



Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015–19

**UNITED KINGDOM
NORTHERN IRELAND**



Cedefop monitoring of vocational education and training policies and systems

Progress towards the medium-term deliverables
of the Riga conclusions

Country chapter

UNITED KINGDOM NORTHERN IRELAND

Developments in vocational education and training policy
in 2015-19

Cedefop (2020). *Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015-19: Northern 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-uk-northern-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 selected figures and 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 2015-2020, 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

At the beginning of the reporting period, the proportion of upper secondary students enrolled in vocational education and training (VET) programmes in the United Kingdom was decreasing and below the EU average: 43.8% in 2013 (European Commission, 2015) against 48.9% in the EU; 42.7% in 2014 compared to 48% in the EU (Cedefop, 2017a, p. 137); 40% in 2015 compared to 47% in the EU ⁽³⁾. Yet, 56.4% of upper secondary initial vocational education and training (IVET) students were following work-based programmes in 2014, against 34% in the EU (Cedefop, 2017a, p. 137). The employment rate of recent upper secondary graduates was also higher than in the EU: 78.5% in 2014 (European Commission, 2015) and 78.7% in 2015 (European Commission, 2016, p. 2) compared to 70.8% and 74.1% on average in the EU in respective years. Adult participation in lifelong learning was above the EU rate: 15.8% in 2014 (European Commission, 2015) and 15.7% in 2015 compared to 10.7% on average in the EU in both years (Cedefop, 2017a, p. 137) (Table 1).

VET in Northern Ireland faced the challenge of increasing its labour-market relevance. Reforming the apprenticeship system and developing new VET programmes was being considered.

⁽³⁾ Eurostat, data for 2015.

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

Indicator label	2010		2015 (*)		Trend in 2011-15 (per year)		
	UK ^f	EU ^f	Yr	UK ^f EU ^f	Range	UK	EU
Access, attractiveness and flexibility							
IVET students as % of all upper secondary students	A	A	'14	42.7 ^b 48.0 ^b _{E1}	'13-'14	▪ -1.1	▪ -0.9
IVET work-based students as % of all upper secondary IVET	A	A	'14	56.4 ^b 34.0 ^b _{E2}	'13-'14	▪ -1.2	▪ 0.1
IVET students with direct access to tertiary education as % of all upper secondary IVET			'14	40.4 69.2 ^{E3}	'13-'14	▪ -9.7	▪ -1.4
Employees participating in CVT courses (%)	31.0	38.0 ^e	'10	31.0 38.0 ^e			
Employees participating in on-the-job training (%)	30.0	20.0 ^e	'10	30.0 20.0 ^e			
Adults in lifelong learning (%)	20.1		'15	15.7 10.7 ^b	'13-'15	↘ -0.5	→ 0.0
Enterprises providing training (%)	80.0	66.0 ^e	'10	80.0 66.0 ^e			
Female IVET students as % of all female upper secondary students	A	A	'14	43.0 ^b 42.7 ^b _{E1}	'13-'14	▪ -1.2	▪ -1.0
Employees of small firms participating in CVT courses (%)	25.0	25.0 ^e	'10	25.0 25.0 ^e			
Young VET graduates in further education and training (%)			'15	33.2 ^b 33.0 ^b	'14-'15	▪ -1.9	▪ -0.3
Older adults in lifelong learning (%)	14.5	5.3	'15	12.1 ^b 6.9 ^b _C	'10-'15	↘ -0.3	↗ 0.4
Low-educated adults in lifelong learning (%)			'15	6.8 ^b 4.3 ^b _C	'13-'15	↘ -0.6	↘ -0.1
Unemployed adults in lifelong learning (%)	19.5		'15	14.2 9.5 ^b	'13-'15	↘ -1.3	↘ -0.4
Individuals who wanted to participate in training but did not (%)	^B	9.5 ^e _B	'11				
Job-related non-formal education and training (%)	81.6 ^B	80.2 ^e _B	'11	81.6 80.2 ^e			
Skill development and labour market relevance							
IVET public expenditure (% of GDP)			'12	130.46 ^b 0.56 ^b _{E4}	'12-'13	▪ 0.07	▪ -0.03
IVET public expenditure per student (1 000 PPS units)			'13	6.1 ^b 6.4 ^b _{E5}	'12-'13	▪ -0.5	▪ 0.0
Enterprise expenditure on CVT courses as % of total labour cost	0.7	0.8 ^e	'10	0.7 0.8 ^e			
Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET			'14	^z 1.0 ^b _{E6}			
STEM graduates from upper secondary IVET (% of total)	A	A	'14	^b 30.0 ^b _{E7}			
Short-cycle VET graduates as % of first time tertiary education graduates			'14	^b 9.3 ^{E8}			
Innovative enterprises with supportive training practices (%)		41.5 ^{E9}	'12				
Employment rate for IVET graduates (20- to 34-year-olds)			'15	79.0 ^b 77.2 ^b	'14-'15	▪ 1.0	▪ 0.3
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over general stream)			'15	-3.4 ^b 5.3 ^b	'14-'15	▪ -0.3	▪ -1.0

