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Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015–17

IRELAND

Cedefop monitoring and analysis of VET policies

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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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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), rather than at upper secondary level (leaving certificate vocational programme (LCVP) and leaving certificate applied (LCA)) (Burke et al., 2016, p. 20-21). Three quarters of upper secondary graduates continue their studies (at either ISCED 4 or 5). The employment rate of recent upper secondary graduates is low: 56.8 % in 2014 compared to 70.8 % in the EU (European Commission, 2015, p. 9). Adult participation in lifelong learning is also low: 6.5 % in 2015 compared to 10.7 % in the EU (Table 1).

At the beginning of the reporting period, VET in the country faced the challenge of better addressing labour market needs, particularly for reskilling and upskilling the labour force. Reform of further education and training was being carried out. A FET authority, SOLAS, had been set up in 2013. A further education and training 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, last available year and recent trend**

Indicator label	2010				Last available year					Recent trend (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		z	34.0	b E2			
IVET students with direct access to tertiary education as % of all upper secondary IVET					'14		z	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		b	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		z	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			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			Last available year				Recent trend (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			

(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: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/5561

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

1.1. Policy priorities for 2016-20

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.

1.2. Main actions in 2015-17

1.2.1. 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, 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. 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.

1.2.2. The 2025 *National skills strategy*

Ireland's *National skills strategy 2025* ([1]) 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. Action 2.1 of the strategy emphasises 'the involvement of practitioners with experience of delivering education, providing for lecturer placements in industry and engagement of lecturers with recent experience of the world of work'. Action 2.2 provides that 'education and training providers will work with SMEs to identify and address training needs'.

1.2.3. Regional skills fora

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 strategy. 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. The National Skills Council oversees and advises on identified skills needs and how to ensure delivery of the corresponding skills.

1.2.4. 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 themselves can publish their curriculum vitae.

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

MTD 2 – Quality assurance mechanisms in line with EQAVET and continuous information and feedback loops to IVET and CVET (^{2})

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. A national quality assurance approach has been developed and there is a methodology for internal and external evaluation. Quality standards for VET providers are used as a condition for accreditation and are becoming a condition for funding.

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).

Data on labour market outcomes for learners in Ireland's further education and training system (including VET) are often fragmented. Until recently, 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 will gather learner data from the time the learner first engages with the FET sector. Part of the data

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(^{2}) Sources:

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (Cedefop): http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en

ReferNet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/networks/refernet

Priorities reported by directors general for vocational training (DGVT) for the 2016-20 period.

EQAVET (2016 Secretariat survey, website, newsletters): http://www.eqavet.eu

2016 Compendium of EQAVET NRP *Erasmus*+ funding

Council Recommendations on the 2016 national reform programmes: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-semester/2016/#

Education and Training Monitor 2016, country reports: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor_en

collection will include monitoring learners' destinations on leaving FET. Labour market outcomes (employment, unemployment or inactivity) will be a key measure in evaluating training programmes designed for labour market entry.

2.1. Quality assurance mechanisms in line with EQAVET ([3])

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.

During the reporting period, the quality assurance policy for all post-compulsory school VET provision has been agreed and is being phased in nationally. Full implementation of the national quality assurance approach, including external review of VET providers, is expected by 2019.

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 2016. All EQAVET indicators are used, including those on 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.

