISCED 665,666). Some programmes, such as medicine or architecture, require up to 5 years. Postgraduate programmes range from 1 year (e.g. taught masters (NFQ 9; EQF 7;

ISCED 667,767)) to 3 years or more for doctoral programmes (NFQ 10; EQF 8; ISCED 864).

VET is provided primarily within the further education and training 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 further education and training sector, but also in tertiary level institutions.

Like the apprenticeship system, the traineeship system has undergone substantial change in recent years in Ireland. Traineeships, unlike apprenticeships, are not regulated by law (there is no occupation profile); they tend to be developed in response to local employers' needs, and curriculum content may vary according to local demand. Traineeships must have a work-based learning component of at least 30%.

Most of the development of the traineeship system has been the result of recognising the need to develop the skills of the employed, as outlined in the national skills strategy. Consequently, while most traineeships programmes had previously been available only to the unemployed, they have, since 2017, also been open to school leavers and the employed. There are no age restrictions for trainees, and they are free of charge to participants. Some unemployed trainees may also receive a training allowance.

Specific skills training 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 3-6 on the national framework of qualifications (or levels 2-5 on the EQF). The courses differ from traineeships in that they tend to be shorter (4 to 5 months), with a shorter on-the-job phase; in addition, the employer does not play a role in recruitment.

Post leaving certificate 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 1 and 2 years. These courses provide integrated general education, vocational training and work experience for young people; however, post leaving certificate courses are also an option for mature learners. They provide, therefore, important lifelong learning opportunities for adult learners.

While some post leaving certificate 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 post leaving certificate courses have a work experience component, although there is no prescribed minimum duration for most courses.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) courses consist of a range of full-time courses (EQF 2-5, ISCED 343, 344, 351) designed to meet the education and training needs of unemployed people aged 21 or over. It is offered by the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) throughout the country. Participation in vocational training opportunities scheme courses is in two modes as follows:

- as a 'core' vocational training opportunities scheme; students participate in a group of up to 20 other vocational training opportunities scheme students in a vocational training opportunities scheme centre or adult education centre;
- as a 'dispersed' vocational training opportunities scheme; students participate in a group of students, some of whom may be vocational training opportunities scheme students and some of whom will be studying through other schemes/programmes (e.g. post leaving certificate course).

Vocational training opportunities scheme programmes offer a wide choice of subjects and

learning activities. Certification is available at a range of levels.

Traditionally, programmes at tertiary level are not officially designated as being VET or General, although many programmes at higher education 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. In 2016, for the first time in Ireland, apprenticeship programmes became available at higher education level..

Apprenticeships introduced from 2016 onward lead to an award between EQF levels 5-8 (levels 5-10 on the national framework of qualifications (NFQ)). Each apprenticeship programme can last for between 2 and 4 years.

New apprenticeships in ICT, finance and hospitality include software development, accounting technician and commis chef.

Learners must hold an upper secondary education qualification and be in employment.

CHAPTER 6.

Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship in Ireland is defined as a structured programme of education and training which formally combines and alternates learning in the workplace with learning in an education or training centre. It is a dual system, a blended combination of on-the-job employer-based training and off-the-job training.

A structured *Craft* model of apprenticeship has been in operation in Ireland since the 1980s, and, following publication of a review of apprenticeship training in Ireland in 2013, a new model was introduced in 2015. Both models are currently operational, with 25 *Craft* apprenticeships primarily in areas such as construction, electrical, motor and engineering, and 37 new apprenticeships in a range of areas including biopharma, ICT, finance, property service, hospitality and food, logistics, and sales.

The national apprenticeship system is governed by legislation, principally the 1967 Industrial Training Act, which sets out the overall structure of the national system and the protections for, as well the responsibilities of, apprentices, employers and education and training providers. The 2012 Quality Assurance Act also underpins apprenticeship, supporting validation and quality assurance arrangements for apprenticeship programmes nationally.

SOLAS is the statutory authority for apprenticeship in Ireland. Its responsibilities include maintenance of a register of employers approved (by SOLAS) to take on apprentices, and a register of apprentices. A condition of employer approval and apprentice registration is agreement to abide by the *Apprenticeship code of practice for employers and apprentices*.

Apprenticeship in Ireland is open to all above the statutory school leaving age (16) including young adults leaving education and training and those already in employment. The minimum educational entry requirement is the *junior certificate* or equivalent, though some apprenticeships and employers have differing minimum entry requirements. Different apprenticeships may also be particularly targeted at different groups; for example, some are targeted primarily at people leaving school and some at people already in employment.

Apprenticeship in Ireland is delivered by both further and higher education and training providers and leads to awards from EQF levels 4-8 (level 5 to level 10 on the national framework of qualifications (NFQ)). Apprenticeships are between 2 and 4 years. All craft apprenticeships are currently 4 years. New apprenticeships vary between 2 and 4, the majority being 2 years. All apprenticeships are expected to offer progression pathways.

Apprenticeships lead to educational and, in some cases, also occupational/sector qualifications, depending on the apprenticeship. The insurance practice apprenticeship, for example, leads to a Level 8 BA (Hons.) degree in insurance practice and to a range of professional industry qualifications such as accredited product adviser and certified insurance practitioner. All Craft apprenticeships lead to a Level 6 advanced certificate that specifies the occupation (e.g. craft - electrical, craft - carpentry & joinery).

In terms of alternation of on-the-job work-based and off-the-job elements of apprenticeship, apprenticeships must include a minimum of 50% on-the-job learning, though different apprenticeships have different arrangements in place. For example, all Craft apprenticeships have a specified series of on-the-job and block-release off-the-job phases. Some new apprenticeships include block release of varying durations, some include day release of varying durations, with durations also differing within some individual apprenticeships according to the stage in the apprenticeship and /or the industry context

The national apprenticeship system is funded through the National Training Fund and from the Exchequer.

An apprentice is considered an employee and is employed and paid under a contract of apprenticeship. The employer provides the on-the-job employer-based element of training and pays the apprentice's salary during this time. In new apprenticeships developed from 2016 onwards, the employer pays the apprentice's salary for the full duration of the apprenticeship, that is, during both the on-the-job and off-the-job elements. The State also pays the training allowances to apprentices during the off-the-job phases of Craft apprenticeship.

The total apprenticeship population at the end of 2020 was 19 630. This reflects a steady increase over the years, compared with, for example, 10,445 at end 2016. A new national *Action plan for apprenticeship 2021-25* sets out a 5-year strategy to deliver on the *Programme for Government* commitment of reaching 10 000 new apprentice registrations per year by 2025.

The need for sectoral engagement and collaboration among enterprises and other stakeholders in the relevant industry has been a critical factor in the development, delivery and ongoing review and adaptation of apprenticeships; one of the key features of new apprenticeships is that they are developed and overseen by an enterprise-led consortium involving industry and education partners. The new action plan, which was published in April 2021 (22), commits to further embedding this well-established industry-focused approach to developing and delivering apprenticeship. This means that the synergy between employers, employee representatives, learners, and the further and higher education system will be enhanced, delivering an apprenticeship system that is well positioned to leverage the close relationship between enterprise and education.

The action plan provides a roadmap to a single apprenticeship system and the provision of new supports for employers and apprentices; it also forms the basis for:

- a new National Apprenticeship Office to drive reforms;
- a new grant for employers, with a top-up grant for areas of identified national skills needs and/or targeted recruitment of underrepresented groups;
- non-financial supports targeted to SMEs in areas such as recruitment and supervision of apprentices;
- setting targets for the public sector to take on apprentices and to create cross-sector apprentices;
- examining the potential development of new cross-border apprentice programmes and support for apprentice engagement in international programmes such as Erasmus.

[22] Further information on apprenticeship in Ireland is available on <https://www.apprenticeship.ie/> and the Action plan 2021-25 can be downloaded at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0879f-action-plan-for-apprenticeship-2021-2025/> .

CHAPTER 7.

