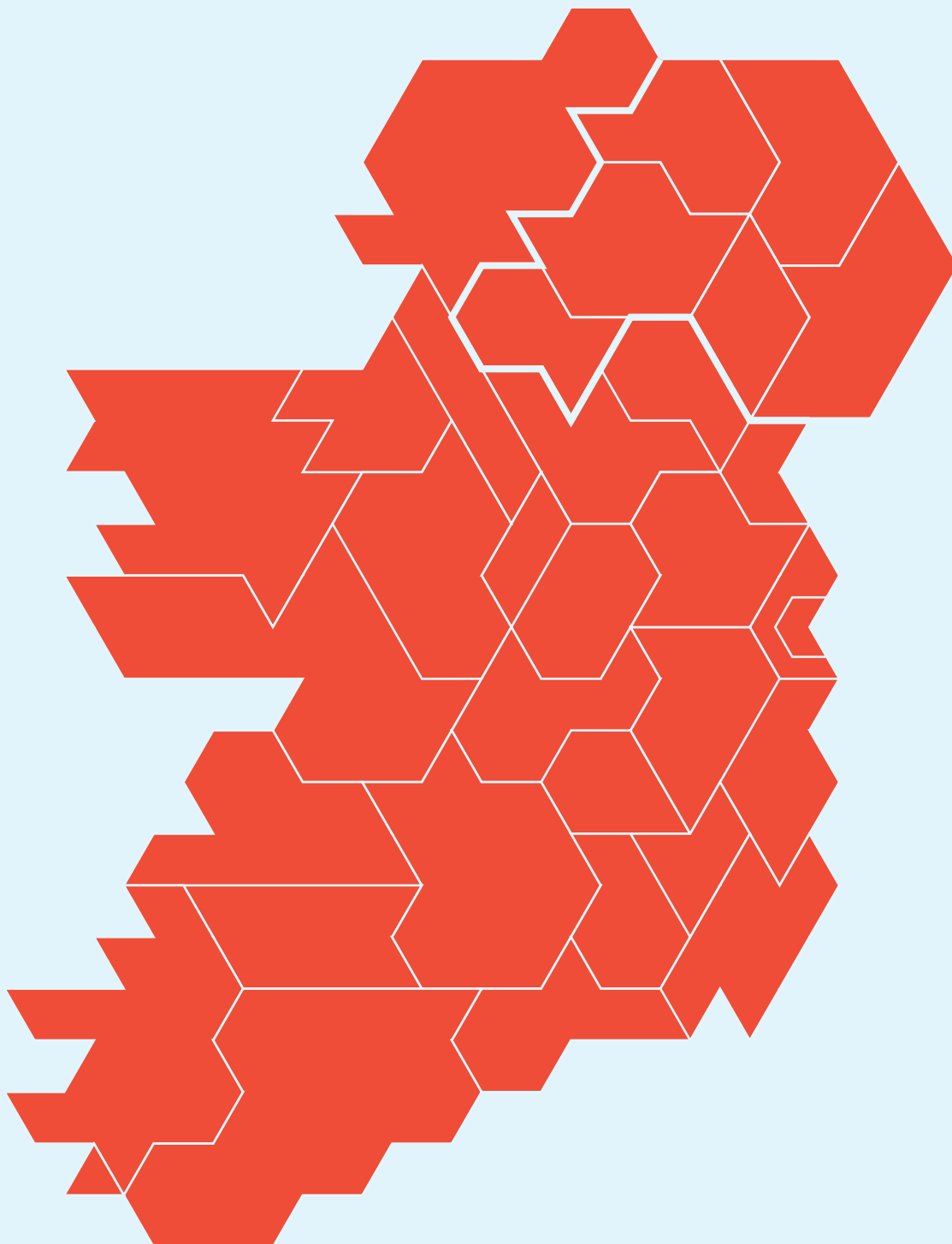


# Future Ready Learning

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Strategic Performance Agreements:  
Developing the Further Education  
and Training System 2018 - 2020





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# Introduction



# Introduction

This is a pivotal moment in the continued development of a strategic and integrated further education and training (FET) system. The formation of SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in 2013 brought the further education and training sectors together for the first time under a devolved delivery model and there followed a natural establishment phase to ensure structures, roles and responsibilities within the respective organisations were aligned with the policy, economic and social objectives which the newly integrated system was designed to serve.

The publication of the first Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 in May 2014 provided further clarity around the direction in which the system needed to develop and contained a commitment to establish an outcomes-based approach to planning and funding to underpin this. It was recognised that to facilitate such an approach required the building of systems and capability, and the creation and iterative development of planning (via the FARR framework and annual ETB and sectoral service planning process) and learner data (via the PLSS) infrastructure over the next few years. This provided a platform to begin to track, analyse and challenge the outcomes arising from further education and training.

Given this platform, the potential for a more strategic and multi-annual approach to planning and funding FET was recognised. A pilot initiative was established between SOLAS and three ETBs which looked at how strategic priorities could be set and targets pursued across multiple years. Following the success of this initiative, a framework was agreed with ETBs for a new process of strategic dialogue to inform the development of three year strategic performance agreements with SOLAS. The launch of the SOLAS Corporate Plan in 2017- 2019, with a series of core national FET sector targets agreed with the Minister for Education and Skills for delivery across a three year period, provided further clarity around what was expected from SOLAS and the ETBs.

In this report we set out the plans which have emerged from the 16 ETB strategic performance agreements from 2018-2020 and the transformation which will continue across further education and training over this period as it responds to the rapidly evolving skills, technological, social and economic landscape.



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# The Further Education and Training System



# The Further Education and Training System

The further education and training system delivers a continuum of learning opportunities from Level 1 to Level 6 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), focused on both core and specific skills development, accompanied by a range of learner supports to facilitate the active inclusion of all citizens. With almost €640 million of funding channelled via SOLAS to 16 ETBs (as set out in the map on the next page) and a range of other smaller scale providers, the system supported well over 300,000 beneficiaries in 2017.

Further education and training provides a diverse range of programmes and supports designed to meet the needs of individuals at different stages of the learning pathway. This includes courses which are focused on transversal skills development including literacy and numeracy (e.g. Adult Literacy, ESOL, ITABE), in order to build the core capabilities which will allow participants to move on to more advanced learning opportunities. A range of programmes (e.g. Youthreach, Back to Education Initiative, Skills for Work) are focused more formally on facilitating progression to other education and training opportunities. Post leaving certificate (PLC) provision has a focus on both facilitating progression to higher education and direct generation of employment outcomes. Other programmes (e.g. traineeships, apprenticeships, specific skills training) are based around the principle of work-based learning and seek to lead directly to sustainable jobs for participants. Further details on the different types of provision are set out in Appendix A.

The community-based ethos of further education and training ensures a widespread geographic distribution of provision across all corners of the state. Community education is a key component of this landscape, with ground up initiatives developed to serve the needs of particular localities, often in partnership with local organisations. This further reinforces the diverse learner profile across FET, with many availing of courses on a part-time basis, often in evenings or via online resources. The maximum length of a further education and training course is one year, although some provision carries a two year option with a distinct award at the end of each year. This means engagement with providers tends to be shorter term than, for example, higher education, yet the system is also characterised by re-engagement of learners for multiple courses, sometimes within the same year.

