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Spotlight on VET

IRELAND

2026

VET in Ireland

Vocational education and training (VET) in Ireland is mainly provided within the statutory further education and training (FET) sector, which comprises both IVET and CVET for adults and young people aged 16+. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) is responsible for the tertiary education system, comprising both the FET and higher education sectors. SOLAS is the devolved statutory agency under the aegis of DFHERIS, responsible for funding and coordinating FET, setting priorities of the national FET strategy, and establishing the national system performance targets.

Major FET providers are the 16 statutory Education and Training Boards (ETBs), each serving its own geographic region. Other SOLAS-funded FET providers include national or community-based regional organisations, the national eCollege online learning platform, and apprenticeship schemes.

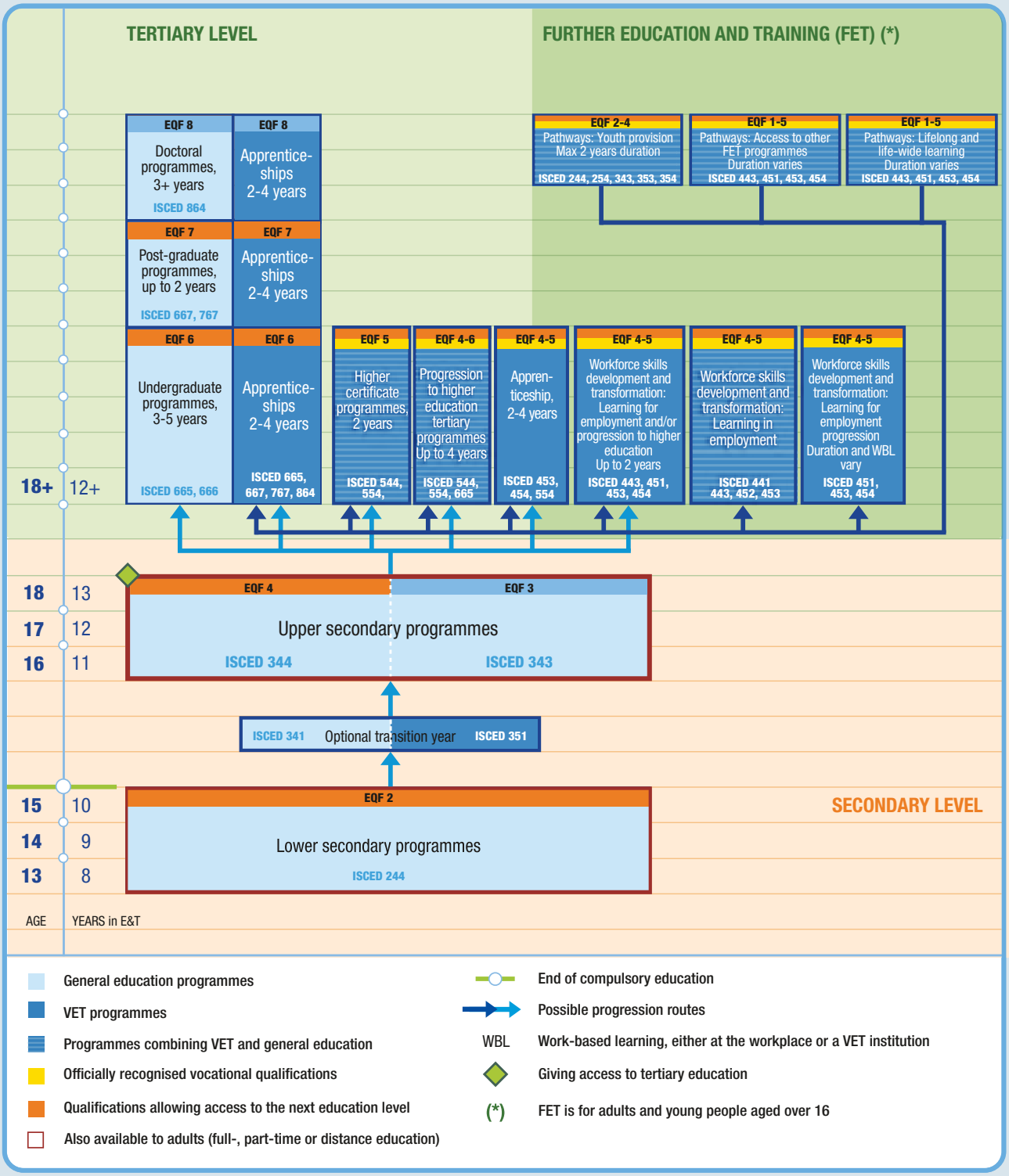
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the State agency that oversees quality standards and awards qualifications. Its remit includes certifying both general and VET awards, as well as all levels on the national framework of qualifications (NFQ 1-10, EQF 1-8).