VET governance

Responsibility for taking decisions and implementing further education and training, which includes most VET provision in Ireland, lies with the Further Education and Training Authority of Ireland (SOLAS), in conjunction with 16 education and training boards (ETBs), who are the VET providers. Both SOLAS and the ETBs are agencies of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. This remit was established under the *Further education and training Act 2013*, which was signed into law in July 2013 (23). The act required SOLAS to submit a five-year strategy for further education and training (FET) provision in Ireland. The FET strategy (24) guides the provision of FET in Ireland (including VET, such as apprenticeship and upskilling initiatives for the employed). The planning, coordination and funding is overseen by SOLAS, in conjunction with FET providers. Strategic performance agreements (25) are concluded between providers and SOLAS and an annual services plan (26) drawn up setting out the provision by programme type, learner cohort, skills areas, at local and national level.

The FET strategy complements other government strategies such as the *National skills strategy 2025* (27), the *National economic plan* (28) and the *National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021*(29).

Since 2016, and the reform of apprenticeship, Ireland's Higher Education Authority also plays a role in the oversight of VET programmes that are delivered in higher education institutions (namely institutes of technology).

[23] <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/act/25/enacted/en/print.html>

[26] <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/2496627d7f/solas-fet-services-report.pdf>

CHAPTER 8.

VET financing mechanisms

In 2020, further education and training (FET) funding was EUR 826.2 million, processed through the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) for the provision of FET programmes. Included within the funding allocated for further education and training is the funding for VET programmes. The funding is received from two main sources, the Exchequer and the National Training Fund. Most of the funding is allocated through SOLAS to the education and training boards (ETBs). Of the EUR 826.2 million allocated to SOLAS, EUR 588 million came from Exchequer funding and EUR 264.6 million came from the National Training Fund; the remaining EUR 3.6 million came from SOLAS generated income.

In 2020, post- leaving certificate (PLC) and Cooperation hours programme grants under the State funded education vote were added to relevant SOLAS sub-heads as part of the 2020 SOLAS allocation from the Department of Education, totalling EUR 146.0 million. Previously the PLC and Cooperation hours funding was transferred directly to ETBs by the Department of Education as part of the *post primary allocation*.

CHAPTER 9.

Teachers and trainers

9.1 VET teacher types

Given the diverse nature of further education and training and VET programmes offered to learners in Ireland, there are several categories of teaching and training professionals working in VET.

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 education and training boards in schools or colleges of further education that deliver post-leaving certificate courses and/or vocational training opportunities scheme programmes. Although further education and training teachers deliver their programmes (including VET) at ISCED level 4 (leading to awards at national framework of qualifications levels 5-6 and European qualifications framework levels 4-5), they are registered with the teaching council as second level teachers. To register, teachers must hold an honours bachelor degree (at national framework of qualifications level 8; European qualifications framework level 6; ISCED 665, 666) and an approved initial teacher education qualification (postgraduate diploma at national framework of qualifications levels 8 or 9 (European qualifications framework levels 6 or 7); alternatively, a teacher may hold a concurrent degree qualification in post-primary initial teacher education (national framework of qualifications level 8; European qualifications framework level 6), which combines the study of one or more curricular subjects with teacher education studies.
- Apprenticeship instructors work in education and training boards 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 (national framework of qualifications level 6; European qualifications framework level 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 and 7) of the apprenticeship programme. Apprenticeship lecturers must hold a degree (national framework of qualifications levels 7-8; European qualifications framework level 6) or equivalent in the subject area, or hold a craft certificate (European qualifications framework level 5) and have 3 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 the further education and training authority (SOLAS) to act as:

- workplace assessor. The assessor must have completed the SOLAS assessor and verifier programme provided by the education and training boards. This course lasts approximately 1 day and is not aligned with the national framework of qualifications;
- workplace tutor. The tutor must be competent and qualified (a holder of a national craft certificate (European qualifications framework level 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 education and

training boards. 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 further education and training sector the qualifications and professional standards of trainers vary. In general, programmes leading to a Quality and Qualifications Ireland award require a subject matter qualification (usually one level higher than that of the course being taught), a pedagogical qualification (usually at third level) and 5 years' industry experience. For all other training, such as computing or 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 in 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 further education and training settings, including education and training boards, Skillnets (30) (mostly providing training, although not exclusively, to the employed) and private sector providers.

9.2 Continuing professional development of teachers/trainers

The emerging trends within learning and development in Ireland are reflected within the sphere of professional development, both commercially and within further education and training (FET) systems. Within FET, professional development (PD) moves away from classic learning systems and 'pure' online learning towards a blended approach incorporating many different ways to learn and access learning. PD is becoming more individualised where FET staff access learning as and when they need it, both individually and through shared networks and collaboration.

FET practitioners also need to update their skills on a continuous basis as there is a definite shift towards lifelong and work-based learning where upskilling and reskilling in ICT and industry required skills is crucial for FET to maintain its standing within industry. While there is a move in FET towards alternative forms of accreditation such as digital badges, it is at an early stage and will not replace a FET qualification in the near future.

The *FET professional learning & development statement of strategy 2020-24* (31) will continue to develop the record of success accomplished by the FET professional development strategy 2017-19 (32). These achievements include:

- clear strategic priorities agreed and actioned;
- nationally consistent approach to planning professional learning and development in ETBs progressed;
- awareness and recognition of the importance of targeted, relevant and strategic professional learning and development increased;
- range of delivery methods expanded to include online and blended learning
- capability and confidence in critical areas such as technology-enhanced-learning, management and enterprise engagement increased;
- new approach to the funding model and structures established to facilitate ongoing development and delivery of high quality, relevant professional development for the FET sector;
- investment in the development of FET practitioners increased through targeted funding;
- strategic professional development supported and implemented at a local level through the creation of professional development coordinator posts.

Professional learning & development high-level actions 2020-24

In consultation with the sector, a set of high-level actions has been identified to achieve the three strategic goals:

Goal 1: improve infrastructure

Expand access to learning and strengthen the delivery infrastructure for effective professional learning and development, including learning networks for sharing good practice nationally.

High level actions

- design and implement flexible delivery methods;
- create learning networks to leverage professional learning and development impacts;
- develop and implement policies and procedures at education and training board (ETB) level to support professional learning and development;
- provide a central professional learning and development delivery facility.

Goal 2: Build capability

Build the capability of those who work in the FET sector through the identification and deployment of strategic professional learning and development initiatives in priority areas.

High level actions

- support the implementation of the FET practice framework to consistently identify and address development needs;
- identify ongoing needs to develop the confidence and capability of FET practitioners;
- develop and roll out strategic initiatives in priority areas;
- identify, share and cascade best practice in professional learning and development across ETBs.

Goal 3: Enhance systems

Develop sustainable systems to meet the planning, funding, resourcing and evaluation requirements of professional learning and development in the FET sector.

High level actions

- optimise an integrated approach to planning at local and national levels;
- utilise tracking and recording system to support planning and benchmarking;
- target investment to ensure relevant professional learning and development across the sector;
- develop effective communication systems to promote the value of professional learning and development;
- implement consistent review and evaluation across the sector to support continuous improvement in practice;
- develop a professional learning and development portal facility to create shared access to learning resources.

Specific headline topics like remote teaching practices, peer-to-peer learning etc.

Enabling themes for the Strategy

At the heart of the strategy is the ambition to foster a culture of excellence in professional learning and development. Five enabling themes will propel the actions identified as necessary to achieve the strategic goals.

Integrated planning and coordination

The implementation of an effective infrastructure for professional learning and development has been progressed over the past few years and will continue as an integral part of the new strategy.

Integrated planning and coordination will assist in the execution of the three strategic goals through infrastructure mapping and implementing a series of well thought out and planned operational tasks. It will focus on the implementation of a strategic approach to the allocation of the professional learning and development budget in line with service priorities. While each ETB is an independent entity, a joined-up and collaborative approach in integrating planning and coordination will greatly enhance and support the overall success of the strategy in driving transformational learning.

Individualised learning

Enthusiasm and motivation to learn at an individual level are central in creating and nurturing the new transformational learning culture that is envisaged. Informal learning networks are a means to support individualised and peer learning across professional areas and ETBs. Increased participation in learning networks will encourage practitioners to reflect, share and sustain the original learning experience and apply it in their practice. It will also stimulate them to avail of new development opportunities.

Flexible delivery systems

Learning opportunities need to be consistently offered in a more flexible way to enable greater access. Access constraints highlighted during the consultation process for this strategy relate to geographic location, preferred learning methods, work schedules, local professional learning and development arrangements and personal commitments. Both the research and the consultative process for this strategy reinforced the need to expand access by offering a wider range of learning delivery methods. These include formal and informal, face-to-face, online, blended, peer and incremental learning, coaching and mentoring, cascading and recognition of prior learning.