## FET IN 2017

**113,995**  
FULL TIME PLACES

**129,357**  
PART TIME PLACES

**50,414**  
COMMUNITY  
EDUCATION PLACES

**8,556**  
eCOLLEGE PLACES

**9,435**  
APPRENTICESHIPS

**€638M**  
Investment

## DELIVERED BY

**16**

Education and  
Training Boards

**22**

State Agencies  
and Bodies

**34**

Voluntary Secondary and  
Community Comprehensive  
Schools

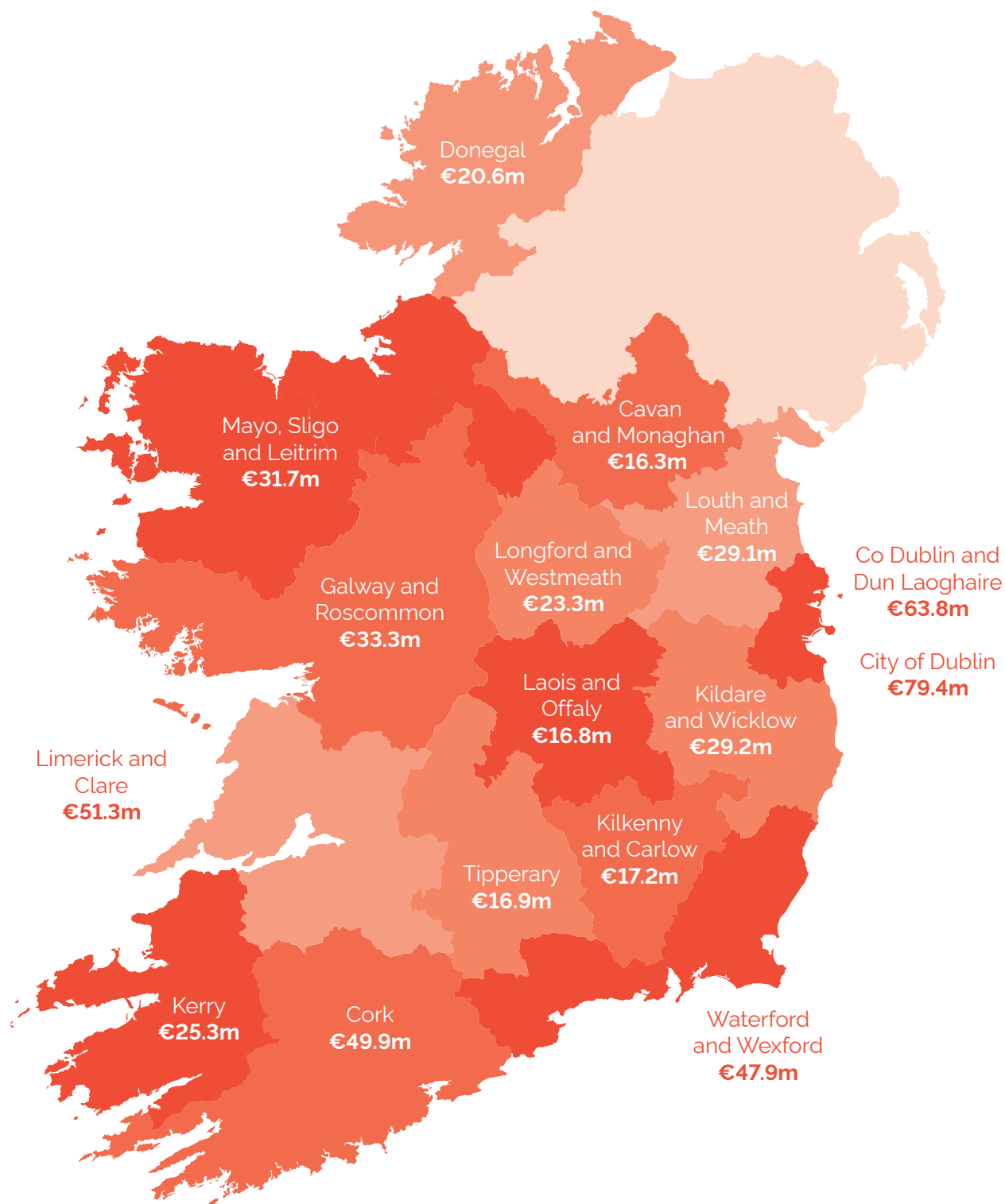
**323,308**  
BENEFICIARIES

**230,641**  
NEW ENTRANTS

**33**  
SKILLS  
CLUSTERS

## Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in Ireland

Allocation of funding to each ETB for 2017





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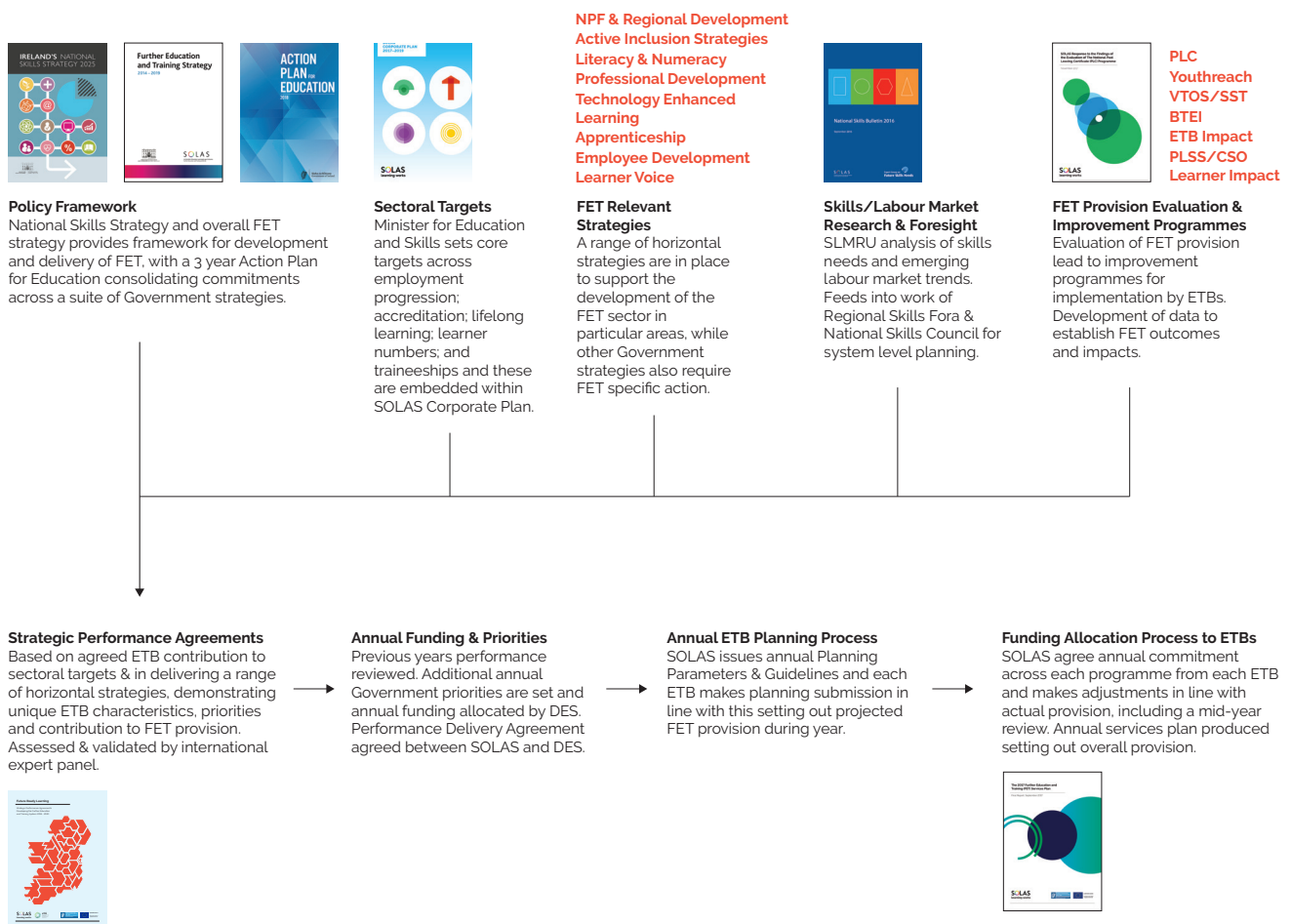
# What is a Strategic Performance Agreement?



# What is a Strategic Performance Agreement?

When a new reporting requirement is introduced within the public sector, it is generally associated with ensuring accountability for Exchequer funding and usually related to the annual budgeting cycle. As a result associated dialogue between the grantor and grantee tends to focus on what services are being provided this year, and how this has changed from the last year of reporting, with little scope for more strategic discussions around development or transformation of the service being provided.

For further education and training, it has long been recognised that, while public accountability is critical, real thought and planning must go into how provision needs to evolve to keep pace with the rapidly changing social, economic and technological context. We are perhaps in an unparalleled period of industrial change, where the world of work, the way in which people learn and develop, the way in which communities survive and prosper, and the way in which enterprises do business, is changing by the day. Therefore a means needed to be found that allowed for the development of a multi-annual strategy, fuelled by a strong evidence base, disruptive thinking, and local context and connectivity, that would ensure that ETBs could respond flexibly to emerging regional needs and deliver clear outcomes in return.



The strategic performance agreement aims to do this, providing a means to harness policy, strategies, targets, labour market insight and a continuing process of programme evaluation and improvement to set out a clear direction for ETB development from which annual plans can then flow and be linked to resource allocations. An overview of their role within the FET strategic planning system is set out in the diagram on the previous page. However more than this, the agreements demonstrate what is unique about the particular region that an ETB serves and what each ETB is doing to effectively respond to these unique characteristics, with many interesting and innovative examples of good practice emerging.

The high-level structure of the agreements is shown in the box opposite. Along with the agreements, each ETB was required to submit templates showing detailed plans for delivering on each target, together with the rationale for any programme change in each case.

The strategic performance agreements also provide the platform for the next stage of the development of the further education and training system, with a review of the funding model to support the agility of ETBs in responding to learner needs. This review, which is commencing during the fourth quarter of 2018, has a goal of developing an approach to supporting ETBs which will allow outcomes to be recognised and good performance to be rewarded, while acknowledging the particular context in which each ETB operates.

### The Performance Agreement

- Introduction
- Regional characteristics
- ETB FET resources & infrastructure
- Strategic priorities and key commitments
- Role in delivering relevant policies and strategies
- Risks, opportunities and challenges
- Summary of actions/initiatives to progress FET strategy goals
- Summary of ETB contribution to 6 national FET sector targets
- Agreement and monitoring arrangements



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# Developing the Agreements



# Developing the Agreements

An intensive support, planning and development process has been progressed during 2018 in order to bring strategic performance agreements to fruition with each of the ETBs. The key steps included:

<b>February</b>	Launch event on 9th February with ETB Chief Executives and Directors in Naas and parameters/templates issued to support process
<b>February</b>	Piloting and refining of approach, processes, templates and systems with Kerry ETB and Limerick-Clare ETB
<b>March</b>	Panel of national and international education and training experts recruited to bring robust and independent challenge and validation to the dialogue and performance agreement process
<b>March - April</b>	Support and development workshops with groups of ETBs including horizon scanning on skills, economy and changing world of work
<b>May</b>	ETBs submit draft target templates and draft strategic performance agreements
<b>May - June</b>	Strategic dialogue meetings from 8th May to 5th June held on-site with each ETB
<b>July</b>	Formal feedback to each ETB following dialogue meeting provided by SOLAS (with input from independent expert panel) and revised consistent structure for agreement circulated
<b>August</b>	Final draft agreements submitted by ETBs and negotiation of final target contributions between SOLAS and individual ETBs
<b>September</b>	Final feedback on draft agreements from SOLAS and subsequent finalisation by ETBs, followed by sign-off by respective Chief Executives