The FET sector is characterised by a diversity of programmes, level and learner profiles. All key national FET stakeholders, including DFHERIS, ETBs and SOLAS, are implementing a new FET funding model established in 2022, following a review by an international panel. This includes streamlining all FET programmes into the following funding categories:

- **apprenticeship**, defined as a programme of structured education and training formally combining and alternating learning in the workplace with learning in an education or training centre. Apprenticeships in Ireland are delivered by both further and higher education and training providers. As of July 2026, 82 different apprenticeships are available, with more in development;
- **workforce skills development and transformation**, which is labour-market-led provision, aiming to meet the specific skill needs of the national or regional economy, industry sectors, and individual learners. It comprises:
  - learning for employment progression, including pathways to apprenticeship, specific skills training, traineeship;
  - learning in employment, including Skills to Advance and eCollege;
  - learning for employment and/or progression to higher education, including the post-leaving certificate (PLC), tertiary degrees, and the vocational training opportunities scheme (VTOS);
- **FET pathways**, which offer education and training opportunities, many of which bridge the gap between foundational learning and access to VET or to service an inclusion agenda. Pathways comprise:
  - youth provision, such as Youthreach and Community Training Centres for learners aged 16-21, and FET pathways from school for learners in the upper secondary Transition Year programme;
  - access to other FET programmes, including the Back to Education Initiative, Bridging and Foundation Training, Building Bridges (prison education), the Local Training Initiative, and specialist training providers (for learners with disabilities);
  - lifelong and life-wide learning, including Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Skills, Community Education, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL);
- **strategic investment funding**, which enables innovative and collaborative programmes to deliver strategic priorities, including:
  - Skills to Advance Innovation and Collaboration projects;
  - Green Skills and climate action;
  - Reach – a fund to improve access and provide support for educationally disadvantaged learners.

Another DFHERIS agency, Skillnet Ireland, offers upskilling courses to unemployed people.

VET in the Irish education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011 codes are provided by ReferNet Ireland (SOLAS) for programmes in place in 2026. They may differ from the 2020-2021 ISCED mapping available from Eurostat at the time of publication.
Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Ireland, 2026.

Distinctive features

Both the FET and Higher Education (HE) sectors are under the remit of DFHERIS. FET delivers at EQF levels 1-5 (NFQ 1-6), while HE delivers at EQF levels 5-9 (NFQ 6-10). While both sectors have separately validated awards, QQI have proposed a single award for both FE and HE at EQF level 5 with ECTS credits.

Ireland is moving towards a new unified tertiary system to enable FET and HE to work more closely. Tertiary Degrees were launched in 2022 and have expanded. A public consultation on tertiary education was undertaken in 2025.

In planned reform of the apprenticeship system under the Apprenticeship Action Plan, the Craft Transfer Plan outlines the transfer of SOLAS's role for craft curriculum and assessment to education providers as the first step to an integrated national apprenticeship. A public consultation on the next Action Plan commenced in 2025.

