VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN EUROPE
IRELAND
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This VET in Europe report is part of a series prepared by Cedefop's ReferNet network. VET in Europe reports provide an overview of national vocational education and training (VET) systems of the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway. The reports help to understand VET’s main features and role within countries’ overall education and training systems from a lifelong learning perspective, and VET’s relevance to and interaction with the labour market.

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Chapter 1  External factors influencing VET

1.1  Introduction

The Republic of Ireland comprises 26 of the 32 counties of the island of Ireland. The remaining six counties make up Northern Ireland which is part of the United Kingdom. The total area of the Republic of Ireland is 84,421 sq km. The major centre of population is Dublin (city and county) and the other major cities are Cork, Galway and Limerick.

1.2  Population

Table 1 shows the estimated Irish population classified by sex and age group at April 2015. All percentage figures refer to the total population. The table indicates that 22% of the population is less than 15 years old, while 13% are aged 65 years or older. This gives a total dependency ratio of 35/65 = 54% and an old age dependency ratio of 13/65 = 20%. The Irish old age dependency ratio has been projected to rise sharply over the coming decades and reach almost 45% by 2050 (Eurostat projected old-age dependency ratio).
Table 1. **Estimated Population (‘000s) classified by sex & age group, April 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons years</th>
<th>Total ‘000s</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Males ‘000s</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Females ‘000s</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–4</td>
<td>360.9</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>184.5</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>176.4</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9</td>
<td>352.4</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>179.0</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>173.4</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14</td>
<td>316.1</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>161.5</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>154.6</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19</td>
<td>283.2</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>146.1</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>137.1</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24</td>
<td>233.5</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>119.5</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>114.0</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–29</td>
<td>290.4</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>140.6</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>149.8</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–34</td>
<td>363.9</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>172.8</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>191.0</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–39</td>
<td>371.5</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>181.6</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>189.9</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–44</td>
<td>351.8</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>174.6</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>177.2</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–49</td>
<td>319.5</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>159.6</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>159.8</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–54</td>
<td>295.8</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>146.1</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>149.7</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55–59</td>
<td>259.9</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>128.9</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>131.0</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–64</td>
<td>230.7</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>114.3</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>116.4</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65–69</td>
<td>202.6</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>100.4</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>102.2</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70–74</td>
<td>149.4</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75–79</td>
<td>111.1</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80–84</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85+</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4635.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>2289.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>2345.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 1 compares the population aged 0-64 years in 2010 and 2015. While the overall population in Ireland increased by 1.2% over this time period, the numbers in the cohorts aged between 15 and 34 years declined, a reflection of both a decreased number of births in earlier years (from the mid-1980s onwards) as well as high outward migration observed among young people during the recession. As many learners enter the VET system from the age of 18 onwards, it is likely this drop in the young population will impact on the number of upper secondary school completers entering the VET system in the medium term. In contrast, the 4% increase observed in the numbers aged 0-14 years is likely to increase the demand for places across all sectors of the education and training system, including VET, over the medium to long term.
Figure 1. Population (000s) by age group, 2010 and 2015

Source: CSO Population and Migration Estimates April 2015

Figure 2 shows net migration estimates by age group (0-64 years) by age group. While total migration over the period 2009-2015 remained negative, outward migration is shown to have negatively affected those aged 15-24 and 25-44 far more than any other age group. While showing signs of easing, migration remains negative for these age groups.

Figure 2. Net migration estimates (000s) by age group (0-64), 2009-2015

Source: CSO Population and Migration Estimates April 2015
* preliminary data
1.3 The labour market

The CSO Quarterly National Household Surveys provide the data for developments in the Irish labour force. The Quarterly National Household Survey is known in other countries as the Labour Force Survey.

1.3.1 Labour market status of the population

The labour market status of persons living in Ireland in quarter 4 2014, the working age population (persons aged 15-64) was 3 million. Of these, 1.88 million persons of working age were in employment; 1.12 million persons of working age were not in employment. Of the working age population not in employment, just over 212,600 were unemployed and 911,200 were economically inactive (1). Detailed information is shown in Figure 3.

(1) Economically inactive are defined as persons who are not in employment or unemployed
Figure 3. Irish population by age & economic status, quarter 4, 2014

Figure 4 shows trends in Ireland’s labour force over the period 2007 (prior to the economic crises) to 2015. There were over 2,167,000 persons in Ireland’s labour force in 2015; while this is a 5% decline (107,000 fewer persons) on the peak values observed in 2008, it is nonetheless higher than at any point since 2010. The labour force participation rate (15 years +) in 2015 was 60%, compared to 64.1% in 2007.

Following sharp declines since the onset of the economic crisis, the numbers in employment have been increasing since 2013, and reached almost 1,964,000 persons in 2015. Employment levels, however, remain 8% lower than their peak level 2007. The employment rate (15-64 years) in 2015 was 63.3%, well below the 69.2% observed in 2007, but none the less higher than 59% observed in 2012.
Unemployment levels in Ireland increased sharply at the beginning of the economic crisis, going from approximately 100,000 persons in 2007 to almost 317,000 in 2011; since then, however, unemployment levels have been decreasing, and in 2015 stood at 203,600, the lowest point in several years.

**Figure 4. Labour force, employment & unemployment (000s), annual averages**

![Chart showing labour force, employment, and unemployment trends from 2006 to 2015](chart.png)

*Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (QNHS data)*

### 1.3.2 Labour force by education attainment levels

Figure 5 shows the breakdown of Ireland’s labour force by highest education level attained. In quarter 1 2016, 46% of Ireland’s labour force held third level qualifications; 13% held post-secondary non-tertiary level education, and 41% held higher secondary or below.
1.3.3 Participation in the labour force by education attainment

Figure 6 shows the labour force participation rate by education attainment. In general, labour force participation rates increase with greater educational attainment: individuals with third level qualifications are more than twice as likely to be in the labour force compared to those with, at most, primary level qualifications. In addition, those with post-secondary non-tertiary education (where most VET graduates are classified) have a higher than average participation rate.

(2) Education data is presented according to ISCED (2011) levels of education attainment; 3rd level non-honours degree programmes typically lead to qualifications spanning NFQ 6-7 (EQF level 5-6); 3rd level honours degree programmes typically lead to qualifications at NFQ 8-10 (EQF levels 6-8)
1.4 The Economy

1.4.1 Performance of the Irish economy: longitudinal trends in GDP and GNP

Economic growth in Ireland between 2010-11 and 2011-12 was negative in terms of both GDP and GNP (Table 2). However, it subsequently turned positive in both 2012-13 and 2013-14. Over the period 2014-15, GDP increased by 26.3% and GNP increased by 18.7%. These dramatic changes in growth figures, however, are due to a number of reasons including:

- an increase in the number of new aircraft imports into Ireland for international leasing activities
- corporate restructuring through imports of individual assets
- reclassifications of the entire balance sheets in 2015.

Economic growth is expected to continue over the medium term, with strong GDP growth expected in 2016 (between 4.1% and 5.1% depending on the commentator) and 2017 (between 3.5% and 4.2%)\(^3\). GNP is also expected to expand, with projected growth of 4.7% in 2016 and 3.7% in 2017\(^4\). Employment is expected to grow by 2.3% in 2016 and by a further 1.8% in 2017\(^5\).

