

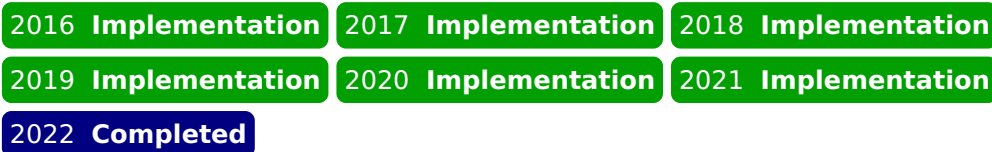
FET graduate tracking and data collection

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 IRELAND

Timeline



ID number 28298

Background

Given the increasing emphasis placed on the labour market relevance of further education and training (FET) programmes since the recession, focus on course outcomes, particularly in relation to employment or progression in the education and training system, has been growing in importance.

National FET System Targets through the Strategic Performance Agreements (SPAs) from 2018 to 2020 rely on data collection and graduate tracking to evidence progress to targets.

Objectives

The development of data IT systems to track FET graduate outcomes, known as the Programme and learner support system (PLSS).

Description

The PLSS is a suite of software applications that are designed to provide an integrated approach to the collection and processing of personal data of users of PLSS and FET programmes funded through SOLAS, and the outputs, outcomes and performance of such programmes. The data are informing the SPAs between the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and SOLAS.

The PLSS consists of three elements:

- (a) national programme database (NDP) – a depository of all programmes/courses designed to be run by FET providers under the aegis of SOLAS;
- (b) national course calendar (NCC) – a course scheduling tool to enable course offer, search and referral; either by the Department of Employment and Social Protection or self-referral; data from the NCC are used to populate the fetchcourses.ie website (a course search facility);
- (c) national learner database (LDB) – a student records system for data collection in relation to learner profile, learner course activity (e.g. application, enrollment and

completion) and outcomes (e.g. progression to further study, employment, unemployment or inactivity).

It is implemented across Ireland by all SOLAS-funded, and some other VET providers.

SOLAS signed data sharing agreements with external stakeholders such as the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and the Department of Employment and Social Protection (DEASP) that should increase the in-house capability of the data analytics unit to produce outcomes reports on future VET provision.

In addition, the skills and labour market research unit in SOLAS continues to monitor the labour market, including transitions data on movements into and out of the labour market by occupational level and education level. The administrative data centre at the Central Statistics Office currently holds a number of datasets, including extracts from the former Training and Employment Authority (FAS) client services system, the Department of Education and Skills post-primary pupil database, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) student records system, Revenue and the Department of Employment and Social Protection social welfare payment system. All of these datasets are linked using the personal public services number (PPSN) as a key.

2016 Implementation

In early 2016, SOLAS procured the services of a data analytics expert to link existing data sets (where possible) to establish the feasibility of using administrative data for the purposes of FET evaluation. The aim of the project was to link education and training data with other administrative datasets in Ireland (e.g. unemployment benefit/allowance claims, other education/training enrollments, employment data) to establish the learner outcomes associated with course participation in selected areas of the FET sector.

2017 Implementation

In 2017, SOLAS continued working with the Central Statistics Office (CSO - Ireland's national statistics institute). In parallel, a pilot study for FET graduate tracking was completed on behalf of SOLAS, to establish outcomes of some FET course participants.

2018 Implementation

SOLAS formally undertook a wider ranging study on learner outcomes as part of graduate tracking.

2019 Implementation

In 2019, the PLSS database was expanded to include eCollege and Skills to advance (a new programme to support employers and the employed) registrations and learner outcomes, increasing the coverage of SOLAS provision.

The data analytics unit published a suite of reports on FET statistics in Ireland by the end of 2019. The publications include FET in Numbers 2018: facts and figures, learners with disability, Roma, traveller communities, lifelong learning, eCollege.

Besides, SOLAS published a report on post-leaving certificate (PLC) learner tracking. The report detailed progression pathways of FET students within higher education and showed that PLC provision ensured solid progression pathways for those learners who wanted to get a third level education.

2020 Implementation

The employment and progression outcomes are only two targets out of six established between SOLAS, the Department of Education, and the Department of Social Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The FET facts and figures report was published with extensive information on the sector and its graduates.

2021 Implementation

SOLAS worked with various government departments including the following: Revenue (the Irish tax and customs competent authority), the CSO, the HEA and the Department of Employment and Social Protection (DEASP) on formal data sharing agreements, system integration and harmonisation in relation to FET graduate tracking. SOLAS produced a number of outcomes reports in 2021 including: *Non-Irish nationals in FET*, *FET in focus* magazine and *Women in FET*. The outcomes reports provide key information with regard to enrollments, age profiles, levels of educational attainment, ISCED fields of study, programme types, economic status, completions and more.

2022 Completed

In 2022, SOLAS published an outcomes report for FET *Early leavers outcomes*. This report uses the PLSS database and the educational longitudinal database (ELD) to examine early leaver learner outcomes for those learners who were enrolled and exited their courses in 2017. Educational transitions of early leavers within FET are explored, as are early leaver outcomes, including substantial employment, in the subsequent 2018 calendar year. Within these two areas of analysis, a range of influencing factors are also considered including the ISCED field of study, programme category, award level, and salary level for those early leavers who obtained employment. Through this study, further explanations as to why learners may exit a programme early can be explored, as can a longer-term trajectory of early leavers' educational and labour market transitions.

Following the implementation of the new SPAs, which cover FET graduate outcomes, as of December 2022 and the new national system targets for FET, there is now a live reporting dashboard on progress made towards new system targets, which now tracks FET graduate outcomes.

The National FET Strategy 2020-24 outlined the strategic priorities and enabling themes in relation to data and evidence-based policy and reporting, and the strategic implementation plan of the FET strategy now incorporates this action. The SOLAS annual report and the annual publication, *This is FET Facts and Figures*, and future thematic publications using national VET system data from PLSS ensure the effectiveness of the policy.

Bodies responsible

- Central Statistics Office (CSO)
- Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS)

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices

Young people (15-29 years old)

Learners with migrant background, including refugees

Learners at risk of early leaving or/and early leavers

Learners with disabilities

Adult learners

Learners from other groups at risk of exclusion (minorities, people with fewer opportunities due to geographical location or social-economic disadvantaged position)

Education professionals

Teachers

Trainers

School leaders

Adult educators

Guidance practitioners

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Other stakeholders

Social partners (employer organisations and trade unions)

Other

Policy makers

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Establishing and developing skills intelligence systems

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Presentation of the programme learner support system \(PLSS\)](#)

[A PLSS data protection statement form \(sample\)](#)

[URL for downloading all reports](#)

Related policy developments

2021 Approved/Agreed

Transforming Learning 2020-24: Ireland's National Further Education and Training Strategy

The FET strategy 2020–24 was developed in consultation with the FET sector and other key stakeholders. Consultation was wide-ranging and included bilateral meetings, regional workshops and a public call for submissions.

 IRELAND

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Completed

Strategic Performance Agreements for FET System National Targets 2022-2024

Each SPA set out plans for the development and innovation of the VET system and include each ETB's contribution to the national FET system targets agreed with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS).

 IRELAND

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ... ” **Cite as**

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). FET graduate tracking and data collection: Ireland. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28298>