



Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015–19

IRELAND



Cedefop monitoring of vocational education and training
policies and systems

Progress towards the medium-term deliverables
of the Riga conclusions

Country chapter

IRELAND

Developments in vocational education and training policy
in 2015-19

Cedefop (2020). *Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015-19: Ireland*. Cedefop monitoring and analysis of VET policies.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/developments-vocational-education-and-training-policy-2015-19-ireland>

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This report was produced by Cedefop and reflects contributions from Cedefop's VET policy and systems team, and Cedefop experts working on common European tools and principles for education and training, and statistics. It is based on detailed information on VET policy implementation submitted by Cedefop's European network of expertise on VET (ReferNet) and other sources.

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Introduction

In June 2015, the ministers in charge of vocational education and training in the EU Member States, the candidate countries and the European Economic Area countries, convened in Riga, agreed on objectives for vocational education and training (VET) policies for 2015-20⁽¹⁾.

Cedefop has been entrusted with monitoring the countries' policies implemented towards reaching these objectives.

This country chapter is part of the monitoring process. It was drafted based on input from the national ReferNet team. It presents an overview of the major policy developments that have taken place in the country in 2015-19, in the areas covered by the Riga medium-term deliverables (MTDs).

The country chapter is structured as follows:

- (a) the introductory section Aspects of vocational education and training context in 2015 briefly sketches the VET context in the country in 2015, highlighting a few figures and some major policy initiatives that were just being adopted or started at that time. This introductory section is targeted at setting a baseline to put in perspective the policy choices and developments that have taken place since the beginning of the Riga cycle;
- (b) five thematic chapters then follow, devoted to the five respective MTDs outlined in the Riga conclusions. Each thematic chapter also begins with a 2015 baseline, more specifically addressing the MTD-related topics. The baseline is followed by the presentation of the major policy developments in the MTD since 2015;
- (c) the country chapter ends with a conclusion summarising the main lines of the 2015-19 policy developments and highlighting possible priorities for the future.

This country chapter is part of the information which the European Commission used to prepare the European Semester exercises⁽²⁾ in 2017-19. The chapter also informs the work of Cedefop and the European Training

(1) *Riga conclusions 2015 on a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015-20, as a result of the review of short-term deliverables defined in the 2010 Bruges communiqué:*

https://www.izm.gov.lv/images/RigaConclusions_2015.pdf

(2) European Semester: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester_en

Foundation (ETF) in preparing a joint monitoring report on the implementation of the Riga conclusions. Both the joint report and the country chapter are aimed at informing the work of EU Member States' Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVTS) and Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT) on taking stock of the outcomes of the Riga conclusions and preparing the next steps for the EU VET policy for the next few years.

Aspects of vocational education and training context in 2015

Vocational education and training (VET) in Ireland is mostly offered at post-secondary non-tertiary level (further education and training, FET) and, since 2016, at third level. It is not available to students within the formal education system at upper secondary level (leaving certificate vocational programme (LCVP) and leaving certificate applied (LCA)) (Burke et al., 2016a, p. 20-21). Three quarters of upper secondary graduates continue their studies (at either ISCED 4 or 5). Ireland does not separate IVET from CVET and incorporates VET along with adult education and training, up to EQF Level 5, as further education and training (FET). Nonetheless, since 2016, the formal apprenticeship system was expanded to include an ever growing number of programmes at tertiary level (ISCED 6-8). The employment rate of recent upper secondary graduates is low: 56.8 % in 2014 compared to 70.8 % in the EU (European Commission, 2015). Adult participation in lifelong learning is also below the EU average at 6.5% in 2015, compared to 10.7% in the EU (Table 1).

At the beginning of the reporting period, VET in the country was focused on better addressing labour market needs, particularly for reskilling and upskilling the labour force. Reform of further education and training, which began in 2013, continued. A FET authority, SOLAS, had been set up in 2013. A further education and training (FET) strategy for 2014-19 was adopted in 2014, targeted at ensuring responsiveness, inclusiveness and labour market relevance of FET. A new Apprenticeship Council was also established in 2014, aiming to extend apprenticeship to those economic sectors where it was not yet in use.

Table 1. Framework data: score on VET indicators in Ireland and in the EU: 2010-15

Indicator label	2010		2015(*)			Trend in 2011-15 (per year)		
	IE f	EU f	Yr	IE f	EU f	Range	IE	EU
Access, attractiveness and flexibility								
IVET students as % of all upper secondary students	A	A	'14	0.0 ^b _z	48.0 ^b _{E1}			
IVET work-based students as % of all upper secondary IVET	A	A	'14		34.0 ^b _{E2}			
IVET students with direct access to tertiary education as % of all upper secondary IVET			'14		69.2 ^{E3}			
Employees participating in CVT courses (%)		38.0 ^e	'10		38.0 ^e			
Employees participating in on-the-job training (%)		20.0 ^e	'10		20.0 ^e			
Adults in lifelong learning (%)	7.0		'15	6.5	10.7 ^b	'13-'15	↘ -0.6	→ 0.0
Enterprises providing training (%)		66.0 ^e	'10		66.0 ^e			
Female IVET students as % of all female upper secondary students	A	A	'14	0.0 ^b _z	42.7 ^b _{E1}	'13-'14	▪ -2.0	▪ -1.0
Employees of small firms participating in CVT courses (%)		25.0 ^e	'10		25.0 ^e			
Young VET graduates in further education and training (%)			'15	24.1 ^b	33.0 ^b	'14-'15	▪ -2.1	▪ -0.3
Older adults in lifelong learning (%)	3.9	5.3	'15	3.1	6.9	'10-'15	↘ -0.1	↗ 0.4
Low-educated adults in lifelong learning (%)	2.8		'15	2.4 ^C	4.3 ^b _C	'13-'15	↘ -0.5	↘ -0.1
Unemployed adults in lifelong learning (%)	7.4		'15	7.4	9.5 ^b	'13-'15	↗ 0.2	↘ -0.4
Individuals who wanted to participate in training but did not (%)	55.1 ^B	9.5 ^e _B	'11	55.1	9.5 ^e			
Job-related non-formal education and training (%)	86.6 ^B	80.2 ^e _B	'11	86.6	80.2 ^e			
Skill development and labour market relevance								
IVET public expenditure (% of GDP)			'13	0.39 ^b	0.56 ^b _{E4}			
IVET public expenditure per student (1000 PPS units)			'13		6.4 ^b _{E5}			
Enterprise expenditure on CVT courses as % of total labour cost		0.8 ^e	'10		0.8 ^e			
Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET			'14		1.0 ^b _{E6}			
STEM graduates from upper secondary IVET (% of total)	A	A	'14		30.0 ^b _{E7}			
Short-cycle VET graduates as % of first time tertiary education graduates			'14		9.3 ^{E8}			
Innovative enterprises with supportive training practices (%)		41.5 ^{E9}	'12		41.6 ^{E9}			
Employment rate for IVET graduates (20- to 34- year-olds)			'15	70.5 ^b	77.2 ^b	'14-'15	▪ 0.9	▪ 0.3
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over general stream)			'15	1.3 ^b	5.3 ^b	'14-'15	▪ -1.1	▪ -1.0