---

\(^{1}\) Central Bank of Ireland, Quarterly Bulletin Q2 2016, OECD, IMF, EU Commission and Department of Finance (Monthly Economic Bulletin May 2016).

\(^{2}\) Central Bank of Ireland, Quarterly Bulletin Q2 2016.

\(^{3}\) Ibid.
Table 2. Economic growth annual growth, 2010-15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP* (at constant market prices)</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>-0.0</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>26.3**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNP* (at constant market prices)</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>-4.0</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO

*Chain linked volume measures referenced to year 2014

** This exceptionally high growth rate was due to exceptional once-off circumstances and is currently the subject of discussion between Ireland and the OECD.

1.4.2 Employment by economic sector

Figure 7 shows national employment by broad economic sector in Ireland in quarter 4 2014. The highest numbers of persons were employed in wholesale & retail, human health and industry, making up 14.3%, 12.8% and 12.6% of national employment respectively. The vast majority of those employed in industry are employed in the manufacturing sector (90%); the remainder are employed in utilities and extraction and mining. When manufacturing employment is further broken down by technological intensity, low technology manufacturing accounted for 41% of total manufacturing employment, followed by high technology (27%), medium-high (17%) and medium-low (15%).\(^6\) In relative terms, employment in high technology manufacturing (e.g. pharmaceuticals, medical devices and computers/electronics) in Ireland has been increasing, with a year-on-year increase of 3.9% between quarter 4 2013 and quarter 4 2014, as well as a 9.4% increase over the period quarter 4 2009-quarter 4 2014.

\(^6\) High technology: pharmaceuticals, computers, etc. (NACE 21,26); Medium-high: chemicals, electrical equipment, machinery, medical instruments, etc. (NACE 20,27-30); Medium-low: petroleum products, rubber and plastic, other non-metallic mineral products, fabricated metal products etc. (NACE 19,22-25,33); Low technology: food, beverages, textiles, leather, wood, paper, printing, etc. (NACE 10-18,31,32).
1.5 Regulation of the labour market

1.5.1 Introduction
In terms of the labour market, Ireland’s regulatory framework compares more with other flexible labour markets such as that of the United Kingdom than with labour markets such as France and Germany. This is illustrated in a number of indicators, including employment protection (Table 3).
Table 3. The OECD indicators on employment protection legislation

Scale from 0 (least restrictions) to 6 (most restrictions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Protection of permanent workers against individual and collective dismissals</th>
<th>Protection of permanent workers against (individual) dismissal</th>
<th>Specific requirements for collective dismissal</th>
<th>Regulation on temporary forms of employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak Republic</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD Employment database – labour market policies and institutions

The statutory minimum wage in Ireland is €9.15 per hour in 2016; however, when cost of living and purchasing power parity (PPP) are considered, it is 6th highest in the EU.
### Table 4. Minimum wage (real wages, US dollar)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Hourly wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak Republic</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD Employment database – labour market policies and institutions (statutory minimum wages at 2014 USD PPP)

### 1.6 Welfare and employment policies relating to VET

1.6.1 Pathways to Work

Pathways to Work is a Government strategy designed to reverse the dramatic rise in the numbers of unemployed jobseekers on the Live Register. It is designed to complement the Action Plan for Jobs(7) as part of a twin-pronged approach to tackling the jobs crisis that emerged in the final years of the last decade. In January 2016, the second phase of the strategy, Pathways to Work 2016–20, was launched, laying out actions for this Government priority over the next five years. Pathways to Work 2016 – 20 contains six key strands involving 86 dedicated actions to build on the employment progress to date under previous Pathways strategies.

While the Action Plan for Jobs prioritises stimulating employment growth, Pathways to Work is focused on making sure that as many as possible of these new jobs, and other vacancies that arise in the economy are filled by people from the Live Register. Pathways to Work is coordinated by the Department (Ministry)

(7) The Action Plan for Jobs is the Government’s plan to improve the conditions for creating new jobs. It is a whole-of-Government initiative under which all Government Departments and 60 Agencies work together to support job creation and protection
of Social Protection, working together with a number of other Government Departments and Agencies.

Pathways to Work 2016-20, aims to enhance employment, education and training services for jobseekers and to increase engagement with employers to provide greater opportunities for those seeking work. There are six strands outlined in the Pathways to work 2016-20 initiative:

- Strand 1: Enhanced engagement with unemployed people of working age
- Strand 2: Increase the employment focus of activation programmes and opportunities
- Strand 3: Making work pay – Incentivise the take-up of opportunities
- Strand 4: Incentivising employers to offer jobs and opportunities to unemployed people
- Strand 5: Build organisation capability to deliver enhanced services to people who are unemployed
- Strand 6: Building Workforce Skills.

1.6.2 Other Government initiatives
Other initiatives by Government since the beginning of the economics crises which aim to address the unemployment issues in Ireland include

- JobsPlus, a financial incentive programme that encourages employers to offer employment to the long-term unemployed. JobsPlus is available to all employers in the private (including commercial semi-state), community, not-for-profit and voluntary sectors. It is not open to public service employers. Employers can avail of Jobsplus when filling positions that arise as a consequence of natural turnover. There are two types of incentives available to employers:
  - A payment of €7,500 for each person recruited who has been unemployed for more than 12 but less than 24 months
  - A payment of €10,000 for each person recruited who has been unemployed for more than 24 months

- JobBridge, the National Internship Programme. JobBridge provides work experience placements for interns for a 6 month or 9 month period. It aims to assist in breaking the cycle where jobseekers are unable to get a job without experience. The scheme is open to both new entrants to the labour market after education or training and to unemployed workers wishing to learn new skills. Interns receive an allowance of €52.50 per week on top of their social welfare entitlement. The European Commission provides co-funding to JobBridge for participants under 25 years. It is jointly backed by the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the
European Social Fund (ESF) and Department of Social Protection on an equal funding basis

- Momentum, a training programme with work experience opportunities for the long-term unemployed in key growth sectors of the economy (examined in greater detail in Chapter 2)
- Springboard+, third level courses (at certificate (NFQ 6; EQF 5), degree (NFQ 7/8; EQF 6) and masters (NFQ 9; EQF 8) level) for securing a qualification in key growth sectors of the economy (identified largely by the work of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) – see Chapter 3 for further details on the work of the EGFSN and the skills needs identification infrastructure in Ireland)
- Skillnets, subsidised training for employees and jobseekers.
Chapter 2  Providing VET in a lifelong learning perspective

2.1  Ireland’s education and training system

Overall responsibility for education and training lies with the Department (Ministry) of Education and Skills (DES): a number of bodies, operating under the aegis of the DES, have responsibilities for different aspects of the education and training system; these include, among others

- The Higher Education Authority (HEA), which is responsible for the effective governance and regulation of tertiary education institutions and the tertiary education system.
- SOLAS, which is Ireland's Further Education and Training (FET) authority, responsible for planning, co-ordinating and funding FET in Ireland
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), which has a range of responsibilities including
  - maintaining the ten-level National Framework of Qualifications
  - making awards and setting standards for FET programmes and some tertiary level education programmes (outside the university sector)
  - reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance in FET and higher education providers in Ireland.
- Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), which advises the Irish Government on current and future skills needs of the economy and on other labour market issues that impact on Ireland’s enterprise and employment growth. It has a central role in ensuring that labour market needs for skilled workers are anticipated and met.

