



VET in Ireland

Ireland's education and training system is divided into four sectors: primary, secondary, further education and training (FET), and higher education. Further education in Ireland covers EQF levels 2-5 (NFQ levels 3-6) with some higher apprenticeships at EQF level 6 (NFQ levels 7/8). The main providers of VET are the 16 education and training boards (ETBs). SOLAS is the Government agency responsible for funding, planning and coordinating FET provision in Ireland. A newly established Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is responsible for policy, funding and governance of Higher and Further Education. Other statutory providers include BIM (seafood industry training) and Teagasc (agricultural training).

VET programmes within FET range from workplace training options, apprenticeship opportunities, courses in further education colleges and community education. Having undergone five years of reform, FET is making a valuable contribution to a more collaborative and cohesive tertiary education system for Ireland. In this context, the tertiary education system comprises FET and HE. Clear progression routes into higher education allow learners to make the transition from EQF levels 3 and 4 (NFQ levels 4 and 5) to EQF levels 5 and 6 (NFQ levels 6, 7, 8) and beyond. It is estimated that 21% of school leavers are enrolling in FET and from the 2017 cohort of 33 017 FET learners, 16% progressed to higher education. VET programmes within FET include:

- apprenticeships: the range of apprenticeship opportunities has diversified in recent years. There are currently 58 apprenticeship programmes available, which include off the job training which spans both FET and Higher Education (EQF levels 4/5/6/7/8 with comparatively few programmes as this is a new development at levels 6, 7, and 8). Apprenticeships are included in the following sectors: engineering, construction, motor, electrical, finance, hospitality and food, biopharma, logistics, property services, recruitment, sales and ICT;
- traineeship is a programme of structured training which combines learning in an education and training setting and in the workplace, aiming to improve recruitment and employment outcomes for participants. Traineeships range from EQF levels 3-5 (NFQ levels 4-6) and are predominantly focused on employment. 75 traineeship programmes are currently available;
- many learners enrol on a post-leaving certificate (PLC) programme (EQF levels 4/5). PLC provision has two overarching aims: to provide successful participants with specific vocational skills to enhance their employment opportunities or to facilitate their progression to additional education and training.

Specific skills training (SST) courses span both IVET and CVET and are delivered by the ETBs (and, in some instances, private providers) and are designed to meet the needs of industry and business across a range of occupations at EQF levels 3-5 (NFQ levels 4-6).

Skills to advance is a national initiative that provides upskilling and reskilling opportunities to employees in jobs undergoing change and to those currently employed in vulnerable sectors.

eCollege is a leading learning platform that delivers online training courses to those who are employed as well as those already enrolled on FET programmes. Courses are designed with the flexibility of response to the specific skills needs of individuals who require certified training to assist return to or progression in the labour market.

Other FET programmes, delivered mainly by ETBs, include second chance education opportunities and community education. Community education plays a critical role, supporting participation and re-engagement in education and training, with around 50 000 learners across FET each year.

Distinctive features of VET

VET in Ireland is not usually offered within the second level system (neither lower secondary (NFQ 3, EQF 2, ISCED 244) nor upper secondary (NFQ 4/5, EQF3/4, ISCED 343/344)). Therefore, most learners are aged at least 16 or over. Active inclusion and community development have always been central tenets of the work of education and training boards and FET providers, with an extensive reach into and across local communities. FET balances the needs of skills for work with the just as critical skills for life; supporting citizenship and prosperity across communities and developing social capital.

