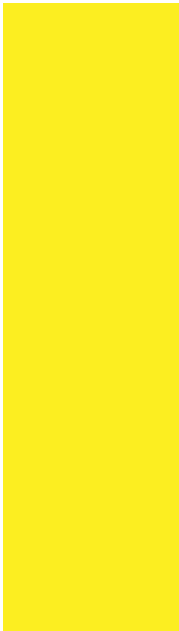
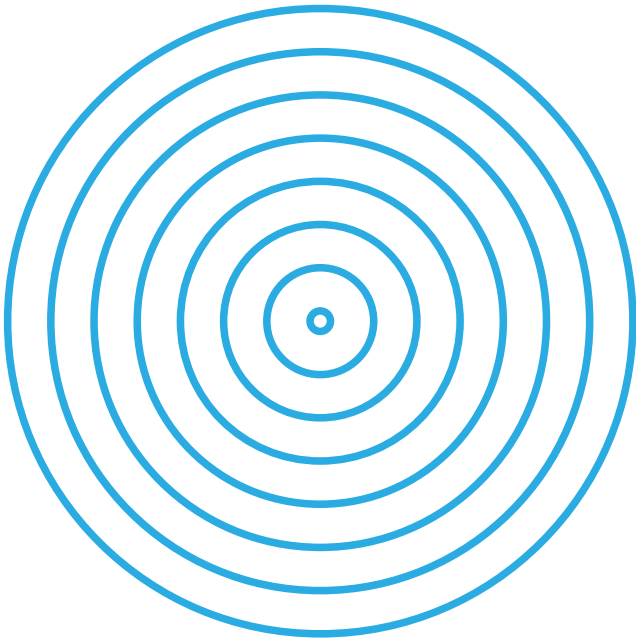


Annual Report & Accounts 2017



ANNUAL REPORT 2017

Pursuant to Section 32 (1) of the Further Education and Training Act 2013, An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS) herewith presents to the Minister for Education and Skills its Annual Report and Financial Statements for the 12-month period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017.

Official Languages Act, 2003

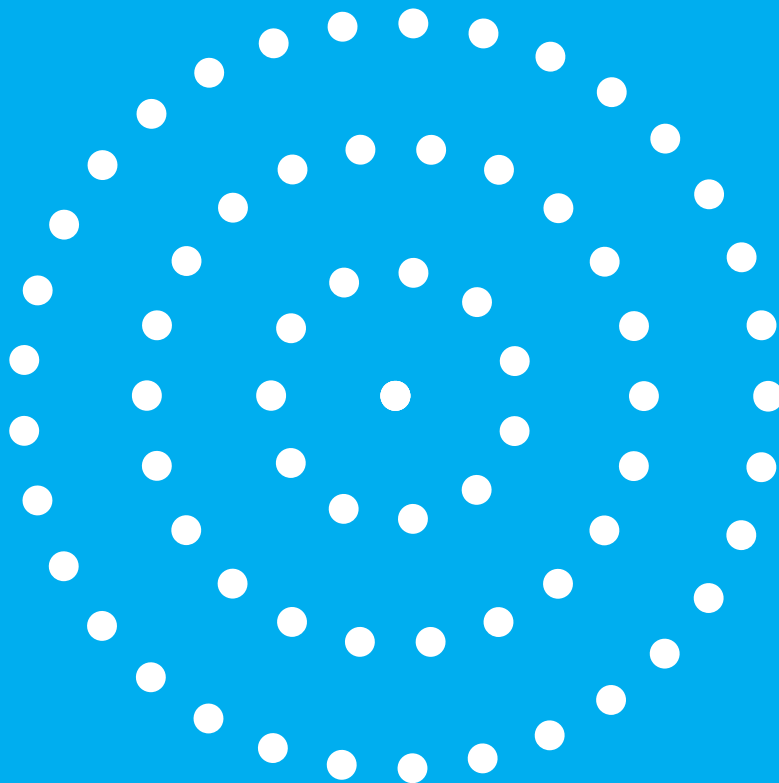
This Annual Report is published simultaneously in each of the official languages.

SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, is responsible for funding, planning and co-ordinating Further Education and Training programmes. All programmes are either funded or co-funded by the Irish Government. Some programmes are co-funded by the European Union under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014–2020.

**SOLAS – An tSeirbhís Oideachais
Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna**
Further Education and
Training Authority

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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD



I am pleased to submit SOLAS' fourth Annual Report, covering the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017, to the Minister for Education and Skills, in accordance with Section 32(1) of the Further Education and Training Act 2013.

Ireland is a very different place to what it was less than five years ago when SOLAS was established. Our population is growing, our economy has emerged from recession, employment levels have risen significantly and a new challenge for many employers is finding the right skills for their businesses. Unfortunately, there are still people who have been left behind. Ireland has an obligation to support all of our citizens and provide equality of opportunity for everyone. The Government's Action Plan for Education and the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016–2020, along with Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025, are the roadmaps to achieving an ambitious, successful and inclusive society with a well-skilled workforce.

SOLAS' role is to provide strategic direction to the further education and training sector to help achieve Ireland's ambition. We are proud to work closely with the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and other partners to translate this strategic direction into tangible outcomes for learners, businesses and communities throughout the country. In this regard, 2017 was an extremely successful year, with the emergence of new apprenticeships and traineeships, an evaluation and affirmation of the benefits of Post Leaving Certificate programmes and the roll-out of the literacy and numeracy strategy, among other initiatives.

SOLAS and the ETBs are considering and planning how best to address the skills needs of workers in areas at risk of being potentially impacted by Brexit. The annual SOLAS service planning process will consider relevant programmes and services required to leverage Brexit-related new job opportunities and reskill workers affected by Brexit.

I would like to thank the Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Richard Bruton TD, the Minister of State for Skills, Research and Innovation, Mr John Halligan TD, and officials from the Department of Education and Skills, for their guidance and support throughout the year.

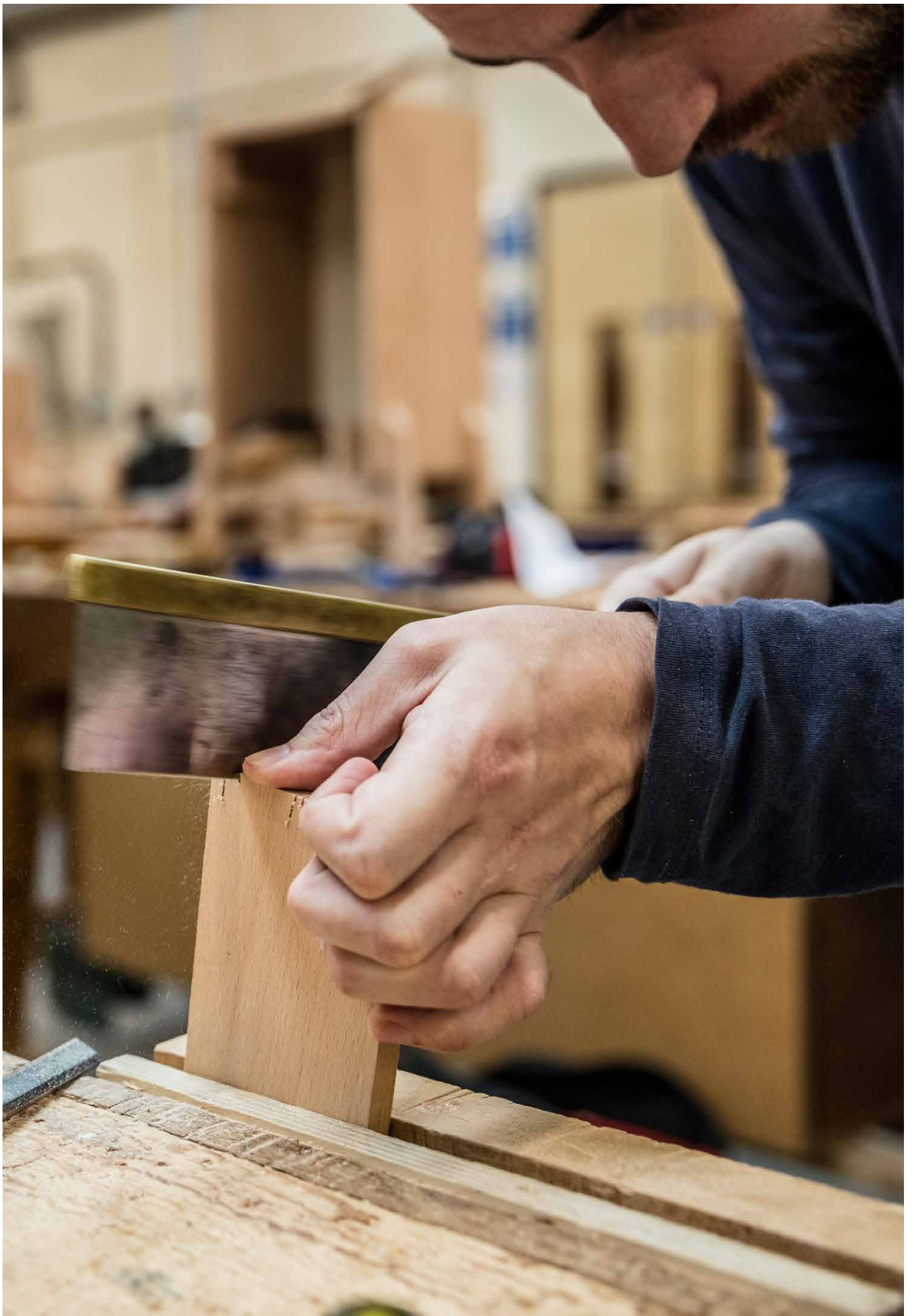
I would like to acknowledge the work of the SOLAS CEO, Paul O'Toole, and SOLAS staff. I would also like to acknowledge Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI); ETBs; government agencies and bodies; and our other partners across the FET sector to constantly strive for excellence in further education and training.

On behalf of the SOLAS Board, I wish to reiterate our commitment to guide and support SOLAS in all of its endeavours. Our collective experience and shared goals, I believe, are helping to shape a FET sector that delivers for learners, employers and communities. I wish to thank SOLAS Board member, David Barrett, who resigned in June 2017, for his commitment and contribution, and I would like to welcome Patrick J Dwyer, Sinead McCluskey and Catrina Sheridan as new members of the SOLAS Board.

The Board continues to provide strategic direction to SOLAS through its oversight of the FET Services Plan and associated funding activity, the progression of the FET Strategy 2014–2019 and the implementation of the SOLAS Corporate Plan. On behalf of the Board, we look forward to guiding and supporting SOLAS in the coming years.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Delaney'.

Patrick Delaney
Chairman



CEO'S FOREWORD



Providing people with opportunities at all stages of their life to improve their skills or engage in further education and training makes a real, tangible difference to people's lives. There is also a constant challenge to meet, anticipate and plan for the changing skills needs of the Irish labour force.

Over 300,000 further education and training places up to Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications are provided each year through local Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and other partners. SOLAS strives to ensure that FET provision is responsive to the needs of learners, employers and communities and works closely with local ETBs and regional skills managers to achieve this.

Significant progress was made in 2017 across the five goals of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019. A mid-term review of the strategy, to assess how well each of the five strategic goals of the strategy has progressed, began in 2017 and is due for completion in Q1 2018.

SOLAS developed and published its second Corporate Plan 2017–2019, setting out the ongoing contribution of SOLAS to the successful achievement of the strategy as well as agreed specific FET sectoral targets with the Department of Education and Skills to be achieved by the ETBs with support from SOLAS. To support the successful implementation of the new SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017–2019 and the achievement of targets, a new top-line organisational structure has been devised and implemented; this includes the establishment of a Work-based Learning Unit and an Active Inclusion Unit.

The National Skills Council, chaired by the Minister for Education and Skills, and nine regional skills fora were launched in 2017. The Council and fora together constitute part of a new skills identification architecture to ensure that the existing and future skills needs of the economy and society can be identified, prioritised and addressed. SOLAS, through its Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) supports the work of the Council and fora with key labour market analyses and skills forecasting intelligence. SOLAS also provides a data gathering, analytical and research resource, and it publishes a number of research reports annually.

SOLAS continues to support the Apprenticeship Council and works closely with other State agencies, such as the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), education providers, consortia, employers and unions, to further the Government's Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland, with an ambitious cumulative target of 50,000 new registrations over the period 2016 - 2020. A second call for new apprenticeship proposals to refresh the existing pipeline was issued in 2017 and an initial 26 apprenticeship proposals, including in areas such as cybersecurity, supply chain, geo-drilling and recruitment, were approved for further development by the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton TD.

I would like to thank my dedicated team at SOLAS, the SOLAS Board, the Minister for Education and Skills, the Minister of State for Skills, Research and Innovation, officials at the Department of Education and Skills, ETBI, the ETBs and other partners.

We are grateful for the support we have received and continue to receive from our stakeholders and partners and we look forward to working together to achieve our collective objectives into the future. Together we can create a better FET experience for learners, for businesses and local communities, so as to achieve a sector that is recognised for excellence and that contributes positively to learners wherever they are on their learning journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul O'Toole".

Paul O'Toole
Chief Executive Officer, SOLAS



BOARD OF SOLAS

An tSeirbhís Oideachais
Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna

Further Education and
Training Authority

The Board of SOLAS was appointed on 27 October 2013 by the Minister for Education and Skills. The Board comprises a Chairman and 12 ordinary members, including the CEO – SOLAS (ex-officio).



Patrick Delaney, Chairman

Former Director of Irish Business and Employers Confederation (Ibec)
Former Director, Small Firms Association (SFA)



Cathriona Hallahan

Managing Director,
Microsoft Ireland



William Egenton

Managing Director,
Dromone Engineering Limited



Cecilia Munro

Principal, Dun Laoghaire Further Education Institute, Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB



Patrick J Dwyer

Former Senior Vice President,
Dell EMC EMEA



Sinead McCluskey

Director of Commercial Innovation, PEI Surgical



Darragh J Loftus

Core Technology Account Manager,
Oracle EMEA Limited



Catrina Sheridan

Chief Executive Officer,
Sightsavers Ireland



Seán Burke

Former Chief Executive Officer,
Limerick and Clare Education
and Training Board



Bernadette Brady,

Former CEO, AONTAS, the national
adult learning organisation



Paul O'Sullivan

Former Dean and Director,
College of Business, Dublin
Institute of Technology



Patricia Carey

Former President,
Skerry's Business College, Cork



Paul O'Toole (ex-officio)

CEO, SOLAS, the Further Education
and Training Authority

BOARD OF SOLAS

Period covered – 12 months

January to December 2017

Board of SOLAS

A total of eight SOLAS Board Meetings were held during the 12-month period 1 January to 31 December 2017.

	Meetings attended
Patrick Delaney – Chairman	(eight)
David Barrett	(two) – resigned in June 2017
Bernadette Brady	(six)
Seán Burke	(eight)
Patricia Carey	(six)
Patrick J Dwyer	(one) – appointed 27 October 2017
William Egerton	(six)
Cathriona Hallahan	(five)
Darragh J Loftus	(six)
Sinead McCluskey	(two) – appointed 27 October 2017
Cecilia Munro	(eight)
Paul O'Sullivan	(five)
Paul O'Toole	(eight)
Catrina Sheridan	(two) – appointed 27 October 2017

Changes during 2017 – including new appointments and reappointments

David Barrett	Resigned as a member of the SOLAS Board in June 2017 – (term due to conclude 26 October 2018).
Seán Burke	Term of office concluded on 26 October 2017. Reappointed by the Minister for Education and Skills for a period of five years – from 27 October 2017 to 26 October 2022.
Patricia Carey	Term of office concluded on 26 October 2017. Reappointed by the Minister for Education and Skills for a period of five years – from 27 October 2017 to 26 October 2022.
Patrick J Dwyer	Appointed to the Board by the Minister for Education and Skills for a period of five years – from 27 October 2017 to 26 October 2022.
Sinead McCluskey	Appointed to the Board by the Minister for Education and Skills for a period of five years – from 27 October 2017 to 26 October 2022.
Cecilia Munro	Term of office concluded on 26 October 2017. Reappointed by the Minister for Education and Skills for a period of five years – from 27 October 2017 to 26 October 2022.
Paul O'Sullivan	Term of office concluded on 26 October 2017. Reappointed by the Minister for Education and Skills for a period of five years – from 27 October 2017 to 26 October 2022.
Catrina Sheridan	Appointed to the Board by the Minister for Education and Skills for a period of five years – from 27 October 2017 to 26 October 2022.

SOLAS BOARD COMMITTEES

Audit and Risk Management Review Committee

Five meetings were held.

Cathriona Hallahan	Chairperson and SOLAS Board Member
Seán Burke	SOLAS Board Member
Robert Chestnutt	External appointee
Paul O'Sullivan	SOLAS Board Member

Strategic Planning Committee

One meeting was held.

Patrick Delaney	Acting Chair
Cecilia Munro	Chairperson (from December 2017) and SOLAS Board Member
Bernadette Brady	SOLAS Board Member
Darragh J Loftus	SOLAS Board Member
Patrick J Dwyer	SOLAS Board Member (from December 2017)
Sinead McCluskey	SOLAS Board Member (from December 2017)

Workforce and Organisational Development Committee

One meeting was held.

Patrick Delaney	Chairperson and Chairman, Board of SOLAS
Patricia Carey	SOLAS Board Member
Catrina Sheridan	SOLAS Board Member

A member of the SOLAS Board was also a member and Chairman of the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee during 2017. (See Appendices for further information).

Board review

In accordance with Section 4.6 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016, the SOLAS Board undertook a review of its performance at the end of 2016. This review was discussed at the Board's annual strategy and planning day in January 2017.

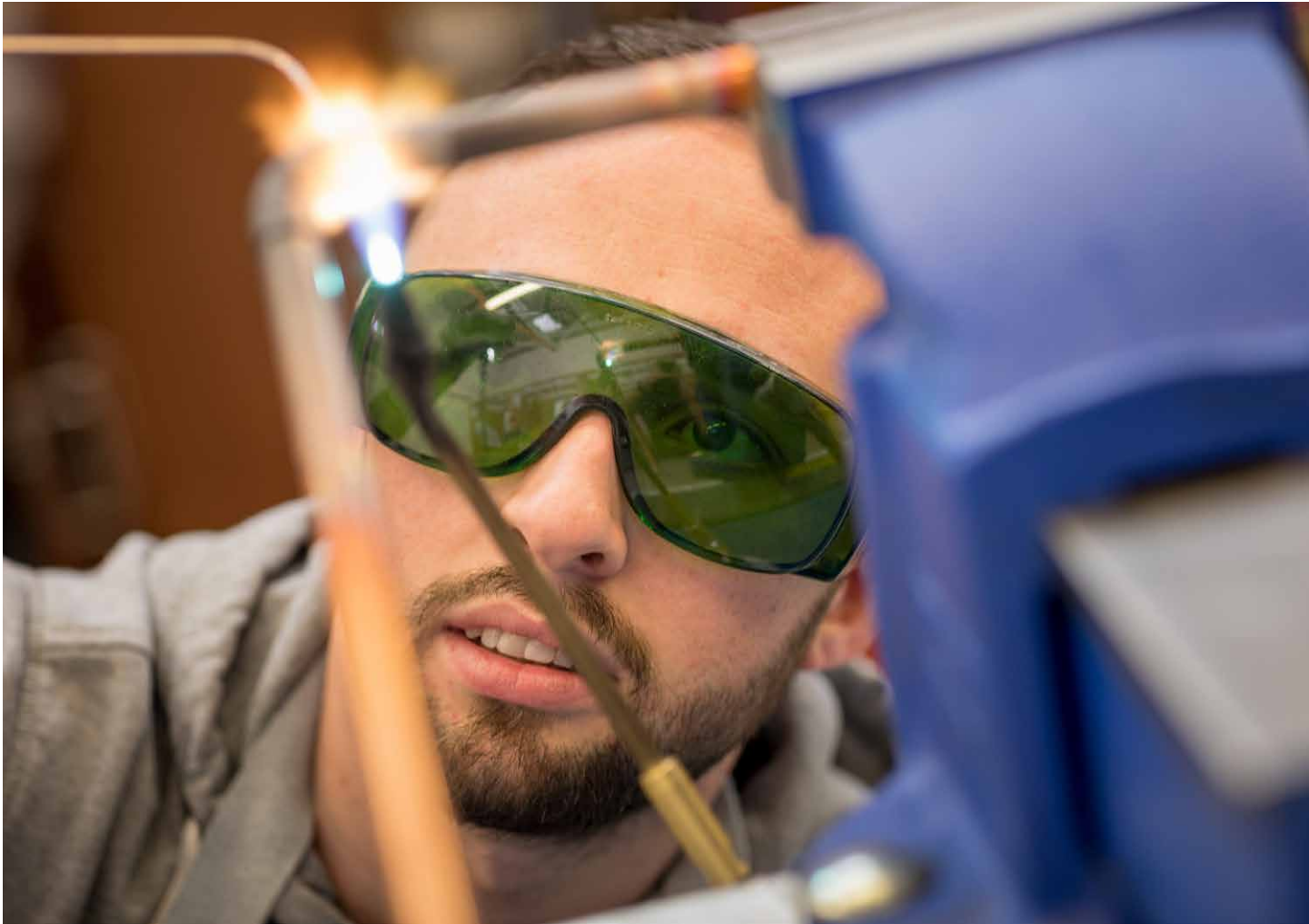
Schedule of Matters Reserved for the Board of SOLAS

In accordance with obligations under the Codes of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, the Board's role is formally set out in the Schedule of Matters. This was updated in 2017.