In Ireland, education is compulsory between the ages of 6 to 16 years. Ireland’s education system is divided into four sectors, primary, secondary, further education and training (FET), and tertiary education (See Figure 8). As summarised in Table 5, there were approximately 557 000 children enrolled in primary education, 345 500 in secondary education (lower and upper), 214 700 in FET and almost 215 000 in third level in the academic year 2015/2016 (2014/15 for tertiary).
Table 5. **Full-time enrolments in Irish education and training system**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Number of enrolments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary*</td>
<td>557 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
<td>187 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
<td>158 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further education &amp; training**</td>
<td>126 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education***</td>
<td>173 400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: *DES (2015/16); **SOLAS (2016); *** HEA (2014/15)*

Figure 8 shows how the four main sectors of Ireland’s education and training system interact.

### 2.1.1 Primary education

Primary education is compulsory from the age of 6 years; however, children may begin at a younger age, and indeed the vast majority of pupils enrol between the ages of 4 and 5 years; primary education is eight years in duration.

### 2.1.2 Secondary education

Secondary education usually lasts five to six years and is divided into lower secondary education (3 years) and upper secondary (2 years). Some pupils may also undertake the Transition Year Programme – a one year programme that acts as a bridge between lower and upper secondary education.

- **lower secondary:** the Junior Cycle (i.e. lower secondary education) is a generally oriented programme of approximately three years’ duration and leads to the Junior Certificate examination, which students usually take at the age of 15 or 16. The Junior Certificate award has been placed at level 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which corresponds to EQF level 2. The vast majority (almost 97%) of second level pupils sit the Junior Certificate examination.

- **upper secondary:** the Senior Cycle (i.e. upper secondary education) takes two years and leads to the Leaving Certificate examination which students usually sit at the age of 17 or 18. Approximately 92% of all those who entered lower secondary education in September 2009 sat the Leaving Certificate examination in either June 2014 or June 2015. There are three types of Leaving Certificate programme: a broadly balanced Leaving Certificate Established (LCE), a Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) (8)

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(8) Contrary to what the programme title may indicate, the LCVP is not considered to be vocational education and training. Rather, the programme aims to lend a vocational dimension to the Leaving Certificate Established programme by allowing pupils to select subjects that complement one another and develop vocational skills. For example,
and a Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) for learners not catered for in the first two. Only students who achieve the LCE and LCVP may proceed directly to third level education. The LCA, in contrast, is designed to prepare learners for either entry to the labour market or progression to further education and training. While the vocational dimension is stronger in the LCA than the other two types, it is nonetheless regarded as general education. In 2016, over two thirds of all Leaving Certificate candidates took the LCE programme, 26% took the LCVP and 5%, the LCA. This distribution is broadly in keeping with that of preceding years. The Leaving Certificate award (regardless of type) has been placed at levels 4-5 on Ireland’s NFQ, corresponding to levels 3-4 on the EQF\(^{(9)}\).

2.1.3 Further education and training (FET)

Since FET in Ireland comprises post-secondary non-tertiary education \(^{(10)}\) as well as second chance education/training, the FET sector is characterised by a high degree of diversity in terms of the type, level and learner:

- FET programmes can be general, vocational or mixed;
- they lead to awards across several levels on the EQF (levels 1-5 on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), or levels 1-6 on Ireland’s National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ));
- target groups include young people who have recently completed upper secondary education, adult learners, early school leavers, the employed, the unemployed, asylum seekers, learners with special needs, among others.

FET is funded, co-ordinated and planned centrally by SOLAS. FET is delivered in training centres and schools/colleges by Education and Training Boards (ETBs); there are 16 ETBs nationwide. Most vocational education and training (VET) in Ireland occurs within the FET sector.

2.1.4 Tertiary education

Over a half of those who complete upper secondary school transfer directly to third level education on completing upper secondary education (DES 2016). Students can opt for third level education in a university, institute of technology, or college of education. There are also a small number of private, independent providers of third level education, mostly business and related disciplines. Undergraduate third level courses are of various durations, ranging from two years for a higher certificate (NFQ 6; EQF 5) to three/four years for an honours bachelor degree (NFQ 8; EQF 6). Some programmes, such as medicine or architecture require up to five years. Postgraduate students may choose to study construction studies and engineering, or home economics and business.

\(^{(9)}\) The Leaving Certificate award is viewed by the public as a single award. However, given that the achievements of some learners may be reflective of indicators largely associated with level 4 on the NFQ while the achievements of other learners were more akin to the indicators associated with level 5, the Leaving Certificate award has been placed across NFQ levels 4-5 (EQF 3-4).

\(^{(10)}\) 28% of all those who complete upper secondary progressed to FET courses (DES 2016)
programmes range from one year (e.g. taught masters (NFQ 9; EQF 7)) to three years or more for doctoral programmes (NFQ 10; EQF 8).

Figure 8. Irish education and training system

2.2 Government regulated VET
Vocational education and training (VET) is provided primarily within the FET sector (comprising post-secondary non-tertiary and second chance education for the unemployed). Some VET also takes place within the tertiary education system, primarily in institutes of technology. Most VET takes the form of apprenticeship training, and to a lesser extent traineeship and specific skills training (for the
unemployed); some Post Leaving Certificate courses are also considered to be VET oriented as some prepare learners for work in specific occupations (e.g. secretarial, childcare), although the work-based learning component tends to be much smaller than that in the apprenticeship and traineeship programmes. Table 6 shows the characteristics of the main VET programmes in Ireland.

Table 6. Characteristics of main VET programmes (current) in Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main VET Programmes</th>
<th>Typical duration</th>
<th>Awards</th>
<th>Typical fields of learning</th>
<th>No of enrolments</th>
<th>Provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>4 Years</td>
<td>NFQ 6</td>
<td>Engineering &amp; construction</td>
<td>7 000</td>
<td>ETB &amp; institutes of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traineeship</td>
<td>6 mths - 2 years</td>
<td>NFQ 4-6</td>
<td>Health/welfare; services</td>
<td>4 500</td>
<td>ETB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Skills Training</td>
<td>6 – 24 weeks</td>
<td>NFQ 4-5</td>
<td>Engineering &amp; construction</td>
<td>15 400</td>
<td>ETB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC courses</td>
<td>1 - 2 years</td>
<td>NFQ 5-6</td>
<td>Health/welfare; services; business</td>
<td>32 000</td>
<td>ETB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTOS</td>
<td>Varies; typically 1-2 years</td>
<td>NFQ 4-6</td>
<td>Business; services</td>
<td>8 900</td>
<td>ETB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momentum (introduced in 2013)</td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>NFQ 4-6</td>
<td>Engineering; ICT; services; business</td>
<td>6 500</td>
<td>ETB and other providers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SOLAS

2.2.1 Apprenticeship

The apprenticeship system in Ireland is governed by the 1967 Industrial Training Act and is organised by SOLAS; FET funding and planning authority in co-operation with the Department (Ministry) of Education and Skills, employers and unions. An apprenticeship normally consists of seven phases: three off-the-job and four on-the-job. Phases 1, 3, 5 and 7 take place with the employer, while Phases 2, 4 and 6 take place at an ETB (phase 2) or an institute of technology (phases 4 and 6)(11). The total duration of off-the-job phases is approximately 40 weeks.

