

# Spotlight on VET IRELAND

Vocational education  
and training systems  
in Europe

2023

## VET in Ireland

Ireland's education and training system is divided into four sectors: primary, secondary, further education and training (FET), and higher education (HE). FET covers EQF levels 1-5 (NFQ levels 1-6) with some higher apprenticeships at EQF Levels 6-8 (NFQ levels 6-10).

SOLAS is the Government agency responsible for funding, planning and coordinating FET provision. The tertiary education system comprises FET and HE under the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), which is responsible for policy, funding and governance of Higher and Further Education. The main providers are 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The national strategy, [Future FET: Transforming Learning 2020-24](#), outlines the vision for the system to 2024 and sets the agenda for the next National Strategy 2025-2029.

FET programmes range from full time and/or flexible or part time provision for apprenticeships, progression to the labour market and to HE, learning in employment, pathways, youth provision, community education, adult literacy for life and agile programmes to meet learner or local or regional community or enterprise needs.

Having undergone several years of reform, FET is making a valuable contribution to a more collaborative and cohesive tertiary education system. A new [National Tertiary Office](#) (NTO) was established in 2023 in a joint initiative between the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and SOLAS. The NTO is tasked with the development of new progressive pathways through FET to HE.

### Apprenticeship

- During 2023, the [National Apprenticeship Office](#), set up in 2022, became well established, further strengthening the partnership between the enterprise and education communities. This office acts as a single point of contact for employers, apprentices and providers in accessing information and guidance on apprenticeship. The range of apprenticeship opportunities has diversified in recent years. There are currently 73 apprenticeships available, with more in development.

### Workforce transformation: learning for employment, employment progression and progression to higher education

- [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. The [PLC programme](#) (EQF levels 4/5) has two overarching aims: to enhance their employment outcomes of learners or to facilitate their progression to Higher Education through dedicated tertiary programmes at EQF level 6/7.
- Specific skills training (SST) courses are designed to meet the needs of industry and business across a range of occupations at EQF levels 2-5 (NFQ levels 3-6).

### Workforce transformation: learning in employment

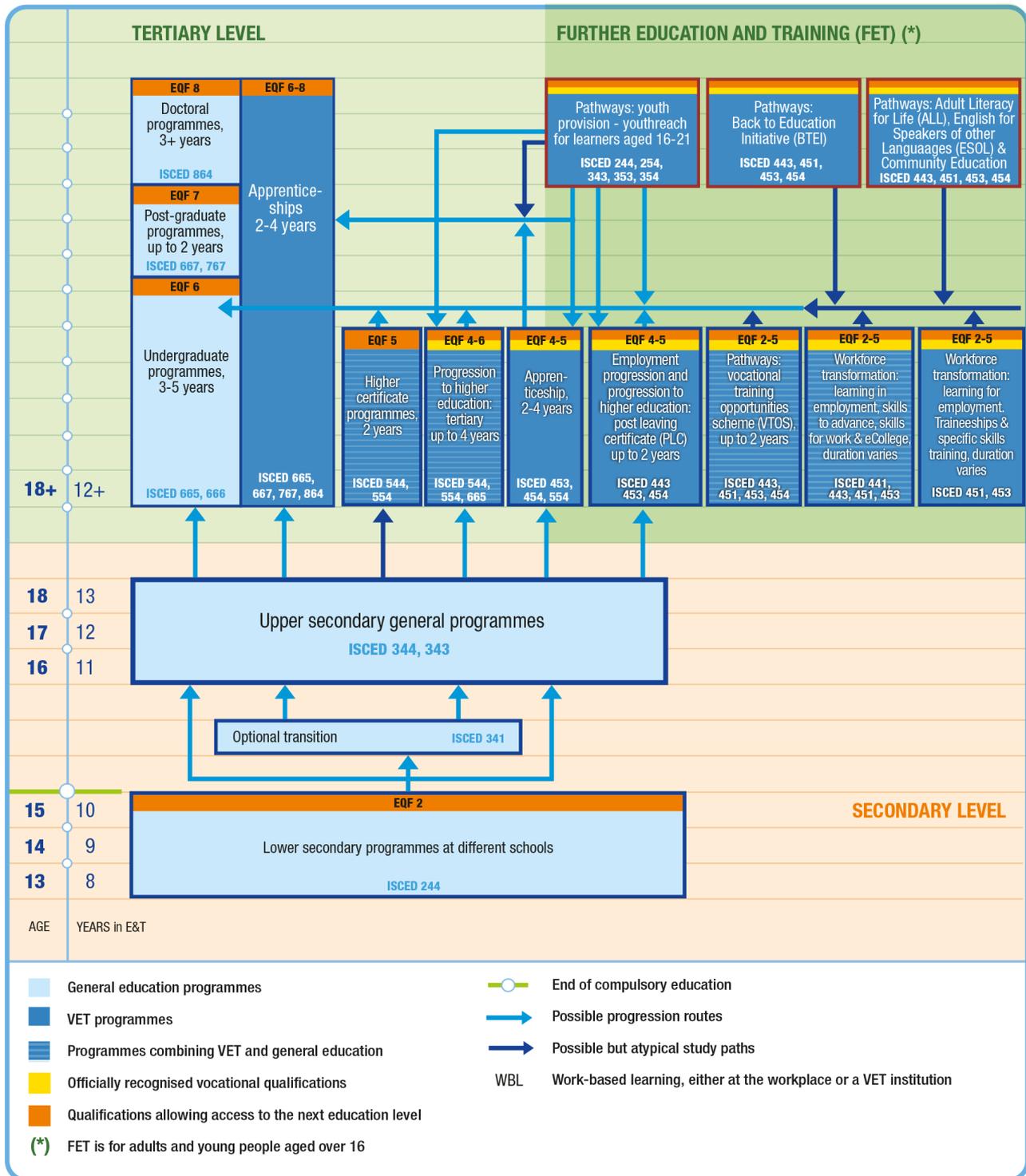
- Courses respond to the specific skills needs of employees and/or the employer or industry who require certified training or education to assist career progression, upskilling and reskilling, such as the Skills to Advance programme. This provision also includes [eCollege](#), a national online learning platform.