Matters reserved for the Board fall under the following headings:

- Strategy and management
- Structure and organisation
- Financial reporting and controls
- Internal controls
- Contracts
- Appointments and remuneration
- Corporate governance matters





FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN 2017

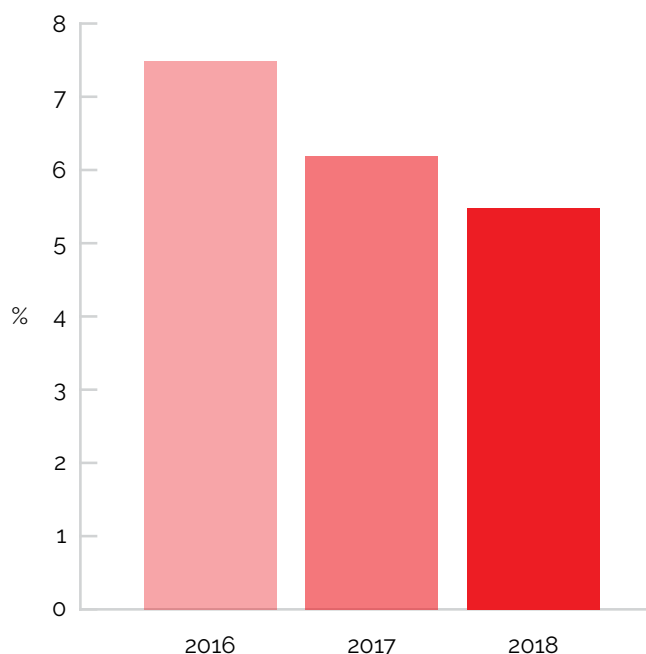
Global economic growth continued to gain momentum in 2017.¹ The European economy entered its fifth year of recovery and is expected to continue to strengthen into 2018, with all European Union (EU) economies showing signs of growth.² The Irish economy was no exception. Strong growth driven by ongoing recovery in the domestic side of the economy, together with solid employment growth, were notable features in 2017, notwithstanding a number of risks, including weak sterling, uncertainty surrounding Brexit and potential changes in international taxation and trade arrangements. Continued strong growth, in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of between 3.9 percent and 4.2 percent in 2018 and a further decline in unemployment to an average of between 5.4 percent and 5.6 percent through 2018, is anticipated³ – from 6.2 percent in December 2017 and 7.5 percent in December 2016.⁴

There was an annual increase in employment of 66,800 in 2017 represented by an increase in full-time employment of 90,100 and a decrease in part-time employment of 23,300. The trend of part-time positions being replaced by full-time positions continued into 2017. While employment gains were recorded in all sectors, administration, industry and construction were particularly robust⁵.

In the period Quarter 1 2012 to Quarter 1 2017 the share in employment grew for all levels of education but was most pronounced for those with post-secondary education, rising by almost 11 percentage points to 74.1 percent in Quarter 1 2017.⁶

Brexit remains the most notable risk to the economy. The Central Bank of Ireland has noted in a number of bulletins that, both in the short term and the longer term, the economic impact of Brexit on Ireland is set to be negative and material.⁷ The Government has adopted a whole-of-government contingency framework identifying key policy issues to be managed by government departments arising from Brexit.

Decline in unemployment 2016 – 2018



Under the direction of the Department of Education and Skills Management Board, the Departments EU/ International Unit⁸ works with a range of departmental divisions and agencies on analysing and prioritising issues for input to the negotiation phase. It also engages with other departments in Brexit Workgroups⁹ to provide key sectorial or thematic advice to the Cabinet Committee and government. Four Brexit consultation fora have been conducted for the higher, further education and training, primary and post-primary education sectors. SOLAS and the FET sector were actively involved in this consultation process.

Noting the potential implications for FET-related skills development needs arising from Brexit, particularly in Border areas, SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are considering and planning how best to address the skills needs of workers in their respective catchment areas at risk of being impacted by Brexit. Work started in 2017 as part of the annual SOLAS service planning process to consider and plan relevant programmes and services required to leverage Brexit-related new job opportunities and reskill workers affected by Brexit.

1 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017), *OECD Economic Outlook*, Volume 2017 Issue 2. Paris, OECD Publishing.

2 European Commission, Winter 2017 Economic Forecast.

3 ESRI (2017) *Quarterly Economic Commentary*, December 2017 and Central Bank of Ireland Quarterly Economic Commentary QB4 October 2017.

4 Central Statistics Office (CSO) Monthly Unemployment Release December 2017 – Seasonally adjusted unemployment rate.

5 CSO, Labour Force Survey, Quarter 4 2017

6 SOLAS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit.

7 Central Bank of Ireland – April 2018 “Quarterly Bulletin 01/18”

8 Minister for Education and Skills reply in the Oireachtas Monday 11 September 2017. <http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/takes/dail2017091100022>

9 Economy and Trade; the Common Travel Area; and European Union Programmes – three of the six sectorial work groups established by Government.



Against the background of an economy gaining added momentum with signs of a tightening labour market, SOLAS, together with its FET partners, continues to play a central role in advancing the Government's economic, social and educational priorities. SOLAS published its second Corporate Plan 2017–2019 in 2017.

The plan sets out the ongoing contribution of SOLAS to successful achievement of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019. It also strengthens the SOLAS commitment to a range of government policies, including the *Action Plan for Education 2016–2019*; the *National Skills Strategy 2025*; the *Action Plan for Jobs 2016*; *Pathways to Work 2016 - 2020* and the *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with a Disability 2015–2024*; *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children & Young People (2014 - 2020)*.

The new Corporate Plan sets out agreed specific FET sectoral targets with the Department of Education and Skills (DES). For example, by the end of 2019 a target of a 10 percent increase in learners securing employment after undertaking a relevant FET course has been agreed, as well as a 10 percent increase in learners progressing to other FET courses or higher education from relevant courses. From 2018, for three years, an average of 10,000 more learners each year are to achieve qualifications related to business sectors where employment growth and skills needs have been identified.

The National Skills Strategy 2025 includes a cumulative target of 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places to be provided over the period 2016–2020. In 2017, the Government launched its plan to meet this cumulative target including annual sub-targets, key elements of implementation and a time-based set of actions. A second call for new apprenticeship proposals to refresh the existing pipeline was launched in 2017. SOLAS has supported the Apprenticeship Council and worked closely with other State agencies, such as the Higher Education Authority, and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), education providers, employers and unions, to ensure that the ambitious targets set by government will be achieved.

SOLAS, collaborating with all partners, worked to progress the Government target of doubling the number of traineeship enrolments by 2020 and of significantly expanding the number of industries offering traineeship programmes can also be achieved. To date, eight new traineeships have been established. A significant increase in the overall traineeship budget is anticipated in the 2018 Budget.

50,000

target apprenticeship and traineeship places to be provided over the period 2016–2020

10,000

more learners each year are to achieve qualifications related to business sectors where employment growth and skills needs have been identified.

The new National Skills Council, chaired by the Minister for Education and Skills, and nine regional skills fora were launched in 2017. These national and regional structures for identifying skills needs were set out in the new National Skills Strategy 2025 and were a key commitment under the Action Plan for Education 2016. The Council and fora are part of a new skills identification architecture to ensure that the existing and future skills needs of the economy and society can be identified, prioritised and addressed. Each regional skills forum has a key role to play in delivering economic growth and driving regional development. Each forum works closely with the enterprise base in each region, together with education and training providers, including HEIs and ETBs, the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, and the Local Enterprise Offices.

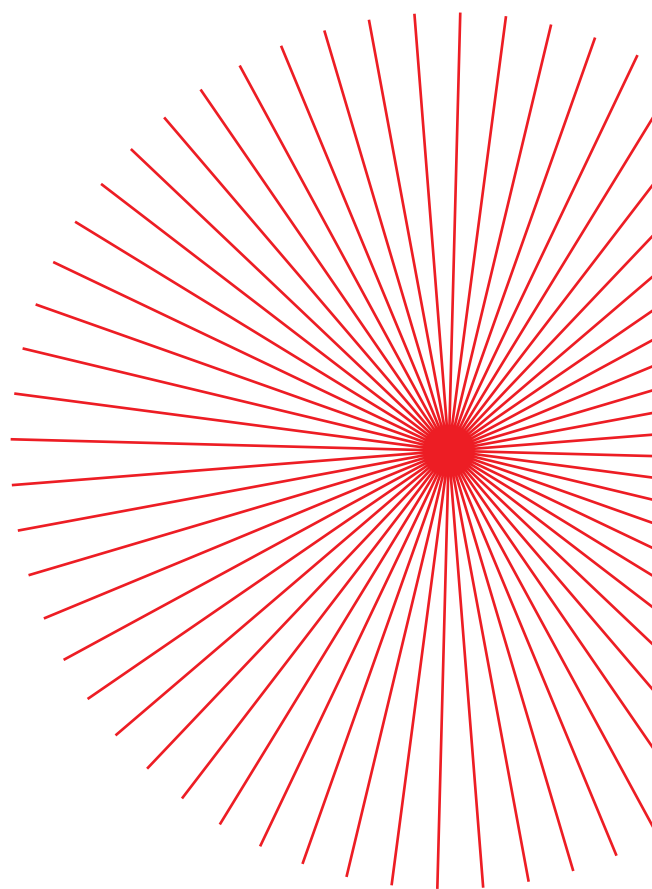
The SOLAS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) supports the work of the National Skills Council and the regional skills fora with key labour market analyses and skills forecasting intelligence. In that regard, the SLMRU continued to provide a data gathering, analytical and research resource to support the work of both the Council and the fora; this included the publication of a number of annual research reports such as *Monitoring Ireland's Skills Supply 2017*; *National Skills Bulletin 2017*; *Annual Vacancy Overview 2017*; *Lifelong Learning Participation Among Adults, 2017*.

The implementation of the FET Strategy 2014–2019, under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills and supported by SOLAS, continued apace, and this implementation included the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. Key achievements in 2017 in relation to implementation of the FET Strategy 2014–2019 are outlined in the next section of this report. SOLAS, on behalf of Department of Education and Skills, commissioned a high-level independent mid-term review of the FET Strategy in the latter part of 2017; this review is due to be published in Q1 2018.

The FET data infrastructure, incorporating a Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) consisting of a national course calendar, a national course database and a national learner database, was populated by all ETBs in 2017. Funding Allocation Requests by ETBs were also incorporated into the PLSS, thus streamlining ETB funding applications, associated SOLAS reporting and management information systems.

The *Annual Progress Report on the Public Service Reform Plan 2014–2016* (incorporating the Education sector reform plan) was published in July 2017 alongside an OECD assessment of the plan. For quality and efficiency of public administration, Ireland continues to perform very well in terms of how it is perceived by business users.¹⁰

A new top-line organisational structure for SOLAS has been devised and implemented; this included the establishment of a Work-based Learning Unit and an Active Inclusion Unit in 2017. The structure is intended to support the successful implementation of the new SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017–2019 and the achievement of the ambitious FET sector targets set out in the plan. A Department of Education and Skills/ SOLAS Performance Delivery Agreement for 2017 was completed and a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Higher Education Authority will be concluded in early 2018.



10 IPA Public Sector Trends Report 2016.

27,500

courses providing
for around



324,000

beneficiaries across



28

different programmes

Apprenticeships

11

new
apprenticeships
validated

circa

5,000

apprenticeship registrations

.....

16

APPRENTICESHIP
PROGRAMMES IN
DEVELOPMENT

PROGRESSING THE FET STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019

The FET Strategy aims to deliver a high quality learning experience leading to better outcomes for all engaged in FET.

There are five high-level strategic goals at the core of the FET Strategy:

1. Skills for the economy
2. Active inclusion, including a literacy and numeracy strategy
3. Quality provision
4. Integrated planning and funding
5. Standing of FET.

Significant progress was recorded across the five goals.

Under Goal 1: Skills for the economy, SOLAS actions relating to the Apprenticeship and Traineeship Plan 2016–2020 were fully implemented. In addition, 11 new apprenticeships have now been validated. This, together with the increase in demand for existing craft apprenticeships and the associated circa 5,000 registrations, signalled that the renewal of the apprenticeship system was well under way.

In addition to the existing 36 apprenticeship programmes spanning the engineering, construction, motor, electrical, hospitality and ICT industry sectors, a further 16 programmes are now in development.

A total of eight new traineeships have now been developed in areas such as hospitality, engineering and digital media. A ministerial briefing was held on traineeships and a new five-step guide and website were launched.

A strategy to develop Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) for FET was approved by the SOLAS Board and was launched within the FET sector. Implementation of the strategy began in 2016. An action plan to establish the baseline of TEL provision in each ETB was developed.

A TEL action plan is currently being developed in each of the 16 ETBs. The plan will cover infrastructure, pedagogy and continuing professional development, content creation and sharing, and organisational practice. The plan is due to be submitted to SOLAS as part of the 2018 ETB funding application process.

With regard to research on best practice FET, a SOLAS-commissioned report on best practice entrepreneurship education and training in the FET sector was published in Q4 2016. As part of the 2017 service planning process, ETBs began the process of developing a coherent response to the report findings and of making arrangements to increase the nature and level of entrepreneurship education and training provided by ETBs in the period 2018–2020.

Research into the barriers to participation in FET, with a particular emphasis on the unemployed and other priority groups, was published in 2017. The report findings are being considered by ETBs with a view to improving accessibility to, and relevance of, programmes and services in 2018.

Under Goal 2: Active Inclusion/Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, the FET Strategy 2014–2019 clearly outlines an adult literacy and numeracy strategy for the FET sector and how it is to be implemented. SOLAS, ETBI and its member ETBs, as well as the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), AONTAS, the national adult learning organisation, and a range of other key stakeholders funded by SOLAS have again worked closely in 2017 to further develop the structures required to progress the implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

For example, SOLAS commissioned ICF Consulting to undertake independent research to expand the evidence base to inform embedding literacy and numeracy across all of FET provision. SOLAS also commissioned ETBI to undertake research with regard to best practice in relation to Initial and Ongoing Assessment of Adult Literacy and Numeracy at NFQ levels 1-3 as well as English Language Provision for Low-Skilled and Unemployed Migrants - Recommendations for Good Practice at NFQ levels 1-3 in ETBs. These reports relate to elements of the Further Education and Training Literacy and Numeracy Strategy which aims to promote, develop and encourage literacy, numeracy and English language acquisition for adults in Ireland. Guidelines for Inclusion of Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in adult literacy provision have also been finalised by NALA and ETBI.

The www.takethefirststep.ie campaign was launched in September by Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton TD. The 2017 campaign built on the 2016 campaign and performed strongly in terms of recall and reach. The campaign featured learners talking about authentic experiences of going back to learning and appealed to a number of segments such as: young recent school leavers, adults looking to improve their employment prospects, learners with more complex issues such as limited basic skills, attention and concentration, and those who would benefit from accessing literacy and numeracy learning for personal development. The campaign worked on a national and regional level with video on demand, radio ads, radio interviews, outdoor advertising and assets adapted to reflect the regional needs. President Michael D Higgins hosted a reception at Áras an Uachtaráin for representatives from the 16 ETBs involved in the campaign. Building on momentum from the campaign, NALA and a team of literacy learners promoted literacy and numeracy learning options and associated benefits at the National Ploughing Championships.

An updated policy context in relation to adult numeracy was submitted to the Department of Education and Skills for consideration. In addition, a policy context focusing on family learning is currently under development by NALA in conjunction with ETBI, SOLAS and Department of Education and Skills.

Under Goal 3: Quality Provision, the 2017 FET Services Plan included a break-down of SOLAS-funded FET provision encompassing circa.27,500 courses providing for around 324,000 beneficiaries across 28 different programmes.


The service planning model has evolved over the past three years and was subject to a further review following the successful publication of the 2017 services plan. SOLAS has begun preparatory work with ETBI and the ETBs to install a stronger three-year strategic planning and funding framework, commencing with the 2018 service planning exercise. This will be based on the achievement of agreed target outcomes set by SOLAS for the ETB sector following the successful piloting and evaluation of this model in the sector.

With regard to upgrading QQI awards, validation and standards, SOLAS and the ETBs have supported QQI in this important work.

With regard to a professional development (PD) strategy, a SOLAS policy proposal is with the Department of Education and Skills for its consideration. A PD strategy National Steering Group has been established with ETBI, the ETBs and SOLAS members, chaired by the Department of Education and Skills. Working groups for five of the critical areas of professional development, namely technology-enhanced learning, leadership and management, quality assurance, ICT and enterprise engagement, have been established. ETBs are currently identifying professional development co-ordinators to support implementation.

A national FET co-ordinator for professional development was appointed in ETBI and is collaborating with SOLAS, ETBs and the National Steering Group on implementation of the FET PD strategy. Working groups have been or are about to be established for the areas of staff development plans, quality assurance, leadership and management.

Memorandums of Understanding and Service Level Agreements for the delivery of a National Craft Apprenticeship were agreed between all ETBs and SOLAS. MOUs have also been agreed by ETBs with the Department of Defence, Foróige, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and the Joint Further Education Representative Group. A collaborative framework has been formally established with QQI.



Under Goal 4: Planning and Funding, the SOLAS Evaluation of the Post-Leaving Certificate programme and the SOLAS response to the findings of the evaluation were approved by the Minister for Education and Skills in December 2017. Following a competitive tendering process, SOLAS commissioned the ESRI to conduct an independent evaluation of the National Youthreach Programme. The evaluation process began in the latter part of 2017. A tender for a SOLAS-commissioned independent evaluation of VTOS and the Specific Skills Programme was published in November 2017. Work on the evaluation is expected to start in Q1 2018. The 2017 follow-up survey report on learners who completed ETB training courses in Q1 2016 was published. Results have improved over the past two years. For example employment outcomes for learners on specific skills training courses increased from 30% to 50%, while evening course employment outcomes increased from 34% to 36% and employment outcomes for learners on specialist training provision for persons with a disability increased from 18% to 26%.

Under Goal 5: Standing of FET, the mid-term review of the FET Strategy 2014–2019 began in 2017 and is due to be completed in Q1 2018. The review will provide an assessment of how well each of the five strategic goals of the FET Strategy have progressed to date, including Goal 5: *Standing of FET*. The SOLAS 2017 communications objectives were met in full.



91,511

Safe Pass cards produced
and distributed



17,806

CSCS/QSCS cards
produced and distributed



WORLDSKILLS 2017

Team of **14** apprentices and trainees
represented Ireland and won **seven**
Medallions of Excellence.

eCollege delivered training to

10,157

jobseekers



TED^xBCFE

TEDxBallyfermotED took place
in November 2017



2017 FET Services Plan was published

**Evaluation of the Post-Leaving Certificate
Programme** and the **SOLAS response to the findings
of the evaluation** were published

Research into the barriers to participation in FET
was published

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

Strategy and Knowledge Division

The SOLAS Strategy and Knowledge Division operates across three units:

The FET Strategy, Programme Evaluation and Research Unit, which is responsible for the FET Strategy programme, for evaluation of mainline FET programmes and for the SLMRU, including skills and apprenticeship forecasting and new data analytics functions.

FET Planning and Investment Unit, which is responsible for strategy and operational planning and funding FET provision. This unit also incorporates programme improvement, which is responsible for leading agreed programme improvements plans arising from independent evaluations of FET programmes and other FET-related research.

The Active Inclusion Unit, which is responsible for ensuring an effective bridging mechanism between social inclusion policy and its implementation by providers and for taking the lead in implementing the Department of Education and Skills Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Implementation Plan.