([3]) 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

Figure 1.   **Use of EQAVET indicators**
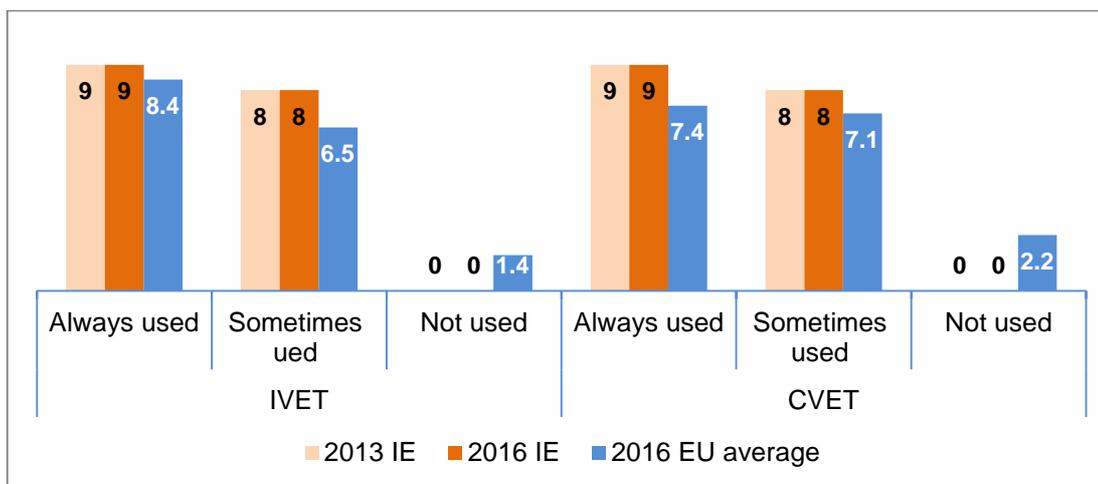
2.2.   Continuous information and feedback loops in IVET

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 the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS), the latter has been working in the reporting period to establish a data infrastructure to support VET provision and policy. The strategy also includes undertaking skills needs research. Part of the work carried out to fulfil this function included the programme and learner support system (PLSS), a joint project between SOLAS and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), the representative association of the 16 education and training boards in Ireland. PLSS will provide 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 will be processed and analysed by the recently formed (in 2016) data analytics unit in SOLAS to show the type of FET (including VET) programmes which are best suited to different outcomes.

2.3. CVET continuous information and feedback loops

Regional skills fora were launched in May 2016 as part of the national skills strategy (Section 1.2.3). Each forum has a steering group to guide its work and a manager to liaise with employers and education/training providers. It provides an opportunity for employers and the education and training system to work together to meet the emerging skills needs of their regions.

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. Policy priorities for 2016-20

For 2016-20, the country's priority in this area, as set by the Director General for vocational education and training, is to develop a common understanding of recognition of prior learning (RPL) and dissemination of good practice in RPL across the further education and training and higher education and training sectors.

3.2. Main actions taken in 2015-17

3.2.1. Guidance

The *National skills strategy 2025* emphasises the need to strengthen career guidance, particularly by engaging employers. SOLAS (the FET Authority) set up in early 2016 a website fetchcourses.ie to provide a tool to inform potential learners of available programmes in the VET sector.

3.2.2. Transparency, recognition, validation

3.2.2.1. *National qualifications framework (^{4})*

The Irish national framework of qualifications (NFQ), which is among the early developed qualifications frameworks in Europe, was officially launched in 2003. It covers FET, higher education and training as well as universities. It has ten levels and is based on learning outcomes. The NFQ was linked to EQF in 2009. It is maintained by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) (^{5}), the single

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(^{4})   Cedefop, 2017b.

(^{5})   This authority was created by an amalgamation of four bodies that had both awarding and quality assurance responsibilities: FETAC, HETAC, NQAI and the Irish Universities Quality Board.

qualifications and quality assurance authority. The framework has reached an advanced operational stage. In 2016, the review of the Irish NFQ was initiated by QQI. Discussions on the appropriate design and review methodology are continuing.

3.2.2.2. *Validation* ([6])

A framework of principles and guidelines for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) was designed in 2005. However, there is no single national strategy, although the need for it has been formally acknowledged ([7]). National principles and central guidelines exist for further and higher education. Validation can lead to exemptions and awards of (partial) qualifications. It leads to the same qualifications as those awarded through formal education and training. Ireland is one of the few countries where full awards can be gained. Providers are required to have quality assurance processes which embrace recognition of prior learning. In the reporting period, a national practitioner network for the recognition of prior learning has been established to coordinate validation developments across sectors. The inaugural meeting of the network was held in 2015. In the same year a research project on RPL in higher education ([8]) was undertaken by the National forum for the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education (NFETL). In May 2016, QQI published policies and criteria for validation in FET ([9]). The 2016-19 action plan for education (Section 1.2.1) 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 that was published in 2016 (Section 1.2.2) has among its objectives the development of a system for RPL and better recognition of workplace learning, in support to lifelong learning.