### Pathways, including [youth provision/youth reach](#), [community education](#) and [adult literacy for life](#)

- These are courses designed to meet the needs of the most educationally, socially or economically disadvantaged learners and empower individuals and communities to achieve personal, educational, employment or other goals.

**Discretionary** targeted provision to meet the needs of specific cohorts in context.

# VET in Ireland's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop, & Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS). (2023). Vocational education and training in Europe – Ireland: system description. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2024). Vocational education and training in Europe: VET in Europe database – detailed VET system descriptions [Database]. [www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/ireland-u3](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/ireland-u3)

## Distinctive features of VET

VET in Ireland (usually referred to as Further Education and Training - FET) is not 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 (ETBs) and other FET providers, with an extensive reach into and across local communities. FET balances the needs of skills for the economy with the just-as-critical lifelong learning, supporting citizenship and inclusion for individuals, their communities and developing social capital.

The [National Skills Strategy 2025](#) 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.

In 2021 [Adult Literacy for Life Strategy](#) was launched. This is a new 10-year literacy, numeracy and digital skills strategy, which is a key commitment in the governmental programme, a holistic societal approach to unmet needs in literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

The development of flexible and agile qualifications is a priority for the sector, particularly to deliver the Green Skills agenda. To date, twenty-three (23) micro-qualifications have been validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland including: green skills for sustainability; digital skills; robotics; aquafarming; business innovation; market development.

## Challenges and policy responses

Current challenges facing the FET sector include addressing the backlog in craft apprenticeships off the job training phases which was caused by the closure of training centres during the pandemic. This backlog has been amplified because of a huge demand in those apprenticeships to address the current shortage of housing crisis. Additional sectoral resources and supports have been employed to address this challenge. There is also the issue of recruitment of staff into the FET sector with a very high demand for labour and a low unemployment rate. In more general terms, the Irish labour market has a shortage of skills in different sectors. Skill requirements are also changing for roles affected by technological change and the transition to a low carbon economy.