SOLAS research in 2017

The SOLAS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) provides research, data and analyses for SOLAS and the National Skills Council, the regional skills fora, and the revamped Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. In addition, the SLMRU publishes research and reports that facilitate development and review of policy and practice in the further and higher education and training sectors.

The SLMRU also manages the National Skills Database and provides labour market data and analyses encompassing the provision of occupational employment projections to 2020 and apprenticeship forecasts for a range of stakeholders nationally, including the ETB sector.

Management and staff in ETB centres/locations who have direct contact with learners, employers and other stakeholders were briefed in 2017 by the SLMRU team on national/regional skills needs and other labour market demographics relevant to the ETB catchment area. The emphasis in the 2017 FET Services Plan, after careful consideration of likely demand, was again concentrated on improving the quality and range of FET provision to meet employer needs.

The SLMRU also undertook a comprehensive schedule of annual research and publications as well as other research work, including:

- Annual Vacancy Overview
- Lifelong learning among adults in Ireland
- Annual National Skills Bulletin
- Monitoring Ireland's Skills Supply
- Labour market transitions analysis
- Recruitment agency surveys (twice yearly)
- Apprenticeship forecasts
- Completion of skills portal update
- CEDEFOP reports
- Ongoing support to Employment Permit System in Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI)
- Ongoing support to the regional skills fora in relation to labour market intelligence at local level
- Support to the Skills for Growth project (in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland, the Department of Education and Skills and the regional skills fora) in relation to data collection on skills shortages at regional level
- Support to the Public Service Pay Commission
- Support to the Department of Health in respect of the development of an integrated strategic approach to workforce planning for the health and social care sector
- Support to the Transitions Reform Steering Group chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills.
- Follow-up Surveys with former programme participants.

Operational data analytics

The Operational Data Analytics Unit provides a FET data analytics service, primarily through the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) and administrative data sets.

The unit continued PLSS development support and prepared the learner database element of the PLSS for analysis for SOLAS-wide use. Work also started on FET outcomes evaluation, using SOLAS' analytics presence in the Central Statistics Office to evaluate selected ETB/FET provision. It also assisted ETBs/SOLAS with the annual service planning process.

The Further Education and Training Services Plan

The 2017 FET Services Plan reflects the aims, objectives and goals presented in the FET Strategy 2014–2019 and takes into consideration the change in the economic climate and potential future skills demands. The plan also reflects the initial contributions by ETBs and SOLAS to support the successful implementation of the FET sector service and performance targets included in the SOLAS Corporate Plan and agreed with the Minister for Education and Skills. The aggregate FET sector targets to be achieved by the end of 2020 are:

- 10 percent more learners securing employment after undertaking a relevant FET course
- 10 percent more learners progressing to other FET courses or higher education from relevant courses
- 10 percent increase in the rate of certification on courses primarily focused on transversal (social mobility) skills development
- 10 percent increase in adult learners taking part in lifelong learning delivered through FET
- 10 percent increase in the rate of certification on courses primarily focused on social mobility skills development that are transversal in nature
- From 2018, for three years, 10,000 more learners on average each year are to achieve qualifications related to business sectors where employment growth and skills needs have been identified.

The profile of FET provision set out in the 2017 Plan also reflects government policy in education and training, and other related areas. The Plan supports the commitments of SOLAS and ETBs outlined in a range of such government policies, examples of which are set out below:

- *The Action Plan for Education 2016–2019*
- *National Skills Strategy 2025*
- *Action Plan for Jobs 2016*
- *Pathways to Work 2016 - 2020*
- *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for Persons with a Disability 2015-2024.*

The above list should not be considered exhaustive.

The plan presented details of the State's investment in FET through exchequer funding and the National Training Fund and through support from the European Social Fund. SOLAS expenditure of €598m supported the delivery of this plan. This does not include direct expenditure by the Department of Education and Skills on PLC and related activity.

The plan also includes a breakdown of SOLAS-funded FET provision, which encompasses circa 27,500 courses, providing for around 324,000 beneficiaries across 28 different programmes.

FET provision in 2017

324,503

beneficiaries

54,189

community education
beneficiaries

254,484

new entrants

10,157

eCollege beneficiaries *

110,854

full-time beneficiaries

33

skills clusters

159,460

part-time beneficiaries

Note: Figures are based on 2017 summary estimated outturns report from ETBs

Delivered by

- 16 ETBs
- 34 voluntary secondary and community comprehensive schools
- 22 State agencies and bodies
- 10 grant-aided consortia

* Excludes fee paying learners

Skills Development Division

The Skills Development Division engages with enterprise to support the FET system, undertakes the duties and requirements of SOLAS as the statutory authority for apprenticeships, and supports and conducts wider skills based initiatives and work based learning programmes such as the European Globalisation Fund. The division works across three departments:

- **National Programme Innovation Unit**, including professional development for the FET community, and employee development in the wider workforce, TEL and eCollege
- **Work-Based Learning**, post-2016 apprenticeships, traineeships and the European Globalisation Fund
- **Apprenticeship and Construction Services**, pre-2016 apprenticeships and national construction schemes

National programme innovation

The SOLAS National Programme Innovation Unit, in partnership with ETBs, employers and employer representative bodies, developed career traineeships in the following areas: Engineering, Laboratory Assistant, Animation Assistant, and Digital Sales and Marketing for small businesses. Career Traineeship is an occupational training programme based on identified labour market needs designed to offer trainees a foothold in a career.

A number of pilot career traineeships commenced in ETBs in 2017 in the following industries:

- Hospitality in conjunction with the Irish Hotels Federation, Vintners Federation Ireland and the Restaurants Association of Ireland
- Engineering
- Digital Sales and Marketing for small business in conjunction with Teagasc, ISME and SFA
- Interior Systems
- Laboratory Assistant
- Animation Assistant in conjunction with Screen Training Ireland, Animation Ireland and VFXAI.

A comprehensive set of resource materials has been created to assist with the development of career traineeships which ETBs and employers can access using designated web links.

Two training initiatives that had been developed to support ETB staff and company personnel with responsibility for implementation of career traineeships continued to run in 2017. One initiative trained 44 staff across 13 ETBs to assist them in identifying training needs with companies through an occupational profiling process. The other initiative provided training for 58 Workplace Supervisors from 31 host companies, so that they could provide structured work-based learning support to the trainees.

An evaluation of the career traineeship pilots was completed in 2017. The evaluation will contribute to the review and expansion of traineeships nationally, and the career traineeship programmes continue to contribute to the targets set out in the Action Plan to expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020. In 2017, 234 trainees participated in career traineeships.

FET Professional Development Strategy 2017–2019

SOLAS began implementing the FET Professional Development Strategy 2017–2019 in collaboration with ETBI and the ETBs.

This implementation plan focuses on a number of actions grouped under three strategic goals:

- Creating the infrastructure and delivery systems for high-quality professional development
- Increasing FET sector capability through relevant, targeted professional development
- Sustainable funding and resourcing of professional development

FET practitioners require reskilling throughout their evolving careers to meet the ever-changing needs of learners. To this end, the FET Professional Development Strategy identified several priority areas for development, such as management development, TEL, employer engagement and quality assurance. Practice frameworks were progressed in these areas and professional development initiatives were identified and prepared for development.

One such initiative identified for development is a Diploma in Change Management for managers in the FET sector; this will consist of a one-year blended learning programme at Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications. The programme will aim to enhance the skill sets of managers around strategic planning and implementation, leading others and self management.

Several initiatives were identified in the area of TEL. These include the design, development and piloting of a range of blended, accredited TEL programmes for FET practitioners at Levels 6, 7 and 8 on the NFQ. The objective of the programmes will be to enhance FET practitioners' TEL practices using digital technologies which best address the learning needs of a diverse group of FET learners. Where possible, the programmes will provide opportunity for FET practitioners to apply the knowledge and skills they develop in their own professional setting, so that they can reflect critically on the potential impact of digital technologies in their own work settings.

Collaboration by SOLAS with ETBI and the ETBs in the implementation of the strategy will continue from 2018 in to 2019.

eCollege

eCollege, the national online learning service, delivered training, free of charge, to over 10,000 unemployed learners and, on a fee-paying basis, to approximately 500 employed learners in 2017. eCollege courses are available on a continuous intake basis, with no waiting lists and flexible time for completion.

Courses are delivered through state-of-the-art online learning platforms that contain the latest online communication and collaboration tools. These facilitate an active learning experience in a rich learning environment.

Case Officers in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection can refer jobseekers for a course at any time; the course is free of charge to jobseekers. Fee-paying clients can get immediate access to courses through an online payment system. Learners starting courses as jobseekers can complete their courses even after gaining employment, at no cost either to the employer or to the learner. While IT-related courses still form the bulk of the demand-led provision, there continues to be increased demand for accounting, health and safety and marketing courses. In 2017, there was increased demand for courses, indicating the increased recognition of online learning as a viable medium for career development and lifelong learning.

During 2017, eCollege held a presentation of certificates for ACCA-awarded Diploma in Accounting and Business course.

Testimonials

"The course was very helpful, filled with lots of information, and I learned so much more than I ever have before when studying Word 2010. eCollege worked so well for me, as I love to work in my own time and outside of a classroom setting. Everything is there at the touch of a mouse, on the go and anytime during the day or night to fit your schedule. The classes and exercises were very good, well thought out and easy to use. I would recommend this course to anyone and to do it on eCollege as it's very handy, easy to use, but you get all the same information and experience as going to a real class or course."

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) is a European-funded programme, designed to assist EU Member States to provide labour market activation supports to those citizens who are made redundant through the effects of globalisation.

SOLAS EGF Co-ordination Unit

In 2017, the SOLAS EGF co-ordination unit provided a comprehensive suite of labour market activation supports to 107 redundant employees of Pratt & Whitney in West Dublin. Simultaneously, the SOLAS EGF team provided specialised interventions in support of 100 NEETs (those aged between 18 and 25 years and not in employment, education or training) across the West Dublin region.

"My first meeting with one of the EGF Team, was very helpful and friendly and she explained to me what EGF was all about. She told me I could meet with a career advisor to get advice and to help me decide on courses I wanted to do.... I wanted to do acting ... She was very excited and told me she could help me with an interview in the Irish Film Academy. I had my interview and it went amazing, I got accepted... We are currently working on 4 short films as we come to the end of the full time course. I wouldn't have been able to afford the training that I have received and get to where I am now if it wasn't for the EGF. I am truly grateful for everything that they have done for me, they are such an amazing team every one of them are so friendly and helpful and did everything they could for me."

Apprenticeship in Ireland 2017

Apprenticeship in Ireland is on an exciting journey. With the announcement in December 2017 of the latest 26 apprenticeship proposals approved for further development by Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton TD, it is evident that traditional perceptions on apprenticeships are shifting.

Included in the announcement were apprenticeship programmes in areas such as cybersecurity, supply chain, geo-drilling and recruitment, ranging from a Level 5 to a Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications. As well as the existing 36 apprenticeship programmes spanning the engineering, construction, motor, electrical, hospitality and ICT industry sectors, a further 16 programmes are already in development. Apprenticeship provision is increasing, with many sectors now embracing the country's commitment to expanding apprenticeship and traineeship.

Currently, more than 12,000 apprentices are undertaking their training, and more than 4,900 approved employers across Ireland are choosing apprenticeships to help support and grow their business. The aim is to have more than 78 apprenticeships on offer, providing a broad range of opportunities in many industry sectors by 2020.

In November 2017, a national apprenticeship competition was launched. The task was to build a 3D 'A' model to showcase the high level of skill and creativity that apprentices demonstrate. Teams of apprentices registered to take part in this competition, which was sponsored by the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) and the Construction Industry Federation (CIF).

Statutory apprenticeships

During 2017, SOLAS had statutory responsibility for the co-ordination of 27 pre-2016 designated apprenticeship programmes and nine post-2016 designated apprenticeship programmes under the Industrial Training Act, 1967 and the Labour Services Act, 1987.

Co-ordinating provider

SOLAS, as an approved QQI co-ordinating provider, is responsible for the development, delivery and maintenance of the curricula and assessment procedures, and for leading the providers of all pre-2016 apprenticeship programmes. Pre-2016 apprenticeship programmes are modular-based programmes, which generally comprise seven alternating phases of on-the-job and off-the-job training and development. On successful completion of an apprenticeship programme, apprentices receive a QQI Advanced Certificate Craft at Major Award Level 6. The standing and value of this certificate is recognised nationally and internationally. Having successfully completed their training a total of 1,462 apprentices were awarded an Advanced Certificate Craft in 2017.

The ETBs, Institutes of Technology and the Irish School of Ferriery provided off-the-job training places for 7,174 craft apprentices in 2017. Throughout 2017, SOLAS registered 4,843 new apprentices, of whom 4,508 were registered to pre-2016 apprenticeship programmes; this represented an increase of 20 percent on the number of registrations recorded in 2016.

The prognosis and forecast for future pre-2016 apprenticeship programme registrations remains positive and it is expected that pre-2016 apprenticeship programme registrations will continue to grow incrementally over the next three years. Table 1 shows the number of apprentices registered with pre-2016 apprenticeship programmes in 2017.

Table 1 2017 Pre-2016 apprenticeship programme registrations by apprenticeship

Pre-2016 Craft Apprenticeship	Annual registrations
Agricultural Mechanics	45
Aircraft Mechanics	53
Brick and Stonelaying	60
Carpentry and Joinery	443
Construction Plant Fitting	86
Electrical	1,705
Electrical Instrumentation	120
Electronic Security Systems	72
Farriery	6
Floor and Wall Tiling	0
Heavy Vehicle Mechanics	143
Industrial Insulation	21
Instrumentation	20
Mechanical Automation and Maintenance Fitting	183
Metal Fabrication	224
Motor Mechanics	353
Painting and Decorating	44
Pipefitting	25
Plastering	34
Plumbing	532
Print Media	2
Refrigeration and Air Conditioning	106
Sheet Metalworking	53
Stonecutting and Stonemasonry	8
Toolmaking	65
Vehicle Body Repairs	46
Wood Manufacturing and Finishing	59
TOTAL	4,508

Table 2 2017 Post-2016 registrations by apprenticeship

Post-2016 apprenticeship programmes	Annual registrations
Industrial Electrical Engineering	19
Polymer Processing Technology	25
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 6)	40
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 7)	36
Insurance Practice	86
Accounting Technician	71
Financial Services Associate	15
Financial Services Specialist	18
Commis Chef	25
TOTAL	335

SOLAS, through its Skills and Labour Market Research Unit and its Apprenticeship Services Unit, regularly conducts evaluations on the imbalances in skills supply and demand in the workplace including craft apprenticeship occupations. In addition, it provides forecasts of apprenticeship requirements over a five-year period.

The overall craft apprenticeship registration pattern since 2009 reflects the expected forecasts of the SOLAS SLMRU and the Apprenticeship Services Unit. Table 3 demonstrates pre-2016 apprenticeship registrations trends in recent years, which replicates developments taking place within the wider Irish economy.

Table 3 Apprenticeship registrations 2012–2017

Year	Registration numbers
2012	1,434
2013	1,929
2014	2,698
2015	3,153
2016	3,742
2017	4,508

Recognition of prior learning and appeals applications

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) provides apprentices with a facility to present verifiable evidence of trade-related experience to enable them to meet the requirements for certification. In 2017, the Recognition of Prior Learning Sub-Committee of the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC) approved 17 applications for the Award of the Advanced Certificate Craft. SOLAS also processes applications from apprentices who wish to seek exemptions from phases or time from the apprenticeship programme. 117 applications from apprentices for such exemptions were successful in 2017.

SOLAS introduced an RPL programme for the Electronic Security Industry to enable those who worked in the industry prior to the introduction of the Electronic Security Systems apprenticeship in 2007 to validate their competence under an RPL process. SOLAS also facilitates craftspeople who completed an apprenticeship during the 'time-served' era to validate their competence through the RPL process. During 2017, SOLAS approved 144 applicants for a Record of Attainment.

The National Apprenticeship Appeals Committee approved 51 applications from both apprentices and employers on a range of matters relating to apprenticeship.

Other pre-2016 apprenticeship developments in 2017 included:

1. Version 4 curricula implementation

In 2016, SOLAS began implementing the version 4 curricula in the ETB network for the following apprenticeships: Electrical, Carpentry and Joinery, Metal Fabrication, Plumbing and Heavy Vehicle Mechanics. SOLAS, in partnership with the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the IOTs, extended the implementation of the version 4 curricula in the IOT network in 2017.

2. Programme review

SOLAS, in partnership with the primary stakeholders, finalised a comprehensive programme review of four pre-2016 apprenticeship programmes.

3. Validation

Following programme submissions for validation, QQI formally validated 12 pre-2016 apprenticeship programmes.

Testimonial

"I'm getting to work on practical jobs, doing tasks that I know will benefit me in my career in the long run. I love learning on the job and I'm so delighted that I got into an apprenticeship and am really enjoying it. I'd strongly encourage other people to do an apprenticeship".

Traineeship

A new guide to traineeship in Ireland was launched in 2017. The guide provides practical information on what is a traineeship; how employers and prospective trainees can access traineeship programmes; information on current traineeship opportunities, and the five-step process to developing a new traineeship.

Sixteen ETBs across Ireland set up dedicated contact points for employers so as to create a single point of contact for industries interested in getting involved in the further education and training area. This area is recognised for providing a well-established evidence base for improving outcomes for learners in gaining or retaining employment. Employers can discuss existing traineeship programme provision, or enquire about the creation of new traineeship programmes. There are currently more than 32 such programmes in Ireland, with plans in place to develop new provision in 2018. Traineeships have been a part of the Irish education and training system for over 20 years. A national traineeship programme was introduced in 1995 and since the mid-1990s there have been an estimated 30,000 participants and more than 1,500 participant companies.

The *Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeships in Ireland 2016-2020* includes targets for the registration of 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places to be provided over this period.

National construction schemes

The range of programmes managed by the SOLAS Construction Services Unit includes 21 construction skills programmes, 14 quarrying skills programmes and the Safe Pass programme. These programmes are available to the construction industry to ensure that it has the requisite leading-edge construction skills, quarrying skills and competencies for success.

The legislation and policy aspects of these schemes are led by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Health and Safety Authority. The schemes are administered by SOLAS, and they are operated by a number of mainly SOLAS-approved private providers. Construction Skills Certification Scheme and Quarrying Skills Certification Scheme programmes require QQI accreditation in order to meet the statutory requirements of these schemes.

Safe Pass programme

The Safe Pass Programme is a one-day health and safety awareness training programme, which is mandatory for specific categories operating within the construction sector, including new entrants, and it is covered under the provisions of Schedule 4 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013.

Construction Skills Certification Scheme programme

The Construction Skills Certification Scheme programme provides for the training, assessment, certification and registration of non-craft operatives within the construction sector and is covered under the provisions of Schedule 5 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013.

Quarrying Skills Certification Scheme programme

The Quarrying Skills Certification Scheme programme provides for the training, assessment, certification and registration of non-craft operatives within the quarrying sector and is covered under the provisions of Schedule 1 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Quarry) Regulations 2008.

Each programme is based on an ethos of first-class customer service, which ensures that employees, potential employees and employers are given primary consideration in the delivery of all aspects of the CSCS/QSCS schemes. Upon successful completion of CSCS/QSCS assessment, a QQI certificate and a SOLAS registration card is issued.

During 2017, the Construction Services Unit maintained its primary goal of incorporating an ethos of continuous improvement in its operations and achieved the following outcomes:

1. The CSCS/QSCS card renewal process to provide equity of treatment for all card holders was revised.
2. SOLAS introduced a range of new provisions to augment the appeal process for CSCS/QSCS and Safe Pass Approved Training Organisations, Trainers and Tutors.
3. SOLAS amended the monitoring determination criteria in order to provide a more focused monitoring system for CSCS/QSCS Approved Training Organisations, Trainers and Tutors.
4. A total of 91,511 Safe Pass cards were processed and distributed.
5. A total of 17,806 CSCS/QSCS cards were processed and distributed.
6. The dissemination of programme cards process has been reduced from 10 days to five days.
7. To enhance transparency, traceability, due process and efficiency, SOLAS introduced a revised recognition of qualification process, in accordance with the requirements of the European Union (Recognition of Professional Qualification) Regulations 2017.
8. SOLAS agreed a Mutual Recognition Agreement with the Construction Skills Register Northern Ireland for holders of Safe Pass and Construction Skills Register (CSR) cards.
9. The recognition of CSCS cards in the UK was maintained through the operation of a harmonisation programme with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) UK.
10. SOLAS maintained a card validation process for the construction industry to ensure compliance with legislative requirements.

