

Learner Support Framework in Further Education And Training (FET) and National Charter for Universal Design

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 IRELAND

Timeline

2024 Implementation 2025 Implementation

ID number 48843

Background

This policy was developed as part of the Fostering Inclusion priority of developing and providing Consistent Learner Supports in Further Education and Training (FET), contained within Future FET: Transforming Learning - The National Further Education and Training Strategy providing Consistent Learner Supports.

The FET Strategy set out and reiterated the sectoral position that relevant supports should be made available to facilitate all learners and fully reflect and take account of their diversity. In effect, the aim is to provide more consistent levels of necessary supports to learners and offer any individual, regardless of their background or formal education level, an opportunity to learn and develop.

Objectives

To adopt a learner-centred ethos and to tailor both learning and supports to meet the needs of learners, with consistent, integrated, and appropriate supports offered to all learners, in all FET settings. Thus, wherever possible the necessary supports should be available independently of the specific FET programme on which the learner is enrolled and engaged. This process can be aided by appropriate IT systems and, in line with the digital transformation and upgrading of infrastructure that is ongoing within the FET system, some of the supports can be IT-based.

Description

The position paper of this policy is underpinned by a Universal Design (UD) approach and aligns with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

The Framework to implement the policy outlines the enhancement of the overall learner experience within FET by:

- (a) develop & standardise supports and apply good practices;
- (b) integrate supports via Universal Design (UD);
- (c) technology to address support needs;
- (d) more consistent & reflective financial supports;

- (e) cross-FET Programme Independent Learner Support Resources;
- (f) ensure the sixteen (16) Education and Training Boards (ETBs) include a budget for consistent learner supports.

The Framework also outlines the distribution of supports as:

- (a) integrated/ mainstreamed supports for all/ the majority of learners - Including: Professional Learning & Development (PL&D) for practitioners, integrated literacy and numeracy, universal design for learning, peer learning and support groups, extracurricular supports, guidance;
- (b) supports for learners with similar needs including group and peer support for learners with disabilities, counselling and mental health supports, literacy, numeracy and digital skills supports;
- (c) individualised and specialist supports for learners with specific needs Including: Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreter, personal assistant, assistive technology, reasonable accommodations in assessment.

The framework also notes a distinction between direct and indirect learner supports:

- (a) direct supports are those provided directly to learners, such as additional literacy and numeracy tuition, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) related supports, digital supports and core digital skills training;
- (b) indirect supports are those provided to FET practitioners to assist them in identifying and addressing their learners' diverse needs.

The framework further supports the areas of learner support identified in Quality Assurance (QA) guidelines as set by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

2024 Implementation

Publication of framework and position paper - August 2024.

2025 Implementation

Reasonable Accommodation - Review of Disability Supports

In February, all Education and Training Boards (ETBs) agreed to review their provision of reasonable accommodation (the legal term for disability supports) in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, using a new toolkit, that had been developed by AHEAD (a charity whose aim is to support the inclusion of disabled people in FET, higher education and graduate employment) in partnership with ETBI (the representative organisation of ETBs). This review began in 2025 and aims to improve the support experience of disabled learners to identify and address gaps in the areas of reasonable accommodations policy, communication of supports, professional development of support staff and the resourcing of services. The development of the toolkit follows earlier research published in 2024, called 'Reasonable Accommodations in FET'. The aim of the research was to gain insight from the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and colleges/centres in their regions on current policies, practices, and challenges regarding the provision of reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities

Universal Design - ALTITUDE - National Charter for Universal Design (UD) in Tertiary Education

Funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the ALTITUDE Project is an extensive cross sectoral collaboration involving six national agencies, fifteen higher education (HE) institutions and six Education and Training Board (ETB) representatives of the Further Education and Training (FET) sector. The vision for the project is to create a tertiary education system where all learners are included and have their needs met through Universal Design (UD).

The project charter recommends key actions to support the implementation of UD collaboratively in Ireland's Tertiary Sector under four key pillars:

- (a) learning, teaching and assessment;
- (b) supports, services and social engagement;
- (c) the physical environment;
- (d) the digital environment.

In 2025, SOLAS, the national agency for Further Education and Training, adopted the Altitude Charter, along with six ETBs.

Bodies responsible

- Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS)
- Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
- Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB)
- City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB)
- Cork Education and Training Board (CETB)
- Donegal Education and Training Board (DETB)
- Dublin Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB)
- Kerry Education and Training Board (KETB)
- Kilkenny Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB)
- Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB)
- Laois Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB)
- Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB)
- Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB)
- Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB)
- Mayo Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB)
- Tipperary Education and Training Board (TETB)
- Waterford Wexford Education and Training Board (WWETB)
- Higher Education Authority (HEA)
- AHEAD - independent non-profit organisation working with and for disabled people to shape inclusive and empowering environments

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)

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)
National, regional and local authorities

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Coordinating VET and other policies
Optimising VET funding
Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET
Further developing national quality assurance systems

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses
Developing and updating learning resources and materials

Teachers, trainers and school leaders competences

Systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuous professional development of school leaders, teachers and trainers

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

[Learner Support in Further Education and Training: Towards a Consistent Learner Experience A Framework Guide](#)

[Learner Support in Further Education and Training: Towards a Consistent Learner Experience Position Paper](#)

[About AHEAD - an independent non-profit organisation working with and for disabled people to shape inclusive and empowering environments](#)

[Reasonable Accommodations in FET Resource Hub](#)

[Reasonable Accommodations in FET Research](#)

[SOLAS Adopts ALTITUDE Charter and Supports Call for Universal Design to be Embedded in Tertiary Education](#)

[ALTITUDE Charter - The National Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education](#)

[Unlocking Inclusion Toolkit](#)

[Altitude - The National Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education - Technical Report](#)

[City of Dublin ETB adopts ALTITUDE Charter](#)

[AHEAD Video: ALTITUDE - the National Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education](#)

[Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB \(DDLETB\) adopts Altitude Charter](#)

[Cork ETB adopts ALTITUDE Charter](#)

[Kildare and Wicklow ETB \(KWETB\) adopts ALTITUDE Charter](#)

[Laois Offaly ETB \(LOETB\) adopts ALTITUDE Charter](#)

[Galway Roscommon ETB \(GRETB\) adopt ALTITUDE Charter](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Completed

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) awarded 2025 UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy for eLearning programme on International Literacy Day

Learn with NALA (LWN)

The LWN programme is offered on a national scale and is free to learners. It offers learners the chance to learn at their own pace, with additional supports such as telephone learning with an individual tutor.

 IRELAND

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Community Education: A Framework for Learning, Providing, Co-ordinating and Funding

Developing the framework was a collective and collaborative process by the whole of the FET sector, focussing on the needs of learners, who were also a key stakeholder and consulted during the process of drafting the framework.

 IRELAND

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Completed

Adult Literacy for Life (ALL): Innovation and Collaboration Fund

The 2023 Innovation and Collaboration Fund was EUR 1 million, with the maximum grant of EUR 50 000.

 IRELAND

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

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

2025 Implementation

QOI and ETBs: Evolving Quality Assurance following Inaugural Review: Quality Dialogue Meetings and Annual Quality Reporting (AQR)

The external review is conducted by review teams. National and international external reviewers are selected for their expertise in one or more specific areas, providing perspectives from education and training, quality assurance, learner voice, community and industry.

 IRELAND

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

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

“ ... ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Learner Support Framework in Further Education And Training (FET) and National Charter for Universal Design: 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/48843>