A pivotal part of this process was the holding of strategic dialogue sessions between SOLAS and the ETBs. These strategic dialogue meetings gave an opportunity for each ETB to discuss the unique characteristics of the region it serves and how provision and support services reflect this. The meeting was then structured around six critical aspects of FET which also aligned to one of the six specific national sectoral targets as follows:

Discussion Topic	Related Target within Agreement
<b>Supporting Jobs for the Economy</b>	10% more learners securing employment from provision which primarily serves the labour market
<b>Progression to Other Learning Opportunities</b>	10% more learners progressing to other further or higher education courses from provision which is primarily focused on this purpose
<b>Transversal Skills Development for Active Inclusion</b>	10% increase in the rate of certification on courses primarily focused on transversal (social mobility) skills development
<b>Expanding Lifelong Learning and Workforce Upskilling</b>	10% increase in adults seeking FET level provision engaging in lifelong learning interventions
<b>Evolving Delivery of Learning to Focus on Critical Skills Needs</b>	Increase in 10,000 learners per annum securing relevant qualifications in sectors where employment growth/skills needs have been identified
<b>Programme Development and Embracing New Models of Apprenticeship and Traineeship</b>	13,900 new traineeship and trainee registrations in the period 2018 to 2020

Also in attendance at the strategic dialogue meetings were two members of an independent expert panel. This panel provided an invaluable resource in offering constructive advice and objective input to inform the development of strategic performance agreements between SOLAS and the ETBs. The panel, recruited via an open and competitive process, brought together expertise in education and training provision in both a national and international context, drawing on experience of systems in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and covering knowledge in other relevant areas such as active inclusion, EU learning programmes and public sector reform. A list of the external expert panel members is provided as Appendix B. The dialogue meetings provided the bedrock from which focused strategic agreements could be developed and key contributions across the six core aspects of FET could be articulated.



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# Overview of the Planned Outcomes



# Overview of the Planned Outcomes

As this report has noted, a key component in developing the agreements was the submission of detailed templates by each ETB showing how planned provision in 2018, 2019 and 2020 will contribute to the realisation of each national FET system target. This ensured that the strategic direction set down for the system was reflected in real plans developed from the ground up, with a wide base of ETB managers and programme stakeholders involved in each case. These plans were expressed in terms of the skills clusters to which provision related, demonstrating how ETB target contributions aligned with requirements across key sectors of the economy.

The table on the next page provides an overview of all the planned outcomes within the Strategic Performance Agreements by target and by skills cluster. It demonstrates that plans are in place across ETBs to comfortably exceed the national FET system targets around employment, progression and transversal skills, and to broadly meet the other targets around lifelong learning, qualifications in key skills areas and traineeship registrations. Of course the plans will not progress in exactly the way envisaged by each ETB, but the foundation provided by detailed outcome planning should ensure that delivery of the six core national targets remains on track.





Table 1 **Summary of Outcomes by National FET System Target and Skills Cluster in Strategic Performance Agreements**

Further Education & Training Provision	Target 1: Employment		Target 2: Progression		Target 3: Transversal Skills	
	2018-2020		2018-2020		2018-2020	
	10% More Learners will secure employment from provision which primarily serves the labour market.		10% more learners will progress to other further or higher education courses from provision which is primarily focused on this purpose.		10% increase in the rate of certification on courses primarily focused on transversal (social mobility) skills development.	
Skill Clusters	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Agriculture, Horticulture and Mariculture	95	50%	61	20%		
Animal Science	66	29%	2	9%		
Arts and Crafts	61	9%	126	56%		
Built Environment	226	60%	37	185%		
Business Administration	311	22%	473	36%		
Engineering	96	94%	99	707%		
Engineering (Electrical)	131	89%	0	0%		
Engineering (IT)	23	79%	17	850%		
Engineering (Mechanical)	136	53%	25	0%		
Engineering (Transport)	55	41%	6	0%		
Entrepreneurship	81	368%	46	0%		
Financial Services	83	56%	-3			
Food and Beverage	312	74%	212	145%		
Hairdressing, Beauty and Complementary Therapies	102	9%	123	93%		
Health, Family other Social Services	501	16%	846	19%		
Information Technology	163	35%	237	199%		
Management	71	80%	0	0%		
Manufacturing	124	78%	18	0%		
Media, Graphics Communications	96	38%	0	0%		
Natural Resources	2	5%	0	0%		
Research and Education-Training	26	34%	0	0%		
Sales & Marketing	159	56%	148	163%		
Science and Technology	56	64%	76	3800%		
Security, Guarding & Emergency Services	21	14%	27	675%		
Sport and Leisure	152	23%	86	98%		
Tourism	159	47%	75	112%		
Transport, Distribution & Logistics	147	27%	0	0%		
Web Development & Design	16	15%	1	50%		
Core ICT			45	3%	4769	53%
Core Personal			959	13%	30567	14%
General Learning			676	31%	5356	48%
Language			11	0%	813	542%
Skills Sampling,			24	30%	590	34%
Key Skills			138	177%	1269	85%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,471</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>4,592</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>43,364</b>	<b>26%</b>

Further Education & Training Provision	Target 4: Lifelong Learning		Target 5: Key Skills Needs		Target 6: Traineeships	
	2018-2020		2018-2020		2018-2020	
	10% increase of adults, who are seeking FET level provision, engaging in lifelong learning interventions		Increase of 10,000 learners per annum securing relevant qualifications in sectors where employment growth/ skills needs have been identified.		13,900 commencements on traineeship programmes	
Skill Clusters	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Agriculture, Horticulture and Mariculture	403	27%			200	0%
Animal Science	171	127%			185	0%
Arts and Crafts	-165	-11%			0	0%
Built Environment	956	54%	708	89%	969	231%
Business Administration	914	10%			2038	64%
Engineering	32	8%	324	104%	184	150%
Engineering (Electrical)	146	73%	170	101%	83	162%
Engineering (IT)	71	53%	123	230%	55	0%
Engineering (Mechanical)	572	25%	568	51%	688	272%
Engineering (Transport)	80	24%	162	70%	378	65%
Entrepreneurship	255	29%	356	260%	0	0%
Financial Services	381	45%			291	75%
Food and Beverage	1095	65%	910	109%	863	74%
Hairdressing, Beauty and Complementary Therapies	357	23%			780	92%
Health, Family other Social Services	1994	13%	4539	44%	2113	16%
Information Technology	887	42%	1148	74%	1085	21%
Management	304	40%			24	-20%
Manufacturing	146	21%	153	79%	569	4167%
Media, Graphics Communications	267	334%	773	49%	460	1367%
Natural Resources	20	50%			0	0%
Research and Education-Training	145	43%			42	0%
Sales & Marketing	127	8%	654	79%	827	53%
Science and Technology	121	195%	208	72%	186	507%
Security, Guarding & Emergency Services	-104	-6%			95	0%
Sport and Leisure	158	12%	342	30%	835	72%
Tourism	426	64%	673	85%	286	0%
Transport, Distribution & Logistics	-5	-0%			494	2767%
Web Development & Design	68	23%	104	30%	66	0%
Core ICT	687	9%				
Core Personal	2622	5%				
General Learning	4183	7%				
Language	895	275%				
Skills Sampling,	153	70%				
Key Skills	356	187%				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18,717</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>11,914</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>13,796</b>	<b>104%</b>

In the following sections, the ETB plans and projected outcomes across each of the six core aspects of further education and training to which these targets relate are discussed in turn. Short examples of good practice across the ETBs are also provided to illustrate the types of innovative approach being adopted to maximise the impact of FET.

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# Supporting Jobs for the Economy



# Supporting Jobs for the Economy

All ETBs are underpinned by strong links with local employers, aligned with a commitment that FET provision is focused on areas of greatest labour market opportunity. Employer engagement in ETBs takes many forms including: work placements and work-based learning; development of occupational standards; involvement in curriculum design or the accreditation of programmes; knowledge transfer; start-up support; and promotional events to encourage potential learners and future employees. This foundation has ensured strong connectivity with industry, but we are now seeing this built upon with more structured, proactive and targeted approaches to maximise the jobs secured for learners on completion of FET courses. It is complemented by the expansion of new models of apprenticeship and traineeship which further strengthen this connectivity. As a result, within the agreements, the ETBs have set ambitious targets to improve learner outcomes and plans are in place for **30% more learners to secure employment** from provision which primarily serves the labour market than was the case in 2017. This would equate to over **3,400 additional learners** gaining employment by the end of this period.

Part of the rationale for improved employment outcomes is the enhanced capacity within ETBs to understand and analyse employer needs in the region and plan more effectively on how they are going to meet those needs. There has been a growing recognition of the importance of regional labour market intelligence from the Skills and Labour Market Research

## Employment Outcomes from FET 2017 - 2020



Unit (SLMRU), and all ETBs cited use of this regional analysis in shaping plans and provision.

A further development surrounds the ability to monitor and validate the employment outcomes of those completing ETB courses, allowing a better understanding of which work most effectively in securing such progression. Work between SOLAS and the CSO is allowing the FET learner database (PLSS) to be linked to Government administrative databases which can then determine rates of progression to employment and higher education. This is a significant improvement from the current self-declared system of tracking employment outcomes by ETBs, which relies on learner contact being maintained post-completion and comprehensive and ongoing data input. ETBs have also benefited from the establishment of regional skills fora, which brings together providers across the education and training system with employers and other key stakeholders to improve understanding of regional skills needs and job opportunities and develop appropriate responses. All ETBs are proactively involved in the fora and they are already playing a positive role in improving progression of FET learners to both employment and to higher education via this partnership approach. This has included the commissioning of region- specific research into sectoral skills requirements which again feed into planning of FET provision.