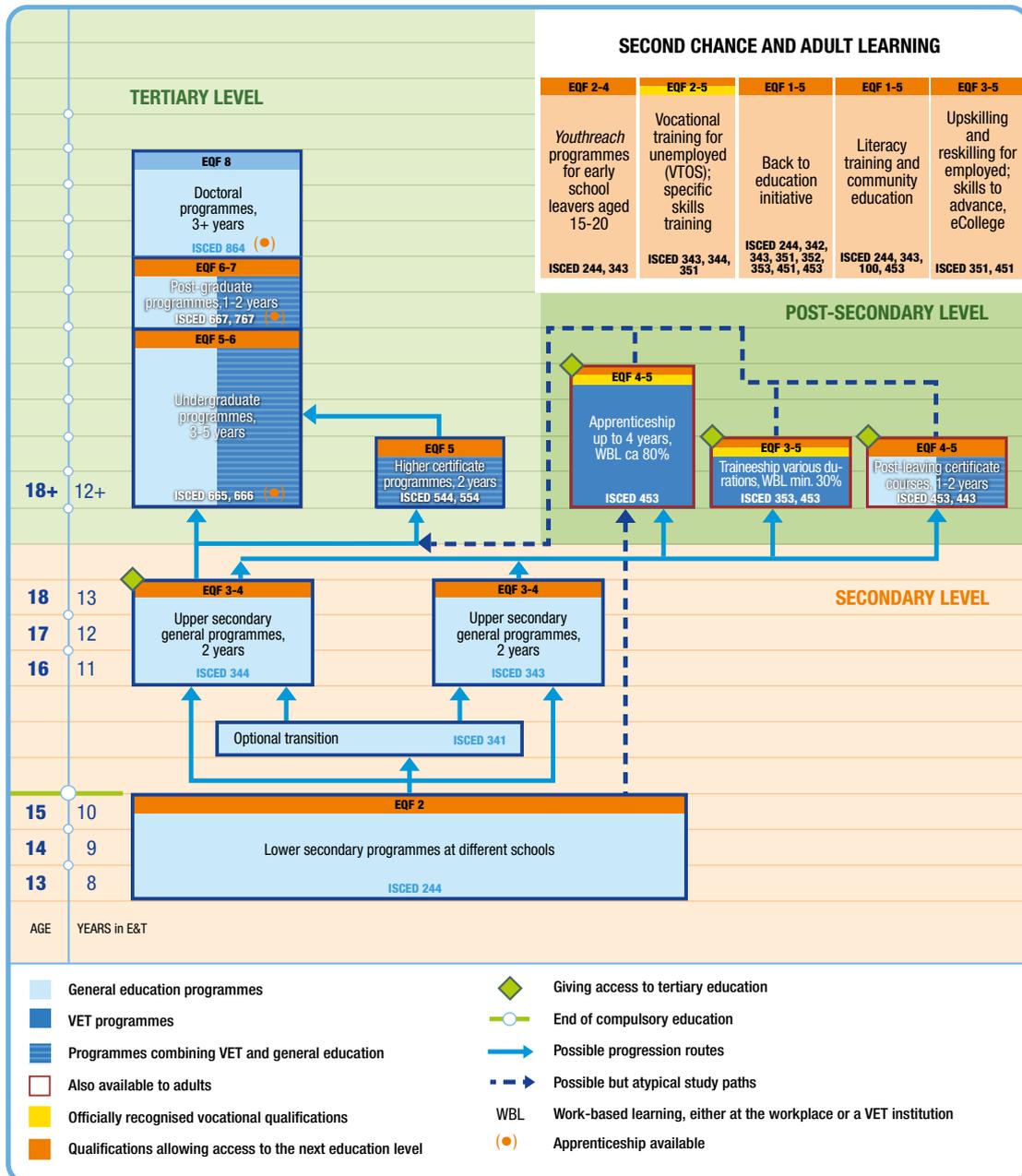
The Irish Government has tasked SOLAS with the development of a new 10-year literacy, numeracy and digital skills strategy, which is a key commitment in the programme for Government.

Considering the future world of work, information technology and digital creativity are growing in popularity. Courses and pathways are available to learners who wish to train as software professionals, network engineers, digital marketers and cybersecurity experts. There are new apprenticeships in ICT which include a focus on female-only cohorts.

Challenges and policy responses

The Further education and training strategy 2020-24 sets out a five-year roadmap for the sector which is built around three key pillars of building skills, fostering inclusion and creating pathways; it aims to address the economic and societal challenges faced over the coming years. FET planning must ensure agility to respond to a large base of unemployed people, or vulnerable workers in need of upskilling and reskilling to re-join or remain in the workforce. This need is currently exacerbated by Covid-19 and the serious potential economic risks of Brexit.

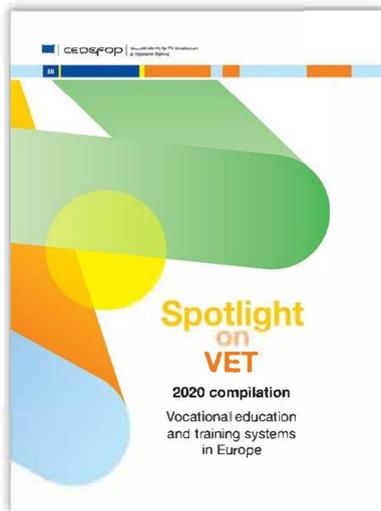
FET Policy responses to the challenging circumstances brought about by Covid-19 include Skills to compete – a funding initiative to support those who have lost their jobs as a result of Covid-19 in returning to the workforce – eCollege, and the apprenticeship incentivisation scheme, a current package of financial support for apprenticeship employers.



NB: ISCED-P 2011.
 Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Ireland, 2020.

Within the FET Strategy 2020-24 there is a vision for transforming learning, and for future FET provision to be shorter, more agile and targeted to specific skills areas. Within FET, flexibility and agility is already evident in relation to extending registration dates and enabling digital technologies to deliver and support priority learners, including but not limited to peo-

ple with disabilities, new migrants, the long-term unemployed, ex-offenders and women. Teaching and learning is also now offered through online and blended approaches. The challenge for FET practitioners is to adapt to new ways of teaching and learning, going beyond online platforms to consider pedagogical approaches and concepts.



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