

FET Learner Outcomes

Early
Leavers



A Report by the
Data Analytics Unit in SOLAS
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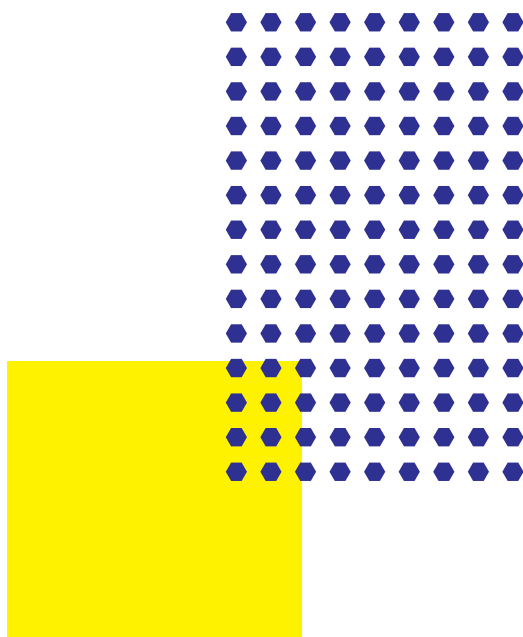
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Legal Framework underpinning the research

The CSO provides researchers with access to relevant data holdings, subject to a stringent confidentiality criterion, within the framework of the Statistics Act, 1993.

The examination of learner outcomes provided in Section 3 of this report, was produced by SOLAS under Section 11 of the Statistics Act 1993, using the Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD) data source which was created in compliance with all relevant data protection legislation.

The ELD data source brings together data from the Department of Education and a number of state agencies, including the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and SOLAS, with employment, benefits and earnings data from the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social Protection. Access to this data source is strictly limited to Officers of Statistics.

The ELD provides the basis for a series of projects that the CSO facilitates in strict compliance with the Statistics Act, which allows researchers to further analyse and examine learner outcomes.

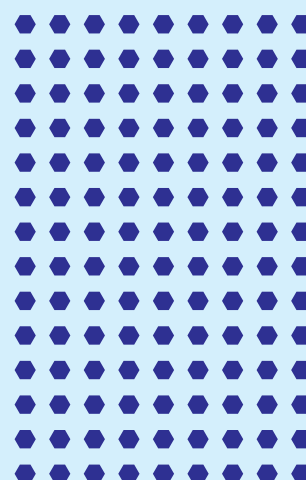
The CSO's role is limited to the development of the ELD data source and it is important to note that any analysis, conclusions, or recommendations made in this report are SOLAS's alone.

Full details relating to the framework for this research work can be accessed through the following links:

<https://www.cso.ie/en/aboutus/lgdpl/legislation/memorandumsofunderstanding/statisticalagreementbetweencsoandsolas/>

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1993/act/21/enacted/en/html>

<https://www.cso.ie/en/methods/education/educationallongitudinaldatabase/>

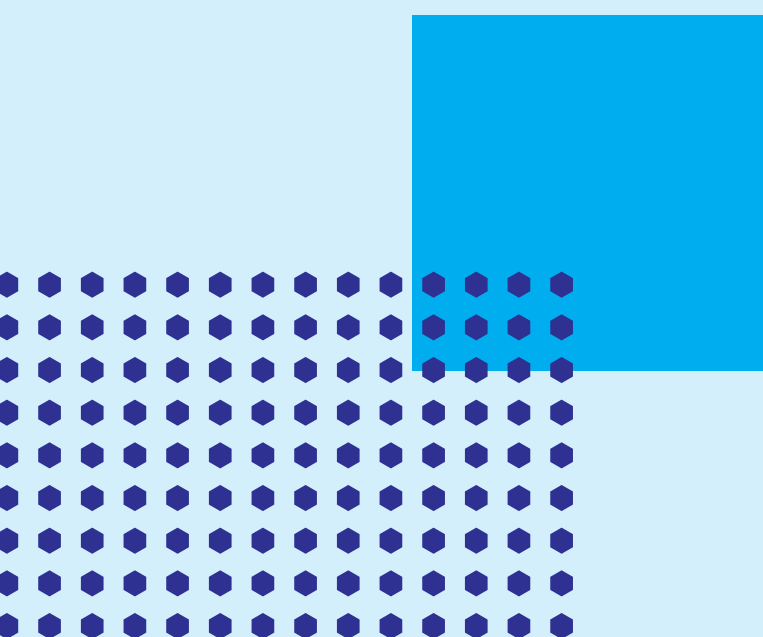


ADC	Administrative Data Centre, CSO
ATI	Accounting Technicians Ireland
BSc	Bachelor of Science Degree
CIBTAC	Confederation of International Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCU	Dublin City University
DSP	Department of Social Protection
ELD	Educational Longitudinal Database, CSO
FET	Further Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IoT	Institute of Technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITEC	Provides international qualifications in a range of different fields
NACE	European Industrial Activity Classification
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate Course
PLSS	Programme and Learner Support System database, SOLAS
PPSN	Personal Public Service number
P-POD	The Post Primary Online Database
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SOLAS	The Further Education and Training Authority

Executive Summary

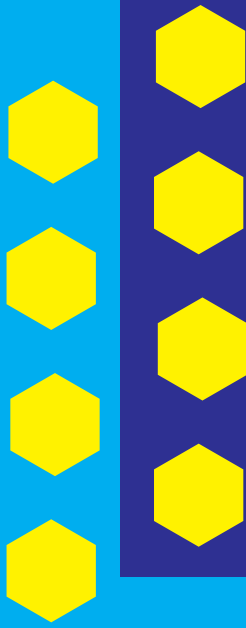
The reasons learners report leaving a course early are diverse and can encompass a range of factors, such as attaining a job, domestic reasons or dropping out because of health issues. Unfortunately, these options assume that learners leave education completely and often neglect the more long-term progression outcomes that some learners make into employment, or back into education. The focus on educational transitions within FET is particularly important because it is common for learners to undertake multiple courses at the same time, as well as courses that are of short duration. Unpacking the details surrounding learners who do transition into employment is also key, because some FET courses are more oriented towards labour market transitions, whereas others are more oriented towards transitions into education. In addition, it is interesting to begin to shed light on the type of employment early leavers attain and some of the factors that may influence this.

This report uses the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) database and the Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD) to examine early leaver learner outcomes for those learners who were enrolled and exited their courses in 2017. Educational transitions of early leavers within FET are explored, as are early leaver outcomes, including substantial employment, in the subsequent 2018 calendar year. Within these two areas of analyses a range of influencing factors are also considered including the ISCED field of study, programme category, award level, and salary level for those early leavers who obtained employment. Through this study, further explanations as to why learners may exit a programme early can be explored, as can a longer-term trajectory of early leavers' educational and labour market transitions.



Section 1

Introduction



1. Introduction

The further education and training sector provides a diverse group of learners with multiple alternatives to meet their educational, personal, and professional needs. The courses are as diverse as the needs and hence, may start at several different times during the year. They may last 4 weeks to 9 months, range from a Level 1 to Level 8, and can be accessible during daytime or in the evenings. This allows the learners to enrol in several courses in a given year. Despite the flexibility of the system, occasionally, the learner may need to leave early due to a variety of reasons: some state that they had an accident, that they are ill, they got offered a job or had to leave early due to domestic reasons, to name but a few.

Overall, almost 90% of learners complete their activity, so on average only 10% leave their study early. This paper examines the details of those learners' profiles and their outcomes. Early leavers are any learner who completed less than 25% of their course requirements. For the purposes of this analysis, first we focus on the descriptive aspects of their backgrounds. A detailed profile is included in the next section, followed by examining the pathways early leavers take within FET. In the last section, we provide detailed evidence of their employment outcomes.

1.1 Early Leavers: Learner Profiles

In 2018, there were 175, 054 unique learner enrolments.¹ Of these learners, 16, 631 left their course early. Like the larger population of FET learners, early leavers were extremely diverse and were represented by 127 different nationalities. The majority of early leavers were Irish (72.9%), followed by Polish (4.2%), British (2.3%), and Lithuanians (2%).

Nationality	Learners
Irish	8,864
Polish	510
British	285
Lithuanian	233
Romanian	204
Brazilian	153
Latvian	149
Syrian	131
Nigerian	95
Pakistani	81

Table 1: Top Ten Early Leaver Nationalities²

¹ This section on early leaver learner profiles is based on learner profiles from 2018 derived from the PLSS database. This is the first year of officially publishing reports from the PLSS database.