### An Innovative Employer Engagement App

Building on the formation of a dedicated employer engagement team in Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB to ensure a clear, focused and consistent access point for all local employers, the ETB has developed an application to map all employers in the region, capture all engagements in a real-time database, automate follow-up actions and allow analysis of local skills needs.



### **Developing Unique Skills Specialisms**

Conscious of a limited potential learner pool within its immediate catchment area, Kerry ETB has developed specialisms in nationally relevant skills areas. This includes: the National Digital Skills Centre in its training centre; a portfolio of courses related to the Renewable and Electrical Power Engineering, Distribution and Transmission sector; and plans to develop a Marine Skills Centre of Excellence building on the launch of a new Marine Engineering traineeship.

Greater understanding of skills needs on the ground is also being linked to more coordinated approaches to working with employers. Many ETBs have clear employer engagement strategies and protocols and most are now investing in dedicated engagement resources to work across all FET settings and programmes and ensure an efficient and effective mechanism to work with local enterprises. The approach harnesses the already good contacts established, for example, at training centre or further education college level, and tries to ensure a holistic ETB response to meeting their needs. Regular engagement events and promotional campaigns targeting industry have also been key in ensuring awareness of the pipeline of potential employees which FET can offer.

The approach to employer engagement across ETBs is also often reflected in a sector specific focus which targets clusters of enterprises in the region. Courses are then developed to respond to the needs of these enterprises, such as for ICT/Fintech by Donegal ETB and Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB, for manufacturing and hospitality and tourism by Kildare Wicklow ETB, for biopharma by Cork ETB, for medical devices by GRETB and for financial and professional services by DDLETB and CDETB.



### **A Sectoral Approach to Employer Engagement**

Laois Offaly ETB identified skills clusters where local employers experience skills shortages including Engineering, Biopharma/MedTech, Health and the Built Environment. As well as a dedicated employer engagement resource, internal and external subject matter experts have been deployed to support the development of traineeships and other courses in partnership with employers in each of these clusters. The contracted training model is used to offer flexible solutions in each case. The National Construction Training Centre at Mount Lucas is also supporting the development of a new scaffolding apprenticeship, traineeship provision and other industry-focused courses.

The greater understanding of skills needs and more effective monitoring of employment outcomes, allied to the more coordinated and targeted approach to employer engagement, provides a platform for FET reform within the ETB plans. This includes the rebalancing of PLC provision away from broad based disciplines towards those with a more direct labour market focus, in line with the findings of the national evaluation of the programme. The evolution of the traineeship model, which will be further discussed later in this report, has managed to secure greater buy-in from employers, with immediate and sustained evidence of successful employment outcomes as a result. The flexibility offered by contracted training provision also allows ETBs to deliver more timely responses to skills needs identified by local employers. Apprenticeships, of course, have a direct link to employment and their expansion will also help to improve outcomes. Specific skills training courses will continue to build on their strong track record of finding jobs for participants. Local training initiatives also facilitate the development of bespoke local responses to address particular skills gaps faced by employers in the region (e.g. professional cookery to meet the needs of the local hospitality sector), although these are often also used as bridging programmes to facilitate progression into the other labour market focused initiatives noted above.

---

# Progression to Other Learning Opportunities



# Progression to Other Learning Opportunities

There is recognition of the need for clearer learner pathways into FET, within FET and from FET, with learning progression a key focus across ETBs. The progress review of the FET Strategy 2014-2019, published in May 2018, identified this as a major priority, and ongoing work on the role of guidance in the education and training system, and on transitions from FET to HE, is expected to add further impetus. From the agreements, plans are in place for **25% more learners to progress to other further or higher education courses** from provision primarily focused on this purpose than was the case in 2017. This would mean an **additional 4,500 learners a year** progressing in this way by 2020.

As with employment outcomes, the infrastructure now exists for accurate tracking and validation of learner progression with the development of the SOLAS/CSO data partnership, and again this should facilitate more effective ETB planning on how to facilitate learning pathways into, across and from FET (building on the current ETB self-declared system). It was evident during the strategic dialogue sessions that ETBs are committed to a more integrated approach to planning and coordination across the entire further education and training portfolio. This was clearly a challenge in initial years as newly merged entities had to design appropriate structures and bring together two different systems and cultures (FE and training), with training facilities transferring on a phased basis to ETBs.



## Internal Progression Routes within FET

Louth Meath ETB has defined a clear learner pathway map showing how its FET programmes can link together. Innovative strategies to facilitate learner progression include embedding modules in Youthreach provision which complement health-related PLC courses and a pilot initiative to give Youthreach learners a one week orientation programme in a PLC college. It is also intended to adopt a similar approach to linking such learners with pre-apprenticeship and traineeship programmes.

## Progression Outcomes from FET 2017 - 2020



This integrated approach is leading to clear strategies to facilitate progression from one FET programme to another, and learner guidance is playing an important role in ensuring potential pathways are clear from the outset. It is also encouraging how programmes are being increasingly constructed as bridging courses which can link directly to other FET programmes. The expansion of traineeship and apprenticeship provision, for example, has led to the development of Level 4 programmes designed to facilitate access into such programmes, with significant plans to expand such initiatives. Many ETBs are developing links between Youthreach provision and PLC, apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities, linking the core skills development at predominantly Levels 3 and 4 to learner pathways which lead to vocational skills development at Level 5 and 6 and potential employment. The Back to Education Initiative has played a similar role within many ETBs, providing Level 4 provision in areas like culinary skills which can facilitate progression into traineeship, apprenticeship and PLC opportunities.





### **Clear Progression Routes to Higher Education**

With no Higher Education Institute within its catchment area, progression to higher education is a key goal of many learners in Cavan Monaghan ETB. Such progression is a central part of the ETB's strategy, underpinned by two strong colleges of further education with links to Athlone IT, Letterkenny IT and DKIT, with up to 50% of those completing PLC courses progressing to HE. There are also awards where students complete the first year locally and then progress to second year in these institutions. In addition, a new partnership arrangement with St Angela's College Sligo will support learners to progress to teacher training.

It should be noted that this target is focused on the small base of programmes listed in Appendix A and does not include PLC provision due to its inclusion in the category as a programme primarily focused on the labour market and employment. It is however recognised that PLC plays a critical role in facilitating progression to higher education, and therefore all ETBs were asked to articulate current PLC progression rates in this regard and any ambition to grow these rates over 2018-2020. This confirmed rates of progression by certified PLC learners of between 20% to 50%, with all committing to at least maintain this rate and some ETBs targeting growth of up to one-fifth. There is already good practice in PLC progression, in the form of direct relationships between colleges of further education and higher education institutions, in memoranda of understanding and protocols between ETBs and these institutions, and via cluster based approaches where pathways are agreed and facilitated at regional level. These efforts will be supported by focused national attention on a more consistent and cohesive framework for progression from FET to HE, with SOLAS chairing the Transitions Reform FET-HE Sub-Group to consider how this could be implemented.

Part of this work will include a clearer recognition of where PLC provision is essentially providing a foundational education which is intended to facilitate progression directly to higher education. It is acknowledged by key stakeholders in FET and HE that such a grounding can improve retention and overall outcomes for these students when they progress to HE, and the formal recognition of these PLC courses as foundation, progression-focused opportunities should facilitate clearer pathways in this regard, while also linking to a major objective of the National Access Plan for Higher Education.

There is also a need to ensure that the potential to progress to higher education from non-PLC FET provision is recognised and fully exploited. This is an area which has often been overlooked due to the perception that the overriding purpose of some of these other FET courses is on direct access to employment. However in keeping with the need to establish clear learning pathways that can remain valid throughout a lifetime, there is a need for a more formal framework that allows an individual to avail of HE opportunities either directly on completion of a traineeship, Specific Skills Training programme, apprenticeship, for example, or at a later stage. The FET-HE sub-group referenced above is profiling FET provision to facilitate the development of a more visible and consistent approach. While the level of qualification (i.e. NFQ Level 5 or Level 6) is the key determinant of access to HE and is programme agnostic, the fact that other forms of provision are not as visible to higher education institutions with no practical pathways put in place to encourage progression as an option does necessitate further work in this space.



### **Developing Pathways within and from FET**

City of Dublin ETB is developing and implementing a protocol with HE providers through the Dublin Regional Skills Forum to facilitate progression, building on the strong links between its FE colleges and HEIs. Its Adult Education Service offers Level 4 pre-college courses which prepare learners for progression to Level 5 and 6 PLC courses, and offers summer classes in specific disciplines to help with learner preparation. There are also established progression routes between Youthreach and PLC programmes.



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# Transversal Skills Development for Active Inclusion



# Transversal Skills Development for Active Inclusion

Active inclusion is a Government, EU and UN priority and involves a commitment to enabling every person to fully participate in society. The FET system is striving to embed an ethos of active inclusion throughout all processes and practices that are applied in the design and delivery of its services. This will allow it to continue to play a vital role in achieving, not only increased equity of access to further education and training, but also more positive outcomes for marginalised individuals and communities

This role that the ETBs play in working with marginalised individuals, groups and communities to ensure their active inclusion in development and learning is critical to a well-functioning society and economy. While this type of activity may not have the immediate labour market benefit of PLC courses or traineeships, it is nonetheless critical to long-term societal stability and provides a clear pathway along which a learner can progress to higher level qualifications and potentially employment over time. Its importance as part of the ETB offering is also clear – in 2017, around 50% of overall FET beneficiaries were identified within transversal skills clusters like general learning, core ICT and personal development.