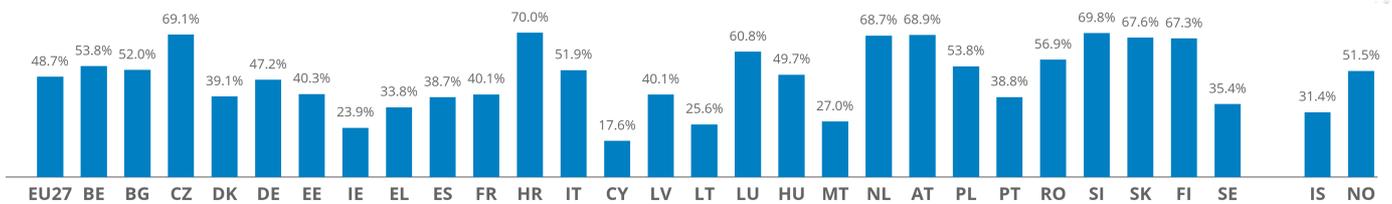
The creation of a unified tertiary system is one of the priorities of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). Crucial to the achievement of this goal is the provision of diverse and progressive pathways for learners, enabling progression across and between different institutions. 2023 saw the piloting of the first joint Tertiary Degrees co-designed and co-delivered by Higher Education Institutions and the Education and Training Boards to provide seamless transitioning pathways from FET to HE.

All key national FET stakeholders, including SOLAS, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and DFHERIS, are in the phased implementation phase of the new outcomes-based FET funding model. The challenge to date has been programme-based rigidity around the deployment of resources and operational regulations. The funding model was reformed to move away from approaches that reinforce programme silos, to reflect the outcomes and performance of ETBs, and to facilitate strategic investment in long-term priorities. The implementation plan will consolidate and streamline the number of FET programmes, and ultimately align the funding with the national system targets.



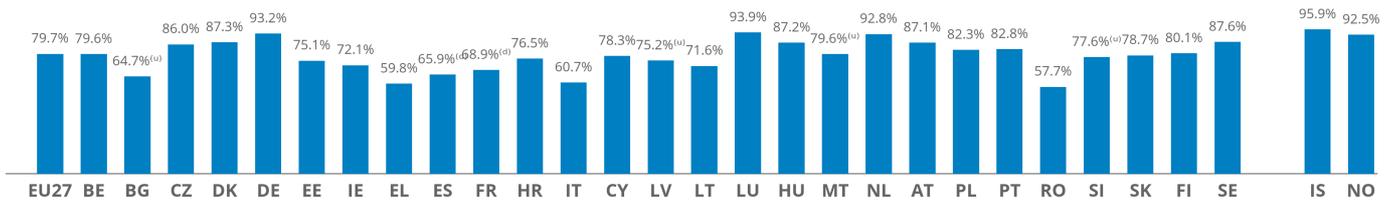
# Education and training in figures

## IVET students as % of all upper secondary students, 2021



[Find out more about this indicator](#)

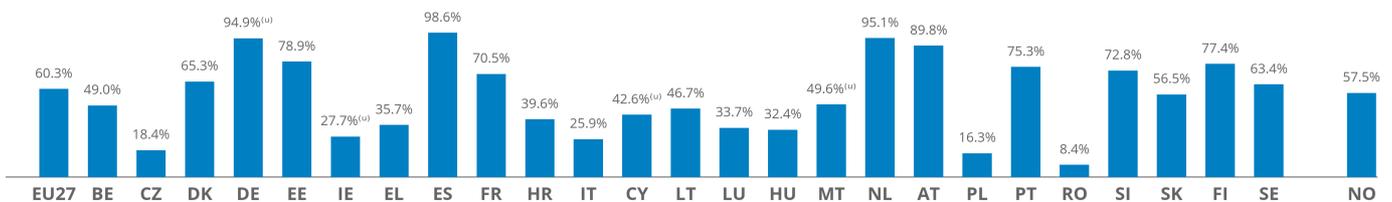
## Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) (%), 2022



Notes: Bulgaria, Latvia, Malta and Slovenia: (u) low reliability, Czechia: (b) break in time series, Spain and France: (d) definition differs

[Find out more about this indicator](#)

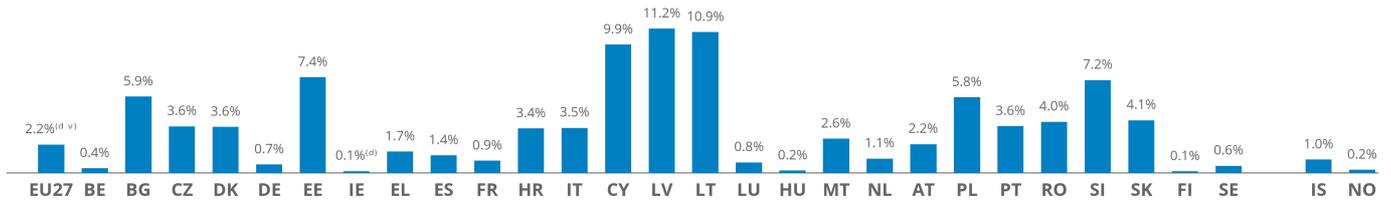
## Recent IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%), 2022