Indicator label	2010		2015(*)			Trend in 2011-15 (per year)		
	IE f	EU f	Yr	IE f	EU f	Range	IE	EU
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over low-educated)			'15	27.6 b	23.7 b	'14-'15	▪ -3.9	▪ -0.1
Workers helped to improve their work by training (%)			'15	91.1	83.7			
Workers with skills matched to their duties (%)	55.4	55.2	'15	54.9	57.3	'10-'15	▪ -0.1	▪ 0.4
Overall transitions and labour market trends								
Early leavers from education and training (%)	11.5	13.9	'15	6.9 C	11.0 C	'10-'15	↘ -1.0	↘ -0.6
30-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	50.1	33.8	'15	52.3 C	38.7 C	'10-'15	↗ 0.6	↗ 1.0
NEET rate for 18-to-24-year-olds (%)	24.1	16.6	'15	18.5	15.8	'10-'15	↘ -1.3	↘ -0.1
Unemployment rate for 20- to 34-year-olds (%)	17.5	13.1	'15	12.1	12.9	'10-'15	↘ -1.2	↗ 0.1
Employment rate of recent graduates (%)	71.0	77.4	'15	75.3 C	76.9 C	'10-'15	↗ 1.0	↘ -0.2
Adults with lower level of educational attainment (%)	27.2	27.3	'15	20.2 C	23.5 C	'10-'15	↘ -1.5	↘ -0.8
Employment rate for 20- to 64-year-olds (%)	64.6	68.6	'15	68.7	70.0	'10-'15	↗ 0.9	↗ 0.3
Employment rate for 20- to 64-year-olds with lower level of educational attainment (%)	46.7	53.4	'15	48.1 C	52.6 C	'10-'15	↗ 0.4	↘ -0.2
Medium/high-qualified employment in 2020 (% of total)			'16	86.7 D	82.8 D			

(*) The data in this column are the data available in 2016. Where 2015 data were not available, data from previous years were used.

(A) UOE (UNESCO, OECD, Eurostat) back reconstruction of 2010 values based on ISCED 2011 (international standard classification of education) not yet available;

(B) AES 2011, used as proxy for 2010 baseline;

(C) 2014 b flags in Eurostat online tables ignored on the basis of other relevant Eurostat metadata;

(D) Forecast made in 2016;

(E1) Based on 28 countries; partial information for NL;

(E2) Based on 25 countries (missing: ES, PL, RO); partial information for NL;

(E3) Based on 27 countries (missing: NL); partial information for EL, IT;

(E4) Based on 19 countries (missing: BE, DK, IE, EL, FR, HR, IT, PT, SK);

(E5) Based on 21 countries (missing: DK, IE, EL, FR, HR, IT, PT);

(E6) Partial information for NL;

(E7) Based on 25 countries (missing: HR, IT, UK);

(E8) Based on 23 countries (missing: BE, IE, FR, CY, UK);

(E9) Based on 22 countries (missing: DE, IE, EL, NL, SI, UK);

(b) Break after 2010, therefore baseline data not included;

(u) Eurostat: 'low reliability';

(z) Eurostat: 'not applicable';

(e) Eurostat: 'estimated'.

NB: EU refers to EU-28, unless otherwise specified. Arrows ↗ or ↘ signal a positive or negative trend based on more than two data points and of magnitude 0.1 per year or more. Trends based on more than two data points but of smaller magnitude are indicated by →; trends based on two points only are marked ▪. Trends are estimated by means of regression models.

Source: Cedefop (2017a), page 53.

CHAPTER 1.

MTD 1 – All forms of work based learning with special attention to apprenticeships

1.1. Baseline 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, initial VET in Ireland included a variety of school-based training and apprenticeships. The apprenticeship⁽³⁾ system in Ireland has a long tradition and was generally well regarded. Apprentices signed an employment contract with the employer and had the legal status of an employee. Moreover, apprentices and their employers signed a SOLAS⁽⁴⁾ apprenticeship registration form, agreeing thereby to accept the Code of Practice⁽⁵⁾. These programmes were offered in a limited number of trades (27 in total), with the largest number of apprentices registered in trades related to the construction sector (ETUC, 2016). The main VET providers were 16 education and training boards (ETBs) spread across the country (Cedefop, 2014).

Just before the reporting period, the apprenticeship system undertook a major reform in Ireland. The National Apprenticeship Review Committee report (2013) provided recommendations for the national apprenticeship system and in 2014 a follow up apprenticeship implementation plan was published, foreseeing among others the setting up of an apprenticeship council to review the existing apprenticeship system. The council involved representatives from employers and employee organisation as well as from education and training bodies. One of the aims of the 2014-19 Further Education and Training Strategy was to develop a new apprenticeship system and to ensure VET relevance and quality through coordinated cooperation. The Apprenticeship Council cooperated with the social partners, further education and training bodies and the Department of Education and Skills and they proposed 25 new apprenticeship programmes in fields such as financial services, high-tech manufacturing, hospitality and transport in mid-2015.

(3) Apprenticeship programmes were regulated by the following Acts: [Industrial Training Act \(1967\)](#), [Labour Services Act \(1987\)](#), [Labour Services Act Apprenticeship Rules \(1997\)](#)

(4) SOLAS is the Further Education and Training Authority in Ireland.

(5) See Cedefop European database on apprenticeship schemes. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/apprenticeship-schemes/country-fiches/ireland>

1.2. Policy priorities for 2016-20

Ireland assigns high priority to policy developments related to work-based learning and apprenticeship. The country's priorities in this area for 2016-20, as set by the Director General for Vocational Education and Training, are to:

- (a) continue implementing the National skills strategy (NSS) 2025, and reform the national apprenticeship programme;
- (b) develop an employee development framework supported by further education and training, and revise structures to build employer engagement with education and training providers.

1.3. Main actions in 2015-19

1.3.1. The 2016-20 Action plan for education and the 2016-20 Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship

The 2016-19 Action plan for education was published in September 2016 and was followed by the 2016-20 Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship in Ireland. The latter focuses on the actions required to achieve some of the goals set out in the action plan for education. The actions outlined in these plans are funded through a variety of sources, depending on the programme; these include the National Training Fund, the Exchequer, and a combination of the National Training Fund and employee and employer contribution. The plans aim to support Ireland's ambition to increase work-based learning significantly as part of apprenticeship and traineeship programmes over the coming five years.

The plans aim to increase until 2020 the number of apprenticeship and traineeship schemes from 27 to 100, and the number of apprentice learners from 8 000 to 50 000. Networks of employers are being set up to secure employer engagement within the apprenticeship and traineeship routes by taking part in identifying training needs and designing training programmes. New apprenticeship programmes have been introduced in new sectors where skills are needed, such as accounting, financial services, and IT. These programmes last for two to four years and are offered at EQF level 4-7. By August 2018, there were 48 apprenticeship programmes (many at tertiary level), with several others being proposed and/or developed. As a result, for the first time, apprenticeships are available at graduate level in Ireland. Each new apprenticeship programme requires an industrial training order which needs to be submitted for legislation by the Department of Education and Skills. SOLAS, in cooperation with several stakeholders, is in charge of preparing those industrial training orders. In 2016,

SOLAS made six industrial training orders ⁽⁶⁾ for apprenticeships to be developed for sectors that previously did not have statutory apprenticeship activities; new apprenticeships in the following sectors were proposed: accountancy, bakery, culinary, financial services, heavy goods and insurance.