Apprentices are considered to be part of the employed population in Ireland and pay the appropriate level of employment insurance. They sign an employment contract with the employer and therefore have the legal status and associated rights and responsibilities of employees.

(11) Despite the fact that training occurs in an institute of technology (i.e. at tertiary level), the qualifications obtained on completion of an apprenticeship is not classified as a third level qualification; instead, it is considered to be a FET qualification.
Until recently there were 27 statutory apprenticeship trades (governed under the Industrial Training Act 1967), the majority of which are concentrated in engineering and construction trades. The largest numbers of apprentices are enrolled in electrical and carpentry/joinery trades. However, following a review of the apprenticeship system by the Department (Ministry) of Education and Skills in 2013, a decision was made to expand the apprenticeship system to other sectors of the economy. There are 25 new proposed apprenticeships in areas such as financial services, high-tech manufacturing, hospitality, and transport; the first of these (financial services) is expected to begin registering students from September 2016. These newer apprenticeships will vary in duration.

2.2.2 Traineeships
Traineeships involve employers and ETBs working together in a dual system of occupational training leading to a qualification. The training content and occupational standards are based on employer consultation and development of a traineeship programme is triggered by the identification of job opportunities within a sector. Traineeships combine workplace training with formal off-the-job tuition in an ETB Training Centre. Traineeships vary in duration from six to twenty-four months, depending on the scope of the curriculum, the skill requirement of the occupation and the entry level of the trainees. As most trainees had been unemployed prior to commencing the traineeship, trainees in Ireland are not considered to be part of the employed; consequently, in contrast to apprentices, trainees receive an allowance rather than a wage and they do not pay employment insurance. Traineeships typically cover occupations such as hairdresser and childcare worker.

2.2.3 Specific Skills Training
Specific Skills Training courses allow people who have lost their job to learn new job-related skills. The courses on offer vary from year to year with different levels of certification. The training content and occupational standards are based on the consultation process involving employers. Certification achieved on course completion ranges from levels 3-5 on the NFQ (or levels 2-4 on the EQF. The courses differ from traineeship in that they tend to be shorter (four to five months), with a shorter on-the-job phase; in addition, the employer does not play a role in recruitment.

2.2.4 Post Leaving Certificate (PLCs)
PLC courses are aimed at learners who have completed the Leaving Certificate examination at the end of upper secondary education. They are full-time courses which last between one and two years. PLC courses provide integrated general education, vocational training and work experience for young people; however, PLC courses are also an option for mature learners (in 2015, 47% of those enrolled on PLC programmes in 2015 were aged 21 or over). As such, PLC courses provide important lifelong learning opportunities for adult learners.
While some PLC courses are vocational in nature (e.g. training in beauty therapy, healthcare, security studies), others are general (e.g. general studies, art, design, etc.). Most PLC courses have a work experience component. The work based component varies, and while it can be up to a quarter of the course, there is no statutory minimum requirement. Completion of a PLC course leads to awards at EQF 4 or 5 (NFQ 5 or 6). PLC courses aim to prepare learners to enter the labour market or to progress to tertiary education, although in practice, the numbers progressing to tertiary education via the PLC qualifications is comparatively small.

### 2.2.5 Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) courses

VTOS consists of a range of full-time courses designed to meet the education and training needs of unemployed people aged 21 or over. It is offered by the 16 Education & Training Boards (ETBs) throughout the country. Participation in VTOS is in two modes as follows:

- as a ‘core’ VTOS student participating in a group of up to twenty other VTOS students in a VTOS Centre or Adult Education Centre.
- as a ‘dispersed’ VTOS student participating in a group of students some of whom may be VTOS students and some of whom will be studying through other schemes/programmes (e.g. PLC course)

VTOS programmes offer a wide choice of subjects and learning activities. Certification is available at a range of levels:

- basic education courses in literacy, numeracy, study skills, personal development and, generally, practical subjects such as woodwork or art.
- foundation courses leading to Junior Certificate or equivalent (NFQ 3; EQF 2)
- Leaving Certificate courses based on a range of subjects, almost always including English (NFQ 4/5; EQF 3/4)
- PLC courses
- portfolio courses where participants ‘mix and match’ from a range of subjects and levels to put together their own learning package

In addition to the above, the majority of VTOS participants also receive tuition in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), where such learning is not part of their chosen course.

VTOS courses are provided free of charge to eligible learners; eligible learners continue to receive a social welfare payments or receive a training allowance in lieu of a social welfare payment.

### 2.2.6 Momentum

The Momentum programme was introduced by SOLAS in 2013 to address the skill needs of the unemployed (i.e. those who had been unemployed for 12 months or more). Training courses are free and offered in variety of sectors where there were identified job opportunities (e.g. tourism, logistics, high-tech manufacturing). Courses vary in duration, ranging from 23-45 weeks. All courses lead to certification (typically NFQ 6 (EQF 5)). Momentum courses are funded by SOLAS (Ireland’s FET authority) and delivered in ETB colleges/ training centres and private education providers. All
courses also have an on-the-job component, designed to provide the learner with work experience and skills. However, as Ireland’s economy recovers and given the recent declines in unemployment, it is unclear if the Momentum programme will continue.

2.3 Access/Routes to VET

Access to VET varies according to the programme type and learner category and are summarised in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Summary of access to VET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Prior education attainment</th>
<th>Minimum age on entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>School completers; older learners may apply</td>
<td>Junior Certificate or equivalent (NFQ 3; EQF 2); most learners hold a Leaving Certificate (NFQ 4/5; EQF 3/4)</td>
<td>15+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traineeship</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>NFQ 3 (EQF 2) or higher, depending on the course</td>
<td>18+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Skills Training</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>NFQ 3 (EQF 2)</td>
<td>18+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Leaving Certificate</td>
<td>School completers; adult learners</td>
<td>Leaving Certificate (NFQ 4/5; EQF 3/4) for school completers</td>
<td>18+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTOS</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Depends on programme; for ISCED level 4, a Leaving Cert (or equivalent) or work experience may be expected</td>
<td>21+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momentum</td>
<td>Long-term unemployed</td>
<td>No official minimum entry requirement, but an ability to follow the course is required.</td>
<td>18+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SOLAS (SLMRU)

2.3.1 Apprenticeship training

In order to register as an apprentice, a learner must first secure employment in the trade s/he wishes to undertake. The minimum entry requirement for apprenticeship training in Ireland is the Junior Certificate or equivalent (NFQ 3 or EQF 2 qualification). In practice, however, the vast majority (three quarters) of new
apprentices hold higher levels of education, typically a Leaving Certificate (NFQ 4/5 or EQF 3/4). Learners who do not meet the minimum education entry requirements may be registered as apprentices by an employer if they have either successfully completed an approved pre-apprenticeship course or if they are over 16 years and have at least three years’ approved work experience.

Generally an apprentice does not pay fees. However, a student contribution is levied on all students (including apprentices) attending institutes of technology (i.e. phases 4 and 6 of apprenticeship training). The maximum rate of the student contribution for the academic year 2016-2017 is €3,000, although in practice the amount is typically lower than this as the student contribution is apportioned for the time an apprentice spends in the institute of technology. Apprentices are not eligible for a student grant.