² The response rate for nationality among early leavers was 73.1%.

In 2018, over one third of early leavers were under 25 years of age and 58.4% were female. Slightly under half (44.6%) of early leavers reported they were unemployed prior to enrolling in a FET course, 38.3% reported they were inactive and 17.1% reported they were employed.

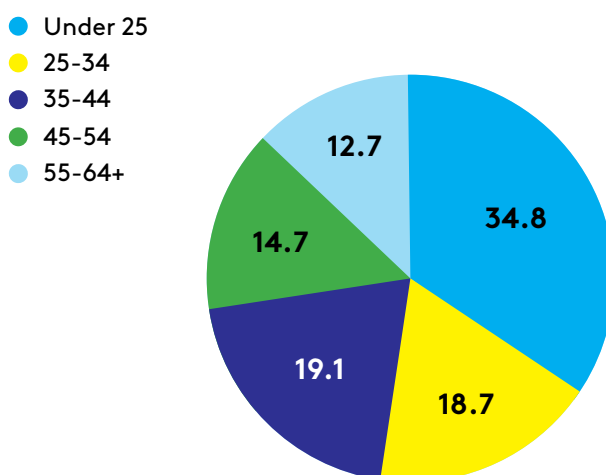


Figure 1: Early Leaver Start Age

A quarter of all early leavers were enrolled in Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programmes. This was followed by Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) Groups (14.5%), Adult Literacy (11.9%) and Community Education (9.3%).

Programme Category	Learners	Percent
Adult Literacy Groups	1,979	11.9
BTEI Groups	2,413	14.5
Blended Training	36	0.2
Bridging and Foundation Training	59	0.4
Community Education	1,544	9.3
Community Training Centres	360	2.2
ESOL	1,354	8.1
Evening Training	1,324	8.0
FET Cooperation Hours	53	0.3
ITABE	167	1.0
Justice Workshop	32	0.2
Local Training Initiatives	316	1.9
Other Funding	93	0.6
PLC	4,141	24.9
Refugee Resettlement	38	0.2
Skills for Work	199	1.2
Specialist Training Providers	298	1.8

Specific Skills Training	675	4.1
Traineeship Employed	10	0.1
Traineeship Training	379	2.3
VTOS Core	527	3.2
Voluntary Literacy Tuition	75	0.5
Youthreach	558	3.4
Total	16,631	100

Table 2: Early Leavers by Programme Category

Among early leavers, 43.4% indicated that they had achieved a lower secondary or primary education and below qualification, whereas 30.3% reported they had an upper secondary education.³

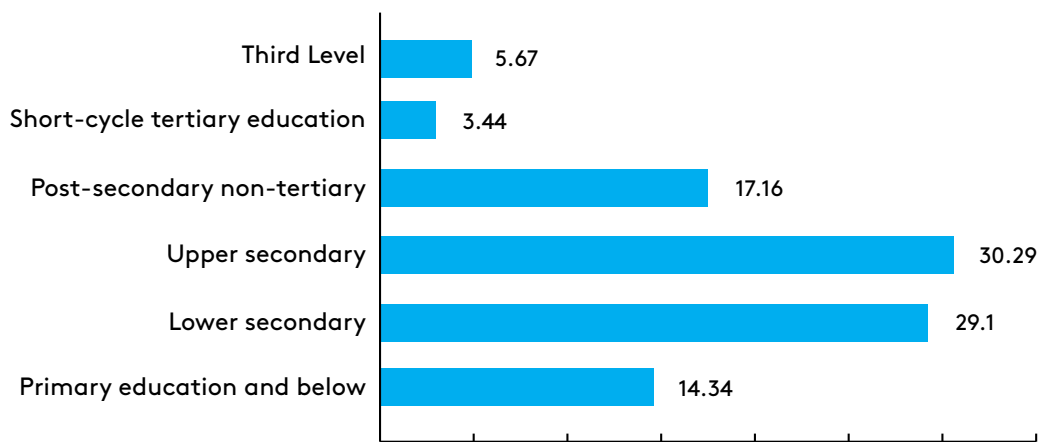


Figure 2: Highest Level of Formal Education

³ The response rate was 71.4% for the highest level of formal education achieved.

Almost half (46.6%) of all early leavers were enrolled in level 5 courses, followed by level 4 (17.5%) and level 3 (15.3%).

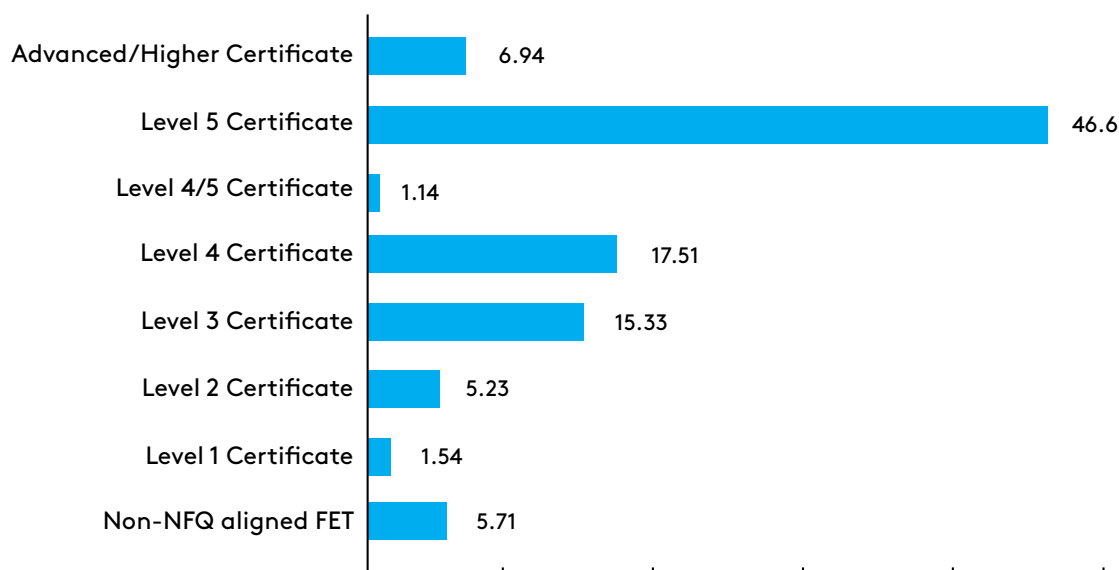


Figure 3: Early Leavers by Award Level⁴

For the ISCED field of learning, almost half of early leavers were enrolled in courses in the area of generic programmes and qualifications. This was followed by early leaver enrolments in the areas of business, administration and law, health and welfare, and services.

ISCED Field	Learner	Percent
Generic programmes and qualifications	7,776	46.8
Education	864	5.2
Arts and humanities	787	4.7
Social sciences, journalism and information	64	0.4
Business, administration and law	1,922	11.6
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	81	0.5
Information and communication technology	976	5.9
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	647	3.9
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	328	2.0
Health and welfare	1,652	9.9
Services	1,534	9.2

Table 3: Field of Study (Broad ISCED)

⁴ This excludes early leavers who were enrolled in courses that do not lead to an award through a recognised awarding body.

In this section, we presented the basic profile of the early leavers based on age, gender, nationality, highest education level attained, award level and principle economic status prior to course start. These learner attributes can be compared to the overall national averages:

- The early leavers tend to be as diverse as the average national profile of all learners in terms of nationality.
- The level of the highest education attained is lower among early leavers, with 43.4% indicated that they achieved less than upper secondary education compared to the national FET learner average of 37.7%.
- The distribution of course award levels among early leavers were similar to the national learner enrolment profile, with the exception of advanced/higher certificate courses, with only approximately half (6.9%) as many learner enrolments.
- While the gender profile is similar to the national FET profile, the age distribution of the early leavers is younger than the overall age distribution of FET learners,
- In terms of their economic status, a significantly higher proportion (44.6%) of the early leavers said they were unemployed compared to 35.9% among all learners.