Transparency

The new strategy has been developed to benefit everyone in the FET sector. Transparency is a key enabler in providing professional learning and development that is visible to everyone, clear and comprehensible. Associated action plans and communications will be a key mechanism in promoting transparency, fostering real and meaningful exchanges between practitioners and promoting peer learning.

Access to professional learning and development must be fair and transparent and is dependent on a strong governance structure. It also needs to be targeted towards the needs of the organisation at a point in time. At the same time, practitioners engaging in professional learning and development have a responsibility to transfer their learning back into the organisation through mentoring other staff and building enhanced capability.

Impact

It is vital for the success of the strategy to achieve impact in professional learning and development at the level of the FET practitioner, the learner and the sector as a whole. While the FET professional development strategy 2017-19 achieved positive and meaningful results for the FET sector, the ambition now is to develop an improved and consistent approach to reviewing, measuring and assessing the impact of learning.

Measuring the impact of the strategy will involve consideration of the effects on:

- professional practice;
- the FET learner experience;
- improving the FET service;
- the culture of learning in the sector.

To assess the return on investment, there is a need to see the benefits of how practitioners are using their learning to provide better services for the learner and their respective organisations. It is envisaged that professional learning and development will be integrated within everyday practice, assisting staff to build their capacity, confidence and flexibility in providing responsive services.

More information is available in the Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspective on teachers and trainers (33).

[30] Skillnet Ireland is a national agency dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of workforce learning in Ireland. The organisation was established in 1999 and works with businesses and their employees to address their current and future skills needs by providing high quality, subsidised training through a series of enterprise-led training networks which operate across a range of sectors and regions. Skillnet Ireland receives public funding through the National Training Fund (NTF), a dedicated fund to support the training of those in employment, and those seeking employment. In addition to NTF funding, Skillnet Ireland channels funding into its training programmes via matching funding provided by its network member enterprises. Skillnets training interventions comprise mostly short courses (days rather than weeks or months). More information available at: <https://www.skillnetireland.ie/>

[31] <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/1e2e117467/solas-professional-dev-strategy.pdf>

[32] <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/4e966c3112/solasfetpds.pdf>

[33] <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/teachers-and-trainers>

CHAPTER 10.

Shaping VET qualifications

10.1 Anticipating skill needs

Following publication of the National skills strategy 2025 (in 2016), the system for the identification of skills needs in Ireland was reconfigured. Skills needs identification is now overseen by a National Skills Council (NSC), which was established in 2017. The NSC is made up of representatives (usually senior civil servants or chief executive officers) from a number of government departments (ministries), their agencies, education/training providers, and employers.

More specifically the NSC includes representatives from the following:

- Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment;
- Department of Public Expenditure and Reform;
- Department of Social Protection;
- employers.

The NSC oversees the process of skills needs identification in Ireland. It is informed by the work of:

- an expert group on future skills needs, which provides advice on sectoral developments in terms of employment;
- regional skills fora: a network of nine fora that forms a direct link between education and training providers and employers at local level;
- The Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU), which monitors the supply and demand for skills and occupational labour. Every year, the skills and labour market research unit publishes the national skills bulletin, a summary of the various supply and demand indicators for skills and labour in Ireland (34). The national skills bulletin also provides a list of the occupations for which a shortage has been identified, distinguishing between a skills shortage, a labour shortage, or a possible future (within the next 5 years) shortage.

See also Cedefop's skills forecast (35) and European skills index (36).

10.2 Designing qualifications

Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (37), the government established Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) (38). Quality and Qualifications Ireland operates under the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. 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 in VET (a significant share of VET-related awards are made by QQI).

The specific statutory functions of QQI include, for example:

- establishing the standards of knowledge, skills or competences 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;
- making awards or delegating authority to make an award where it considers it appropriate; reviewing and monitoring the operation of the authority so delegated.

QQI sets standards for further education and training awards (including VET) and tertiary education awards made outside the university sector (39).

QQI awards' standards are determined within the National Framework of Qualifications (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. Such standards are determined to be consistent with the NFQ award types.

[34] https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/4c65b3076a/solas_nsb_report.pdf

[35] <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/skills-forecast>

[36] <https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en/indicators/european-skills-index>

[37] Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012:
<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/28/enacted/en/print.html>

[38] <https://www.qqi.ie/>

[39] 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 Quality and Qualifications Ireland make their own awards. Universities and Dublin Institute of Technology act as their own awarding bodies.

[40] Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2021). First snapshot of quality in education and training boards. <https://www.qqi.ie/news/first-snapshot-of-quality-in-education-and-training-boards>

CHAPTER 11.

Quality assurance

Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is required to develop and publish guidelines for providers for the quality assurance 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, such as programme validation, providers' quality assurance procedures must be approved by QQI as fit for purpose. Therefore, providers are responsible for assuring the quality of 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 (FET) sector. QQI guidelines for further education and training providers 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 complement EQAVET guidelines.

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 national framework of qualifications levels. Programme validation, therefore, can assure providers and learners that successful completion of a programme validated by QQI will lead to a specific national framework of qualifications (NFQ) awards.

Programme validation is a two-stage process:

- approval of the provider's ability to quality assure its programmes;
- 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 5 years. If the criteria are not met, then the programme cannot be offered as proposed.

In 2020 QQI commenced the inaugural reviews of quality assurance in education and training boards (ETBs). The inaugural review is an historic event - both for QQI and the ETBs - as it is the first review process of its kind to be conducted within the sector. It seeks to further encourage the development of the quality culture within ETBs and improve public confidence in the quality of further education and training (FET) provision by promoting transparency and public awareness. The implementation of this review process is a collaborative effort, with support from Further Education and Training Authority of Ireland (SOLAS) in briefing the review teams on the FET system in Ireland as well as an overview of the particular ETB. The process is continuing, reports on the first phase were published in December 2020 (40).

CHAPTER 12.

Validation of prior learning

Under an EU Council Recommendation (41) Member States should have arrangements in place for the validation of non-formal and informal learning no later than 2018. Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is required to establish policies and criteria for access, transfer and progression (ATP) for providers. On the basis of these policies, providers then establish ATP procedures which they implement, including policies on credit accumulation, credit transfer and identification and for the formal assessment of the knowledge, skill and competence previously acquired by learners, including for the purposes of awards.

QQI has published an ATP policy restatement 2015 (42). Following consultation on approaches to policy development, the principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in further and higher education and training were also republished.

QQI monitors the effectiveness of policies and procedures and their implementation through cyclical review and annual dialogue meetings.

Significant collaborative work is undertaken nationally with stakeholders across higher, further and community sectors to support the sustainable development of revised, innovative RPL policies that continue to be informed by dynamic practice nationally and internationally.

For more information about arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning please visit Cedefop's European database (43).

[42] <https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2021-11/qp-20-policy-restatement-policy-on-criteria-for-atp-in-relation-to-learners-for-providers-of-fh-et.pdf>

[43] <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/european-database-on-validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning>

CHAPTER 13.

Incentives for learners

Funding

In common with other sections of the Irish education sector, the provision of public VET is largely funded by the Exchequer; consequently, VET programmes are provided free or at a minimal charge. As an example, the post-leaving certificate (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, learners on PLC courses have paid a participant contribution of EUR 200 (prior to this, learners did not have to pay any fees). There may be other minimal costs, such as registration and exam fees, which may vary according to the different colleges. Certain categories of PLC learners are exempted from this participant contribution: for example, learners who qualify under the student grant scheme 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 taking up further education and training courses is much less expensive than attending higher education courses in Ireland.

Grants, allowances, support

There are numerous grants and incentives available to support individuals intending to take up courses in the further education and training sector:

- 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 at second level (both lower secondary (NFQ 3/EQF 2, ISCED 244) and upper secondary (NFQ 4/5, EQF 3/4, ISCED 343, 344) or further (NFQ 1-6/EQF 1-5) and tertiary (third level) (NFQ 6-10, EQF 5-8, ISCED 544-864) education, while keeping their existing social welfare payments;
- the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) is targeted at people over the age of 16 who have not completed their leaving certificate and allows participants to combine family and work with a part-time further education programme;
- the 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;
- 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 3 miles from the education and training board (44).