Indicator label	2010		2015 (*)		Trend in 2011-15 (per year)		
	UK ^f	EU ^f	Yr	UK ^f EU ^f	Range	UK	EU
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over low-educated)			'15	21.9 ^b 23.7 ^b	'14-'15	▪ 2.7	▪ -0.1
Workers helped to improve their work by training (%)			'15	84.9 83.7			
Workers with skills matched to their duties (%)	52.6	55.2	'15	57.8 57.3	'10-'15	▪ 1.0	▪ 0.4
Overall transitions and labour market trends							
Early leavers from education and training (%)		13.9	'15	10.8 ^b 11.0 ^c	'11-'15	↘ -1.0	↘ -0.6
30- to 34-year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)		33.8	'15	47.8 ^b 38.7 ^c	'11-'15	↗ 0.5	↗ 1.0
NEET rate for 18- to 24-year-olds (%)	17.8	16.6	'15	14.5 15.8	'10-'15	↘ -0.7	↘ -0.1
Unemployment rate for 20- to 34-year-olds (%)	9.9	13.1	'15	6.8 12.9	'10-'15	↘ -0.7	↗ 0.1
Employment rate of recent graduates (%)		77.4	'15	85.8 ^b 76.9 ^c	'11-'15	↗ 1.1	→ 0.0
Adults with lower level of educational attainment (%)		27.3	'15	20.3 ^b 23.5 ^c	'11-'15	↘ -0.8	↘ -0.8
Employment rate for 20- to 64-year-olds (%)		68.6	'15	76.9 ^b 70.0	'11-'15	↗ 0.9	↗ 0.4
Employment rate for 20- to 64-year-olds with lower level of educational attainment (%)		53.4	'15	59.7 ^b 52.6 ^c	'11-'15	↗ 1.1	↘ -0.1
Medium/high-qualified employment in 2020 (% of total)			'16	84.6 ^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.

(^f) UOE (UNESCO OECD Eurostat) back reconstruction of 2010 values based on ISCED (international standard classification of education) 2011 not yet available.

(^b) AES (adult education survey) 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, p. 137.

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, apprenticeships were available in Northern Ireland at EQF levels 3 and 4 within the 16+ further education (FE) sector. Qualifications that could be associated with an apprenticeship programme were those from the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) ⁽⁴⁾ and National vocational qualifications (NVQs).

Higher level apprenticeships had been piloted at EQF levels 4 and 5 since 2012. A new apprenticeship strategy, *Securing our success*, had been published in June 2014 ⁽⁵⁾, taking on board suggestions from a review of apprenticeships carried out in 2013 in Northern Ireland. The main aims of the reform were to support the creation of apprenticeships across the full range of qualifications in professional and technical occupations starting at levels 3 up to 8 (EQF levels 4-8), with a special focus on higher apprenticeships, as well as to provide pathways to further education and higher education. Attracting more students and employers and raising the number and quality of higher apprenticeships were priority areas. Funds had been allocated ⁽⁶⁾.

A *Review of youth training provision* in Northern Ireland ⁽⁷⁾ had also been carried out, examining vocational training offered at level 2 (EQF level 3). It led to a 2015 *Strategy for youth training* proposing to create a baccalaureate-style curriculum that would include work-based learning and allow students to continue into an apprenticeship or further education or be skilled enough to find sustained employment ⁽⁸⁾.

⁽⁴⁾ Combining theoretical and practical vocational education and leading to awards, certificates and diplomas at first (QCF level 2), national (level 3) and higher national (levels 4 and 5) levels.

⁽⁵⁾ For more information on the components of an apprenticeship, click [here](#). See p. 8.

⁽⁶⁾ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6632-2015-ADD-28/en/pdf>

⁽⁷⁾ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/consultations/review-youth-training-consultation>

⁽⁸⁾ Visit the dedicated webpage of the Department for the Economy: [Generating our Success - the Northern Ireland strategy for youth training](#).

1.2. Main actions taken in 2015-19

1.2.1. Piloting the Northern Ireland strategy for youth training

Generating our success: the Northern Ireland strategy for youth training ⁽⁹⁾ (Section 3.2.4.2) aims at developing a new broad-based baccalaureate-style programme for young people at level 2 (EQF level 3). It integrates structured work-based learning primarily as a method for developing skills. Piloting started in autumn 2015 and finished in June 2018. The programme was created as a stepping stone towards VET at EQF level 4 and above, through apprenticeships and new higher level apprenticeship programmes at level 4 (EQF level 5) and above. An Education and Training Inspectorate evaluation of the pilots (for the initial period 2015-17) found that most of the programmes were appropriately designed to enable students to progress or re-engage with education and training, to learn new skills and build upon their prior experiences. It also appeared that the piloted programmes enabled students to access education and training at an appropriate level and to progress seamlessly to employment, and further and higher education ⁽¹⁰⁾.

1.2.2. *Further education means success: the Northern Ireland strategy for further education*

The Northern Ireland strategy for further education – *Further education means success* (Section 3.2.2.2) – and its implementation programme were published in 2016. The aim of the strategy is to provide a world class, economically relevant professional and technical education system; create a globally competitive economy through supporting employers to upskill and become more innovative; and overcome educational disadvantage and support social and economic inclusion. The strategy commits the colleges to develop employability skills through high-quality work placements and simulated work environments using virtual reality technology and project-based learning, and to promote entrepreneurial spirit, creativity and the ability to innovate.

A new development to the strategy was initiated in April 2017 when the *FE means success* programme board approved the further development of the lead *College curriculum hubs* concept. Since October 2017, the Department for the Economy has worked with the further education sector and each of the six

⁽⁹⁾ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/youth-training-strategy.pdf>

⁽¹⁰⁾ <https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/evaluation-of-youth-training-pilot-programmes-level-2-and-appni-level-3-in-six-colleges-of-fe-in-ni.pdf>

colleges has been designated as the central hub in one of the specific occupational areas: digital IT, hospitality and tourism; engineering; life sciences; construction; health and social care; entrepreneurship. Each curriculum hub is recognised as the lead college in the occupational area and collaborates with the other five colleges in order to draw in the teaching and curriculum excellence, sectoral knowledge and economic engagement to provide consistent high-quality provision for learners and employers across Northern Ireland. The use of virtual learning environments and continuous professional development are integral to the curriculum hubs and are key to the effective delivery of high-quality curricula. Action plans have now been developed and approved for each hub for the period January 2019 to August 2020 and outcomes will be regularly monitored and reported on by the Department for the Economy.