External review

The CSCS, the QSCS and the Safe Pass schemes were put in place from 2000 onwards, first on an administrative basis and subsequently on a statutory basis, as a contribution to improving health and safety practices in the broad construction sector.

In recognition of the current challenges presented by these schemes, and at the request of SOLAS, a group comprising representatives of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Education and Skills, the Health and Safety Authority, QQI and SOLAS was established to consider the current and future arrangements for these schemes. This group will consider the policy, principles, design and content of these schemes into the future.

To contribute to the work of this group, and in recognition of the current challenges, SOLAS undertook a formal review of its processes to confirm that they are fit for purpose. In order to ensure objectivity and transparency, an independently chaired working group was also established to provide oversight and guidance for this review.

SOLAS procured the services of process design experts to consider all aspects of the current operation and processes of the schemes and prepare their findings and recommendations. This work was completed at the end of 2017 and SOLAS is in the process of reviewing the report and its recommendations prior to beginning the next phase of the process.

Resources Division

The SOLAS Resources Division is a key component of the organisation, which enables it to deliver on its corporate plan and commitments under the FET Strategy, while also supporting ETBs and the wider FET sector.

SOLAS continued to support transitional arrangements to the former FÁS Training Centres (now ETB Training Centres) in relation to SAP, traineeship and apprenticeship payroll, network and SOLAS continued to support the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in relation to legacy systems.

In the education and skills sector, the implementation of the Department of Education and Skills Shared Services Plan 2014–2016 continued, with SOLAS supporting the drive for shared services projects in ETB areas of payroll and finance. SOLAS also developed real-time data sharing arrangements with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and QQI to support jobseeker activation and training programmes.

The SOLAS Resources Division operates across three departments:

- **Finance**, including FET funding, staff payments, management accounting/accounts department, treasury, EU finance, general Ledger/statutory accounts, procurement, inventory and SAP support.
- **ICT** manages all internal ICT functions, including the development of systems providing the data infrastructure required to support the FET sector, as well as providing ongoing supports to ETBs and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.
- **Organisational development and support** incorporates Human Resources and Staff Relations, Legal and Audit Services, Risk and Record Management, Facilities Services, and the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS).

ICT

The ICT Unit is not only responsible for the development and operation of the PLSS but also provides support both internally and externally to other stakeholders. These include the Department of Education & Skills, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Education and Training Boards.

Organisational development and support

In 2017, the Organisational Development and Support Unit continued to support management and staff in improving SOLAS' capability, strengthening its corporate governance framework and mechanisms, and providing facilities services.

Human Resources and Staff Relations Unit

The Human Resources and Staff Relations Unit manages human resources and pension administration, as well as the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS). The unit continued with its development and management of staff policies and procedures and staff relations matters, and it also assisted SOLAS in achieving its corporate objectives through workforce planning. The agreed workforce plan, established in 2016 was underway in 2017 and is on target for completion in 2018.

Facilities Services Unit

Throughout 2017, the Facilities Services Unit provided business support services across the organisation. These included in-house printing and managed print; postal, telephone, security, catering and cleaning services; reception, meeting room and audiovisual services. The unit ensures that the premises, including mechanical and electrical services, are maintained and fully functional. It is also responsible for ensuring that SOLAS meets or exceeds its statutory responsibilities under environmental and health and safety legislation.

Legal and Audit Services Unit

In 2017, the Legal and Audit Services Unit provided a range of legal services. These included the management of legal actions; the provision of legal advice; compliance with data protection legislation; management of insurances and complaints; and processing certificates of experience. It also provided a range of audit and governance-related support services, including the management and execution of the annual risk-based audit plan and the management of key corporate governance requirements in relation to the SOLAS annual accounts and liaison with the SOLAS Audit and Risk Management Review Committee (ARMRC).

Programme and Learner Support System

The Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) is a joint initiative between SOLAS and the ETBs. It is a software system which provides a set of tools for FET providers to manage programmes and also to manage the scheduling and advertising of courses and the applicant and learner lifecycle.

The PLSS also provides interfacing facilities for interoperability with third-party systems. It enables the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to refer clients directly into the application process of FET courses. It also integrates with the funding allocations requests and reporting (FARR) planning process.

Within the PLSS there are three major components:

- The National Programme Database (NPD)
- The National Course Calendar (NCC)
- The Learner Database

At the end of 2017, all of these components were in use throughout the ETB sector.

There were 701 national programmes (comprising 3,987 modules) published on the National Programme Database. These covered a diverse range of awards available through FET provision, including awards by QQI, ACCA, Accounting Technicians of Ireland, CITAC, City and Guilds, CompTIA, Irish Computer Society (ICS), ITEC, Microsoft, Oracle, and Pearson. In 2017, there were circa. 27,500 courses scheduled on the National Course Calendar and 227,551 learners with activity in 2017 were recorded on the learner database.

During the year, there were over 500,000 visits to fetchcourses.ie, the course search website, of which circa. 231,000 were unique users. FET providers now have the option to accept online applications via fetchcourses.ie. Learners can apply for courses run by different providers on a single website and can manage their application process online.

Communications and Secretariat

SOLAS has a statutory obligation under Section 7 (1) (b) of the Further Education and Training Act 2013 to promote an appreciation of the value of further education and training. It also has responsibilities under Goal 5 of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019 to promote the standing of FET.

Working in partnership, SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority are leading a promotional campaign for apprenticeship in collaboration with apprenticeship partners such as the ETBs, IOTs, consortia, the Department of Education and Skills and others. This campaign is an element of *The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016–2020*.

The campaign features strong visuals and messaging and has resulted in attracting more visitors to the website, as well as communicating key messages to target audiences. The apprenticeship website www.apprenticeship.ie had 287,000 visitors, with 166,000 unique users in 2017. Facebook and Twitter accounts were activated in May 2017 and, for the period to end December 2017, the Facebook page had 10,000 followers and 3.8 million impressions. The Twitter account had 1,400 followers at end December 2017.

In addition to [apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie), the communications team manages the SOLAS website and social media accounts, including Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube, as well as promoting fetchcourses.ie. Analytics show that the SOLAS website had 311,000 visits in 2017 and 209,000 unique users, with fetchcourses.ie achieving 500,000 visits and 231,000 unique users. The number of followers on the SOLAS Twitter account grew steadily throughout the year and currently stands at over 3,000 followers.

In October 2017, a team of 14 young apprentices and trainees represented Ireland at the 44th WorldSkills Competition – the Skills Olympics – in Abu Dhabi. The WorldSkills Competition, the biggest vocational education and skills excellence event in the world and one that truly reflects global industry, takes place every two years. The competitors represent the best of their peers and are selected from skills competitions in WorldSkills member countries and regions. They demonstrate technical abilities, both individually and collectively, to execute specific tasks which they study and/or perform in their workplace. Traditionally, Irish teams have performed to exceptional standards and 2017 was no different, with Team Ireland securing seven Medallions of Excellence.

A communications campaign around Team Ireland was developed by the SOLAS communications team and this included events, digital, social media and press and radio interviews, all of which took place prior to, during, and following the competition.

In November, the WorldSkills team met with the Oireachtas Education Committee and with the Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Richard Bruton TD and Tánaiste Ms Frances Fitzgerald TD.

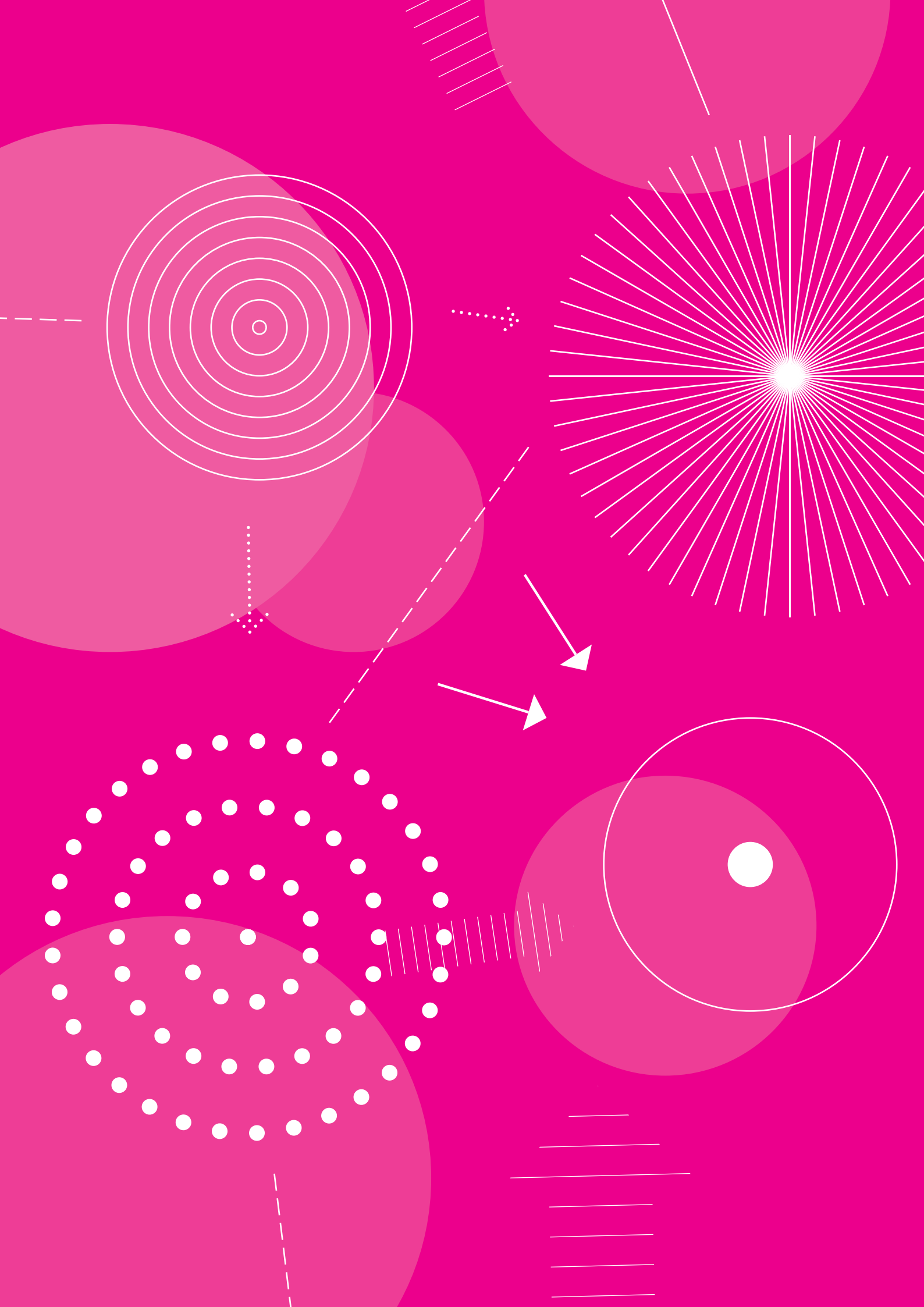
To celebrate International Women's Day 2017, SOLAS hosted an event to celebrate women in further education and training, with the message that education can empower women and help advance gender parity. SOLAS worked with the SAOL Project, which is a community project focused on improving the lives of women affected by addiction and poverty. The women shared their experiences of drug use and poverty, and how education helped them to build better lives for themselves and their families. The event, attended by over 100 guests, including policy-makers, was both inspiring and informative.

SOLAS supported both College Awareness Week and the Europe-wide Vocational Skills Week 2017 campaigns. The purpose of these campaigns was to showcase the diversity of FET to post-primary students. Dun Laoghaire Further Education Institute, hosted the launch of College Awareness Week, and a visit by the Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Richard Bruton TD and Irish VET Week Ambassador, Margaret Reilly, to Baldoyle Training Centre, Dublin, marked the start of Vocational Skills Week.

SOLAS' participation in the campaigns included hosting a TEDx Talk in Ballyfermot College of Further Education (BCFE). Students at the college were given an opportunity to put their learning into practice by working with the SOLAS communications team on many aspects of the event, including filming and sound production. Ten speakers took to the stage with their interpretation of the theme, 'Creativity' and helped ignite a conversation around this theme amid an audience of employers and education providers.

The Communications and Secretariat team continued to provide secretariat support to the SOLAS Board throughout 2017. In addition to this ongoing support, 2017 saw the induction of three new Board members, as well as the management of digitalisation of Board materials which was further implemented during the year.





CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Legislative mandate

SOLAS (An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna) – Further Education and Training Authority was established on 27 October 2013 under the Further Education and Training Act 2013.

Under the Further Education and Training Act 2013, the general functions of SOLAS are defined as:

- a. prepare and submit to the Minister for Education and Skills a strategy in respect of the provision of FET;
- b. promote an appreciation of the value of FET;
- c. consult with the Minister for Social Protection, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and employers from time to time for the purpose of determining which, or which classes of, FET programmes should be the subject of advances by An tSeirbhís;
- d. advance moneys to Education and Training Boards and other bodies engaged in the provision of FET programmes;
- e. provide or arrange for the provision of training and retraining for employment and to assist in and co-ordinate the provision of such training by persons other than An tSeirbhís;
- f. assess whether or not Education and Training Boards, and other bodies engaged in the provision of FET programmes, to whom moneys have been advanced, perform their functions in an economic, efficient and effective manner;
- g. promote, encourage and facilitate the placement of persons belonging to such class or classes of person as may be specified by the Minister for Social Protection, after consultation with the Minister for Education and Skills in FET programmes that are funded, in whole or in part, out of public moneys;
- h. promote co-operation between Education and Training Boards and other bodies involved in the provision of FET and programmes;
- i. promote equality of opportunity in relation to the provision of FET;
- j. develop and facilitate the development of new and existing FET programmes, including the establishment of systems designed to monitor the quality of the education and training concerned for the purpose of ensuring that those programmes serve their purpose;
- k. provide or assist in the provision of training to persons charged with the delivery of FET programmes in respect of which moneys have been advanced by An tSeirbhís under *section 21*;
- l. conduct, or arrange for the conduct of, research as respects any matters relating to the functions of An tSeirbhís; and
- m. advise the Minister in relation to any matter connected with the functions of An tSeirbhís.

Ongoing assistance is provided by SOLAS to the ETBs on a range of transition and other supports. SOLAS also continues to provide IT supports to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection arising from the transfer of former FÁS Employment Service Offices and related staff to that Department in 2012.

In addition to its core functions, as defined under the FET Act 2013, SOLAS also retains responsibility for apprenticeships and construction-related programmes, i.e. Safe Pass, CSCS and QSCS, as well as e-College and EGF Programmes.

Code of Practice for Governance of State Bodies

The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016, which superseded the 2009 code, came into effect in September 2016. It has been adopted by SOLAS and processes have been put in place to ensure that all aspects of SOLAS operations comply with the requirements of the Code.

Performance Delivery Agreement

A Performance Delivery Agreement between the Department of Education and Skills and SOLAS was agreed in July 2017.

Corporate health and safety

SOLAS complies with its statutory responsibilities under the Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and all regulations under this Act. SOLAS' objective is to provide a safe and healthy work environment for all staff and clients, and to meet its responsibilities to other persons, including members of the public who may be affected by its operations. SOLAS management co-ordinates and ensures compliance with its Safety Policy Statement through the implementation of the Safety Management System across the organisation.

Risk

SOLAS, through its Risk Management Policy, is committed to the implementation of a coherent, effective, and efficient framework for managing risk throughout the organisation. It also provides a proactive and structured approach to identifying, managing and reporting the risks faced by the organisation. The Board of SOLAS is ultimately responsible for risk management under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. The Board has delegated authority to the ARMRC with regard to the ongoing oversight and assurance of the Risk Management Framework and Process. Identified significant risks to the organisation are documented in the SOLAS Corporate Risk Register and, as part of the Risk Management Process, the Corporate Risk Register is reviewed by the ARMRC four times a year and presented to the Board for review twice a year.

Data Protection Acts, 1988 and 2003

The Data Protection Acts are designed to protect the privacy of individuals' personal data. The Acts provide individuals with the right to obtain a copy of all personal data relating to them that is held by the Data Controller. SOLAS is a designated Data Controller and complies fully with the legislation.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

The Act on GDPR comes into being on 25 May 2018. SOLAS is addressing the requirements of the legislation and in particular the data capture and exchange protocols.

Protected Disclosure Act 2014

In 2017, there were no new matters raised under the Protected Disclosures Act.

Energy efficiency and environmental policy statements

In June 2001, the Government issued a Memorandum requiring all State agencies to outline in their Annual Report measures being taken to reduce energy usage, where they have responsibility for new premises or major refurbishment of buildings and/or in buildings occupied by them. Under Statutory Instrument (SI) 542 European Communities (Energy End-Use Efficiency and Energy Services) Regulations 2009, the public sector has specific energy reporting obligations.

SOLAS is committed to contributing to the achievement of verifiable energy efficiency savings of 33 percent in the public sector by 2020, in line with the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009–2020. In partnership with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SOLAS actively reports and monitors its energy usage, and puts in place strategies and actions to achieve and exceed, where possible, targeted savings. In the Annual Report 2017 on Public Sector Energy Efficiency Performance, it was noted that SOLAS had achieved 28.5 percent energy savings since SEAI baseline and an overall status of more efficient than baseline and on track for the 2020 target.

SOLAS recognises its duty to ensure that its operations and activities have minimal impact on the local and wider environment. Through the waste management system, and in conjunction with the waste management contractor, SOLAS has implemented actions that ensure a high level of waste material recycling thus minimising waste sent to landfill. SOLAS is committed to good practice in terms of environmental awareness and green procurement practices, where possible.

The 2017 priorities will be carried into 2018 and will include the monitoring and control of energy costs, energy auditing, a focus on energy efficiencies and savings when procuring equipment, coupled with implementation of energy efficiency design for any relevant projects that may arise.

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014

SOLAS recognises how services will change with the emergence of positive duty, as set out in section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. SOLAS met with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) on a number of occasions in 2017 to ensure that it is managing its public duty obligations in the best way possible.

SOLAS is committed to a policy of equal opportunity and adopts a positive approach to equality in the organisation. SOLAS develops and implements appropriate policies and programmes that address the labour market needs of socially excluded people and incorporates a proactive equality perspective into all SOLAS supported services and programmes. All SOLAS services are open to men and women equally and to all citizens of the European Union and the European Economic Area.

SOLAS is an equal opportunities employer. To this end, SOLAS is committed to ensuring that no staff member, or applicant for employment to SOLAS, receives less favourable treatment than any other on grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, membership of the traveller community, or on any other grounds not relevant to good employment practice.

The organisation's continued focus is to develop and encourage an equality culture and attitude within SOLAS. The objective is to ensure that all staff are treated fairly and are provided with equal opportunities for development and career progression. This involves integrating equality into day-to-day performance management and staff development programmes, so that it becomes part of the culture of the organisation and a core management practice – encouraged by all managers and adopted by all staff throughout the organisation.

Ethics in Public Office Act, 1995 and Standards in Public Office Act, 2001

SOLAS became subject to the Ethics in Public Office Act, 1995 and the Standards in Public Office Act, 2001 with effect from 29 January 2015.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, 2014

The provisions of the Freedom of Information Act apply to SOLAS. The Act establishes three statutory rights:

- A legal right for each person to access information held by public bodies
- A legal right for each person to have official information relating to him/herself amended where it is incomplete, incorrect or misleading, and
- A legal right to obtain reasons for decisions affecting oneself.

In 2017, SOLAS received 13 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act.

Official Languages Act, 2003

SOLAS engaged with the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to develop an Official Languages Scheme in 2015 and is currently awaiting confirmation of the scheme. In the meantime, SOLAS' Annual Reports, Financial Statements and other relevant documents are published simultaneously in both official languages, in compliance with the general provisions of the Act. The SOLAS website will be accessible in both Irish and English.

Prompt Payment of Accounts Act, 1997

The Board of SOLAS has overall responsibility for the organisation's compliance with the Prompt Payment of Accounts Act, 1997. The European Communities (Late Payment in Commercial Transactions Regulations, 2012) introduced significant amendments to the Prompt Payment requirement as contained in the Act.