Positive employability outcomes

The first goal in the corporate plan 2017-19 of the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) is for further education and training (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 increase the attractiveness of FET among school leavers and other learners in Ireland. To this end, monitoring learner outcomes from FET courses is a key function of SOLAS. This data, along with local labour market intelligence (also provided by SOLAS), informs the FET planning agreements SOLAS makes with education and training boards (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 employers' needs and that learners from VET-oriented courses will be job ready. System performance and outcomes are monitored using a suite of tools available to SOLAS: Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) research, on behalf of both SOLAS and the National Skills Council.

Management of the national skills database

- annual national skills bulletin and the annual vacancy overview and quarterly skills bulletins in specific fields e.g. women, older workers and the unemployed;
- FET independent evaluations including in provision such as PLC and youthreach;
- FET system overall reports and specific studies reflecting reach of the FET sector and the diversity of learners;
- SOLAS-Central Statistics Office (CSO) statistical collaboration reports to track the national sectorial and ETB-specific targets established as well as reports on graduate tracking and PLC learner outcomes.

[44] The allowances paid depend on a number of factors including the programme type. Depending on the programme, the allowances paid to trainees can be the equivalent of the payment made to the unemployed. Travel and accommodation allowances depend on the programme and the distance the learner lives from the training centre (e.g. EUR 32.60 per week for somebody living at a distance of 64 kilometres or more. An accommodation allowance is typically EUR 69.90 per week.

CHAPTER 14.

Incentives for enterprises to boost their participation in VET provision

Further education and training development framework for employees

In October 2018, the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) published its further education and training (FET) employee development framework, which aims to upskill and reskill 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 national framework of qualifications level 5/European qualifications framework level 4), those working in vulnerable occupations/sectors (e.g. elementary and operatives working in some low-tech manufacturing). Continuing efforts concentrate on developing education and training board capacity, rolling out a promotional campaign and monitoring metrics (45).

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.

Skills to advance gives upskilling and reskilling opportunities to employees in jobs going through change, and to people employed in vulnerable sectors. It aims to give employees the skills to progress in their current job, or to take advantage of new job opportunities. The courses cover a wide range of part-time evening study: national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 4-6 (EQF levels 3-5) and non-accredited courses. Courses are generally delivered through a combination of online teaching and classroom-based learning.

[45] Enterprises do not receive direct funding. The funding goes to the provider.

CHAPTER 15.

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 post-leaving certificate (PLC) courses, 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 courses' participants may receive in-house education and career guidance on the issue of vocational area choice, on 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 NCGE, which is an agency of the education ministry, 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. The NCGE has collaborated with the youthreach programme in the development of the web wheel model, 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.

SOLAS is working with NCGE to coordinate the adult education guidance initiative within the education and training boards (ETBs), which provides nationwide guidance for learners before and after they participate in vocational training opportunities schemes programmes.

The institutes of technology provide higher education and some VET and further education and training (FET) programmes. The majority of the institutes of technology offer a careers service to students. The main provision is targeted at final year students and recent graduates, though some careers services have started to provide careers education in the curriculum of undergraduate courses. The careers advisory/appointments office provides information on education and employment opportunities. Universities and the institutes of technology 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, each 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 2 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 that are already providing development opportunities to FET practitioners: the further education and support service in programme development and quality assurance; the NCGE for FET guidance personnel; the National Learning Network and the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) for disability awareness, etc.

Please see:

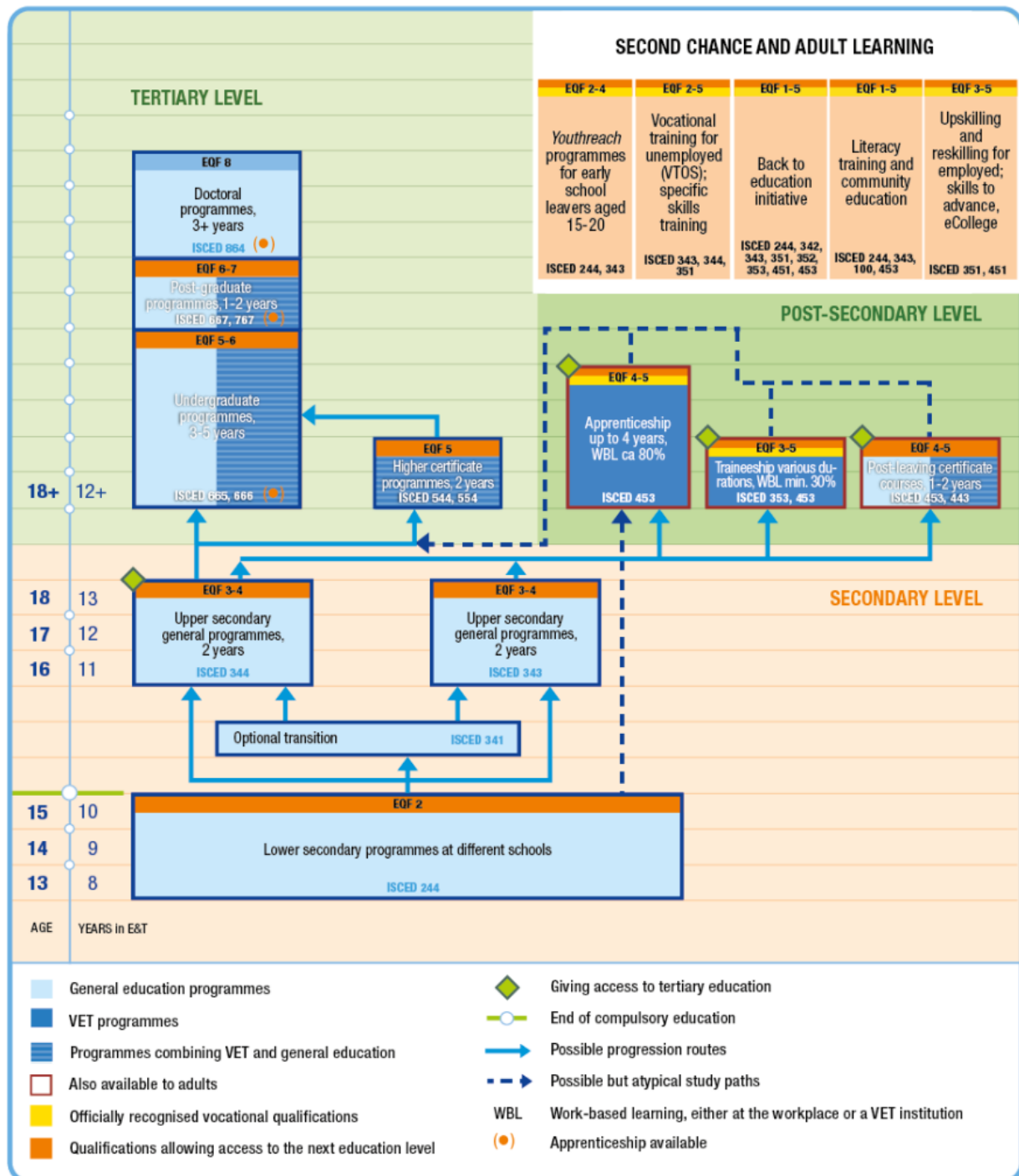
- guidance and outreach Ireland national report (46);
- Cedefop's labour market intelligence toolkit (47);
- Cedefop's inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices (48).

[46] <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/events-and-projects/networks/refernet/thematic-perspectives/guidance-outreach>

[47] <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/toolkits/resources-guidance/toolkit/where-can-you-find-more-information-in-your-country-and-elsewhere>

[48] <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices>

Vocational education and training system chart



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Ireland, 2022.