1.2.3. Funding apprenticeship

The UK wide Apprenticeship levy was introduced on 6 April 2017 and applies to all employers in Northern Ireland, across the public and private sectors. It impacts on all employers with an annual pay bill of more than £3 million, who pay the levy at 0.5% of their total pay bill. The collection of the levy by HM Revenue and Customs is a matter reserved to the UK Government.

Northern Ireland receives a Barnett consequential ⁽¹¹⁾ of apprenticeship expenditure in England funded by the Apprenticeship levy. However, the Levy is administered within the Northern Ireland block grant through the standard budgetary process ⁽¹²⁾.

1.2.4. Promoting apprenticeship

The apprenticeship online portal, *Connect to success*, was launched in June 2017 ⁽¹³⁾. This service, developed in association with Careers Service, was first launched for school-work experience opportunities. It was then developed further to provide employers with the opportunity to advertise apprenticeship opportunities to potential apprentices and provide potential apprentices with the

⁽¹¹⁾ The Barnett formula is a mechanism used by the British Treasury to adjust the amounts of public expenditure allocated to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

⁽¹²⁾ The levy does not result in any noticeable additional funding being made available for apprenticeships, due to negative Barnett consequentials, arising from the cessation of spending on apprenticeship programmes elsewhere in the relevant Whitehall departments and the additional financial burden the levy places on public sector employers

⁽¹³⁾ The portal is for advertising apprenticeships only. A decision was taken not to advertise traineeships at this stage although the background functionality exists.

opportunity to search and consider the apprenticeship opportunities available. The Careers Service has commissioned a review of the portal which is under way in 2019. A review of the apprenticeship side is planned.

1.2.5. Involving stakeholders in apprenticeship and youth training

A key part of the implementation of the *Apprenticeships and youth training* strategies is placing local employers at the heart of curriculum development to ensure that apprenticeships and traineeships meet the skills needs of their industry. To this end, sectoral partnerships (SPs) were established in 2017 across a number of economic sectors with the aim of bringing employers, qualification experts and policy advisors together to provide a comprehensive review of apprenticeship and traineeship qualifications from Level 2 to Level 8, including underpinning standards and assessment methods. Ten SPs have been established to date.

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**

At the beginning of the reporting period, a quality assurance reference point was in place. It had been set up in 2009 and covered initial vocational education and training (IVET), continuing vocational education and training (CVET)/adult learning and non-formal/informal learning. A quality assurance approach and a methodology for internal and external evaluation existed. A common quality assurance framework for publicly funded VET and associated workplace learning had been defined. VET providers' compliance to quality standards was a precondition for accreditation of programmes and funding. A framework, guidelines and performance indicators supported internal and external evaluation. External quality inspection was provided by the Northern Ireland Education and Training Inspectorate for education and training up to Level 3 in Further Education colleges and contracted training providers. Organisations were also required to assure the funding Department of their capacity to plan for quality improvement on an annual basis. In 2014, a Quality Improvement Team was created in the Department to support the Quality Improvement Advisor and to monitor, report and track the quality of VET provision. The Quality Improvement team also conducted quality evaluations of Higher-Level Apprenticeships.

Graduate tracking covering IVET learners from post-16 education was also in place. The mechanism was based on a quantitative telephone survey six months after graduation ⁽¹⁴⁾.

In 2008, the Sector Skills Development Agency was replaced by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) which took over the task of

⁽¹⁴⁾ Data have been produced annually as of 2015 (European Commission and ICF 2018).

identifying skills needs ⁽¹⁵⁾. Research work was usually carried out by external institutes, based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative sources including surveys of employers and relevant stakeholders. 21 Sector Skills Councils (SSC) across the United Kingdom would also provide information on skills needs in various sectors (EEPO, 2015).

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

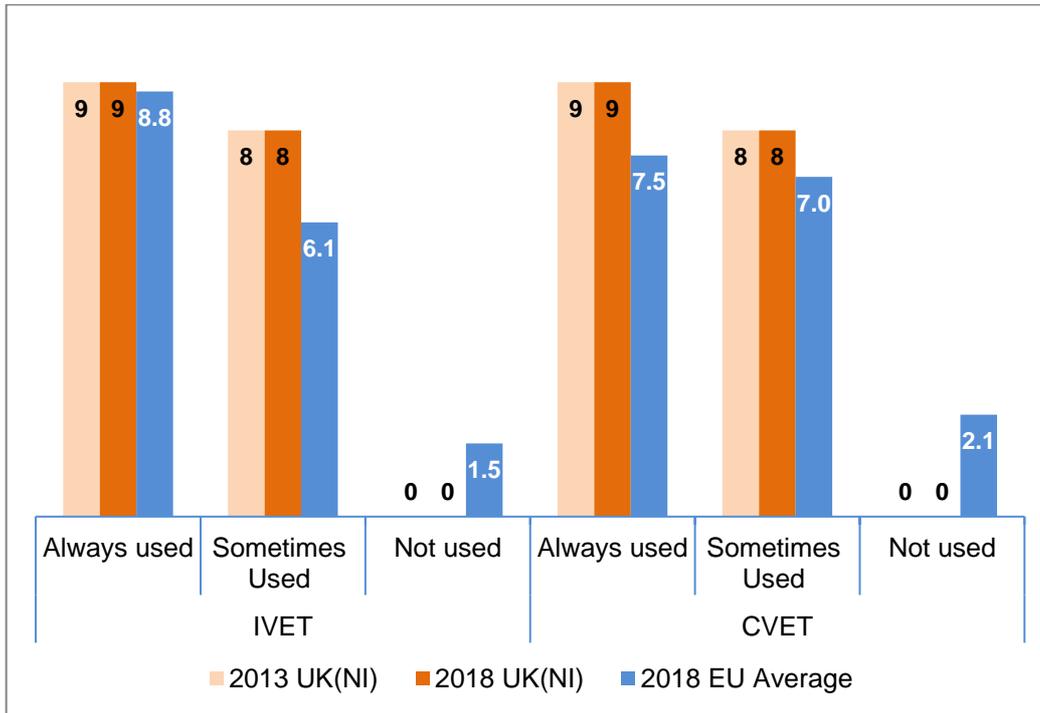
In 2016-17, the quality assurance reference point (QARP) for Northern Ireland used *Erasmus+* funding to support the six NI FE colleges in their implementation of quality improvement practices into the activities of VET teachers and trainers. A collaborative portal of educational resources and support of technology enhanced learning was developed ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Systematic use of European quality assurance in vocational education and training (EQAVET) indicators to monitor the VET system ('always used' item in Figure 1), has remained unchanged compared to 2013. Northern Ireland was above the EU average in both initial and continuing VET in 2018. All EQAVET indicators are used (mostly always).