## Accredited Options across all Literacy Provision

With the exception of its family learning programmes, Donegal ETB's literacy service offers accredited options to all learners at NFQ levels 1-3, including courses leading to minor and major awards (e.g. NFQ L1 in Core Skills, NFQ L2 in Essential Skills, NFQ L3 in Employability Skills, and other General Learning and ICT awards). Skills Checker, a screening tool developed by Donegal ETB is used to ensure that learners across FET programmes are placed on the correct course and at the right level and is being rolled out across all FET provision in 2018 and 2019.

## Certification Outcomes from FET Transversal Skills Development 2017 - 2020



There has however been recognition of a need to build on the long track record of FET in supporting transversal skills development by ensuring that it is much more proactive in facilitating onward progression and in formalising and accrediting the learning received. This shift in approach was apparent across the agreements, and ETBs were ambitious in terms of what they believe can be achieved in certification outcomes from these types of intervention, with plans in place to **grow the rate by 26%** over the period 2017 to 2020. This equates to **over 3,100 additional learners receiving certification by 2020**.

The ETB efforts to certify a much larger proportion of provision at levels 1-3 are underpinned by policy commitments including the expansion of accreditation options within the national literacy and numeracy strategy and a move away from informal learning and use of voluntary tutors in delivery. One ETB has already adopted an approach of offering accreditation for all provision at Levels 1 to 3, and all ETBs are focusing on formalisation and accreditation of such provision over the course of their performance agreements.

One of the key drivers for success in formalising and improving outcomes from transversal skills development is more effective understanding of the competency levels of learners and there has been strong commitment across ETBs to develop more effective screening and assessment systems. To this

end, SOLAS and ETBI published a good practice toolkit and guidelines for the assessment of literacy and numeracy at Levels 1 to 3 in March 2018. All ETBs are committed to using this resource and the agreements demonstrate that more structured and consistent approaches to screening and formative assessment are being put in place to ensure alignment of support with learner capability and needs.

The recognition of transversal skills development also needs to be supported by the further development of standards for levels 1 to 3 provision. SOLAS is currently supporting a QQI-led review of standards for awards at Levels 1 to 3, which should provide a clearer framework for accreditation and support ETB development work.

A further dimension of transversal skills development is the considerable contribution made by ETBs in developing the English language skills of migrants. It is estimated that in 2017 over 15,000 learners were supported by ETB ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision. While ETBs offer priority ESOL provision to refugees and asylum seekers, there is also considerable demand from migrants who are both seeking employment or, in some cases, already in jobs. ETBs have used Skills for Work programmes in partnership with local employers to improve the language skills of existing employees, thus supporting their integration within the communities that they live and progression within their places of work. A review of ESOL provision commissioned by SOLAS and ETBI identified a number of recommendations around funding, assessment, curriculum development and accreditation which all ETBs are committed to progressing over the course of the agreements.

The prioritisation of support for all learners is an important aspect of ETB plans. Barriers to participation are recognised and there are many innovative ETB approaches to address them, from female engagement in apprenticeships, to outreach work with traveller groups and family literacy programmes. The community education model has been very successful in facilitating inclusion and development, often by working in partnership with local organisations. While national unemployment levels are low, many ETBs face particular challenges around 'unemployment blackspots' (79 areas around the state where jobless levels reach over 27%). There was also universal feedback on the increased prevalence of learners presenting with mental health issues and the need for more concentrated levels of support for the current learner cohort than was previously the case. Consistent and integrated learner support and guidance was another core theme within the agreements, and this will be critical to facilitate course completion and progression across all levels of FET and beyond. All ETBs are committed to integrating literacy and numeracy support across all FET settings, with new approaches targeting traineeship and apprenticeship.



### **Literacy & Numeracy Support across FET provision**

Waterford Wexford ETB is focused on integrating literacy and numeracy support across all FET provision. Initial assessment is critical and WWETB uses the BKSB assessment test, from which an individual learning plan is developed for each learner. Although some support is unaccredited, the majority of learners are on accredited programmes at Levels 1, 2 and 3, providing formal recognition of their development. The Adult Literacy Service is working with Waterford and Wexford Training Centres to address literacy and numeracy support needs of apprentices, with initial assessment undertaken in both locations.

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# Expanding Lifelong Learning and Workforce Upskilling



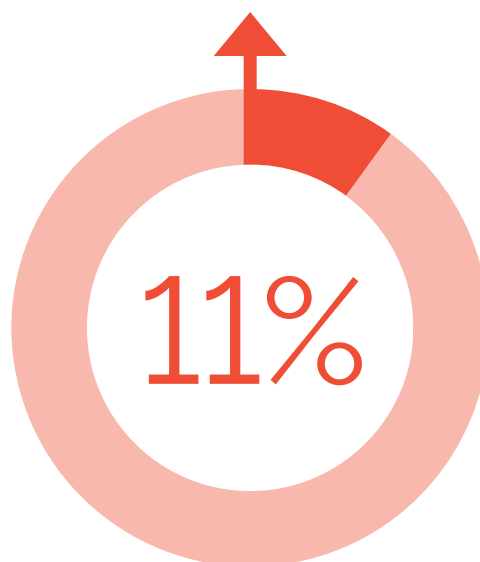
# Expanding Lifelong Learning and Workforce Upskilling

In contrast with other forms of educational engagement and attainment, levels of lifelong learning in Ireland lag behind those of other developed nations, and improving this position has been a key policy priority in recent years. The National Skills Strategy 2025 identified more people engaging in lifelong learning as one of its core objectives, seeking increased and easier opportunities for those in employment to engage in education and training and greater focus on workplace learning and recognition of prior learning in that context. This commitment was further formalised in the FET system with the recent launch of 'Skills to Advance', a policy framework designed to upskill the existing workforce, which is further discussed below.

The FET system is ideally placed to deliver lifelong learning opportunities, with a presence within most communities, a track record of delivering both part-time and full-time provision to people of all ages and strong connectivity with local employers and their employees. This is reflected in the plans set out by ETBs within the agreements, with an **11% increase** expected in adults starting a suite of lifelong learning relevant programmes over the period 2017 to 2020. This will equate to over **18,000 additional learners** across these programmes by 2020.

The agreements reflect an ongoing shift in focus from 'for employment' to 'in employment' across FET provision, continuing a trend in recent years as ETBs respond to lower levels of unemployment and

## Engagement in FET Lifelong Learning 2017 - 2020



recognise the need to support skills development for those in employment. As a result ETBs project growth in evening training, Skills for Work, community education and other programmes targeting adult learners.

As we noted earlier in this report, ETBs are actively developing employer engagement mechanisms to facilitate participation of employees in FET. The new 'Skills to Advance' framework should give further impetus to these efforts and has been keenly awaited by ETBs. This will effectively allow the existing workforce with formal skills levels below Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications to access FET free of charge. Significant new targets have been set within the framework which will complement the expansion of provision set out by the ETBs, with 17,500 additional places for employees targeted over the period 2018-2020. All ETBs commit to supporting implementation of Skills to Advance within the agreements, underpinned by proposals to build employer engagement capability. There is already plenty of existing good practice of ETBs working with employers to meet the upskilling needs of their employees. This includes using existing programmes like Skills for Work, developing bespoke training courses which can be delivered on-site and facilitating access to Level 5 and Level 6 provision within Colleges of Further Education and Training Centres.



### Developing Lifelong and Flexible Learning Offerings

Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB aims to support the development of entrepreneurial skills by including entrepreneurial modules across courses. It has begun to integrate new technology enhanced learning pedagogies into the classroom in Youthreach centres and Community Training Centres. It is already collaborating with existing employers to develop bespoke training programmes to meet their skills needs and promotes blended and flexible learning options to the existing workforce, with a significant portfolio of evening training provision.

There is also commitment to developing a more strategic approach to learner financed part-time evening provision, which has to date generally been driven by the initiative of individual colleges. There is a real opportunity to mainstream this provision into the core FET offering and support its alignment with the key skills needs of the region. This in turn would facilitate a more effective and coordinated approach to its promotion. From the agreements it would appear that there are over 10,000 learners already availing of such provision with significant potential to expand this cohort.

The embedding of more flexible delivery models for FET will be key to the effective development of lifelong learning in the future. Although there are some structural barriers that can constrain flexibility which are discussed later in this report, ETBs have proved remarkably agile in responding to the needs of particular cohorts. This has included provision that is: more accessible (e.g. in the workplace, in community facilities); at times to suit participants (e.g. evenings, weekends); via blended learning to reduce the requirement for physical attendance and associated travel; or tailored to suit particular backgrounds and settings (e.g. family initiatives, group working). These approaches will continue to ensure that FET lifelong learning opportunities are available and accessible to all throughout the regions which they serve.

Further expansion of the use of technology enhanced learning (TEL) will also be important in improving the accessibility of FET. There is already considerable investment in developing ETB staff capability in TEL, and examples were cited of online and blended learning initiatives across the ETBs. There have been initiatives to build the skills and confidence of ETB educators to use both Apple and Microsoft technology inside and outside the classroom, and to develop federated Moodle structures with the national eCollege resource. All ETBs summarised a clear TEL strategy within the agreements, and all note the need to invest in appropriate ICT infrastructure in order to facilitate development.



### **Meeting Employee Development Needs**

Employee upskilling and engagement in lifelong learning crosses many facets of the Cork ETB provision. While employees have to date largely engaged with CETB on a personal or self-directed level through night courses, community and adult education, on-line learning or other modes of delivery, employer-led initiatives are increasingly prevalent. For example, the specialist BioPharma training facility in Carrigaline provides both a pipeline of potential skilled labour and bespoke staff training programmes to serve the needs of the many major multi-national companies from this sector which are located in the county.