The Board has delegated this responsibility to SOLAS management. The system of internal financial control incorporates such controls and procedures as are considered necessary to ensure compliance with the Act. The organisation's internal control system includes accounting and computer controls designed to ensure the identification of invoices and contracts for payment within the prescribed payment dates. These controls are designed to provide reasonable, though not absolute, assurance against non-compliance with the Act. The Board is satisfied that in 2017, SOLAS complied with the provisions of the Act in all material respects. In total, €1,383.22 was paid in relation to late payment interest penalties.

Governance Statement and Board Members' Report

The Governance Statement and Board Members' report is presented in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 and guidelines issued in November 2017.

Governance

The Board of SOLAS was established under the Further Education and Training Act, 2013. The functions of SOLAS are set out in sections 7, 8 and 9 of this Act. The functions of the Board are set out in the Schedule of Matters reserved for the Board. The Board is accountable to the Minister for Education and Skills and is responsible for ensuring good governance and performs this task by setting strategic objectives and targets and taking strategic decisions on all key business issues. The regular day-to-day management, control and direction of SOLAS are the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the senior management team. The CEO and the senior management team follow the broad strategic direction set by the Board and ensure that all Board members have a clear understanding of the key activities and decisions related to the entity and of any significant risks likely to arise. The CEO acts as a direct liaison between the Board and management of SOLAS.

Board Responsibilities

The work and responsibilities of the Board are set out in the Schedule of Matters Reserved for the Board which contain the matters specifically reserved for Board decision. Standing items considered by the Board include:

- declaration of interests,
- reports from committees,
- financial reports/management accounts,
- performance reports and
- reserved matters.

Section 31(1) of the Further Education and Training Act, 2013 requires the Board of SOLAS to keep, in such form as may be approved by the Minister for Education and Skills with consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, all proper and usual accounts of money received and expended by it.

In preparing these financial statements, the Board of SOLAS is required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently,
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent,
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that it will continue in operation and
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements.

The Board is responsible for keeping adequate accounting records which disclose, with reasonable accuracy at any time, its financial position and enables it to ensure that the financial statements comply with section 31 (2) of the Further Education and Training Authority Act, 2013.

The Board is responsible for approving the annual FET Services Plan and budget. A review of the services plan and budget was carried out by the Board at its meeting on 5th September, 2017 (i.e., mid-year review of the FET Services Plan 2017 and Proposed Funding Amendments).

The Board is also responsible for safeguarding its assets and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Board considers that the financial statements of SOLAS give a true and fair view of the financial performance and the financial position of SOLAS at 31 December 2017.

Board Structure

The Board consists of a Chairperson and 11 ordinary members, all of whom are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. Additionally the SOLAS CEO is an *ex-officio* member of Board. Three new members of the Board were appointed for a period of five years in 2017. Four existing members of the Board were reappointed for a period of five years in 2017. The duration of each Board Member's tenure is determined by the Minister for Education and Skills on appointment. The Board met on eight occasions in 2017.

The table below details the appointment period for current members:

Board Member	Role	Date Appointed
Patrick Delaney	Chairperson	27.10.13
Bernadette Brady	Ordinary Member	27.10.13
Patricia Carey	Ordinary Member	27.10.17 (second term)
Cecilia Munro	Ordinary Member	27.10.17 (second term)
Cathriona Hallahan	Ordinary Member	27.10.13
Darragh J. Loftus	Ordinary Member	27.10.16 (second term)
Paul O'Sullivan	Ordinary Member	27.10.17 (second term)
William Egerton	Ordinary Member	27.10.13
Sinead McCluskey	Ordinary Member	27.10.17
Seán Burke	Ordinary Member	27.10.17 (second term)
PJ Dwyer	Ordinary Member	27.10.17
Catrina Sheridan	Ordinary Member	27.10.17
Paul O'Toole	Ex-officio Member	27.10.13

The Board conducts an annual self-evaluation and will commission an external Board Effectiveness and Evaluation Review in 2018.

The Board has established three committees, as follows:

- 1. Audit and Risk Management Review Committee:** comprises three Board members and one independent member. The role of the Audit and Risk Management Review Committee (ARMRC) is to support the Board in relation to its responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance and associated assurance. The ARMRC is independent from the financial management of the organisation. In particular the Committee ensures that the internal control systems, including audit activities, are monitored actively and independently. The ARMRC reports to the Board after each meeting and formally in writing annually.

The members of the Audit and Risk Management Review Committee are: Cathriona Hallahan, Chair; Seán Burke, Board member; Paul O'Sullivan, Board member and Robert Chestnutt, independent member. There were five meetings of the ARMRC held in 2017.

- 2. Strategic Planning Committee:** comprises five Board members.

The aim of the Strategic Planning Committee is to maintain a strategic focus on both the SOLAS Further Education and Training Strategy and the SOLAS Corporate Plan in the exercise of the organisation's functions and the conduct of its business. The Committee provides oversight on the implementation and evolution of the SOLAS Corporate Plan in the context of the FET Strategy and other SOLAS responsibilities.

The members of the Strategic Planning Committee are: Cecilia Munro (Chair from December, 2017), Bernadette Brady, Board member, Patrick J. Dwyer, Board member (from December, 2017), Darragh J. Loftus, Board member, Sinead McCluskey, Board member (from December, 2017). There was one meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee held in 2017.

- 3. Workforce and Organisational Development Committee:** comprises three Board members.

The purpose of the Committee is to provide advice and assurance to the Board on all matters relating to the workforce and organisational development including issues relating to:

- Human resources including remuneration, workforce monitoring and planning and development of staff;
- Organisational development;
- Equality and diversity including strategy, policy and monitoring within the organisation.

The members of the Workforce and Organisational Development Committee are: Patrick Delaney – Chair, Patricia Carey, Board member, Catrina Sheridan, Board member (from December, 2017). There was one Committee meeting held in 2017.

Schedule of Attendance, Fees and Expenses

A schedule of attendance at the Board and Committee meetings for 2017 is set out below including expenses received by each member:

In accordance with the requirements of Paragraph 1.4(iv) of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies – Business and Financial Reporting Requirements 2016, expenses paid to the Board in the year ended 31 December 2017 are disclosed hereunder. As SOLAS Board members do not receive any fees, the disclosure relates only to expenses paid in respect of attendance at Board meetings.

	Board	Audit & Risk Management Review Committee	Workforce and Organisational Development Committee	Strategic Planning Committee	Fees 2017 €	Expenses 2017 €
Number of meetings scheduled/Meetings Attended	8	5	1	1		
DELANEY, Patrick	8/8	-	1/1	1/1	0	0
BRADY, Bernadette	6/8	-	-	1/1	0	0
BURKE, Seán	8/8	5/5	-	-	0	0
CAREY, Patricia	6/8	-	1/1	-	0	1,135
CASSIDY, Elizabeth*	-	-	-	-	0	1,887
DWYER, Patrick J.	1/2	-	-	-	0	0
EGENTON, William	6/8	-	-	-	0	0
HALLAHAN, Cathriona	5/8	5/5	-	-	0	0
LOFTUS, Darragh J.	6/8	-	-	-	0	0
MCCLUSKEY, Sinead	2/2	-	-	-	0	0
MUNRO, Cecilia	8/8	-	-	1/1	0	0
O'SULLIVAN, Paul	5/8	2/5	-	-	0	0
O'TOOLE, Paul	8/8	-	-	1/1	0	0
SHERIDAN, Catrina	2/2	-	1/1	-	0	0
BARRETT, David**	2/4	-	-	-	0	0
Total					0	3,022

*Retired from Board – October 2016.

** Resigned from Board – June 2017

Key Personnel Changes

The terms of four members of the Board expired during the year. In accordance with the Further Education and Training Act, 2013 the Minister elected to re-appoint four members: Mr. Seán Burke, Ms. Patricia Carey, Ms. Cecilia Munro and Mr. Paul O'Sullivan. In addition, the Minister appointed three new members, Mr. PJ Dwyer, Ms. Sinead McCluskey and Ms. Catrina Sheridan on the 27th October 2017 to bring the Board complement up to 13 members.

One member, Mr. David Barrett, resigned from his position with effect from June, 2017.

Disclosures Required by Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016)

The Board is responsible for ensuring that SOLAS – Further Education and Training Authority has complied with the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies ("the Code"), as published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in August 2016. The following disclosures are required by the Code:

Employee Short-Term Benefits Breakdown

Employees' short-term benefits are categorised into the following bands:

Benefit Band €	Number of Employees in 2017	Number of Employees in 2016
20,001 - 60,000	143	156
60,001 - 70,000	24	20
70,001 - 80,000	20	22
80,001 - 90,000	5	6
90,001 - 100,000	3	7
100,001 - 110,000	5	0
110,001 - 120,000	0	0
120,001 - 130,000	0	1
130,001 - 140,000	1	1
140,001 - 150,000	1	1
150,001 - 160,000	0	0
160,001 - 170,000	0	0
170,001 - 180,000	0	0
180,001 - 190,000	0	1
190,001 - 200,000	1	0
Total	203	215

The above table reflects all employees employed in 2017 and 2016. Part time employees are counted as single employees not full time equivalents (FTE). Employees that retired within the year are also counted.

A total of 178 staff (full time equivalents) were being paid by SOLAS at 31 December 2017 (2016: 189).

Note: For the purposes of this disclosure, short-term employee benefits in relation to services rendered during the reporting period include salary, overtime, allowances and other payments made on behalf of the employee, but exclude employer's PRSI.

Consultancy Costs

Consultancy costs include the cost of external advice to management and exclude outsourced 'business-as-usual' functions. The following consultancy costs were charged to overheads.

	2017 €	2016 €
Legal (general legal advice)	344,680	26,738
Financial/actuarial advice	3,998	9,532
Human Resources	68,277	10,200
Business improvement	140,944	0
Other	11,611	13,753
Total Consultancy Costs	569,510	60,223
Consultancy costs capitalised	0	0
Consultancy costs charged to the Income and Expenditure and Retained Revenue Reserves	569,510	60,223
Total	569,510	60,223

The following consultancy costs were charged to direct programme costs in 2017 (Note 6 of the financial statements).

	2017 €	2016 €
Legal advice (general legal advice)	0	205,353
Financial/actuarial advice	0	0
Human Resources	0	0
Business improvement	0	0
Other	35,711	93,542
Total Consultancy Costs	35,711	298,895
Consultancy costs capitalised	0	0
Consultancy costs charged to the Income and Expenditure and Retained Revenue Reserves	35,711	298,895
Total	35,711	298,895

Legal Costs and Settlements

The table below provides a breakdown of amounts recognised as expenditure in the reporting period in relation to legal costs, settlements and conciliation and arbitration proceedings relating to contracts with third parties. This does not include expenditure incurred in relation to general legal advice received by SOLAS which is disclosed in Consultancy costs above.

	2017 €	2016 €
Legal fees of SOLAS – legal proceedings *	600,310	364,543
Counterparty legal fees – legal proceedings	156,000	0
Conciliation and arbitration payments	0	0
Settlements	285,000	0
Total	1,041,310	364,543

* The 2017 figure includes €260,022 in Construction Programme Costs (Note 6 of the financial statements).

Travel and Subsistence Expenditure

Travel and subsistence expenditure is categorised as follows:

	2017 €	2016 €
Domestic		
— Board*	3,022	10,113
— Employees †	320,760	366,184
International		
— Board	0	0
— Employees ‡	19,077	22,851
Total	342,859	399,148

* all domestic travel and subsistence paid directly to Board members in 2017 and 2016.

† all domestic travel and subsistence paid directly to staff members in 2017 and 2016.

‡ includes travel and subsistence of €8,722 paid directly to staff in 2017 (2016: €10,268). The balance of €10,355 (2016: €12,583) relates to expenditure paid by SOLAS on behalf of the staff.

Travel & Subsistence above includes €48k for European Globalisation Fund (EGF) and is included in EGF Programme Costs (Note 6 of the financial statements).

Travel & Subsistence expenses of €5,110 were reclaimed from the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) and the European Union.

Hospitality Expenditure

The Income and Expenditure Account includes the following hospitality expenditure:

	2017 €	2016 €
Staff Hospitality	3,338	1,488
Client Hospitality	740	453
Total	4,078	1,941

Statement of Compliance

SOLAS has complied with the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, as published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in August 2016, with the following exception:

Non-Compliant Procurement

During 2017 a contract extension with a value of €267,828 was awarded to an existing tied supplier and was not re-tendered in time due to a resources issue in the Skills Development Division. This supplier had won a previous tender for this service in 2012. The extension was sought by the Business Unit and approved by the CEO in line with SOLAS internal procedures. This contract will be re-tendered in 2018.

We have also identified five supply contracts totalling €395,455 that were rolled over pending finalisation of national tendering processes which were primarily outside the control of SOLAS. New procurement processes have been undertaken for these contracts, three were completed in 2017 and two will be completed in 2018.



FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Statement of Responsibilities of SOLAS

Under the Further Education and Training Act 2013, An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS) was established with effect from 27 October, 2013.

Under the Further Education and Training Act 2013, the general functions of SOLAS are defined as:

- (a) prepare and submit to the Minister a strategy in respect of the provision of further education and training;
- (b) promote an appreciation of the value of further education and training;
- (c) consult with the Minister for Social Protection, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and employers from time to time for the purpose of determining which, or which classes of, further education and training programmes should be the subject of advances by An tSeirbhís;
- (d) advance moneys to Education and Training Boards and other bodies engaged in the provision of further education and training programmes;
- (e) provide, or arrange for the provision of, training and retraining for employment and to assist in and coordinate the provision of such training by persons other than An tSeirbhís;
- (f) assess whether or not Education and Training Boards and other bodies engaged in the provision of further education and training programmes, to whom moneys have been advanced, perform their functions in an economic, efficient and effective manner;
- (g) promote, encourage and facilitate the placement of persons belonging to such class or classes of person as may be specified by the Minister for Social Protection after consultation with the Minister for Education & Skills in further education and training programmes that are funded, in whole or in part, out of public moneys;
- (h) promote cooperation between Education and Training Boards and other bodies involved in the provision of further education and training programmes;
- (i) promote equality of opportunity in relation to the provision of further education and training;
- (j) develop and facilitate the development of, new and existing further education and training programmes including the establishment of systems designed to monitor the quality of the education and training concerned for the purpose of ensuring that those programmes serve their purpose;

- (k) provide, or assist in the provision of, training to persons charged with the delivery of further education and training programmes in respect of which moneys have been advanced by An tSeirbhís;
- (l) conduct, or arrange for the conduct of, research as respects any matters relating to the functions of An tSeirbhís; and
- (m) advise the Minister in relation to any matter connected with the functions of An tSeirbhís.

SOLAS is required under section 31(1) of the Further Education and Training Act 2013, to prepare annual accounts, as may be approved by the Minister for Education and Skills with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

In preparing those financial statements, SOLAS is required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently;
- make judgements and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that SOLAS will continue in operation; and
- disclose and explain any material departures from applicable accounting standards.

SOLAS is also responsible for keeping adequate accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time its financial position and which enable it to ensure that the financial statements comply with paragraph 31(1) of the Act. SOLAS is also responsible for safeguarding its assets and for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

SOLAS has complied with the above requirements in preparing the financial statements.

SOLAS approved the financial statements on 26 April, 2018.



Patrick Delaney
Chairman, SOLAS

Date: 23 May 2018



Paul O'Toole
Chief Executive Officer,
SOLAS

Date: 23 May 2018

COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL REPORT FOR PRESENTATION TO THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS



Ard Reachtaire Cuntas agus Ciste Comptroller and Auditor General

Report for presentation to the Houses of the Oireachtas

An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS)

Opinion on financial statements

I have audited the financial statements of SOLAS for the year ending 31 December 2017 as required under the provisions of section 31 of the Further Education and Training Act 2013. The financial statements comprise

- the statement of income and expenditure
- the statement of comprehensive income
- the statement of financial position
- the statement of cash flows and
- the related notes, including a summary of significant accounting policies.

In my opinion, the financial statements give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities and financial position of SOLAS at 31 December 2017 and of its income and expenditure for 2017 in accordance with Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 102 — *The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and the Republic of Ireland*.

Basis of opinion

I conducted my audit of the financial statements in accordance with the International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) as promulgated by the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI). My responsibilities under those standards are described in the appendix to this report. I am independent of SOLAS and have fulfilled my other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the standards.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Report on information other than the financial statements, and on other matters

SOLAS has presented certain other information together with the financial statements. This comprises the annual report, the governance statement and the statement on internal control. My responsibilities to report in relation to such information, and on certain other matters upon which I report by exception, are described in the appendix to this report.

Non compliance with procurement rules

I draw attention to the statement on internal control which discloses a number of instances of non compliance with public procurement guidelines. The statement also sets out the steps taken or planned by SOLAS to address the matter.

Seamus McCarthy
Comptroller and Auditor General

25 May 2018

Appendix to the report

Responsibilities of Board members

The governance statement and Board members' report sets out the Board members' responsibilities. The Board members are responsible for

- the preparation of financial statements in the form prescribed under section 31 of the Further Education and Training Act 2013
- ensuring that the financial statements give a true and fair view in accordance with FRS102
- ensuring the regularity of transactions
- assessing whether the use of the going concern basis of accounting is appropriate, and
- such internal control as they determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

Responsibilities of the Comptroller and Auditor General

I am required under section 31 of the Further Education and Training Act 2013 to audit the financial statements of the SOLAS and to report thereon to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

My objective in carrying out the audit is to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement due to fraud or error. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the ISAs will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with the ISAs, I exercise professional judgment and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. In doing so,

- I identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements whether due to fraud or error; design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks; and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- I obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the internal controls.
- I evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures.
- I conclude on the appropriateness of the use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, on whether a material uncertainty

exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the SOLAS's ability to continue as a going concern. If I conclude that a material uncertainty exists, I am required to draw attention in my report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify my opinion. My conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of my report. However, future events or conditions may cause the SOLAS to cease to continue as a going concern.

- I evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

I communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that I identify during my audit.

Information other than the financial statements

My opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information presented with those statements, and I do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with my audit of the financial statements, I am required under the ISAs to read the other information presented and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or with knowledge obtained during the audit, or if it otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If, based on the work I have performed, I conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, I am required to report that fact.

Reporting on other matters

My audit is conducted by reference to the special considerations which attach to State bodies in relation to their management and operation. I report if there are material matters relating to the manner in which public business has been conducted.

I seek to obtain evidence about the regularity of financial transactions in the course of audit. I report if there is any material instance where public money has not been applied for the purposes intended or where transactions did not conform to the authorities governing them.

I also report by exception if, in my opinion,

- I have not received all the information and explanations I required for my audit, or
- the accounting records were not sufficient to permit the financial statements to be readily and properly audited, or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records.

STATEMENT ON INTERNAL CONTROL

Scope of Responsibility

On behalf of the Board of An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS) I acknowledge our responsibility for good governance (in line with the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016) and for ensuring that an effective system of internal control is maintained and operated. In discharging its functions, the Board has delegated clearly defined authority levels to the SOLAS executive and staff while reserving certain matters for its own decision.

Purpose of the System of Internal Control

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to an acceptable level rather than to eliminate it and therefore can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance that assets are safeguarded, transactions are authorised and properly recorded and that material errors or irregularities are either prevented or would be detected in a timely period. The system requires that line management, the executive and the finance, procurement and HR functions exercise stringent control and report any significant control failures to the Board.

Capacity to Handle Risk

SOLAS has an Audit and Risk Management Review Committee (ARMRC) comprising of three Board Members and one external expert. The Chair of the ARMRC is a qualified accountant. The ARMRC met five times in 2017.

The internal audit function in SOLAS operates in accordance with the Internal Audit Principles set out in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016. The work of Internal Audit is informed by a risk analysis profile of expenditure and activity; strategic objectives; cyclical audit coverage; and the outcomes of previous audits. The focus of this work is generally on the areas of significant potential risk to the organisation. The 2017 Internal Audit Plan was approved by the ARMRC, on behalf of the Board. During 2017, five Internal Audit Reports were issued covering areas of payroll/pensions, governance compliance, data access infrastructure, internal financial controls and operations.

The ARMRC meets the Head of Internal Audit on a regular basis to review the work of Internal Audit, which includes a report of internal audit activity. The ARMRC reports to the Board on its work on a regular basis. Annually, the ARMRC provides the Board with a formal report on the internal audit activity for the year.

Agreement was reached during the year between the ARMRC and the Internal Audit Unit of the ETBs (IAU) on SOLAS' input to the Audit Plan of the IAU and on receiving audit reports from the IAU carried out on Further Education and Training expenditure.