⁽¹⁵⁾ The UKCES itself was terminated in March 2017. It had a wide-ranging role, and the government announced in July 2016 that new structures were needed to move onto the next phase of the skills agenda. The Employers Skills Survey, previously managed by the UKCES, is now managed in-house by the Department of Education.

⁽¹⁶⁾ 2016 Compendium of EQAVET NRP *Erasmus+* funding:
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/compendium_eqavet_2016_for_website.pdf

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 Northern 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 initial and continuing VET in 2015-19

As a follow up to the 2016 Northern Ireland strategy for further education *Further education means success* (Sections 1.2.2 and 3.2.2.2), the Department for the Economy, supported by colleges, has started the process of identifying and collecting information on learner progression and learner destinations after leaving college. Since September 2017, colleges are required to publish information on learner achievements, learner progression and learner destinations on their websites.

A three-year sponsorship arrangement started in 2015 between the Department for the Economy and the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre to build a skills-barometer model to estimate future skill needs and gaps by level,

sector and subject area. Skills Barometer reports were published in 2015 and 2017 ⁽¹⁷⁾.

In May 2016, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) Regulation ⁽¹⁸⁾ became the responsible body for the accreditation and quality assurance of all qualifications offered in Northern Ireland, including GCSE, GCE and professional and technical (vocational) qualifications.

⁽¹⁷⁾ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/skills-and-employment>

⁽¹⁸⁾ http://ccea.org.uk/about_us/what_we_do

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 ⁽¹⁹⁾, the Northern Ireland Careers Service provided an all age careers education and guidance service to promote employment, education and training opportunities. Careers advisers operated throughout Northern Ireland from Job Centres, Jobs and Benefits Offices and stand-alone careers offices. Advisers also worked with careers teachers in schools and further education colleges to provide advice and guidance to pupils from 14-19. In Northern Ireland, careers education was a statutory area of learning in the common curriculum for all grant-aided post-primary schools. In addition, further education colleges and higher education institutions also offered careers guidance to their students.

In Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy offered a guarantee of training towards level 1-3 qualifications (EQF levels 2-4) through its *Training for Success* programme for all unemployed 16-17-year-old school leavers. Those with a disability and from an in-care background had extended eligibility.

3.2. Main actions taken in 2015-19

3.2.1. Guidance: the 2015-20 careers strategy

The careers strategy, *Preparing for success 2015-20* ⁽²⁰⁾, jointly agreed between the Department for the Economy and the Department of Education, was

⁽¹⁹⁾ This introductory section presents the 2015 state-of-play in the MTD as a baseline for the monitoring exercise. Most of the situation it describes has remained unchanged over the reporting period and is therefore still in place at the end of the reporting period. The next sections in this MTD focus on what has changed with respect to this 2015 baseline, and how.

⁽²⁰⁾ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/preparing-success-2015-2020-strategy-careers-education-and-guidance>

published in March 2016. Key commitments in the strategy include the development of an accountability and quality assurance framework to ensure delivery of impartial careers guidance; introduction of new and innovative delivery channels, including online web chat and increased use of social media; improved access to up-to-date labour market information; ensuring equality of opportunity; offering face-to-face advice to adults and young people at key transition stages; providing additional support to those at risk of becoming disengaged and those with barriers; and providing more advice to parents. Work is also planned to develop an e-portfolio to facilitate the recording of education and work-related activities to support career management.

In September 2017, the Department for the Economy added apprenticeships, including higher level apprenticeships, onto its on-line portal *Connect to success NI*. The portal enables employers to advertise apprenticeships as well as work experience opportunities and provides those seeking to launch or develop their careers the opportunity to search for these positions through a central source ⁽²¹⁾.

3.2.2. Permeability and flexibility

3.2.2.1. Introducing flexibility: changes to the Entitlement framework

The *Entitlement framework*, which sets out the post-14 curriculum, became statutory in 2013 and reached full implementation in 2015. It ensured a wide offer at school through more learning options and two-third general and one-third applied courses. Schools were also required to offer at least 24 courses at lower secondary level and 27 in the post-16 category, a minimum of one third being vocational. However, due to resource and budget restraints, along with giving schools more autonomy, a January 2017 decision ⁽²²⁾ gives schools more flexibility to reduce the number of courses. From September 2017 onwards, schools must offer access to a minimum of 21 courses at lower secondary and 21 at post-16 level, of which at least one third must be general and one third applied.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/new-strategy-careers-education-and-guidance-launched-0>

⁽²¹⁾ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/contacts-az/connect-success-ni>

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/news/employers-find-right-apprentice-or-work-placement-your-business>

⁽²²⁾ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/weir-announces-changes-entitlement-framework>

3.2.2.2. *Supporting progression: the 2016 further education strategy*

The 2016 Northern Ireland strategy for further education *Further education means success* (Section 1.2.2) recommends that further education colleges particularly focus on developing increased provision at level 3 (EQF level 4) and above, in areas that will help rebalance/rebuild the economy. The qualifications system, innovative teaching and clear pathways should ease progression to studies at higher levels. The strategy also suggests rationalising and simplifying the qualifications landscape to make it more easily understood by users. Colleges are encouraged to support companies in ensuring that employees have the required knowledge, skills and qualifications, or can acquire them in flexible ways.