2.3.2 Traineeship
Traineeships are mostly aimed at the unemployed and as such learners need to be officially unemployed (and in receipt of social welfare payments) in order to access the traineeship programme. The minimum education entry requirement for traineeships in Ireland varies according to the type of traineeship; while a qualification at NFQ 3 (EQF 2) is usually the minimum, most entrants hold at least a Leaving Certificate (NFQ 4/5 or EQF 3/4). In addition, for traineeships (e.g. childcare, healthcare) where the learner may be in contact with vulnerable people (e.g. children, adults with disabilities) Garda (Police) vetting is also required. Courses are free to the unemployed.

2.3.3 Specific Skills Training
Like traineeships, Specific Skills Training courses are aimed at the unemployed and learners are therefore officially classified as unemployed prior to beginning training. The minimum education entry requirement is a qualification at NFQ 3 (EQF 2). All courses are free to the unemployed.

2.3.4 Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses
Entry to PLC courses usually requires the applicant to hold a Leaving Certificate qualification or equivalent (i.e. a qualification at levels 4/5 on the NFQ or 3/4 on the EQF). Adult learners (i.e. those aged 23 or over) without Leaving Certificate qualifications may also access PLC courses if they have sufficient work experience. Garda Vetting may also be required, depending on the course. A participant contribution of €200 per year is also required, although this fee may be waived under certain circumstances (e.g. those in receipt of a means-tested student grant, those in receipt of social welfare payments, etc.).

(12) Garda vetting is conducted in respect of personnel working in a full-time, part-time, voluntary or student placement capacity in a position where they have unsupervised access to children and/or vulnerable adults.
2.3.5 Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) courses
VTOS programmes are second chance learning opportunities for unemployed adults. As such learners are aged at least 21 years and have been in receipt of social welfare payments for at least six months prior to enrolment.

2.3.6 Momentum courses
To access a Momentum course, applicants must be officially unemployed for at least 12 months. There are no fees and while there is no specified minimum education attainment pre-requisites, evidence of basic education attainment may be required.

2.4 Progression from VET
Learners completing programmes in VET typically have a number of options: they may continue their studies in VET, progress to tertiary level education (in an institute of technology) or enter the labour market. Currently, there is no systematic way to capture the data on progression of VET graduates to employment, study etc. While surveys and individual projects have focused on some groups (the results of which are discussed below), they are not carried out on an annual basis and are not comparable with each other. In order to address this data deficit, SOLAS and the ETBs (providers of FET and VET training) are currently developing a data infrastructure which will allow for the identification of outcomes (further study, employment, unemployment etc.) for learners who had engaged in FET in general, including VET(13).

The most relevant studies undertaken in relation to monitoring progression from VET programmes in Ireland at present include:

- a survey of a sample of learners who had previously been enrolled on selected training courses (unpublished SOLAS 2015)(14);
- a tracking study monitoring the destination of a single cohort of learners who had completed Post Leaving Certificate courses (unpublished, DES: 2016);
- a tracking study of learners who received QQI certificates in further education and training courses (including VET courses) (QQI 2014)(15).

(13) The system is known as the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) and is comprised of three elements, one of which is the National Learner Database. The National Learner Database is a student records system for data collection in relation to learners (e.g. education level prior to enrolment on a course), learner course activity (e.g. whether the learner completed the course or obtained certification), and learner outcomes (e.g. whether the learner progressed to further study or employment). Currently, the software to facilitate data collection is near completion, and an analysis of learner outputs is expected from 2018.

(14) Follow Up Surveys of FÁS Programme Participants. Prior to 2013, FAS was responsible for the running of a variety of training and education programmes, including the VET programmes focussed on in this study: traineeship, specific skills training, Momentum and Apprenticeship

(15) Dempsey & Dunne (2014). Where do FETAC learners go?
Each of the three projects cited above focus on the measuring the learning outcomes associated with completing either courses (or qualifications). Given the economic situation at the time, economic status was a key measurement in courses designed to prepare the learner for entry (or re-entry in the case of the unemployed) to the labour market. Nonetheless, due to differences in data collection methods and outcomes classifications, the findings of these studies are not comparable with one another.

2.4.1 The SOLAS follow-up survey
The SOLAS follow-up survey contacted a representative sample of the total number of learners who had completed certain types of training courses between January and March in 2014. Only VET related programmes are considered here. As shown in Table 8, fewer than half of all those who completed training courses in 2014 were in employment. However, it should be borne in mind that these programmes are specifically aimed learner groups that had already been highly vulnerable to unemployed; on average 82% of all learners surveyed (including those on general learning courses) prior to commencing training.

Table 8. Current economic status of training course completers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Completers</th>
<th>Momentum</th>
<th>Specific Skills Training (Long)</th>
<th>Specific Skills Training (short)</th>
<th>Traineeship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive/Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a scheme</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SOLAS

2.4.2 PLC completers research
Research conducted by the Department (Ministry) of Education and Skills (DES) tracked individual learners, using a unique personal identifier (a protected identifier key based on the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN)), to link learner data to other data sources that were available at the time (e.g. employment data and third level enrolment data). Although the study was carried out in 2016, the latest available data for tracking purposes pertained to learners enrolled in the 2010/2011 academic year. Table 9 shows that the majority of those completing PLC courses in 2011 had enrolled in further studies, either within the FET sector or at third level: 25% re-
enrolled in a PLC course, almost 5% enrolled in other FET training courses, and almost 10% were studying at a tertiary level institution.

Table 9. PLC Students classified by destination in 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Leaving Certificate course</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other FET training</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third level</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social welfare (unemployed)</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data unavailable</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DES (2016)

2.4.3 QQI (FET) learners

As in the case of PLC completers, this study tracked individual learners, using an anonymised identifier derived from the PPSN. The data shows that of those who obtained a QQI (FET, formerly known as FETAC) certificate in 2009, 56% were in employment the following year. It is not possible to disaggregate in the data those learners who had followed VET programmes from general learning programmes.

Table 10. Destination of QQI (FET) certificate holders in 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QQI (FET) awards</th>
<th>Share*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To employment</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To unemployment</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To QQI (FET) course</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To tertiary education</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Self Employed 2010</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not recorded</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: the shares are not exclusive and therefore may sum up to more than 100% (i.e. a person may have been both unemployed and employed at different points in the same calendar year).

Source: Dempsey & Dunne (2014)

2.5 VET teachers, trainers and tutors

Given the diverse nature of FET and VET programmes offered to learners in Ireland, there are several categories of teaching and training professionals working in VET. The main VET teacher/trainer categories are outlined in Table 11. In general, VET
teacher/trainer categories are distinguished by the programmes they deliver, their technical and pedagogical qualifications required, and the funding mechanisms.

Teachers work in Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in schools or colleges of further education that deliver post Leaving Certificate courses (PLCs) and/or VTOS programmes. Although FET teachers deliver FET (including VET) at ISCED level 4 (and leading to awards at NFQ 5-6; EQF levels 4-5), they are, for administrative purposes, considered to be and indeed registered with the Teaching Council as second level teachers; in order to register, teachers must hold an honours bachelor degree (at NFQ 8; EQF 6) and an approved initial teacher education qualification (postgraduate diploma at NFQ 8 or 9 (EQF 6 or 7); alternatively, a teacher may hold a concurrent degree qualification in post-primary initial teacher education (NFQ 8; EQF 6) which combines the study of one or more curricular subjects with teacher education studies.

