

Progress Review of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019

June 2018

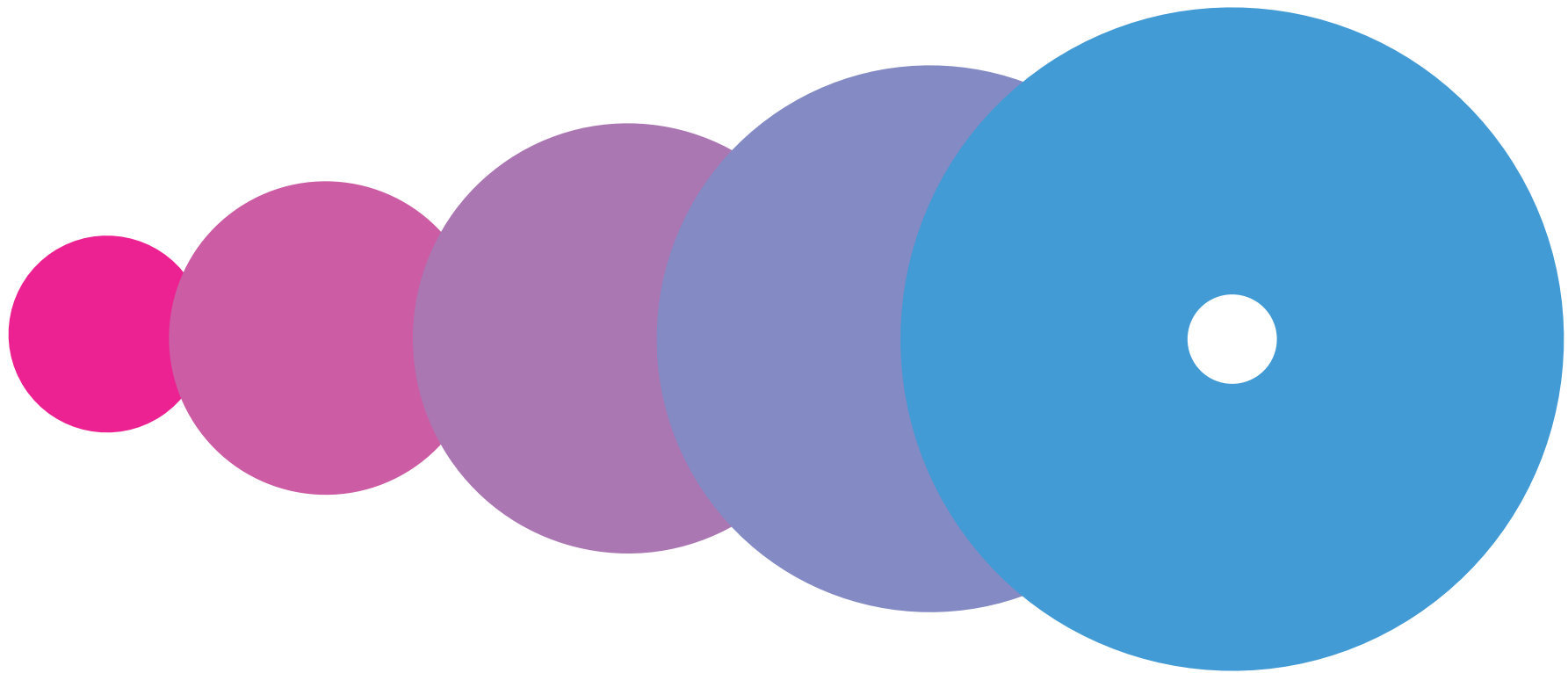


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GLOSSARY

AEGAI	Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CTC	Community Training Centre
DEASP	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DBEI	Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
FARR	Funding Allocations Requests and Reporting
FET	Further Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLSS	Programme and Learner Support System
SIAC	Strategy Implementation Advisory Committee
SMT	Senior Management Team
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning
QA	Quality Assurance
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first ever Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014-2019 was published on the 12th May 2014 by the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., and Minister of State for Training and Skills Ciarán Cannon T.D. A Detailed Strategy Implementation Plan (DIP) was developed setting out 50+ Actions to be progressed by lead FET partners including the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and SOLAS in the period 2014-2019. A Strategy Implementation Advisory Committee (SIAC) chaired by DES and supported by SOLAS was established to advise DES with regard to implementation of the Actions in the implementation plan. Key FET partners¹ are represented on the SIAC. The implementation plan contained a SOLAS commitment to conduct a high-level progress review of the Strategy during its lifetime. This high-level review was tasked with considering the FET and labour market operating environment, international FET comparators, the appropriateness and relevance of the strategic Goals and Objectives, progression of the Strategy and governance and oversight mechanisms.

The FET sector has undergone significant reform in recent years. It was widely acknowledged that the FET Strategy, for the first time set the direction of travel for the sector in Ireland. It was recognised that the nature of the FET sector is itself complex and wide-ranging and must cater for a diverse range of social, economic and demographic learner cohorts. This complexity is highlighted in *Section II* which gives a contextual overview of the FET sector and operating environment, including economic and political developments since the initial development of the Strategy. This context is much changed since the strategy was launched in 2014, with substantially reduced unemployment levels, radically different labour market conditions and major structural reform including the establishment of SOLAS and 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

FET in other jurisdictions is described in *Section III* and key learnings from Wales, New Zealand and Germany are discussed. *Section IV* presents the findings from the one-to-one and online consultations which were carried out with participants including the SIAC members, SOLAS Senior Management Team, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) CEOs and FET Directors, Regional Skills Forum Managers, Wider Participants and Learners. The Detailed Implementation Plan allowed an assessment of the overall implementation progress of the Objectives and Action and these findings are also presented.

While the achievement of successfully establishing a whole new infrastructure surrounding FET provision and the associated building of capability within these new and evolving organisations is acknowledged and commended, this inevitably had some impact on the early progression of the strategy. Despite this there are many key achievements arising from the Strategy thus far. These include the roll-out of new apprenticeship and traineeships models, the development of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, the development of the strategic dialogue process between SOLAS and the ETBs, the advancement of data management systems including the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) and Funding Allocations Requests and Reporting (FARR) and the establishment of the National FET Learner Forum.

Beyond the findings in relation to the progression of the strategic Actions some additional observations were made in relation to:

¹ Including Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) and its member ETBs, DEASP, DPER IBEC, ISME, NALA, Aontas, QQI.

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- Policy and vision for the FET sector and need for the Department to establish a clear policy position if they are to realise the wider ambition to adopt a whole-system approach.
- Governance and ownership of the Strategy and the importance of complete clarity around who is ultimately responsible for driving the implementation of the Strategy if the Goals and Objectives are to be met over the next 18 months.
- Strategy oversight and implementation and the varying levels of understanding of the interdependencies between the Strategic Objectives and Actions
- Data and the ongoing importance of having a robust, singular, system-wide, “fit for purpose” infrastructure in place given the fact that data infrastructure around FET is not as strong as it needs to be.
- The learner pathways given the shift to re-skilling and lifelong learning and how the learner must be supported and they move through the broader educational continuum.

Recognising the achievements to date by the Strategy, our recommendations contain key elements that will *firstly* support the on-going implementation of the strategic Objectives and Actions for the remaining 18 months of the current strategy; and *secondly*, point to strategic issues as DES look to develop FET Strategy 2 which will help frame both the learnings to date and the evolving operating environment in which learners, educators and employers must exist.

	Recommendations	Observations
1	Department of Education & Skills should assume, or clearly mandate, more active responsibility for the governance and oversight of the FET Strategy implementation process. Accountability for the delivery of strategic Actions by individual organisations should be underpinned by explicit commitments within cross-Departmental agreements, MoUs, Performance Delivery Agreements or Strategic Performance Agreements.	There needs to be more robust system in place to ensure responsibility and accountability for delivering on the strategy and facilitating its successful implementation. Clear Departmental oversight of strategy implementation and the governance arrangements is important in ensuring delivery.
2	Progress the further development of the data infrastructure required to facilitate the collection and analysis of quality data.	The ongoing work being done by SOLAS to develop the necessary data infrastructure which will enable it to access appropriate evidence, including, counterfactual impact evaluation in support of the new funding model must continue as a matter of urgency.

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3	Define the “ <i>value proposition</i> ” for the FET sector to help promote the benefits of engaging with FET sector for the learners and employers alike.	Arguably one of the biggest barriers to the successful implementation of the FET Strategy is the lack of clear understanding around the benefits of engaging with the FET sector. For the sector to credibly promote its value in the market place, FET must be able to highlight and demonstrate the real-world benefits of engaging with it.
4	Develop a strategic vision for FET in the broader education sector which gives greater clarity on future learner pathways and expected outcomes. This could be achieved through a shared strategic vision for FET and higher education. This should work with the multi-annual FET sector targets agreed with the Minister for Education and Skills and embedded within the SOLAS Corporate Plan, and the multi-annual commitments set out in the Action Plan for Education to form an overall policy framework for the development of FET	Given the changing employment landscape and the evolving profile of the learner, this vision would set out where FET is positioned within the education continuum and the anticipated relationships and alignment between Secondary Education, Further Education and Training and Higher Education. Working in tandem with the existing targets and policy commitments made with regard to FET, it would give greater recognition to the future shift in provision from those seeking employment to those in -employment or re -skilling and the focus on life-long-learning .
5	Develop a system-wide performance framework in a similar manner to that developed for the higher education sector and with some common themes to facilitate the development of further synergies between the sectors. This should reflect the policy framework noted above and will be delivered via the system of strategic dialogue and multi-annual strategic performance agreements which is now being established between SOLAS and ETBs. .	<p>If Ireland is to deliver on its vision “to become the best education and training system in Europe” it will need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold the system accountable for performance for the delivery of national priorities and monitor performance of the system as a whole; • Articulate all the expectations of the system from different areas of government/agencies across the various dimensions of higher education activity; • Increase the visibility of performance of the system to Government and the wider public; • Contribute to system and policy development by highlighting structural and other deficits including data capacity; • Allow ETBs to identify their strategic niche and mission and agree a strategic performance agreement aligned with funding.
6	Support the development of clear learner pathways which will combine enhanced learner guidance, support and information with	This aligns learner pathways with effective guidance services accessed during the lifetime of a learner and provides fundamental information and advice on their

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	<p>clear and consistent transition routes to better reflect and enable the shift in focus to life-long learning, recognition of prior learning and the learner's journey through the education continuum.</p>	<p>education and training options. If a clearer and more consistent approach can be implemented on transitions between further education and training, and in recognizing prior learning in accessing further and higher education, it should encourage and support learners' progress through the education continuum. Learner pathways are intimately linked to career pathways within employers and there is also a need to reflect such career pathways within this approach, taking account of the different pathways within particular sectors or occupations (e.g. healthcare, engineering)</p>
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The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019 was the first of its kind in Ireland and was developed at a point in time very different to where we as an economy are now. The Strategy set out a Vision and Mission for the sector and allowed the Department, SOLAS and delivery partners to have the ambition to be a “world class integrated FET system, highly valued by learners and employers” and importantly it provided an implementation plan to support the realisation of that ambition.

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE FET STRATEGY PROGRESS REVIEW

The purpose of the Further Education and Training Strategy (hereon referred to as the *Strategy*) is to set out “the future direction for FET to ensure the provision of 21st century high-quality further education and training programmes and services to learners, employees and employers. Key to its success will be the engagement, particularly at local level, of a range of actors including education and training providers, employers and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (*DEASP*), Enterprise Ireland and Industrial Development Authority (*IDA*) Ireland. Local engagement with employers had been identified by the National and Economic Social Council (*NESC*) as a significant area for improvement within FET and with effective engagement between ETBs and the *DEASP*, including the Intreo offices (and JobPath) being essential for a ‘fit for purpose’ FET system”.²

The objective of this Review, as set out in the terms of reference, is to assess the appropriateness, priority and continued relevance of the strategic Goals and Objectives as set out in the Strategy Implementation Plan. The review is intended to provide an overall independent assessment of how well the FET Strategy is progressing, identify areas for improvement and bring forward realistic and concrete recommendations to help support the its implementation over the next 18 months while providing a learning opportunity for the DES, SOLAS and Delivery Partners as they consider the drafting of the second FET Strategy.

METHODOLOGY

This Review, commissioned by SOLAS, began in November 2017 within an expected timescale of four months from the start date.

The scope of the review included the following:

1. Assess the appropriateness, priority and continued relevance of the Goals and Actions set out in the Strategy Implementation Plan, having regard to the significant reform of the sector, Government policy in the area including the National Skills Strategy (2016), Action Plan for Education (2017) and Action Plan for Jobs (first Action Plan for Jobs was published in 2012 maybe not refer to just the 2017 version), Pathways to Work 2016 - 20 and the wider economic and labour market developments since the strategy was first published in 2014.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of lead partners in achieving their Objectives and Actions to date, as set out in the detailed plan including:
 - Determining the significant achievements and key outcomes to-date against each of the five strategic goals.
 - Identifying areas where performance has lagged and ascertain drivers of any underperformance.
3. Identify the key challenges to date in delivering the Actions set out in the implementation plan as set out in the strategy.

² Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019, pg. 41

4. Assess the governance framework and the role of the SIAC, how it could be enhanced and how the level of ownership of commitments under the strategy could be improved.
5. Consider how the current breakdown of expenditure between labour market and wider socially focused FET provision correlates with wider labour market conditions and, where possible, how this compares internationally.
6. Seek the views from the lead partners and relevant stakeholders, including social and business representatives, on how the strategy is progressing and how the prioritisation of resources should reflect the improved external economic environment.
7. Make appropriate recommendations regarding the focus of the FET Strategy for the 2018 - 2019 period, including the potential re-alignment and re-prioritisation of high level Goals and Actions with the improving economic and labour market situation, and highlighting, where possible, future risks and challenges in the sector.

The methodology employed:

- Review of documentation relating to FET as provided by SOLAS, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and other Lead Partners
- Desk research on the FET sector and operating environment in Ireland and other jurisdictions
- 32 one-to-one consultations with key FET Delivery Partners including DES, ETBI, QQI SOLAS and the SIAC

[The one-to-one consultations were guided by a series of standardised agreed upon questions. Feedback was then aggregated and synthesised so that responses to the questions asked and referred to within the body of the report would not be attributable to any one individual]

- Three separate and anonymised online surveys were circulated to groups of stakeholders, as listed below, and the participants were given a few weeks to return and surveys:
 - ETB CEOs and FET Directors
 - Regional Skills Fora Managers
 - Wider stakeholder organisations, most of which were consulted during the development of the Strategy in 2013
- Review of the Internal Report to SOLAS on Findings of the 2017 Further Education and Training Learner Forum
- All research and analysis was overseen and contributed to by two Subject Matter Experts – Professor Ellen Hazelkorn and Dr. Richard Thorn.
- The Terms of Reference for this high-level Review are provided in **Appendix A**.

SECTION II: CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

This Progress Review of the FET Strategy takes place against the backdrop of a changed external environment to that in effect when the plan was originally developed. The financial crash and the uncertainty surrounding the economy and very high levels of unemployment stand in marked contrast to the improved situation today. The FET strategy reflects both pragmatic responses to the challenges facing the country at the time of its publication and strategic responses to 'future proof' it as far as possible for a future recovery.

The changing contours of economic and structural reform developments and emerging skills needs provide important insights into how best to contextualise and frame the inputs, outcomes and recommendations arising from the review. They provide important reference points to evaluate the relevance of the current strategy's five high-level Goals, associated Objectives and enabling Actions and implementation plan and to assess how far and how well the FET sector has advanced the original ambition set for it by Government including how well it is supporting the Government's current and future ambition for education more generally and for FET more specifically.

This section of the review report provides an overview of the economic recession and public sector reforms that formed the backdrop to the development of the FET Strategy 2014-2019. Current and emerging developments impacting on FET and its re-purposing are then highlighted including EU and government skills agenda including FET-related skills, longer term developments impacting on economic growth and skills needs such as digitalisation, globalisation and skills polarisation. Increasing skills forecasting capacity within the FET sector is an important development to ensure the overall relevance and effectiveness of current and future FET provision for learners and employers. The need to increase the utilisation of FET-related skills by employers and planned developments to address the FET-related skill needs of employees are also outlined. An overview of the current and future developments to improve pathways from FET to higher education is provided. Several key commitments are set out in the second SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019 that will consolidate work already underway and drive forward a number of Actions in the FET Strategy implementation plan.

FRAMING THE FIRST FET STRATEGY 2014-2019

The impact and effect of the recent global financial crash and the very challenging economic and labour market context that emerged were particularly acute in Ireland. Domestic demand decreased by more than a quarter (26%) and employment rates fell 10 percentage points. At the same time unemployment increased from 4.5% in 2007 to 15% in 2012.³ In the autumn of 2010, Ireland entered into a European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund ('troika') loan programme. The programme of assistance came with strict conditionality. Successive Irish

³ UCD GEARY INSTITUTE, (2013), 'How governments retrench in crisis: the case of Ireland'.

governments undertook to cut spending and increase revenue over a number of years.⁴ The programme of assistance also committed Ireland to a structural reform agenda (to maximise the potential for economic growth) including reform of further education and training.

