Education and training in figures

**IRELAND**

Learners in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational and general programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2012</th>
<th>AT</th>
<th>DE</th>
<th>ES</th>
<th>IE</th>
<th>PT</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>EU-28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of all students</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>32.5</td>
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Tertiary education by type

<table>
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<th>IE</th>
<th>PT</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>EU-28</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary education by type</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>48.4</td>
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Lifelong learning

<table>
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<th>AT</th>
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<th>IE</th>
<th>PT</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>EU-28</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>38.8</td>
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Early leavers from education and training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2013</th>
<th>AT</th>
<th>DE</th>
<th>ES</th>
<th>IE</th>
<th>PT</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>EU-28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of early leavers from education and training</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>9.2</td>
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Further information

- EUROPE 2020=40
- EUROPE 2020=10
- E&T 2020=15
Most vocational education and training (VET) occurs within the State sector, although private providers also play a role. The country’s education and training system is divided into four main sectors: primary, secondary, further and post-secondary non-tertiary education and training (FET), and higher education. VET is provided primarily within the FET sector, with some in higher education.

The main VET providers are 16 education and training boards (ETBs) spread across the country. Responsibility for funding, planning and coordinating FET programmes at ETBs lies with SOLAS, Ireland’s Further Education and Training Authority. Other statutory providers include BIM (seafood industry training) and Teagasc (agricultural training). These bodies are publicly funded. Some programmes are co-funded by the European Social Fund. Higher VET programmes are the responsibility of the Higher Education Authority (the statutory body for higher education). Ireland’s 10-level national framework of qualifications (NFQ) is referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF). VET qualifications (NFQ) is referenced to the framework of VET (OFF 1-5) EQF 1-5 EQF 1-5 EQF 1-5 EQF 1-5.

Most vocational education and training (VET) takes place on completion of secondary education. Apprenticeships and traineeships are mostly at post-secondary level, rather than at secondary level. VET programmes are also available in many other European countries. The introduction of the NFO in 2003 provided a system for coordinating and comparing awards, adding learner progression and mobility between different sectors of the education system. As a result, those with FET/VET qualifications can move up a ladder system of progression to gain more advanced awards in the FET sector, or even to tertiary level. Tertiary-level colleges such as institutes of technology now reserve a number of places for those with certain types of FET awards (including apprenticeship qualifications). Aligning FET/VET and tertiary education and training with labour market needs has been an important aspect in recent years. Work carried out on identifying skills needs is used to assist education and training (including VET) providers in aligning relevant courses with labour market requirements. Ireland has developed a solid mechanism for identifying the economy’s skills needs. The work is overseen by a Government-appointed expert group on future skills needs, which is made up of representatives of government (including the ministries of Education, Enterprise and Finance), employers’ and employees’ representatives, and education and training providers. FET/VET planning and provision is coordinated and funded jointly following FET/VET sector reform (2013). The FET authority (SOLAS) established and a five-year FET strategy was published (SOLAS, 2014). The structure of training and education is based on a clear, integrated pathway for learners within the FET sector, responding to the needs of learners and the labour market.

In Ireland, general and academic education is more highly appealing when compared to FET/VET. The preferred option for upper secondary graduates is usually to proceed to tertiary education: in 2010, approximate 30% opted for tertiary education, while 22% entered FET (PLC courses, 20%; FAS/SOLAS courses (including apprenticeship), 1%). To address this issue, part of the remit of the newly-established Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) is to improve the attractiveness of FET/VET programmes in society.

Expanding the apprenticeship system. Formal apprenticeship is currently made up of just 25 trades, with 80% of apprentices in construction and related areas. A review of the apprenticeship system (DES, 2014) concluded it should be expanded to include new apprenticeships in areas including ICT, retail, hospitality, business administration, medical devices, and financial services.

Unemployment. At 13.1% in 2013, Ireland’s unemployment, according to Eurostat, was higher than the EU average (10.8%), and higher for those under 25 (26.8%). Data from the National skills bulletin (2014) also show the younger the individual and the lower their educational qualifications, the more likely they are to be unemployed. The challenge is to ensure that the FET/VET programmes provide learners with skills in demand in the labour market, while assisting those with lower (or no) educational qualifications to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to progress. In response, the Momentum programme was established in 2012 as part of the government’s action plan for jobs. Under Momentum, jobseekers can avail of free training (which includes on-the-job training (modules) to gain in-demand skills and access to work opportunities in identified growing sectors, such as ICT, tourism and manufacturing technologies.)
VET in Ireland

Most vocational education and training (VET) occurs within the State sector, although private providers also play a role. The country’s education and training system is divided into four main sectors: primary; secondary, further and post-secondary non-tertiary education and training (FET), and higher education. VET is provided primarily within the FET sector, with some in higher education.