3.2.3. **Qualifications framework** ⁽²³⁾

The qualifications and credit framework (QCF) was adopted and introduced in 2008, building on previous frameworks since the 1980s. In 2010, it was referenced to the EQF. The QCF had limited scope as it mainly covered VET qualifications in England and Northern Ireland. It was open to qualifications awarded by the private sector but was not comprehensive and operated in parallel to the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) and the previously devised national qualifications framework (NQF), which included general education qualifications.

In October 2015 a regulated qualifications framework (RQF) was introduced for England and Northern Ireland, replacing the QCF and the NQF ⁽²⁴⁾. The RQF covers all academic and vocational qualifications regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) ⁽²⁵⁾ and by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) Regulation ⁽²⁶⁾. The RQF uses the same eight levels (plus three entry levels) as the QCF but introduces some changes in the way qualification size ⁽²⁷⁾ is calculated. While the QCF had a clear regulatory role, the RQF does not regulate qualifications and does not set qualification design rules; it describes them in a transparent way and provides an overview of qualifications, showing how they relate to each other. Ofqual is

⁽²³⁾ Cedefop, 2017b.

⁽²⁴⁾ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofqual-to-introduce-new-regulated-qualifications-framework>

⁽²⁵⁾ Register of regulated qualifications: <http://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>

⁽²⁶⁾ http://ccea.org.uk/about_us/what_we_do

⁽²⁷⁾ Certificate or diploma award depends on the indicative time a standard learner might need to study a qualification.

responsible for the daily running of the framework. One of the main principles applying to all qualifications in the RQF (after consultation carried out in spring 2015) is to use the guided learning hours (GLH) and the total qualification time (TQT) ⁽²⁸⁾. GLH is composed of activities completed by the learner under the direct instruction or supervision of a lecturer. TQT is made up of the GLH plus all other time taken in preparation without supervision. TQT has been a requirement for all RQF qualifications since the end of 2017. Awarding organisations are expected to review their existing qualifications accordingly. The RQF level is displayed on all certificates for regulated qualifications referenced to the framework but there are no plans to introduce EQF levels on certificates. The EQF level is, however, displayed along with the RQF level for each qualification in the register of regulated qualifications. The replacement of the QCF and NQF by the RQF implies that the UK referencing report needs to be updated as regards England and Northern Ireland. The joint EQF NCP for England and Northern Ireland is currently working on an updated referencing report for the RQF and will present the final report to the EQF Advisory Group in 2019.

3.2.4. Training, reskilling and upskilling vulnerable groups

3.2.4.1. The 2016-21 Employment strategy for people with disabilities

The *Employment strategy for people with disabilities* ⁽²⁹⁾ was launched in March 2016. The strategy aims to support people with disabilities to find or return to

⁽²⁸⁾ All qualifications registered in the framework are assigned a measure of size, expressed in total qualification time (TQT) and guided learning hours (GLH). Total qualification time is the number of notional hours which represents an estimate of the total amount of time that could reasonably be expected to be required for a learner to achieve and demonstrate the achievement of the level of attainment necessary for the award of a qualification. TQT comprises the number of hours which an awarding organisation has assigned to a qualification for guided learning (GL), and an estimate of the number of hours a learner will reasonably be likely to spend in preparation, study or any other form of participation in education or training, including assessment, which takes place as directed by – but, unlike guided learning, not under the immediate guidance or supervision of – a lecturer, supervisor, tutor or other appropriate provider of education or training.

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/awarding-organisations-must-justify-sizes-of-qualifications>

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/597612/total-qualification-time-criteria.pdf

⁽²⁹⁾ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/del/Disability%20Strategy%20report%20%28Web%29.pdf>

work and remain in work. A Disability Employment Forum has been established to drive forward the action plan under the five themes highlighted in the strategy:

- (a) empowering and supporting people to secure paid employment;
- (b) job retention and career development;
- (c) working with employers;
- (d) research and development;
- (e) strategic partnership and engagement.

3.2.4.2. *Training for the young low-qualified: Strategy for youth training*

The *Strategy for youth training* ⁽³⁰⁾ adopted in June 2015 (Section 1.2.1) highlights the importance of support measures in helping young people complete their training and progress into employment or higher-level VET. All 16- to 24-year-olds who require training at level 2 (EQF level 3) will have the opportunity to participate: those not in employment, those starting a new job, and those in jobs.

3.2.5. Supporting VET participation through increased attractiveness

In December 2017, Northern Ireland's six regional further education (FE) colleges have joined together to launch a new marketing campaign, *Let's do Business*, to promote their services to local employers and businesses ⁽³¹⁾. Services include a range of funded training and mentoring programmes, bespoke training and initiatives available to local employers who wish to grow their business through increased profitability or product development, as well as budding entrepreneurs who require assistance in turning their business idea into a commercial reality. They can also help with recruitment, accessing funding and technical expertise to bring new products to market. Each college has developed expertise in specific areas. A new dedicated website ⁽³²⁾ has been created to help employers identify the college best suited to their business' needs, provide information on funding opportunities and establish better collaborative relationships.

⁽³⁰⁾ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/youth-training-strategy.pdf>

⁽³¹⁾ Sources: <https://www.yourcollegeni.com/>

⁽³²⁾ www.yourcollegeni.com

CHAPTER 4.

MTD 4 – Key competences in both IVET and CVET

4.1. Baseline 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, key competences in Northern Ireland were embedded in the ‘areas of learning’ which schools had to provide (at least one course per area). However, such requirements were not binding for VET, the majority of which was delivered in the further education and skills sector, including apprenticeships. Adult literacy and numeracy were part of the Essential Skills qualifications that were mostly offered in colleges for 16-19-year-old learners⁽³³⁾.