The structural reform programme provided, among other changes, for the dissolution of FÁS and the establishment of a new Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS), the establishment of 16 Education and Training Boards, the establishment of the National Employment and Entitlements Service (*Intreo*), the establishment of Qualifications and Quality Assurance Ireland (QQI), and the launch of the Pathways to Work and the Action Plan for Jobs initiatives. Each has had and continues to have an impact on FET.

The restructuring of the Vocational Education Committees into 16 ETBs was implemented in July 2013.⁵ An order for the establishment of the new further education and training authority, SOLAS, was signed in October 2013 and its commencement brought about the dissolution of FÁS. Intreo, established as part of the Government's reform of labour market activation policies as set out in the Pathways to Work Initiative, was launched in February 2012 under the auspices of the then Department of Social Protection. It provided support to people to establish their benefits entitlements, advise them about their training options, and assist them in securing employment.

The severity of the economic challenge and the fiscal constraints and obligations under the 'troika' bail-out programme informed the Department of Education and Skills' expectations around the future role of SOLAS and the expected impact of its mission.⁶ In that regard, the immediate challenges for the further education and training system were also set out. At the time, there was an 'unprecedented' rate of unemployment (15%) with over 40% of unemployed persons classified as long term unemployed. This gave rise to a significantly increased demand for education and training provision including FET. Against a backdrop of Government intent to 're-invent' Ireland's economy, a key expectation was that Government activation measures would be supported to provide clear and purposeful pathways to employment, either directly or via the further and higher education and training systems.

In addition, there was concern that because the FET sector had grown in an organic and uncoordinated way it lacked strategic direction. As a result, there was unlocked potential in the sector which had not been realised. FET was expected to 'help us get back on our feet and back to work through upskilling for the jobs and society of tomorrow'.⁷ FET was to do this by SOLAS bringing that strategic direction to the sector and enabling and empowering the new ETBs to deliver better quality further education and training.

With the enactment of the Further Education and Training Act (2013), the strategic leadership role and mandate of SOLAS was further crystallised. Under Section 9 of the Act, SOLAS was to prepare and submit to the Minister a strategy in respect of the provision of further education and training and that it would include a strategy aimed at promoting, developing and encouraging literacy and numeracy within this provision. The first ever integrated FET strategy (The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019), incorporating an adult literacy and numeracy strategy, was

4 NERI, (2013), 'Ireland's Investment Crisis: Diagnosis and Prescription'. So that the General Government Deficit was to fall below the Maastricht limit of 3% of GDP by 2015.

5 The Education and Training Boards Act 2013.

6 DES (2011), 'An Action Plan for SOLAS (An Seirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh Agus Scileanna). The new Further Education and Training (FET) Authority'.

7 Ibid.

published by SOLAS and DES in May 2014. A detailed strategy implementation plan was developed by SOLAS and endorsed by DES which provided specifics around: Actions required, performance indicators, timeframes, lead partner of each Action etc. The Strategy document called for oversight of the implementation of the Plan. To this end, a Strategy Advisory Committee (SIAC) was established, chaired by the Department of Education and Skills supported by SOLAS and includes key FET partners to advise DES on strategy implementation.

The role of the SIAC, at a high level, is to:

- **Advise** on FET Strategy implementation, ensuring that implementation of Actions is in line with the DES approved Implementation Plan
- **Review** any recommendations for implementation of initiatives that may be presented by Lead /Support Partners
- **Review** periodic implementation monitoring reports and advise SOLAS accordingly
- **Advise** on any strategic changes to the Implementation Plan and ensure that they are undertaken in a timely manner so that the Plan is implemented as per agreed timelines.

As previously mentioned the SIAC is supported in its role and functions by SOLAS who serve on and provide Secretariat to the Committee, as well as prepare briefing papers/monitoring/progress reports and provide relevant information the SIAC may need to make informed decisions. The current membership and Terms of Reference of the SIAC are listed in **Appendix B**.

ONGOING POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

In November 2013, the government announced its decision to conclude the EU/IMF programme from the end of that year⁸ and the momentum behind the public-sector reform programme continues to drive forward. Since the conclusion of the bailout programme the economy and the labour market have recovered and continue to steadily improve, particularly in the period since 2016.

Five progress reports on public service reform have been published since 2011. 'Our Public Service 2020' is the new framework for development and innovation in the public service and was launched in December 2017. It aims to build a stronger public service including the education sector and to deliver better quality services to the Irish public. Implementation of the framework began in 2018.⁹

In that regard, an extensive programme of reform is on-going across the education and training sector. Major change initiatives and key milestones are captured in the Integrated Reform Delivery Plan.¹⁰ The education reform programme enhances and develops the five key goals of the Department's Strategy Statement 2016 to 2019 such as improving the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special

⁸ European Commission (2013), 'Economic Adjustment Programme for Ireland Autumn 2013 Review'

⁹ Per.Gov.ie

¹⁰ Detailed plans for shared services, including procurement, and external service delivery have been published separately.

educational needs. To oversee this programme of reform, DES has established an Education and Training Reform Board and a Public Service Reform (*PSR*) Programme Office. The Department is working closely with national agencies including SOLAS and ETBI and other Government Departments to implement this ambitious programme of reform. The Action Plan for Education 2018, sets out detailed reform commitments for delivery this year, building on the higher-level multi-annual Action Plan for Education 2016 – 2019.¹¹

Since the Further Education and Training Strategy was published in 2014, there have been several reform and policy developments and publications of note which articulate the policy ambitions at national and regional level for the learner and have particular influence on the ongoing relevance and appropriateness of the strategic Goals and Objectives as set out in the Further Education and Training Strategy and the learning continuum in which the learner is expected to progress.

The ambition for FET in the period 2018-2020 has most recently been articulated in the second SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019. Several key FET sector targets are highlighted for example increases in the uptake of lifelong learning and in the provision for ‘in-demand’ skills and increased levels of qualifications in these skill areas.¹² The year 2016 marked the transition to the implementation of key Government policies for medium term growth. **Enterprise 2025** sets out the ten-year jobs and enterprise strategy. **Innovation 2020** sets out the five-year strategy for research and development, science and technology, including a roadmap to deliver on the vision for Ireland to become a global innovation leader by focusing on excellence, talent and impact.

The new **National Skills Strategy 2025** published in early 2016, sets out a vision for the period up to 2025 of how Ireland can develop relevant skills and ensure that our supply of skills is activated and effectively used. It aims to make Ireland internationally renowned for its talent, for its highly skilled and adaptive people, equipped with the higher order capabilities required in the 21st century workplace and for its openness to continuous learning.

The Network of **Regional Skills Fora** was created as part of the National Skills Strategy 2025. The Fora provide:

- a single contact point in each region to help employers connect with the range of services and supports available across the education and training system
- more robust labour market information and analysis of employer needs to inform programme development
- greater collaboration and utilisation of resources across the education and training system and enhancement of progression routes for learners
- a structure for employers to become more involved in promoting employment and career progression opportunities in their sectors.¹³

¹¹ <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Action-Plan-for-Education-2016-2019/>

¹² <http://www.SOLAS.ie/SOLASPdfLibrary/SOLASCorporatePlan.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.regionalskills.ie/>

The implementation of eight **Regional Action Plans for Jobs** is on-going and based on a collaborative approach between public sector bodies and relevant private sector actors within each region to build on existing strengths and assets identifying opportunities to ensure employment growth of 10 – 15 per cent in each region.¹⁴

The following policy statements and reports frame the context for the progress review of the FET Strategy:

- **Evaluation of PLC Programme Provision** (2018)¹⁵ commissioned by SOLAS and conducted by the ESRI which provides a detailed evaluation of PLC provision to provide a strong evidence base which would inform future policy development for a cohort of learners which represent the largest component of full-time further education and training provision in Ireland. SOLAS has published a set of recommendations in response to the ESRI evaluation findings to improve the learner experience, learner outcomes and the standing, relevance and responsiveness of PLCs.¹⁶
- The **Higher Education System Performance Framework, 2018 – 2020** (2018)¹⁷ which represents the second phase of evolution of the changed relationship between the State and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). It has been developed with the implementation of the System Performance Framework for Higher Education published in 2013 whose purpose was to hold the system accountable for performance, to articulate all the expectations of the system, to increase visibility of performance, to contribute to system and policy developments and to allow HEIs to identify their strategic niche and mission and agree a performance compact aligned with funding.
- **Action Plan for Education 2018** (2018)¹⁸ whose ambition is to provide the best education and training system in Europe over the next decade and represents the significant strategic reform programme under way in education and training and recognises the importance of critical business functions to ensure business continuity and quality of service to all our stakeholders.
- The **Action Plan for Jobs 2017** (2017)¹⁹ concludes that *“building a strong economy that delivers sustainable full employment is not an easy task in light of increasing global uncertainty, particularly in the global trading environment. We must intensify our efforts to enhance and improve competitiveness and build resilience across all sectors of the economy”. And importantly it states that, “we must focus on structural reforms which improve productivity across the economy, including increasing efficiencies, and reducing unnecessary administrative burdens. We must continue to develop, nurture and attract world class talent and drive investment in innovation to sustain a competitive advantage, particularly in key sectors”.*

¹⁴ <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Action-Plan-for-Jobs-2017.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.esri.ie/pubs/RS61.pdf>

¹⁶ https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2018-press-releases/pr18-01-09_14072_SOLAS_plc_review.pdf

¹⁷ <http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2018/01/higher-education-system-performance-framework-2018-2020.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/action-plan-for-education-2018.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Action-Plan-for-Jobs-2017.pdf>

- **Ireland 2040** (2017)²⁰ which sets out The National Planning Framework, is the Government's plan to cater for the extra one million people that will be living in Ireland, by focusing on growing our regions, their cities, towns and villages and rural fabric, building more accessible urban centres of scale and securing better outcomes for communities and the environment, through more effective and coordinated planning, investment and delivery.
- The **Pathways to Work 2016 – 2020** (2016)²¹ framework with a goal to ensure that as many jobs as possible go to people on the Live Register and should reflect a shift in focus from “activation in a time of recession” to “activation in a time of growth” by consolidating the progress made to date with an initial focus on working with unemployed jobseekers, in particular people who are long-term unemployed and extending the approach of activation to other people who, although not classified as unemployed jobseekers, have the potential and the desire to play a more active role in the labour force.
- The **National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030** (2011)²² which sets out the long-term vision for higher education as having a central role in making Ireland a country recognised for innovation, competitive enterprise and continuing academic excellence, and an attractive place to live and work with a high quality of life, cultural vibrancy and inclusive social structures.

FET is a key contributor to the above DES reform programme and many of the FET strategy implementation Actions enable the reform programme to achieve the ambition set for education in, for example, the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, the National Skills Strategy, the Action Plan for Jobs, Pathways to Work, and the agreed FET sectoral targets set out in the SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019. Given the interconnectedness of FET to 'cross DES' and 'cross government' initiatives, the FET strategy both impacts on and is itself impacted upon by a broad range of strategies and implementation plans as it sits concurrently within the education reform landscape and in the wider 'all of government' reform agenda.

The above backdrop provides a lens in which the interdependent and complementary nature of primarily employment-focussed FET provision can be comprehended vis-à-vis provision that primarily strives to advance social equity. In this way, a solid platform can be installed to identify key 'carry-over' actions to be brought forward into the second five-year FET strategy to complement additional new Actions and sub-strategies that may be warranted in repurposing the FET sector in the new economic climate.

20 Ireland 2040 Our Plan, National Planning Framework

21 <https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/PathwaysToWork2016-2020.pdf>

22 http://www.cit.ie/contentfiles/DES_Higher_Ed_Main_Report.pdf

AN IMPROVING ECONOMY / LABOUR MARKET

Global economic growth continued to gain momentum in 2017.²³ The European economy entered its fifth year of recovery and is expected to continue to strengthen into 2018 with all EU economies showing signs of growth.²⁴ The Irish economy is no exception and continues to grow strongly.

Current levels of underemployment are now close to those that pertained in the pre-crisis period. The unemployment rate is forecast to average 5.4 per cent in 2018.²⁵ The tightening of the labour market and projections for inflation are also likely to result in moderate rises in wages over the period. As the labour market approaches full employment levels, wage growth has intensified, rising four times faster in the period between Q2 2016 and Q2 2017 compared to the same period in the previous year.

Strong growth driven by on-going recovery in the domestic side of the economy together with solid employment growth were notable features in 2017. Continued strong growth in terms of GDP of 3.9 - 4.2 per cent in 2018. **Figure 1** illustrates the decline in unemployment rates since December 2014; and further decline in to an average of 5.4 - 5.6 per cent through 2018/19 is anticipated.²⁶

An additional 60,000 jobs are expected to be created in 2017. While employment gains were recorded in all sectors, industry including construction was particular robust. The trend of part-time positions being replaced by full-time positions also continued into 2017. In the period, Quarter 1 2012 to Quarter 1, 2017 the share in employment grew for all levels of education but was most pronounced for those with post-secondary education, rising by almost eleven percentage points to 74.1% in Quarter 1 2017.²⁷

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

Figure 1: Monthly unemployment rate, Dec 2014-17



²³ OECD (2017), 'OECD Economic Outlook', Volume 2017 Issue 2, OECD Publishing, Paris.

²⁴ European Commission (2017) Winter Economic Forecast.

²⁵ <https://www.esri.ie/news/economic-growth-set-to-remain-solid-in-2017-and-2018/>

²⁶ ESRI 2017, 'Quarterly Economic Commentary', December 2017 and Central Bank 'Quarterly Economic Commentary Quarter B4 2017'.

²⁷ SOLAS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit.

THE NEW SKILLS AGENDA AND FET

Following structural reforms introduced after the financial crisis in many countries, the focus of new efforts by governments including Ireland is to underpin and sustain further improvement in the economy and more inclusive progress. A broader, more comprehensive concept has recently emerged at EU level in respect of the purpose of FET in advancing the skills agenda. FET comprehends a broader concept than just ‘feeding’ the needs of the economy. Learning is a goal in its own right, providing individuals with the ability to participate as fully as possible in adult life, including work.

This understanding is at the core of EU skills policy.²⁸ Here FET is not only linked with labour market requirements of the knowledge economy for a highly-skilled workforce but to the needs of older workers, the needs of low-skilled and disadvantaged groups for the purpose of achieving social cohesion and increasing labour market participation. The Irish Government committed to investment in skills policies that raise the employability of people while at the same time promote the personal development of individuals and raise their quality of life.²⁹ These priorities were subsequently embedded across a range of Government policy initiatives such as the FET Strategy 2014-2019, Ireland’s National Skills Strategy 2025, Action Plan for Education, Pathways to Work, Action Plan for Jobs, FET Strategy 2014-2019 and the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020. The new SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019 reflects this more inclusive skills agenda and in addition sets out details of how SOLAS commitments embedded in these and other policy initiatives will progress this agenda.

KEY DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND FET

Economic growth is central to economic development.³⁰ Among the key drivers of economic growth are globalisation, technology, innovation and human capital accumulation.³¹ The one that has received the most recent attention is technology. History shows the importance of technology across all workplaces, in the ways of working across all occupations and consequently, the very functioning of the economy. Because of frequent advances and changes in technologies, patterns of work and work content, skills can quickly become outdated.³²

Consequently, producing world class skills are rightly at or close to the top of many Governments’ list of priorities, including for the FET sector. The challenge to achieve this should not be underestimated. There is a ‘global auction’ for cut priced talent.³³ Studies suggest that skills are a source of competitive advantage at national and local level provided they are part of a broader and integrated strategy of national economic development³⁴

28 ‘Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) December 2013’. Also, OECD (2015), ‘Economic Policy Reforms 2015 Going for Growth’ <https://www.oecd.org/economy/growth/Going-for-growth-2015-executive-summary.pdf>

29 ‘RIGA Conclusion 2015 On a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015-2020, as a result of the review of short-term deliverables defined in the 2010 Bruges Communiqué’.

30 World Bank <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/economy-and-growth>

31 Hepburn, C. and Beinhocker, E., (2014) ‘Resilient and Inclusive Prosperity within Planetary Boundaries’, University of Oxford; The London School of Economics and Political Science; The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in China & World Economy / 76–92, Vol. 22, No. 5, 2014, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

32 Cambridge Publishers, (2016); ‘Labour in the 21st Century, Insights into a Changing World of Work’. Editors: Katherine Stone, Emanuele Dagnino, Silvia Fernández Martínez December 2016.

33 Brown, P., Lauder, H., and Ashton, D., ‘The knowledge economy and the global auction for brainpower’ in Open to Ideas: Essays on education and skills, City and Guilds and Policy Connect U.

34 LEED and OECD; ‘Delivering Local Development: Ireland’.

which fortunately is already in place in Ireland.³⁵ However, the share of low skilled workers in Ireland that experience literacy or numeracy issues or experience *both* literacy and numeracy issues is in the region of 20%³⁶ and remains a key challenge for FET and the FET strategy.