By early 2019, there were 45 apprenticeship programmes available, up from the initial 27 programmes that existed prior to expansion of the apprenticeship system. The total number of learners on apprenticeship programmes grew in both 2017 and 2018, with over 5 600 new apprentices registered in 2018, up from over 4 800 the preceding year. Most of the increase continues to be in the pre-2016 apprenticeship programmes due to the strong performance of the construction sector in Ireland over recent years. Nonetheless, the numbers on new apprenticeship programmes continue to grow, reaching 590 learners by the end of 2018. New apprenticeships include laboratory analyst and technician, polymer processing technologist, accounting technician, ICT network technician, and logistics associate. In addition, there are a further 24 programmes in development where the occupation profile has been approved by the Apprenticeship Council but validation and quality assurance processes are yet to be completed. Examples of new apprenticeships in development include advanced quantity surveyor, baker, bar manager, CGI technical artists (animation, games), HGV driver, and recruitment executive.

The traineeship model has been modified and expanded to new sectors and occupations. In the past, traineeships were primarily available only to unemployed people. However, they are now open to a wider range of participants, including school leavers and the employed. The new traineeships must comprised at least 30% on-the-job training, lead to awards at levels 4-6 on the NFQ (EQF 3-5), and range in duration between six months and two years. In 2018, a number of new traineeships continued to be developed, based on the needs identified in collaboration with industry representatives and on local requirements. The vast majority of participants on traineeship programmes continue to be unemployed: 97% of traineeship participants in 2018 were unemployed and 73% were aged 25 years or older. There were 65 traineeship programmes available by the end of 2018 but, as traineeship programmes are designed to meet local needs, not all traineeships are available in each education and training board (ETB). Each ETB may customise and adapt an existing traineeship which means that there is a degree of divergence across providers in the traineeships for a particular occupation.

⁽⁶⁾ See SOLAS Annual report 2016:

<http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/SOLAS%20Annual%20Report%202016.pdf>

1.3.2. The 2025 National skills strategy

Ireland's National skills strategy 2025 ⁽⁷⁾ was published in early 2016. It 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. The strategy points to the need for employers – especially SMEs – to provide work placement opportunities for students.

1.3.3. Promoting apprenticeship in the construction sector

At the beginning of 2016, the Construction Industry Federation launched a new website to promote apprenticeships and careers in the construction sector. Employers have the opportunity to publish there their apprenticeship vacancies to potential candidates, and candidates can publish their curriculum vitae.

⁽⁷⁾ https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf

CHAPTER 2.

MTD 2 – Quality assurance mechanisms in line with EQAVET and continuous information and feedback loops to IVET and CVET

2.1. **Baseline 2015**

A quality assurance national reference point (QANRP) has been in place since 2008. It assures quality, monitors effectiveness of providers, and reviews their quality assurance procedures. It covers initial vocational education and training (IVET), continuing vocational education and training (CVET)/adult learning and non-formal learning. At the beginning of the reporting period a national quality assurance approach has been developed and there was a methodology for internal and external evaluation. Quality standards for VET providers were used as a condition for accreditation and funding.

Data on labour market outcomes for learners in Ireland's further education and training system (including VET) were collected but were often fragmented and there was no systematic method for gathering data across the VET sector. As part of the reorganisation of FET (including VET), SOLAS has established the programme and learner support system (PLSS), which would gather learner data from the time the learner first engages with the FET sector. Part of the data collection would include monitoring learners' destinations on leaving FET. Labour market outcomes (employment, unemployment or inactivity) would be a key measure in evaluating training programmes designed for labour market entry.

At the beginning of the reporting period the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in SOLAS, produced most of the data on labour market's intelligence such as vacancy statistics and intelligence, employer's surveys, sectoral studies and occupational forecasts (EEPO, 2015). It produced a National Skills Bulletin providing an annual overview of the situation and trends of the Irish labour market. Since 2010 SLMRU, took over the task of producing the occupational forecast from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). These forecasts were disseminated directly to all government departments, universities and ETBs and were a key artefact in the activities of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), which had an important role in shaping government policies in related issues. The occupational forecast data and other occupational information were also available via an [online tool](#).

2.2. Quality assurance mechanisms in line with EQAVET ⁽⁸⁾ in 2015-19

Ireland attached high priority to policy developments related to quality assurance. For 2016-20, the country's priorities in this matter, as set by the Director General for Vocational Education and Training, are to:

- (a) ensure that all education and training boards have established comprehensive quality assurance procedures;
- (b) ensure that the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures has been externally evaluated.

In January 2019, the strategic performance agreements between SOLAS and each of the 16 education and training boards (ETB) were published. Each agreement outlines the context and priorities for each ETB for the period 2018-20, with an emphasis on the contribution of the ETB in achieving the key national further education and training (FET) sector targets ⁽⁹⁾. Targets and metrics vary by ETB, depending on regional characteristics (age, education attainment profile, unemployment rates, enterprise base). It is intended that a review process will be carried out each year incorporating any necessary and agreed amendments.

In addition, various FET programmes (some of which include VET) have undergone (or are currently undergoing) external evaluation. For example, in 2017, the post leaving certificate (PLC) programme underwent an evaluation by Ireland's Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). Based on the recommendations arising from the evaluation, SOLAS established the PLC Programme Improvement Advisory Committee to develop an improvement plan.

Actions to be implemented under this plan include:

- (a) a readjustment of the balance between PLC programmes that aim to train learners in job or sector specific fields (e.g. hairdressing), PLC programmes with a focus on transition entry to third level education (e.g. art) and PLC programmes that aim to provide learners with the

⁽⁸⁾ EQAVET stands for European quality assurance in vocational education and training; *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training*: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2009.155.01.0001.01.ENG

⁽⁹⁾ Targets are articulated in documents such as the National skills strategy 2025 and the Further education and training (FET) strategy 2014-19.

prerequisites to enter apprenticeship training. The readjustment is determined by SOLAS in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills and the education and training boards (ETBs) as part of the annual service planning process;

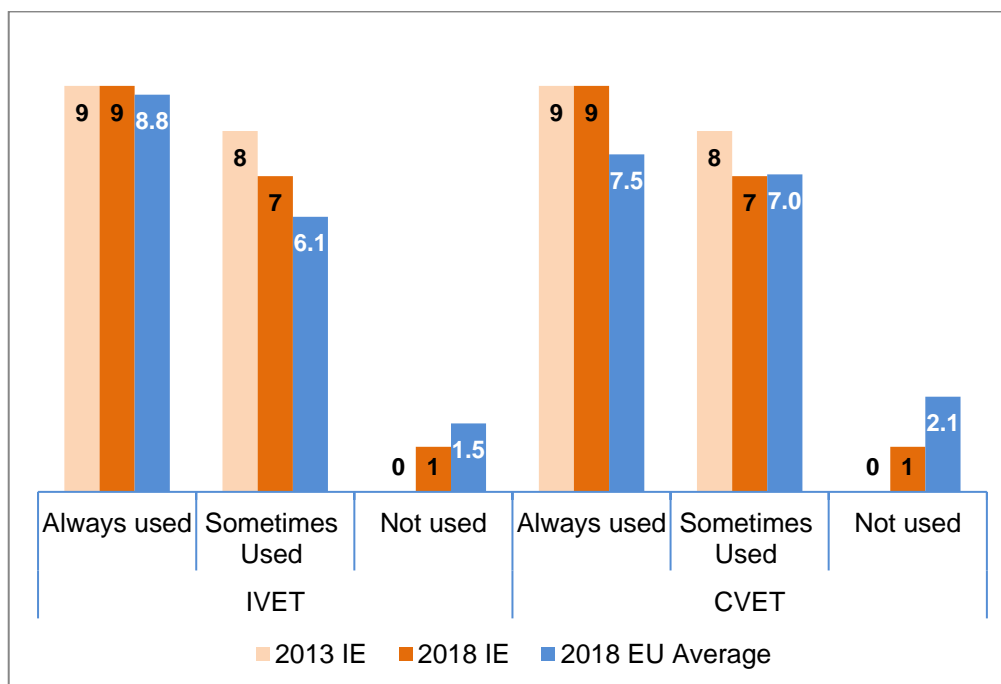
- (b) submission of a labour market justification for PLC programmes to SOLAS every three years for review. The first submission commenced in 2018.

