

Strategic Performance Agreements for FET System National Targets 2022-2024

POLICY DEVELOPMENT **STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN**  IRELAND

Timeline



ID number 28295

Background

Strategic performance agreements (SPAs) in the further education and training (FET) sector are concluded between SOLAS (the national authority for FET) and education and training boards (ETBs).

Education and training boards (ETBs; in Irish: Bhord Oideachais agus Oiliúna, BOOanna) are statutory FET providers; they manage centres for FET and adult education and training throughout the country. There are 16 ETBs in Ireland. Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) is the national representative association for the ETBs.

Further education and training (FET) is one of the four sectors of the education and training system, and it includes vocational education and training programmes.

Objectives

The SPAs define how ETBs contribute to achieving national performance targets for FET success in 'generating outcomes of employment, progression, active inclusion, lifelong learning, meeting critical skills needs, and new models of delivery' (National FET Strategy 2020-24).

Description

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). Measures and targets can vary by ETB, and take into account their regional characteristics, such as educational attainment, unemployment rates, enterprise base. Every year, the SPAs are reviewed and necessary amendments are agreed.

2018 Approved/Agreed

2019 Implementation

In January 2019, the SPAs were published.

SOLAS-funded FET provision in 2019 amounted to EUR 683 million. This comprised of EUR 430.3 million in Exchequer funding, EUR 249.1 million from the National Training Fund (NTF), and SOLAS income of EUR 3.6 million. Following provision for SOLAS running costs, there was a budget available for distribution of EUR 19.3 million to ETBs, voluntary secondary and community and comprehensive schools (VSCCS) and other FET organisations. In 2019, a capital budget of EUR 12.7 million was available to ETBs to meet carryover capital commitments from 2018 and to fund capital investment projects.

In 2019, SOLAS made EUR 606.6 million available for FET programme provision and it was estimated that 247 855 individual learners commenced a FET programme in 2019. Many participate in FET more than once, and, in this regard, the total number of beneficiaries of FET programmes was estimated at 329 293, which was almost 7% more than the reported number in 2018. ETBs catered for nearly all of the increase in planned beneficiary numbers in 2019.

The services plan provided comprehensive analysis for estimated retention, completion and accreditation rates by programme for the ETBs and other providers for 2019. Analysis was also provided on planned participation rates for the priority groups of the long-term unemployed, refugees, disabled learners and learners in need of literacy and numeracy skills. A new measurement of full-time equivalency (FTE) had been introduced taking account of the number of participation hours required for the completion of each FET programme. It was envisaged that the new measurement, which provided a different lens to view planned provision in the sector, would lead to a more transparent approach in measuring inputs, outputs and outcomes and would, therefore, inform future FET investment decisions.

2020 Implementation

The 2020 FET services plan was published in the shadow of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. While the challenges presented were many, there was confidence that the agile nature as well as the flexible planning and funding mechanisms of FET would leave the sector well-placed to meet them.

2021 Implementation

The process of preparing the SPAs started in 2021, with some delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Intensive consultations took place. SOLAS sought the views of key stakeholders, and internally, consultation was undertaken with the Senior Leadership Team in SOLAS, the Strategic Planning Committee (a sub-committee of the SOLAS Board) and the Board. ETBs were also consulted to ensure that the agreements were co-designed and co-developed in a spirit of mutual respect and partnership. A draft framework was then developed by SOLAS.

2022 Implementation

In 2022, the consultations were concluded. The SPAs were signed between SOLAS and 16 ETBs for the period of 2022-24, within the timeframe of the current FET strategy (2020-24). The SOLAS national system report and individual SPAs were published and came into effect in December 2022.

The SOLAS system report gives an overview of overall context of the national FET and includes a summary of the collective national ambition of the ETBs and SOLAS. The report also defined each of the twelve targets, outlined the process of establishing the SPAs and reflected on the ETBs achievements in 2018-21.

By the end of 2024, Ireland's FET system is expected to achieve the following:

- (a) an over-12-percent increase in sustainable employment outcomes from pre-

pandemic levels, with over 30 000 FET graduates securing sustainable work in 2024;

- (b) an over-10-percent increase in employment outcomes from pre-pandemic levels, with around 20 000 unemployed learners reskilled per year;
- (c) refocused on pathways within FET, expanding learning progression within FET and to higher education by up to 25%, to over 35 000 learners progressing to other courses by 2024, through the unified tertiary system;
- (d) sharply increased certification of transversal skills and widened participation of key target groups by at least 10% on pre-pandemic levels, while adding 10 000 places in support of the Adult literacy for Life (ALL) 10-year strategy;
- (e) increased lifelong learning participation by over 7% beyond pre-COVID levels, and doubling the scale of the Skills to advance workforce upskilling initiative;
- (f) by 15% expanded provision that focuses on critical skills needs and embedding green skill modules across all VET curricula/training courses.