VET Programme Types

EQF 4-5
Post-leaving certificate courses, 1-2 years ISCED 443/453

Initial VET (post-leaving certificate) programmes leading to EQF levels 4-5, ISCED 443/453

EQF level	4-5	ISCED-P 2011 level	443,453
Usual entry grade	Not applicable	Usual completion grade	12+
Usual entry age	18+	Usual completion age	Not applicable
Length of a programme (years)	2 (up to)		
Is it part of compulsory education and training?	✗	Is it part of formal education and training system?	✓
Is it initial VET?	✓ In so far as part of the course content is VET in nature, it is considered initial education.	Is it continuing VET?	✗
Is it offered free of charge?	✗	Is it available for adults?	✓

ECVET or other credits Not applicable (49)

Learning forms (e.g. dual, part-time, distance)

- school-based learning;
- component of work-based learning is small, usually with no minimum duration required; it is usually carried out in the context of work experience with a local employer.

Main providers Information not available

Share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies	<30% (50)
Work-based learning type (workshops at schools, in-company training / apprenticeships)	<p>No formal requirements</p> <p>Work experience, when part of the curriculum, typically occurs with a company.</p>
Main target groups	<p>Young people who have completed the upper secondary cycle, adults.</p> <p>The main target group for post-leaving certificate courses is learners who have completed the leaving certificate, which is the examination held at the end of upper secondary education. The aim is to provide education/training in a range of subject areas (e.g. business, art, healthcare, social care, among others).</p> <p>However, older learners may also enrol on post-leaving certificate courses.</p>
Entry requirements for learners (qualification/education level, age)	The usual requirement is that the applicant holds a leaving certificate qualification or equivalent (i.e. qualifications at levels EQF3/4). Adults without a leaving certificate may access these courses if they have sufficient work experience.
Assessment of learning outcomes	On completion of a post-leaving certificate programme, learners undergo a number of assessments (continuous assessment and written examination). For programmes that lead to an award made by Quality and Qualifications Ireland, the assessments are based on learning outcomes. Not all programmes lead to an award made by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (industry certification or other awarding bodies may be used).
Diplomas/certificates provided	The certification received depends on the course followed. Usually, courses lead to awards that have been placed at level 4 or 5 on the EQF and they are recognised for progression and employment opportunities. Progression can be to other further education and training courses, or indeed to third level colleges either in Ireland or the UK.
Examples of qualifications	Teachers' aides (51)
Progression opportunities for learners after graduation	Those who complete a post-leaving certificate course may progress to tertiary education. Primarily, the post-leaving certificate courses aim to prepare learners to enter the labour market.

Destination of graduates

According to an evaluation of the post-leaving certificate sector published in 2018 (52)

- 33% of post-leaving certificate course completers progressed to employment (a breakdown of VET versus general learning is not possible);
- Almost 21% progressed to further studies within the further education and training (FET) system;
- 27% progressed to higher education;
- 12% were unemployed.

In 2019 a detailed analysis of PLC outcomes was conducted by SOLAS. The

results from this research indicate:

- 48% of 2014-15 post-leaving certificate graduates were in substantial employment only after 1 year, representing a 7 percentage point increase *vis-a-vis* the 2012/13 cohort. If we include those graduates who are in employment and in higher education the rates increase from 54% to 64%;
 - for the same cohorts, we find a fall in the proportion of those graduates who continue their education and those neither in higher education or substantial employment 1 year after completion;
 - a significantly large proportion (almost 27%) of those in substantial employment work in the wholesale and retail sector, accommodation and food service (16%) and in human health and social work activities (15%).
 - the median weekly wage of a post-leaving certificate graduate in substantial employment within a year of completion was EUR 253.6 increasing to EUR 431.5 within 6 years. Considering that the sample of post-leaving certificate graduates in our analysis mainly include those under 25 years of age who are mainly employed in the wholesale and retail sector, this median weekly wage is comparable to the Central Statistics Office figures reported at a national level.
 - In terms of progression outcomes, we find that a significant proportion of post-leaving certificate graduates progress onto a HE course at a higher level within the same year of completion of their post-leaving certificate course. Most progressions take place between cognate disciplines.
 - Another significant finding from our analysis is that those post-leaving certificate graduates who enrol in a higher education course have a high progression rate within the higher education, therefore suggesting high completion rates in subsequent years.
-

Awards through validation of prior learning	✗	
General education subjects	✓	Most of these courses are general or a mix of general and VET.
Key competences	✓	Key competences are part of the assessment procedure.
Application of learning outcomes approach	✓	
Share of learners in this programme type compared with the total number of VET learners		Approximately 13% based on 2020 SOLAS further education and training (FET) services report (53)

[49] Credits accumulated, if any, on the basis of certifying bodies, which can vary.

[50] For post- leaving certificate courses with a work-based learning component.

[51] As described in national context.

[52] https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/83dc934f29/esri_plc_evaluation.pdf

[53] <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/2496627d7f/solas-fet-services-report.pdf>

EQF 3-5
Traineeship
various durations,
WBL min. 30%
ISCED 353, 453

Initial VET (traineeship) programmes leading to EQF levels 3-5, ISCED 353, 453

EQF level	3-5	ISCED-P 2011 level	353, 453
Usual entry grade	Not applicable	Usual completion grade	Not applicable
Usual entry age	18+	Usual completion age	Not applicable
Length of a programme (years)	from 6 months to 2 years		
Is it part of compulsory education and training?	✗	Is it part of formal education and training system?	✗ In the past, traineeships were part of second chance education/training and open only to the employed. Since 2016 they are also open to school leavers, the employed and adult learners.
Is it initial VET?	✓	Is it continuing VET?	✗
Is it offered free of charge?	✓	Is it available for adults?	✓

ECVET or other credits Information not available

Learning forms (e.g. dual, part-time, distance)

- on- the-job training
- school based learning

Main providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools (education and training board training centre) • enterprises
Share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies	>=30%
Work-based learning type (workshops at schools, in-company training / apprenticeships)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in-company practice
Main target groups	Unemployed, employed, school leavers (either young people or adults).
Entry requirements for learners (qualification/education level, age)	A qualification at EQF level 2 is usually the minimum. In addition, for those opting for qualifications at childcare and/or healthcare sectors (especially when they will be dealing with children or adults with disabilities) a police vetting (54) is also required.
Assessment of learning outcomes	Assessment is via exams and continuous assessment methods. They are typically based on learning outcomes.
Diplomas/certificates provided	Learners may receive a full or partial award (with partial awards being recognised as part fulfilment of the requirements for a full award). Awards span levels 3-5 on the EQF.
Examples of qualifications	Healthcare support assistant (55)
Progression opportunities for learners after graduation	Those who complete a traineeship can enter the labour market or progress to further studies within the further education and training system.
Destination of graduates	Information not available
Awards through validation of prior learning	Information not available
General education subjects	✓
Key competences	✓

Application of learning outcomes approach ✓

For traineeships that lead to awards on the national framework of qualifications (made by Quality Qualifications Ireland), a learning outcomes approach is applied.

Share of learners in this programme type compared with the total number of VET learners

Approximately 2% based on 2020 SOLAS further education and training (FET) services report (56)

[54] The police vetting process is about criminal history checks and other relevant information on potential and current employees, volunteers and vocational trainees to approved agencies that provide care to children and vulnerable members of society.

[55] As described in national context.

[56] <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/2496627d7f/solas-fet-services-report.pdf>

EQF 4-5
Apprenticeship up to 4 years, WBL ca. 80% ISCED 453

Initial VET (apprenticeship) programmes leading to EQF levels 4-5, ISCED 453

EQF level 4-5	ISCED-P 2011 level 453
Usual entry grade Not applicable	Usual completion grade Not applicable
Usual entry age 16+	Usual completion age Not applicable
Length of a programme (years) 4 (up to)	
Is it part of compulsory education and training? ✗	Is it part of formal education and training system? ✓
Is it initial VET? ✓	Is it continuing VET? ✗
Is it offered free of charge? ✓ In the initial phases. However, any part of the training that takes place in a higher education institution will incur fees.	Is it available for adults? ✓

ECVET or other credits Information not available

Learning forms (e.g. dual, part-time, distance)

- school-based learning; (contact studies either at an education/training provider or a higher education institution)
- in-company practice (practical training in a company).