Apprenticeship instructors work in ETBs in training centres which deliver the first off-the-job phase of apprenticeship (phase 2). At present there is no requirement for instructors on classroom based apprenticeship programmes to hold a pedagogical qualification, but they must hold a craft certificate (NFQ 6; EQF 5), plus 5 years’ experience.

Apprenticeship lecturers work in institutes of technology, which are third level institutions, delivering training on the remaining two phases (4 & 7) of the apprenticeship programme. Apprenticeship lecturers must hold a degree (NFQ 7/8; EQF 6) or equivalent in the subject area or hold a craft certificate (NFQ 6; EQF 5) and have three years postgraduate experience.

Work based tutors are employed, in both private and public sectors, in craft occupations. They are responsible for overseeing the work and training of apprentices during the on-the-job phases of the apprenticeship programme (phases 1, 3, 5 and 7). Employers must employ a suitably qualified and relevant craftsperson who has been approved by SOLAS to act as:

(a) the workplace assessor; the assessor must have completed the SOLAS assessor and verifier programme provided by the education and training boards; this course lasts approximately one day and is not aligned with the national framework of qualifications.

(b) the workplace tutor; the tutor must be competent and qualified (a holder of a national craft certificate\(^{(16)}\) EQF 5) to train apprentices.

The tutor and assessor can be the same person provided they hold the relevant qualification.

\(^{(16)}\) Recognition of prior learning (including the compilation of a portfolio of work) may be accepted in the absence of certification.
**Tutors/trainers** work on VET programmes or on general learning programmes in ETBs. They deliver training (other than apprenticeship) or education (e.g. adult literacy), often on programmes aimed at the unemployed (e.g. specific skills training or other VET programmes), or early school leavers (general education). For other types of VET training in the FET sector the qualifications and professional standards of trainers vary. In general programmes leading to a QQI award require a subject matter qualification (usually one level higher than that of the course being taught), a pedagogical qualification (usually at third level) \(^{(17)}\) and 5 years industry experience. For all other training e.g. computing, accounting, trainer profiles tend to vary depending on the awarding body, the subject matter being taught and the provider. However pedagogical qualifications are increasingly in demand for these types of courses.

Trainers of other types of training programmes are generally required to hold a technical qualification at a level that is one step above the programme being delivered. In addition they must also hold a minimum amount of relevant work experience. Increasingly however there is a demand for these trainers to hold a pedagogical qualification.

**Other trainers** work in a variety of FET settings, including ETBs, Skillnets (providing training mostly although not exclusively to the employed) and private sector providers;

**Table 11. Summary VET teacher/trainer categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Programme delivered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Honours bachelor degree (NFQ 8; EQF 6) (any subject) and a recognised initial teacher qualification at postgraduate level or Honours bachelor degree (NFQ 8/EQF 6) concurrent degree qualification in post-primary initial teacher education which combines the study of one or more curricular subjects</td>
<td>Post Leaving Certificate course VTOS courses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{(17)}\) In some cases however where technical competence is required, the tutors are not third level graduates and not necessarily eligible to undertake the standard post-graduate pedagogical qualifications.
### Occupation | Qualifications | Programme delivered
--- | --- | ---
**Apprenticeship Instructor** | Craft certificate (NFQ 6; EQF 5) and 5 years’ experience | Apprenticeship training phase - 2 classroom based
**Apprenticeship Lecturer** | Ordinary or honours degree (NFQ 7/8; EQF 6) Or Craft certificate (NFQ 6; EQF 5) and 3 years’ experience | Apprenticeship training phases 4 & 6 - classroom based
**Work based tutor** | SOLAS assessor and verifier programme (for assessment) And/or Craft certificate (NFQ 6; EQF 5) | Apprenticeship training phases 1, 3, 5 & 7 - work based
**Tutor** | Various; depends on the type and level of course | VET for the unemployed (traineeship, specific skills training, etc)

*Source: SOLAS (SLMRU)*

#### 2.6 Other forms of training

Outside of the formal education and training system, most VET opportunities occur within the context of Skillnets training. Skillnets works with business in Ireland to address their current and future skill needs by providing high quality, subsidised training through 62 training networks in a range of regions and sectors. Networks are composed of private sector businesses in the same sector and/or region that have come together to carry out training-related activities that may not be possible on their own. Member businesses, and their employees, are directly involved in the identification, design, delivery and evaluation of training. Skillnets is actively supported by employer and employee bodies such as IBEC, SFA, CIF, Chambers Ireland and receives funding from the National Training Fund (NTF) through the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Participating businesses also make a financial contribution. While initially designed for employee training, in light of high unemployment levels in Ireland, Skillnets has, since 2010, offered training to the unemployed.

The main Skillnets programme types are:

- **Training Networks Programme (TNP):** Subsidised quality training programmes focused on the small-medium enterprise (SME) sector. Examples of training programmes include Lean manufacturing (8 days); Care of the older person (4 days); Cold calling for telesales (1 day);
• Finuas Networks Programme (Finuas): Subsidised quality training programmes in the international financial services (IFS) sector covering banking/asset financing, corporate treasury, investment management, aviation finance, securitisation, reinsurance and related professional services;
• ManagementWorks: A subsidised management development training and mentoring programme available to businesses (SMEs and owner-managers) in all sectors, to assist them to grow in terms of sales, output and employment. One day courses include business growth, business leadership and Lean business;
• Job-Seekers Support Programme (JSSP): Skillnets supports the needs of job-seekers by focusing on integrated training with enterprise, dedicated conversion courses and work placements in areas of high employment potential. Examples of courses for job seekers include customer service training 2 days training, plus work experience.

In 2015, Skillnets provided training to 42,200 employees across 12,900 participating companies (average training duration was six days). It also provided training to almost 6,700 job seekers (average training duration of nine days).
Chapter 3  Anticipating labour market needs

3.1 National skills needs identification

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) was established in 1997 and advises the Government on the current and future skills needs of the economy and on other labour market issues that impact on Ireland’s enterprise and employment growth. The EGFSN is comprised of representatives of business, employees, education, government department, state agencies and trade unions. The Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) based within the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) provides the EGFSN with data, analysis and (primarily quantitative) research.

In 2002, the SLMRU set up the National Skills Database (NSD). The NSD is an electronic database which stores all data produced by the public authorities in Ireland which is relevant to the issue of skills supply and skills demand. In general, occupation title is used as a proxy for skill, while for education & training data, field of learning and NFQ level (where available) are used. Figure 9 summarises some of the most important datasets included in the NSD. Appendix A provides additional details on each of the above data sets.

Figure 9. Demand and supply indicator data held in the National Skills Database

Source: SOLAS (SLMRU)

The National Skills Database facilitates the use of a range of indicators and models to assess potential imbalances between the demand and supply of skills form more than 100 occupations.

The findings of three additional SLMRU projects are also used to further interpret the data in the NSD.
• Transitions data: using the Labour Force Survey\(^{(18)}\) (including employment and unemployment data), it is possible to track the number of people moving in and out of employment, unemployment and inactivity at occupational level, and thereby identify job churn and job replacement demand.

• Occupational projections: this data provides projections of employment demand at occupational level up to 2020, in order to estimate the extent to which economic growth is likely to impact on employment demand at occupational level. The report supports decision-making in the areas of education and training provision, labour market policy, immigration policy, and career guidance.