The importance of the FET Strategy continuing to focus all FET partners on low levels of literacy and numeracy is essential since people with higher literacy skills are more likely to be, among other things, more productive at work, more satisfied at work, less likely to live in poverty, be unemployed or economically inactive.³⁷ Although much of the Irish workforce is well qualified, approximately one in six of the adult population have literacy difficulties.³⁸ Many have insufficient literacy and numeracy skills to obtain sustainable employment. In other words, it makes sense to continue to focus FET strategic efforts on areas of potential high returns in terms of employment and social mobility such as literacy and numeracy.³⁹

The importance of ICT digital literacy skills for every citizen too is evidently growing, yet half of the EU adult population (56%) have no ICT skills or can only fulfil the simplest set of tasks in a technology-rich environment (Level 1). The percentage of Irish population 16-65 years of age at ICT Level 1 is 57%.⁴⁰ Therefore, FET has a very important role in also strengthening the individual's digital literacy capacities.

SKILLS POLARISATION AND FET

Skills polarisation in Ireland is relatively acute. There has been a significant shift in the relative share of 'middle' skilled jobs of total employment in the period 1995-2015 with a 15% decline set against a 15% rise in the level of high skilled jobs. There has been a slight increase (0.7%) in the level of low skilled jobs⁴¹ over the same period. At the same time, there are between 170,000 to 200,000+ low skilled workers in the Republic of Ireland or around 10% of the workforce.⁴²

These individuals are particularly at risk of poverty and deprivation, more likely to be in receipt of supplementary social supports and often fall into the category of the 'working-poor'. Many of these occupations are also in sectors identified as having particularly prevalent precarious work such as hotel and catering, construction, health & care, agriculture, cleaning, retail, security and food. Again, the central role of FET going forward is to enable workers build the right skills, offering the opportunities to upskill and reskill throughout their working lives.

Internationally education and training systems, labour markets, workers and workplaces have, to a greater or lesser degree, have been challenged to respond effectively to emerging skill needs. FET is no exception. Three components are key to improving levels of agility:

- the development of transferable skills

35 A Strategy for Growth; Medium-Term Economic Strategy 2014–2020; 'Pathways to Work'; 'Action Plan for Jobs'; 'Rural Action Plan 2017'; 'Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025'; 'FET Strategy 2014-2019'.

36 OECD (2017), 'Skills Outlook 2017', Fig 1.7

37 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012), 'Skills, employment, income, inequality and poverty: Theory, evidence and an estimation framework'.

38 'The Survey of Adult Skills for Ireland (PIAAC)' 2012.

39 Literacy and numeracy in the broadest sense including digital literacy, financial literacy etc.

40 OECD's Survey of Adult Skills, also known as the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult competencies or PIAAC 2012/2013.

41 OECD (2017) 'Employment Outlook'. Definition of high-skill jobs as involving "complex cognitive tasks" that are not frequently repeated. Middle Skills consist of "repetitive cognitive task" e.g. clerical.

42 NERI (2017), 'A time-series analysis of precarious work in the elementary professions in Ireland'.

- more programmes that include work-based learning such as apprenticeships and traineeships⁴³
- steps to better match skills to jobs and to ensure that skills are fully utilised⁴⁴

INCREASING THE DEMAND FOR FET SKILLS

Although skills supply forms an important element in Irish skills policy, there is an opportunity for the FET sector, led by SOLAS, to widen its focus and place much greater emphasis on boosting underlying levels of employer demand for skills and helping ensure existing skills are used more productively in the workplace. Success in this approach relies on sustained cooperation from industry⁴⁵ and strong support and coordination from DES, QQI and the HEA.

Even if the right skills are identified, the challenge of ensuring a timely flow of skilled workers from the further education and training sector to meet this demand should not be underestimated. The OECD conclude that around one-quarter of workers in advanced economies report a mismatch between their skills and those required to do their job. More specifically some of the highest levels of underutilisation of skills (40%) are reported by Irish workers.⁴⁶ New research⁴⁷ recently published by the ESRI confirms this with 46 per cent of full-time Irish employees reporting that their skills are greater than those required to do their job, the fourth highest rate of skill underutilisation out of 28 EU countries. A relatively low number of Irish employees feel that their skills are matched to their job. The rate of “matched employment” in Ireland, at 46 percent, is the fourth lowest in the EU.

An analysis of the labour market in the National Skills Bulletin 2013 estimated that over a million movements of individuals between employment, unemployment and inactivity took place in 2012, including frequent changes of both occupations and employers right across the skills levels. While this points to the flexibility of the Irish labour market and opportunities for jobseekers, it also highlights the difficulties facing lower skilled people in securing sustainable employment. The notion that job opportunities are or will only be concentrated in high-skilled graduate positions does not fit with the evidence.

A significant volume of jobs become available simply through replacing people who leave the workforce for a variety of reasons including retirement, new career etc. This creates on-going demand for people with diverse levels of qualifications and types of experience, including those with further education and training credentials. An emphasis on developing a ‘well skilled’ rather than a ‘high skilled’ economy better mirrors best practice skills policies. Broad availability of good-quality education is regarded as a foundation for future training, supported by a close matching of skills supply to

⁴³ OECD, World Bank, ILO (2016); ‘*Enhancing employability*’ - Report prepared for the G20 Employment Working Group with inputs from The International Monetary Fund.

⁴⁴ OECD (2016), ‘*Economic Outlook*’, Volume 2016, Issue 2.

⁴⁵ Keep, E. ‘Education, Employment and the Economy: Time to bid the past goodbye?’ in *Essays on education and skills*, City and Guilds and Policy Connect U.

⁴⁶ OECD (2011), ‘*Employment Outlook*’.

⁴⁷ ESRI (2017), ‘Educational attainment and skill utilisation in the Irish labour market: An EU comparison’.

the needs of enterprises and labour markets, thus facilitating the successful adjustment of all workers and enterprises to changes in technology and markets.⁴⁸

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT AND FET

During the financial crisis, government skills and activation policy quite rightly focussed on those who had lost their job. As employment begins to recover to pre-crisis levels it is important not to lose sight of how to support re-skilling and upskilling of those within the workforce while at the same time keeping a strong focus on unemployed jobseekers to ensure the sustainability of the recovery. DES and SOLAS are preparing an Employee Development Strategy that the FET sector can support to sustain the recovery.⁴⁹ The development strategy is particularly pertinent given that Ireland ranks relatively low regarding participation in lifelong learning⁵⁰ with some of the lowest levels of lifelong learning participation among those currently working in low skilled occupations.

Since small and medium sized enterprises constitute the majority of enterprises in Ireland and for the majority of employed people, skills training and development is especially critical in respect of the health of local and regional economies and communities. Context on the ground matters for the SME sector. It influences the amount and nature of training and skills development that is undertaken and desired by SMEs.⁵¹ Unsurprisingly, the vast bulk of SMEs want training tailored to their own particular set of circumstances and to be responsive to their own particular company requirements. Their product/service market position, the niche which a company occupies and the markets within which it competes (or is looking to enter) are central in determining their skills requirements.

At a practical level, SMEs find it harder than large organisations to release people for off-the-job training while at the same time maintaining normal day to-day operations. Even when they commit to training, firms often report difficulty in accessing training that is tailored to their specific needs in terms of type and quality of courses, scheduling, location etc. We also know that the smaller the firm the less likely it is to be engaged in training in the first place, while a sizeable proportion of small firms undertake no training at all. Fully one-half of small firms in the EU perceive no need for further training of their workforce following recruitment and those smaller firms that do train are found to be less likely to have a training plan or budget.⁵² These factors clearly signal an important focus for the remaining period of the existing strategy and for the second FET strategy on increasing the demand for FET related skills across all business sectors.

There is a temptation to view the above discussion in terms of all those FET programmes classed as ‘employment driven’ as somehow more preferable than provision that is primarily offered to increase social inclusion and equity or to increase engagement or re-engagement in lifelong

48 ILO, (2011), ‘A G20 Training Strategy - A Skilled Workforce for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth’.

49 Targeting employment growth in Manufacturing Bio-Pharm, Data Analytics, Tourism Hospitality, Freight Transport, Distribution & Logistics, Agriculture and Food, Construction, International Financial Services, ICT.

50 SOLAS Lifelong Learning Report for the National Skills Council.

51 OECD and LEED (2014), ‘Leveraging Training Skills Development in SMEs’.

52 OECD and LEED and Danish Business Authority, ‘UPGRADING WORKFORCE SKILLS IN SMALL BUSINESSES: REVIEWING INTERNATIONAL POLICY AND EXPERIENCE’, Report for Workshop on ‘Skills Development for SMEs and Entrepreneurship’ Copenhagen, 28 November 2012.

learning. On the contrary it is vital to offer a level of general skills and education programmes to equip individuals with the necessary foundations to pursue more specific technical programmes to meet important educational and social objectives.⁵³ One of the most important of these objectives is enabling FET learners with a FET-related qualification to access third level education.

FET TO HE PATHWAYS

FET to HE targets have been set for some time although measuring the actual numbers remains a challenge. The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015 – 2019 sets a target of 10% (from 6.6%) of new entrants to higher education whose basis for admission is a further education qualification. This target was also set in the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014– 2019. On-going collaboration between QQI, SOLAS and the HEA, and work by regional clusters on the development of pathways between further and higher education will support the achievement of this target. In numerical terms, the above target represents an increase of about 2,000 in the number of new entrants progressing to higher education on the basis of their further education award over the next five years.

DES and SOLAS through the Transitions Reform Group are working to broaden entry-routes into higher education from the FET Sector. A new FET sub-group is being established to examine current routes from further education and training to higher education and to propose improvements to these arrangements. SOLAS is working with the HEA, QQI and ETBI to finalise the draft terms of reference for the sub-group. The aims of the sub-group will be to ensure that education and training qualifications from the FET Sector are recognised for entry into higher education in an agreed and consistent manner and to identify barriers to higher education from further education and training and propose appropriate solutions.

In addition to the work of the Transitions Reform Group, SOLAS is also working with the HEA National Access Plan Steering Committee and the Irish Universities Association to examine ways in which the process for learners in FET to progress to HE can be improved. SOLAS is currently mapping the current links between FET and HE institutions to establish a full repository of information concerning those existing links. The work undertaken to date shows the significant links that currently exist as well as the broad range of progression options. SOLAS and ETBI are also represented on the FET2HE Regional partnership - a partnership of the Leinster Pillar and 8 ETBs. It hosted a conference backed by a scoping paper and with guest presentations, including the US Community College perspective, where advanced entry and agreed articulated links and credit transfer agreements with clear pathways are effective in certain regions.

BUILDING UP SKILLS FORECASTING CAPACITY

Providing quality education and training and meeting existing skill needs is not sufficient in itself to underpin a world class further education and training system. Policymakers and education providers need sound evidence of the skills which will be required in future to help them make the right

⁵³ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2012), 'Comprehensive Review of Expenditure Thematic Evaluation Series Labour Market Activation and Training'; Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit Government of Ireland.

decisions on policies and reforms, education curricula, and investment.⁵⁴ There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Local and regional labour markets shape skills needs along with the global trends as discussed above. Currently SOLAS, through its Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, continuously monitors the skills and competence requirements of enterprises in Ireland.

There are four major on-going FET initiatives designed to further improve intelligence on the skill and competence requirements of Irish enterprises. The first is the systematic evaluation of the outcomes from SOLAS funded FET programmes. SOLAS is in the process of developing a model for the systematic evaluation of the major destination outcomes. Secondly, a database has been developed - Programme Learning and Support System (PLSS) - which contains all relevant data on courses and participants and it will provide the major source of inputs to the model. The data on the subsequent destination of participants will come from the integration of four major databases.⁵⁵ Several pilots have already been carried out and the results confirm that the project is feasible from a technical perspective.

Thirdly SOLAS intends to begin systematic data mining of all on-line major vacancy databases. The purpose of this initiative is to map the changing competences associated with different occupations. The results will be circulated to all FET providers, particularly the ETBs so that course curricula can be adapted to current enterprise competency requirements.

The fourth initiative concerns the Department of Education and Skills-led regional employers' fora and the 'MEND' project. SOLAS is actively engaged with the Department of Education and Skills, the Higher Education Authority, Enterprise Ireland and the University of Maynooth on this 'MEND' project which explores the potential of the Regional Employers Skills Fora - working in tandem with a range of appropriate State departments and agencies - to act as a conduit for the systematic gathering of data on the skill and competency requirements of enterprises in Ireland. The next three years therefore provides a significant opportunity to advance the contribution that further education and training makes to learners, enterprises and communities. The progress review of the current FET strategy and scoping and development of the next FET strategy needs to be cognisant of these developments.

A NEW SYSTEM OF FET STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY

The successful follow-through on the many initiatives developed or started under the first SOLAS Corporate Plan 2014-2016 and the progressing of new initiatives in the second SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019 are central to the overall success of the existing FET strategy. These include approaches to systematic performance-based evaluation and funding, advances in data analytics and research, implementation of the DES-led literacy and numeracy strategy implementation plan, implementation of the professional development strategy for all FET staff, better annual FET service planning and facilitating the development and roll out of new apprenticeships and traineeships, while enhancing the quality of existing apprenticeships and traineeships.

⁵⁴ European Commission (2016). 'COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS; A NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE' – *'Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness'*.

⁵⁵ Revenue; Social Welfare Payments Database; Post Primary and Higher Education Student Database and the PLSS.

However, significant challenges remain for the FET sector. The sector is challenged to respond quickly to the improved economic circumstances and to evolving social inclusion priorities while undertaking the longer term strategic reform in terms of planning, delivery and quality assurance. Much institutional knowledge and experience was lost during the recession and has not, to date, been fully replaced. Most parts of the sector are faced with competing demands and significant resource pressures. It will be important for SOLAS and the FET sector to optimise resources, strengthen existing partnerships and develop new ways of increasing efficiencies and effectiveness without compromising on the quality of provision and services.

The SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-19 was closely aligned with the FET strategy, sharing five common goals, but it also heralded agreement with the Department of Education and Skills to delivery of specific quantitative targets from the FET sector over the three-year period. These targets related to areas including employment, progression to other education and training opportunities, lifelong learning, transversal skills and traineeship development. They also provided the framework for the development of multi-annual strategic performance agreements between SOLAS and the ETBs, which are now being rolled out. These agreements will formalise a partnership between SOLAS and ETBs based on outcomes to be delivered over a three-year period, with each agreement expected to set out:

- Links to wider strategic planning of the ETB and relevant national, regional and local policy/strategy context
- Real understanding of unique characteristics of the region and learners it serves
- A set of strategic priorities for FET which reflect these characteristics
- The unique contribution which the ETB will make to FET over the 3 years
- An innovative and adaptable approach to the evolving landscape
- Commitment to the ETB contribution across national sectoral targets
- Risks, challenges and opportunities over the next three years and how these can be addressed

FET FUNDING AND FUTURE EXPENDITURE FOCUS

In 2017, a total of **€830mm** was invested in FET through Exchequer funding and the National Training Fund (*NTF*). The 2017 allocation to SOLAS was €635mm, of which 52% is Exchequer funded and 48% non-Exchequer funded, with €578mm of this allocation spent on the provision of Further Education and Training Programmes.

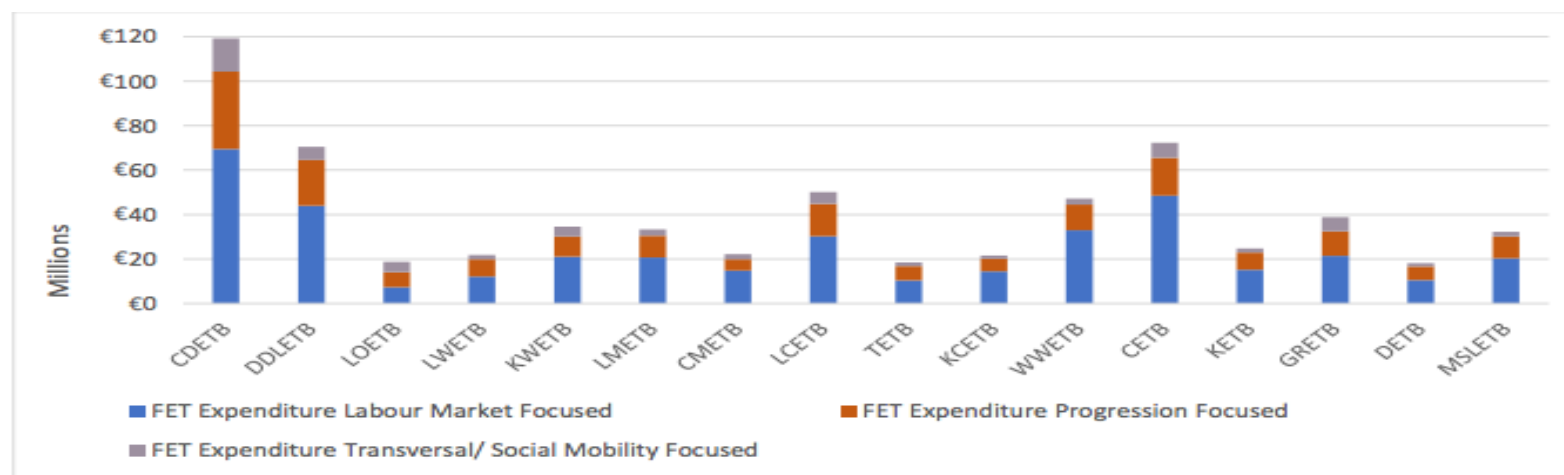
The SOLAS Services Plan 2017 (which is informed by SOLAS Corporate Plan outlined above) provided for a total budget allocation of **€638,250m**, to be made available for SOLAS-funded FET provision in 2018. In 2017, some 323,308 beneficiaries benefitted from SOLAS-funded FET programmes

and services against 339,283 beneficiaries in 2016. There were 230,641 new entrants to FET funded schemes in 2017 which represented a reduction of 15,000 on the 2016. Approximately 59% of beneficiaries are individuals that require introductory level courses/supports focused on progression and transversal skills that can assist them in accessing further training or employment.

