



Transforming Learning

The Further Education & Training System

FET System Outcomes Report 2018-2022



Riátas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union

Introduction

In 2022, the Further Education and Training system recovered substantially from the periods of lockdown and the impact of the Global Pandemic. The FET national learner system in 2022 recorded 186,740 unique learners accessing core FET provision; an additional 21,603 learners enrolled on the national eCollege system and Ireland had an overall apprenticeship population of 26,325.

The FET and Apprenticeship system supported 234,668 unique learners in 2022, while overall activity and other funded provision, including in construction skills has led to the strongest year ever for the system with a learner activity level which exceeds

350,000. This is a significant achievement and one to be acknowledged, particularly given that the FET system and SOLAS, the statutory authority, is this year marking 10 years since the establishment of the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and SOLAS in 2013.

The maturity of reporting, performance and the delivery of outcomes through both of the FET National Strategies over this period and the published system reports since 2018 are further examined in this high-level report which accompanies the SOLAS publications to date and includes narrative and trend data to also document the impact of the Pandemic over this time.

FET Core Provision Enrolment Trends

Enrolment data from FET PLSS Learner System

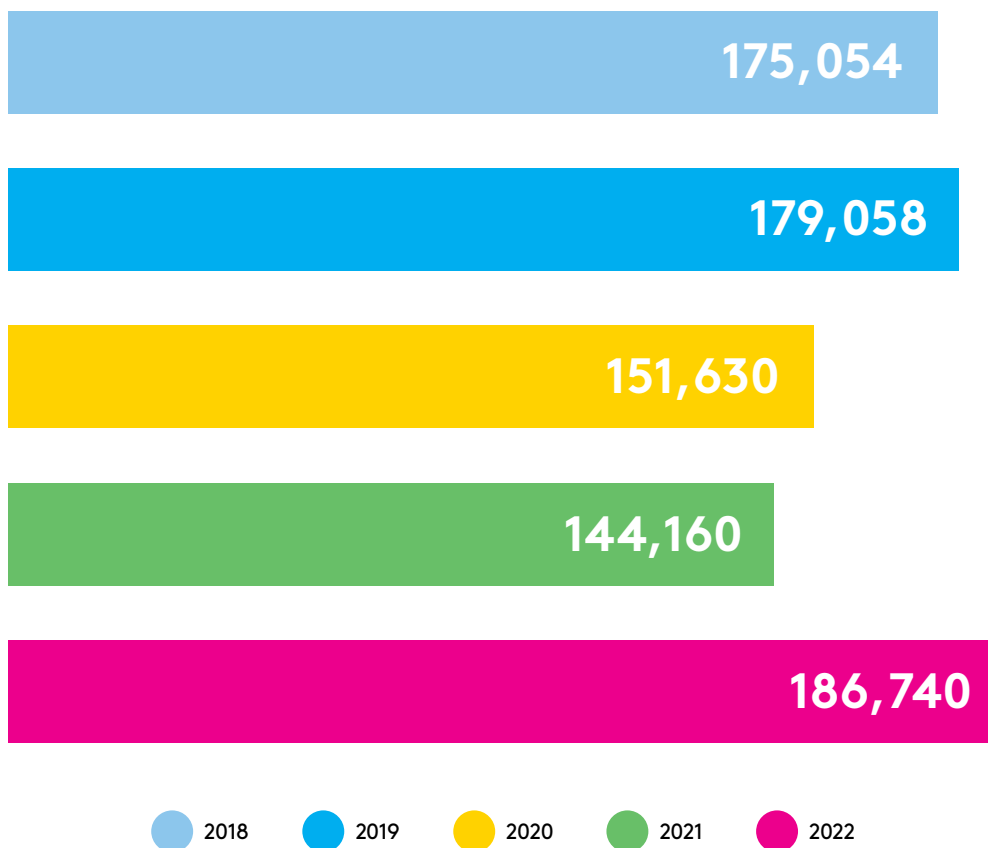


Figure 1 – FET PLSS Core Provision Enrolment at Unique Learner Level

In addition to the core FET provision highlighted above, which has been collected and reported on since 2018, SOLAS has also undertaken an all-of-system approach to data, reporting and overall statistics since 2020. This has supported an integrated and collaborative vision underpinned by a national data strategy to ensure a broader and more cohesive capture of the impact of FET and SOLAS funded activities. It has also served as a mechanism to inform essential future planning and policy, informed by evidence, on the future needs of FET, within an overall unified tertiary system. This approach ensures for example, that apprenticeship training is referenced in this context, as well as the substantial offering made available to citizens through the online eCollege platform and the essential and core construction skills made available through SOLAS.

This high level report will aim to provide some initial and previously unpublished data and trends, which signals a new approach to the SOLAS Further Education and Training System Reporting, in line with the National FET Strategy 2020-2024. It also aligns with the Strategic Performance Agreements 2022-2024, the recommendations from the strategic review of eCollege, the National Apprenticeship Action Plan 2020 – 2025 and the newly established National Apprenticeship Office and National Tertiary Office.

As the new FET system funding model is implemented across 2023 and 2024, as a component of the national FET Strategy 2020-2024 and the accompanying Strategic Performance Agreements 2022-

2024, the system data, reporting and performance mechanisms will also evolve in line with the vision of Future FET.