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# Focusing on Ireland's Critical Skills Needs

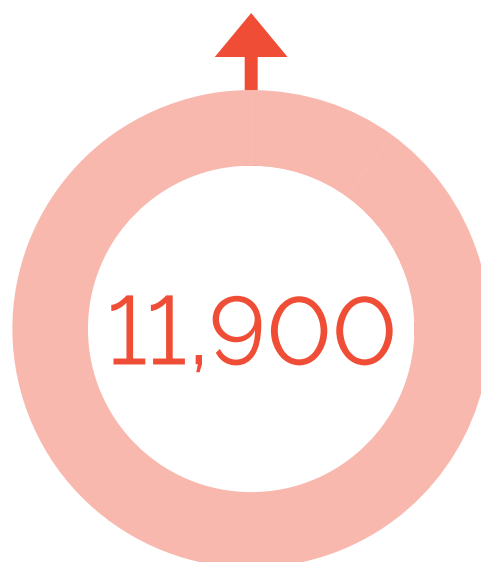


# Focusing on Ireland's Critical Skills Needs

While meeting the first four targets (related to jobs, progression, transversal skills, and lifelong learning) allowed ETBs to build incrementally on what they were already doing, the targeting of 10,000 additional FET qualifications per annum in a range of defined key skills areas (set out in Appendix A) was more challenging as it required a clear shift in ETB approach. Delivering on this target represents an almost 50% increase on current provision levels within these skills areas by 2020. This necessitates a rebalancing of existing provision from non-prioritised areas, an enhanced focus on ensuring that activity within these skills areas is fully accredited, and that expansion of FET provision is concentrated as far as possible within these areas. The ETBs have fully embraced this task and have plans in place to deliver an annual average increase of 11,900 key qualifications over the period 2018-2020.

The re-focusing of provision was a major theme throughout the strategic dialogue process, and clear plans are in place to shift away from broad based skills provision towards that focused on specific vocational skill needs. This is evident in the commitment to

## Additional FET Qualifications in Key Skills Areas Annually



### Rebalancing Provision to Meet Evolving Needs

Kilkenny Carlow ETB is reviewing all full-time provision to ascertain what programmes best align with a work-based learning approach and will introduce many new programmes over the coming years, including bridging and foundation programmes in 3 locations which provide a clear learner pathway into advanced labour market focused courses. New traineeships include Hospitality and Culinary Skills, ICT, Engineering, Transport & Distribution Logistics and a pilot traineeship in Coach and Bus Transport. Additional components will be added to existing awards in PLC, VTOS and BTEI, with new PLC programmes in Applied Science, Performing Arts, Production Arts, Professional Cookery and Advanced Make-Up Artistry. Other PLC programmes will be phased out, as part of a commitment to reduce or cease those programmes that no longer have learner demand or labour market relevance.

steer PLC provision towards a greater labour market focus in line with the national evaluation findings for the programme. The development of the traineeship model and growth in apprenticeships will also build supply of qualifications in key skills areas. Likewise the efforts to expand lifelong learning, and the prioritisation of workforce upskilling activity, should support the achievement of this target.

There are also substantial commitments set out by ETBs for new programme development to respond to the evolving skills needs of their regions. This is often aligned with the prioritisation of particular sectors, such as construction in Laois-Offaly, hospitality in Kildare-Wicklow, manufacturing in Longford-Westmeath or ICT/FinTech in Donegal. This has included innovative bespoke accredited training responses for local companies in areas like LEAN manufacturing, sales and supervisory management.

Other awarding bodies such as City & Guilds and ITEC are being used to support development of valuable offerings in areas like ICT and health and can offer an alternative validation route to QQI. City & Guilds Super Centres are now in place in Cavan Monaghan, Kilkenny Carlow, Limerick Clare, Mayo Sligo Leitrim, Tipperary and Waterford Wexford.





### **Quality Assurance underpinning Relevant Qualifications**

Through a re-engagement process with QQI, Kildare Wicklow ETB have developed a quality improvement plan (QIP) which includes enhancing QA governance structures and delivering new QA procedures in FET. New programme development will be critical for KWETB and the validation of programmes by QQI is an important aspect. KWETB plan to commence the journey to devolved responsibility by QQI for validation of its own programmes. KWETB will also continue to build relationships with other certifying bodies in the provision of relevant quality programmes.

ETBs enjoy a constructive relationship with QQI, fuelled by a new re-engagement process with the agency and the quality improvement plans that have resulted. Significant progress has recently been made in validating a range of ETB programmes, including new apprenticeships. There is a strong commitment across ETBs to develop and streamline quality assurance processes, with some also keen to seek further autonomy and ultimately delegated authority in this space, which could facilitate more agile and responsive offerings in the future.

There was also ETB commitment to stop running courses which were not strategically aligned to the evolving needs of the region, or where demand was declining, and to find flexible ways of dealing with the structural barriers which discouraged the discontinuation of provision. For example, some ETBs are deprioritising or consolidating provision in areas like general business, craft and childcare as they expand in other disciplines.

The agreements reveal an increased focus on accreditation of learning, together with plans to make available additional accredited courses and modules in areas such as entrepreneurship. The drive to upskill the existing workforce, with the momentum of Skills to Advance and the mainstreaming of currently self-financed provision, will also have an impact in supporting 10,000 additional learners with relevant qualifications from the specified skills clusters.



### **Responding to Emerging Key Skills Needs in the Region**

The manufacturing sector in the Midlands is a key employer in the region, spanning areas like Food, Engineering, Life Sciences, Cleantech, Electronic, and Paper, Print and Packaging. While there is still a need for operative skills for production, welding and fabrication, industry is increasingly looking to adopt next generation manufacturing technologies including CNC and automation. Longford Westmeath ETB was involved in the setting up of a Centre of Excellence for Advanced Manufacturing processes and technologies and more recently the formation of a Skillsnet in Robotics and Cobotics. Building on the success of its current Automation Course which focuses on upskilling and cross skilling of learners, Longford Westmeath ETB will design a new Level 6 Traineeship in Robotics.

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# Embracing New Models of Apprenticeship and Traineeship



# Embracing New Models of Apprenticeship and Traineeship

The National Action Plan for Expansion of Apprenticeships and Traineeships 2016-2020 set an ambitious target of 13,900 new traineeship registrations across the years 2018, 2019 and 2020 and this aim was embedded within the performance agreements. The buy-in to the evolving model of traineeships as a key means of meeting the skills needs of regional employers was striking during the strategic dialogue process. All ETB agreements contain clear and ambitious plans for the substantial expansion of traineeships, collectively seeking to more than double existing levels of provision, with **13,800 new registrations planned**. This will be achieved by a combination of new programme development in emerging skills areas and a shift in other skills specific programme provision to fit the traineeship model. There is scope for this contribution to increase further when plans for 2020 are firmed up and new development ideas emerge during the agreement period, which should allow the national registration target to be met.

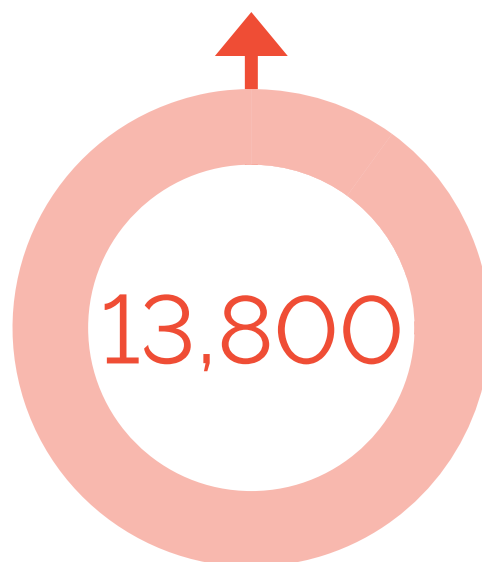
The success of the traineeship lies in its clear links to employment outcomes and simplicity as a model which appeals to providers, employers and learners alike. A duration of 6 to 20 months, with a minimum of 30% involving on-the-job training, and flexibility around the type of award, guarantees industry buy-in,



## Developing New Traineeships to meet Industry Needs

Limerick and Clare ETB will build on an already strong portfolio of work-based learning provision to develop new traineeships in engineering. This will include CNC, Sheet Metal and Machine Tool Operating to reflect the growth area of precision engineering in the region and Industrial Automation to reflect the local cluster of large production companies that require personnel competent in industrial automation techniques and maintenance skills. Administration will be another area of focus to meet the needs of local SMEs. LCETB will continue to consider the conversion of suitable SST courses to traineeships e.g. in hairdressing which could potentially be a pathway to the new Hairdressing Apprenticeship.

## New Traineeship Registrations 2018-2020



reasonably quick turnarounds in getting programmes up and running and a good chance of employment on conclusion. Traineeships are already being delivered in areas as diverse as hospitality, medical administration, outdoor activities, animation and healthcare. Plans are also in place around customer service and barista, machine tool operating, biopharma, equestrian, glazing and CAD.

The transitioning of Specific Skills Training provision to traineeships (e.g. in hairdressing, logistics and life sciences manufacturing) has been an important characteristic of the expansion made and planned. Plans are also in place to consider whether PLC and VTOS offerings can evolve to traineeships in areas like childcare and business administration. This is in keeping with a theme of trying to make traineeships available to potential learners in a variety of different local settings, rather than a previous reliance on provision via the training centre. Traineeship provision has been facilitated by the contracted training model, which allows ETBs to work around structural barriers limiting flexibility in the deployment of their own resources by using third party providers to meet emerging skills needs.