A report by Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (*DPER*) in July 2017⁵⁶ outlined that the changing landscape of further education and training provision in Ireland has created an opportunity to shape the sector to be more transparent, effective and accountable and to enhance high quality outputs, outcomes and performance. The report acknowledges that FET not only provides education and training but also “refresh economically-valuable skills” which will be needed to boost the future competitiveness of the Irish market. As part of this approach to providing skills and support to a labour force it recognised that FET also plays an important part in the provision of socially orientated programmes which would assist “people lead fulfilling lives, supporting some hard-to-reach individuals and groups to achieve their potential and reducing the costs to society of exclusion”. However, while it recognised the importance and wider benefits regarding the social focus of some of the provision, the overarching primacy of the FET expenditure should “be based, in the first instance, on the requirements of the labour market”.⁵⁷

The report analysed the FET provision by SOLAS and the sixteen ETBs. The report set out ETB funding across three categories of provision as follows: *Category 1*: Predominantly Labour Market Focused, *Category 2*: Predominantly Progression Focused and *Category 3*: Predominantly Individual Transversal Skills/Social Mobility Focused. The breakdown of these three categories is illustrated in **Figure 2** below.

Figure 2: FET Expenditure by Category per ETB in 2016



⁵⁶ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Spending Review, Analysis of Further Education & Training Expenditure by Education Training Boards, July 2017

⁵⁷ Spending Review 2017, Analysis of Further Education & Training Expenditure by Education Training Boards, pg. 15

Given the changing operating and employment landscape as described above, one of the findings of the report was to “review this feature of FET provision, in order to avert a return to a situation where aggregate FET expenditure remains static regardless of the wider economic and labour market conditions”, recommending that SOLAS should evaluate the level of expenditure in the wider socially focussed provision and consider whether there should be a stronger correlation between FET expenditure and the needs of the wider labour market.

Due to the dissimilar way in which other jurisdictions classify FET provision, it was difficult to compare expenditure between labour market and wider socially focused FET provision and correlate this with wider labour market conditions. Substantive conclusions around the appropriateness of expenditure based on international comparisons would have been subject to an inappropriate level of applied assumptions.

The DPER report goes on to say that the expected reduction in expenditure focusing on labour market as unemployment nears zero, must be diverted towards the provision of programmes focused on upskilling those IN employment and bringing those hardest to reach in the education and training continuum. The recent Ireland 2040 Planning framework reiterates this by saying that the availability of well-educated, skilled talent is a fundamental driver of national competitiveness at both national and regional level.⁵⁸ It is the development of human capital at all levels (post-secondary and adult learners of all ages) and the continued professional development of the providers which is fundamental to the country’s economic success. The Ireland 2040 report specifically recognises the role which the FET systems can play in “catalysing and supporting economic and social development in local communities, in regions and nationally.”

The report also mirrored the future skills assessment of the World Economic Forum and the emergence of digitisation by asserting that the only way to future proof our competitiveness will be to develop a skills base that will move Ireland to the forefront of digital and innovative activity. Access to new technologies, knowledge and skills is crucial if Ireland is to develop its value-added segments and knowledge-intensive products and services. The ongoing required funding made available for Category 1, 2 and 3 provision must be aligned with the strategic and management capacity of the ETBs and other programme providers if it to better drive “applied innovations and their commercialisation and diffusion at regional level”.

MEETING FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS

Jobs and careers (and therefore skill sets) have been changing rapidly for the past 20 years. Several key drivers, such as demographic structure, technological advancements, regulatory requirements and climate change will significantly impact future employment, occupational structure and employees’ skills and qualifications across sectors. Globalisation and technological change (including digitalisation) are destroying some jobs and creating others. Around 14 of every 15 jobs in the EU will become available due to the need to replace workers leaving the labour market. The large share of people new at their jobs in 2025, due to high replacement demand and changes in job content and type of job tasks performed in some occupations or sectors will naturally create a need for high quality education and training in touch with changing skill needs in the labour market.

⁵⁸ Project Ireland 2040, National Planning Framework

The mix of jobs has changed profoundly as the number of traditionally middle-skill jobs, from machine operatives to clerical workers, has declined relative to both 'high' and 'low' skills jobs, leaving labour markets more polarised and heightening concerns about growing inequality. Ireland is no exception. Polarisation can be partly explained by the shift away from manufacturing, a sector historically characterised by a high number of middle-skill jobs, and into services between 1995 and 2015. Ireland has experienced a 15% decrease in 'middle' skills jobs and 15% increase in 'high' skill jobs over this period.

Digitalisation too has diverse and opposing effects on job dynamics. On the one hand, it tends to initiate new products, machines and increased competitiveness, leading to the creation of new jobs. On the other hand, digitalisation has impacted on the substitution of parts of or on entire jobs and leading to job losses. Digitisation and automation have given rise to significant changes in occupational structure and are changing the nature of work and careers. Again, routine jobs (many of which are middle-skilled) are being sought less since they are the ones most easily automated. Across all countries, workers with a lower level of education are at the highest risk of displacement.

The challenges arising from the impact of digitalisation and automation are significant. Groups with the lowest ICT skills tend to be the same people (plus those least prepared to update their skills) that are at the highest risk of losing their jobs in the changing technological landscape. While the importance of ICT skills for every citizen is evidently growing, half of the EU adult population (56%) have no ICT skills or can only fulfil the simplest set of tasks in a technology-rich environment (Level 1). The percentage of Irish population 16-65 years of age at ICT Level 1 is 57% and at level 2 or above, 25%.

Given this evolving labour market context, a number of developments are expected within specific sectors or areas of activity including:

- Routine 'white collar' office roles (middle level jobs) such as Office and Administrative roles as well as Manufacturing and Production roles are expected to see a further decrease but are also anticipated to have relatively good potential for upskilling and productivity enhancement through technology.
- Although the manufacturing sector as a whole will experience slight decline in the future, significant replacement demand will continue to exist, and the motor vehicles subsector, is expected to grow with the change to electric cars.
- Future employment in transport equipment or electronics and optical equipment will be stable
- Positive, employment growth in non-marketed services attributed to employment in health services and education, compensating for employment losses in the public administration.
- Workers in lower skilled roles in the Office and Administrative and Manufacturing and Production sectors may find themselves caught up in a vicious cycle of recycling in and out of employment in the absence of opportunities for re-skilling or upskilling.

- In general, most job openings are expected to be in services, but due to replacement demand significant numbers of job opportunities are still expected to be maintained in manufacturing.
- Most workers in transportation and logistics occupations, together with the bulk of office and administrative support workers, and operatives and skilled workers in production occupations are at risk.
- Jobs with a predictable pattern of activities are the most susceptible to automation and digitalisation e.g. sewing, accounts clerks, cargo and freight agents, insurance underwriters.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it is clear to see that both the operating environment in which FET was conceived and the policy landscape in which it operates have changed dramatically in recent years. The nature of the labour market and future skills requirements are also evolving rapidly, and education and training provision will have to continuously respond to the technological, regulatory and other changes which will emerge over the next decade. It is therefore against this backdrop we now set out the findings from our review, and our observations and recommendations to support the more immediate and longer-term success of FET.

SECTION III: FET IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

The OECD notes that as global economic competition accelerates, and countries compete on the quality of goods and services, there is a need to ensure that the labour force has a “range of mid-level trade, technical and professional skills alongside the high-level skills associated with university education.”⁵⁹ Accordingly, many OECD countries are now devoting significant policy attention and resources to the FET/VET sector.

Internationally, national systems of FET/VET are very diverse. In contrast to higher education which is usually more clearly defined, FET/VET provision can be wide-ranging and heterogeneous. Research shows⁶⁰ that the broad continuum of European systems in operation range from countries with high standardisation, strong track differentiation and strong linkages between education and the labour market (for example, Germany) to countries with equally high standardisation but much weaker track differentiation and school to work linkages.

Similarities to the Irish system can be seen across the OECD where FET/VET development has tended to be episodic, responding to particular needs and demands as they arise rather than in a strategic way. From this perspective, Ireland can be characterised as a system which has high standardisation but less differentiation into academic or vocational tracks and qualifications in terms of levels and grades are found to act as a strong signal to employers within the Irish labour market.⁶¹

The Department of Education and Skills describe further education as education and training which occurs after second level schooling but which is not part of the third level system.⁶² The definition put forward in the Further Education and Training Strategy states:

- FET provides education and training and related supports to assist individuals to gain a range of employment, career, personal and social skills and qualifications at Levels 1-6 on the NFQ or equivalent.
- It is aimed at jobseekers, school leavers, labour market returners, employees, those interested in new career direction, those wishing to access ‘second chance’ education, those wishing to re-engage in learning and to prepare school-leavers and others for higher education.
- FET also plays an important role in helping people to lead fulfilling lives, supporting some of the hard-to-reach individuals and groups to achieve their potential and reducing the costs to society of exclusion.

59 OECD (2011) OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training. Learning for Jobs. Paris: OECD, p7.

60 Allmendinger, 1989; Maurice et al., 1986; Müller and Shavit, 1998

61 McGuinness, S., Bergin, A., Kelly, E., McCoy, S., Smyth, E., Whelan, A., & Banks, J. (2014). Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future, pg. 109

62 <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Further-Education-Training/>

Depending on national context, FET systems in other jurisdictions broadly speaking provides education and training opportunities to the school leavers and to under-represented groups, and to adults 25-64 years who are involved in re-skilling/up-skilling, those who require literacy and numeracy interventions, and to communities across the country to meet an identified education and training need. Accordingly, provision includes:

- Initial vocational education and training, including high quality apprenticeships
- A re-entry route for individuals to education and training, including literacy and basic education
- Professional or vocational development of individuals either in the workforce or re-entering the workforce
- Community education and training and
- Other systematic and deliberate learning undertaken by adults in a wide variety of settings and contexts, both formal and informal.⁶³

Governance arrangements for FET/VET also vary from country to country. Historically, many countries have developed separate governance arrangements reflecting different educational pathways and occupational destinations. However, increasingly, there is a growing understanding that people in high participation societies require much greater preparation for a wider range of competences, and greater education-system flexibility so that students, of all ages, can move in and out of the education system as labour market and life circumstances changes. The concept of lifelong learning (LLL) stresses that “*learning throughout life is a continuum*”.⁶⁴ This requires greater cohesion across the tertiary or post-secondary education system, with more attention being given to developing coherent and integrated governance and educational pathways between parts of the system.⁶⁵

Three international comparators are included below, as a way of providing a reference to the issues and policy responses in different OECD jurisdictions, with respect to FET provision and governance arrangements. The three countries – Wales, Germany and New Zealand – were chosen because they share similar educational conditions and expectations as developed societies and economies. Wales (3.1m people) and New Zealand (4.7m people) are similar in size to Ireland; Germany has a well-developed vocational and apprenticeship system and is often looked to as a role model.

Each jurisdiction has its unique features. Context is important to understanding different policy choices, and accordingly resulting structures and governance arrangements. Thus, the vignettes are provided here for policy-learning, rather than policy-copying, purposes.

⁶³ McGuinness, S., Bergin, A., Kelly, E., McCoy, S., Smyth, E., Whelan, A., & Banks, J. (2014). Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future, (35), pviii

⁶⁴ AGE Platform (2007) *Lifelong Learning - A Tool for All Ages*, leaflet. http://www.age-platform.eu/images/stories/EN/AGE_leaflet_lifelong_learning.pdf

⁶⁵ Wheelan, L., Buchanan, J. & Yu, S. (2015) *Linking qualification and the labour market through capabilities and vocational streams*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

WALES

The Welsh post-compulsory sector comprises a multifaceted and diverse set of institutions, providing for learner needs from 16 years onwards. Reflecting this complexity, governance, regulation, quality assurance, and performance review is overseen and monitored by a myriad of organisations, some of which are Welsh-based, while others operate within the broader English or UK post compulsory system. The complexity also reflects the fact that compulsory education, up to 16 years, is a definitional characteristic; thus, educational provision after 16 years is referred to as post-compulsory education.

Further education has been directly governed and funded by the Welsh Government, via the Department for Education and Skills. In contrast, higher education is overseen by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

The Welsh FE system is a complex and diverse sector providing a range of qualifications for learners of various backgrounds and ages, including work-based learning, adult and community education, and for learners from 16 years onwards. As in Northern Ireland and England, FE colleges offer 6th Form education, which represents the final 1-3 years of secondary education where students prepare for their A-levels, in addition to vocational education programmes. FE Institutions also offer some HE courses, sometimes in partnership with universities.

The FE sector is a key player in helping to deliver the Welsh Government's aims to widen participation, tackle social exclusion and stimulate economic regeneration. Three policy initiatives represent the government's approach towards FET education delivery:

- Qualified for Life
- Skills Implementation Plan and
- Youth Engagement and Progression Framework.

Following a review of the post-compulsory education, the Welsh government is introducing an integrated governance model under the auspices of the new Tertiary Education and Research Commission. The new structure will be a single regulatory, oversight and co-ordinary authority, responding for funding provision at all levels, ensuring quality, and being the lead funder for research. There will also be stronger emphasis on education's social and economic impact and links with its regions, as can be evidenced by the work being done by the Regional Skills Partnerships. These provide a forum for schools, local authorities, employers and other stakeholders to identify skills requirements supporting targeted sectoral growth, streamlined to teaching and learning programmes.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ <http://gov.wales/?view=Search+results&lang=en>

NEW ZEALAND

In New Zealand, tertiary education, sometimes called *post-compulsory education*, comprises all post-school provision. This includes VET, foundation education and second-chance learning for adults, English language provision for refugees, migrants and foreign students, adult and community education, secondary-tertiary programmes which combine elements of both, as well as higher education.

The Education Act 1989 advocated the Learning for Life policy agenda which led to the “removal of false or outdated distinctions between ‘education’ and ‘training’, or between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ learning.” Accordingly, New Zealand has developed a highly integrated tertiary education system, with all post-compulsory education services sharing (to a greater or lesser extent) a common policy, funding and regulatory framework administered by the government.⁶⁷

FE is primarily offered as technical and vocational qualifications by the institutes of technology and polytechnics, with curricula based on practical and industry-related knowledge, and work experience often an integral element. In 2016, there were over 400,000 students, including international students, enrolled in formal study programmes at tertiary level. Over the last years, the number of students enrolling on diploma and certificate programmes, which provide pathways for students progressing from school and entry into the tertiary education for those seeking vocational qualifications or changes in their career, has increased.⁶⁸

Tertiary education is overseen by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), established by the abovementioned Education Act 1989.⁶⁹ The TEC has independent statutory powers related to the approval of Crown funding for tertiary education institutions; in addition, it implements Government policy when directed by the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment, and monitors the performance of the sector.

New Zealand has introduced mission-based performance compacts. The TEC sets out what it expects to fund in a Plan Guidance document, and subsequently agrees with individual tertiary education organisation (TEOs) what they will achieve over the three-year Plan period. Each institution must then develop a three-year plan showing how it will focus on the TEC's priority areas, and have this plan approved by the TEC.⁷⁰

In 2000, New Zealand established a Tertiary Education Advisory Commission to develop a strategic direction for tertiary education. Its first report recommended a very broad definition of tertiary education:

“...the Commission has chosen to take the view that tertiary education should be broadly defined. This definition includes learning at all levels within public tertiary institutions (i.e. polytechnics, universities, colleges of education and wānanga), programmes provided by private and government training establishments, business-based education, industry training, and all lifelong learning beyond the compulsory school system. It thus includes both formal and non-formal education, and what is often termed “second-chance” education. Embracing these diverse

67 New Zealand Productivity Council (2017) *New models of tertiary education. Final Report*. Government of New Zealand, pg. 16

68 Ministry of Education (2016) *New Zealand's Annual Tertiary Education Enrolments*.

69 <http://www.tec.govt.nz>

70 <http://www.tec.govt.nz/funding/funding-and-performance/investment/plan-guidance/>

forms of education and training is particularly important if the challenges of promoting lifelong learning and designing a tertiary education system that contributes to the knowledge society are to be taken seriously”.⁷¹

Following on from this, the government asked the Productivity Commission to investigate how trends in technology, internationalisation, population, tuition costs and demand for skills may drive changes in models of tertiary education. It undertook public consultation, and a final report was submitted in March 2017.⁷²

GERMANY

Germany has a well-established dual system of vocational education and training, which is distinct from its higher education/university system. The German apprenticeship system is called a “Dual System” because training takes place in both firms and public training systems. It provides over 300 certified trained occupations, designed by government and industry. The origin of the VET system is based upon the separation between vocational training and academic education which can be traced back to medieval times. These clear distinctions became solidified in the structure of the educational system during the 19th and 20th centuries, thereby creating a highly segmented and differently regulated system.⁷³

There is a relatively clear distinction between professional activities requiring either an academic degree or a vocational training qualification. HE is aimed primarily at upper level of civil service and professions, whereas vocational training leads directly to occupations in the industrial, commercial and craft sectors. There are differences also in governance between the further and higher education. Higher education is a state responsibility whereas vocational is subjected to a mixed regime, including primarily a private responsibility for the practical training in enterprises and a state responsibility for the vocational school.