Main providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enterprises • schools (education and training board training centre or an institute of technology)
Share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies	>= 50% <=80%
Work-based learning type (workshops at schools, in-company training / apprenticeships)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practical training at a college of further education and training • in-company practice
Main target groups	Programmes are available for young people and also for adults. Since apprentices are part of the employed, they must be at least 16 years of age. There is no formal upper age limit.
Entry requirements for learners (qualification/education level, age)	<p>There are two types of programmes at this level (box):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pre-2106 craft apprenticeship training for which the formal minimum entry requirement is the junior certificate or equivalent (EQF 2 qualification). In practice, however, the vast majority (three quarters) of new apprentices hold higher levels of education, typically a Leaving Certificate (EQF level 3/4); • post 2016 apprenticeship for which the entry requirements vary, depending on the specific apprenticeship programme, although a leaving certificate (EQF level 3/4) is generally the minimum.
Assessment of learning outcomes	To complete apprenticeship training, apprentices are assessed at various stages of the programme, both on and off the job. They are based on learning outcomes and include a practical component.
Diplomas/certificates provided	Learners who complete the traditional pre-2016 type apprenticeships receive a craft certificate. For the post 2016 apprenticeship, there are different possibilities depending on the apprenticeship. Once learners begin to emerge from these programmes, they may receive: a level 5 certificate, an advanced certificate, a higher certificate, an ordinary degree, an honours bachelor degree or a masters degree.
Examples of qualifications	<p>Pre-2016 apprenticeships: carpentry and joinery, electrical, instrumentation, plastering (57)</p> <p>post-2016 apprenticeship: accounting technician, insurance practice, ICT associate network engineer, retail practice, arboriculture, and HGV driver (58);</p>

Progression opportunities for learners after graduation	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.
Destination of graduates	All apprentices must hold an employment contract prior to commencing the apprenticeship programme. Therefore, destination is by default to employment.
Awards through validation of prior learning	Information not available
General education subjects	✓ General subjects such as mathematics are taught for some apprenticeships, although not all.
Key competences	✓ Competences such as digital skills are taught.
Application of learning outcomes approach	✓ All apprenticeship awards are on the national framework of qualifications, so a learning outcomes approach is applied.
Share of learners in this programme type compared with the total number of VET learners	Approximately 5% based on 2020 SOLAS further education and training (FET) services report (59)

[57] As described in national context.

[58] As described in national context.

[59] <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/2496627d7f/solas-fet-services-report.pdf>

EQF 5
Higher certificate programmes, 2 years ISCED 544, 554

Initial VET (higher certificate) programmes leading to EQF level 5, ISCED 544, 554

EQF level 5	ISCED-P 2011 level 544, 554
Usual entry grade Not applicable	Usual completion grade Not applicable
Usual entry age 18+	Usual completion age Not applicable
Length of a programme (years) 2	
Is it part of compulsory education and training? ✗	Is it part of formal education and training system? ✓
Is it initial VET? ✓ In so far as VET is offered at this level (it is a very small component), it is part of initial VET.	Is it continuing VET? ✗
Is it offered free of charge? ✓ All students, unless in receipt of a means tested grant, must pay fees.	Is it available for adults? ✓

ECVET or other credits Usually 120 ECTs are earned on completion of the 2 years (60).

Learning forms (e.g. dual, part-time, distance)

- School based learning

Main providers

- Schools (institutes of technology, universities, colleges of education)

Share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies	Information not available
Work-based learning type (workshops at schools, in-company training / apprenticeships)	Information not available
Main target groups	The main target group are school leavers, but increasingly older learners are being encouraged to take up opportunities at this level.
Entry requirements for learners (qualification/education level, age)	Upper secondary certificate For some lifelong learning focussed programmes, however, formal education requirements may differ and work experience may be sufficient.
Assessment of learning outcomes	To complete programmes at this level, learners need to pass a final examination (part of the grade may be earned through continuous assessment). Assessment is typically based on learning outcomes.
Diplomas/certificates provided	Learners receive a higher certificate on completion of their studies.
Examples of qualifications	Higher certificate in business studies, marketing associate professional (61)
Progression opportunities for learners after graduation	Progression to the next level (EQF 6) of tertiary education. Learners may also enter the labour market.
Destination of graduates	Information not available
Awards through validation of prior learning	✗
General education subjects	✓
Key competences	Information not available
Application of learning outcomes approach	✓

Share of learners in this programme type compared with the total number of VET learners Not applicable

[60] Credits are decided individually by the higher education institutions.

[61] As described in national context.

EQF 5-6

Undergraduate
programmes,
3-5 years
ISCED 665, 666

Initial VET (undergraduate) programmes leading to EQF levels 5- 6, ISCED 665, 666

EQF level	5-6	ISCED-P 2011 level	665, 666
Usual entry grade	Not applicable	Usual completion grade	Not applicable
Usual entry age	18+	Usual completion age	Not applicable
Length of a programme (years)	3-5		
Is it part of compulsory education and training?	✗	Is it part of formal education and training system?	✓
Is it initial VET?	✓	Is it continuing VET?	✗
Is it offered free of charge?	✗ Third level fees apply to all learners, with the exception of those in receipt of a means-tested grant	Is it available for adults?	✓

ECVET or other credits 180 - 240 ECTS, depending on the programme (62).

Learning forms (e.g. dual, part-time, distance)

- mostly school-based learning

Main providers

- universities;
- institutes of technology;
- colleges of education

Share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies	Information not available
Work-based learning type (workshops at schools, in-company training / apprenticeships)	Information not available
Main target groups	Programmes are predominantly targeted at young people, but are available to adults also.
Entry requirements for learners (qualification/education level, age)	A leaving certificate award is the minimum requirement.
Assessment of learning outcomes	To complete VET programmes at this level, learners need pass a final examination (which may also include continuous assessment component as part of the final grade)
Diplomas/certificates provided	Learners receive an honours bachelor degree.
Examples of qualifications	Bachelor of arts (hons) degree), bachelor of science (hons) degree (63).
Progression opportunities for learners after graduation	Those who complete education/training at this level can enter the labour market or continue their studies at EQF 7.
Destination of graduates	75% of graduates in 2017 had either started or were about to start a job, although this share varies by field of learning (64), 18% were engaged in further study,4% were employed,3% were engaged in other activities.
Awards through validation of prior learning	Information not available
General education subjects	Information not available
Key competences	Information not available
Application of learning outcomes approach	Information not available

Share of learners in this programme type compared with the total number of VET learners Not applicable

[62] Credits are decided individually by the higher education institutions.

[63] As described in national context.

[64] Higher Education Authority (2017). *Graduate outcomes survey: class of 2017*.
<https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/02/HEA-Graduate-Outcomes-Survey.pdf>

EQF 6-7

Post-graduate
programmes,
1-2 years
ISCED 667, 767

Initial VET (post-graduate) programmes leading to EQF levels 6-7, ISCED 667, 767

EQF level	6-7	ISCED-P 2011 level	667,767
Usual entry grade	Not applicable	Usual completion grade	Not applicable
Usual entry age	18+	Usual completion age	Not applicable
Length of a programme (years)	2 (up to)		
Is it part of compulsory education and training?	✗	Is it part of formal education and training system?	✓
Is it initial VET?	✓	Is it continuing VET?	✗
Is it offered free of charge?	✗ learners must pay fees in most instances	Is it available for adults?	✓
ECVET or other credits	60-120 ECTS credits depending on the programme (65)		
Learning forms (e.g. dual, part-time, distance)	Information not available		
Main providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools (universities, institutes of technology, colleges of education) 		
Share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies	Information not available		

Work-based learning type (workshops at schools, in-company training / apprenticeships)	Information not available
Main target groups	Programmes are available for young people and also for adults.
Entry requirements for learners (qualification/education level, age)	The minimum requirement for entry to postgraduate education is an honours bachelor degree (EQF 6) or equivalent.
Assessment of learning outcomes	To complete a VET programme at this level, learners need to pass a final examination (part of the final grade may be composed of continuous assessment). Also, depending on the programme, submission of a thesis may also be required.
Diplomas/certificates provided	Depending on the programme a learner may receive a higher diploma, a postgraduate certificate, a postgraduate diploma or a master degree.
Examples of qualifications	Master degree in education (66)
Progression opportunities for learners after graduation	Those who complete education and training at this level may enter the labour market or continue their studies at the same or higher level (EQF 7 or EQF 8).
Destination of graduates	86% of graduates in 2017 had either started or were about to start a job, although this share varies by field of learning (67), 4% were engaged in further study,5% were employed,5% were engaged in other activities.
Awards through validation of prior learning	✓
General education subjects	✓
Key competences	✓
Application of learning outcomes approach	✓

**Share of learners in
this programme type
compared with the
total number of VET
learners** Not applicable

[65] Credits are decided individually by the higher education institutions.