Key to the success of the traineeship model is the relevance of the qualifications, with all carrying national and internationally recognised awards which give the learner a passport for social and economic mobility. Industry buy-in is also a critical component, with the relevant sector required to collaborate in design of,



### Developing New

#### Apprenticeship Programmes

Galway Roscommon ETB is committed to building on its long track record in apprenticeships by rolling out a series of new post-2016 programmes. This includes serving as collaborating provider on the commis chef apprenticeship, working with MSLETB on delivery of the butchery apprenticeship and with LCETB on the hairdressing apprenticeship. It will also run the Accounting Technician (in partnership with ATI) and Network Engineer (in partnership with FIT) apprenticeships, with both scheduled for their first intake in late 2018.



### Embracing the New Traineeship Model

In 2017 Tipperary ETB worked with the Local Enterprise Office to commission analysis of education, training and business support needs of companies in the county. This indicated demand for particular key skills and the traineeship model offered an ideal mechanism to deliver on these needs. A new traineeship is being developed for the Certified Accountancy Pathway, and TETB will explore further traineeships in equine and agricultural activity. It has also converted specific skills training programmes to traineeships in medical administration, logistics and distribution.

recruitment to, and operation of, the traineeship. It is clear from the agreements that this has ensured that close relationships have developed between ETBs and industry which not only facilitate the smooth running of the existing traineeship but also kickstart discussions on new possibilities. The on-the-job training aspect of traineeships is of mutual benefit as it allows the host to train the learner on industry specific requirements and gives the learner an opportunity to learn the sector from the inside out.

The approach to apprenticeship is in the midst of significant reform, with pre-2016 programmes across construction, electrical, engineering and motor related occupations being updated to ensure their continued alignment to skills needs, while a whole suite of post-2016 programmes targeting new occupations are being rolled out. The agreements show that growth in registrations for pre 2016 programmes is expected to continue, playing a critical role in establishing the overall apprenticeship offering as a real and valid option for young people across the country. The establishment of new facilities in Tipperary and a programme of investment in infrastructure across the FET system, as well as clear collaborative partnership working across ETBs in the delivery of programmes, were notable developments in facilitating essential wider access to these apprenticeship opportunities, with state of the art equipment underpinning their attractiveness to potential learners.

The development and roll-out of post 2016 apprenticeships across ETBs has perhaps been slower than initially envisaged as they come to terms with validation challenges and timelines, coordination and quality assurance responsibilities, and employer buy-in to a model which is different from the pre 2016 approach. However there remains strong commitment and encouraging signs of progress. The three year look forward facilitated by the strategic performance agreement process reaffirmed the progress that is currently being made and the planned new apprenticeships over that period. Auctioneering and property services, commis chef, software developer associate, network engineer associate and butchery apprenticeships continue to be rolled out by ETBs in 2018, with plans well underway for 2019 in diverse areas like hairdressing, OEM engineering and wind turbine maintenance. There are also interesting proposals to develop pre-apprenticeship options for learners, including bridging programmes at Level 4 and courses developed in PLC settings, and the advancement of such plans will be critical in ensuring a pipeline of potential apprentices to meet industry needs over the next few years.

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# Facilitating Reform



# Facilitating Reform

The plans expressed by the ETBs during dialogue sessions and within performance agreements are compelling and cohesive and driven by a strong evidence base, track record of delivery and connectivity with learners, enterprises and communities. While this provides confidence around successful delivery of the agreements, ETBs were also very clear about the risks and challenges that need to be addressed to support the further development and reform of FET.

- **Appropriate Management Structures:** It was noted that as ETBs' planning, monitoring and oversight responsibilities expand as the FET sector evolves, appropriate management structures and resources need to be introduced to facilitate successful development. The fast-tracking of organisational design work to introduce appropriate middle-management resources in areas such as employer engagement, TEL, CPD and planning/data was cited as extremely important
- **Programme Validation and Quality Improvement:** While all ETBs have recently successfully progressed through a re-engagement process with QQI and summarised quality enhancement plans within agreements, the need for additional quality assurance expertise and resources was clear. Constraints around delivering agile and responsive provision given validation requirements and timelines were identified and there is increasing use of other awards (e.g. City and Guilds) to support course development.
- **Capital Investment:** Urgent and sustained capital funding is required to address health and safety requirements, to ensure fit for purpose facilities and to adapt to rapidly evolving skills needs within ETB regions. The commitments to FET within the National Development Plan will help to address this capital deficit but it must be carefully prioritised to maximise its impact.
- **New Apprenticeship and Traineeships:** While the new apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities were warmly welcomed, ETBs had some concern over the requirements expected of a coordinating provider in both the development and management of a new apprenticeship. The potential for establishing a shared or national coordinating provider infrastructure to support the further development of FET apprenticeships was discussed to minimise the risks of employer and apprentice confusion and additional overheads that may arise from individual ETB approaches.
- **Learner Recruitment:** With the marked improvement of the labour market and the level of available capacity within both the FET and HE sectors, there is evidence that course recruitment is challenging. This can have a number of effects including potential sub-optimal recruitment practices where learners are not guided to the most suitable course, levels of attrition in both the HE and FET sector, sub-optimal utilisation of capacity, ineffective competition between institutions and supply driven planning. Related issues include identifying and recruiting new learner cohorts such as those in employment, career guidance and the FET value proposition and promotion.
- **Policy Guidelines and Parameters:** ETBs, and formerly the VECs, worked to a set of FET programme guidelines which issued from the Department of Education and Skills. Since 2014, ETBs have worked to a set of Planning and Funding Parameters and Requirements which are set by SOLAS in accordance with section 21 (b) of the Further Education and Training Act 2013 and which are updated annually. These Planning and Funding Parameters and Requirements take precedence over the programme guidelines, a position supported by the Department of Education and Skills. The programme guidelines however are still in existence and ETBs perceive that these guidelines, many which impact on staff terms and conditions, are confusing, and can create bureaucracy and artificial barriers to progress.
- **Employer Engagement:** Varied approaches emerged in respect of the approach to employer engagement by ETBs. All recognise its vital importance and are seeking to advance this type of engagement but some seem to be at early stages of development in establishing formal structures and resources. The new Skills to Advance initiative will provide fresh impetus in this area, together with the continued evolution of work based learning programmes and the SOLAS-led development of an enterprise engagement framework process.
- **Harmonisation of Learner Supports:** There is some inconsistency in the availability of learner supports across FET provision, particularly in terms of literacy and numeracy provision and access to guidance. The availability of supports for all learners with disabilities is also inconsistent, with PLC students having access to the Fund for Students with Disabilities, while others in FET do not.
- **Differences in Staff Terms and Conditions:** ETBs identified the varied terms and conditions of different types of teachers, instructors and tutors across FET provision as a barrier to greater flexibility and faster response times in programme delivery. They can also impede free movement of staff between different colleges and centres within ETBs which will be essential to adapt to evolving regional needs.

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# Conclusion





# Conclusion

The strategic performance agreements which have now been put in place, and the ETB plans that underpin them, are intended to serve as 'living' strategies which are subject to continued reflection and development in response to the changing environment. The monitoring arrangements reflect this approach, with:

- progress against the targets recorded and reviewed as part of the annual planning process between SOLAS and ETBs, with any gaps between actual and target performance identified.
- action plans put in place to address these gaps or, where a clear and agreed rationale exists, targets amended as appropriate
- a mid-term review of the agreement scheduled for September 2019 including strategic dialogue with each ETB
- a rolling annual system of setting planned contributions to each of the national FET targets over the following 3 years to ensure that a multi-annual approach to development and change is maintained
- use of CSO held administrative datasets to independently evaluate progress against employment and progression targets

After a period of development and establishment, the strategic performance agreements demonstrate the real transformation which is taking place across the FET sector. The increased formalisation and accreditation of learning, a focus on transparent and more consistent progression routes, a rebalancing of provision towards key skills areas and workforce needs and the expansion of lifelong learning provision are facilitating a clearer learner pathway into, within and from FET. Further evidence of performance and impact will emerge from PLSS development, the data partnership between SOLAS and the CSO, programme evaluations and thematic research. This will reinforce and enhance the strategic performance agreement process, but at its first attempt it has already set out a clear direction for FET and made clear the sector's ability to deliver on critical targets around employment, progression, transversal skills, lifelong learning, meeting key skills needs and embracing new models of traineeship and apprenticeship.





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# Appendix A



# Appendix A

## Explaining the Targets

In agreeing the SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-19, the Department for Education and Skills specified a range of targets to be met by the further education and training sector over a three year period:

- **Target 1 – Employment Outcomes:** 10% more learners will secure employment from provision which primarily serves the labour market.
- **Target 2 – Progression:** 10% more learners will progress to other further or higher education courses from provision which is primarily focused on this purpose.
- **Target 3 – Transversal Skills Development:** 10% increase in the rate of certification on courses primarily focused on transversal (social mobility) skills development.
- **Target 4 – Lifelong Learning:** 10% increase of adults, who are seeking FET level provision, engaging in lifelong learning interventions (this target could be subject to upward revision following the benchmarking process.)
- **Target 5 – Relevant Qualifications:** From 2018, for three years, an average increase of 10,000 learners per annum securing relevant qualifications (e.g. special purpose awards) in sectors where employment growth / skills needs have been identified (e.g. Construction, ICT, Food and Beverages, Hospitality, Wholesale / Retail, Biopharma / Pharmachem, Health / Other Care, Digital Media, Sport and Fitness, Engineering, Enterprise Skills needs; domestic / international).
- **Target 6 – Apprenticeship and Traineeship Provision:** 30,500 new apprentice and trainee registrations in the period 2017 to 2019 which will represent an increase in registrations from circa 6,000 in 2016 to circa 12,400 in 2019.