When we compare early leavers to full and partial completers who were enrolled in QQI accredited courses during 2018,⁵ we find that:

- The probability of the learner becoming an early leaver decreases with age.
- Men are more likely than women to leave their education or training early.
- The gender of the learner is a significant factor even when we consider other learner attributes such as ethnicity, economic status, and whether or not the learner belongs to other disadvantaged groups (ex-offender, homeless, substance misuser).
- Being unemployed and economically inactive increases the odds of being an early leaver (when age, gender and the level of the course is fixed).
- The odds of a learner not completing the course is higher if the course level is 3, 4 and 5 versus level 1.
- The odds of a learner not completing the course is higher if a learner is homeless, a single adult in a household, an ex-offender or a substance misuser.
- The ethnic background of the learner does not have any impact on the learner's course outcome.

⁵ We estimate the probability of leaving early based on a number of factors using a logit model. The details of this model can be provided upon request.

Section 2

Early Leaver
transitions
within FET



2. Early Leaver transitions within FET

As mentioned earlier, learners may participate in more than one course in a given year. For those learners who undertake multiple courses, it is likely that they may become an early leaver at any stage in their FET journey. In order to fully understand why learners may be leaving a course before completion, we ask our learners the reasons behind their exit. This information has been recorded in the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) since 2017 for each learner and each activity. While this provides some understanding behind the reasons for their exit, this information is often unknown.

In this section, we focus on the pathways early leavers follow within FET. The motivation behind this is to capture other factors that may have an impact on why a learner leaves before completion for (e.g. the course level, the course area, etc.), as well as explore whether an early leaver might have already completed a course or might do so afterwards. All of this information is new for the sector and might shed some light into the way learners engage with FET. Therefore, we focus on labour market oriented or progression focused FET provision only, as we believe the reasons a learner may leave a course early might intersect, with other factors in FET provision that focuses on transversal skills provision. This group includes enrolments by unique learners in 2017 and early leavers in the following programmes:

	Number of unique learners enrolled	Number of early leavers
BTEI Groups	17,584	2,169
Blended Training	434	63
Bridging and Foundation Training	614	115
Community Training Centres	2,103	459
Evening Training	12,689	1,906
Justice Workshop	118	39
Local Training Initiatives	2,364	562
PLC	34,455	4,212
Skills for Work	2,172	182
Specialist Training Providers	2,613	465
Specific Skills Training	10,164	1,403
Traineeship Training	2,238	542
VTOS Core	3,345	525
Youthreach	2,637	411
Total	93,530	13,053

Table 4: Programme Category by total Enrolments and Early Leavers

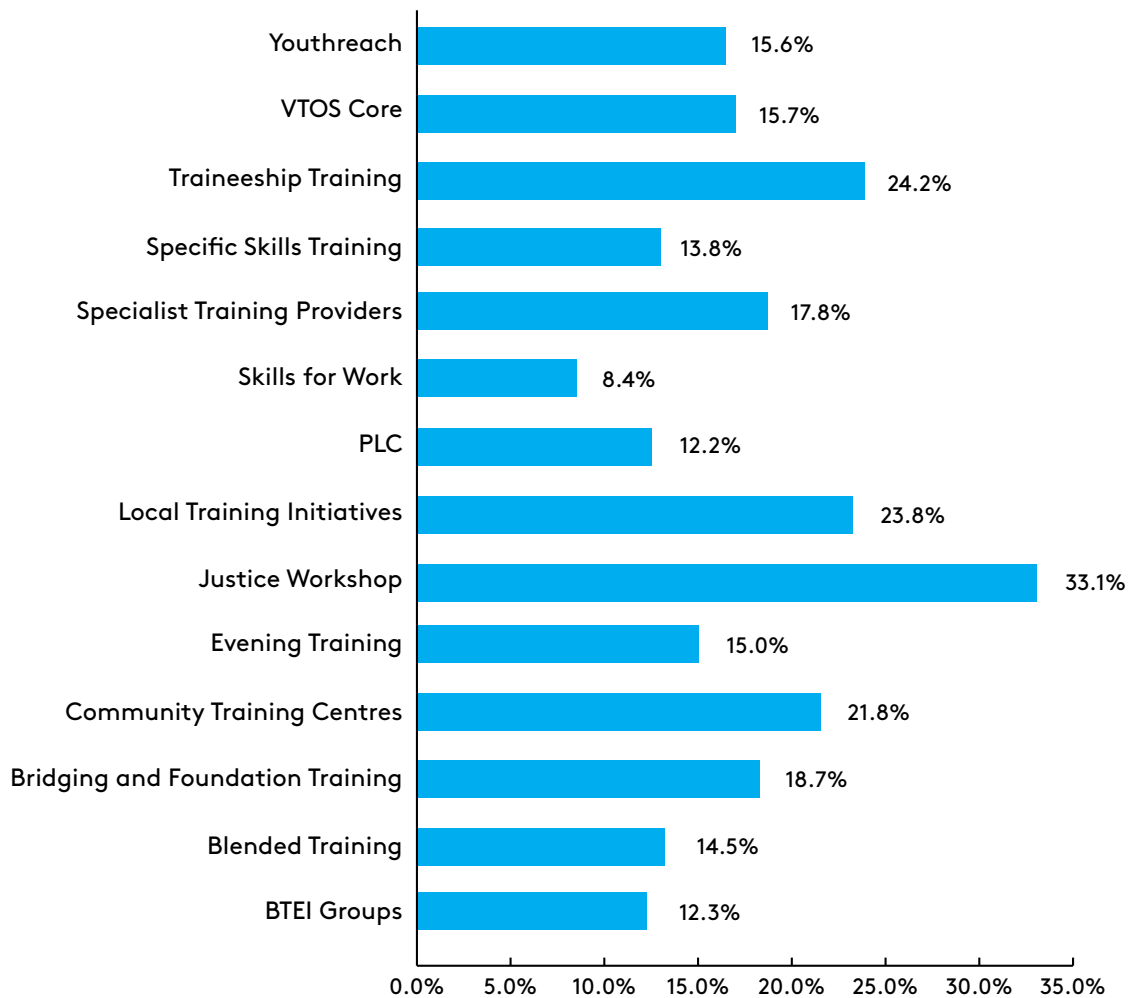


Figure 4: Percent of Early Leavers within Programme Category, 2017

When we examine the share of early leavers *within* each programme category, we can see that the early leaver rates were the lowest among the Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) and Back to Education Initiatives (BTEI) cohort (around 12%), and highest within the Justice Workshop group (33%), followed by Traineeship Training (24%), Local Training Initiatives (24%) and Community Training Centres (22%).

Another perspective is to look at the number of early leavers and see which programmes account for the majority. Below, we can see that 32% of early leavers were enrolled in a PLC course, followed by 17% in BTEI and 15% in Evening Training.

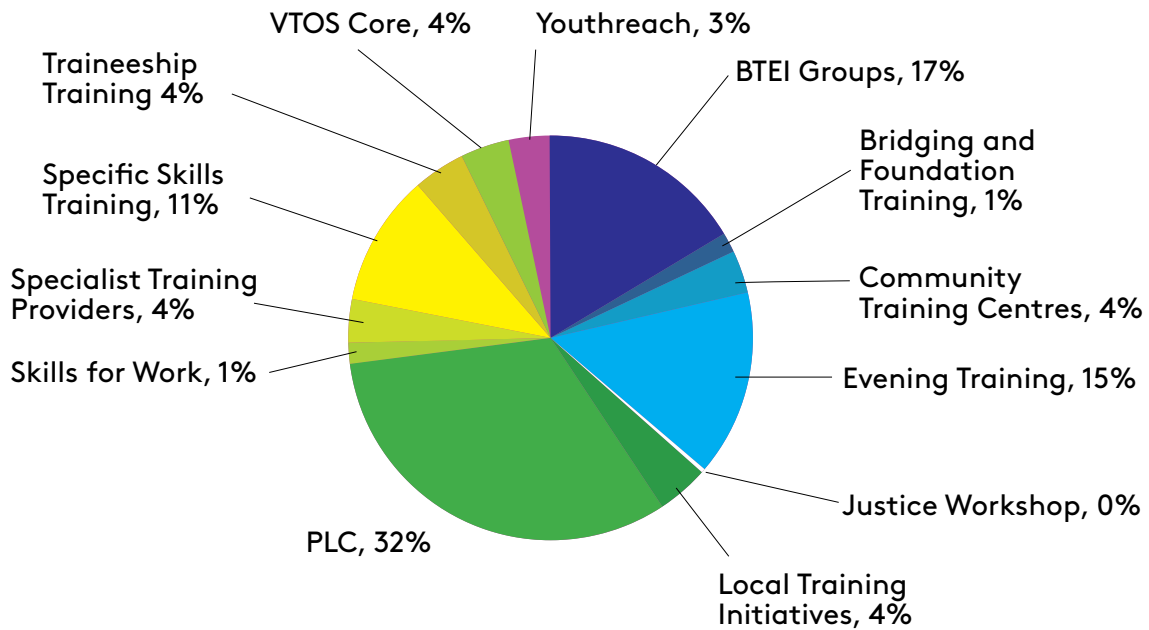


Figure 5: Percent of Early Leavers by Programme Category

Some of the reasons for being an early leaver are captured in PLSS. The chart below shows the most commonly mentioned reasons. The learners often leave a course because of unfavourable domestic circumstances (14%), a job offer (13%), or health issues (10%).