Risk and Control Framework

SOLAS' Executive Risk Management Committee, whose membership includes all Executive Directors and which is chaired by the Chief Executive Officer, promotes, directs and monitors risk management processes within SOLAS. To assist this process, SOLAS has appointed a Director as Risk Co-ordinator. The Risk Co-ordinator is responsible for supporting the work of the Risk Management Committee and for compiling and preparing reports for the ARMRC. The Board and the Audit and Risk Management Review Committee (ARMRC) provide independent oversight and review of the effectiveness of SOLAS' risk management.

A formal process for the identification, evaluation, mitigation and management of business risks has been established and includes:

- the identification and nature of risks;
- the likelihood of occurrence;
- the financial or other implications;
- the mitigating controls and factors;
- the maintenance of a corporate risk register;
- plans to manage the identified risks;
- monitoring and reporting on the process;
- the review of risk on an ongoing basis by management and on a formal basis by the ARMRC at least twice a year;
- aligning key risks by business unit to the annual business plans.

Ongoing Monitoring and Review

The Board has taken steps to ensure an appropriate control environment is in place by:

- clearly defining and documenting management responsibilities and authority;
- ensuring clear lines of accountability for management;
- establishing formal procedures through various committee functions to monitor the activities and safeguard the assets of the organisation;
- establishing procedures for reporting significant control failures and ensuring appropriate corrective action is taken;
- developing a strong culture of accountability across all levels of the organisation;
- adopting and adhering to the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies;
- reviewing the effectiveness of the board,
- ensuring the control environment includes an active Audit & Risk Management Review Committee (ARMRC), an Internal Audit function, the Chief Executive Officer's monthly report to the Board and the presentation to the Board of activity and financial results, current month and year to-date, on a monthly basis.

The system of internal control is based on a framework of regular management information, policies and procedures including segregation of duties and a system of delegation and accountability. In particular it includes:

- the identification of key risks and implementation of related controls and ongoing monitoring of the operation where any identified deficiencies are reported to SOLAS' Executive Risk Management Committee and the ARMRC;
- a comprehensive budgeting system with an annual budget, which is reviewed and agreed by the Board. This incorporates a detailed business planning process;
- setting targets to measure financial and other performance;
- reviews by the Board of monthly and annual Financial Reports which indicate activity and financial performance against budgets;
- established procurement procedures under which goods and services are procured in accordance with EU and national procurement requirements;

- that each foreign travel request is subject to approval by the Chief Executive Officer, or in his case by the Chairman.
- procedures for the control of capital investment that are in accordance with Guidelines for the Appraisal and Management of Capital Expenditure Proposals, issued by the Department of Finance in February 2005;
- Terms and Conditions of funding in place for each Education and Training Board, a parameters document that outlines the business planning process including objectives for each year, a comprehensive business service plan that is reviewed twice a year.

Procurement

We confirm that we have procedures in place to ensure compliance with current procurement rules and guidelines as set out by the Office of Government Procurement. One matter regarding controls over procurement is highlighted under internal control issues below. Another matter is noted affecting five supply contracts in 2017 which was primarily outside the control of SOLAS.

Review of Effectiveness

The Board's monitoring and review of the effectiveness of the System of Internal Control is informed by the work of:

- the Executive Directors/Managers within SOLAS, who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the financial control framework;
- the Head of Internal Audit;
- the ARMRC, which oversees the work of Internal Audit and reviews the Statement on the System of Internal Controls; and
- the comments made by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General in his management letter or other reports.
- A review of the effectiveness of control was undertaken as "The Internal Control Framework" by the Board on 26th April 2018. This review focused on Internal Audit findings, the Corporate Governance Register and disposals of fixed assets.

Internal Control Issues

No material breaches in internal control, material losses or frauds were identified during the course of the year. However, one weakness was identified in relation to a procurement issue in the Skills Development Division as detailed below.

Non-Compliant Procurement

During 2017 a contract extension with a value of €267,828 was awarded to an existing tied supplier and was not re-tendered in time due to a resources issue in the Skills Development Division. This supplier had won a previous tender for this service in 2012. The extension was sought by the Business Unit and approved by the CEO in line with SOLAS internal procedures. This contract will be re-tendered in 2018.

We have also identified five supply contracts totalling €395,455 that were rolled over pending finalisation of national tendering processes which were primarily outside the control of SOLAS. New procurement processes have been undertaken for these contracts, three were completed in 2017 and two will be completed in 2018.



Patrick Delaney
Chairman, SOLAS

Date: 23 May 2018

SOLAS

Statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2017

	Note	2017	2016
		€'000	€'000
Income	2	603,131	605,341
Expenditure			
Payroll Costs	5	11,397	11,734
Overheads	5	7,304	6,874
Solas Operational Costs		18,701	18,608
Retirement Benefit Costs	5	15,210	19,200
Programme Costs	6	7,936	11,978
Grants to Education and Training Boards	7(a)	548,613	538,232
Grants to VSCCS*	7(b)	725	726
Grants to Organisations in the FET sector	7(c)	7,006	7,147
Total Grants		556,344	546,105
Total Expenditure		598,191	595,891
Surplus for the Year		4,940	9,450

Notes 1 to 19 form an integral part of these Financial Statements.

* Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools

Signed:



Patrick Delaney
Chairman, SOLAS

Date: 23 May 2018



Paul O'Toole
Chief Executive Officer, SOLAS

Date: 23 May 2018

SOLAS

Statement of Comprehensive Income for the year ended 31 December 2017

	Note	2017	2016
		€'000	€'000
Surplus for the Year		4,940	9,450
Actuarial Gain/(Loss) on Retirement Benefit Assets/ (Liabilities)	13(i) (e)	7,340	(75,817)
Adjustment to Deferred Retirement Benefit Funding		(7,340)	75,817
Total Recognised Surplus for the Year		4,940	9,450

Notes 1 to 19 form an integral part of these Financial Statements.

Signed:



Patrick Delaney
Chairman, SOLAS

Date: 23 May 2018



Paul O'Toole
Chief Executive Officer, SOLAS

Date: 23 May 2018

SOLAS

Statement of Financial Position as at 31 December 2017

	Note	2017		2016	
		As at 31 December 2017		As at 31 December 2016	
		€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000
Non Current Assets					
Property, Plant & Equipment	8		739		1,005
Current Assets					
Inventory	9	7		9	
Receivables	10	770		1,233	
Cash and Cash Equivalents		5,810		10,058	
		6,587		11,300	
Amounts falling due within one year					
Payables	11	(1,431)		(1,660)	
Net Current Assets			5,156		9,640
Total Assets Less Current Liabilities before Retirement Benefit Obligations			5,895		10,645
SOLAS Retirement Benefit Liabilities	13	(734,480)		(758,630)	
Deferred Retirement Benefit Funding	13	734,480	0	758,630	0
Total Assets			5,895		10,645
Capital and Reserves					
Capital Reserve		739		1,005	
Capital Account		194	933	168	1,173
Revenue Reserve			4,962		9,472
			5,895		10,645

Notes 1 to 19 form an integral part of these Financial Statements.

Signed:



Patrick Delaney
Chairman, SOLAS

Date: 23 May 2018



Paul O'Toole
Chief Executive Officer, SOLAS

Date: 23 May 2018

SOLAS

Statement of Cash Flows for the year ended 31 December 2017

	Note	2017	2016
		€'000	€'000
Cash flow from Operating Activities			
Surplus for the Year		4,940	9,450
Interest Paid/(Received)		19	(1)
Refund to the Department of Education & Skills		(9,450)	(1,420)
Adjustment for non-cash items			
(Increase)/Decrease in Inventory	9	2	2
(Increase)/Decrease in Receivables	10	463	(393)
Increase/(Decrease) in Payables	11	(229)	(2,148)
Net Cash Inflow/(Outflow) from Operating Activities		(4,255)	5,490
Cash flow from Investing Activities			
Proceeds from Sale of Fixed Assets		0	20
Payments to Acquire Fixed Assets	8	(89)	(586)
Capital Grants Received	3	3,000	3,000
Capital Grants to ETBs	7(a)	(2,885)	(2,477)
Cash flow from Financing Activities			
Interest (Paid)/Received		(19)	1
Increase/(Decrease) in Cash and Cash Equivalents in the Year		(4,248)	5,448
Cash and Cash Equivalents at the beginning of the Year			
		10,058	4,610
Cash and Cash Equivalents at the end of the Year			
		5,810	10,058

The Surplus is stated after taking account of Depreciation and Amortisation of Capital Grant.

Notes 1 to 19 form an integral part of these Financial Statements.

SOLAS

Statement of Changes in Reserves and Capital Account for the year ended 31 December 2017

	Note	Revenue Reserves	Capital Account	Capital Reserves	Total
		€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000
Balance as at 31 December 2015		1,422	231	754	2,407
Surplus for the Year		9,450	0	0	9,450
Refund to the Department of Education and Skills		(1,400)	(20)	0	(1,420)
Sale of Asset		0	20	0	20
Capital Grants Received	3	0	3,000	0	3,000
Capital Grants to ETBs	7(a)	0	(2,477)	0	(2,477)
Payments to Acquire Fixed Assets	8	0	(586)	586	0
Amortisation of Capital Grant - Depreciation	2 & 8	0	0	(335)	(335)
Retirement Benefits					
Actuarial Gain/(Loss) on Retirement Benefit Assets/(Liabilities)	13(i) (e)	(75,817)	0	0	(75,817)
Adjustment to Deferred Exchequer Retirement Benefit Funding		75,817	0	0	75,817
Balance as at 31 December 2016		9,472	168	1,005	10,645
Surplus for the Year		4,940	0	0	4,940
Refund to the Department of Education and Skills		(9,450)	0	0	(9,450)
Capital Grants Received	3	0	3,000	0	3,000
Capital Grants to ETBs	7(a)	0	(2,885)	0	(2,885)
Payments to Acquire Fixed Assets	8	0	(89)	89	0
Amortisation of Capital Grant - Depreciation	2 & 8	0	0	(355)	(355)
Retirement Benefits					
Actuarial Gain/(Loss) on Retirement Benefit Assets/(Liabilities)	13(i) (e)	7,340	0	0	7,340
Adjustment to Deferred Exchequer Retirement Benefit Funding		(7,340)	0	0	(7,340)
Balance as at 31 December 2017		4,962	194	739	5,895

Notes 1 to 19 form an integral part of these Financial Statements.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

1 Accounting Policies

The basis of accounting and significant accounting policies adopted by SOLAS are as follows:

Establishment of SOLAS

SOLAS was established on 27 October 2013 in accordance with the Further Education and Training Act 2013.

These financial statements set out the results of SOLAS for the year ending 31 December 2017 with comparatives for the period from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016.

The functions of SOLAS are set out in sections 7 to 9 of the Further Education and Training Act 2013.

Significant Accounting Policies

The following accounting policies have been applied consistently in dealing with items which are considered material in relation to the financial statements of SOLAS.

Basis of Preparation

The financial statements have been prepared under the modified historical cost convention and with Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 102 in a form approved by the Minister for Education and Skills with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform under the Further Education and Training Act 2013.

The financial statements have been prepared using the accruals method of accounting except as stated below and in accordance with accounting practice generally accepted in Ireland. Accounting standards generally accepted in Ireland in preparing the financial statements giving a true and fair view are those published by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland and issued by the Financial Reporting Council.

In accordance with DPER Circular 21/2015 relating to FRS 102, these financial statements comprise the Statement of Income and Expenditure, Statement of Comprehensive Income, Statement of Financial Position, Statement of Cash Flows and Statement of Changes in Reserves and Capital Account. In addition notes 1 to 19 form an integral part of the financial statements.

Property, Plant & Equipment

Capitalisation

Property, Plant and Equipment are stated at historic cost or revalued amounts less accumulated depreciation and provisions for impairment.

The cost of an asset is made up of the purchase price of the asset plus any costs directly attributable to bringing the asset into working condition for its intended use.

Fixtures and fittings below the capitalisation threshold are charged to the Statement of Income and Expenditure in the year of purchase. The capitalisation threshold amount is €1,000 inclusive of VAT. All computer equipment is capitalised regardless of value.

Depreciation

Depreciation is calculated to write off the original cost of the asset or the revalued amount less the estimated residual value on a straight-line basis over its estimated useful economic life as follows:

- Land - Nil
- Leasehold Improvements (over the term of the lease)
- Equipment and Furniture – 5 years (20%)
- Computers and other computer equipment – 3 or 5 years (33 1/3% or 20%)

No provision for depreciation is made in respect of freehold land. Depreciation on capital assets is matched by a transfer from the Capital Reserve.

The carrying value of tangible fixed assets is reviewed for impairment if events or changes in circumstances indicate that the carrying amount value may not be recoverable.

Capital Reserve

The capital reserve represents the net amount expended on tangible assets, funded by Exchequer Grants. These grants are amortised to revenue over the expected life of the assets in line with the depreciation, tangible asset impairments and tangible asset write-offs.

Inventory

Inventory is stated at cost less appropriate write-downs for diminution in value. Cost comprises invoice price of the goods.

Cash

Cash, for the purpose of the cash flow statements, comprises cash in hand and deposits repayable on demand.

Provision

A provision is recognised in the Statement of Financial Position when SOLAS has a present legal or constructive obligation and it is probable that an outflow of economic benefits would be required to settle the obligation.

Revenue

State Funding

Current and capital grants are accounted for on a cash received basis. Capital grants which are included in capital reserves are recognised in the income statement over the expected life of the assets in line with the depreciation, tangible asset impairments and tangible asset write-offs.

Surpluses that have arisen in previous years are carried forward to the current year with the agreement of the Department of Education and Skills and refunded or part-refunded to the Department in the current year when requested.

Other Income

In general, other income is accounted for on a cash received basis except where invoices are issued. In this case, income is accounted for as invoiced.

Foreign Currency and Functional Currency

Items included in the financial statements are presented in "Euro", the currency of the primary economic environment in which SOLAS operates (the "functional currency").

Transactions denominated in foreign currency during the period have been translated at the rate of exchange ruling at the date of the transaction. Assets and liabilities denominated in foreign currencies are translated into Euro at the rates of exchange ruling at the Statement of Financial Position date. The resulting profits or losses are dealt with in the Statement of Income and Expenditure.

Grants

Current and capital grants paid to Education and Training Boards, Voluntary, Community and Secondary Schools, various other agencies and bodies, for the purposes of Further Education and Training are accounted for on a cash basis. This is consistent with the manner in which State funding is accounted for by SOLAS.

Capital Grants to Education and Training Boards

Capital Grants disbursed to Education and Training Boards are accounted for in the Statement of Income and Expenditure. Income is released from the Capital Account to finance such grants.

Bad Debts

Debtors are disclosed at original invoice amount less an allowance for potentially uncollectible debts. Provision is made where there is objective evidence that SOLAS will not be in a position to collect the associated debts. Bad debts are written off to the Statement of Income and Expenditure on identification.

Leasing

Rentals in respect of operating leases are charged to the Statement of Income and Expenditure on a straight-line basis over the lease term. There are no financial leases in place. Operating leases relate to buildings occupied by SOLAS.

Legal Cases

Legal costs including those in relation to legacy cases involving FÁS are recognised in the financial statements as they are incurred. Provision is made for the Board's best estimate of the cost of any settlement when judged probable that a settlement will occur in the case and the cost of settlement can be measured reliably.

Retirement Benefits

There are two retirement benefit schemes as follows:

- A defined benefit scheme which provides retirement benefits to former AnCO staff. This scheme was closed to new members on 1 January 1988. On 31 December 2009 the assets of the scheme were transferred to the National Pension Reserve Fund in accordance with the Financial Measures (Miscellaneous Provision) Act 2009. Contributions from SOLAS and staff in this scheme are paid over to the Department of Education and Skills each year.
- An unfunded defined benefit scheme whose benefits are paid out of the funding provided annually by the Department of Education and Skills. Contributions from staff in this scheme are paid over to the Department of Education and Skills each year.

Retirement benefit costs reflect retirement benefits earned by employees in the period.

Actuarial gains or losses arising on scheme liabilities are reflected in the Statement of Comprehensive Income and a corresponding adjustment is recognised in the amount recoverable from the Department of Education and Skills.

Retirement benefit liabilities represent the present value of future retirement benefit payments earned by staff to date. Deferred retirement benefit funding represents the corresponding asset to be recovered in future periods from the Department of Education and Skills.

Critical Accounting Estimates and Judgements

The preparation of financial statements requires management to make judgements, estimates and assumptions that affect the application of policies and reported amounts of assets, liabilities, income and expenses. The estimates and associated assumptions are based on historical experience and various other factors that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances, the results of which form the basis of making judgements about carrying values of assets and liabilities that are not readily apparent from other sources. Actual results may differ from these estimates.

The estimates and underlying assumptions are reviewed on an on-going basis. Revisions to accounting estimates are recognised in the period in which the estimate is revised if the revision only affects that period or in the period of the revision and future periods if the revision affects both current and future periods. The areas involving a high degree of judgement or complexity or areas where assumptions or estimates are significant to the financial statements include:

Impairment of Property, Plant and Equipment

The carrying values of items of land and buildings, equipment and furniture are reviewed for indicators of impairment at each reporting date and are subject to impairment testing when events or changes in circumstances indicate that the carrying value may not be recoverable.

When the carrying value exceeds the estimated recoverable amount (being the greater of fair value less costs of disposal and value-in-use), an impairment loss is recognised by writing down the assets to their recoverable amount. In assessing value-in-use, the estimated future cash flows are discounted to their present value using a pre-tax discount that reflects current market assessments of the time value of money and the risks specific to the asset for which the future cash flow estimates have not been adjusted.

The impairment testing process requires management to make significant judgements and estimates regarding the future cash flows expected to be generated by the use of and, if applicable, eventual disposal of, long-lived assets as well as other factors to determine the fair value of the assets.

Retirement Benefits

The liabilities and costs associated with the defined benefit retirement benefit schemes (both funded and unfunded) are assessed on the basis of the projected unit method by professionally qualified actuaries and are arrived at using actuarial assumptions based on market expectations at the financial reporting date. The discount rates employed in determining the present values of the schemes' liabilities are determined by reference to market yields at the financial reporting date on high-quality corporate bonds of a currency and term consistent with the currency and term of the associated post-employment benefit obligations.

The net surplus or deficit arising on the defined benefit retirement benefit schemes, together with the liabilities associated with the unfunded schemes, are shown either within non-current assets or non-current liabilities in the Statement of Financial Position.

Assumptions

The assumptions underlying the actuarial valuations from which the amounts recognised in the financial statements are determined (including discount rates, rates of increase in future compensation levels, mortality rates and healthcare cost trend rates) are updated annually based on current economic conditions and for any relevant changes to the terms and conditions of the retirement benefit and post-retirement plans.

These assumptions can be affected by:

- (i) For the discount rate, changes in the rate of return on high-quality corporate bonds.
- (ii) For future compensation levels, future labour market conditions.
- (iii) For healthcare cost trend rates, the rate of medical cost inflation in the relevant regions.

The weighted average actuarial assumptions applied in the determination of retirement benefit and other post-retirement liabilities are contained in Note 13. While management believes that the assumptions used are appropriate, differences in actual experience or changes in assumptions may affect the obligations and expenses recognised in future accounting periods. The assets and liabilities of defined benefit retirement benefit schemes may exhibit significant period-on-period volatility attributable primarily to changes in bond yields and longevity. In addition to future service contributions, significant cash contributions may be required by the Department of Education and Skills to remediate past service deficits.

2 Income

	Note	2017	2016
		€'000	€'000
State Funding - Non Capital	3	612,991	610,943
ETB Capital Grants		2,885	2,477
Net Deferred Retirement Benefit Funding	13(i)(c)	(16,810)	(11,689)
Other Income	4	3,710	3,275
Amortisation of Capital Grant - Depreciation	5 & 8	355	335
Total Income		603,131	605,341

3 State Funding

	2017	2016
	€'000	€'000
State funding was received under the following headings:		
Non Capital		
Vote 26 (Subheads B3, B5 & B7) - Department of Education and Skills		
Administration and General Expenses		
Staff Costs and Overheads (B3)	17,505	17,530
Less: Employee Retirement Benefit Contributions paid to the Department	(650)	(675)
Less: Employer Retirement Benefit Contributions paid to the Department	(173)	(216)
	16,682	16,639
SOLAS Training Programmes (B3)	5,758	5,558
Further Education & Training Pay Grants (B5)	97,707	101,507
Further Education & Training Non Pay Grants (B5)	163,128	168,539
Retirement Benefit Funding (B7)	33,000	32,600
Total Vote 26 - Department of Education and Skills	316,275	324,843

3 State Funding (continued)

	2017	2016
	€'000	€'000
Other Oireachtas		
National Training Fund †	296,716	286,100
Total State Funding - Non Capital #	612,991	610,943
Capital		
Vote 26 (Subhead B3.1 & B5.3) - Department of Education and Skills	3,000	3,000
Total State Funding - Capital	3,000	3,000
Total State Funding	615,991	613,943

† An amount of €296.716m (2016 : €286.100m) was received during the year from the National Training Fund. These funds were used to part-finance a range of Further Education & Training Programmes for both the employed and the unemployed including Apprenticeship, Momentum, Skills Training, Traineeship, Bridging Foundation, Local Training Initiatives, Foundation/Progression in Community Training Centres, Specialist Training Providers, Workplace Basic Education Fund and Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme.