3.2.3. Policy framework for employee development

In the reporting period, SOLAS is overseeing the development of a policy framework for employee development to guide activity relevant support undertaken by the FET sector. It addresses provision for the development of

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([6]) Cedefop, 2017a; Cedefop et al. 2017

([7]) QQI (2013). *Green paper on the recognition of prior learning*: https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Green%20Paper%20-%20Section%204.7.pdf

([8]) National forum for the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education (2015). *A current overview of recognition of prior learning in Irish higher education*. Focused research report No 2: http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Project-2.pdf

([9]) http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Initial_Validation_policy_7_10_13.pdf

those at work at levels 1 to 6 on the national framework of qualifications (NFQ), levels 1 to 5 on the EQF.

3.2.4. 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.

MTD 4 – Key competences in both IVET and CVET

4.1.   Baseline

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

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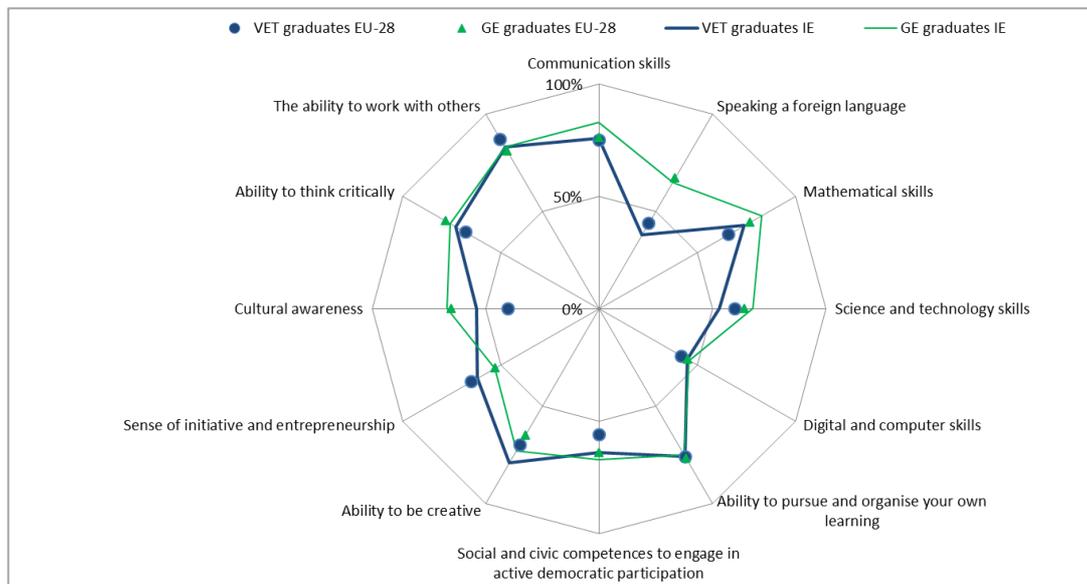
NB: Respondents who attended upper secondary education. Interviewees were asked in summer 2016 about their overall experience in upper secondary education. Aggregated data do not take account of different types and sectors of VET and age groups of respondents.

Source: Cedefop, 2017c.

The context of key competences in 2015 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 4.2). However, the share of low achievers in Ireland is much lower than in the EU on average (below 15%for maths and reading), where the trend is similar.