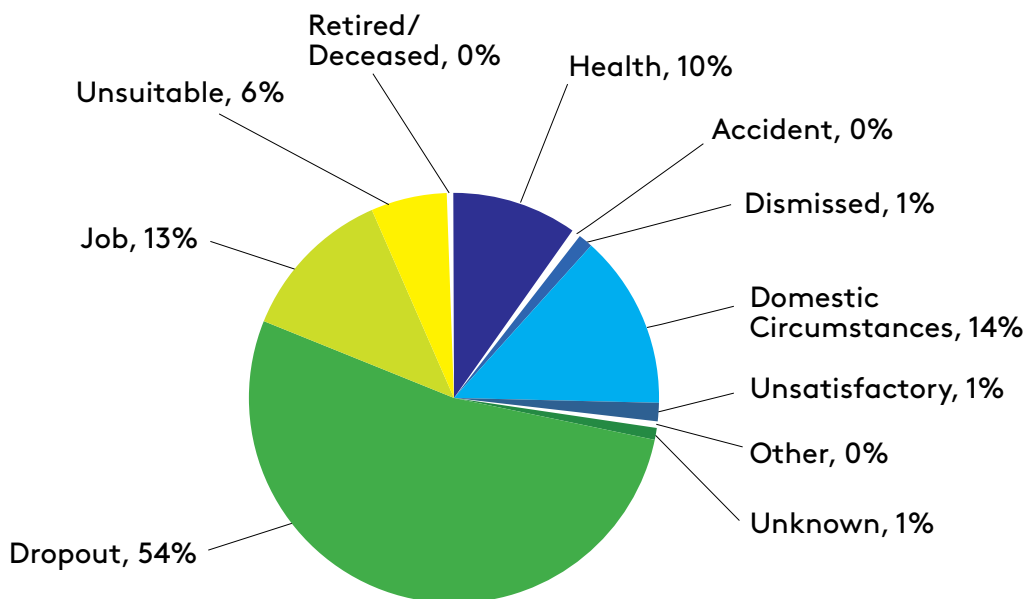


Figure 6: Reasons for a Learner Exiting a Programme Early

Overall, the reasons for a learner exiting a programme early all assume that the learner is ending their education and not returning, but this is not always the case. A more accurate perspective is to look at the progression pathways of all learners. Below is a table with the number of learners who were enrolled in a FET course during 2017. Some of the learners went on to enrol and complete several courses. According to PLSS records, there were over 90,000 unique learners enrolled in the all programme categories. The majority of these learners (77,000) completed their 1st course while 12,251 left their course early. The table below shows the number of early leavers and the percentage share of those who returned to FET in the following 12 months. The largest number of early leavers were those learners who were enrolled in their 1st FET course. Of this cohort, 9.8% went on to enrol in another course, with 790 out of 1,195 completing their second course. Even though decreasingly smaller numbers of learners might leave a second, third or fourth course, the return rates to the FET sector are significantly higher (e.g., 16% of those early leavers enrolled in their 3rd FET course and 14.3% of those early leaver enrolled in their 4th course).

	Early Leavers	Early Leaver Progression	Early Leaver Return Rate
1st FET course	12,251	1195	9.8%
2nd FET course	2,043	186	9.1%
3rd FET course	285	46	16%
4th FET course	70	10	14.3%

Table 5: Early Leaver Progression Outcomes

To further understand the types of courses early leavers are transitioning into, here we examine the outcomes of the 790 early leavers who left their 1st FET course, but completed their 2nd FET course in the same year. Some of these learners switched to another level and/or field of study. Below is a flow chart diagram that shows the early leaver's 1st FET course field of study (based on the broad ISCED) on the left, and the early leaver's 2nd FET course on the right. The thickness of the line in the flow chart reflects the total number of early leavers according to field of study that progressed from their 1st FET course to their 2nd FET course. For those early leavers that returned to complete a 2nd FET course, the majority enrolled in a course in the same field of study, though there were a few exceptions. For example, out of the 135 learners who left their 1st FET course early in the field of business, administration and law, 51 completed another course in the same field of study, 27 completed a course in generic programmes and qualifications, 16 in ICT, 11 in health, 12 in services, and 8 in arts and humanities.

Progression of Early Leavers | Total = 790

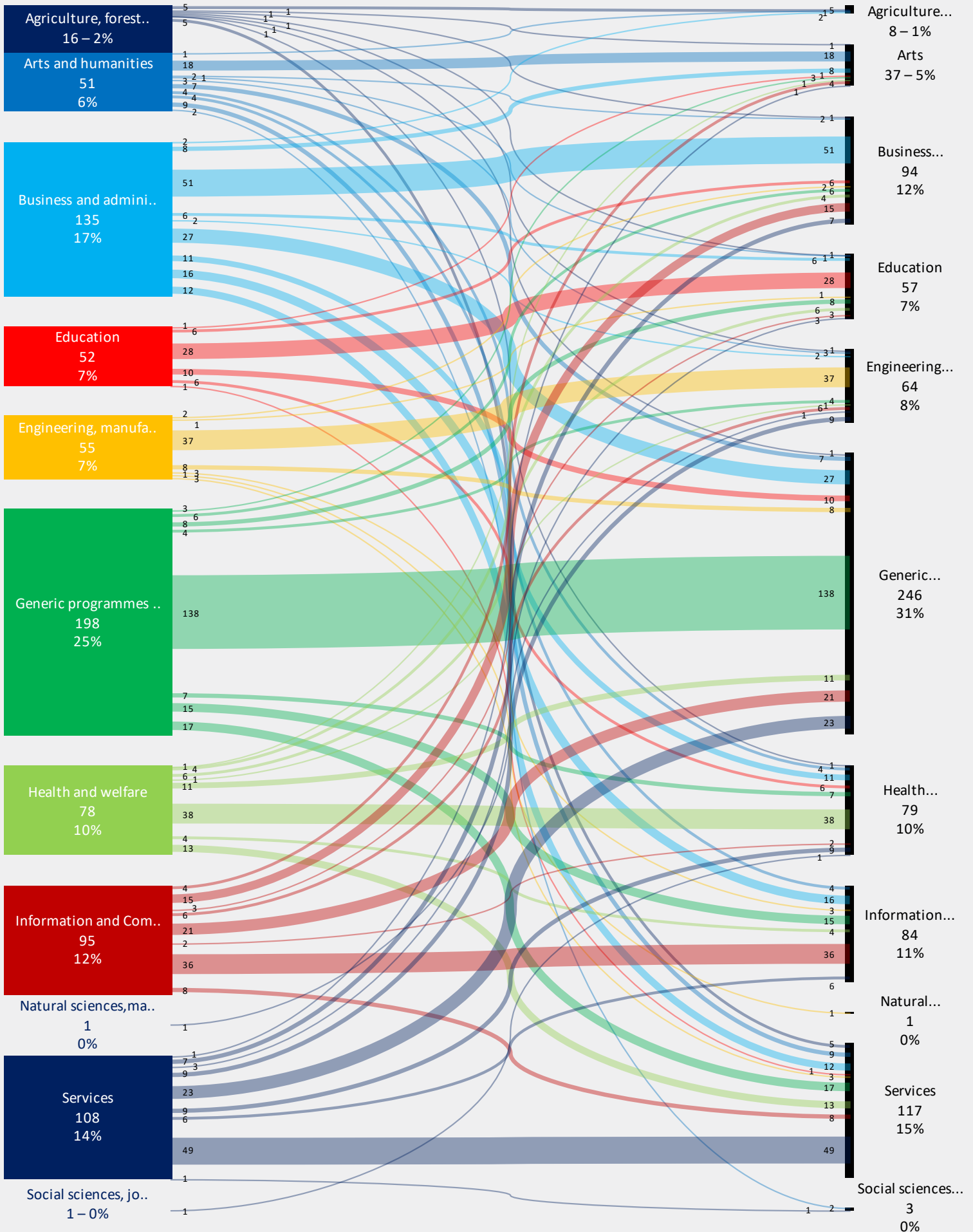


Figure 7: Early Leaver progression within FET by Field of Study (Broad ISCED)