Other FET programmes are also currently being evaluated. These include the *Youthreach* programme (education for early school leavers) and Vocational training opportunities scheme (VTOS). The findings are expected to be published in the second and fourth quarters of 2019 respectively.

The QANRP has been using *Erasmus+* funding to develop self-evaluation criteria and procedures to strengthen the processes of continuous improvement for VET providers and embed EQAVET indicators in the national context.

The situation concerning the systematic use of EQAVET indicators to monitor the VET system ('always used' item in Figure 1) has remained unchanged compared to 2013. Ireland was above the EU average in IVET and CVET in 2018. All EQAVET indicators are used apart from the success rate of disadvantaged groups in VET programmes in IVET and CVET. These include the share of providers applying internal quality assurance systems and on mechanisms to identify training needs at the workplace. Data on destination of VET learners upon completion of their training and on the utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace are only sometimes used, due to data protection restrictions. However, given the increasing emphasis placed on the labour market relevance of further education and training programmes (including VET programmes) since the recession, a focus on course outcomes, particularly in relation to employment or progression in the education and training system is growing in importance: in 2017 a pilot study (unpublished) was completed on behalf of SOLAS which sought to establish outcomes of some VET course participants. In 2018-19, SOLAS formally undertook a wider ranging study of learner outcomes.

Figure 1. Use of EQAVET indicators



NB: Of the 17 indicators suggested by the 2009 EQAVET recommendation, nine were 'always used' in IVET in 2013 and 2018 in Ireland, compared to 8.8 in the EU on average in 2018.

EU average was calculated based on available information for 31 out of 35 VET systems.

Source: Cedefop calculations based on EQAVET Secretariat surveys for 2013 and 2018 data.

2.3. Continuous information and feedback loops in IVET and CVET in 2015-19

Ireland attaches a high priority to continuous information and feedback loops in VET. The country's priority in this matter for 2016-20, as set by the Director General for Vocational Education and Training, is that education and training boards use data on outcomes to monitor and plan their provision.

Following the 2015 agreement on a data-sharing protocol between the Department of Social Protection and SOLAS, the latter has been working in the reporting period to establish a data infrastructure to support VET provision⁽¹⁰⁾ and policy. The strategy also includes undertaking skills needs research. Part of the work carried out to fulfil this function included the PLSS programme, a joint project between SOLAS and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), the

⁽¹⁰⁾ Ireland does not distinguish between initial and continuing VET, so any data infrastructure applies to both types. It also applies to the broader further education and training sector (general learning, adult literacy etc.).

representative association of the 16 education and training boards in Ireland. PLSS provides a complete picture of total enrolments, completers (along with certification, if any) and, eventually, outcomes (employment, further studies) of learners undertaking almost all types of Government-funded FET. Data were processed and analysed by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit in SOLAS to show the type of FET (including VET) programmes which are best suited to different outcomes. By April 2017, all ETBs were using PLSS for at least some of their courses to process learner course applications and enrolments (except apprentices).

Towards the end of 2017, SOLAS, through the recently formed (2017) Data Analytics Unit in collaboration with Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, took steps to continue work, initially completed on a pilot basis in 2017 within the central statistics office (Ireland's National Statistics Institute). The aim of this project is to link education and training data with other administrative datasets in Ireland (including unemployment benefit/allowance claims, other education/training enrolments, employment data) to establish the learner outcomes associated with course participation in selected areas of the FET sector. SOLAS analysed the data in 2018 but data had not been made publicly available by the time this report was written.

To take on board skills needs at regional level, the Department of Education and Skills set up and funded nine regional skills fora in May 2016. The fora are part of the national skills strategy (Section 1.3.2). Their main purpose is to facilitate cooperation and engagement between employers and education and training providers to make sure that the content of programmes is aligned to labour market needs. Each forum is guided by a steering group and a manager who liaise with employers and education/training providers. As stipulated in the national skills strategy, a National Skills Council was launched in April 2017 and is chaired by the minister of education and skills. It oversees and advises on identified skills needs and how to ensure delivery of the corresponding skills.

In addition, the Skills for growth initiative was launched in December 2017 by Enterprise Ireland ⁽¹¹⁾ and the Department of Education and Skills to all regions. In 2018 additional partners were brought on board. These partners include employer engagement officers working for other Government agencies, including the Department of Employment and Social Protection and Údarás na Gaeltachta, the regional authority responsible for the economic, social and cultural development of Ireland's Irish-speaking regions). The inclusion of other

⁽¹¹⁾ Enterprise Ireland is the government organisation responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets.

government agencies ensures that, at government level, a comprehensive and coherent picture can be gained for skills needs. The initiative ⁽¹²⁾ guides SME representatives to think strategically about their current and future skills needs; it also introduces them to tools and questionnaires which help them identify skills needs, skills shortages and reasons for the skills needs arising. Once skill needs have been identified, Regional Skills Fora links companies with the education and training providers best suited to responding to their skills needs. All data collected in this capacity is collated by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit in SOLAS and used in the identification of skills shortages across Ireland.

⁽¹²⁾ See the [press release](#) of the Department of Education and Skills, 27.4.2017.

CHAPTER 3.

MTD 3 – Access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible/permeable systems, guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning

3.1. **Baseline 2015**

At the beginning of the reporting period the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014-19 aimed to encourage learners into further education and training (FET, post-secondary non-tertiary level), which was where most VET occurs (Cedefop ReferNet Ireland, 2014, p. 7). Two core components of the FET system were Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) and apprenticeship training. It was estimated that almost 25% of those who completed upper secondary enrolled to FET. Learners who obtained awards (i.e. qualifications) on completing courses within the FET sector were able to access third level education. In reality, however, the number of learners progressing to third level from the FET sector was comparatively small ⁽¹³⁾.

The NFQ was officially launched in 2003 covering all levels of Ireland's education and training system, including FET and higher education and had reached an advanced operational stage by 2015. It contained ten levels, was based on learning outcomes and was referenced to the EQF in 2009. In 2012, the Government established Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) as a new integrated agency, replacing the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). Among the main tasks of QQI are maintenance, development and review of the Irish national framework of qualifications (NQF).