All-of-system activity and enrolment data

Over 204,000 unique learners¹ were supported through FET in 2018. Unique learners in 2019 indicated an overall increase in national provision. In 2019, there were over 210,000 unique learners.² Within this there were significant increases in the number of learners choosing FET from marginalised groups (as referenced below). This included almost a 50% increase in learners with a disability at this time as well as increased participation from learners from the Traveller and the Roma Communities. This level of participation in 2019 by learners was on a par with HE, as in 2019 the learner registration recorded for Higher Education was 232,000.

It is a significant achievement therefore by the FET system and the Education and Training Boards to see such growth in a system since then, given how FET was so significantly impacted by the Pandemic. Naturally enrolment numbers decreased over the period of 2020-2021 in core FET provision, (which was slightly offset in part by high levels of engagement with the SOLAS eCollege online platform), when the majority of the FET system was physically closed with provision focused almost exclusively online. Of huge concern also during this period was the limited reach to priority learners, and the decrease in participation rates from learners with a disability, from the Traveller Community, the Roma Community, Asylum Seekers

1 PLSS registrations, apprenticeship and e-college registrations. Source - *This is FET Facts and Figures 2018, FET in Numbers 2018 eCollege 2018 Learners Report, SOLAS Apprentice Registrations*

2 This includes 179,508 unique registrations on PLSS, an apprentice population of 17,829 at the end of 2019 and approximately 13,217 unique learners starting an eCollege course.

and Refugees. In 2022 this trend reversed and increases are now evident, as well as a return to numbers similar to 2019 and prior to the onset of the Pandemic.

Of note also during 2022 is the outstanding response from the Education and Training Boards and the FET system in supporting people from Ukraine. At the end of December 2022, the FET system had supported 20,623 Ukrainian people who were living in Ireland. This represents 41.4% of all arrivals of people from Ukraine who are over the age of 14. Many Ukrainian learners have engaged in more than one course during this time and the full activity by this group of learners reached an activity level of 38,864 for the same period (averaging 1.9 courses per person).

The SOLAS strategic partnership with the Central Statistics Office also led in 2022 to FET data informing key national publications by the CSO relating to how Ireland responded to the crisis which can be referenced [here](#). Not only does this significantly validate the FET system data, but it also demonstrates the considerable strength of the FET system and its infrastructure in supporting national priorities in a time of crisis.

The development of the new Strategic Performance Agreements between SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards for the period of 2022 – 2024 provided renewed focus and energy as the system returned to 2019 operating levels based on the vision of Transforming Learning in the *Future FET Strategy*. All the agreements and the overall system report are all published and available [here](#).