Total = 700

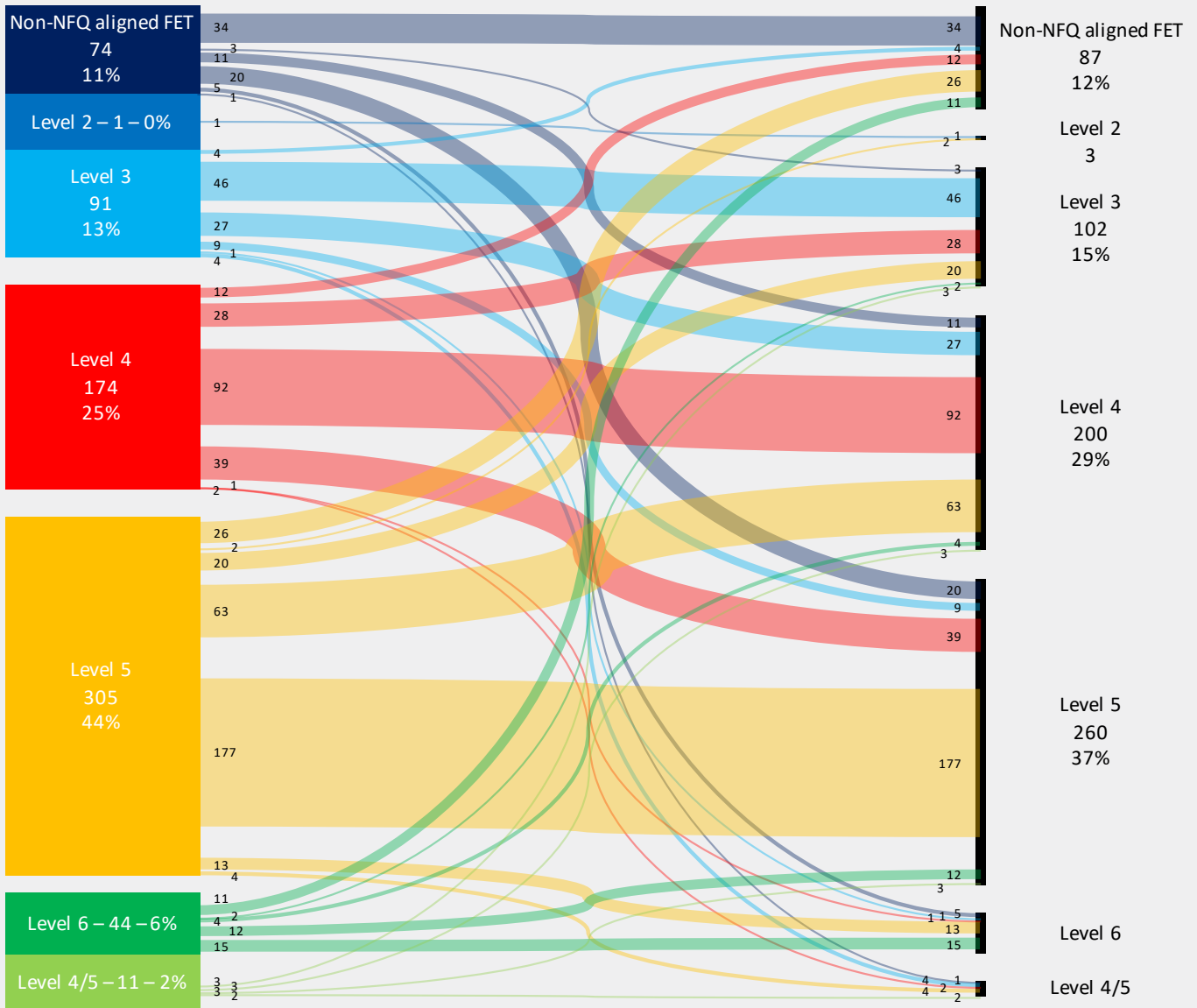
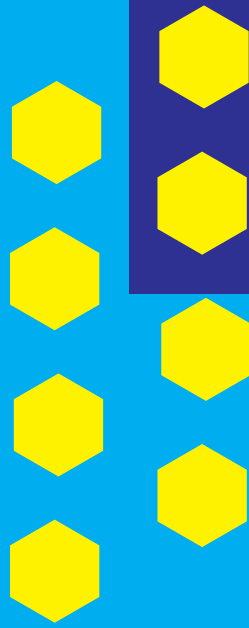


Figure 8: Early Leaver Progression within FET by Award Level

This flow chart, similar to the previous one, shows the change from the level of the 1st course to the level of the 2nd course by early leavers who left their 1st FET course but completed their 2nd FET course. The majority of early leavers were enrolled in a course at Level 5 initially. 177 out of 305 early leavers later completed another course at the same level; 63 at Level 4, 13 at Level 6, 20 at Level 3 and 26 in non-NFQ aligned FET. In summary, these two flow charts have illustrated that learners may take many pathways: they may return and complete another course at the same or different level or choose another area of field of study.

Section 3

Early Leaver
Outcomes



3. Early Leaver Outcomes

In this section, we consider the outcomes of those learners who exited their course early during 2017. To examine the outcomes of these learners, we use the Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD), developed by the CSO. This framework is produced by linking datasets from the education sector, including PLSS, to other public sector datasets e.g., Revenue, DSP, QQI and HEA describe learner outcomes over a range of years. All linkage is carried out by using a 'protected identifier key' (PIK) assigned on each contributing data source. The PIK is then used to link the pseudonymised data sources together to create the PIR. The PIK protects a person's identity but also enables linking across data sources over time. The PIK enables high quality deterministic matching thus significantly reducing/eliminating linkage error. We examine the learner outcomes from PLSS in the subsequent calendar year 2018.

The analysis considers 14,011 unique learners who left their course early in 2017. It was not possible to match 112 of the early leavers due to invalid PPSNs in the PLSS dataset. Table 6 and 7 show the programme and NFQ level breakdowns for the early leaver cohort respectively.

Programme Category	Frequency	Percent
BTEI Groups	2,532	18.1
Blended Training	66	0.5
Bridging and Foundation Training	115	0.8
Community Training Centres	470	3.4
Evening Training	2,071	14.8
Justice Workshop	40	0.3
Local Training Initiatives	583	4.2
PLC	4,454	31.8
Skills for Work	188	1.3
Specialist Training Providers	494	3.5
Specific Skills Training	1,465	10.5
Traineeship Training	535	3.8
VTOS Core	550	3.9
Youthreach	448	3.2
Total	14,011	100.0

Table 6: Programme Category of Early Leavers (2017)

NFQ Level	Frequency	Percent
Non-NFQ aligned FET	1,852	13.2
2	44	0.3
3	1,306	9.3
4	3,020	21.6
5	6,701	47.8
6	1,088	7.8
Total	14,011	100

Table 7: Award Level by Early Leavers (2017)

Using the ELD, we examine the 2018 outcomes of 2017 early leavers. They are divided into the following five mutually exclusive outcomes.

- **Employment Only** - Worked at least 12 weeks in the year, earning at least 100 Euro a week on average from their main employer, or have significant self-employment (turnover in excess of 1000 Euro in a calendar year). Must have no record of enrolment in education (as defined below) for the year in question.
- **Employment and Higher Education** - Must meet above conditions of employment but also have a record of enrolment in any available educational database (PPOD, HEA, QQI, Springboard, and PLSS).
- **Education Only** - Must have a record of enrolment in any educational database (PPOD, HEA, QQI, Springboard, and PLSS) for the year in question but not meet the definition of employment.
- **Neither Employment nor Higher Education** - Does not meet the definition of employment nor do they have an enrolment record in education, but they do have some record of unemployment or other DSP benefits in the ELD for the year in question.
- **Not Captured** - No record of employment, benefits, or enrolment in education in the ELD for the year in question.