The main VET providers are 16 education and training boards (ETBs) spread across the country. Responsibility for funding, planning and coordinating FET programmes at ETBs lies with SOLAS, Ireland’s Further Education and Training Authority. Other statutory providers include BIM (seafood industry training) and Teagasc (agricultural training). These bodies are mostly publicly funded. Some programmes are also co-financed by the European Social Fund. Higher VET programmes are the responsibility of the Higher Education Authority (the statutory planning and policy body for higher education). Ireland’s 10-level national framework of qualifications (NFQ) is referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF). VET pertains to NFQ levels 5 or 6 (EQF 4 or 5), with some programmes at NFQ 7 (EQF 6). Most awards made through the State-funded sector, and many in the private sector, have been placed on the NFQ.

While it is possible to proceed to apprenticeship training following completion of lower secondary education (ISCED 2), most (around 90%) continue to complete upper secondary education, which in Ireland is general, rather than vocational, in nature.

Post-secondary non-tertiary programmes are aimed mostly at those who have completed upper secondary education. Training includes: apprenticeships; people acquire craft skills status by combining off-the-job training (in ETBs and institutes of technology) and on-the-job training (with an employer). Training leads to an NFQ level 6 (EQF 4) craft certificate. Partial awards are also made.

Post-leaving certificate courses (PLCs): delivered in ETB colleges or second-level schools; they comprise general or vocationally oriented education, for both. Typically, training is in areas such as technical knowledge, personal/core skills and work experience: PLCs lead to an NFQ level 5 or 6 award (EQF 4 or 5). Partial awards are also made.

Training for other occupations: delivered by secondary-level schools, ETB colleges, private or sectoral providers (e.g. for tourism, agriculture or horticulture). Awards, full or partial, are made, usually at NFQ level 5 or 6 (EQF 4 or 5).

VET at tertiary level (ISCED 5B) is provided mostly by institutes of technology and, to a lesser extent, by universities and other higher education providers. Courses are mainly in business, science and technology and lead to an NFQ level 6 or 7 award (EQF 5 or 6). For second chance education and training for the unemployed, VET is also offered in the form of: VTOS (vocational training for the unemployed); Youthwork (for early leavers aged 15-20); and the back to education initiative (part-time for adults). Full and partial awards are made at NFQ levels 1-4 (EQF 1-5).

Apprenticeships and traineeships: training for the unemployed for a range of occupations (such as financial advisor assistant, pharmacy sales assistant). It leads to an NFQ level 5 or 6 (EQF 4 or 5) award (full or partial).

Specific skills training: training for the unemployed in a vocational skill (such as computer hardware maintenance), delivered by ETBs (on average, 16 weeks). There is a range of awards, full and partial, at NFQ levels 3-5 (EQF 2-4).

VET in Ireland's education and training system

Distinctive features of VET

Most VET takes place on completion of upper secondary education (ISCED 3). VET programmes are mostly at post-secondary level, rather than at secondary level, due to the way NFQ was mapped to other European countries. The introduction of the NFO in 2003 provided a system for coordinating and comparing awards, aiding learner progression and mobility between different sectors of the education system. As a result, those with FET/VET qualifications can move up a ladder system of progression to gain more advanced awards in the FET sector, or even to tertiary level. Tertiary-level colleges such as institutes of technology now reserve a number of places for those with certain types of FET awards (including apprenticeship qualifications). Aligning FET/VET programmes with the labour market needs has been an important aspect in recent years. Work carried out on identifying skills needs is used to assist education and training (including VET) providers in aligning relevant courses with labour market requirements. Ireland has developed a solid mechanism for identifying the economy’s skills needs. The work is overseen by the Government-appointed expert group on future skills needs, which is made up of representatives of government (including the ministries of Education, Enterprise and Finance), employers’ and employers’ representatives, and education and training providers. FET/VET planning and provision is coordinated and funded following recently fledgling FET sector reform (2013). The FET framework, SOLAS was established and a five-year FET strategy was published (SOLAS, 2014). The structure of FET provision is based on a clear, integrated pathway for learners within the FET sector, responding to the needs of learners and the labour market.

Challenges and policy responses

Attractiveness of VET. In Ireland, general and academic qualifications are highly regarded when compared to FET/VET. The preferred option for upper secondary graduates is to proceed to tertiary education: in 2010, approximately 75% entered tertiary education, while 21% entered FET (PLC courses, 20% FAS/SOLAS courses (including apprenticeship), 1%). To address this issue, part of the remit of the newly-established Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) is to improve the attractiveness of FET/VET programmes in society.