Also in 2017, the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform (D-PER) conducted a spending review of further education and training. A key aspect of this review involved analysis of programmes delivered by the ETBs by categorizing each programme as one of the following:-

- Predominately Labour Market Focus FET Programmes
- Predominately Progression Focus FET Programmes
- Predominately Social Mobility (Individual Transversal skills) FET Programmes

The setting of these three year national sectoral targets and broad categorisation of targets provided a framework by which strategic performance agreements between SOLAS and ETBs could be developed, highlighting the planned contribution of each ETB to their realisation. However to ensure that this contribution could be clearly understood and linked to development of activity across FET programmes, some definitions and parameters were placed around each target, and these are discussed for each in turn below.

### Target 1: Employment Outcomes

The D-PER spending review identified programmes which had a predominantly labour market focus and to ensure consistency with this review, the measuring of employment outcomes under Target 1 was related only to programmes within this category:

<b>Full-Time</b>	Apprenticeship Training	Blended Training
	Local Training Initiatives	PLC
	Specific Skills Training	Traineeships Training
	VTOS	VSCCS PLC
<b>Part-time</b>	Evening Training	On-line Learning (eCollege)

The target itself is calculated by looking at the actual completers from these programmes in 2017 logged on PLSS or via FARR who were recording as achieving an employment outcome, and then asking each ETB to set out a plan for the numbers completing who it expects to achieve an employment outcome in 2018, 2019 and 2020, calculating the expected change from this 2017 baseline. Currently therefore the contribution is self-declared by the ETB, based on its understanding of a learner outcome and with the assumption that all employment outcomes have been logged comprehensively within the system. It is however acknowledged that work to integrate FARR and PLSS and to ensure comprehensive and quality learner data input into PLSS is still progressing, and it is likely that the baseline for each ETB in 2017 may be higher than initially estimated.

SOLAS and the ETBs intend to move to a more robust method of setting the baseline by using access to revenue and jobseekers databases held by the CSO to establish independently the employment outcomes of learners on these programmes in 2017. This should not change the ambition for the number of completers securing employment outcomes in 2018, 2019 and 2020 but could revise the baseline which will mean the overall ETB contribution to meeting the target (i.e. the percentage change in completers securing employment outcomes) over the three year period could be updated.

## Target 2: Progression

The D-PER spending review identified programmes which had a predominantly progression focus and to ensure consistency with this review, the measuring of progression outcomes under Target 2 was related only to programmes within this category.

<b>Full-Time</b>	Justice Workshops	Youthreach
	Bridging & Foundation Training	Community Training Centres
	Specialist Training Programmes	
<b>Part-time</b>	BTEI Groups	Skills for Work
	VSCCS BTEI	

The target itself is calculated by looking at the actual completers from these programmes in 2017 logged on PLSS or via FARR who were recorded as having progressed to other further and higher education courses, and then asking each ETB to set out a plan for the numbers completing who it expects to achieve such a progression outcome in 2018, 2019 and 2020, calculating the expected change from this 2017 baseline. As with Target 1, currently the contribution is self-declared by the ETB, based on its understanding of a learner outcome and with the assumption that all progression outcomes have been logged comprehensively within the system. It is however acknowledged that work to integrate FARR and PLSS and to ensure comprehensive and quality learner data input into PLSS is still progressing, and it is likely that the baseline for each ETB in 2017 may be higher than initially estimated.

As with target 1, the baseline may be revised once learner outcome data from access to CSO databases (which also includes higher education learner data) is available. This should not change the ambition for the number of completers securing progression outcomes in 2018, 2019 and 2020 but could mean the overall ETB contribution to meeting the target (i.e. the percentage change in completers securing progression outcomes) over the three year period could be updated.

It is also acknowledged that PLC provision has an important role in facilitating progression, particularly to higher education, yet the rigid categorisation approach to ensure consistency with the spending review within the targets, where a programme can only be either predominantly labour market focused **OR** predominantly progression focused, meant that it was only included in the former when setting proposed ETB contributions in the formal target template. However, each ETB has been asked to articulate the current level of progression from PLC provision, and state any ambition for change in the progression rate over the lifetime of the agreement. Given the focus on this area and wider national work of FET to HE transitions, it is expected that the current rate of progression to HE from PLC across all ETBS will be at least maintained between 2018 and 2020.

## Target 3: Transversal Skills Development

The D-PER spending review identified programmes which had a primary focus on transversal skills development and to ensure consistency with this review, the measuring increases in the rate of certification under Target 3 was related only to programmes within this category.

<b>Full-Time</b>	Irish Deaf Society provision	
<b>Part-time</b>	Adult Literacy	ESOL
	FET Co-operation Hours	ITABE
	Libraries Training	Refugee Resettlement
	Voluntary Literacy Tuition	NALA Write on (p/t on line)

The target itself is calculated by looking at the actual completers from these programmes in 2017 logged on PLSS or via FARR who were recorded as having achieved certification, and then asking each ETB to set out a plan for the numbers completing who it expects to achieve such a certification outcome in 2018, 2019 and 2020, calculating the expected change from this 2017 baseline. In contrast with Target 1 and 2, the data should for 2017 should be robust as it relates to certification rather than perceived outcomes.

#### Target 4: Lifelong Learning

The lifelong learning activity measured under Target 4 used the EU definition of lifelong learning which relates to people over 25 years. As comprehensive data for all FET learners aged over 25 is not available in 2017 (as the PLSS was rolled out during the year), the target focuses on activity (measured by numbers starting courses) within programmes that predominantly address the needs of learners over 25. This base can be reviewed at the end of 2018 when there is a full dataset available through PLSS, and where it should be possible to isolate the cohort of learners aged over 25 across all FET. In the meantime, the baseline and plans have been built on those starting or expected to start courses in the following programmes over the period 2018-2020.

Blended Training	Specific Skills Training
Traineeships Training	Traineeship Employed
VTOS	Evening Training
On-line Learning (eCollege) (p/t)	Bridging & Foundation Training
Specialist Training Programmes	BTEI Groups
Irish Deaf Society	NALA Write on (p/t on line)
Skills for Work	Adult Literacy
Voluntary Literacy	LTI
ITABE	Refugee Resettlement
Community Education	

Deriving the target in this way means that it does not fully compare to wider national lifelong learning targets, or to new targets for employee development and workforce upskilling, but it does nonetheless provide an insight and ambition to grow lifelong provision across FET in a way that can be robustly tracked over the course of the performance agreement.

It is also important to note that FARR and PLSS does not currently record the self-financed evening course provision which takes place in FET facilities, most commonly in PLC colleges. SOLAS has asked ETBs to estimate the extent of this cohort if possible within the agreements.

#### Target 5: Relevant Qualifications

This target attempts to increase the focus of FET provision on key skills areas with an ambition to grow qualifications in these areas by an average increase of 10,000 learners per annum. Relevant qualifications can include special purpose awards and are measured in the following skills clusters as part of this target.

Built Environment (Construction)	Engineering
Engineering (Electrical)	Engineering (IT)
Engineering (Mechanical)	Engineering (Transport)
Entrepreneurship/ Enterprise Skills	Food and Beverage - Hospitality
Health, Family other Social Services	Information Technology - ICT
Manufacturing	Media, Graphics Communications - Digital Media
Sales & Marketing - Wholesale/ Retail	Science and Technology - Biopharma/Pharmachem
Sport and Leisure - Sports and Fitness	Tourism - Hospitality
Web Development & Design	

The number of certificates awarded in 2017 sets the baseline for this target and ETBs are then asked to project the number of certificates within these skills clusters that they expect to award in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

#### Target 6: Apprenticeships and Traineeships

Drawn from the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeships and Traineeships 2016-2020, this sets a national target of 30,500 new apprentice and trainee registrations in the period 2018 to 2020. Pre 2016 apprenticeships are coordinated centrally by SOLAS while new apprenticeships are in a development stage and more difficult to plan in terms of specific course roll-out. In the performance agreements therefore, we have asked ETBs to focus on three year plans for expanding traineeship provision, asking them to project numbers starting traineeships in 2018, 2019 and 2020. The Action Plan defines a target over the period 2018-2020 of 13,900 new registrations.

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# Appendix B



## Appendix B

# Independent Expert Panel Members

<b>Ken Rutherford</b>	Head of College Region Outcome Agreements at Scottish Funding Council
<b>Yvonne Croskery</b>	Senior strategy, apprenticeship, youth training roles with the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland
<b>Richard Thorn</b>	Supported design of and participated in higher education strategic dialogue process and experience in linking education to regional development reviewed FET strategy
<b>Jennifer Van Aswegen</b>	Role with Disability Federation of Ireland and active inclusion expert
<b>Peter Baldwin</b>	Ex Assistant Secretary at Department of Education and Skills with responsibility for FET
<b>Justin Rami</b>	Academic expert in further education and training at DCU
<b>John Graystone</b>	Welsh FET expert, former head of Colleges Wales, now Chair of FET awarding body
<b>Angela Whiteside</b>	Quality improvement expert in Northern Ireland with wider experience working with QQI panels
<b>Fiona Croke</b>	EU education and training expert.
<b>Fiona Hartley</b>	Formerly SOLAS and VEC with in-depth knowledge and expertise in FET and wider education and training issues.
<b>Pat Harvey</b>	Supported development of strategic dialogue process in higher education & expert in linking education to regional development
<b>John Mulcahy</b>	Wider government perspective from experience with Failte Ireland and understanding of FET role in delivering on industry training needs







**SOLAS**

**An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna**

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