SOLAS funded activity supports FET Core Provision, which includes a range of courses from Levels 1-6 on the NFQ across a multitude of areas. This activity is further analysed in the FET Facts and Figures published reports for the periods of 2018-2022.³ This provision includes recognised FET such as full time Level 6 courses, in key skills areas, specific provision for young people, services for those in employment, upskilling opportunities for those who find themselves unemployed as well as a rich offering for everyone in terms of community education. A key component of provision also includes core and key skills opportunities to address and support those who seek adult literacy and numeracy advancement.

SOLAS also funds and supports key skills initiatives in construction, in advancing and training of apprentices and through many collaborative partnerships and initiatives to ensure FET is there for everyone across Ireland, right across the adult lifelong learning landscape. It is a particular strength in the system that many learners who start a journey, continue their journey and that reinforces the importance of reporting on all activity in FET. This is vital, as only capturing unique learners will not be a true or effective measure in terms of what the system delivers.

³ 2021 FET Facts and Figures and 2022 FET Facts and Figures reports scheduled for publication Q2 2023

This high level chart aims to represent this uniqueness as well as the wider activity that SOLAS supports on an annual basis.

All-of-System Funded Activity

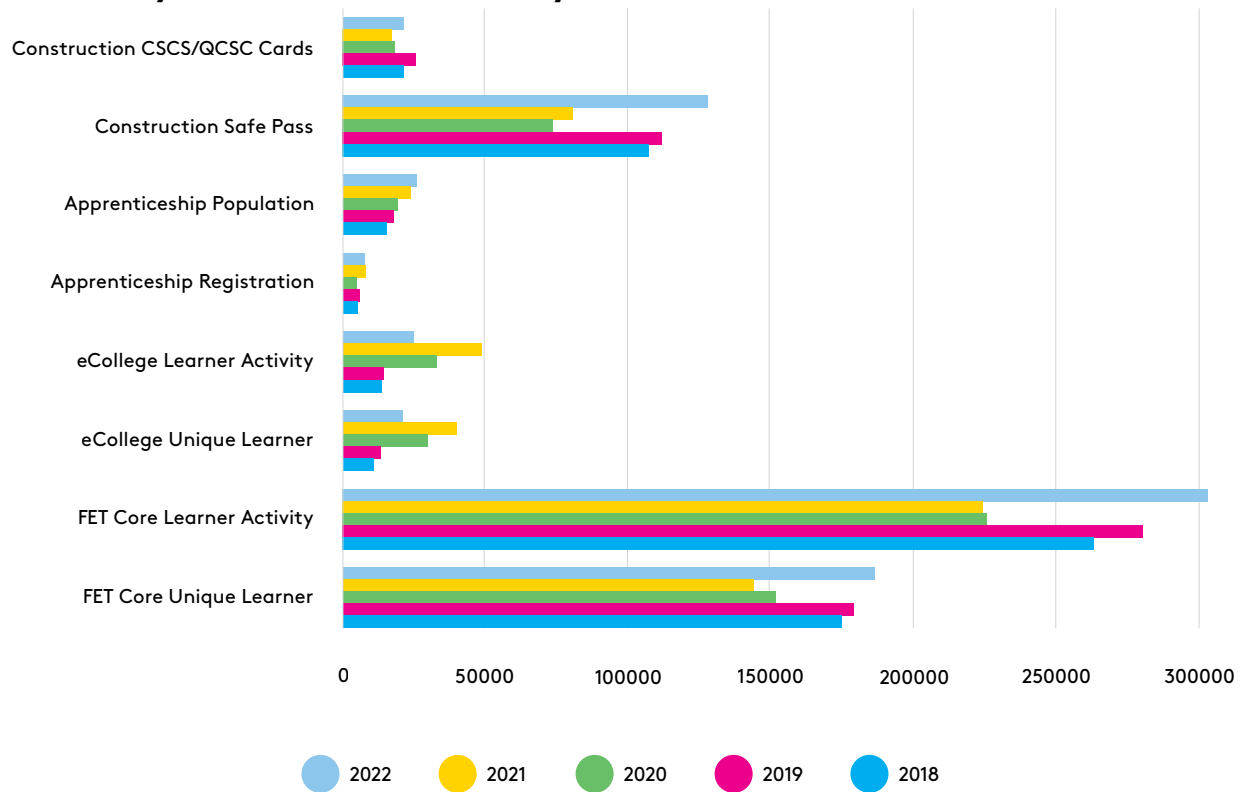


Figure 2 – All-of-System SOLAS overall funded activity

The data table below presents these patterns across the various components within the SOLAS funding framework.

All-of-System Activity Reporting	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
FET Core Unique Learner	175,054	179,058	151,630	144,160	186,740
FET Core Learner Activity	263,319	280,421	225,898	224,538	303,465
eCollege Unique Learner	11,301	14,000	30,000	40,120	21,603
eCollege Learner Activity	13,859	14,714	33,281	49,053	25,287
Apprenticeship Registration	5,648	6,177	5,326	8,607	8,286
Apprenticeship Population	15,670	17,829	19,630	24,209	26,325
Construction Safe Pass	107,481	112,186	73,892	81,000	128,230
Construction CSCS/QCSC Cards	21,948	26,050	18,750	17,740	21,451

Figure 3 – Data underpinning all of system SOLAS funded activity

The scale and the impact of the overall annual system, reported on a total activity basis, incorporating all the elements reflected above is detailed in the below diagram.