Table 7 shows the proportion of early leavers in each outcome for the calendar year 2018. Nearly half (47%) are found in substantial employment, whereas almost 1/6th of the learners are not captured by the ELD, suggesting these early leavers may have gone overseas to work or study.

Employment Only	33.0%
Education and Employment	14.3%
Education Only	20.4%
Neither Education nor Employment	15.9%
Not Captured	16.4%

Table 8: Early Leaver Outcomes

NFQ Level	Employment Only	Education and Employment	Education Only	Neither Education nor Employment	Not Captured
Non-NFQ aligned FET	37.8%	12.4%	14.4%	19.1%	16.4%
2	13.6%	9.1%	45.5%	18.2%	13.6%
3	16.5%	9.7%	31.9%	15.7%	26.3%
4	24.2%	12.1%	27.1%	18.2%	18.4%
5	36.9%	16.2%	18.5%	14.6%	13.8%
6	46.9%	16.2%	11.6%	12.3%	13.0%

Table 9: Early Leaver Outcomes by Award Level

Table 9 shows the mutually exclusive outcome proportions, based on the NFQ Level of the FET course. Two relationships are apparent. The proportions in employment in the subsequent calendar year increase with the increasing NFQ Level and the numbers in education decrease with increasing NFQ Level (See Figure 9).

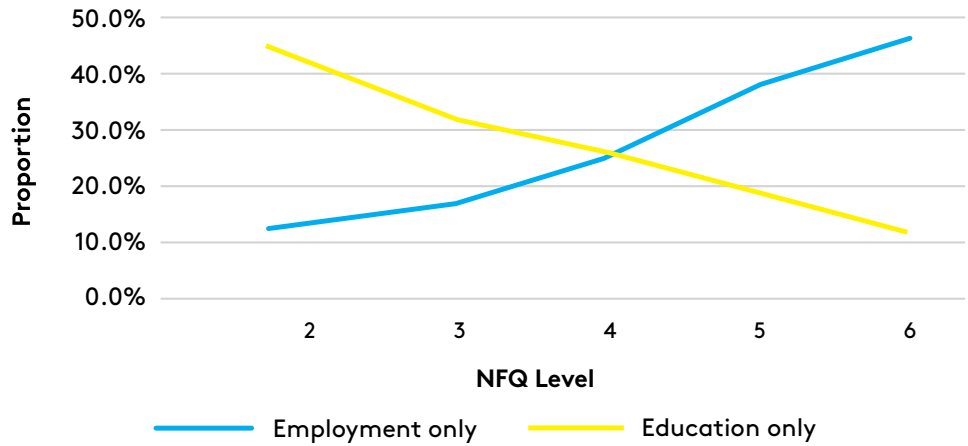


Figure 9: Early Leaver Employment and Educational Outcomes

3.1 Early Leaver Substantial Unemployment Outcomes

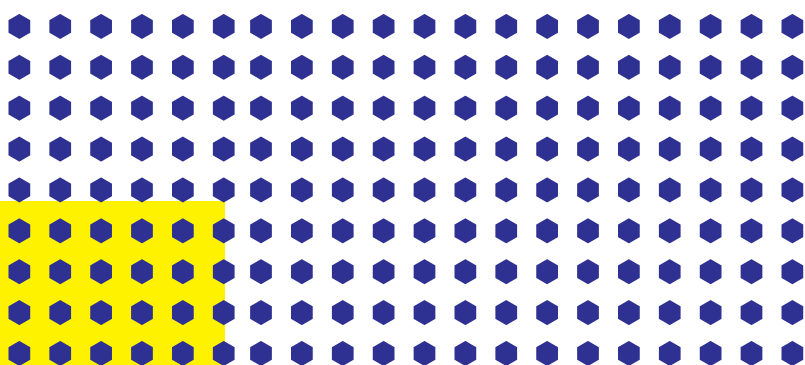
In this section, we move away from the mutually exclusive outcomes described in section 3, to focus on those early leavers who find themselves in substantial unemployment. The study of this cohort is extremely important, allowing SOLAS to gain a deeper understanding of the types of learners ending up in substantial unemployment.

In 2018, 5479 (39%) of the 14,011 early leavers had an instance of a DSP claim. Nearly half (2683) claimed either Jobseekers Allowance or Jobseekers Benefit for a total period of 12 weeks or more.⁶

Table 10 shows the percentage of early leavers in substantial unemployment for each NFQ level. The highest proportion are those from non-NFQ aligned FET programmes (26%) followed by those leaving level 4 programmes (22%). The percentage breakdown for each programme category is shown in Table 11, Traineeship Training and SST (Specific Skills Training) have the highest proportions of early leavers in unemployment (31%).⁷ These programmes are both labour market focused and aimed at learners hoping to enter/re-enter the labour market.

NFQ Level	Early Leavers	Unemployed	Percent
Non-NFQ aligned FET	1,852	485	26.2
2	44	8	18.2
3	1,266	180	14.2
4	3,020	655	21.7
5	6,701	1,170	17.5
6	1,088	185	17.0
Total	13,971	2,683	19.2

Table 10: Unemployed Early Leavers by NFQ Level



⁶ These early leavers are defined as substantially unemployed.

⁷ Justice Workshops are excluded due to the sensitivity of these programmes.

Programme Category	Early Leavers	Unemployed	Percent
BTEI Groups	2,532	466	18.4
Blended Training	66	15	22.7
Bridging and Foundation Training	115	26	22.6
Community Training Centres	470	47	10.0
Evening Training	2,071	591	28.5
Local Training Initiatives	583	118	20.2
PLC	4,454	597	13.4
Skills for Work	188	8	4.3
Specialist Training Providers	494	44	8.9
Specific Skills Training	1,465	457	31.2
Traineeship Training	535	166	31.0
VTOS Core	550	117	21.3
Youthreach	448	31	6.9
Total	13,971	2,683	19.2

Table 11: Unemployed Early Leavers by Programme Category

3.2 Early Leaver Substantial Employment Outcomes

In this section, we focus on those early leavers who secured substantial employment in the subsequent calendar year (2018). As previously discussed, nearly half (47%, 6618) of the early leavers secured substantial employment (see Table 8). Table 12 highlights the difference in employment rates for early leavers from each programme category.⁸ The lowest rate (19%) is for those learners leaving Youthreach early. These programmes provide a second-chance for education and training to young people who left school early. The highest rate is (77%) for those leaving Skills for Work early. This programme is aimed at upskilling those already in employment.

Programme Category	Early Leavers	Employed	Percent
BTEI Groups	2,532	1,102	43.5
Blended Training	66	42	63.6
Bridging and Foundation Training	115	39	33.9
Community Training Centres	470	116	24.7
Evening Training	2,071	1,050	50.7
Local Training Initiatives	583	183	31.4
PLC	4,454	2,644	59.4
Skills for Work	188	145	77.1
Specialist Training Providers	494	105	21.3

⁸ Justice Workshops are excluded due to the sensitivity of these programmes.

Specific Skills Training	1,465	664	45.3
Traineeship Training	535	261	48.8
VTOS Core	550	183	33.3
Youthreach	448	84	18.8
Total	13,971	6,618	47.4

Table 12: Employed Early Leavers by Programme Category

Table 13 highlights the relationship between employment and NFQ levels among early leavers. Overall, a positive correlation exists between the two factors, with employment rates increasing as NFQ levels increase.

NFQ Level	Early Leavers	Employed	Percent
Non-NFQ aligned or FET	1,852	929	50.2
2	44	10	22.7
3	1,266	338	26.7
4	3,020	1,095	36.3
5	6,701	3,559	53.1
6	1,088	687	63.1
Total	13,971	6,618	47.4

Table 13: Employed Early Leavers by NFQ Level.

The median weekly wage, for the cohort of early leavers in substantial employment for the subsequent calendar year is 328 euro. The median wage varies depending on the type and NFQ level of the FET programme. Table 14 and 15 show the median weekly wages across the different NFQ levels and FET programme categories.