Other ongoing developments include:

- a new funding and FET college model, to simplify FET programmes and integrate FET systems, underpinned by a major capital investment to develop and build community-based FET colleges;
- the first dedicated FET strategy for the green transition outlined in Green skills 2030, and accompanying implementation plan;
- agile awards development with QQI for VET qualifications, following quality reviews and annual quality reporting by ETBs;
- adoption of the Irish Altitude Charter for Universal Design for inclusion and to meet learners' needs, underpinned by the FET Learner Support Framework;
- implementation of the Community Education Framework for learning, provision, coordination and funding community-based FET provision;
- delivery of the Adult Literacy for Life strategy, a systems-based approach for meeting the needs of adult learners for literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Upper secondary schools do not deliver IVET. In 2025, a new partnership between schools and ETBs delivered IVET modules to school students in the Transition Year. This partnership aims to increase progression routes for from school to FET through experiential learning of life and vocational skills.

Challenges and policy responses

The landscape of FET in Ireland is undergoing significant transformation, marked by both progress and challenges.

Ireland's FET strategy Creating Futures 2026-30, building on the earlier FET Strategy Transforming Learning 2020-2024, was launched in May 2026. The new strategy has four strategic objectives: provide future-ready knowledge and skills; build inclusion for prosperity and cohesion; develop quality with innovation; and collaborate for impact.

To meet the challenge of a better balance in skills demand versus supply, the strategy focuses on developing and implementing a labour market data strategy that expands skills forecasting and insights to anticipate and meet priority knowledge and skill needs at national and regional levels. To deliver future-ready skills, the FET sector will advance smart specialisation, accelerate apprenticeship reform, prioritise AI, digital skills and green innovation, and respond to the skill needs of housing and infrastructure development. The strategy also outlines actions to advance the development of enterprise training capability, with a particular focus on very small and small businesses.

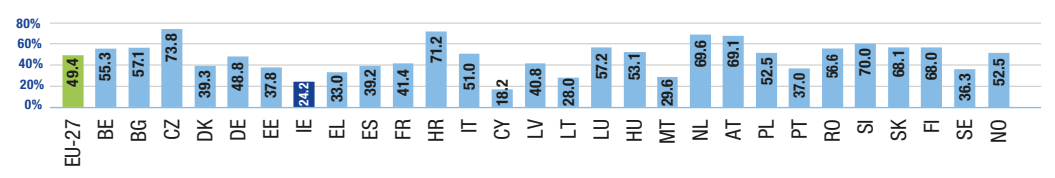
The policy response for inclusion for prosperity and cohesion ensures every community has access to FET, prioritising adult literacy needs. Learners are placed at the heart of decision-making. Universal design principles are embedded throughout the FET system, with tailored supports for under-represented learner groups. The learner base is diversified and widened through new methods of outreach.

To strengthen quality, innovation, collaboration and partnership, the strategy introduces the new FET College model to consolidate existing provision within an integrated college structure. Quality is embedded across the system through strategic engagement and collaboration with QQI. A flexible, learner-centric ecosystem expands modular provision, micro-qualifications and recognition of prior learning. The strategy seeks to strengthen partnerships across education, while expanding collaboration with industry and representative bodies, as well as EU and international partners, to strengthen shared learning and innovation.

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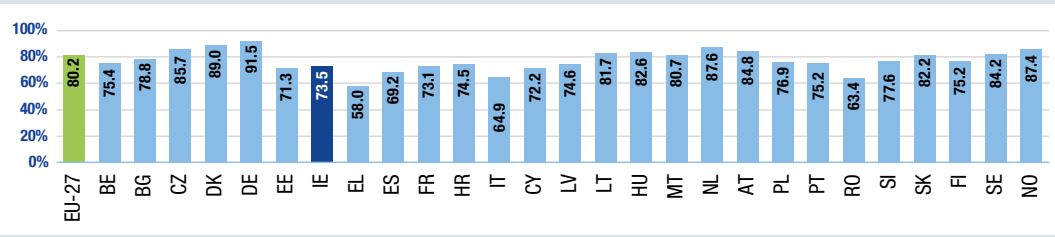
Education and training in figures