Although the need for a single national strategy on the recognition of prior learning had been formally acknowledged such a strategy was not in place by 2015 (QQI, 2013). A framework of principles and guidelines for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) was designed in 2005. Validation could lead to exemptions and awards of (partial) qualifications; the same qualifications as those awarded

⁽¹³⁾ In 2013, approximately 18% of all those who completed full awards in the FET sector applied to study at third level.

through formal education and training. The inaugural meeting of a national practitioner network for RPL took place in 2015 to coordinate validation developments across sectors.

At the beginning of the reporting period guidance and counselling was taking different forms. Learners could access guidance services through self-referral or were referred to courses and services through the Department of Social Protection. Young learners leaving school at the age of 16 (or younger), could join the *Youthreach* programme (second chance) which includes counselling, guidance and psychological services. The National Centre for Guidance in Education ⁽¹⁴⁾ (NCGE) was supporting guidance in *Youthreach* and similar programmes. SOLAS was working with NCGE to co-ordinate the Adult Education Guidance Initiative within the ETBs which provides nationwide guidance for learners before and after they participate in VET for unemployed training (VTOS) programmes (Cedefop ReferNet Ireland, 2014, pp. 52-53).

3.2. Policy priorities for 2016-20

For 2016-20, the country's priority in this area is high, as set by the Director General for Vocational Education and Training. The plan is to develop a common understanding of RPL, establish a national steering group for RPL and disseminate good practices across the further education and training and higher education and training sectors.

SOLAS in 2018 began the preparation of the new five-year Further education and training strategy to cover the period 2020-24. It is expected to be submitted for review and approval by the Minister for Education and Skills by the end of 2019.

3.3. Main actions taken in 2015-19

3.3.1. Guidance

The National skills strategy 2025 emphasises the need to strengthen career guidance, particularly by engaging employers. SOLAS set up in early 2016 the website fetchcourses.ie as a tool to inform potential learners of available programmes in the VET sector. In early 2018, the Minister for Education and Skills launched a review of the career guidance services available to learners

⁽¹⁴⁾ NCGE is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills.

across three of the four sectors of the Irish education and training system (second level schools, FET providers and tertiary level institutions). The review was carried out by independent consultants and is currently ⁽¹⁵⁾ under consideration by the Minister for Education and Skills.

3.3.2. Transparency, recognition, validation

3.3.2.1. National qualifications framework ⁽¹⁶⁾

In 2016, the review of the Irish NFQ was initiated by QQI. Discussions on the appropriate design and review methodology are continuing.

3.3.2.2. Validation ⁽¹⁷⁾

In May 2016, QQI published policies and criteria for validation in FET ⁽¹⁸⁾. The 2016-19 action plan for education (Section 1.3.1) includes the aim to develop a national policy on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) (Objective 2.1, Action No 44) by 2018. The 2025 national skills strategy, published in 2016 (Section 1.3.2), has among its objectives the development of a system for RPL and better recognition of workplace learning, in support to lifelong learning.

3.3.3. Policy framework for employee development

In line with the national skills strategy, SOLAS prepared a FET policy framework for the skills development of employed people. This addresses provision for the development of those at work at levels 1 to 6 on the national framework of qualifications (NFQ) (levels 1 to 5 on the EQF). This new policy framework outlines how the FET sector can ensure that employees' skills are current and relevant and thus contribute to Ireland's future growth. Drawing up the policy framework involved consultation with a range of stakeholders, including government departments (Education and Skills; Enterprise, Business and Innovation), agencies (Industrial Development Agency, Enterprise Ireland), business associations and representatives, education and training providers (e.g. skillnets, education and training boards, the National Adult Literacy Association), among many others. The document was officially launched in early September

⁽¹⁵⁾ This report was drafted in June 2019.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Source: Cedefop, 2017b.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Source: Cedefop, 2017a; Murphy 2016.

⁽¹⁸⁾ QQI (2017). *Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training*. Dublin: QQI.

http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Initial_Validation_policy_7_10_13.pdf

2018. The first learners enrolled on relevant programmes, known as *Skills to advance*, in quarter four of 2018.

To support the upskilling of the adult working age population, SOLAS published in October 2018⁽¹⁹⁾ its strategy *Supporting working lives and enterprise growth in Ireland 2019-21*. This outlines the ways in which those in employment could avail of upskilling opportunities through the engagement between FET providers (education and training boards) and employers. Funding for these programmes will be allocated to education and training boards, via SOLAS. The aim is to have 40 000 workers and 4 500 SMEs engaging in state-supported upskilling programmes by 2021.

In addition, Enterprise Ireland launched in December 2017 the *Spotlight on skills* programme to train Irish companies in identifying their skills needs over the short to medium term. Two persons from each company attend a workshop to identify and plan solutions to their skills requirements, within the context of their companies' business strategies. Following the workshop, interested companies may also avail of targeted engagement with their local regional skills forum manager (Section 2.3) to address any education/training related skills needs.

3.3.4. Creating new training and qualification opportunities

Online learning offers opportunities to acquire formal qualifications, particularly for those who are unable to attend schools and colleges. In 2015, *eCollege*, the national online learning service operated by SOLAS, awarded two major four-year contracts worth EUR 7.5 million to Cenit College and Enovation Solutions. Cenit College is responsible for the management of *eTutoring* and related support services, while Enovation Solutions handles monitoring and reporting services. This *eCollege* partnership is to ensure that online education and training is responsive, flexible, innovative, of high quality, and meets learners' personal, social and economic needs.

In 2016, SOLAS and ETBI published a *Strategy for technology enhanced learning in further education and training 2016-19*. The strategy examines ways to bring technology into the further education and training sector to support innovative teaching and learning practices. In 2017, the SOLAS corporate plan for 2017-19 outlined goals, one of which is to support the education and training boards in expanding delivery options, including the use of ICT and technology-

⁽¹⁹⁾ Available at:

http://www.solas.ie/SkillsToAdvance/Documents/SupportingWorkingLives_EnterpriseGrowth_PolicyFramework_Sept2018.pdf

enhanced learning to facilitate access and participation for a diverse group of individuals.

CHAPTER 4.

MTD 4 – Key competences in both IVET and CVET

4.1. Baseline 2015

Legislation ⁽²⁰⁾ supporting key competences in education is not VET specific but rather covers the entire education and training system. At primary and post primary level, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011-20) is driving the implementation of a programme of reform focused on curriculum, assessment and teaching practices. Common Awards System (CAS) introduced in 2007, was an important development in relation to formalising the role of key competences in FET. It was a system of specific standards which were determined for FET awards. The CAS specifications included standards expressed as minimum expected learning outcomes, reflecting knowledge, skill and competence, as reflected in the level descriptors in the national framework of qualifications. With the exception of learning to learn, development of key competences was covered through the inclusion of a required component in the award specifications. Not all key competences were equally present across the awards. Some, such as communication in the mother tongue, learning to learn and interpersonal, intercultural and social competences were present in the vast majority of awards, but others, especially entrepreneurship, cultural expression and communication in foreign languages featured far less widely, being confined to awards to which these components play an important role. A strategic objective of the Further Education Strategy 2014-19 is to ensure that further education and training programmes are developed in line with the needs of entrepreneurs including the development of entrepreneurial skills.