NFQ Level	Median Wage
Non-NFQ aligned FET	€376
2	€266
3	€296
4	€315
5	€319
6	€353

Table 14: Employed Early Leavers by NFQ Level and Median Wage

Programme Category	Median Wage
Blended Training	€484
Skills for Work	€449
Bridging and Foundation Training	€397
Specific Skills Training	€378
VTOS Core	€365
Traineeship Training	€365
Evening Training	€360
Local Training Initiatives	€333
Youthreach	€320
PLC	€313
Community Training Centres	€299
BTEI Groups	€290
Specialist Training Providers	€248

Table 15: Employed Early Leavers by Programme Category and Median Wage

It is interesting that the highest median wage, is found for those learners who left a course that is unaligned to the NFQ framework. We found earlier that the highest proportion of unemployed early leavers exited unaligned programmes. However, this evidence suggests that those who did secure employment after early exit, earned the highest median weekly wage (376 euro).

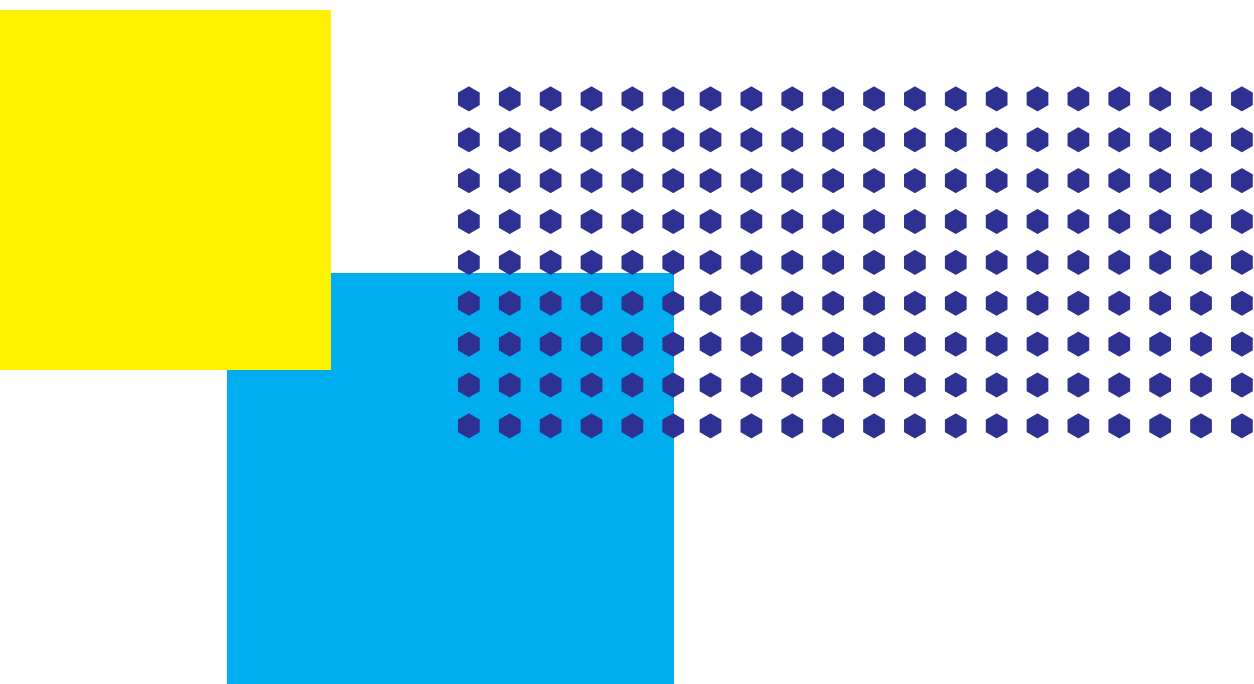
The median weekly wage level increases with increasing NFQ levels, from 266 Euro for level 2 to 353 Euro for level 6. The highest median wage is found for early leavers from Blended Learning programmes, these programmes mix online and face-to-face delivery methods. The lowest medium wage is found for learners who leave Specialist Training Providers (those with disabilities or mental health issues) programmes early.



Early leavers were subsequently employed in various sectors (see table 16). The top five sectors of employment for the early leavers were: wholesale and retail trade, accommodation and food services, health, administrative and support services, and industry (which includes manufacturing). This list mirrors the national employment by sector, as the top three sectors of employment in Ireland are indeed wholesale and retail trade, accommodation and food services, and health sectors.

NACE Category	Number of early leavers employed
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	1,593
Accommodation and food service activities	1,294
Human health and social service activities	1,199
Administrative and support service activities	919
Industry	648
Other NACE Category	460
Construction	389
Financial and insurance real estate activities	370
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	300
Professional, scientific and technical activities	233
Education	208
Transportation and storage	206
Information and communication	192
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	60
Total	8,071

Table 16. Sectors of Employment



The median weekly pay of the early leavers depends on the sector they are employed in (see table 17). In Table 17 we can see that mining and quarrying, activities of extraterritorial bodies, manufacturing, public sector, and utilities pay the highest (median) weekly wages.

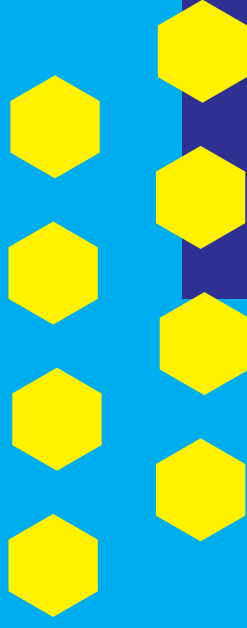
NACE Category	Median weekly pay
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	306.87
Accommodation and food service activities	286.65
Human health and social service activities	220.29
Administrative and support service activities	378.28
Manufacturing	449.88
Construction	381.17
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	439.89
Other service activities	246.52
Professional, scientific and technical activities	422.6
Education	277.38
Transportation and storage	430.34
Information and communication	425.64
Financial and insurance activities	397.92
Real estate activities	330.64
Arts, entertainment and recreation	320.6
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	374.66
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	424.11
Mining and quarrying	698.94
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	476.4
Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods-and-services-producing activities of households for own use	329.33
Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies	534.48
Average weekly pay	328.57

Table 17. Median Weekly Pay of Early Leavers

There is also a direct alignment between the sector of employment and the ISCED field of learning that an early leaver was enrolled in. The majority of early leavers who were subsequently employed in wholesale and retail services, accommodation and food services, and the health sector were enrolled in courses in services, business administration and law, and health and welfare. Similarly, early leavers who were employed in construction and manufacturing were enrolled in courses in engineering, manufacturing and construction (see Appendix 1).

Section 4

Conclusions



4. Conclusions

This report has illustrated that early leavers are a diverse group, encompassing a range of nationalities, education levels, and age groups. While initial early leaver reasons suggest that over half are dropouts, this report has demonstrated that progression pathways are more varied than the early leaver reasons may suggest and may not tell the whole story. This report has provided evidence of the different progression pathways within Further Education and Training (FET) into successive courses, as well as for some, progression outcomes into substantial employment. It also has highlighted some of the learner profiles of early leavers, such as NFQ levels and median wages, and the relationship these factors may have on progression outcomes.