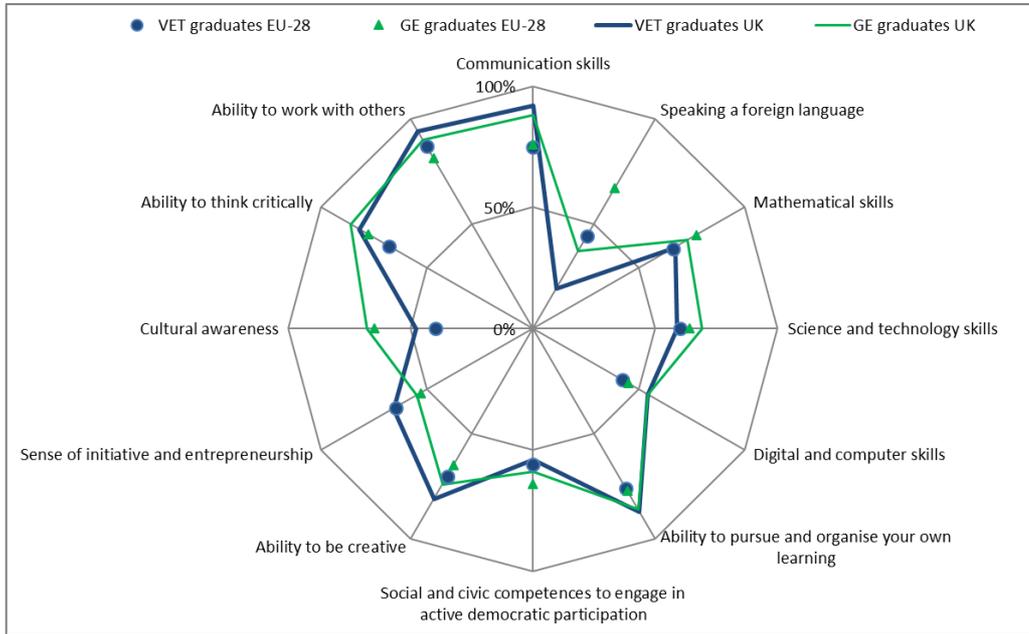
A recent survey⁽³⁴⁾ showed that, in the United Kingdom, compared with general education graduates, those who completed VET programmes felt they had:

- (a) stronger (ranked by priority):
 - (i) sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
 - (ii) ability to be creative;
 - (iii) ability to work with others;
 - (iv) communication skills;
- (b) weaker:
 - (i) cultural awareness;
 - (ii) foreign language speaking;
 - (iii) science and technology skills (Figure 2).

⁽³³⁾ For more information on key competences in VET see: [UK NARIC. \(2016\). *Key competences in vocational education and training – United Kingdom*. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series.](#)

⁽³⁴⁾ Cedefop (2017c). Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 62. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/264585>

Figure 2. **Self-evaluation of acquired skills in general education (GE) and VET in 2016**

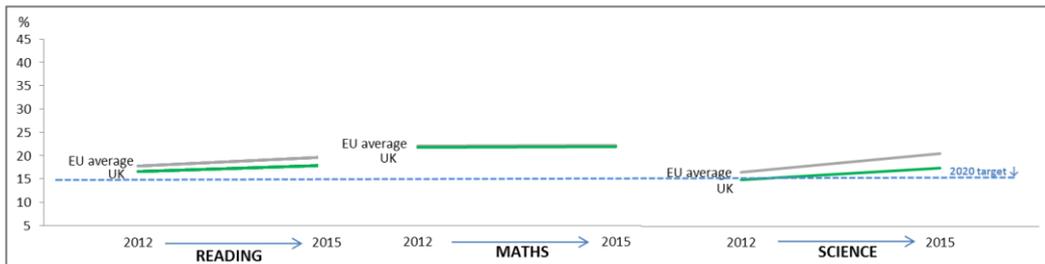


NB: GE stands for general education. Respondents who attended upper secondary education. Interviewees were asked in summer 2016 about their overall experience in upper secondary education. Aggregated data do not take account of different types and sectors of VET and age groups of respondents.

Source: Cedefop, 2017c.

The context of key competences in 2015 in the United Kingdom was mainly characterised by an increasing share of young low achievers in reading and science compared with 2012 (Figure 3). The share of low achievers in the UK was lower than in the EU on average, 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 (programme for international student assessment) scale.

Source: OECD, 2014; OECD, 2016.

As VET enrolled 40% of all upper secondary learners in the country ⁽³⁵⁾, this trend was likely to be reflected in the key competences trained for in VET programmes.

4.2. Key competences addressed in the reporting period

Table 2 outlines the 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	YES	
Foreign languages		
Digital competence	YES	
Maths	YES	
Science		
Technology		
Social and civic competences		
Learning to learn		
Financial literacy		
Entrepreneurship competence		
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 VET

The 2016 strategy for further education, *Further education means success* (Sections 1.2.2 and 3.2.2.2), recommends that colleges raise the level of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) competence by adopting the new qualifications that were developed through the refreshed

⁽³⁵⁾ Calculated from Eurostat; data for 2015.

Essential skills strategy ⁽³⁶⁾ in September 2016 and the reviews of GCSEs (general certificates of secondary education) in English and mathematics. There is renewed focus on developing learners' applied numeracy, literacy and problem-solving capabilities within pre-16 provision.

The youth training system will provide a new broad-based baccalaureate-style combined award at level 2 (EQF level 3), equating to a minimum of five GCSEs at grades A* (the highest) to C, including English and mathematics qualifications at level 2 (EQF level 3) and additional qualifications deemed relevant to the needs of individual sectors. Content will be decided through the newly implemented development process which allows sectoral partnerships (SP) to set specific occupational standards referenced to national occupational standards (NOS), including relevant professional and technical skills, assessment preferences and professional qualifications. This will specifically enable the development of the agreed eight wider transversal skills which build upon linkages to the Northern Ireland school curriculum (cross curricular and thinking and personal skills) and UNESCO Skills for employment.