Non Capital State funding is reported net of surpluses recovered from ETBs amounting to €6.467m relating to previous years. Excluding this recovery Non Capital State funding for FET activities in 2017 would have been €619.458m and total income would have been €609.598m.

State funding includes an advance of European Social Fund (ESF) funding and European Globalisation Fund (EGF) funding where relevant.

In line with DPER Circular 13/2014, a refund of €9.45m was made by SOLAS during 2017 to the Department of Education and Skills at the request of the Department.

4 Other Income

	2017	2016
	€'000	€'000
Construction Activities	3,516	3,101
Miscellaneous Income	194	174
Total	3,710	3,275

5 Payroll Costs, Retirement Benefit Costs and Overheads

	Note	2017	2016
		€'000	€'000
Payroll Costs			
CEO, Communications and Secretariat		653	618
Strategy & Knowledge		2,545	2,684
Skills Development		3,799	3,994
Resources		4,400	4,438
Total Payroll Costs *		11,397	11,734
Total Retirement Benefit Costs	13(i)(a)	15,210	19,200
Overheads			
Travel & Subsistence †		292	336
Staff Training & Development		136	80
Depreciation	8	355	335
Establishment Costs		2,509	2,995
Programme Development Costs		253	266
Communications & Information Technology		1,594	1,200
Insurance & Accidents		328	792
Other Overheads ‡		1,837	870
Total Overheads		7,304	6,874
Total Payroll, Retirement Benefit and Overhead Costs		33,911	37,808
Comptroller & Auditor General Audit Fee		40	40

* Total Payroll Costs comprises salaries of €11,360k, allowances of €30k and overtime of €7k.

† Travel & Subsistence amounting to €48k for European Globalisation Fund (EGF) is included in EGF Programme Costs (Note 6). Travel & Subsistence above is composed of national €273k and international €19k.

‡ Other Overheads include Comptroller & Auditor General Audit Fee.

6 Programme Costs

	2017	2016
	€'000	€'000
eCollege	1,915	1,686
Technology Enhanced Learning	1,693	1,257
European Globalisation Fund	308	1,069
Momentum (Labour Market Education & Training Fund)	365	4,792
Training For Employment	4,281	8,804
Apprenticeship	1,943	1,767
Construction	1,248	1,063
Training In Employment	3,191	2,830
Programme Evaluations & Reviews	148	83
Skills Development/Traineeship	12	0
Programme Innovation	304	261
Miscellaneous	464	344
Total Programme Costs	7,936	11,978

Direct Provision of Funding

7(a) Summary of Grants Paid to Education and Training Boards

Education & Training Board	FET Provision	Capital	2017 Total	2016 Total
	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000
Cavan & Monaghan	16,515	41	16,556	14,632
City of Dublin	76,580	79	76,659	79,752
Cork	48,665	891	49,556	50,592
Donegal	19,444	265	19,709	20,435
Dublin & Dun Laoghaire	63,471	106	63,577	65,681
Galway & Roscommon	33,616	251	33,867	32,230
Kerry	25,071	263	25,334	24,439
Kildare & Wicklow	29,259	28	29,287	26,667
Kilkenny & Carlow	16,686	0	16,686	14,230
Laois & Offaly	16,882	(5)	16,877	14,646
Limerick & Clare	51,948	402	52,350	49,934
Longford & Westmeath	22,411	112	22,523	22,655
Louth & Meath	28,286	(25)	28,261	29,684
Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim	31,728	269	31,997	30,585
Tipperary	16,599	0	16,599	13,567
Waterford & Wexford	48,567	208	48,775	48,503
Total	545,728	2,885	548,613	538,232

Grants to ETBs are reported net of surpluses recovered amounting to €6.467m relating to previous years. Excluding this recovery Grants to ETBs in 2017 would have been €555.080m.

Direct Provision of Funding

7(b) Summary of Grants Paid to Schools and Miscellaneous Grant Payments

FET Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools (PLC)	2017	2016
	€'000	€'000
Ballyhaunis Community School, Co. Mayo	2	2
Castlecomer Community School, Co. Kilkenny	3	2
Castlerea Community School, Co. Roscommon	2	2
Central College, Limerick	33	31
Clifden Community College, Co. Galway	2	2
Colaiste Mhuire, Co. Galway	1	1
Donahies Community School, Donaghmede, Dublin 13	2	4
Dunmore Community School, Co. Galway	1	2
Glenamaddy Community School, Co. Roscommon	5	4
Gorey Community School, Co. Wexford	13	9
Jesus & Mary Secondary School, Co. Sligo	9	9
Kilrush Community School, Co. Clare	1	2
Mary Immaculate Secondary School, Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare	5	4
Mercy College, Co. Galway	6	7
Moate Business College, Co. Westmeath	32	52
Our Lady's Secondary School, Co. Mayo	1	2
Ramsgrange Community School, Co. Wexford	2	1
Sancta Maria College, Co. Mayo	1	1
Scoil Phobail Mhic Dara, Co. Galway	1	1
St Cuan's College, Co. Galway	6	6
St Joseph's College, Co. Westmeath	4	3
St Joseph's Secondary School, Spanish Point, Co. Clare	0	1
St Louis Community School, Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo	9	17
St Patrick's Comprehensive School, Co. Clare	1	3
Tullow Community School, Co. Carlow	5	4
	147	172

Direct Provision of Funding

7(b) Summary of Grants Paid to Schools and Miscellaneous Grant Payments

FET Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Schools (Programme BTEI)	2017	2016
	€'000	€'000
Central College, Limerick	57	54
Donahies Community School, Donaghmede, Dublin 13	55	52
Mary Immaculate Secondary School, Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare	41	39
Nagle Rice Secondary School, Doneraile, Co. Cork	18	17
North Presentation Secondary School, Co. Cork	72	69
Presentation Secondary School, Cannon Street, Waterford	34	33
Sacred Heart Secondary School, Clonakilty, Co. Cork	41	39
Sancta Maria College, Co. Mayo	13	13
Scoil Bernadette, Montenotte, Cork	12	12
Scoil Mhuire, Ennistymon, Co. Clare	13	13
St Joseph's Secondary School, Spanish Point, Co. Clare	43	41
St Louis Community School, Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo	11	20
St Michael's School, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon	29	28
	439	430
Miscellaneous Grant Payments		
Department of Education and Skills (LDA re-imbursement) ‡	138	121
Payments to various schools for QQI Authentication	1	3
	139	124
Total	725	726

Direct Provision of Funding

7(c) Summary of Grants paid to the Further Education Sector and European Union and Specific Projects

Further Education and Training - Support Organisations	2017	2016
	€'000	€'000
AONTAS - The National Adult Learning Organisation	1,093	1,086
Dyslexia Association of Ireland	129	129
Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)	540	11
National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)	1,638	1,729
National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)	217	277
Waterford Institute of Technology-Regional Educational Guidance Service (WIT/REGSA)	0	134
	3,617	3,366
Further Education and Training - Staff Representative Organisations		
Adult Education Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI)	0	5
Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) #	60	0
National Association of Adult & Community Education Directors (NACED)	4	4
	64	9
Further Education and Training - Lifelong Learning Opportunities		
Age Action Ireland	67	67
Irish Countrywomen's Association	21	21
Peoples College, Dublin 1	92	92
Educational Trust, c/o PACE, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15	0	18
	180	198
Further Education and Training - Continuing Professional Development		
Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT/NALA)	494	494
European Union and Specific Projects		
Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (PIAAC)*	31	64
Fasttrack into Information Technology (FIT)	1,144	1,144
Irish Association of Community Training Organisations (IACTO)	166	150
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)	20	20
Leargas	0	34
	1,361	1,412
Further Education and Training - Other Providers		
National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) - Write On/Phone Tuition	220	204
Irish Deaf Society	240	215
	460	419

Direct Provision of Funding

7(c) Summary of Grants paid to the Further Education Sector and European Union and Specific Projects

Further Education and Training - Provision of Apprenticeship Development Grants	2017	2016
	€'000	€'000
Associated Craft Butchers	48	47
City of Dublin ETB	2	0
Fasttrack into Information Technology (FIT)	0	13
Ibec - Financial Services Ireland	132	72
Ibec - IMDA Apprenticeship	48	177
Ibec - Plastics Ireland	0	135
Irish Hotels Federation	20	0
Irish Road Haulage Association	0	8
Limerick Institute of Technology	25	50
Scottish Association of Master Bakers	0	38
The Institute of Accounting Technicians in Ireland	0	13
The Insurance Institute of Ireland	0	39
	275	592
Further Education and Training - Standards Based Apprenticeship Phase Two Grants		
Cork Institute of Technology	161	184
ICT Associate Professional Initiative (FIT)		
Fasttrack into Information Technology (FIT)	394	473
Total	7,006	7,147

Summary of Grants Paid to Staff Representative Organisations via Education and Training Boards Ireland

A Grant of **€9.5k (2016: €9.5k)** for The Adult Education Officers Association (AEOA) was paid by Education Training Board Ireland (ETBI) in 2017. The grant was paid by Waterford & Wexford ETB in 2016.

A Grant of **€12.9k (2016: €12.9k)** for The Adult Literacy Organiser's Association (ALOA) was paid by ETBI in 2017. The grant was paid by Kilkenny & Carlow ETB in 2016.

A Grant of **€19k (2016: €19k)** for The National Association of Youthreach Co-Ordinators (NAYC) was paid by ETBI in 2017. The grant was paid by Dublin & Dun Laoghaire ETB in 2016.

A Grant of **€9.5k (2016: €9.5k)** for The National Association of VTOS Co-Ordinators (NAVC) was paid by ETBI in 2017. The grant was paid by Cork ETB in 2016.

A Grant of **€4.75k** for The Adult Education Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI) was paid by ETBI in 2017.

A Grant of **€4.75k** for The Community Education Facilitators Association was paid by ETBI in 2017.

‡ Locally Devised Assessments (LDA) payments to teachers in Voluntary Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools paid via the Department of Education and Skills.

* Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

8 Property, Plant & Equipment

	Note	2017 Land & Buildings	2017 Equipment & Furniture	2017 Total	2016 Total
Cost		€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000
Opening Balance		576	3,158	3,734	3,363
Additions during the period*		(12)	101	89	586
Disposals during the period	8 (i)	0	(105)	(105)	(215)
Balance at the end of the period		564	3,154	3,718	3,734
Accumulated Depreciation					
Opening Balance		58	2,671	2,729	2,609
Depreciation on Disposals	8 (ii)	0	(105)	(105)	(215)
Charge for the period		53	302	355	335
		111	2,868	2,979	2,729
Net Book Value at the end of the Year/Period		453	286	739	1,005

Property, Plant & Equipment

* The €12k credit under land and buildings relates to an accrual in 2016 that did not materialise in 2017.

8(i) The disposal of equipment and furniture in the period was €0.105m (2016: €0.215m). This amount related to fully depreciated legacy and obsolete equipment.

8(ii) All depreciation, asset disposal, asset write-off and impairment charges are financed by a corresponding transfer from the Capital Reserve.

9 Inventory

	2017	2016
	As at 31 December 2017	As at 31 December 2016
	€'000	€'000
Stationery	7	9
Total	7	9

10 Receivables

	2017	2016
	As at 31 December 2017	As at 31 December 2016
	€'000	€'000
Trade and Other Receivables	37	86
General Prepayments	677	1,147
Payroll Receivable	56	0
Total	770	1,233

11 Payables

	2017	2016
	As at 31 December 2017	As at 31 December 2016
	€'000	€'000
Trade Payables	640	568
Accruals	639	879
Holiday Pay Provision	113	166
Payroll Deductions	39	47
Total	1,431	1,660

12 Remuneration

12(a) Aggregate Employee Benefits

	Note	2017	2016
		€'000	€'000
Wages and Salaries		10,659	11,011
Employer PRSI Costs		738	723
Retirement benefit costs		15,210	19,200
Total	5	26,607	30,934

Employee benefits include salary and BIK but exclude employer retirement benefit contributions.

Total employer retirement benefit contributions for the organisation amounted to €173k in 2017 (2016: €216k).

A total of 178 staff (full time equivalents) were being paid by SOLAS at 31 December 2017 (2016: 189).

SOLAS has a Delegated Sanction Agreement (DSA) for the recruitment and promotion of staff, up to and including Director Level. This is subject to adherence by SOLAS to the binding overall three-year pay ceilings from 2015 – 2017 and on-going compliance with Workforce Planning requirements.

A further 22 staff (2016: 28) were unpaid being on leave of absence, on career breaks, in receipt of Permanent Health Insurance, on nil pay due to sick leave or on pension rate of pay.

An amount of €506,973 was deducted from Wages and Salaries for the year 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017 in relation to the Pension Levy and paid to the Department of Education and Skills (2016: €585,756).

No severance/termination payments were made in 2017 or 2016. All added years and early retirement granted were subject to normal actuarial reductions.

12(b) Staff Short-Term Benefits

	2017	2016
	€'000	€'000
Basic Pay	11,360	11,718
Allowances	30	15
Overtime	7	1
Total	11,397	11,734

12(c) Key Management Personnel

Key management personnel in SOLAS consists of the members of the Board, the Chief Executive Officer and three Executive Directors. The Board of SOLAS do not receive fees, Board expenses are set out in note 12(e). The total value of employee benefits for key management personnel is set out below:

	2017	2016
	€	€
Salaries	529,034	581,900
Allowances	11,700	11,377
Total	540,734	593,277

This does not include the value of retirement benefits earned in the period. The key management personnel are members of SOLAS' pension scheme and their entitlements in that regard do not extend beyond the terms of the model public service pension scheme.

12(d) Chief Executive Officer and Benefits

The CEO remuneration package for the financial period was as follows.

	2017	2016
	€	€
Salary	178,314	175,554
Allowances	11,700	11,377
Total	190,014	186,931

The Chief Executive Officer is a member of SOLAS' pension scheme and his entitlements in that regard do not extend beyond the terms of the model public service pension scheme. The value of retirement benefits earned in the period is not included above.

12(e) Fees and Expenses paid to Board members

In accordance with the requirements of Paragraph 1.4 (iv) of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies-Business and Financial Reporting Requirements 2016, expenses paid to the Board in the year ended 31 December 2017 are disclosed hereunder.

As SOLAS Board members do not receive any fees the disclosure relates only to expenses paid in respect of attendance at Board meetings.

	2017	2016
	€	€
	Expenses	Expenses
Pat Delaney (Chairman)	0	0
Paul O Toole (Chief Executive Officer)	0	0
David Barrett	0	792
Bernadette Brady	0	0
Sean Burke	0	2,328
Patricia Carey	1,135	3,132
Liz Cassidy	1,887	0
Patrick J Dwyer	0	0
William Egerton	0	0
Cathriona Hallahan	0	0
Darragh J Loftus	0	1,784
Sinead McCluskey	0	0
Cecilia Munro	0	0
Paul O Sullivan	0	0
Catrina Sheridan	0	0
Kenneth Whyte	0	2,077
Total	3,022	10,113

13 Superannuation Schemes

Under Section 8 of the Labour Services Act, 1987, An Foras Áiseanna Saothair was required to prepare and administer retirement benefit schemes for the granting of retirement benefit entitlements to its staff. The superannuation schemes were approved in 1998 by the then Ministers for Finance and Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

There are two retirement benefit schemes as follows:

- A defined benefit scheme which provides retirement benefits to former AnCO staff. This scheme closed to new members on 1 January 1988. On 31 December 2009 the assets of the scheme of €364.6m were transferred to the National Pension Reserve Fund (NPRF) in accordance with the Financial Measures (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. In line with the provisions of the Act, the obligation to pay benefits in accordance with the approved benefit rules of the transferred retirement benefit fund has effect after the date of the relevant transfer. Benefits are paid out of the funding provided annually by the Department of Education and Skills.
- An unfunded defined benefit scheme whose benefits are paid out of the funding provided annually by the Department of Education and Skills each year.

Contributions from staff in both schemes are paid over to the Department of Education and Skills each year.

In accordance with Section 46 of the Further Education and Training Act 2013 the retirement benefit payments and other superannuation liabilities of staff transferred to Education and Training Boards (ETBs) on 1 January and 1 July 2014 became the liability of the ETBs.

13 (i)

SOLAS commissioned an actuarial valuation of accrued liabilities at the financial reporting date and the cost of benefits (service cost) accrued during the year. The results of this valuation and assumptions used based on the projected unit method are listed hereunder.

	2017	2016
(a) Retirement Benefit Costs		
	€'000	€'000
Current Service Cost	3,840	3,540
Interest Expense	11,370	15,660
Contributions from Plan Members	650	675
Funding Recoverable in respect of current period Retirement Benefit Costs.	15,860	19,875
Employee Retirement Benefit Contributions paid to the Department	(650)	(675)
Retirement Benefit Costs	15,210	19,200
(b) Present Value of SOLAS Accrued Liability at beginning of year	758,630	694,502
Funding Recoverable in respect of current period Retirement Benefit Costs.	15,860	19,875
Actuarial (Gain) / Loss	(7,340)	75,817
Benefits Paid	(32,670)	(31,564)
Present Value of SOLAS Accrued Liability at end of year	734,480	758,630

(c) Net Deferred Funding for Retirement Benefits in the Year

The net deferred funding for retirement benefits recognised in the Statement of Income and Expenditure is as follows:

	2017	2016
	€'000	€'000
Funding Recoverable in respect of current period Retirement Benefit Costs	15,860	19,875
State Grant applied to pay Retirement Benefits	(32,670)	(31,564)
	(16,810)	(11,689)

(d) Actuarial Assumptions

The Financial Assumptions used for FRS102 purposes were:

	2017	2016
Discount Rate	1.50%	1.50%
Price Inflation	1.70%	1.70%
Salary Increases	2.20%	2.20%
State Pension Increases	1.70%	1.70%
Retirement Benefit Increases	2.20%	2.20%

The mortality tables used reflect the results of a recent Society of Actuaries investigation into the mortality experience of self-administered retirement benefit schemes in Ireland. The mortality investigation indicated that mortality rates continues to decrease, but at a rate lower than had been previously assumed. This is consistent with the reduction in population mortality improvement rates recorded by the CSO in recent years and is also consistent with the CSO's decision to reduce the assumed rates of future mortality improvements in its latest set of labour force projections.

The average life expectancy, in years, of a pensioner retiring is as follows:

	2017 Retiring at 60	2016 Retiring at 60
Males	26.2 years	26 years
Females	28.7 years	28.6 years
	2017 Retiring at 65	2016 Retiring at 65
Males	21.4 years	21.2 years
Females	23.8 years	23.7 years

(e) Actuarial Gain / (Loss)

	2017	2016
	€'000	€'000
Actuarial Gain / (Loss) Recognised in the SCI †	7,340	(75,817)
Cumulative Gains / (Losses) Recognised in the SCI	(22,181)	(29,521)

† Statement of Comprehensive Income

13(ii)

The retirement benefit liability of €734.480m includes an amount of €584.350m (79.5%) related to the retirement benefit liabilities of legacy organisations currently being administered by SOLAS. These retirement benefits are being paid by the Payroll Shared Service Centre (PSSC). Arrangements are under consideration with the Department of Education & Skills to have the funding associated with such retirement benefits assigned directly to the PSSC rather than being routed through the books of SOLAS.

13(iii)

SOLAS recognises as an asset, amounts owing from the State for the unfunded deferred liability for retirement benefits on the basis of a number of past events. These events include the statutory backing for the superannuation scheme and the policy and practice in relation to funding public service retirement benefits including the annual estimates process. SOLAS has no evidence that the funding policy will not continue to progressively meet this amount in funding in accordance with current practice. The deferred funding asset for retirement benefits as at 31 December 2017 amounted to €734.480 million. The calculation of the deferred asset is solely for FRS102 reporting purposes.