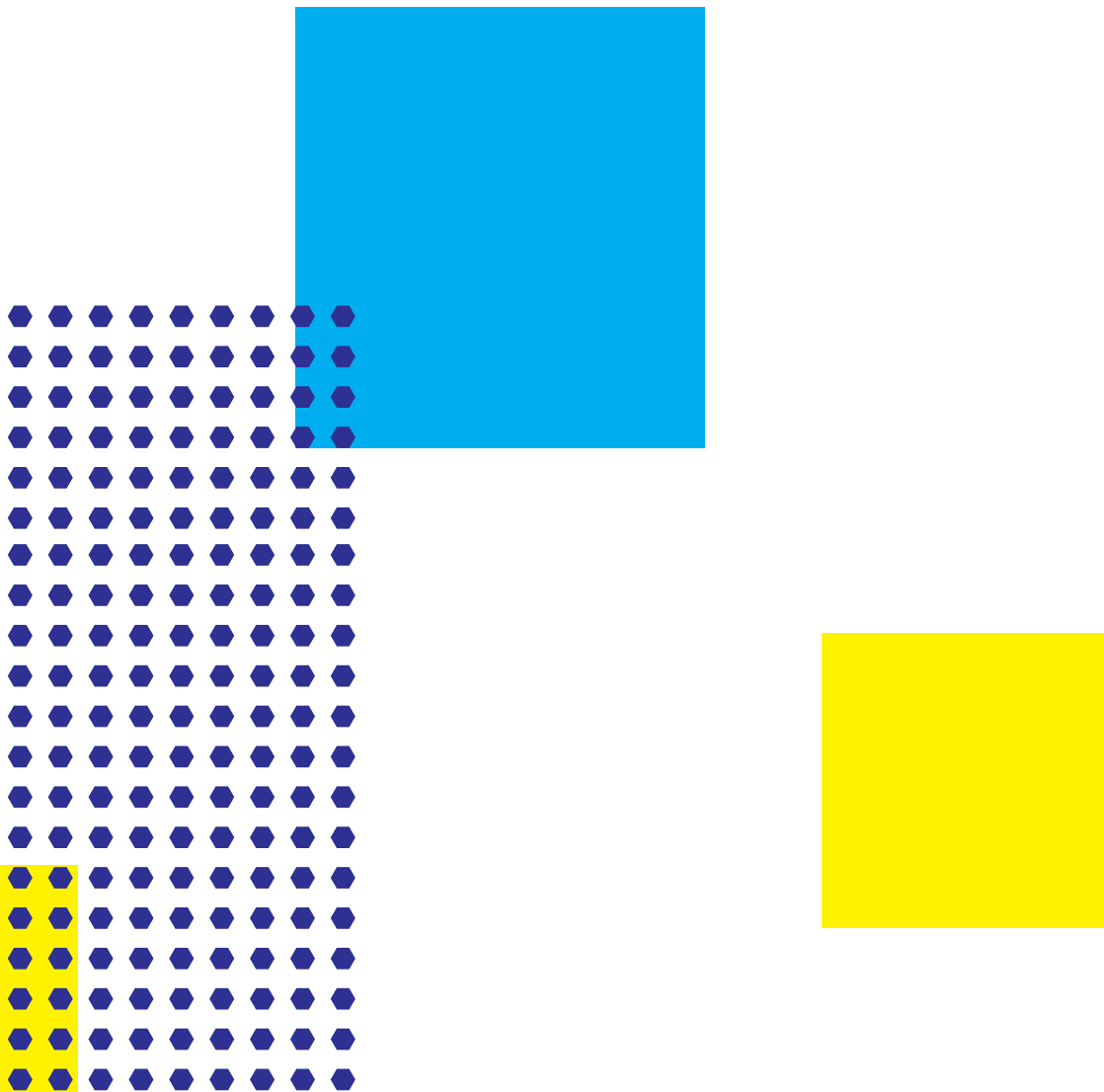
For early leavers that progressed to another course within FET:

- A total of 1,195 of the 12,251 early leavers went on a second course. Of the early leavers who enrolled on a second course, 790 completed the course.
- The majority of first-time early leavers were enrolled in a course at Level 5 initially. For early leavers who enrolled on a second course, horizontal movement at the same course level was common. However, there was also extensive evidence of both upward and downward movement between course levels. This story was similar when considering movement between areas of study. Many stayed within the same area when they completed another course, but small numbers of early leavers moved between different ISCED fields of learning.

For early leavers that exited FET into the labour market:

- Nearly half (47%) of early leavers were found in substantial employment.
- The proportions of early leavers who were in employment in the subsequent calendar year were found to increase with each higher course NFQ level. Whereas the reverse was true for education and NFQ level, with proportions of early leavers returning to education decreasing with higher course NFQ levels.
- The specific programme, whether it is oriented towards labour market or education progression, was also found to matter among those early leavers who progressed into substantial employment. The lowest rate (19%) was among early leavers enrolled in Youthreach, a second chance education and training for young people who left school early, whereas the highest rate (77%) was among those early leavers enrolled in Skills for Work, aimed at upskilling those already in employment.
- The median weekly wage for the cohort of early leavers in substantial employment for the subsequent calendar year was 328 euro. This varied depending on the type and NFQ level of the FET programme. We found that median weekly wage increases with each NFQ level, with the exception of non-NFQ aligned FET. This group had the highest median wage (376 euros).
- In relation to programme type and wages, the highest median wage was for early leavers from Blended Learning programmes. These programmes combine online and face-to-face delivery methods, the lowest median wage was for those learners leaving Specialist Training Providers (people with disabilities or mental health issues) early.

This report has provided detailed evidence showing many early leavers progress into FET and employment. Progression paths within FET appear to be extremely diverse, with some transitions into a second course occurring between subject areas and even to higher and lower NFQ levels. When looking at progression outcomes beyond FET, it appears that a relationship between programme type and NFQ level also exists, in relation to the proportion of early leavers in employment, as well as median wages for those in employment. Importantly, this research challenges the assumption that early leavers simply become inactive or unemployed upon leaving a FET course and paves the way for further research on early leavers in the FET sector.



Appendix 1

Early Leaver Progression into Employment: Sector of Employment vs. ISCED Field of Learning

Wholesale and Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles	
ISCED Field of Learning of Course from which Beneficiary was an Early Leaver	Number of Beneficiaries
Services	317
Business administration and law	316
Health and welfare	212
Generic programmes and qualifications	175
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	144
Arts and humanities	138
Education	118
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	106
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	45
Social sciences, journalism and information	13
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	9
Total	1,593

Accommodation and Food Service Activities	
ISCED Field of Learning of Course from which Beneficiary was an Early Leaver	Number of Beneficiaries
Services	289
Business administration and law	242
Health and welfare	195
Generic programmes and qualifications	180
Arts and humanities	121
Education	94
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	77
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	42
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	26
Social sciences, journalism and information	16
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	12
Total	1,294

Human Health and Social Work Activities	
ISCED Field of Learning of Course from which Beneficiary was an Early Leaver	Number of Beneficiaries
Health and welfare	270
Business administration and law	241
Generic programmes and qualifications	162
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	144
Education	137
Services	137
Arts and humanities	42
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	36
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	25
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	3
Social sciences, journalism and information	2
Total	1,199

Administrative and Support Service Activities	
ISCED Field of Learning of Course from which Beneficiary was an Early Leaver	Number of Beneficiaries
Business administration and law	174
Services	151
Health and welfare	131
Generic programmes and qualifications	126
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	113
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	99
Arts and humanities	51
Education	45
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	23
Social sciences, journalism and information	4
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	2
Total	919

Manufacturing	
ISCED Field of Learning of Course from which Beneficiary was an Early Leaver	Number of Beneficiaries
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	134
Business administration and law	101
Generic programmes and qualifications	87
Services	84
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	59
Education	58
Health and welfare	47
Arts and humanities	21
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	14
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	3
Social sciences, journalism and information	2
Total	610

Construction	
ISCED Field of Learning of Course from which Beneficiary was an Early Leaver	Number of Beneficiaries
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	87
Generic programmes and qualifications	85
Services	70
Business administration and law	52
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	42
Health and welfare	21
Education	13
Arts and humanities	10
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	7
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	1
Social sciences, journalism and information	1
Total	389

Public Administration and Defence; Compulsory Social Security	
ISCED Field of Learning of Course from which Beneficiary was an Early Leaver	Number of Beneficiaries
Business administration and law	66
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	45
Services	40
Education	39
Generic programmes and qualifications	34
Health and welfare	32
Arts and humanities	18
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	16
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	9
Social sciences, journalism and information	1
Total	300

Other Service Activities	
ISCED Field of Learning of Course from which Beneficiary was an Early Leaver	Number of Beneficiaries
Services	86
Business administration and law	58
Generic programmes and qualifications	44
Health and welfare	31
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	25
Education	14
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	11
Arts and humanities	8
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	6
Social sciences, journalism and information	2
Total	285

Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities	
ISCED Field of Learning of Course from which Beneficiary was an Early Leaver	Number of Beneficiaries
Business administration and law	79
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	33
Services	26
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	23
Health and welfare	18
Arts and humanities	17
Generic programmes and qualifications	16
Education	13
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	6
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	2
Total	233

Education	
ISCED Field of Learning of Course from which Beneficiary was an Early Leaver	Number of Beneficiaries
Business administration and law	48
Education	39
Generic programmes and qualifications	32
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	22
Health and welfare	19
Arts and humanities	18
Services	15
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	10
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	5
Total	208

Transportation And Storage	
ISCED Field of Learning of Course from which Beneficiary was an Early Leaver	Number of Beneficiaries
Business administration and law	33
Generic programmes and qualifications	31
Services	31
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	27
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	25
Health and welfare	23
Education	16
Arts and humanities	14
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	3
Social sciences, journalism and information	2
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	1
Total	206





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