

New Prison Education Taskforce: Education, Training and Apprenticeship Opportunities to support Rehabilitation and Post-Release Access to Employment

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 IRELAND

Timeline

2023 Implementation

2024 Implementation

2025 Implementation

ID number 48931

Background

In 2022, the Office of the Inspectorate of Prisons published a report, in partnership with the Department of Education's Inspectorate. This report made recommendations for the Irish Prison Service (IPS) on how to improve work training and education in prisons and was submitted to the Minister for Justice. The Department of Justice's 2023 Justice Plan included an action to establish a taskforce to improve education and upskilling across the criminal justice system. The Prison Education Taskforce was then established in 2023.

Objectives

The objective of the Prison Education Taskforce is to ensure education and upskilling opportunities to support prisoner rehabilitation and employment, post release.

Description

The Prison Education Taskforce is co-chaired by the Minister for Law Reform and the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science. The Taskforce includes representatives from both government departments, the Irish Prison Service, SOLAS (the national agency for Further Education and Training), the National Apprenticeship Office, the Probation Service, the University of Maynooth and former prisoners.

The Taskforce is implementing innovative approaches in prison education, including the piloting a NQF Level 5 (EQF Level 4) qualification in retrofitting, qualifying participants to be employed post release in retrofitting work. The roll out of apprenticeships in Commis Chef and the piloting of a new painting and decorating apprenticeship is also another innovation.

The development of a consistent approach to the use of technology for education in prisons is being led by the Irish Prison Service.

As part of the Taskforce's work, an information day on IVET and CVET opportunities was held within one prison, with other events scheduled in two (2) other prisons in different

locations. In addition, a dedicated literacy programme is also rolled out across seven (7) prison locations as a peer-to-peer literacy ambassador programme by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

2023 Implementation

Publication of the Department of Justice 'Justice Plan 2023', outlining the action to establish a Prison Education Taskforce.

First Meeting of the new Prison Education Taskforce held in May 2023.

First Information day on IVET and CVET opportunities held in November 2023.

2024 Implementation

Piloting of retrofitting course commences in two prisons.

2025 Implementation

The 2025 Programme for Government undertakes to *'Implement an employment strategy for former offenders and support increased access to education and training workshops through the Prison Education Taskforce'*.

The Department of Justice's new strategy 'Building Pathways Together: Criminal Justice Reintegration Through Employment Strategy 2025-2027' outlines the guiding principles of the strategy, one of which is *'Alignment between appropriate education and relevant employment opportunities is vital to ensuring people with convictions are well placed to find employment while filling gaps in the State's employment needs.'* This strategy also references its policy alignment with the ongoing work of the Prison Education Taskforce and the National Skills Strategy.

The Prison Education Taskforce held its sixth meeting in June 2025, co-chaired by the Minister of State with responsibility for Further Education, Apprenticeship, Construction and Climate Skills and the Minister of State with responsibility for International Law, Law Reform and Youth Justice.

Bodies responsible

- Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)
- Department of Justice
- Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS)
- Irish Prison Service
- National Apprenticeship Office (NAO)
- Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
- University of Maynooth
- National Adult Literacy Agency

Target group

Learners

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)

Education professionals

Teachers

Trainers

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Other stakeholders

Social partners (employer organisations and trade unions)
National, regional and local authorities

Other

Department of
Justice

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Coordinating VET and other policies

Optimising VET funding

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Integrating green transition and sustainability in VET curricula and programmes

Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Teachers, trainers and school leaders competences

Supporting teachers and trainers for green transition and sustainability

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Promotion strategies and campaigns for VET and lifelong learning

Providing for individuals' re- and upskilling needs

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Office of the Inspector of Prisons and Department of Education Inspectorate: Report Summary of Inspection of Prison Education and Work Training](#)

[Department of Justice: Justice Plan 2023](#)

[Ministers co-chair Prison Education Taskforce's first meeting](#)

[Pilot scheme to teach prisoners home retrofitting skills](#)

[Here to help - Case study: Pilot of the National Adult Literacy Agency \(NALA\) Peer-to-Peer Literacy Ambassadors' and Tutors' programme in Portlaoise Prison.](#)

[Programme for Government 2025](#)

[Building Pathways Together Criminal Justice Reintegration Through Employment Strategy 2025-2027](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Completed

The Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-25

Ireland's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-25 was launched in 2021 by the Ministers for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Minister of State for Skills and Further Education.

 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

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

“ … ” **Cite as**

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). New Prison Education Taskforce: Education, Training and Apprenticeship Opportunities to support Rehabilitation and Post-Release Access to Employment: 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/48931>