⁽³⁶⁾ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/Essential%20Skills%20Interactive%20PDF%20%28revised%29.pdf>

CHAPTER 5.

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

5.1. Baseline 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, VET teaching in Northern Ireland was faced with the need for FE teaching staff to update their industry practice to support the new and innovative approaches implemented in apprenticeships and youth training. Ensuring that part-time FE teachers were equipped with the necessary pedagogical skills was also a challenge (only 24% of part-time FE teachers held a teaching qualification).

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

Full time lecturers working more than eight hours per week in Northern Ireland had to possess a degree in a relevant subject area or a qualification at QCF ⁽³⁷⁾ level 5 in a relevant subject area plus three years of relevant industrial experience. Lecturers had also to possess a recognised teaching qualification ⁽³⁸⁾, or enrol on an appropriate course, which they then had to complete within the first three years of appointment.

Teaching staff in the VET sector in Northern Ireland used the professional titles of lecturer, teacher, trainer, tutor and assessor.

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

Professionals providing training or coaching to apprentices in companies (in-company trainers) had to comply with the requirements of the employer and any regulations specific to the occupational area. Professionals and companies determined how they stayed up to date on industry specific matters.

⁽³⁷⁾ Qualification and credit framework

⁽³⁸⁾ For example, the postgraduate certificate in education (FE). A list of acceptable teaching qualifications could be found in the Department for the Economy circulars from 2012.

5.1.3. VET school teachers: main lines for CPD

Full-time lecturers in Northern Ireland were entitled to a minimum of five days professional development per year. At publicly funded VET providers, teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) was the responsibility of employers (Cedefop, 2015). Needs for staff development were identified at national level by education provider inspectorates, but the main responsibility for identification of training needs rested with individual education and training providers through staff performance management processes and monitoring of data. CPD courses were developed in conjunction with the University of Ulster. Courses particularly addressed the topics of dealing with adult learner and disadvantaged learner needs.

Colleges had also established links and partnerships with businesses to inform and support CPD. This enabled staff to participate in industrial/business placements which gave them opportunities to update skills and knowledge about working practices, technologies and business management, and develop effective partnerships with industry.

5.2. Initial training for teaching/training staff in VET schools 2015-19

The *Further education means success* strategy published in 2016 (Sections 1.2.2 and 3.2.2.2) committed to establishing a new teacher education framework with renewed focus on high quality initial teacher education for all lecturing staff in colleges. Work is under way and includes a review of the minimum standards for pedagogy and subject qualifications.

5.3. Initial training for trainers in enterprises 2015-19

The *Strategy for youth training* ⁽³⁹⁾ adopted in June 2015 (Sections 1.2.1 and 3.2.4.2) foresees that in-company trainers (buddies) assigned to learners in the workplace will be required to have appropriate recent experience of their industry and undertake introductory training. A quality assurance project under development since 2015 will set up a quality assurance model to ensure high-quality youth training provision.

⁽³⁹⁾ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/youth-training-strategy.pdf>

5.4. CPD for teaching/training staff in VET schools 2015-19

The *Strategy for youth training* ⁽⁴⁰⁾ adopted in June 2015 (Sections 1.2.1 and 3.2.4.2) foresees that teachers delivering the non-work-based elements of youth training will be required to have recent experience of their industry and relevant occupational and pedagogical qualifications. All teachers will be expected to spend periods of time updating their skills and knowledge of their industry, as defined by the relevant sectoral partnership.

The *Further education means success* strategy adopted in 2016 (Section 1.2.2) implies strengthening further education college performance in a number of key areas including pedagogy, teacher qualifications and CPD. Work in this area is currently in process and various approaches are in place to ensure lecturers' industrial knowledge and skills are kept up to date through placements with local employers and exchanges with similar organisations in other countries. CPD courses have been developed in conjunction with Ulster University, both in relation to industry placements and essential skills teaching.

The quality assurance project for training in-company trainers (Section 5.3) will include criteria for CPD and continuing performance monitoring of both trainers and teachers.

5.5. CPD for trainers in enterprises 2015-19

The requirement of the 2015 *Strategy for youth training* ⁽⁴¹⁾ on in-company trainers having appropriate recent experience of their industry and the related quality assurance project (Section 5.3) also covers their continuing training.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/youth-training-strategy.pdf>

⁽⁴¹⁾ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/youth-training-strategy.pdf>

Statistical overview: 2019 update

Table 3 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 the United Kingdom and in the EU: 2015, last available year and recent change**

Indicator label	2015				Last available year				Recent change			
	UK	f	EU	f	Yr	UK	f	EU	f	Range	UK	EU
Access, attractiveness and flexibility												
IVET students as % of all upper secondary students	40.1		47.3	ce	'17	46.6		47.8	ce	'15-'17	6.5	0.5
IVET work-based students as % of all upper secondary IVET	54.1		28.3	ce	'17	48.8		27.9	ce	'15-'17	-5.4	-0.5
IVET students with direct access to tertiary education as % of all upper secondary IVET	39.2		68.1	ce	'17	49		68.6	ce	'15-'17	9.7	0.4
Workers participating in CVT courses (%)	30.4		40.8		'15	30.4		40.8				
Workers participating in on-the-job training (%)	52		34		'15	52		34				
Adults in lifelong learning (%)	15.7		10.7		'18	14.6		11.1		'15-'18	-1.1	0.4
Enterprises providing training (%)	85.7		72.6		'15	85.7		72.6				
Female IVET students as % of all female upper secondary students	40.1		42	ce	'17	47.6		42.7	ce	'15-'17	7.5	0.7
Employees of small firms participating in CVT courses (%)	30.3		30		'15	30.3		30				
Young VET graduates in further education and training (%)	33.2		33		'18	33.5		33		'15-'18	0.3	0
Older adults in lifelong learning (%)	12.1		6.9		'18	11.2		7.3		'15-'18	-0.9	0.4
Low-educated adults in lifelong learning (%)	6.8		4.3		'18	5.8		4.3		'15-'18	-1	0
Unemployed adults in lifelong learning (%)	14.3		9.5		'18	13.1		10.7		'15-'18	-1.2	1.2
Individuals who wanted to participate in training but did not (%)					'16	16.9		11.4				
Job-related non-formal education and training (%)					'16	83.6		79.4				