The system in Germany faces some challenges, including those posed by globalisation, increased personal mobility, structural change in industrial life, technological advances and demographic change. As a result, existing barriers between individual areas of education are being dismantled, so that qualifications in one area can constitute entry to another, and learning content already acquired does not have to be lived and learned all over again. Progress is also being made with respect to developing an interdisciplinary National Qualifications Framework (NQF), to make it easier for qualifications and learning outcomes to be recognised across all areas of education.

KEY LEARNINGS FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS

It is clear from the overview of other jurisdictions that the same challenges are being faced by all FET systems and policy makers across the OECD as they attempt to develop and improve their educational system so that it can better meet the demands and needs of the 21st century. It should be

⁷¹ TEAC (2000) *Shaping a Shared Vision. Initial Report of the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission*. Wellington, NZ: Tertiary Education Advisory Commission, p9.

⁷² <https://www.productivity.govt.nz/inquiry-content/2683?stage=1>

⁷³ Wolter, A., & Kerst, C. (2015). The “academization” of the German qualification system: Recent developments in the relationships between vocational training and higher education in Germany.

noted that each FET system has evolved to reflect differing goals, needs and contexts and, consequently, cross-country variation in the structure and nature of FET is not necessarily evidence of inferior provision. There are however some interesting and useful learnings that do emerge from each.

The VET/FET sector in all three examples is wide-ranging, and caters for a complex group of learners. Of the three systems, the German system is especially structured. It has a traditional rigid segmentation between vocational and academic tracks, however, this system too is having to evolve to meet 21st century societal and labour market needs, and to provide wider access for non-traditional students.

New Zealand has for a long time recognised the concept of tertiary education, which it has clearly pronounced through various publication and policy reports. This approach underpinned the establishment of the Tertiary Education Commission. Wales is also moving towards this approach to ensure a more coherent and learner-centred approach to post-secondary education. In contrast, the German system has a clearly defined governance model which replicates the educational system.

The New Zealand system is also interesting because of its use of three-year plans which requires each TEO to submit a strategic plan for which it is then funded. The plans must align with government priorities and objectives – a process which is similar to the Irish strategic dialogue process.

While no one system offers the ultimate solution, the three jurisdictions considered prompted some further observations:

- Intermediary organisations, such as SOLAS, continue to play an important role in steering, monitoring and regulating the sector and helping ensure the FET/VET system has the to deliver the appropriate mix of programmes for society and for learners
- Negotiated performance agreements provide a mechanism to help shape the system in ways which meet national objectives and institutional mission⁷⁴
- A tertiary education/system-wide approach can offer a more coherent and integrated approach to educational provision and for learners to meet the needs of the 21st century
- Other jurisdictions have created an integrated governance model which brings Further Education and Higher Education together in a single intermediary organisation with responsibility for strategic, coordinated and coherent approach to educational provision, across teaching and research, vocational and academic studies.

⁷⁴ de Boer, H, et al (2015) *Performance-based funding and performance agreements in fourteen higher education Systems. Report for the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science*. Enschede, Netherlands

SECTION IV: REVIEW FINDINGS

In this section, we set out high level findings from our review of relevant documentation and analysis of consultations with key stakeholders under each strategic goal. While much of the focus in this section will be on what can be done to improve the implementation of FET's stated Objectives it is important to acknowledge at the outset the input from all lead partners and the significant progress that has been made over the past three years across all aspects of the strategy.

KEY STRATEGIC ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

In considering the achievements arising from implementation of the FET strategy, there was an overriding recognition of the starting point at the launch of the strategy in 2014 and the major structural change and shifting social and economic context since that time. In particular there was acknowledgement of the significant achievement of successfully establishing a whole new infrastructure surrounding FET provision via the development of SOLAS and the ETBs and the associated building of capability within these new and evolving organisations.

While the challenge in establishing and operationalising these organisations inevitably had some impact on the early progression of the strategy, there was a large degree of consensus from the consultation process and surveys that key strategic achievements had been realised. These are highlighted in no particular order in the box below. It was also found that the FET Strategy provided a vision and a pathway forward for the sector for the first time and fundamentally changed how FET is focused, managed and structured in Ireland.

Establishment and capability building of FET infrastructure including SOLAS and the ETBs

Collaborations with the Regional Skills Fora

Development and advancement of data management systems including the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) and Funding Allocations Requests and Reporting (FARR)

Development of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

Establishment of Enterprise Engagement groups at local ETB level

Establishment of the National Adult Learner Forum

Establishment of the SIAC as an oversight body

Focus on planning and the development of the Performance Funding and Planning Model

Initiation of Strategic Dialogue with ETBs

New apprenticeship and traineeship models and offerings

Progression of a new provider lead quality assurance model

Publication of the Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) in Further Education and Training Strategy 2016 - 2019

With the operating environment in which the strategy was developed so different to that faced currently, there are challenges that must be addressed to ensure that ETBs have the capacity to remain agile and responsive to rapidly evolving FET needs. There is a need for investment in capital infrastructure to ensure modern high quality FET provision and indeed in wider regional infrastructure (e.g. broadband) to support more flexible modes of delivery of education and training to facilitate access by learners, including those in employment. There will also be a need to facilitate the up-skilling and re-skilling of existing staff in FET providers to respond to changing labour market needs. Many consultees also pointed to the ongoing challenge of balancing resources and provision as they endeavour to meet the diverse needs of a very broad cohort of learners, their communities, employers and the economy.

The purpose of the consultation process was to gain as wide a perspective as possible of the relevance, progression, implementation and impact of the FET Strategy since its development in 2014.

There were five consultation exercises, including:

1. One-on-one consultations with the DES, the SIAC members and SOLAS Senior Management Team (SMT)
2. Online survey circulated to the ETB CEOs and FET Directors
3. Online survey circulated to the Regional Skills Forum Managers
4. Online survey circulated to a wider group of relevant FET partner and stakeholders
5. Learner feedback as set out in the 2017 National FET Learner Forum Report.⁷⁵

The table below describes the number of participants in each of the four groups who were invited to participate in the one-to-one consultations and the online surveys and the response rate achieved.

Invited consultation participants	Number Invited to Participate	% Response Rate
SIAC Members and SOLAS SMT	33	94
ETB CEO/FET Directors*	32	56
Regional Skills Fora Managers	7	85
Wider Relevant Stakeholders	70	44

* it is understood that many of the ETB CEO/FET Directors submitted a joint survey response

⁷⁵ Internal report to SOLAS on findings of the 2017 National FET Learner Forum

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS PER STRATEGIC GOAL

Firstly, we describe each Goal by:

- its definition in the Strategy
- its associated Objectives and
- evidence of success as set out in the Strategy under “how will know that the Strategy is successful”

Secondly, we present an illustration of progression to date as illustrated by the Detailed Implementation Plan under:

1. Number of Action Indicators completed
2. Number of Action Indicators progressing in line with originally proposed timelines
3. Number of Action Indicators not progressing
4. Number of Action Indicators progressing but with amended timelines from the those originally proposed
5. Number of Action Indicators which are in the scoping phase

These progression indicators and their colour coding mirror those which appear on the **Version 11** of the *Detailed Implementation Plan* which is updated by the Lead Partners and presented quarterly to the SIAC for comment.

The topics discussed with the SIAC and SOLAS SMT are set out in **Appendix C** below. The survey questions asked of the ETB CEOs and FET Directors are set out in **Appendix D**. Regional Skills Fora Managers survey questions are listed in **Appendix E** and the Wider FET Stakeholder survey questions are set out in **Appendix F**.

The detailed feedback as it corresponded to the various questions asked and surveyed during the consultation process is synthesised under each Goal and included in **Appendix H – L**.

Finally, we summarised the key points of note which emerged in relation to each of the Strategic Goals. These key findings formed part of the basis for the proposed Enabling and Strategic recommendations.

GOAL 1: SKILLS FOR THE ECONOMY

Goal Definition:

“FET will address current and future needs of learners, jobseekers, employers and employees and will contribute to national economic development”

Strategic Objectives

1. Install an appropriate advisory infrastructure to ensure that the relevant provision is informed directly by employers and reflects/responds to emerging labour market challenges.
2. Provide further education and training programmes for a diverse range of individuals with a particular focus on long-term unemployed people and unemployed young people.
3. Implement the new apprenticeship system.
4. Provide further education and training programmes for employees supported by a new FET employee development strategy.
5. Provide further education and training programmes to assist people to start and sustain their own business.

Evidence of success as set out in the FET Strategy 2014 - 2019⁷⁶

- Greater alignment between FET provision and FET-related employer needs
- Employers (large and small) increasingly engage in FET
- Skills forecasting can better withstand disruptive global, national or local business forces

Implementation Progress Assessment - 90% of Goal 1 Action Indicators Completed or Progressing on Schedule

	Number of Action Indicators Completed	Number of Action Indicators Progressing	Number of Action Indicators Not Progressing	Number of Action Indicators Progressing with Amended Timeline	Number of Action Indicators in Scoping Document Phase
Objective 1	4	1		2	
Objective 2		2			
Objective 3	5	3			
Objective 4		1			
Objective 5	1	1			

⁷⁶ Further Education and Training Strategy, How will we know that the Strategy is successful? pg. 19

Goal 1 - Summary of Key Findings

The key messages emerging from the consultation process under Goal 1 were:

- The identification of local and national skills and the establishment of the regional Skills Fora is a key achievement under this Goal and will better inform the development of ETB Service Plans through the modification of FET provision
- The progression of the Apprenticeship Implementation Plan and the agreed MOUs and SLA between SOLAS, ETBs and ETBI for the delivery of those programmes will not only facilitate engagement with the Enterprise sectors, but also ensure that the apprenticeships offered are capable of anticipating and responding to future labour market demand rather than simply reacting to current need
- The on-going development of a new apprenticeship system is essential to allow for the rapid review and roll-out of demand-led apprenticeships capable of responding at speed to labour market needs
- The roll-out of the Professional Development Strategy 2017-2019 is an important development which will better enable ETB management to engage with SOLAS and other Lead Partners in the strategic dialogue planning process
- While the appropriateness of programme provision is being supported by work from QQI to more clearly develop a sectoral model and approach to programme development and validation, including a framework for industry engagement, it is important that this process also reflects the needs of the “hard to reach” cohort of learners and includes a focus on active/social inclusion
- To support these new apprenticeships and the ongoing provision of programmes by the ETBs, it is vital that an appropriate guidance service is in place for the learner which will provide the appropriate access to information to support their decision-making process
- Recognition of the challenge around the increasing prevalence of low-paid, short-term employment and the need to focus on workforce upskilling, with a pressing need for a formal targeted employee development strategy
- The agreement on MOUs and SLAs between SOLAS, ETBI and the ETBs for the delivery of the apprenticeship system is helping drive this strategic goal and such agreements should be explored with all Lead Partners

GOAL 2: ACTIVE INCLUSION, LITERACY AND NUMERACY STRATEGY

Goal Definition:

“FET provision will support the active inclusion of people of all abilities in society with special reference to literacy and numeracy”

Strategic Objectives

1. Support active inclusion across FET
2. Devise and implement a strategy to promote literacy and numeracy across FET

Evidence of success as set out in the FET Strategy 2014 - 2019⁷⁷

- A higher proportion of those who engage in FET, including those with barriers to participation such as persons with a disability, as well as existing and future DSP priority cohorts, stay engaged, complete qualifications, transition successfully into employment or where appropriate, move into higher level qualifications in FET or HET.
- Literacy and numeracy are being addressed effectively and are not a barrier to participation in FET

Implementation Progress Assessment - 81% of Goal 2 Action Indicators Completed or Progressing on Schedule

	Number of Action Completed	Number of Actions Progressing	Number of Actions Not Progressing	Number of Actions Progressing with Amended Timeline	Number of Actions In Scoping Document Phase
Objective 1	2	2	1		
Objective 2	1	8		2	

⁷⁷ Further Education and Training Strategy, How will we know that the Strategy is successful? pg. 19

Goal 2 - Summary of Key Findings

The key messages emerging from the consultation process under Goal 2 were:

- There is a perception that funding and resources are allocated only to those learners likely to succeed in the market place or programmes which will directly meet market driven demand. Once there is clarity around the definition of active inclusion and further development of policy, then requests for funding and resources in this area can be better justified
- The new DEASP and ETBI protocol pertaining to the referral of learners will ensure appropriate course and support services matching. This will be a key enabler of this Goal
- There needs to be a renewed focus on the National Skills Strategy targets for up-skilling of those at Levels 1 – 3 which must be evidenced and incorporated as part of the ETB strategic Planning process
- Giving more prominence to the learner voice will ensure that there is a better understanding of not only barriers to entry into the FET sector from a literacy and numeracy skills point of view but also issues such as childcare, flexible provision and use of technology which can affect those trying to stay in FET too
- Due to changing economic circumstances and the forecasted drop in unemployment, positive developments can be seen in SOLAS's recently published research regarding '*Barriers to Further Education and Training with particular reference to Long Term Unemployed Persons and Other Vulnerable Individuals*'. ETBs are being asked to address the findings of this research by submitting details of how they are addressing (or intend addressing) the relevant barriers
- There should continue to be a focus on addressing gender imbalance in areas of FET provision such as apprenticeships, with clear strategies in place to promote, and remove barriers to, female participation.

GOAL 3: QUALITY PROVISION

Goal Definition:

“FET will provide high quality education and training programmes and will meet appropriate national and international quality standards”

Strategic Objectives

1. Respond to the needs of learners
2. Ensure excellence in FET programme development
3. Upgrade the guidance services within FET and extend to all who engage with FET, including employees
4. Develop standards for staff qualifications in the FET sector
5. Provide effective pathways for FET graduates to Level 7 and 8 within the higher education sector

Evidence of success as set out in the FET Strategy 2014 - 2019⁷⁸

- Learner, community and employer satisfaction with provision is very high
- Access to high quality career guidance, counselling and labour market information service for everyone who engages with FET
- Innovative education and training programmes are being developed and rolled out on an ongoing basis

DIP Progress Assessment - 80% of Goal 3 Action Indicators Completed or Progressing on Schedule

	Number of Action Completed	Number of Actions Progressing	Number of Actions Not Progressing	Number of Actions Progressing with Amended Timeline	Number of Actions In Scoping Document Phase
Objective 1	2	2			
Objective 2		3		1	
Objective 3		2		1	
Objective 4	1	2			
Objective 5				1	

⁷⁸ Further Education and Training Strategy, How will we know that the Strategy is successful? pg. 19

Goal 3 - Summary of Key Findings

The key messages emerging from the consultation process under Goal 3 were:

- Strategic Objective 1 and the associated Actions to collect feedback from learners on the effectiveness of the programmes and progression outcomes would fit better under Strategic Objective 4.2: *Develop and install a 'fit-for-purpose' data infrastructure to support FET policy and provision*. The purpose of the Forum is to gather the views of learners to support effective policy developments, the standing of FET is a welcome, but secondary, outcome of the Forum. This is also evidenced through the qualitative data from the National FET Learner Forum 2017.
- Since the launch of the strategy QQI has undertaken many Actions to support its implementation. Some of these were identified as specific Actions in the DIP and reported to the SIAC but many of the more important and systemic Actions, rooted in QQI's core statutory functions were not in the plan.⁷⁹ An example of such Actions pertaining to *Goal 3* include:
 - Piloting a new programme to confirm through validation that programmes have been designed in a way that allows learners who successfully complete the programme to meet national award standards
 - The delay in the publication of the Guidance Strategy has impacted not only Goal 3 but also Goal 5: Standing of FET and the progression pathways.
- Mapping of learner pathways should be cognisant of all pathways across the education continuum, not just from FET to HE but also for e.g. Lifelong Learning, Recognition of Prior Learning and active inclusion.