• Apprenticeship forecasts. Apprenticeship forecasting aims to provide policy makers with a broad indication of the anticipated annual apprentice recruitment requirement for industry for the coming years. They are also used to estimate the training provision required for each trade.

Drawing on the data held in the NSD, the findings of the employment projections and the transitions data, the SLMRU produces a number of publications annually: the National Skills Bulletin, Vacancy Overview, Monitoring Ireland’s Skills Supply and the Regional Labour Market Bulletin. These reports assist the EGSFN and other policy makers in the early identification of skills needs in Ireland. The information is also used to inform other areas such as labour market activation measures and education/training provision.

In May 2016, the Department of Education and Skills established a national network of nine regional skills fora throughout Ireland. The network will:

• provide a cohesive education led structure for employers and the education/training system to work together in building the skills needs of their regions
• help employers better understand and access the full range of services available across the education and training system;
• enhance links between education and training providers in planning and delivering programmes, reduce duplication and inform national funding decisions.

Each regional skills forum aims to facilitate engagement between education/training providers and employers at regional level so as to identify the specific nature of employer skills needs and the extent to which these needs can be met from the education and training system, particularly from the FET and third level sectors (e.g. new course provision, enhancement of existing courses or course modules, work based learning etc). They will be assisted in part through the labour market intelligence provided by the SLMRU. In turn, the data gathered from employers will be fed back to the SLMRU in order to compile a national picture as well as a regional picture regarding the skills needs of Ireland’s employers.

\(^{(18)}\) In Ireland, the Labour Force Survey is known as the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS)
3.2 Qualifications and quality assurance

A key development in qualification and quality assurance in Ireland was the establishment in 2003 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). The NFQ is a ten level framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way. The many different types and sizes of qualifications included in the NFQ are organised based on their level of knowledge, skill and competence. Because all NFQ qualifications are quality assured, learners can be confident that they will be recognised at home and abroad. In 2009, the Irish NFQ was referenced to the European Qualifications Framework, making qualifications easier to understand across different countries in Europe.

Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, the Government established Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). QQI operates under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills. It is both an awarding and a quality assurance body. While the remit of QQI extends to both general and vocational education and training awards, it plays a key role in setting standards and qualifications and standards in VET. Significant shares of VET awards are made by QQI, so do all awards made to qualified apprentices.

The specific statutory functions of QQI include:

- promote, maintain, further develop and implement the National Framework of Qualifications; (NFQ)
- advise the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to national policy on quality assurance and enhancement in education and training;
- review and monitor the effectiveness of education and training providers’ quality assurance procedures;
- establish the standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners before an award can be made by QQI or by an education and training provider to which authority to make an award has been delegated;
- make awards or delegate authority to make an award where it considers it appropriate; review and monitor the operation of the authority so delegated.

3.2.1 Award standards

QQI sets standards for further education and training awards (including VET) and tertiary education awards made outside the university sector. It is also responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance in further and higher education.

(19) In 2012, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established as a new integrated agency, replacing the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB).

(20) The awards at tertiary level are made to learners at a variety of tertiary institutions including private independent colleges. Third level institutions such as most institutes of technology have received delegated authority from QQI to make their own awards. Universities and Dublin Institute of Technology act as their own awarding bodies.
and training providers in Ireland. This includes the universities, institutes of technology, Education and Training Boards and private sector providers availing of QQI awards.

QQI awards standards are determined within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) which comprises a grid of indicators, award-type descriptors and other policies, criteria, standards and guidelines that may be issued to support it. QQI determines awards standards for the education and training awards that it makes itself and that are made by providers to whom it has delegated authority to make an award\(^{(21)}\). Such standards are determined to be consistent with the NFQ’s award-types.

### 3.2.2. Quality Assurance (QA)

Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, QQI is required to develop and publish guidelines for providers for the quality assurance (QA) of their programmes and services. Providers are required by legislation to ‘have regard to QQI guidelines’ in developing their own procedures for quality assurance. In some instances, e.g. programme validation, providers’ QA procedures must be approved by QQI as fit for purpose.

Therefore, the overall approach to QA in education and training means that providers are responsible for quality assuring their own programmes with reference to the guidelines and criteria issued by QQI. Given the variety of providers in Ireland, QQI has developed guidelines for a number of sectors including the Further Education and Training sector. In its guidelines for FET providers, QQI notes they are directed to the EQAVET Framework, the European initiative for quality assurance in VET, designed to provide tools for the management of quality in vocational education and training. QQI is an active contributor to EQAVET’s work on a European level and these guidelines are designed to be complementary with it.

Programme validation is a key quality assurance process that QQI uses to approve new programmes proposed by providers of education and training. Validation in this context means that a programme meets minimum standards in terms of learning outcomes and NFQ levels. Programme validation therefore can assure providers and learners that successful completion of a programme validated by QQI will lead to a specific NFQ awards. Programme validation is a two-stage process:

- (a) approval of the provider’s ability to quality assure its programmes
- (b) validation by QQI of a specific programme(s). QQI does this by appointing independent expert(s) to compare provider proposals against the requirements of the particular NFQ award(s).

\(^{(21)}\) Universities and Dublin Institute of Technology are awarding bodies authorised by law to make awards. QQI does not determine awards standards for their awards. They are required by section 43(3) of the 2012 Act to ensure, in so far as is reasonably practicable, that each award that they make is recognised within the NFQ. In this context recognition within the framework of a designated awarding body’s (DAB) award means that the award standard is determined by the DAB to be consistent with the relevant NFQ award-type.
If the proposed programme meets QQI criteria, it can be validated for up to five years. If the criteria are not met then the programme cannot be offered as proposed.

3.3.3. Recognition of Prior Learning
Under an EU Council Recommendation, Member States should have arrangements in place for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, no later than 2018 and under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, QQI is required to establish policies on recognition of prior learning within the policies and criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP). While the legal basis for the development of RPL policies was established in the Qualifications Act 1999, and the NQAI published principles and operational guidelines in 2005, RPL policy is currently being revised by QQI. QQI has consulted widely with relevant stakeholders in order to achieve a more cohesive approach to delivering RPL nationally. QQI aims to develop a comprehensive policy and operational procedures in line with legislation on the basis of national collaboration, consideration of the current arrangements and identification of best practice nationally and internationally.
4.1 Incentives for learners

Significant changes have recently taken place in the way in which Ireland’s Further Education and Training sector is structured. Since most VET in Ireland takes place within the Further Education and Training sector, these changes are expected to have a significant impact on VET, and the way in which participation is promoted and incentivised. Although not all changes have yet been fully rolled out, initial steps have already been taken with a view to providing training that is (a) relevant to the labour market, (b) cost effective (for the learner, employer and the state), and (c) well regarded by learners, parents and employers.

The FET Strategy recognises the importance of providing VET courses that equip learners with highly regarded qualifications directly relevant to labour market needs. As a result, course planning is now closely linked with local labour markets. In addition SOLAS and the ETB’s (main providers of VET in Ireland) have set up (in 2013) and have already begun to roll out the Programme and Learning Support System. This initiative will aid in recording statistics on learner progression, outcomes, course participation etc. The overall aim is to be able to provide potential learners and employers with evidence of the quality of courses leading directly to employment or possibly further studies. Such evidence when it becomes available is expected to enhance the profile of VET in Ireland and encourage learners to pursue a VET pathway on completion of upper secondary education (currently approximately of Ireland’s school leavers go to third level).