Indicator label	2015				Last available year				Recent change			
	UK	f	EU	f	Yr	UK	f	EU	f	Range	UK	EU
Skill development and labour market relevance												
IVET public expenditure (% of GDP)	0.5		0.5	ce	'16	0.5		0.5	ce	'15-'16	0	0
IVET public expenditure per student (1000 PPS units)	7.4		7.1	ce	'16	6.5		7.4	ce	'15-'16	-0.9	0.3
Enterprise expenditure on CVT courses as % of total labour cost	1.3		0.9		'15	1.3		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)			29.2	ce	'17	23.3		29.1	ce	'15-'17	23.3	0
Short-cycle VET graduates as % of first time tertiary education graduates					'17	5.9	d	14.3	b ce	'15-'17		
Innovative enterprises with supportive training practices (%)					'16			37.7				
Employment rate for IVET graduates (20-34 year-olds)	79		77.2		'18	80.5		80.5		'15-'18	1.5	3.3
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over general stream)	-3.4		5.4		'18	-2.4		6.6		'15-'18	1	1.2
Employment premium for IVET graduates (over low-educated)	22		23.7		'18	14.8		23.3		'15-'18	-7.2	-0.4
Workers helped to improve their work by training (%)	84.9		83.7		'15	84.9		83.7				
Workers with skills matched to their duties (%)	58.1		57		'15	58.1		57				
Overall transitions and labour market trends												
Early leavers from education and training (%)	10.8		11		'18	10.7		10.6		'15-'18	-0.1	-0.4
30-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	47.9		38.7		'18	48.8		40.7		'15-'18	0.9	2
NEET rate for 18-24 year-olds (%)	14.5		15.8		'18	13.4		13.7		'15-'18	-1.1	-2.1
Unemployment rate for 20-34 year-olds (%)	6.7		12.9		'18	5		9.4		'15-'18	-1.7	-3.5
Employment rate of recent graduates (%)	85		75.9		'18	86		80.6		'15-'18	1	4.7
Adults with lower level of educational attainment (%)	20.3		23.5		'18	19.6		21.9		'15-'18	-0.7	-1.6
Employment rate for 20-64 year-olds (%)	76.8		70		'18	78.7		73.1		'15-'18	1.9	3.1
Employment rate for 20-64 year-olds with lower level of educational attainment (%)	59.7		52.6		'18	65.1		56.1		'15-'18	5.4	3.5
Medium/high-qualified employment in 2030 (% of total)					'18	88.4	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, 46.6% of all upper secondary students in the United Kingdom were enrolled in IVET. This percentage is 1.2 points below the EU average. However, it appears that the percentage of upper secondary students in IVET is higher by 6.5 points compared to the situation in the country in 2015.

In 2017, 48.8% of all upper secondary IVET students were enrolled in a work-based learning setting which is substantially lower (5.4 points less) than in 2015. In contrast the EU average is 27.9%.

In 2018, 14.6% of adults participated in lifelong learning activities which is lower (1.1 points less) than in 2015. The EU average is 11.1%

In 2018, the employment rate for IVET graduates (20-34 years old) was 80.5%, equal to the EU average. It appears that the employment rate for IVET graduates (20-34 years old) is higher by 1.5 points compared to the situation in the country in 2015.

Conclusion

Since 2015, Northern Ireland has been piloting reforms of its work-based learning, apprenticeship and traineeship systems. Development of tools to monitor VET learner transition to the labour market and forecast labour market trends and skills needs has been initiated. Strategies to support guidance and study progression have been launched. Plans to provide groups in need (people with disabilities, young low-qualified) with new training opportunities have been set up. Major progress has been achieved with the introduction of the regulated qualifications framework (RQF), bringing together the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) and the national qualifications framework (NQF). Steps have been taken to support the development of key competences in initial VET and reinforce the initial training and continuing professional development of VET teachers and in-company trainers.

Compared to 2015-16, the main changes in 2017 have taken place in MTDs 1 and 3. In MTD 1, the design work for college hubs, intended to coordinate education and training in specific occupational areas, was started ⁽⁴²⁾. In MTD 3, a new type of VET promoting action was launched, targeted at raising business awareness of the range of business-oriented bespoke services offered by further education colleges ⁽⁴³⁾.

No innovative development was reported for 2018-19.

The actions carried out show that the main lines of the Riga conclusions are being addressed. However, information available to Cedefop at the time of writing this report, suggests that further supporting the development of key competences in continuing VET/adult learning is an issue worthy of more consideration in the future.

⁽⁴²⁾ See Section 1.2.2.

⁽⁴³⁾ See Section 3.2.5.

Acronyms

AES	adult education survey
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CPD	continuing professional development
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
DGVT	Director General for Vocational Education and Training
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
Eurostat	statistical office of the European Union
FHEQ	framework for higher education qualifications
GCE	general certificate of education
GCSE	general certificate of secondary education
GDP	gross domestic product
GE	general education
GLH	guided learning hours
ICT	information and communication technology
ISCED	international standard classification of education
IVET	initial vocational education and training
NEET	not in education, employment, or training
NQF	national qualifications framework
NRP	national reference point
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Ofqual	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
PISA	programme for international student assessment
PPS	purchasing power standards
QCF	qualifications and credit framework
RQF	regulated qualifications framework
STEM	science, technology, engineering and math programmes
TQT	total qualification time
UOE	UNESCO, OECD, Eurostat
VET	vocational education and training

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