⁷⁹ FET Strategy 2014-19, Progress Review – QQI actions to date

GOAL 4: INTEGRATED PLANNING AND FUNDING

Goal Definition:

“FET provision will be planned and funded on the basis of objective analysis of needs and evidence of social and economic impact”

Strategic Objectives

1. Implement a new integrated and coordinated FET planning model
2. Develop and install a “fit-for-purpose” data infrastructure to support FET policy and provision
3. Introduce a performance-related funding (appropriate to the type of FET provision and defined strategic outcomes)
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of all current FET provision

Evidence of success as set out in the FET Strategy 2014 - 2019⁸⁰

- Higher proportion of those who engage in FET complete qualifications, transition successfully into employment or move into higher level qualifications in FET or HE
- Greater alignment between FET provision and FET related skills needs
- Investment is being made in new and more effective pedagogy and research in adult learning to better inform policy and practice

Implementation Progress Assessment - 72% of Goal 4 Action Indicators Completed or Progressing on Schedule

	Number of Action Completed	Number of Actions Progressing	Number of Actions Not Progressing	Number of Actions Progressing with Amended Timeline	Number of Actions In Scoping Document Phase
Objective 1	1	1			
Objective 2	7	1			
Objective 3		1		1	
Objective 4	1	1		3	1

⁸⁰ Further Education and Training Strategy, How will we know that the Strategy is successful? pg. 19

Goal 4 - Summary of Key Findings

The key messages emerging from the consultation process under this Goal were:

- The delay in implementing an “evidence based funding model” until 2019 needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency
- The importance of developing a “fit for purpose” data model cannot be overstated and while some aspects are still in the “design phase” it would be prudent to integrate data systems with wider relevant stakeholders such as DEASP and where possible integrate into the planning, performance and strategic dialogue process
- The importance of investing in capital infrastructure to ensure modern, high quality and responsive FET provision that meets the needs of a rapidly evolving labour market
- Strategic Objective 4 should be prioritised and actioned at a quicker pace as its intention is to inform policy and potentially other Strategic Goals
- Strategic planning must be enabled through resourcing and training of ETB management to fully harness the new way of working
- The recent publication of the Professional Development Strategy should hopefully enable the effective roll-out of the strategic planning pilot initiative mentioned above
- Appropriate training must be put in place at ETB level so that there is full engagement with the evolving PLSS and FARR data management systems and any additional administration around those new systems is not overly burdensome

GOAL 5: STANDING OF FET

Goal Definition:

“Ensure a valued learning path leading to agreed employment, career developmental, personal and social options”

Strategic Objectives

1. Promote and provide high quality FET which is responsive to the needs of industry and learners
2. Conduct an economic and social impact study of one ETB

Evidence of success as set out in the FET Strategy 2014 - 2019⁸¹

- FET is the first choice for many school leavers, employers and others.

Implementation Progress Assessment - 80% of Goal 5 Action Indicators Completed or Progressing on Schedule

	Number of Action Completed	Number of Actions Progressing	Number of Actions Not Progressing	Number of Actions Progressing with Amended Timeline	Number of Actions In Scoping Document Phase
Objective 1	1	2			
Objective 2		1		1	

⁸¹ Further Education and Training Strategy, How will we know that the Strategy is successful? pg. 19

Goal 5 - Summary of Key Findings

The key messages emerging from the consultation process under Goal 5 were:

- The economic and social impact studies to assess the impact at local, regional and national level should be resourced as a matter of urgency
- These impact studies will evidence the real-world value, such as learner progress rates and in-employment upskilling, of engaging with the FET sector for the learners and employers
- Improved Standing of FET will be driven by these outcomes if the value of the sector can be seen by progression of valued up-skilling
- Improved Standing of FET is viewed by many as the ultimate metric for the success of the Strategy
- Strategic Objectives should be re-defined to better tackle the fundamental cultural and attitudinal barriers to engaging with the FET sector
- Strategic Objectives should be developed further so that there is greater clarity around:
 - The audience for any Communications Strategy given the changing nature of the learner
 - How FET is creating value for the learner, enterprise and the community
 - The role of partnerships and understanding how those partnerships can be leveraged
 - How to engage with other providers for the benefit of the learner i.e. HE and IoTs
- Action Performance Indicators should be centred around more frequent impact studies which better highlight the progression of learners through the education system
- The credibility of the FET sector will ultimately be judged by its ability to compete in the educational ecosystem for a limited cohort of learners and evidence to all stakeholders the real-world benefits of attaining a FET qualification

SECTION V: OBSERVATIONS

In this section, we outline several key observations based on our analysis of the findings from the consultation process and sectoral knowledge under the following headings:

- FET Policy and Vision;
- Governance and Ownership;
- Strategy Implementation and Oversight;
- Data Infrastructure and
- Learner Pathways

FET POLICY AND VISION

There was some confusion as to what the FET sector is trying to achieve; what the priority areas are; and a clear understanding of what the unmet needs of some learners are. Though FET is defined by various stakeholders differently, it is thought that the most appropriate and relevant definition appears in the FET Strategy 2014-2019 itself which states that:

“FET provides education and training and related supports to assist individuals to gain a range of employment, career, personal and social skills and qualifications at Levels 1-6 on the NFQ or equivalent, and is aimed at jobseekers, school leavers, labour market returners, employees, those interested in new career direction, those wishing to access second chance’ education, those wishing to re-engage in learning and to prepare school-leavers and others for higher education FET also plays an important role in helping people to lead fulfilling lives, supporting some of the hard-to-reach individuals and groups to achieve their potential and reducing the costs to society of exclusion”.

In addition to having this definition in place for FET, there is a sense that the absence of an overarching FET *policy* document which clearly sets out a vision for the sector is a significant hindrance to the progression of the FET strategy. This is evidenced by the apparent difference of opinions amongst many stakeholders as to whether the FET Strategy serves, in essence, as a policy document. It is thought that there is a need for an overarching policy that would sit above the strategy and provide the clarity of direction beyond the time covered by this strategy.

If the FET sector are to realise its ambition of adopting a whole-system approach, a further important consideration for the Department in establishing a clear policy position, is defining how the FET sector can develop and align with the higher education sector in a way that ensures more seamless transitions for learners. As previously mentioned work currently underway between SOLAS, the HEA National Access Plan Steering Committee and the Irish Universities Association to examine ways in which the process for learners in FET to progress to HE can be improved is a positive step, but its work must now be prioritised and progressed. In establishing the future focus, it will be important to ensure it links all the partners’ needs and creates a compelling vision for all.

GOVERNANCE AND OWNERSHIP

If the objectives of the FET strategy are to be delivered there needs to be more robust system in place to ensure responsibility and accountability for delivering on the strategy and facilitating its successful implementation. Clear Departmental oversight of strategy implementation and the governance arrangements is important in ensuring delivery.

It is critically important that there is complete clarity around who is ultimately responsible for driving its implementation. From the consultation process it would appear there is a lack of certainty around the role of DES versus that of SOLAS in ensuring its delivery. While SIAC has a role to play in supporting the implementation process its role is purely advisory and as such it is outside its remit to hold partners to account for their activities and/or inactivity.

It is felt that this authority to question progress or challenge alterations to timelines should be the responsibility of the “owner” of the strategy i.e. the Department of Education and Skills. It is important DES should continue to be supported in an administrative capacity by SOLAS and this will be tracked as part of its new Performance Delivery Agreement which outlines specific required activities, and financial accountability and risk. Similarly, SOLAS have developed an SLA with each ETB for the delivery function of the apprenticeship system.

In terms of the governance arrangement between SOLAS and other key FE delivery partners, it is understood there are also some issues around accountability and reporting as not all are based on agreed Memoranda of Understanding or equivalent documents between the two parties. This has resulted in ambiguous relationships in some cases and has the potential to affect the quality of the provision and the ability for funded providers to engage with strategic planning and adequately meet labour market needs. One notable finding was that SOLAS and the HEA do not currently have an existing MoU, albeit we understand that one is in development.

STRATEGY OVERSIGHT AND IMPLEMENTATION

From the consultation process it is understood that there are varying levels of understanding of the inter-relationships between the strategic Objectives and Actions across the FET Strategy.

A basic requirement of good project management practice is to identify where there are interdependencies between Actions and stakeholders and ensure they are aligned appropriately. It would seem this has not been the case to date and instead the implementation plan has been read in a linear fashion with limited focus on progressing inter-relationships and interdependencies between Actions. Arguably of more significance to this process and the future implementation of the remainder of the Actions under the FET strategy is the need to continually review and re-prioritise Actions to reflect the dynamic operating environment. From our assessment, it would seem this has not been done to a level you would expect or require to actively manage the implementation process effectively.

DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

The importance of having a robust, singular, system-wide “*fit for purpose*” data infrastructure cannot be overstated. The FET Strategy notes that the data infrastructure around FET in Ireland is weak, particularly by international standards.⁸² At the time the FET strategy was developed it as acknowledged there was a bewildering myriad of FET data; a multiplicity of data-gathering systems across FET; a lack of systematic data collection and analysis of FET data at national (and local) level; and limited use of data in decision making at all levels.

The ongoing work being done by SOLAS to develop the necessary data infrastructure which will enable it to access appropriate evidence, including, counterfactual impact evaluation in support of the new funding model must continue as a matter of urgency.

However, despite developments in areas such as PLSS and FARR many data gaps remain. This fact was highlighted in the Evaluation of PLC Programme Provision where it found that a comprehensive dataset on PLC provision does not exist. Therefore, there are no comprehensive measures of key variables that track participants and outcomes over time, such as enrolments, completion rates, levels of accreditation and progression patterns. Furthermore, at the school/college level, no information is available on factors such as the planning process, structure of delivery and teacher provision.⁸³

The recent DPER Spending Review states that to ensure a transparent, effective and accountable FET sector demonstrating high quality outputs, outcomes and performance, and to inform policy decisions, it is imperative that the PLSS platform be populated as a matter of priority, and that SOLAS and DES capitalise on the improved data as it emerges from PLSS rather than waiting until it is fully operational.⁸⁴

SOLAS themselves, through their Corporate Plan, acknowledge the important role of data is to play in three major initiatives⁸⁵ which will gather information on the skills and proficiencies required by Irish enterprises. They intend to evaluate the SOLAS/ETBI PLSS and integrate this information with major databases from Revenue, the Department of Employment and Social Protection, the Department of Education and Skills and others subject to compliance with data protection requirements; the results will be circulated to all FET providers so that course curricula can be adapted.⁸⁶ New levels of coordination between SOLAS and the Central Statistics Office will also allow for better learner tracking to mirror that being done in the higher education system.

LEARNER PATHWAYS

While it is notable that the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015 – 2019 sets a target of 10% for the number of new entrants entering HE from FET and DES and SOLAS through the Transitions Reform Group are working to broaden entry-routes into higher education from the FET Sector, the focus remains on a singular direction of travel for the learner.

⁸² Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019, pg. 7

⁸³ Evaluation of PLC Programme provision, Seamus McGuinness et al, pg. 1

⁸⁴ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Spending Review 2017, Analysis of Further Education and Training Expenditure by Education Training Board, July 2017

⁸⁵ SOLAS Corporate Plan 2017-2019, Skills Information, pg. 29

⁸⁶ SOLAS Corporate Plan, 2017-2019

Given the shift to re-skilling and lifelong learning, the mapping of pathways through the broader education continuum should be considered. It is important to differentiate between a “*learner pathway*” and the more general student guidance (soon to be reviewed) which is provided to learners.

It should be assumed, that with the predicted increasing need for *up* and *re*-skilling and the evolving nature of the adult learner that access to HE from FET must be supported to the same extent as access back through the system *from* HE to FE as required during the lifetime of career of the learner.

These clearer learner pathways should inform a framework which would ensure the provision of an integrated, coherent set of educational programmes and access points for any learner engaging with the FET or HE and enable the learner to more easily navigate through the system.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

In considering the findings we are very conscious that this is a progress review and it is expected significant steps forward will continue to be made in implementing the FET strategy over the next 18 months. However, we are equally aware of the importance of highlighting what might be improved over the remainder of the strategy and to enhance the likelihood of successful delivery. Emerging from the review, it is clear there are several issues that need to be addressed in the short and longer-term.

Specifically, the development of a clear and compelling vision for the future direction of FET and how the various stakeholders work together in a constructive manner to deliver on the FET Objectives will be crucial to future success. Tied in with this is the need to ensure the manner of engagement between partners is based on stated Objectives, goals and reward for good performance. It is further thought this can only be achieved with the development and implementation of appropriate processes and procedures underpinned by strong data and systems, all of which now need to be prioritised.

SECTION VI: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FET STRATEGY 2018 - 2019

The implementation of the FET strategy must be grounded in appropriate systems, resources and supports and continually developed by the delivery Partners and all the relevant stakeholders who engage with and benefit from the FET sector.

We are very cognisant that the strategy was developed at a time of enormous flux, our recommendations are positioned as the first step in a long journey towards an FET sector that is highly responsive to learners, employers, providers and the community.

While it was originally envisaged that this exercise would include a re-prioritisation of Objectives and Actions and an assessment of their continued relevance, it became apparent during the course of this exercise that there was broad agreement amongst the stakeholders that the strategic Goals, Objective and Actions still remain appropriate and relevant even given the changed operating environment. It was felt that the immediate focus should centre on addressing more fundamental issues and processes rather than re-prioritising prior to the development of FET Strategy 2. However, it is thought a subsequent process to properly align interdependencies across Objectives would be beneficial (see below).

It must also be remembered that the Strategy was the first of its kind for the sector and so is just over half way through its first iteration and some argue, still in the “*design phase*”. The success of the FET Strategy will be contingent on the continued positive momentum and engagement established during the first half of its lifecycle.

The impact and outcomes data generated over the next few years will evidence the success or failure of this FET Strategy. It is hoped that the **enabling recommendations** proposed will (*in the short-term*) support the progression of the remaining Actions over the next 18 months and that the **strategic recommendations** (*looking forward*) will help inform the drafting of the next FET Strategy document and shape the overall educational sector in which it will operate.

Enabling and Strategic Recommendations:

SHORTER-TERM <i>ENABLING</i> RECOMMENDATIONS	LONGER-TERM <i>STRATEGIC</i> RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Department of Education & Skills should assume, or clearly mandate, more active responsibility for the governance and oversight of the FET Strategy implementation process.</p> <p>Accountability for the delivery of strategic Actions by individual organisations should be underpinned by explicit commitments within cross-Departmental agreements, MoUs, Performance Delivery Agreements or Strategic Performance Agreements.</p>	<p>Develop a strategic vision for FET in the broader education sector which gives greater clarity on future learner pathways and expected outcomes. This could be achieved through a shared strategic vision for FET and higher education. This should work with the multi-annual FET sector targets agreed with the Minister for Education and Skills and embedded within the SOLAS Corporate Plan, and the multi-annual commitments set out in the Action Plan for Education to form an overall policy framework for the development of FET.</p>
<p>Progress the development of the data infrastructure required to facilitate the collection and analysis of quality data.</p>	<p>Develop a system-wide performance framework in a similar manner to that developed for the higher education sector and with some common themes to facilitate the development of further synergies between the sectors. This should reflect the policy framework noted above and will be delivered via the system of strategic dialogue and multi-annual strategic performance agreements which is now being established between SOLAS and ETBs.</p>
<p>Define the “<i>value proposition</i>” for the FET Sector to help promote the benefits of engaging with FET sector for the learners and employers alike.</p>	<p>Support the development of clear learner pathways which will combine enhanced learner guidance, support and information with clear and consistent transition routes to better reflect and enable the shift in focus to life-long learning, recognition of prior learning and the learner’s journey through the education continuum.</p>

RECOMMENDATION 1: RE-ENVISAGE THE FET STRATEGY GOVERNANCE & IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES

The Department of Education & Skills should assume, or clearly mandate, more active responsibility for the governance and oversight of the FET Strategy implementation process. Accountability for the delivery of strategic Actions by individual organisations should be underpinned by explicit commitments within cross-Departmental agreements, MoUs, Performance Delivery Agreements or Strategic Performance Agreements.

Although the Department of Education and Skills is recognised by many to be the primary body responsible for the implementation of the FET strategy, it is thought they should assume, or clearly mandate, more active responsibility for the governance and oversight of the FET Strategy implementation process. Accountability for the delivery of strategic Actions by individual organisations should be underpinned by explicit commitments within cross-Departmental agreements, MoUs, Performance Delivery Agreements or Strategic Performance Agreements.

To achieve this:

- DES to confirm authority and responsibility for the implementation of the FET Strategy;
- Ensure the relationships between the DES and all delivery partners are clearly defined in a series of MoUs and/or SLAs;
- Ensure the roles and responsibilities of SIAC are clearly communicated and understood by all;
- Conduct a series of consultative exercises with all Lead and Support Partners to:
 - Redefine each goal so to that they read as a goal statement with specific and clearly described end states;
 - Develop outcomes for each Strategic Objective, defining what the success of the Strategic Objective would deliver;
 - Re-prioritise at Strategic Objective and Action level and assign one individual lead partner organisation per Action. This would assist all SIAC members to understand the interdependencies across the Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP). The exercise should also consider any additional work of Lead Partners that is not currently reflected in the DIP.
- Implement appropriate programme management resources (PMO) and disciplines, as described in **Appendix G**, to ensure effective and on-going oversight of the implementation of the Strategy including for example change control, risk and issue management and interdependency management processes.

RECOMMENDATION 2: DEVELOP A FULLY INTEGRATED DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

Progress the development of the data infrastructure required to facilitate the collection and analysis of quality data.

The ongoing work being done by SOLAS to develop the necessary data infrastructure which will enable it to access appropriate evidence, including, counterfactual impact evaluation in support of the new funding model must continue as a matter of urgency.

To achieve this:

- Fully integrate the PLSS and FARR systems which should allow for real-time input, output and outcomes data to be collected and analysed;
- Utilise the outcomes, performance and qualitative data to better highlight the depth of impact, quality of progress and better inform the strategic dialogue and planning process between SOLAS and the programme providers;
- Ensure that the new Management Information System being developed by SOLAS is designed to give a “multi lens” view on the reporting of FET provision and seamlessly integrating all funded programme providers and the relevant government agencies such as CSO and the DEASP. This will help ensure that the initial provision of courses is appropriate and that there is adequate tracking during the lifetime of the learners as they move through the education continuum;
- Integrate the *quantitative* data emerging from both the SLMRU and the Regional Skills Fora with the *qualitative* data being generated by advocacy groups such as AONTAS and NALA. This should provide a clearer focus on the evolving nature of the labour market needs while also recognising the critical information on the changing nature of the learner and how learner journeys can be better supported;
- Put in place a single integrated accounting system for use across all ETBs.