Notes: Germany, Ireland and Cyprus: (u) low reliability

[Find out more about this indicator](#)

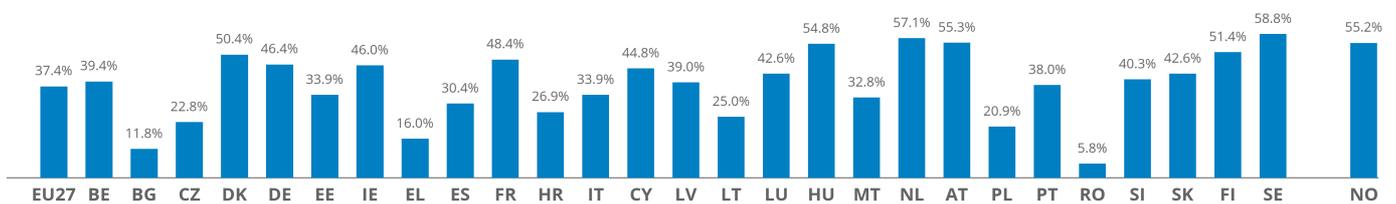
## IVET learners who benefitted from a learning mobility abroad (%), 2021



Notes: EU27: (d) definition differs (v) Cedefop estimate, Ireland: (d) definition differs, Croatia, Cyprus, Netherlands and Slovenia: (z) not applicable

[Find out more about this indicator](#)

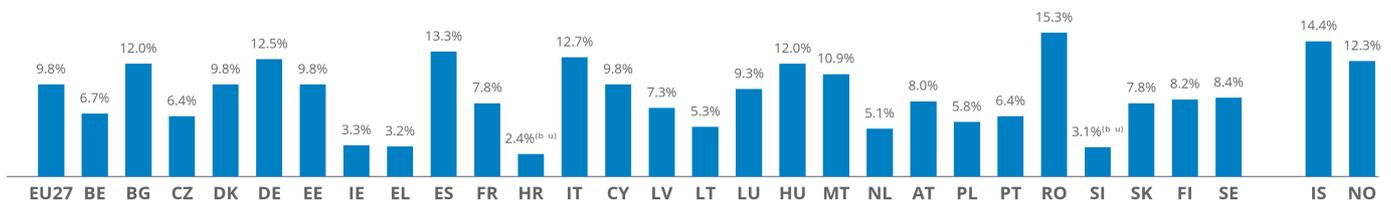
## Adults (25-64 year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%), 2016



Notes: All values: (b) break in time series

[Find out more about this indicator](#)

## Early leavers from education and training (%), 2021



Notes: EU27, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway: (b) break in time series, Croatia and Slovenia: (b) break in time series (u) low reliability

[Find out more about this indicator](#)

Source: [Cedefop's Key indicators on VET](#)



## Further information

- Cedefop and ReferNet. (2023). *Timeline of VET policies: Ireland*.
- European Commission. (2023). *Education and training monitor: Ireland*.
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- Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. (2021). *Statement of Strategy 2021-2023*.

<a href="https://nto.heia.ie">https://nto.heia.ie</a>	National Tertiary Office
<a href="https://www.solas.ie">https://www.solas.ie</a>	SOLAS
<a href="https://www.qqi.ie">https://www.qqi.ie</a>	QQI - Quality and Qualifications Ireland
<a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-higher-education-innovation-and-science">https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-higher-education-innovation-and-science</a>	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
<a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/service/a54e5-find-support-to-train-your-staff-with-regional-skills/">https://www.gov.ie/en/service/a54e5-find-support-to-train-your-staff-with-regional-skills/</a>	Regional Skills
<a href="https://www.etbi.ie">https://www.etbi.ie</a>	Education and Training Boards Ireland
<a href="https://www.solas.ie/refernet/">https://www.solas.ie/refernet/</a>	ReferNet Ireland

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/ireland-u3>

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