An additional driver of key competences was the Further Education and Training Strategy, published by SOLAS in 2014. The 2014-20 FET strategy ⁽²¹⁾, adopted in 2014, provided for the FET sector to ensure acquisition of at least some key competences: mathematics, communication, digital competence and

⁽²⁰⁾ At national level, policy development in relation to the role of key competences in FET curricula had been driven primarily by the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and the Further Education and Training Act 2013.

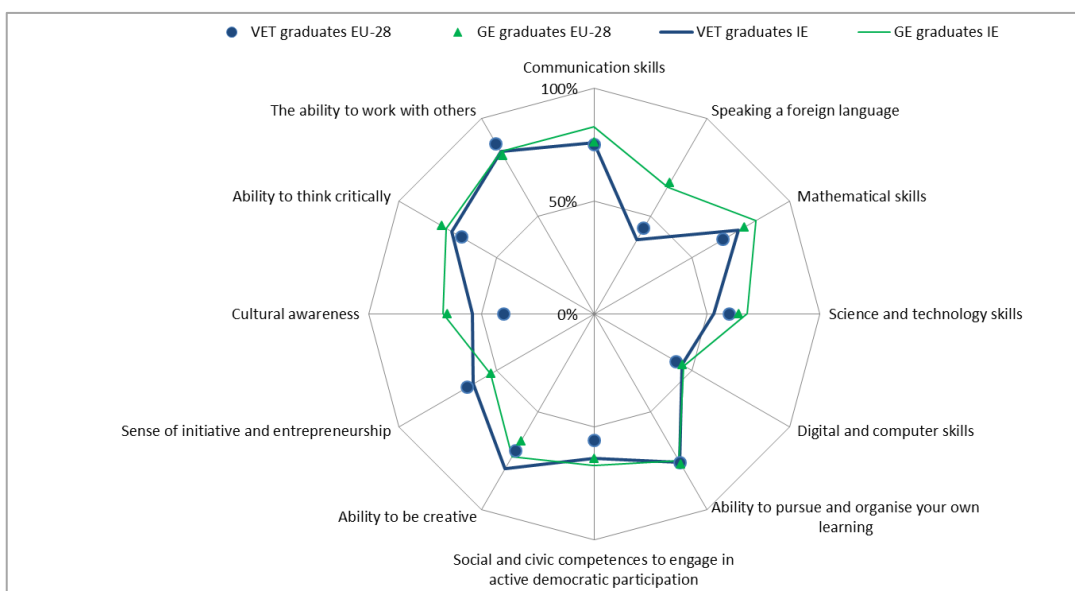
⁽²¹⁾ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf>

entrepreneurship. Qualifications awarded to those completing FET programmes require minimum achievement in most of the eight EU key competences ⁽²²⁾.

Compared with general education graduates, those who completed VET programmes feel they have stronger (ranked by priority (Cedefop, 2017c)):

- (a) sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
 - (b) ability to be creative;
 - (c) ability to pursue and organise one's own learning;
- and weaker:
- (a) foreign language speaking;
 - (b) science and technology skills;
 - (c) cultural awareness (Figure 2).

Figure 2. **Self-evaluation of acquired skills in general education and VET**



NB: Interviewees were asked in summer 2016 about their overall experience in upper secondary education. Aggregated data do not take account of different types and sectors of VET and age groups of respondents.

The figure illustrated the views of learners who attended upper secondary education. As most VET takes place on completion of upper secondary education this figure may not provide the complete picture of VET learners in Ireland.

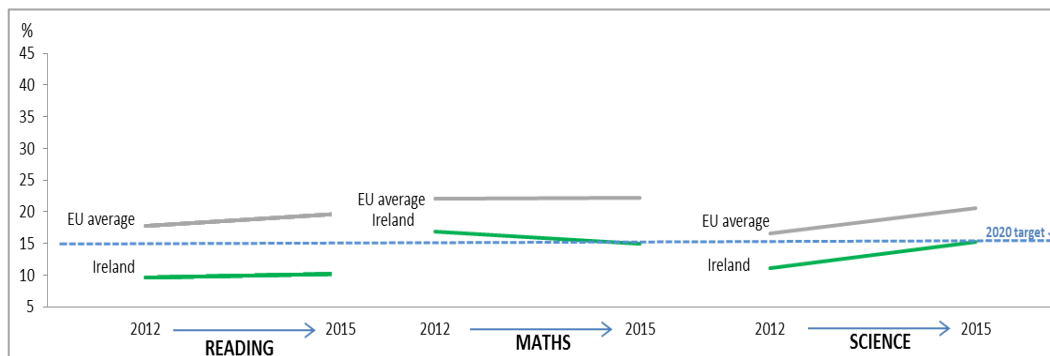
Source: Cedefop, 2017c.

The context of key competences in 2015 was mainly characterised by an increasing share of young low achievers in reading and science, and a decreasing share of low achievers in maths compared with 2012 (Figure 3).

⁽²²⁾ For more information on key competences in VET in Ireland see Burke et al. (2016b).

However, the share of low achievers in Ireland was much lower than in the EU on average (below 15% for maths and reading), where the trend was similar.

Figure 3. **Share of 15-year-olds with low achievement in reading, maths and science**



NB: Low achievement means failing Level 2 on the PISA scale.

Source: OECD (PISA 2012 and 2015).

This trend was likely to be reflected in the acquisition of the key competences trained for in VET programmes.

In 2015 re-skilling and up-skilling were a challenge for the education and training system. Ireland's FET system had been unable to provide the types of skills that the rebalanced Irish economy needed and had failed to give the unemployed valuable and relevant re-skilling and up-skilling opportunities. Reforms had been put in place to achieve a system that was more responsive and relevant to labour market needs (European Commission, 2015).

4.2. **Key competences addressed in the reporting period**

Table 2 outlines/gives a summary of key competences in initial and continuing VET that were addressed in the reporting period. A description of policies is provided in the following sections.

Table 2. **Key competences addressed in 2015-19**

	IVET	CVET
Country language(s) and literacy		
Foreign languages	YES	YES
Digital competence	YES	YES
Maths		
Science		
Technology		
Social and civic competences		
Learning to learn		
Financial literacy		
Entrepreneurship competence	YES	YES
Cultural awareness and expression		
Key competences as a package		

NB: The list derives from the 2006 EU key competences framework for lifelong learning; it has been restructured and expanded with additional competences that can be considered key.

Source: Cedefop based on ReferNet input.

4.3. **Key competences in initial and continuing VET in 2015-19**

For the 2016-20 period, the country's priority in this area is high, as set by the Director General for Vocational Education and Training. The plan is to improve levels of basic skills as part of FET literacy and numeracy strategy 2014-19.

The 2016 action plan for education 2016-19 ⁽²³⁾ (Section 1.3.1), which sets out the Government's plans for implementing the National skills strategy 2025, included the aim to ensure that entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation are nurtured by the education and training system. The plan presented several actions that refer to some of the key competences, not just in VET (IVET and CVET) but across the entire education and training sector. Actions with implications for VET delivery include:

⁽²³⁾ Action plan for education and training :

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/Department-of-Education-and-Skills-Strategy-Statement-2016-2019.pdf>

See also the specific action plan for education 2017 that is derived from the action plan 2016-19 and builds on the progress made to date and incorporates feedback from the consultation process.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/Action-Plan-for-Education-2017.pdf>

- (a) foreign languages: a foreign languages strategy was published in December 2017 ⁽²⁴⁾ to increase the diversity and provision of foreign language learning opportunities, and improve awareness of the benefits of language learning for career and study abroad opportunities. While the strategy places less emphasis on the FET sector (including VET), improved foreign language uptake and proficiency in earlier years in the education system (in lower and upper secondary school) will have an impact on the language skills of learners entering VET programmes in the future;
- (b) ICT: increasing the use of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment so that learners are equipped with the necessary ICT skills. This includes implementing the SOLAS 2016-19 strategy for technology-enhanced learning in FET (Section 3.3.4);
- (c) in 2016, SOLAS commissioned a report on best practices in entrepreneurship education and training in the FET sector. The report outlined a number of key findings, including the need to augment entrepreneurship education in the sector, the need for an action plan on entrepreneurship education, and the need for enhanced resources and more flexible service in terms of entrepreneurship education teaching/training.