RECOMMENDATION 3: DEFINE THE VALUE PROPOSITION FOR THE FET SECTOR

Define the “value proposition” for the FET Sector to help promote the benefits of engaging with FET sector for the learners and employers alike.

Arguably one of the biggest barriers to the successful implementation of the FET Strategy is the lack of clear understanding around the benefits of engaging with the FET sector. For the sector to credibly promote its value in the market place, FET must be able to highlight and demonstrate the real-world benefits of engaging with it.

The further education and training sector interacts with many stakeholders whose buy-in is and influence is required to properly promote the sector and the idea that FET can be a credible “Number One” choice for a learner.

To achieve this:

- Fast track the economic and social impact studies which will determine the local, regional and national impact for learners and employers;
- Define the Value Proposition of FET sector based on the learning from the data emerging from the impact studies and in so doing establish the evidence for FET;
- Develop and implement a new Communications Strategy as a matter of urgency using the evidence base from the above studies;
- Increase role clarity and their respective levels of engagement for the organisations central to the delivery of the FET Strategy e.g. SOLAS, ETBs, QQI and ETBI;
- Build on the current relationships with HE to better demonstrate to the learner how the education system is a continuum and FE is not just a stepping stone to HE;
- Increase the public awareness through initiatives such as AONTAS Star Awards, Cork Lifelong Learning Festival, Irish representation at the European Vocational Skills Week to name a few.

RECOMMENDATION 4: DEVELOP AN INTEGRATED STRATEGIC VISION FOR FET TO INFORM FET STRATEGY 2

Develop a strategic vision for FET in the broader education sector which gives greater clarity on future learner pathways and expected outcomes. This could be achieved through a shared strategic vision for FET and higher education. This should work with the multi-annual FET sector targets agreed with the Minister for Education and Skills and embedded within the SOLAS Corporate Plan, and the multi-annual commitments set out in the Action Plan for Education to form an overall policy framework for the development of FET.

Given the changing employment landscape and the evolving profile of the learner this vision would set out where FET is positioned within the education continuum and the anticipated relationships and alignment between Secondary Education, Further Education and Training and Higher Education. Working in tandem with the existing targets and policy commitments made regarding FET, it would give greater recognition to the future shift in provision from those seeking employment to those in-employment or re-skilling and the focus on life-long-learning.

The setting of such a vision would also provide a foundation to begin the development of FET Strategy 2. While the current FET Strategy does reflect the priorities articulated in wider policy reform in the education sector and other policy initiatives such as labour market activation, the FET sector would benefit from clear direction from the Department of Skills and Education to help articulate exactly who FET is catering for and the expected outcomes, which would in turn lead to more appropriate supported learner pathways through the education continuum.

It is also important to acknowledge that the successor strategy will be designed in a more dynamic environment than that of the previous one. Mega trends such as technological change, globalisation, ageing society and polarising of skills demands will be magnified by the outcome of the Brexit negotiations. The approach to strategy development must reflect this dynamic environment via a continuous and adaptive review process as requirements from FET emerge and change over the course of its lifetime. The embedding of rolling three-year strategic performance agreements between SOLAS and ETBs will support this process, ensuring a future focused outcomes-based approach to responding to these requirements at regional level.

To achieve this:

- The Department of Education and Skills should engage with Government departments and other stakeholders to develop a shared strategic vision for Further Education and Training *and* Higher Education.

RECOMMENDATION 5: DEVELOP A SYSTEM-WIDE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Develop a system-wide performance framework in a similar manner to that developed for the higher education sector and with some common themes to facilitate the development of further synergies between the sectors. This should reflect the policy framework noted above and will be delivered via the system of strategic dialogue and multi-annual strategic performance agreements which is now being established between SOLAS and ETBs.

Much like the Further Education and Training Strategy, the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 sets out the long-term vision for higher education as having a central role in making Ireland a country recognised for innovation, competitive enterprise and continuing academic excellence, and an attractive place to live and work with a high quality of life, cultural vibrancy and inclusive social structures.

If Ireland is to deliver on its vision “**to become the best education and training system in Europe**” it will need to:⁸⁷

- Hold the system accountable for performance for the delivery of national priorities and monitor performance of the system as a whole;
- Articulate all the expectations of the system from different areas of government/agencies across the various dimensions of higher education activity;
- Increase the visibility of performance of the system to Government and the wider public;
- Contribute to system and policy development by highlighting structural and other deficits including data capacity;
- Allow ETBs to identify their strategic niche, capabilities, strengths and mission and agree a performance compact aligned with funding.

While the FET strategy does, for example, link Goal 4 (*Integrated Planning and Funding*) with a new performance-related funding model designed to incentivise and reward improved provision of programmes by the ETBs, an overarching system-wide performance framework would better match funding and operational autonomy with a level of accountability for performance against clearly articulated expectations across the entire funded education sector.

⁸⁷ Higher Education System Performance Framework, 2018 – 2020, pg. 2

To achieve this:

- DES/SOLAS should look to the equivalent higher education framework in the context of further developing its relationships with individual programme providers as it continues to roll out the strategic dialogue pilot nationwide;
- Develop KPIs under the new framework which would better reflect the contribution of all programme providers to a fully integrated education system while building on their own individual missions, capacities and strengths;
- Utilise the data coming from the Strategic Dialogue and Strategic Agreement framework adopted by ETBs and SOLAS and other learner pathway processes to inform thinking around the policy framework.

RECOMMENDATION 6: DEVELOP CLEAR LEARNER PATHWAYS

Support the development of clear learner pathways which will combine enhanced learner guidance, support and information with clear and consistent transition routes to better reflect and enable the shift in focus to life-long learning, recognition of prior learning and the learner's journey through the education continuum.

There is a need to develop clearer learner pathways with effective guidance services accessed during the lifetime of a learner and provision of fundamental information and advice on their education and training options. If a clearer and more consistent approach can be implemented on transitions between further education and training, and in recognising prior learning in accessing further *and* higher education, it should encourage and support learners' progress through the education continuum. Learner pathways are intimately linked to career pathways within employers and there is also a need to reflect such career pathways within this approach, taking account of the different pathways within particular sectors or occupations (e.g. healthcare, engineering).

This is also consistent with the findings from the evaluation of PLC programme provision⁸⁸ published early in 2018 which discussed the concept of “pathways” – a concept which has been prominent in cross-national policy debates but acknowledged as best presented as a metaphor than an analytical tool. The concept as laid out in the evaluation has been illustrated in three main ways:

1. To distinguish the main types of pathways beyond compulsory schooling and into the labour market, to compare their strengths and weaknesses, and to determine their relative size and role in an effective transition system;
2. To examine the relationships and interconnections between pathways, and to determine how best to organise systems of pathways; and
3. To analyse the relationship between pathways and the ‘navigations’ of the young people who use them; in particular to consider how pathways can be organised to reflect the perspectives and priorities of individuals and to enable them to manage and control their own itineraries;

In other jurisdictions, such as the US, the “*guided pathways*” model has emerged as a particularly influential strategy for moving FE towards providing a more integrated and cohesive model for student progression and success, whether into work and careers or into higher education.⁸⁹ The creation of effective learner pathways entails a systemic redesign of the student experience, where appropriate, from initial connection through further and higher education system and progression to completion, with reform where necessary to program structure, new student intake, instruction, and support services.

⁸⁸ Evaluation of programme provision, Seamus McGuinness et al, January 2018

⁸⁹ Dougherty, K., Lahr, H., & Morest, V. S. (2017). Reforming the American Community College: Promising Changes and Their Challenges.

To achieve this:

- The development of clear learner pathways must have due regard for:
 - Academic programme structure where programs are fully mapped out and aligned with education progression and/or career advancement;
 - Instruction given to students which make the learning and progression outcome explicit so that students can see how they are progressing;
- Develop a fully integrated tertiary education model focused on student learner/career pathways, which would build on the existing relationship between Further Education and Training and Higher Education, and include all learners on the educational continuum;
- Continue to further develop, rollout and align PLSS with all other relevant records from other appropriate Government agencies e.g. Revenue and Department of Social Protection to capture student's progression and outcomes.

SECTION VI: FUTURE CHALLENGES AND RISKS IN THE FET SECTOR

During the development of the Strategy several implementation challenges were identified⁹⁰ as follows:

1. Balancing reform with business continuity and Government priorities
2. Employers capacity to provide sufficient and structured workplace learning opportunities
3. Additional investment requirements with regard to installing 'fit-for-purpose' data infrastructure
4. Current operational structures which may not meet the learner expectations regarding engagement with the labour market or delivering required placements
5. Need for increasing levels of private/contracted-out provision
6. Need for pedagogy skills of teachers/trainers to stay ahead of the curve
7. Expanding the capacity to embed literacy and numeracy in the relevant FET provision
8. The management of the academic year to deliver the best results for the overall FET system

Many, if not all the above, remain a challenge to the Sector today. While the Strategy identifies the challenges, it does not set out in a formalised manner processes which would assess the likelihood of these challenges having a negative impact of the Strategy implementation.

Some current examples of risks to the successful implementation of the remainder of the FET Strategy are set out below in a risk register format with indicative ratings applied.

⁹⁰ Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019, pg. 33

High Level Progress Review of the FET Strategy 2014 – 2019

Risk ID	Risk category	Risk description	Date registered	Mitigating actions	Impact *	Probability *	Risk rating (Impact X Probability)
01	Strategic	Governance relationships surrounding the implementation of the FET Strategy remain unclear resulting in lack of ownership and accountability	26/1/18	Appropriate governance mechanisms are put in place	5	4	20
02	Strategic	Definition of FET – what it is and who it caters for - continues to be ambiguous resulting in mis-matched provision across the sector	26/1/18	Development of policy document for the FET sector	5	4	20
03	Strategic	Lead Partners not communicating effectively with each other which results in inefficiencies across the sector	26/1/18	SIAC to introduce appropriate project management disciplines including interdependency management	4	4	16
04	Operational	Lack of appropriate data infrastructure to evidence learner pathways and learner outcomes results in lower uptake rates	26/1/18	Investment in data infrastructure and developing the FET sector evidence base	4	4	16

High Level Progress Review of the FET Strategy 2014 – 2019

Risk ID	Risk category	Risk description	Date registered	Mitigating actions	Impact *	Probability *	Risk rating (Impact X Probability)
05	Reputational	Public perception of FET worsens resulting in lower uptake rates across the FET sector	26/1/18	Inter-agency and inter-governmental groups collectively promote the benefits of FET Guidance structures and processes that promote FET to students are put in place throughout the education system.	3	2	6
06	Financial	Insufficient resourcing and funding prevents ETB's and lead partners from delivering an appropriate service to learners	26/1/18	Appropriate data management systems are progressed to allow for evidenced based funding	5	1	5

* Impact/Probability are rated on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is the highest impact/probability

The development of a FET Strategy Risk Register would enable the SIAC to better understand the potential challenges and risks and allow mitigating actions to be put in place. It would also put a formal mechanism in place by which Lead Partners can rate the risks and escalate *highly rated* risks to SOLAS or the Department in a timely manner.

CONCLUSION

The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019 was the first of its kind in Ireland and was developed at a point in time very different to where the economy is now. The strategy set out a Vision and Mission for the sector and has allowed the Department of Education and Skills, SOLAS and the delivery partners to progress their shared ambition to be a “*world class integrated FET system, highly valued by learners and employers*” and importantly it provided an implementation plan to support the realisation of that ambition.

While there have been substantial strategic and operational achievements to date, the assessment of progress on some of the Objectives shows there is still work to be done in several areas. It has been acknowledged that much of the efforts have been focused on the initial “*design phase*” – be it in the formation of the ETBs or in the development and roll-out of the data infrastructure. Now that this work is well under way, it is imperative that greater urgency is given to delivering on the strategic Objectives and Actions so that they are all progressed as planned over the next 18 months.

The six recommendations proposed in this review must be viewed through two lenses. The first shorter-term enabling recommendations, are cognisant of what needs to happen to support the achievement of the existing strategic Objectives before the end of the current strategy. Central to the successful implementation of the remaining Actions is the drive and involvement of DES together with the application of robust PMO functions and the continued expansion of the strategic dialogue and agreements which, in turn, will be supported by the integration of a data infrastructure and will sustain the value proposition for the FET sector.

Secondly, the long-term strategic recommendations highlight, at a sectoral-level, what direction we believe Further Education and Training sector should take going forward into FET Strategy 2. Having an articulated policy for the FET sector complimented by a system-wide performance framework will allow the programme provision to remain relevant in a rapidly evolving economy, respond to the changing nature of the learner and ultimately better accommodate and support the learner as they progress through the broader education continuum.

As the process of scoping and developing the second FET strategy nears, the DES must re-evaluate the FET sector’s position in the broader educational system. It must now cater for labour-market demand which has evolved to be far more technologically driven and a learner, now often, a lifelong learner who engages with the further and higher education sector as a continuum and whose focus is on up-skilling and progression while *in* employment.

The implementation of the enabling recommendations over the next 18 months and the integration of the strategic recommendations as FET Strategy 2 is being developed will ensure that the FET sector remains responsive to economic demands and relevant to both the learner and the employer through the provision of high-quality educational provision.

APPENDICES***APPENDIX A: PROGRESS REVIEW OF THE FET STRATEGY 2014 - 2019 TERMS OF REFERENCE***

The Terms of Reference for the review of the FET Strategy 2014 - 2019 include:

- Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of lead partners in achieving their Objectives and Actions to date, as set out in the detailed plan including:
 - Determining the significant achievements and key outcomes to-date against each of the five strategic goals.
 - Identifying areas where performance has lagged and ascertain drivers of any underperformance.
- Identify the key challenges to date in delivering the Actions set out in the implementation plan as set out in the strategy.
- Assess the governance framework and the role of the SIAC, how it could be enhanced and how the level of ownership of commitments under the strategy could be improved.
- Consider how the current breakdown of expenditure between labour market and wider socially focussed FET provision correlates with wider labour market conditions and, where possible, how this compares internationally.
- Where relevant seek the views from the lead partners and relevant stakeholders, including social and business representatives, on how the strategy is progressing and how the prioritisation of resources should reflect the improved external economic environment.
- Make appropriate recommendations regarding the focus of the FET Strategy for the 2018-2019 period, including the potential re-alignment and re-prioritisation of high level goals and Actions with the improving economic and labour market situation, and highlighting, where possible, future risks and challenges in the sector.

APPENDIX B: MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SIAC

Draft Terms of Reference of FET Strategy Advisory Committee

The FET Strategy 2014-2019 is divided into three parts:

1. Executive Summary
2. FET Strategy
3. Overarching Implementation Plan.

A more Detailed Implementation Plan that elaborates the Overarching Plan has been developed by SOLAS and approved by Department of Education and Skills. This detailed Plan sets out:

- The specific task(s) required to address each strategic Actions underpinning the relevant high level goals
- Performance indicator(s) relating to each Action
- Timeframe(s) relating to each Action
- Ownership of Actions i.e. the department/agency/body who will lead/support on each Action.

The main structure for implementing the detailed Plan is an FET Strategy Implementation Advisory Committee Chaired by DES, to serve as a resource base for SOLAS with regard to FET Strategy Implementation. Membership of SIAC will include the following representatives of the lead bodies identified in the FET Strategy Detailed Implementation Plan:

Department of Education and Skills – Chair	ETBI
SOLAS – 2 Nominees	NCGE
ETBs – 5 Nominees	DEASP
DJEI	Private Training Providers x 2
QQI	NALA
Apprenticeship NAC	IBEC
HEA	ISME
AONTAS	Learner Representative

Terms of Reference of SIAC

The SIAC will have the key advisory role to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the FET Strategy and is expected to guide and support the FET sector and all the lead implementing partners and other relevant support bodies in delivering the FET strategy implementation project.

The Advisory Committee will be supported in its role and functions by SOLAS that will serve as the Secretariat of the Committee, convene meetings, take minutes and set its agenda, as well as preparing briefing papers/ monitoring/progress reports and providing all the relevant information the Committee needs to make informed decisions.

In particular, SIAC will:

- **Advise** on FET Strategy implementation, ensuring that implementation of Actions is in line with the DES approved Implementation Plan
- **Review** any recommendations for implementation of initiatives that may be presented by Lead /Support bodies
- **Review** periodic implementation monitoring reports and advise SOLAS accordingly
- **Advise** on any strategic changes to the Implementation Plan and ensure that they are undertaken in a timely manner so that the Plan is implemented as per agreed timelines.

Procedures of the SIAC

1. The quorum for the Steering Committee will be 6 lead partners.
2. Individual lead partners will lead on progressing the relevant Actions as set out in the FET Strategy Detailed Implementation Plan and should ensure continuity in participation to all meetings.

SIAC Meetings

The SIAC is expected to meet quarterly SIAC meetings will be held in SOLAS, Castleforbes House, Castleforbes Road, Dublin 1.