While these changes are very much in their infancy and the effects have yet to be felt in a significant increase in VET uptake, other characteristics of the VET system that incentivise participation include:

- **Costs**: relative to third level, the costs associated with participating in VET are considerably lower. At third level, while tuition is free, all students must pay a registration charge of €3 000 per annum. VET courses on the other hand are frequently free of charge (e.g. Momentum, traineeship etc) although the full time Post Leaving Certificate course is approximately €300 per annum. Apprentices are employees and paid as such and while in training receive an allowance;

- **One Step Up**: The One Step Up campaign aims to help adults to enhance their learning by promoting access to learning opportunities for all adults through the website, freephone helpline number, and the calendar of events. These learning opportunities include promoting access Further Education and Training courses; One Step Up is funded with the support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union and co-financed by the Department of Education and Skills through SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority. This project is managed by AONTAS who have been assigned the
role of National coordinator for the Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning).

- Industry: A number of industry/sectoral representative organisations such as IBEC (Irish Business and Employers' Confederation) and the Small Firms Association (IBEC’s SME affiliate), ISME (the Irish Small and Medium-sized Enterprises association), and the Irish Construction Industry Federation (CIF), provide either financial or other incentives to promote training practices among their membership. They also contribute to enterprise-based continuing vocational training activities through their participation in the industry-led Skillnets Training Networks Programme.

4.2 VET guidance and counselling

Guidance and counselling services in relation to vocational education and training opportunities are provided at different levels within the Irish education system. The Education Act (1998) states that second levels schools shall use their available resources to ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices. Guidelines prepared by the Department of Education and Skills specify that a guidance programme be part of a school plan and identifies the central role of the guidance counsellor as well as the important contribution of different members of staff to the role of guidance.

Within the higher education sector, all of the universities and most of the Institutes of Technology offer a careers service to students. The main provision is targeted at final year students and recent graduates though some career services have started to provide careers education in the curriculum of undergraduate courses. The Careers Advisory/Appointments Office provides information on educational and employment opportunities to students and graduates. Students can meet with a Careers Adviser for educational and career guidance.

Guidance in the FET sector is aimed at students and adults aged over 18, attending programmes on Levels 1–6 of the National Framework of Qualifications. Individual FET colleges under the aegis of the Education and Training Boards provide guidance supports focusing on educational, personal, social and career opportunities.

Guidance for mature/second chance students returning to the education and training sector is available from the Adult Educational Guidance Service (AEGS) within the ETB network which provides personal, educational and vocational guidance which supports learners to make informed decisions about course choice and certification if required, progression plans and recognition of prior learning.

Students at second level education and above can access a range of online career guidance portals such as Qualifax (www.qualifax.ie) and Career Directions (www.careerdirections.ie).

National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) operates under the aegis of Léargas - The Exchange Bureau. The Centre supports and develops guidance
practice in all areas of education and informs the policy of the Department of Education and Skills in the field of guidance. NCGE hosts the EU funded Euro guidance Centre Ireland and is the representative for Ireland/DES at the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network. The aims of NCGE are to

• promote the implementation of best practice in guidance and counselling in schools, centres for education, and adult education settings in accordance with the requirements of the Education Act 1998;
• advise on high quality and relevant initial guidance counselling education and training and provide continuing professional development for guidance practitioners;
• promote the implementation of best practice in guidance and counselling in both formal and non-formal settings in accordance with national priorities;
• advise on policy and strategies for the promotion of a continuum of guidance in the context of lifelong learning (NCGE is responsible for the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative).

The planned actions for NCGE presented in the 2016 FET Services Plan (published by SOLAS) are:

• continue provision of the Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI) support programme for guidance practitioners in the education sector
• review and up-date NCGE’s Adult Guidance Management System to improve monitoring and report generation
• re-launch the AEGI online Handbook for wider Adult Guidance Sector
• co-ordinate and provide Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for guidance practitioners.

SOLAS is working with NCGE to co-ordinate the Adult Education Guidance Initiative within the ETBs which provides nationwide guidance for learners before and after they participate in selected VET programmes.
References
[URLs accessed on 16.05.2017]


<table>
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEGS</td>
<td>Adult Educational Guidance Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS)</td>
<td>Further Education and Training Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Central Statistics Office</td>
</tr>
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<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
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<td>European Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>Expert Group on Future Skills Needs</td>
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<td>Education and Training Board</td>
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<td>Further education and training</td>
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<td>Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS)</td>
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<td>Higher Education Authority</td>
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<td>Higher Education and Training Awards Council</td>
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<td>IBEC</td>
<td>Employers representative organisation (Irish Business and Employers Confederation)</td>
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<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>Post Leaving Certificate courses</td>
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<td>Skills and Labour Market Research Unit</td>
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<td>Small and Medium Enterprises</td>
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<td>VTOS</td>
<td>Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme</td>
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Annex 1

Data sources in the NSD

Supply indicators

- Employment data: an analysis of employment data from the Central Statistics Office (Ireland’s national statistics institute) provides a profile of employment in Ireland by detailed occupation; other variables such as age, gender, education level, work type (full-time/part-time), among others are also available;
- Immigration (Employment permits): employers, where necessary, employ workers from non-EU/EEA countries through employment permit schemes; the data on newly issued employment permits, provided by the Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation (Ministry for employment), may be used to highlight occupations for which employers experience difficulty in sourcing staff within the EU/EEA.
- Recruitment agency survey findings: the SLMRU has conducted a recruitment agency survey every six months since January 2008; it is designed to gather the views of recruitment agencies in respect of the occupations for which vacancies, in their experience, are proving difficult to fill.
- Job vacancy data: vacancy notifications from two sources, namely the Public Employment Service (PES) and IrishJobs.ie (private source of job vacancy data) provide an insight to areas in which employers are currently looking to recruit staff.
- Job announcements: the SLMRU monitors announcements made in the media of new jobs expected to come on stream in the short-to-medium term; these are usually for large numbers of jobs.

Supply indicators:

- Third level enrolment and graduation data (by course title, NFQ (EQF) level, field of learning); the data is used to monitor the supply of skills from the education and training system; applications for places on education and training courses are also analysed where available
- Third level first destination survey data; this data provides an indication of the destination (i.e. employment, unemployment, further studies etc) of third level graduates in the nine months following graduation from third level institutions
- FET awards data: this data shows the number of people gaining awards from QQI following a programme of study in the FET sector (which includes VET) by NFQ (EQF) level and field of learning
- Training follow-up survey: the follow-up surveys establish the learning outcomes (i.e. employment, unemployment, further study, etc.) associated with learners from selected training programmes in the FET sector (including
VET); SOLAS is currently exploring the possibility of using administrative data systems to link learner data across other data systems in order to establish whether, following completion of a FET course, learners secured employment, progressed to further study, were unemployed, etc. The project is currently on-going

- Unemployment data: unemployment data (from the Central Statistics Office) is analysed by detailed age, gender, education level, and if applicable, previous occupation and sector worked

- PES job seeker data: job seeker data is available on a monthly basis and shows the number of people looking and available for work.