2023 Implementation

In 2023, the annual progress report on the SPAs was published, showing significant growth in learner numbers, to nearly 219 000 learners accessing just over 375,00 places. Overall, one in ten adults in Ireland engages in Further Education and Training (FET). The increase in FET learners and activities included increases in the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), and increase in Skills to Advance, an upskilling initiative for employees. In addition, the FET sector supported more than 40 000 learners from Ukraine. Participation in online learning increased to 31 000 learners, which now includes green skills offerings.

Over 5 000 learners trained in Net Zero Energy Building (NZEB), contributing to the Government's Housing for All Strategy. Over 150 000 learners undertook construction safety training.

For monitoring the SPAs and targets, there is a live data dashboard, with key metrics and progress indicators for monthly reporting. There are also informal dialogues between SOLAS and Education and Training Boards (ETBs) regarding performance.

The other key achievements noted by the 2023 report are that national system targets were exceeded significantly in the key priorities of building skills, inclusion, creating pathways.

The growth in green skills provision was not as strong as the other target, and this continues to be focus for green skills and climate action initiatives to impact the outcomes for FET.

Some target measurements, such as supporting jobs, have a time lag in reporting, as the outcomes are provided by the Central Statistics office and are only counted one year after a learner exits a FET course. The 2023 data on jobs was not available at the time of the publication of the report.

2024 Completed

In October 2024, there was an expression of interest call for peer reviewers for an expert panel for the Strategic Dialogue Processes to inform the next round of the SPAs in alignment with the next FET Strategy for 2025-2029.

By the end of 2024, the Strategic Dialogue processes had been completed, and the SPA cycle concluded at the end of 2024,

2025 Completed

The next national system performance targets aligned to the next national FET strategy 2025-2029 are expected to be published in early 2026.

Bodies responsible

- Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)
- Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS)
- City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb)
- Cork Education and Training Board (CETB)
- Donegal Education and Training Board (DETB)
- Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB)
- Dublin Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB)
- Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB)
- Kerry Education and Training Board (KETB)
- Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB)
- Kilkenny Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB)
- Laois Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB)
- Limerick Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB)
- Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB)
- Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB)
- Mayo Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB)
- Tipperary Education and Training Board (TETB)
- Waterford Wexford Education and Training Board (WWETB)

Target group

Learners

Young people (15-29 years old)

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)

Learners with migrant background, including refugees

Learners at risk of early leaving or/and early leavers

Learners with disabilities

Adult learners

Older workers and employees (55 - 64 years old)

Unemployed and jobseekers

Persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment

Low-skilled/qualified persons

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

Other

Education and training boards (ETBs)

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Coordinating VET and other policies

Optimising VET funding

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Establishing and developing skills intelligence systems

Modernising VET infrastructure

Modernising infrastructure for vocational training

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses

Acquiring key competences

Integrating green transition and sustainability in VET curricula and programmes

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[SOLAS \(2022\). Transforming Learning Strategic Performance Agreements. The FET System 2022-24](#)

[Individual SPAs \(2022-24\) for all ETBs](#)

[Ireland's national skills strategy 2025](#)

[Transforming Learning - National FET Strategy 2020-2024](#)

[Transforming Learning Strategic Performance Agreements: Annual Progress Report 2022](#)

[Transforming Learning Strategic Performance Agreements: Annual Progress Report 2023](#)

[Expression of Interest Call for Peer Reviewers on the Expert Panel for the SOLAS/Education and Training Boards Strategic Dialogue Process](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

Further Education and Training (VET) Funding Model Review

The process of review started in 2019 with the agreement on the guiding principles and approach. An international expert panel was appointed, with an internal funding model review advisory group and data modelling working group established to support the panel's work.

 IRELAND

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Further Education and Training Colleges of the Future (CotF): Capital Call

The National FET Strategy defined that CotFs should have the following characteristics:

 IRELAND

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2024 Completed

Green Skills for Further Education and Training (FET) Roadmap 2021-2030

The policy roadmap 'Green Skills for FET 2021-30' sets a strategic direction for green skills initiatives throughout the Irish FET sector and points to key areas for the FET Sector in the transition to a green economy.

 IRELAND

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2023 Completed

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Strategy 2021-23

DFHERIS funds and creates policy for the higher and further education and research sectors. It also oversees the work of the State agencies and public institutions operating in these areas.

 IRELAND

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

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

2022 Completed

FET graduate tracking and data collection

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

 IRELAND

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2023 Completed

Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025

The 2025 National skills strategy is targeted at ensuring relevance of education and training to the needs of learners, society and the economy. It is based on active involvement of employers and quality teaching and learning, with a perspective of lifelong learning and inclusion.

 IRELAND

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ... ” **Cite as**

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Strategic Performance Agreements for FET System National Targets 2022-2024: 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->