IVET students as % of all upper secondary students, 2024



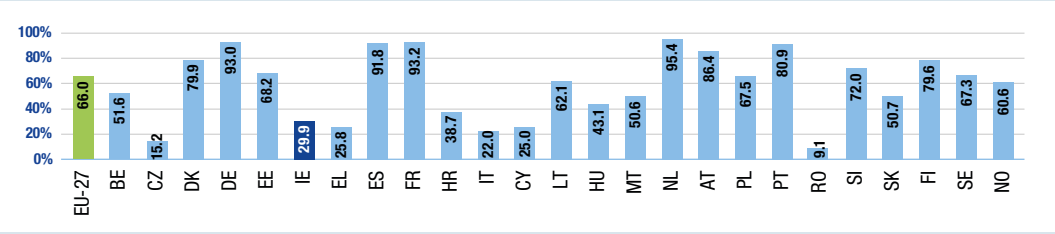
NB: No available data for Iceland.
Source: Eurostat, educ_uoe_enrs04 [Extracted on 4.5.2026].

Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34) (%), 2025



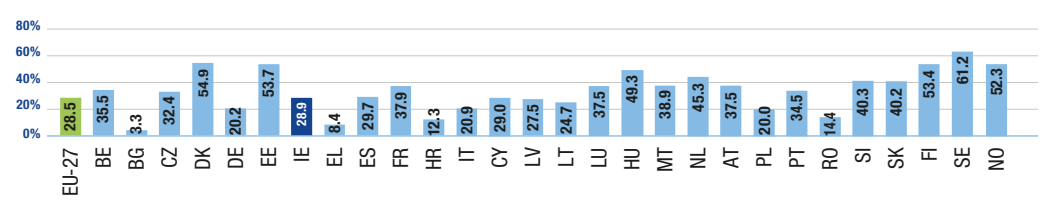
NB: Denmark: (b) break in time series / Spain and France (d) definition differs / Bulgaria, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia: (u) low reliability, Luxembourg and Iceland: (:) no data available
Source: Eurostat, edat_lfse_24 [Extracted on 5.5.2026].

Recent IVET graduates (20-34) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%), 2025



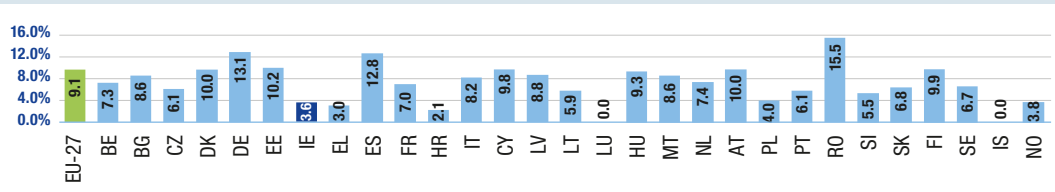
NB: Denmark: (b) break in time series / Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta and Poland: (u) low reliability/ Bulgaria, Latvia, Luxembourg and Iceland: (:) no data available
Source: Eurostat, tps00215 [Extracted on 20.5.2026].

Adults (25-64) with a learning experience in the past 12 months (%), 2024



NB: Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Greece and Hungary: (b) break in time series / Malta: (u) low reliability/ Iceland: (:) no data available
Source: Eurostat, trng_lfs_17 [Extracted on 5.5.2026].

Early leavers from education and training (%), 2025



NB: Denmark: (b) break in time series / Spain and France (d) definition differs / Croatia and Luxembourg: (u) low reliability, Iceland: (:) no data available
Source: Eurostat, edat_lfse_14 [Extracted on 5.5.2026].

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Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)
Education and Training Boards (ETBs)
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
SOLAS

This Spotlight was drafted by Anthie Kyriakopoulou, Cedefop expert, member of the VET policies and systems team. Cedefop would like to thank Aedin O'Toole from SOLAS (ReferNet Ireland team) for her valuable feedback.

This Spotlight was peer reviewed by Vicky Oraiopoulou, Cedefop policy officer.

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CEDEFOP | European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Europe 123, 570 01 Thessaloniki (Pylaia), Greece
Postal: Cedefop service post, 570 01 Thermi, Greece
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020, Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu

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