All-of-System Funded Activity

Data compiled from all SOLAS sources

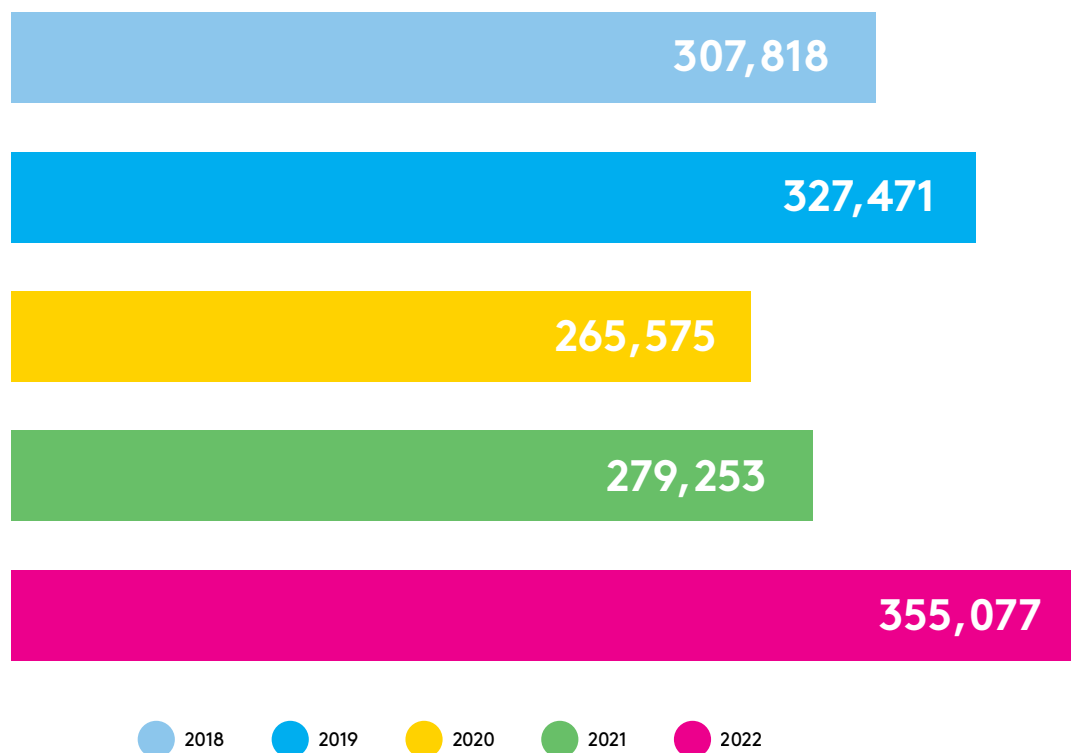


Figure 4 – All of SOLAS annual activity impact and trends

FET System Trends 2018-2022

The national FET learner system which records core FET provision as published in the FET system Facts and Figures reports the following unique enrolments over this period.

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
175,054	179,058	151,630	144,160	186,740

Figure 5 – FET PLSS Core Provision Enrolment at Unique Learner level

The impact of the Pandemic is evident across 2020 and more prominently in 2021 however, despite this, by 2022 the system has grown by more than 6% since the first full system report was completed in 2018. Although we can acknowledge there may have been some underreporting at this early stage in 2018, as the infrastructures has matured, the

system recovery is clearly evident with the increase of almost 30% following the sharpest decline in 2021. This is a real testament not only to the resilience of the FET system but also to the commitment, creativity and the efficacy of the Education and Training Boards during the initial recovery phases of the Pandemic.

eCollege

Of note also in terms of reported core FET activity above, this does not include the significant increase and reach of the national SOLAS eCollege online learning system. which became a free portal to support everyone affected during the period of the Pandemic. The eCollege platform which reported 2018 enrolment activity of 11,301 markedly shifted and increased to the levels reported below in 2021 and 2022.

The eCollege service operates on a continuous intake and therefore these figures should be reviewed in this context.

2021	2022
40,120	21,603

Figure 6 - eCollege enrolments at unique learner level

FET System Widening Participation

By 2019, it was evident that the reach by the FET system to priority learners was increasing, albeit we account for some of this due to improved recording and reporting. However this was one of main concerns during the Pandemic when many of these learners were 'lost' in the system.