[66] As described in national context.

[67] Higher Education Authority (2017). *Graduate outcomes survey: class of 2017*.
<https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/02/HEA-Graduate-Outcomes-Survey.pdf>

EQF 2-4
Youthreach programmes for early school leavers aged 16-20 ISCED 244, 343.

Initial VET (youthreach) programmes leading to EQF levels 2-4, ISCED 244, 343

EQF level	2-4	ISCED-P 2011 level	244, 343.
Usual entry grade	Not applicable	Usual completion grade	Not applicable
Usual entry age	16-20	Usual completion age	Not applicable
Length of a programme (years)	3 (up to)		
Is it part of compulsory education and training?	✗	Is it part of formal education and training system?	✓
Is it initial VET?	✓	Is it continuing VET?	✗
Is it offered free of charge?	✓	Is it available for adults?	✗

ECVET or other credits Information not available

Learning forms (e.g. dual, part-time, distance)

- school-based learning; (contact studies at an education/training provider
- in-company practice option (practical training in a company).

Main providers

- schools (education and training board training centre)

Share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies >=30%

Work-based learning type (workshops at schools, in-company training / apprenticeships)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practical training at a further education and training provider • in-company practice
Main target groups	Programmes are available for young people aged between 15-20 years.
Entry requirements for learners (qualification/education level, age)	<p>In order to enrol in youthreach, the following requirements apply:</p> <p>learners must be between 15 and 20;</p> <p>learners have left 'mainstream' school early</p>
Assessment of learning outcomes	Learners are assessed at various stages of the programme. Assessment is based on learning outcomes and may include a practical component or skills demonstration.
Diplomas/certificates provided	There are different possibilities depending on the youthreach course. Once learners begin to emerge from these programmes, they may receive: a QQI component (minor) award at EQF level 2 or 3 (NFQ level 3 or 4), a compound award at EQF level 2 or 3 (NFQ level 3 or 4) (major award) a special purpose award at EQF level 2 or 3 (NFQ level 3 or 4) or a Junior certificate (EQF level 2), a Leaving certificate (EQF levels 3 and 4) programmes Or a Leaving certificate Applied award (EQF level 4) or in some cases a third party industry award at levels 3 or 4.
Examples of qualifications	Not Applicable
Progression opportunities for learners after graduation	Learners completing programmes in Youthreach typically have a number of options: they may continue their studies in VET, progress to tertiary level education or enter the labour market.
Destination of graduates	<p>According to an evaluation of the post-leaving certificate sector published in 2019 (latest data available) (68):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27% of youthreach course completers progressed to employment; • 38% progressed to further studies within the further education and training (FET) system; • 35% were unemployed or unknown outcomes.
Awards through validation of prior learning	Information not available

General education subjects	✓ General subjects such as mathematics, Communications, Personal effectiveness, Career planning, Art, design, photography or other creative courses are taught.
Key competences	✓ Competences such as digital skills are taught.
Application of learning outcomes approach	✓ Most youthreach awards are included in the national framework of qualifications (NFQ), so a learning outcomes approach is applied.
Share of learners in this programme type compared with the total number of VET learners	Approx. 2% based on 2020 SOLAS further education and training (FET) services report (69).

[68] https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS82_1.pdf

[69] <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/2496627d7f/solas-fet-services-report.pdf>

EQF 2-5
Vocational training for unemployed (VTOS); specific skills training ISCED 343, 344,351

Initial/Continuing VET (Vocational training for unemployed (VTOS); specific skills training) programmes leading to EQF levels 2-5, ISCED 343, 344,351

EQF level 2-5		ISCED-P 2011 level 343, 344,351	
Usual entry grade	Not applicable	Usual completion grade	Not applicable
Usual entry age	21+	Usual completion age	Not applicable
Length of a programme (years)	2 (up to)		
Is it part of compulsory education and training?	✗	Is it part of formal education and training system?	✗
Is it initial VET?	✓	Is it continuing VET?	✓
Is it offered free of charge?	✓	Is it available for adults?	✓

ECVET or other credits Information not available

Learning forms (e.g. dual, part-time, distance)

- school-based learning; (contact studies at an education/training provider)
- in-company practice option (practical training in a company).

Main providers

- schools (education and training board training centre)

Share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies	>=30%
Work-based learning type (workshops at schools, in-company training / apprenticeships)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practical training at a further education and training provider • in-company practice
Main target groups	Programmes are available for people aged over 21 years who are receiving social welfare payment for at least 6 months:
Entry requirements for learners (qualification/education level, age)	<p>Learners must be aged 21 or over to participate in VTOS.</p> <p>Learners should also receive one of the following social welfare payments for at least 6 months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> jobseeker's benefit; jobseeker's allowance; one-parent family payment; disability allowance; illness benefit or invalidity pension blind pension deserted wife's allowance/benefit widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's contributory pension widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's non-contributory pension prisoner's wife's allowance <p>If a learners doesn't receive any of the above social welfare payments, he/she still qualify for VTOS if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dependent spouse, civil partner or cohabitant of an eligible person status applies; • the leaners receives statutory redundancy
Assessment of learning outcomes	Learners are assessed at various stages of the programme, They are based on learning outcomes and may include a practical component or skills demonstration, Assignments, Projects and Exams.

Diplomas/certificates provided	There are different possibilities depending on the VTOS course. Once learners begin to emerge from these programmes, they may receive: a QQI component (minor) award at EQF levels 2-5 [national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-6], a compound award at EQF levels 2-5 [national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-6 (major award)] a special purpose award at EQF levels 2-5 [national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-6, or a Junior certificate a Leaving certificate programmes. Or a Leaving certificate applied award or in some cases a third party industry award at EQF levels 2-5 (national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-6).
Examples of qualifications	Not Applicable
Progression opportunities for learners after graduation	Learners completing VTOS programmes typically have a number of options: they may continue their studies in VET, progress to tertiary level education or enter the labour market.
Destination of graduates	Those who complete a VTOS course can enter the labour market or progress to further studies within the further education and training system.
Awards through validation of prior learning	Information not available
General education subjects	✓ General subjects such as mathematics, communications, personal effectiveness, career planning,
Key competences	✓
Application of learning outcomes approach	✓ Most VTOS awards are on the national framework of qualifications, so a learning outcomes approach is applied.
Share of learners in this programme type compared with the total number of VET learners	VTOS core is listed at Approx. 2% based on 2020 SOLAS further education and training (FET) services report (70)

[70] <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/2496627d7f/solas-fet-services-report.pdf>

EQF 1-5
Back to education initiative
ISCED 244, 342, 343, 351, 352, 353, 451, 453

Continuing VET programmes leading to EQF levels 1-5, ISCED 244, 342,343, 351, 352,353, 451, 453

EQF level	1-5	ISCED-P 2011 level	244, 342, 343, 351, 352, 353, 451, 453,
Usual entry grade	Not applicable	Usual completion grade	Not applicable
Usual entry age	16+	Usual completion age	Not applicable
Length of a programme (years)	2 (up to)		
Is it part of compulsory education and training?	✗	Is it part of formal education and training system?	✗
Is it initial VET?	✗	Is it continuing VET?	✓

Is it offered ✓

free of charge?

The participants eligible for free tuition are people who (or their dependants):

- have qualifications lower than upper-secondary level education or
- receive a jobseeker's payment or means-tested social welfare payment - there is a list of eligible payments in the *Back to education initiative (BTEI) operational guidelines (71)* - or
- receive working family payment (formerly known as family income supplement or
- have a medical card or
- are eligible to participate in vocational training for unemployed (VTOS) or youthreach courses.

All other participants are charged a fee

Is it ✓

available for adults?

ECVET or other credits Information not available

Learning forms (e.g. dual, part-time, distance)

- Part time learning; (contact studies at an education/training provider)
- in-company practice option (practical training in a company).

Main providers

- education and training board providers such as FET institutes, training centre

Share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies $\geq 30\%$

Work-based learning type (workshops at schools, in-company training / apprenticeships)

- practical training at a further education and training provider
- in-company practice

Main target groups

The BTEI provides part-time further education courses mainly for people who have not completed the Leaving Certificate or an equivalent qualification.