Expanding the apprenticeship system. Formal apprenticeship is comprised of just 25 trades, with 80% of apprentices in construction and related areas. A review of the apprenticeship system (DEIS, 2014) concluded it should be expanded to include new apprenticeships in areas including ICT, retail, hospitality, business administration, medical devices, and financial services.

Unemployment. At 13.1% in 2013, Ireland’s unemployment, according to Eurostat, was higher than the EU average (10.8%) and even higher than the EU average (19%). Data from the National skills bulletin (2014) also show the younger the individual and the lower their educational qualifications, the more likely they are to be unemployed. The challenge is to ensure that the FET/VET programmes provide learners with skills in demand in the labour market, while assisting those with lower (or no) educational qualifications to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to progress in the workplace. In response, the Momentum programme was established in 2012 as part of the government’s action plan for jobs. Under Momentum, jobseekers can avail of free training (which includes off-the-job training modules) to gain in-demand skills and access to work opportunities in identified growing sectors, such as ICT, tourism and manufacturing technologies.
VET in Ireland

Most vocational education and training (VET) occurs within the State sector, although private providers also play a role. The country’s education and training system is divided into four main sectors: primary, secondary, further and post-secondary non-tertiary education (FET) and higher education. VET is provided primarily within the FET sector, with some in higher education.

The main VET providers are 16 education and training boards (ETBs) spread across the country. Responsibility for funding, planning and coordinating FET programmes at ETBs lies with SOLAS, Ireland’s Further Education and Training Authority. Other statutory providers include IBM (seaweed industry training) and Teagasc (agricultural training). These bodies are publicly funded. Some programmes are co-financed by the European Social Fund. Higher VET programmes are the responsibility of the Higher Education Authority (the statutory planning and policy body for higher education).

Ireland’s 10-level national framework of qualifications (NFQ) is referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF). VET pertains to NFQ levels 5 or 6 (EQF 4 or 5), with some programmes at NFQ 7 (EQF 6). Almost all awards made through the State-funded sector, and many in the private sector, have been placed on the NFQ.

While it is possible to progress by apprenticeship training following completion of lower secondary education (ISCED 2), most programmes (around 90%) continue to complete upper secondary education, which in Ireland is general, rather than vocational, in nature.

Post-secondary non-tertiary programmes are aimed mostly at those who have completed upper secondary education. Training includes: apprenticeships; people acquire craftsperson status by combining off-the-job training (in ETBs and institutes of technology) and on-the-job training (with an employer). Training leads to an NFQ level 6 (EQF 4) craft certificate. Partial awards are also made.

- Post-leaving certificate courses (PLCs): delivered in ETBs colleges or secondary schools; they comprise general or vocationally oriented education, or both. Typical training is in areas such as technical knowledge, personal/care skills and work experience: PLCs lead to an NFQ level 5 or 6 award (EQF 4 or 5). Partial awards are also made.
- Training for other occupations: delivered by second-level schools, ETBs colleges, private or sectoral providers (e.g. for tourism, agriculture or farming). Awards, full or partial, are made, usually at NFQ level 5 or 6 (EQF 4 or 5).
- VET at tertiary level (ISCED 5B) is provided mostly by institutes of technology and, to a lesser extent, by universities and other higher education providers. Courses are mainly in business, science and technology and lead to an NFQ level 6 or level 7 award (EQF 5 or 6).

For second chance education and training for the unemployed, VET is also offered in the form of:
- VTOS (vocational training for the unemployed): Youthreach (for early leavers aged 15-20); and the back to education initiative (part-time for adults). Full and partial awards are made at NFQ levels 1-4 (EQF 1-5).
- Traineeships (vocational training for the unemployed), Youthreach (for early leavers aged 15-20); and the back to education initiative (part-time for adults). Full and partial awards are made at NFQ levels 1-4 (EQF 1-5).
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- Specific skills training: training for the unemployed in a vocational skill (such as computer hardware maintenance), delivered by ETBs (on average, 16 weeks). There is a range of awards for the unemployed, and partial, at NFQ levels 3-5 (EQF 2-4).

VET in Ireland’s education and training system

Most VET takes place on completion of upper secondary education (ISCED 5). Some programmes are mostly at post-secondary level, rather than at secondary level, as occurs in many other European countries.