During the process of establishing the new Strategic Performance Agreements, the urgent focus on reconnecting to these priority learners was emphasised as a national priority. This is reflected across the National System targets, in the area of widening participation.

The national FET learner system trends for priority cohort learners are as follows (Figure 7):

Widening Participation	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Traveller Community	1,212	1,527	1,139	1,130	1,319
Roma Community	302	382	305	270	333
Asylum Seeker	825	1,129	911	709	1,132
Refugee	1,041	1,344	1,212	1,115	3,448
Learner with a Disability	8,644	13,098	11,376	10,588	12,578
Learners aged 50+	45,605	48,284	36,046	35,866	49,618

Figure 7 - Unique enrolments as reported on the FET Learner PLSS system

*Note the introduction in 2022 of the national system target for widening participation in the Strategic Performance Agreements 2022-2024

Apprenticeship

The Apprenticeship system in Ireland over this period is effectively referenced through the development and implementation of two national action plans, both heralding a vision for growth, expansion and modernisation. The system was developing, with new national programmes being introduced prior to the onset of the Pandemic. Given the nature of the hands-on practical training requirements of apprenticeship, the

closure of centres across FET and higher education had a significant impact. Despite this, supports and additional resourcing was prioritized which has contributed to an increase in registrations and the overall population of apprentices in Ireland, which currently stands at over 23,000. Apprenticeship registrations and trend data is referenced in the tables above.

Conclusion

SOLAS, the ETBs and the FET system are now 10 years in existence. It is clear there is a level of maturity in the performance and reporting infrastructure, despite the impact of the Pandemic to further grow and deliver on the overall national agenda for Transforming Learning. The reach and the impact of the FET and apprenticeship system is considerable and although there are limitations on how the system can report, there is now a clear opportunity to further embed and explore how the system can evolve, can adapt and can deliver for the citizens of Ireland.



Block 1
Castleforbes House
Castleforbes Road
Dublin 1
D01 A8N0