The Department of Education and Skills launched in June 2018 the *Explore* programme to address the lack of digital skills amongst older workers and to increase Ireland's rate of participation in lifelong learning. In each of the nine regions in the Regional Skills Fora network, managers approached education and training boards to provide basic digital skills to workers in the manufacturing sector. Programmes are delivered, in small groups of learners, in flexible formats to suit the workers of each company. The programme was initially piloted in the South East region of Ireland and was later rolled out nationwide.

⁽²⁴⁾ Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026.

CHAPTER 5.

MTD 5 – Systematic initial and continuing professional development of VET teachers and trainers

5.1. **Baseline 2015**⁽²⁵⁾

In April 2014 the Strategy for FET emphasised the importance of a ‘clear and consistent professional and competency skill roadmap’ and of continuing professional development (CPD) for FET professionals. At the beginning of the reporting period there were four main groups of teachers and trainers in VET programmes:

- (a) teachers, working in Education and Training Boards (ETB) delivering post Leaving Certificate courses (PLC)
- (b) FET apprenticeship instructors
- (c) HE apprenticeship lecturers
- (d) in-company trainers (work-based apprenticeship tutors and/ or assessors)

There were also two other types of professionals: tutors (in VET for the programmes for unemployed and other specific skills training) and trainers (in various programmes e.g. industry skills and adult learning).

5.1.1. Access to VET teaching: entry requirements and initial training

The Teaching Council was setting the professional standards for first and second level teaching, promoted and regulated the profession. Since April 2013, teachers on PLC courses (the new entrants to the profession) had to have a teaching qualification recognised by the Teaching Council. Qualifications ⁽²⁶⁾ had to carry a minimum of 60 ECT credits and lead to an award at Level 6 or higher on the EQF. FET apprenticeship instructors had to hold a craft certificate EQF level 5, plus five years’ experience, while HE apprenticeship lecturers had to hold a degree (EQF level 6) or equivalent in the subject area or hold a craft certificate (EQF level 5) and have three years post graduate experience.

⁽²⁵⁾ Section based on Burke et al. (2016c).

⁽²⁶⁾ Examples included: Postgraduate diploma in teaching in further education, and Bachelor of arts (honours) in teaching in further and adult education.

For other types of VET training in the FET sector the qualifications and professional standards of trainers varied. In general, tutors did not have to be registered with the Teaching Council.

5.1.2. In-company trainers: entry requirements and initial training

To participate in apprenticeship programmes, in-company trainers and their employers had to be registered with SOLAS. Employers had to employ qualified crafts persons approved by SOLAS as:

- (a) work-based apprenticeship assessors: the assessor had to have completed the one-day SOLAS assessor and verifier programme provided by the education and training boards (not aligned with the national framework of qualifications); and/ or
- (b) work-based apprenticeship tutors: the tutor had to be competent and qualified (a holder of a national craft certificate EQF level 5) to train apprentices.

Trainers in other types of training programmes were generally required to hold a technical qualification at a level that was one step above the programme being delivered. In addition they had to also hold a minimum amount of relevant work experience.

5.1.3. VET teachers: main lines for CPD

With the exception of apprenticeships, CPD for FET professionals in Ireland had been taking place mostly on an ad-hoc basis. As part of the restructuring of FET in Ireland in 2013, the establishment of SOLAS led to the setting up of the National Innovation Unit within SOLAS. This unit comprised:

- (a) the FET Professional Development Unit. This aimed to develop structures and supports for the professional development of FET personnel, to underpin the provision of high quality and relevant education and training programmes;
- (b) the Innovation Unit. This aimed at innovation at national and local level and promoted knowledge transfer within the FET sector;
- (c) the Workforce Development Unit. This coordinated the development of a FET workforce development strategy.

5.1.4. In-company trainers: main lines for CPD

As part of the regular review process of any apprenticeship programme, the review group identified any upskilling or professional development which was required to deliver the programme. Such new requirements often resulted in a

change in the instructor profile. It was the responsibility of the ETB to provide this government-funded training.

5.2. Initial training for VET teachers in 2015-19

The country's priority in this area for 2016-20 is to provide for and support the initial training of FET practitioners, including VET teachers.

In November 2016, the 2017-19 FET professional development strategy was published by SOLAS and ETBI. The strategy acknowledges that 'provision specific to the FET practitioner is not adequately addressed within the existing formal learning offer'. It states that 'in the period to 2019, the implementation of the strategy will include an examination of the feasibility of developing a suite of qualifications/modules for the FET learning practitioner that can be used at entry level and for skills updating' (ETBI and SOLAS, 2016). In 2017, within the framework of this strategy, a number of staff at education and training boards (FET providers) were trained to be able to identify their training needs within individual companies.

5.3. Initial training for in-company trainers in 2015-19

For 2016-20, the country's priority in this area is to provide for and support the initial training of FET practitioners including in-company trainers and mentors.

During 2017, a number of workplace supervisors from 31 host companies were trained to be able to provide structured work-based learning support to learners on traineeship programmes.

5.4. CPD for VET teachers and in-company trainers in 2015-19

The country's priority for 2016-20 in this area is to provide for and support the CPD of FET practitioners, including VET teachers and trainers.

The FET professional development strategy 2017-19 (Section 5.2) provides for implementation actions which include establishing local and national CPD structures, coordination of CPD actions, CPD planning, relevance control, delivery method development, ensuring better access to CPD opportunities for part-time and occasional staff, increasing staff capability in the use of digital technology to enhance learning, and staff reskilling and upskilling. Funding channels will be established. These include a plan for education and training

boards (ETBs) to receive dedicated funding for professional development activity, through the SOLAS-managed funding allocation process. SOLAS plans to establish a central FET professional development budget to fund the development of interventions to address strategic development needs at a national level; and a plan to establish a new professional development innovation fund as an enabler for joint action at national level and across groups of ETBs. Over the lifetime of the strategy, mechanisms will be developed to enable the recording and tracking of professional development activities at individual, ETB and national level.

In 2017, an initiative to introduce a diploma in change management for managers was developed. It aims to be a one-year course looking to enhance the skill sets of managers in the FET sector to plan, and lead in the area of FET. In addition, within the framework of the technology-enhanced learning (TEL) strategy, a number of programmes were designed and developed for FET practitioners. The objective is to improve teachers' TEL practices and tailor approaches best suited to the needs of different types of learners.