The introduction of the NFQ in 2003 provided a system for coordinating and comparing awards, adding learner progression and mobility between different sectors of the education system. As a result, those with FET/VET qualifications can move up a ladder system of progression to gain more advanced awards in the FET sector, or even to tertiary level. Tertiary-level colleges such as institutes of technology now reserve a number of places for those with certain types of FET awards (including apprenticeship qualifications).

Alignment of training programmes between the two sectors means that the long-term market needs has been an important aspect in recent years. Work carried out on identifying skills needs is used to assist education and training (including VET) providers in aligning relevant courses with labour market requirements.

Ireland has developed a solid mechanism for identifying the economy’s skills needs. The work is overseen by the Government-appointed expert group on future skills needs, which is made up of representatives of government (including the ministries of Education, Enterprise and Finance), employers and employers’ representatives, and education and training providers.

FET/VET planning and provision is coordinated and funded centrally following FET sub-sector reform (2013). The FET sub-sectors, SOLAS was established and a five-year FET strategy was published (SOLAS, 2014). The structure of the FET sector is based on a clear, integrated pathway for learners within the FET sector, responding to the needs of learners and the labour market.

Distinctive features of VET

- Attractions of VET. In Ireland, general and academic education is at a premium, and going higher than when compared to FET/VET. The preferred option for upper secondary graduates is usually to proceed to tertiary education: in 2010, approximately 70% of upper secondary education was co-financed by the European Social Fund. VET in Ireland is structured to provide an alternative pathway to completing upper secondary education, while assisting those with lower (or no) educational qualifications, the more likely they are to be unemployed. The challenge is to ensure that the FET/VET programmes provide learners with skills in demand in the labour market, while assisting those with lower (or no) educational qualifications to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to progress. In response, the Momentum programme was established in 2012 as part of the government’s action plan for jobs. Under the Momentum, jobseekers can avail of free training (which includes on-the-job training modules) to gain in-demand skills and access to work opportunities in identified growing sectors, such as ICT, tourism and manufacturing technologies.

- Challenges and policy responses. The introduction of the NFQ in 2003 provided a system for coordinating and comparing awards, adding learner progression and mobility between different sectors of the education system. As a result, those with FET/VET qualifications can move up a ladder system of progression to gain more advanced awards in the FET sector, or even to tertiary level. Tertiary-level colleges such as institutes of technology now reserve a number of places for those with certain types of FET awards (including apprenticeship qualifications). Alignment of training programmes between the two sectors means that the long-term market needs has been an important aspect in recent years. Work carried out on identifying skills needs is used to assist education and training (including VET) providers in aligning relevant courses with labour market requirements.

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- Alignment of training programmes between the two sectors means that the long-term market needs has been an important aspect in recent years. Work carried out on identifying skills needs is used to assist education and training (including VET) providers in aligning relevant courses with labour market requirements.

- Ireland has developed a solid mechanism for identifying the economy’s skills needs. The work is overseen by the Government-appointed expert group on future skills needs, which is made up of representatives of government (including the ministries of Education, Enterprise and Finance), employers and employers’ representatives, and education and training providers.
Education and training in figures

Further information


This spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Ireland.

Learners in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational and general programmes
% of all students in upper secondary education, 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>AT</th>
<th>BE</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>CS</th>
<th>DE-20</th>
<th>ES</th>
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<th>LU</th>
<th>NL</th>
<th>PT</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>EU-28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voc.</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
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<td>13.8</td>
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<td>Gen.</td>
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<td>83.6</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>85.1</td>
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<td>83.6</td>
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Tertiary education by type
% of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary education by type, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>AT</th>
<th>BE</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>CS</th>
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<tr>
<td>ISCED 5B</td>
<td>57.2</td>
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<td>56.4</td>
<td>54.6</td>
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<td>54.6</td>
<td>50.1</td>
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<td>57.2</td>
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<td>ISCED 5A-6</td>
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<td>45.4</td>
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<td>49.9</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>42.8</td>
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Lifelong learning
% of population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>AT</th>
<th>BE</th>
<th>CI</th>
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<tr>
<td>Voc.</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>32.8</td>
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<td>32.7</td>
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<td>67.3</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>71.3</td>
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Early leavers from education and training
% of early leavers from education and training, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>AT</th>
<th>BE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voc.</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>94.0</td>
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<td>92.6</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further information

- ReferNet Ireland. www.education.ie Department of Education and Skills
- SOLAS, Further Education and Training Authority
- EGFSN, expert group on future skills needs
- QQI, Quality and Qualifications Ireland
- ILE, Higher Education Authority
- IEA, Higher Education Authority
- State Examinations Commission

This spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Ireland.