Entry requirements for learners (qualification/education level, age)	<p>Learners must be aged 16 or over to participate in the back to education initiative.</p> <p>The BTEI provides part-time courses for adults and young people aged over 16 who left school with few or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels.</p> <p>The groups prioritised for participation in the BTEI are listed in the <i>BTEI operational guidelines</i> (72). Within these groups, priority is given to those most educationally disadvantaged.</p> <p>Eligible are also employed people on a low income. The aim is to give people an opportunity to combine their learning with family, work and other commitments.</p>
Assessment of learning outcomes	Learners are assessed at various stages of the programme, they are based on learning outcomes and may include a practical component or skills demonstration, Assignments, Projects and Exams.
Diplomas/certificates provided	There are different possibilities depending on the course. Once learners begin to emerge from these programmes, they may receive: a QQI component (minor) award at EQF levels 2-5 (national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-6), a compound award at EQF levels 2-5 (national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-6 (major award)), a special purpose award at EQF levels 2-5 (national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-6) or a Junior certificate a Leaving certificate programmes Or a Leaving certificate applied award or in some cases a third party industry award at EQF levels 2-5 (national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-6).
Examples of qualifications	Not Applicable
Progression opportunities for learners after graduation	Learners completing BTEI programmes typically have a number of options: they may continue their studies in VET, progress to tertiary level education or enter the labour market.
Destination of graduates	Those who complete a BTEI course can enter the labour market or progress to further studies within the further education and training system.
Awards through validation of prior learning	Information not available
General education subjects	✓
Key competences	✓

**Application of learning
outcomes approach** ✓

Most awards are on the national framework of qualifications, so a learning outcomes approach is applied.

**Share of learners in
this programme type
compared with the
total number of VET
learners**

Approx. 10% based on 2020 SOLAS further education and training (FET) services report (73)

[72] <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5afe0f-operational-guidelines-back-to-education-allowance/>

[73] <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/2496627d7f/solas-fet-services-report.pdf>

EQF 1-5
Literacy training and community education ISCED 244, 343, 100, 453

Continuing VET (literacy training and community education) programmes leading to EQF levels 1-5, ISCED 244, 343, 100, 453

EQF level	1-5	ISCED-P 2011 level	244, 343, 100, 453
Usual entry grade	Not applicable	Usual completion grade	Not applicable
Usual entry age	16 +	Usual completion age	Not applicable
Length of a programme (years)	2 (up to)		
Is it part of compulsory education and training?	✗	Is it part of formal education and training system?	✗
Is it initial VET?	✗	Is it continuing VET?	✓

Is it offered free of charge? ✓

Eligible for free tuition are learners who (or whose dependants):

- have qualifications lower than upper-secondary level education or
- receive a jobseeker's payment or means-tested social welfare payment;
- receive working family payment (formerly known as family income supplement or
- have a medical card or
- are eligible to participate in vocational training for unemployed (VTOS) or youthreach.

All other participants are charged a fee

Is it available for adults? ✓

ECVET or other credits Information not available

Learning forms (e.g. dual, part-time, distance)

- Part time or full-time learning; (contact studies at an education/training provider)
- in-company practice option (practical training in a company).

Main providers Education and training board providers such as FET institutes, FET training centres

Share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies $\geq 30\%$

Work-based learning type (workshops at schools, in-company training / apprenticeships)

- practical training at a further education and training provider
- in-company practice

Main target groups	<p>Participants in the community education schemes are typically early school leavers or people from disadvantaged communities.</p> <p>Those who take part in community education schemes are involved in all aspects of the course development including: the identification of their needs, the design of the programmes and adapting them on a regular basis.</p>
Entry requirements for learners (qualification/education level, age)	<p>You must be aged 16 or over to enrol on a community education scheme.</p> <p>The scheme provides courses for adults and young people aged over 16 who left school with few or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels.</p>
Assessment of learning outcomes	<p>Community Education is a non-traditional programme, there usually different methods of assessment within each course. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assignments; • projects; • learners' records; • observations; • demonstrations of skills • exams
Diplomas/certificates provided	<p>There are different possibilities depending on the course. Once learners begin to emerge from these programmes, they may receive: a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) component (minor) award at EQF levels 2-5 (national framework of qualifications(NFQ) levels 3 - 6), a compound award at EQF levels 2-5 (national framework of qualifications(NFQ) levels 3 - 6) (major award) a special purpose award at EQF levels 2-5 (national framework of qualifications(NFQ) levels 3 - 6) or a Junior certificate a Leaving certificate programmes or a Leaving certificate applied award or in some cases a third party industry award at EQF levels 2-5 (national framework of qualifications(NFQ) levels 3 - 6).</p>
Examples of qualifications	Not applicable
Progression opportunities for learners after graduation	<p>Learners completing community education programmes typically have a number of options: they may continue their studies in VET, progress to tertiary level education or enter the labour market.</p>
Destination of graduates	<p>Those who complete a community education course can enter the labour market or progress to further studies within the further education and training system.</p>

Awards through validation of prior learning	Information not available
General education subjects	✓
Key competences	✓
Application of learning outcomes approach	✓ Most awards are included in the national framework of qualifications (NFQ), so a learning outcomes approach is applied.
Share of learners in this programme type compared with the total number of VET learners	Approx. 30% based on 2020 SOLAS further education and training (FET) services report (74)

[74] <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/2496627d7f/solas-fet-services-report.pdf>

EQF 3-5
Upskilling and reskilling for employed; skills to advance, eCollege, ISCED 351, 451

Continuing VET (upskilling and reskilling for employed; skills to advance, eCollege} programmes leading to EQF levels 3-5, ISCED 351, 451

EQF level	3-5	ISCED-P 2011 level	351, 451
Usual entry grade	Not applicable	Usual completion grade	Not applicable
Usual entry age	16	Usual completion age	Not applicable
Length of a programme (years)	2 (up to)		
Is it part of compulsory education and training?	✗	Is it part of formal education and training system?	✗
Is it initial VET?	✗	Is it continuing VET?	✓
Is it offered free of charge?	✓ Courses are highly subsidised, depending on skill level.	Is it available for adults?	✓

ECVET or other credits Information not available

Learning forms (e.g. dual, part-time, distance)

- Part time or full-time learning;
- in-company practice option (practical training in a company).

Main providers

Education and training board providers such as FET institutes, FET training centres, e-college

Share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies	>=30%
Work-based learning type (workshops at schools, in-company training / apprenticeships)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practical training at a further education and training provider • in-company practice
Main target groups	<p>These programmes are primarily aimed at those who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • currently working in a lower-skilled job; • aged 50 or over; • currently working in a job that is changing a lot. <p>E-college courses are aimed at a variety of learners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those already doing an FET course who would like to augment their learning; • those who have recently become unemployed or had their hours reduced; • those wishing to upskill and reskill in digital, ICT and business skills related areas.
Entry requirements for learners (qualification/education level, age)	Learners must be aged 16 or over and be employed in a job going through change, or be employed in vulnerable sectors.
Assessment of learning outcomes	<p>Methods of assessment typically include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assignments; • projects; • demonstrations of skills; • exams.
Diplomas/certificates provided	<p>There are different possibilities depending on the course. Once learners begin to emerge from these programmes, they may receive: a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) component (minor) award at EQF levels 2-4 (national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-5), a compound award at EQF levels 2-4 (national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-5) (major award) a special purpose award at EQF levels 2-4 (national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-5) or a Leaving certificate programmes Or a Leaving certificate applied award or in some cases a third party industry award at EQF levels 2-4 (national framework of qualifications (NFQ) levels 3-5).</p>
Examples of qualifications	Not applicable

Progression opportunities for learners after graduation	Learners completing these programmes typically have a number of options: they may continue their studies in VET or progress to tertiary level education.
Destination of graduates	Learners completing these programmes can progress within the further education and training system or progress within the workplace.
Awards through validation of prior learning	Information not available
General education subjects	✓
Key competences	✓
Application of learning outcomes approach	✓ A learning outcome, competence-based approach is applied.
Share of learners in this programme type compared with the total number of VET learners	Information not available

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