The 2014-19 FET strategy (Section 4.1) referred to the role of SOLAS in (helping to) train FET teachers. Since 2015, SOLAS has supported the education and training boards in profiling the skills of teachers, tutors and trainers working in FET, including their qualifications. *Skills profile* is an IT-based tool to capture the necessary data and inform the overall CPD strategy that SOLAS and its partners are developing.

Statistical overview: 2019 update

The table below updates the figures that were provided in table 1. Although table 1 may contain data for 2015, these are not systematically repeated here. In some cases, not repeating is due to breaks in time series, which prevent comparability. In other cases, values differ due to methodological changes.

Table 3. **Score on VET indicators in Ireland and in the EU: 2015, last available year and recent change**

Indicator label	2015				Last available year				Recent change			
	IE	f	EU	f	Yr	IE	f	EU	f	Range	IE	EU
Access, attractiveness and flexibility												
IVET students as % of all upper secondary students		z	47.3	ce	'17	10.3		47.8	ce	'15-'17		0.5
IVET work-based students as % of all upper secondary IVET		z	28.3	ce	'17	100		27.9	ce	'15-'17		-0.5
IVET students with direct access to tertiary education as % of all upper secondary IVET		z	68.1	ce	'17		z	68.6	ce	'15-'17		0.4
Workers participating in CVT courses (%)	49.7		40.8		'15	49.7		40.8				
Workers participating in on-the-job training (%)	50		34		'15	50		34				
Adults in lifelong learning (%)			10.7		'18	12.5	b	11.1		'15-'18		0.4
Enterprises providing training (%)	77.4		72.6		'15	77.4		72.6				
Female IVET students as % of all female upper secondary students		z	42	ce	'17	7		42.7	ce	'15-'17		0.7
Employees of small firms participating in CVT courses (%)	33.2		30		'15	33.2		30				
Young VET graduates in further education and training (%)			33		'18	32.5	b	33		'15-'18		0
Older adults in lifelong learning (%)			6.9		'18	8.9	b	7.3		'15-'18		0.4
Low-educated adults in lifelong learning (%)			4.3		'18	4.4	b	4.3		'15-'18		0
Unemployed adults in lifelong learning (%)			9.5		'18	16	b	10.7		'15-'18		1.2
Individuals who wanted to participate in training but did not (%)					'16	13.5	b	11.4				
Job-related non-formal education and training (%)					'16	87.4		79.4				

Indicator label	2015				Last available year				Recent change			
	IE	f	EU	f	Yr	IE	f	EU	f	Range	IE	EU
Skill development and labour market relevance												
IVET public expenditure (% of GDP)	0.2		0.5	ce	'16		d	0.5	ce	'15-'16		0
IVET public expenditure per student (1000 PPS units)	5.4		7.1	ce	'16		d	7.4	ce	'15-'16		0.3
Enterprise expenditure on CVT courses as % of total labour cost	0.8		0.9		'15	0.8		0.9				
Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET			1	ce	'17			1	ce	'15-'17		0
STEM graduates from upper secondary IVET (% of total)		z	29.2	ce	'17		z	29.1	ce	'15-'17		0
Short-cycle VET graduates as % of first time tertiary education graduates		d			'17			14.3	b ce	'15-'17		
Innovative enterprises with supportive training practices (%)					'16	31.4		37.7				
Employment rate for IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds)			77.2		'18	78.1	b	80.5		'15-'18		3.3
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over general stream)			5.4		'18	3.1	b	6.6		'15-'18		1.2
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over low-educated)			23.7		'18	31.1	b	23.3		'15-'18		-0.4
Workers helped to improve their work by training (%)	91.1		83.7		'15	91.1		83.7				
Workers with skills matched to their duties (%)	54.8		57		'15	54.8		57				
Overall transitions and labour market trends												
Early leavers from education and training (%)			11		'18	5	b	10.6		'15-'18		-0.4
30-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)			38.7		'18	56.3	b	40.7		'15-'18		2
NEET rate for 18-24 year-olds (%)			15.8		'18	12.6	b	13.7		'15-'18		-2.1
Unemployment rate for 20-34 year-olds (%)			12.9		'18	7.3	b	9.4		'15-'18		-3.5
Employment rate of recent graduates (%)			75.9		'18	83.9	b	80.6		'15-'18		4.7
Adults with lower level of educational attainment (%)			23.5		'18	16.8	b	21.9		'15-'18		-1.6
Employment rate for 20-64 year-olds (%)			70		'18	74.1	b	73.1		'15-'18		3.1
Employment rate for 20-64 year-olds with lower level of educational attainment (%)			52.6		'18	51.5	b	56.1		'15-'18		3.5
Medium/high-qualified employment in 2030 (% of total)					'18	92	D	85.8	D			

EU refers to EU-28, unless otherwise specified.
(D) Forecast made in 2018.
(ce) Cedefop estimate based on available country data
(b) Eurostat: 'break in time series'.

(u) Eurostat: 'low reliability'.
(z) Eurostat: 'not applicable'.
(e) Eurostat: 'estimated'.
(d) Eurostat: 'definition differs'.

Source: Cedefop, 2020.

In 2017, 10.3% of all upper secondary students in Ireland were enrolled in IVET. This percentage is 37.5 points below the EU average.

In 2017, 100% of all upper secondary IVET students were enrolled in a work-based learning setting, the same percentage as in 2015. In contrast the EU average is 27.9%.

In 2018, 12.5% of adults participated in lifelong learning activities. The EU average is 11.1%.

In 2018, the employment rate for IVET graduates (20-34 years old) is 78.1%. The EU average is 80.5%.

For the two last indicators, though data were available in 2015 (Table 1), due to a break in time series, 2018 and 2015 cannot be reliably compared.

Conclusion

Since 2015, Ireland has taken actions to expand work-based learning and apprenticeships, and reinforce employer involvement in education and training. Steps have been taken to strengthen quality assurance mechanisms in VET along with data collection systems. A review of the application and effects of the national framework of qualifications, and steps towards a national validation strategy, have been initiated. Plans supporting the development of key competences in VET, and for the initial and continuing training of VET teachers and trainers, have been set up and start to be implemented.

In 2017 and 2018 there was continued expansion of the apprenticeship system (MTD1), increased labour market relevance of FET programmes through analysing data and cooperation arrangements at regional level (MTD2) and strengthened lifelong learning through upskilling and reskilling the workforce (MTD3). The actions carried out show that the main lines of the Riga conclusions and the country's policy priorities for the 2016-20 period are being addressed.

Acronyms

CPD	continuing professional development
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
DGVT	Directors General for Vocational Education and Training
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European Social Fund
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
Eurostat	statistical office of the European Union
FET	further education and training
GDP	gross domestic product
GE	general education
IVET	initial vocational education and training
LCA	leaving certificate applied
LCVP	leaving certificate vocational programme
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
NEET	not in education, employment, or training
NSS	national skills strategy
PISA	programme for international student assessment
PLC	post leaving certificate
PLSS	programme and learner support system
PPS	purchasing power standards
QANRP	quality assurance national reference point
QF-EHEA	qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area
QNQR	national framework of regional qualifications
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RPL	recognition of prior learning
SLMRU	Skills and Labour Market Research Unit
SOLAS	Further Education and Training Authority
STEM	science, technology, engineering and math programmes
VTOS	vocational training opportunities schemes
UOE	UNESCO, OECD, Eurostat
VET	vocational education and training
WBL	work-based learning

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