From 2010 onwards, in accordance with the provisions of the Financial Measures (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, future retirement benefits of the transferred retirement benefit fund will be met on a "pay as you go basis" out of the funding provided annually by the Department of Education and Skills. Contributions from staff and the employer in this scheme are paid over to the Department on a monthly basis.

14 Lease Commitments

SOLAS had the following future minimum lease payments under non-cancellable (up to lease break clauses where these apply) operating leases.

	2017 As at 31 December 2017	2016 As at 31 December 2016
Operating Lease Commitments	€'000	€'000
Payable within one year	1,590	2,427
Payable within 2 to 5 years	3,369	4,250
Payable after 5 years	1,103	1,855
Total	6,062	8,532

All Operating Leases are in relation to Buildings. SOLAS has no other Operating Leases.

The lease commitments at 2017 year end are €6.062m for 1 property.

The lease commitments at 2016 year end (net of sublets of €0.819m) were €7.713m for 2 properties.

Operating lease payments recognised as an expense in 2017 were €1.553m (2016: €2.264m).

SOLAS exited a lease on 43-49 Mespil Road on 8th July 2017. Dilapidations of €225k were paid in relation to this property. All properties were utilised in 2017. All Operating Leases are continuously reviewed by SOLAS.

Under the lease agreement for the SOLAS office on Castleforbes Road, Dublin 1 a rent free period of 10 months commenced after the payment of the first quarter rent. The value of the incentive has been spread across the life of the lease.

Finance Lease Commitments

There were no Finance Leases.

15 Funding

Most of SOLAS' income is a grant from the Department of Education and Skills which is provided to meet liabilities maturing during the year, as opposed to expenditure incurred during the year. SOLAS recognises its income from the Department of Education and Skills on a cash basis, whereas expenditure is recognised as incurred. As a result, the annual surplus or deficit on the Statement of Income and Expenditure and the accumulated surplus or deficit do not represent normal operating surpluses or deficits and are largely attributable to the difference between accruals expenditure and cash-based funding.

16 Capital Commitments

At 31 December 2017 SOLAS had entered into total capital commitments amounting to €6k. Capital commitments at 31 December 2016 amounted to €8k.

17 Contingent Liability

In the normal course of business SOLAS is involved in various legal actions including the finalisation of legacy cases. After careful assessment of each case, the Board is confident that there are no actions, including the legacy actions, which, when settled, are likely to have a material impact on the financial statements.

18 Related Party Disclosures

Related party personnel in SOLAS consist of the CEO and members of the Board of Directors. Total compensation paid to related party personnel, including Board members' fees and expenses and total CEO remuneration, amounted to €193,036 (2016: €197,044). A breakdown of remuneration and benefits paid to related party personnel is provided in notes 12(d) and 12(e).

SOLAS adopts procedures in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform covering the personal interests of Board members. In the normal course of business, SOLAS may approve grants or enter into other contractual arrangements with entities in which SOLAS Board members are employed or are otherwise interested.

In cases of potential conflict of interest, Board members do not receive Board documentation on the proposed transactions nor do the members participate in or attend Board discussions relating to the matters. All such instances are recorded in the Board minutes. There were three occasions during the year when a Board member did not participate in or attend Board discussions relating to matters that represented a conflict of their interests.

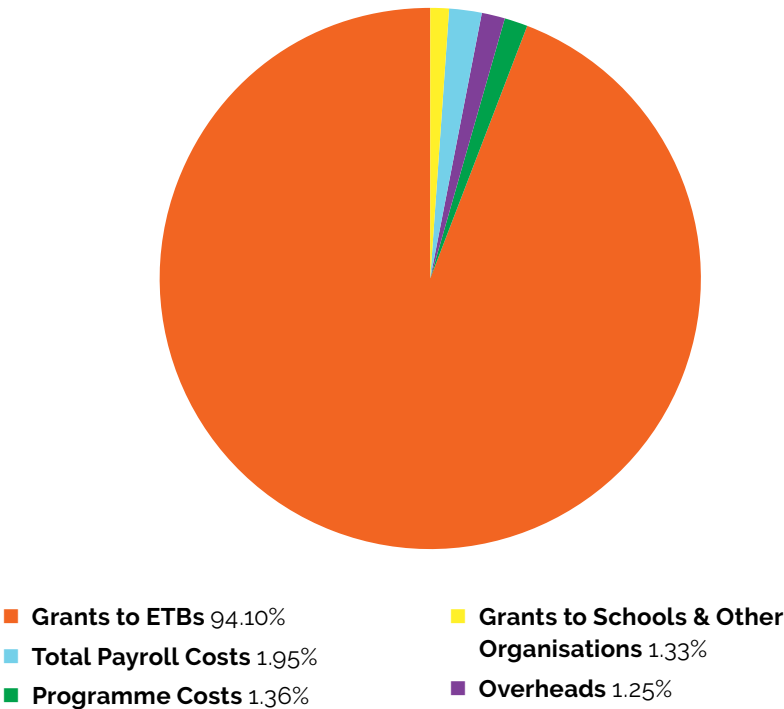
19 Board Approval

The Board approved the Financial Statements on
26 April, 2018.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

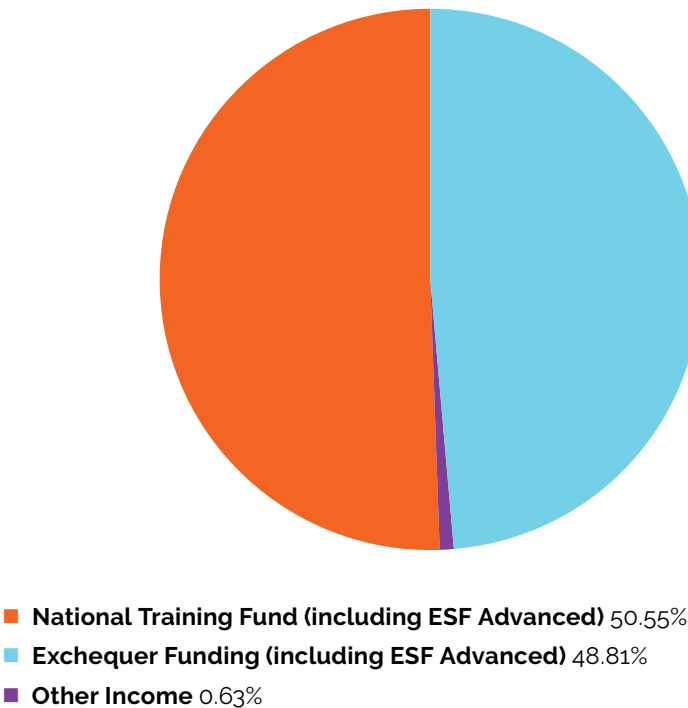
Breakdown of Expenditure Excluding Pensions



Breakdown of Expenditure Excluding Pensions

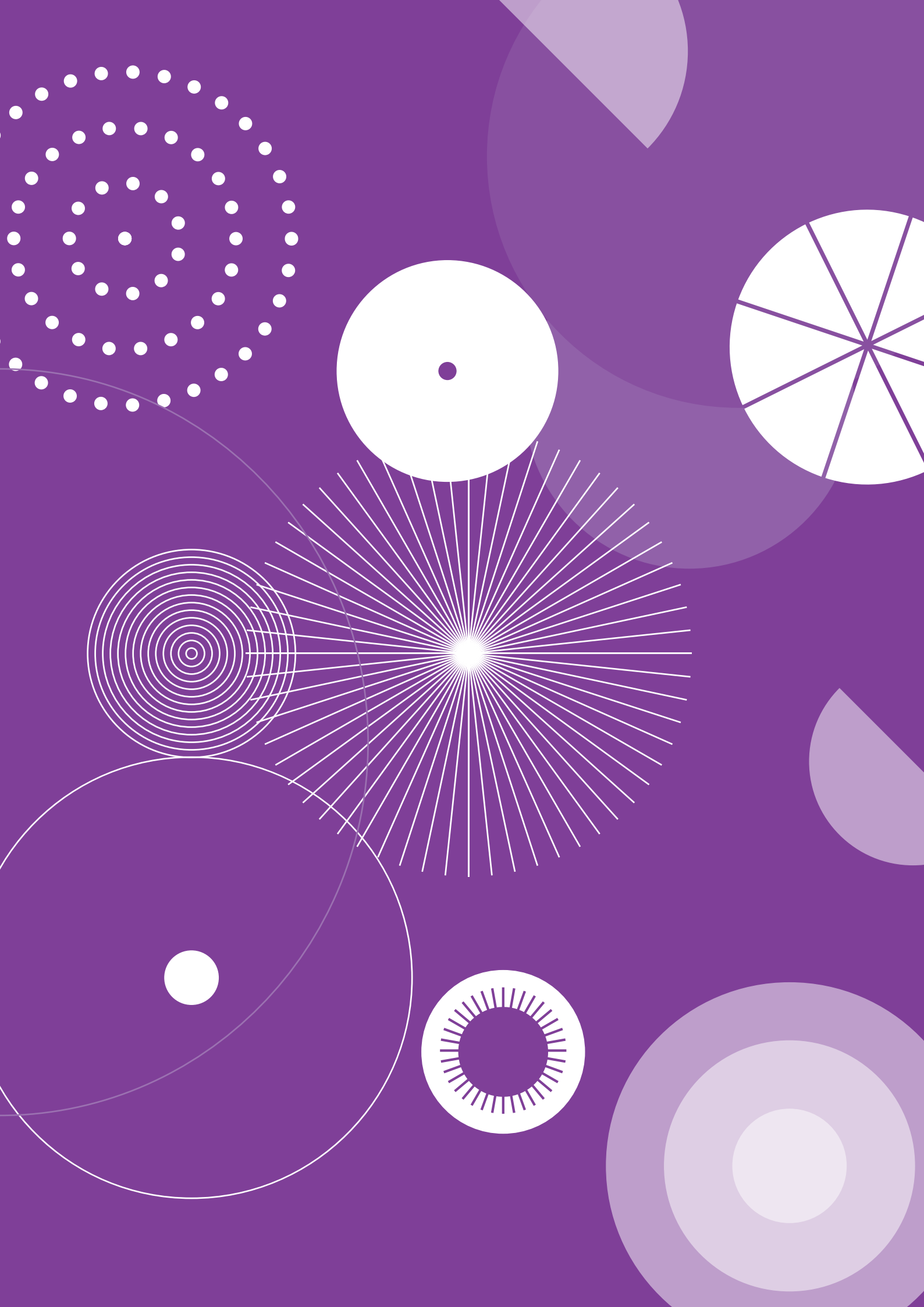
	€'000
Total Payroll Costs	11,397
Total Overheads	7,304
Total Programme Costs	7,936
Total Grants to ETBs	548,613
Total Grants to Schools & Other Organisations	7,731

Sources of Income Excluding Pensions



Sources of Income Excluding Pensions

	€'000
National Training Fund	296,716
Other Income	3,710
Exchequer Funding	286,515



TABLES AND APPENDICES

Appendix (i) Direct Provision of Funding (Further Education Grants) Breakdown of Grants by Programme as Reported by the Education and Training Boards

Education & Training Board	Adult Guidance	Adult Literacy	Back To Education Initiative	Community Education	English for Speakers of Other Languages	Innovation Projects	Intensive Tuition Adult Basic Education	Breacadh
	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000
Cavan & Monaghan	335	1,016	906	414	136	0	76	0
City of Dublin	508	4,253	2,222	1,685	463	1,138	197	0
Cork	404	2,116	1,425	963	134	725	258	0
Donegal	301	931	1,057	491	69	14	59	0
Dublin & Dun Laoghaire *	631	2,322	4,014	1,723	0	(61)	257	0
Galway & Roscommon	470	2,194	2,899	265	0	143	105	225
Kerry	195	777	603	274	102	753	47	0
Kildare & Wicklow	422	1,523	1,411	552	173	0	50	0
Kilkenny & Carlow	591	997	1,020	319	0	0	80	0
Laois & Offaly	361	1,036	1,149	401	0	0	46	0
Limerick & Clare	579	2,572	1,894	845	254	417	191	0
Longford & Westmeath	225	1,124	904	261	0	0	70	0
Louth & Meath	414	1,128	1,148	571	162	160	76	0
Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim	410	1,181	1,616	547	166	0	121	0
Tipperary	273	952	1,085	382	129	0	68	0
Waterford & Wexford	253	1,627	1,205	618	115	0	105	0
Total	6,372	25,749	24,558	10,311	1,903	3,289	1,806	225

The negative balances reported by some ETBs on some programmes are the result of surpluses carried forward from prior years.

* Funds of circa €2.236m for the Skills for Work Programme (Workplace Education Fund) were channelled through Dublin & Dun Laoghaire ETB to all other ETBs.

Post Leaving Certificate	VTOS	Workplace Education Fund	Youthreach	Further Education Operational Costs	Refugee Programmes	DEIS Family Literacy	Advocacy	Total
€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000
770	547	0	2,783	176	7	12	0	7,178
1,150	12,586	0	8,674	1,610	0	0	54	34,540
853	3,607	0	6,620	1,245	68	58	57	18,533
40	2,275	0	3,024	504	5	(4)	81	8,847
456	4,237	2,766	7,289	1,324	0	(1)	0	24,957
362	5,946	0	5,260	(222)	512	110	191	18,460
173	2,782	0	2,328	1,358	61	41	0	9,494
211	8,377	0	4,094	840	(3)	2	0	17,652
237	2,854	0	951	232	0	9	0	7,290
89	2,892	0	2,760	31	41	23	0	8,829
94	7,408	0	5,312	2,862	(19)	(2)	0	22,407
119	2,139	0	1,776	85	231	28	0	6,962
396	2,230	0	4,628	669	236	50	0	11,868
433	3,587	0	2,832	844	160	22	0	11,919
16	2,497	0	1,616	197	16	0	24	7,255
547	7,975	0	4,790	2,223	310	23	0	19,791
5,946	71,939	2,766	64,737	13,978	1,625	371	407	235,982

Appendix (ii) Direct Provision of Funding (Training Grants) Breakdown of Grants by Programme as Reported by the Education and Training Boards

Education & Training Board	Apprenticeships	Bridging Foundation	Community Training Centres	Justice Workshops	Evening Courses	European Globalisation Fund	On-Line Blended Learning	Local Training Initiatives
	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000
Cavan & Monaghan	459	1	0	0	0	0	0	822
City of Dublin	7,427	78	9,617	213	1,156	0	0	1,085
Cork	6,752	(56)	1,771	0	466	0	22	3,716
Donegal	1,497	19	0	0	291	0	0	294
Dublin & Dun Laoghaire	4,244	175	2,691	182	622	0	998	1,942
Galway & Roscommon	2,110	0	828	125	300	0	65	1,661
Kerry	2,691	108	805	0	233	0	36	(8)
Kildare & Wicklow	866	140	1,071	0	0	0	0	2,123
Kilkenny & Carlow	1,289	502	2,719	0	0	0	0	1,732
Laois & Offaly	0	26	1,026	0	161	0	0	768
Limerick & Clare	7,107	(11)	1,922	(120)	950	99	0	2,455
Longford & Westmeath	2,748	138	1,956	76	220	0	3	886
Louth & Meath	4,125	825	792	0	(67)	0	0	1,863
Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim	3,612	0	1,714	0	129	0	0	2,199
Tipperary	436	257	2,344	0	95	0	0	1,304
Waterford & Wexford	7,998	530	2,101	0	863	0	26	2,425
Total	53,361	2,732	31,357	476	5,419	99	1,150	25,267

The negative balances reported by some ETBs on some programmes are the result of surpluses carried forward from prior years.

Skills Training	Specialist Training Providers	Traineeship	Libraries	Training Pay Grants	Training Operational Costs	Sub-Total	Capital	Total
€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000
3,739	1,164	895	0	674	1,583	9,337	41	9,378
2,795	9,958	2,475	0	5,344	1,889	42,037	79	42,116
4,317	5,087	1,036	35	4,891	2,096	30,133	891	31,024
2,419	1,020	2,089	0	2,049	919	10,597	265	10,862
9,902	4,514	2,309	253	7,046	3,633	38,511	106	38,617
3,215	2,435	874	0	2,552	992	15,157	251	15,408
4,090	3,174	1,339	0	2,087	1,021	15,576	262	15,838
2,464	2,315	1,216	0	731	680	11,606	28	11,634
1,203	588	534	0	523	305	9,395	0	9,395
635	1,755	1,698	0	1,076	910	8,055	(5)	8,050
4,238	3,317	2,230	(25)	4,849	2,529	29,540	402	29,942
2,292	2,577	683	0	2,915	955	15,449	112	15,561
1,946	1,593	1,634	0	2,544	1,166	16,421	(25)	16,396
3,514	3,372	1,605	0	2,575	1,090	19,810	269	20,079
2,271	970	424	0	682	561	9,344	0	9,344
5,720	1,820	1,427	0	4,118	1,750	28,778	208	28,986
54,760	45,659	22,468	263	44,656	22,079	309,746	2,884	312,630

Appendix (iii)

Membership of Advisory Committees

(for the period 1 January to 31 December 2017)

National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC)

Number of meetings held: four

William Egenton	Chairman (and SOLAS Board Member)
Dermot Carey	Employer Representative – Construction Industry Federation (CIF)
Vivienne Patterson*	Higher Education Authority (HEA) retired in March 2017 and was replaced by Ruaidhri Neavyn in March 2017
Eamon Devoy	(ICTU representative) Technical Engineering and Electrical Union (TEEU)
Jim Moore*	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU); Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT) – Retired in May 2017 and was replaced by Brian Nolan (ICTU – TEEU)
Barry O'Connor	Institute of Technology Apprenticeship Committee (ITAC)
Phil O'Flaherty	Department of Education and Skills (DES)
Margaret O'Shea	Employer Representative – Society of the Irish Motor Industry (SIMI)
Martin G O'Brien	Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
Ray Kelly	SOLAS (Executive)

Secretariat

Chris Feeney*, SOLAS Secretariat, retired in February 2017 and was succeeded by Brian Head.

Changes to membership during 2017

*Jim Moore (ICTU) retired on 8 May 2017 and was replaced by Brian Nolan, National Construction Official, TEEU with effect from 15 June 2017

*Ruaidhri Neavyn (HEA) replaced Vivienne Patterson as the HEA representative with effect from 13 March 2017

*Chris Feeney, SOLAS, Secretariat retired on 9 February 2017 and was succeeded by Brian Head (SOLAS) who took up the role as Secretariat with effect from the 9 February 2017

NAAC – Redundant Apprentice Accreditation Sub-Committee

Number of meetings held: two

Peter Egan – Chair	Louth and Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB)
Ray Kelly	SOLAS (temporary chairman for Peter Egan – attended one meeting, on 11 July 2017)
Paddy Kavanagh	Technical Engineering and Electrical Union (TEEU)
Tommy Moloney	G&T Crampton Limited (CIF)
David Nicholson	Dun Laoghaire Further Education Institute (ITAC)
Eugene Branley	Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB)
Julie Mannion	SOLAS, Apprenticeship and Construction Services
Secretariat	
Bryan Redmond	SOLAS

Appendix (iii)

(continued)

NAAC – National Apprenticeship Appeals Committee

Number of meetings held: five

Patricia Cassells – Chair *	Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board – (DDLETB)
Tommy Flaherty	Construction Industry Federation (CIF)
Paddy Kavanagh	Technical Engineering and Electrical Union (TEEU)
Tony Wallace*	Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT)
David Nicholson	Dun Laoghaire Further Education Institute (ITAC) (temporary substitute for Tony Wallace – attended one meeting on 12 December 2017)
Eugene Branley	Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB)
Peter Heffernan	City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB)
Chris Feeney*	SOLAS – Apprenticeship and Construction Services
Brian Head	SOLAS – Apprenticeship and Construction Services
Julia Mannion	SOLAS – Apprenticeship and Construction Services (temporary substitute for Brian Head – attended two meetings on 30 March 2017 and 12 December 2017)
Joe Roe	SOLAS Legal Services
Secretariat	
Bryan Redmond	SOLAS

Changes during 2017

*Ms Patricia Cassells retired from Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB in July 2017, but remained as Independent Chairperson.

*Mr Tony Wallace retired from ITAC in October 2017.

*Mr Chris Feeney retired from SOLAS in February 2017 and was succeeded by Brian Head.