Figure 3.   **Share of 15-year-olds with low achievement in reading, maths and science**
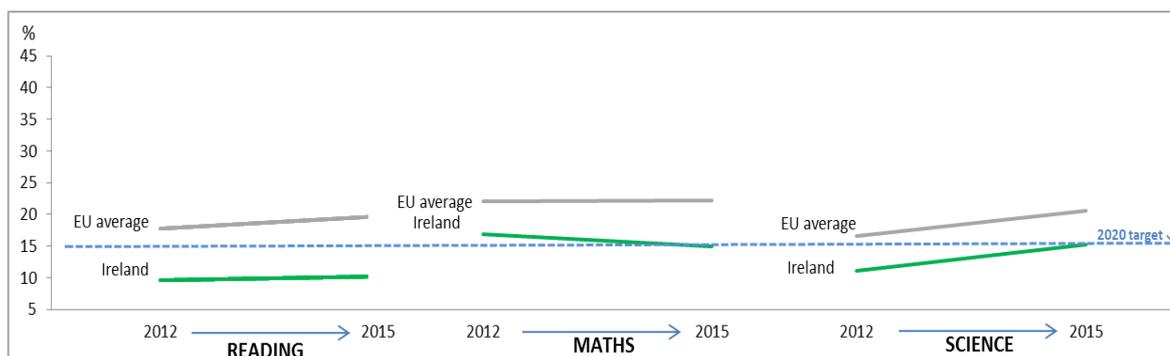
NB: Low achievement means failing Level 2 on the PISA scale.
Source: OECD (PISA 2012 and 2015).

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

VET in Ireland is mostly provided at post-secondary non-tertiary level within the FET sector. Legislation supporting key competences in education is not VET specific but rather covers the entire education and training spectrum. The 2014-20 FET strategy ([10]), adopted in 2014, provided for the FET sector to ensure acquisition of at least some key competences: mathematics, communication, digital competence and entrepreneurship. Qualifications awarded to those completing FET programmes require minimum achievement in most of the eight EU key competences ([11]).

4.2.   Key competences in initial and continuing VET

For the 2016-20 period, the country's priority in this area, as set by the Director General for vocational education and training, is to improve levels of basic skills

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([10]) https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf

([11]) For more information on key competences in VET in Ireland see Burke and Condon (2016).

as part of FET (further education and training) literacy and numeracy strategy 2014-19.

The 2016 action plan for education 2016-19 (^{12}) (Section 1.2.1) 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. Planned actions with implications for VET delivery include:

(a) foreign languages: publishing a foreign language strategy, increasing the diversity and provision of foreign language learning opportunities, and improving awareness of the benefits of language learning for career and study abroad opportunities;

(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.

In 2016, SOLAS commissioned a report on best practices in entrepreneurship education and training in the FET sector (^{13}). 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.

(^{12}) 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

(^{13}) http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/TMA_EET_in_FET_final_report.pdf

MTD 5 – Systematic initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors

The 2014-19 FET strategy presented by SOLAS in 2014 provided for the training of teachers and work-based tutors in the sector. It acknowledged the sector's need for standards on staff qualifications. A national continuous professional development (CPD) strategy for the sector was also planned.

Since 2013, those who want to register as teachers for the further education sector are required to have a teacher education qualification approved by the Teaching Council in addition to the necessary degree. Work-based tutors for apprenticeship programmes must be registered with SOLAS. Tutors must hold a national craft certificate at EQF level 5 in order to train apprentices. They are not required to have a pedagogical qualification.

5.1. Initial training for VET school teaching / training staff

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 the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), the representative body for education and training boards in Ireland. 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).

5.2. Initial training for trainers and mentors in enterprises

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.

The 2017-19 FET professional development strategy published in 2016 (Section 5.1) addresses FET learning practitioners at large, including 'adult literacy tutors, community education tutors, VTOS ([14]) tutors, *Back to education initiative* (BTEI) tutors, *Youthreach* resource persons, guidance counsellors and instructors in training services' (ETBI and SOLAS, 2016, p. 16). Initial training for these categories will be approached together with that for teachers (Section 5.1).

5.3. Continuing professional development for teaching/training staff in VET schools and enterprises

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

The FET professional development strategy 2017-19 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; a plan for SOLAS 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.

The 2014-19 FET strategy 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

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([14]) Vocational training opportunities schemes.

necessary data and inform the overall CPD strategy that SOLAS and its partners are developing.

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 which guide the strategy for IVET development. A review of the application and effects of the national framework of qualifications, and steps towards a national validation strategy, have been initiated. Plans in support to 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.

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. However, information available to Cedefop at the time suggests that an issue deserving some consideration in future is that of further implementing ECVET (credits).

List of abbreviations

CPD	continuing professional development
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
DGVT	Director 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
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
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
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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