

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

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 IRELAND

Timeline

2024 **Approved/Agreed**

ID number 48740

Background

Under the key priority Fostering Inclusion, the national Further Education and Training Strategy Future FET: Transforming Learning, Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024, a commitment was made to develop a community education framework by SOLAS, (the national agency for FET, and including Education and Training Boards (ETBs), community education providers, learners and other relevant stakeholders.

The intention of the framework is to ensure a more consistent approach to SOLAS funded community education across the country and allow the unique characteristics of community education to be reflected in how it is supported within FET. At the same time the framework ensures that it meets common FET requirements in terms of gathering basic learner data, linking to learning pathways, and offering consistent learner support.

Objectives

Community education takes a holistic, learner-centred approach and incorporates both formal and informal learning, addressing learners' personal development and building skills while offering educational opportunities through simplified pathways and the possibility of moving forward into the FET system and beyond. Community education fosters social cohesion and active citizenship, playing an important role in supporting a democratic society.

The Framework gives a foundation to help shape how SOLAS and the ETBs fund, coordinate, support, develop and monitor community education.

The National FET Strategy outlined seven (7) core principles underpinning Community Education Framework:

- (a) facilitating diversity of learning and learners;
- (b) ensuring consistency of support for community education;
- (c) embedding technologies to maximise community access;
- (d) delivering quality learning experiences;
- (e) linking to progression pathways within FET and beyond;
- (f) tailoring an approach to data and outcomes to reflect the delivery model;
- (g) working in partnership with ETBs to ensure a strategic approach.

Description

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.

A writing group was set up that included many different stakeholders in the FET Sector. This group was an important space to discuss ideas and challenges and was imperative for shaping the final content.

There was a 12-month development process, comprising four phases:

Phase 1 - Bespoke research on community education,

Phase 2 - Desk-based research,

Phase 3 - Key stakeholder consultation,

Phase 4 - Finalising the framework.

The final published draft of the Community Education Framework outlines how positive changes will be enacted in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector:

How we learn through community education - optimising learner supports, financial aid for costs, digital learning, a collaborative approach and partnership.

How we provide community education - FET pathway courses, listing providers, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to underpin partnerships, accreditation options and professional learning and development of practitioners.

How we co-ordinate community education - capturing the wider benefits of learning, simplified data gathering, alignment with the national ten-year Adult Literacy for Life (All Strategy) and address regional gaps in provision.

How we fund community education - consistent funding approaches, national funding, staffing and resources and cross-department funding.

The framework includes 24 recommended actions to implement for the above areas.

2024 Approved/Agreed

The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science launched the Community Education Framework in July 2024.

SOLAS, the national agency for funding and co-ordinating Further Education and Training (FET) established a National Implementation Steering Group to manage the implementation of the actions identified in the Community Education Framework under the four areas: Learn, Provide, Co-ordinate and Fund.

The Steering Group comprises representatives from key stakeholder groups including ETBs, ETBI, community education providers, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Community Education Facilitators Association (CEFA), POBAL and AONTAS.

The Steering Group met twice in 2024 focussing on initial actions aiming to implement the recommendations in the Community Education Framework.

Action 4

The needs of community education providers and learners are considered as part of the national Digital Learning Framework for FET, which includes digital skills and blended learning and addressing the digital divide.

Action 6

Development of local and regional engagement strategy to enhance collaboration and partnership, including mapping stakeholders.

Action 13

Regular training needs analysis to identify targeted professional learning and development (PLD) initiatives.

Action 18

Developing a more effective and collaborative community education response to unmet literacy needs with Regional Literacy Co-ordinators under the Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) strategy.

Bodies responsible

- Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS)
- Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)
- Department of Rural and Community Development
- Pobal
- 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)
- Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB)
- Kilkenny Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB)
- Laois Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB)
- 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)
- Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
- Adult Learning Association (AONTAS)
- Community Education Facilitators' Association (CEFA)

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

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

Other

Community
organisations

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 infrastructure

Improving digital infrastructure of VET provision

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses
Using learning-outcome-based approaches and modularisation
Diversifying modes of learning: face-to-face, digital and/or blended learning;
adaptable/flexible training formats
Developing and updating learning resources and materials
Acquiring key competences

Transparency and portability of VET skills and qualifications

Learners' possibilities of accumulation, validation and recognition of learning outcomes
acquired non-formally and informally

Teachers, trainers and school leaders competences

Systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuous professional
development of school leaders, teachers and trainers
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
Permeability between IVET and CVET and general and vocational pathways, academic and
professional higher education
Financial and non-financial incentives to learners, providers and companies
Providing for individuals' re- and upskilling needs
Lifelong guidance
Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science \(DFHERIS\) launches Community Education Framework](#)

[The Community Education Framework publication](#)

Related policy developments

2024 **Design**

Learner Support in Further Education And Training (FET): Towards a Consistent Learner Experience

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:

 IRELAND

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2023 **Implementation**

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

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.

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Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ... ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). Community Education: A Framework for Learning, Providing, Co-ordinating and Funding: Ireland. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2024 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/48740>