APPENDIX C: STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND SOLAS SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM DISCUSSION TOPICS

1	Describe your involvement with the design and monitoring of FET Strategy?
2	In what areas of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 has there been a large degree of progress since 2014?
3	Is there a clear understanding of the main focus of the strategy, that the overarching Goals and Actions are appropriate and aligned with evolving Government policy and external environment since the strategy was launched?
4	<p>In what areas of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 has there been little or no progress since 2014?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Reasons behind lack of progress ❖ Drivers for under-performance ❖ What changes which could be made to Objectives/Actions to achieve deadlines
5	Are there any areas of the strategy which require greater or lesser attention given where Ireland is now compared to when strategy was written in 2014?
6	What are the latest changes in Government policy and the FET environment that are not currently reflected in the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019?
7	In your opinion, what impact has the strategy had to date from the perspective of a) the learner b) teachers? c) management of your organisation?
8	Are there any governance issues or challenges in terms of meeting the Objectives of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019?
9	<p>How do you manage the reporting of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019?</p> <p>Is there are clear governance, accountability and oversight frameworks in place for achieving the aims of the strategy?</p> <p>Are there any governance issues or challenges in terms of meeting the Objectives of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019?</p> <p>How could the governance framework and the role of the SIAC be enhanced and how the level of ownership of commitments under the strategy could be improved?</p>

APPENDIX D: ETB CEOs AND FET DIRECTORS SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Are you familiar with the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014 – 2019?
2. Are you familiar with the Overarching Implementation Plan relating to the Strategy?
3. Please identify the areas where there have been significant achievements across the FET Strategy and the factors that have contributed to those achievements?
4. Please identify the areas where FET Strategy implementation performance has lagged and the factors that have contributed to the lag?
5. Of the Actions assigned to the ETBs as lead or co-lead in the Overarching Implementation Plan, please identify the most important ones?
6. Of the Actions assigned to the ETB as lead or co-lead in the Overarching Implementation Plan, please identify the least important ones?
7. Please list the challenges faced by ETBs in terms of delivering on the Actions as set out in the Overarching Implementation Plan?
8. To what extent has the standing of the FET Sector been enhanced over the last two years by the development and implementation of the FET Strategy 2014-2019?
9. Can you provide an example of how the learner experience has improved in your ETB since the development of the FET Strategy in 2014?
10. What areas of the FET Strategy 2014-2019 should be prioritised over the next two years?
11. Please use the text box below for any additional comments you may have.

APPENDIX E: REGIONAL SKILLS FORA MANAGERS SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Are you familiar with the *Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014 – 2019*?
2. Please identify the most significant achievements to-date of the FET Strategy 2014-2019 and the factors that have contributed to those achievements?
3. Please identify the areas where FET Strategy implementation performance has lagged and the factors that have contributed to the lag?
4. Are the FET Strategy 2014-2019 Goals and Objectives still relevant in the current economic environment?
5. Are there any Goals and/or Objectives which, if added, would enable the Strategy to better adapt to the changing economic environment at national and regional level?
6. What impact has the progression of the FET Strategy 2014-2019 had on your organisation?
7. What areas of the FET Strategy 2014-2019 should be prioritised over the next two years?
8. To what extent has the standing of the FET Sector been enhanced over the last two years by the development and implementation of the FET Strategy 2014-2019?
9. Please use the text box below for any additional comments you may have

APPENDIX F: WIDER FET STAKEHOLDER SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Are you familiar with the *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019*?
2. Was your organisation involved in the development of the FET Strategy 2014-2019?
3. Please identify the most significant achievements to-date of the FET Strategy 2014-2019 and the factors that have contributed to those achievements?
4. Please identify the areas where FET Strategy implementation performance has lagged and the factors that have contributed to the lag?
5. Are the FET Strategy 2014-2019 Goals and Objectives still relevant in the current economic environment?
6. Are there any Goals and Objectives which, if added, would enable the Strategy to better adapt to the changing economic environment?
7. What impact has the progression of the FET Strategy 2014-2019 had on your organisation?
8. What areas of the FET Strategy 2014-2019 should be prioritised over the next two years?
9. To what extent has the standing of the FET Sector been enhanced over the last two years by the development and implementation of the FET Strategy 2014-2019?
10. Please use the text box below for any additional comments you may have.

APPENDIX G: DETAILED REVIEW FINDINGS

GOAL 1 DETAILED FINDINGS

Goal 1	SIAC / SOLAS SMT Perspective	ETB CE/FET Director Perspective
Progressing Well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergence of new organisational structures Co-ordination of ETBs and SOLAS Representation on the Regional Skills Fora by each of the ETBs New apprenticeships coming on stream, for example culinary, accounting technician and financial services Learner voice being heeded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant achievement has been made in Skills for the Economy through local collaborations and working with Regional Skills Fora Provision of training to assist people to start and sustain their own businesses Establishment of Employer Engagement Groups, including an Employer Engagement database
Lack of Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-focus on Life-Long-Learning Apprenticeship uptake is not always aligned with forecast number of learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of Employee Development Strategy Sense that the strategy has concentrated mainly on the former FÁS areas
Enablers of Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase engagement with local enterprise and SME Improve data governance to enable inter-agency integration Address legacy and continuing tensions which exist between FE and HE providers of programmes being offered to the same cohort of learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional resourcing needed in ETBs where there are continuing high levels of long-term unemployment Developing courses which focus on generic skills so that learners can create their own opportunities as labour market needs evolve at speed Implementation of MoUs between ETBs and DEASP Initial development of TEL strategy Continuously review programme quality and outcomes to ensure they are meeting the future needs of learners, jobseekers, employers and employees Sectoral skills needs analysis and skills audit using national, regional and local data
Barriers to Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on Apprenticeship may distract from the overall FE provision Agility of the ETBs to meet changing labour market Tension between provision of programmes focused on job creation/upskilling and social inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to respond appropriately to industry needs is still challenging in rural regions There has been little support for the “very successful” PLC sector and this has led to a small drop in numbers in this sector Staff recruitment issues when recruitment is not done by ETBs

Goal 1	Regional Skills Fora Managers Perspective	Wider Participant Perspective
Areas of significant progress / impact to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater alignment with FET-related employer skills needs through local and regional engagement especially in the last year through collaboration with Regional Skills Fora and other educational providers. More coordinated engagement with Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection clients. Focus on apprenticeship development during 2017 has led to increased levels of employer engagement and participation at a national level. The emphasis on industry engagement is very welcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The setting up of new structures which better facilitate employer input into the FET Skills provision at a national (National Skills Council) and regional level (Regional Skills Fora). The increased focus on employer engagement and the creation of partnerships between industry and educational institutions which has occurred under the current FET Strategy is welcome and has already begun to tackle some of the skills mismatches in our economy, particularly within localities and regions Involvement and cooperation between the FET, HE providers, as well as employers, is contributing to programmes being developed which offer the best chance of employment
Areas of performance lag to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The feeling among many employers that FET providers are only concerned with job seekers and with unemployment figures dropping More could be done for those in employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rationalisation of provision across funding programmes Progress and development of new FET courses has stalled, this is due to lack of resources on the ground to develop new courses and the new validation requirement by QQI Inaccessibility of many FET courses for small and medium sized enterprises
Issues for consideration going forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employer engagement but more co-ordinated with other such structures to complement and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilisation of technology and online learning to ensure maximum advantage can be taken of skills-based learning for employability, life-long learning and CPD. Changes in the nature of work, e.g. digitisation, robotics, the emergence of the gig economy etc., need to be taken into account going forward. Increased focus on the ease of access for small and medium sized enterprises to engage with skills and training providers. Increased integration across complimentary and/or competing policies

Goal 1	Learner Perspective
Issues for consideration going forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build partnerships between SOLAS and the DES, the DEASP. SOLAS, with support from DES, must ensure that DEASP treats FET learners as people trying to improve their social and educational position, and not simply as wards of DEASP decision making. • Establish regular communication between DEASP and ETB services to ensure fluid sharing of information on courses and services, including guidance. • Ensure consistent application of eligibility criteria to ensure the integrity of the system. • While ensuring consistency in the application of eligibility criteria, build processes and criteria that allow case dependent decision making within defined parameters. A system with built in flexibility will enable decision makers to make informed decisions about learners without compromising the integrity of the system. • Although AEGI currently provide valuable guidance services before during and after courses to aid progression and ensure learner needs are met, staffing of the AEGI services is not uniform throughout the country. It must be remembered that many learners involved in FET are second chance learners who do not hold deep knowledge about the many interconnected policies, programmes and systems available to help.

GOAL 2 DETAILED FINDINGS

Goal 2	SIAC / SOLAS SMT Perspective	ETB CE/FET Director Perspective
Areas of significant progress / impact to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledgement of the importance of active inclusion, given the current economic environment Implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011-2020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledgement that continued investment in active inclusion is important to ensure all people have access to FET services that enable them to reach their potential and to contribute to society.
Areas of performance lag to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent level of active inclusion provision between the ETBs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barriers such as lack of childcare, transport, fear of losing welfare payment, costs and no broadband pushes most marginalised groups in communities further away from these courses Lack of national Recognition of Prior Learning Strategy Inconsistent social welfare payments and allowances which impeded participation
Enablers of Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector needs overarching Policy guidance Learner voice Recognition that active inclusion provision varies across ETBs. For example, Dublin has a high level of labour provision whereas the midlands and South West have higher levels of progression/active inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued levels of active inclusion through the provision of high quality, accessible, flexible education and training programmes and supports suited to the identified needs of the individual Some ETBs are devising a policy to implement the new national strategy for the promotion of literacy and numeracy across FET
Barriers to Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed levels of understanding on the relevance and importance of active inclusion provision within FET Focus on the provision of Level 4 and onwards programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restrictive programme structures inhibit flexibility to respond to workforce development

Goal 2	Regional Skills Fora Managers Perspective	Wider Relevant Stakeholder Perspective
Areas of significant progress / impact to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant progress on active inclusion by actively targeting jobseekers and marginalised groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The development of administrative and data systems that are now producing enhanced information for the individual learner, the provider, but particularly at a societal level, to better inform what is working, for whom and to what end.
Areas of performance lag to date	<p><i>[Survey participants made no reference to areas of performance lag referred to under Goal 2]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over emphasis on job-readiness and training for employer needs and not enough focus on FETs role in contributing to personal, family and community development/cohesion Too much value placed on accreditation as an outcome and not enough value on wider societal outcomes While one of the main Strategic Goals is for active inclusion there are still difficulties in getting those furthest away from the labour market back in to training. Even for those who are working, barriers still exist for them to access further education or training Barriers such as lack of childcare, transport, fear of losing welfare payment, costs incurred in taking up a place are experienced by our members but can be exacerbated in rural areas, especially in terms of transport and broadband. Not having access to this infrastructure in rural areas pushes most marginalized groups in communities further away from these courses. A distinct model of FET provision should be put in place for people with mental health challenges
Issues for consideration going forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lifelong Learning and Literacy and numeracy strategy implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online and remote learning can ensure that there is no geographic disadvantage to those in regions, rural areas Given that the economic crisis has shifted nationally, there is a need to revisit the model that was adopted nationally i.e. engagement of outside organisations to deliver FET Objectives e.g. FRS/Turas Nua Wellness and resilience building in learners need to be prioritized as a singular goal

Goal 2	Learner Perspective
<i>Issues for consideration going forward</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide mental health awareness training to FET staff, including how to communicate with learners demonstrating signs of mental health challenges, and about where to direct learners for appropriate additional supports. • Create portfolios of learner successes rather than exams to better reflects learner work experience and for use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

GOAL 3 DETAILED FINDINGS

Goal 3	SIAC / SOLAS SMT Perspective	ETB CE/FET Director Perspective
Areas of significant progress / impact to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issuing of quality assurance guidelines for ETB Piloting of a new approach to the validation of programmes QQI and SOLAS MoU QQI have engaged with all ETBs in relation to new QA procedures, an independent evaluation of how each ETB was working was carried out and QQI aim to agreed new QA procedures with all ETBs before summer 2018 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Provision, QA is at the heart of our provision and is continually improved as part of our systems and focus on programme and assessment development Established an ETB FET Quality Assurance Unit which will ensure excellence in FET programme development, delivery and standards
Areas of performance lag to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length of time it took for PLC review to be completed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having an effective CPD strategy and framework in place is critical to support quality of provision across the FE sector There still seems to be a lack of robust Guidance available to people seeking to take up training and education where either over qualified or under qualified people are placed on courses that are not suitable to them
Enablers of Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ETBs taking on the ownership of QA validation procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of Internal Verification, External Authentication and Results Approval processes Engagement with QQI and the development of an Executive Self Evaluation (including a Quality Improvement Plan)
Barriers to Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance at all stages of learner pathway Capacity level of the ETB to operate QA Courses offered can be reflective of the staff skillset and contracts in place as opposed to local needs Need to develop an on-line apprenticeship life cycle management system as this is currently paper based. Additional training and support at FET Director and middle-management level is required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amendments to various Key Performance Indicators and Timelines in relation to QQI Actions has had an impact on the ability of the sector to respond to sectoral needs and the development of new awards etc. Appropriate staffing levels due to the previous moratorium on staff recruitment, delays in sanctioning new posts - QA, TEL, CPD positions in particular Several posts being granted on a temporary basis only Significantly increased reporting requirements locally and for SOLAS/DES

Goal 3	Regional Skills Fora Managers	Wider Relevant Stakeholder
Areas of significant progress / impact to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of a wide range of courses in community based centres has helped to encourage people with lower levels of educational attainment to engage and upskill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> QQI's articulation of QA guidelines which clearly identified the corporate responsibility of individual ETBs for the quality assurance of FET The widening of the talent pipeline accessible to industry at NFQ Levels 5 and Level 6 Improved rationalisation of provision across funding programmes.
Areas of performance lag to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal FET staff development. "Learning roadmap" for FET should be promoted and discussed more with students and parents/guardians. ETBs are challenged to provide the resources / expertise to develop new programmes and engage with QQI to have the programmes accredited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes and mechanisms for effective collaboration between the FET and HE education sectors, to allow easier transition from one to the other Courses need to be more flexible and eligibility criteria for these courses relaxed in cases where a person decides to return to higher education, but must be unemployed continuously for nine months prior to this Ireland continues to lag behind other countries in the participation of the workforce in lifelong education and training Many SMEs are either restricted from accessing or are deterred from accessing FET because of administrative burdens which face them in applying Lack of flexible provision and a full appreciation of the impact on unemployed learners and their ability to improve their skills given the obligations other state agencies put on these learners.
Issues for consideration going forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger progression routes between FE and HE now required to provide incentives to those embarking on lifelong learning progression routes Upgrading of the guidance service and extending it to employees Course provision requires significant review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuously validating FET programme performance and outcomes in accordance with clear and defined objectives and the resulting outcomes

Goal 3	Learner Perspective
<i>Issues for consideration going forward</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure tutors receive supports that allow them to effectively perform their job, which is critical for learner success • Evaluate the entry criteria for programmes and why they may not be followed • Build relationships between ETBs and local employers to establish a space where learners can benefit from employment and opportunities regardless of their age, socio-economic background, or pre-education experience

GOAL 4 DETAILED FINDINGS

Goal 4	SIAC / SOLAS SMT Perspective	ETB CE/FET Director Perspective
Areas of significant progress / impact to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning, funding and grant allocation systems Formation of the new ETBs Appointment of the FET Directors in the ETBs ETB performance funding model Three-year corporate targets established to drive FET Strategy forward Initiation of the Strategic Dialogue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful development and implementation of the PLSS and FARR due to a commitment and support to the project (from an ICT, human and financial resources perspective centrally in SOLAS and ETBI) Strategic dialogue engagement Establishment of a FET Innovation Fund
Areas of performance lag to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pace at which PLSS system is progressing Integration/data-exchange between governmental departments Sharing of data between DES, Revenue commissioners and the Department of Social Protection to allow for the future tracking and assessment of learner outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of two systems (FARR and PLSS) has been slow and resulted in a significantly increased administrative burden Lack of appropriate capital investment in ETB infrastructure There was no capital budget for FET until 2017 when €6m was made available
Enablers of Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further roll-out of the performance funding pilot scheme Strategic dialogue engagement Robust data informed evidence based funding model Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) unit in SOLAS provided valuable input in terms of labour market research over the years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SOLAS, DES, DPER etc. working together to capture all necessary data to assist with full learner information, decision making and providing better options and outcomes The EGFSN has provided valuable insight/input, through its sectoral studies which have identified needs of particular sectors as well as needs in horizontal areas such as ICT
Barriers to Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unclear performance targets in active inclusion Providing evidence of outcomes to show value for money spent in FET sector The PLSS system has its limitations in terms of tracking outcomes across community education programmes. Poor data makes service planning process is burdensome and complex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited integration of the Learner voice in programme provision and development Relationship with the HE Sector remains a challenge

Goal 4	Regional Skills Fora Managers	Wider Relevant Stakeholder
Areas of significant progress / impact to date	[Survey participants made no reference to areas of performance lag referred to under Goal 4]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The appointment of FET Directors in the ETBs and the role they have played in the emergence of a comprehensive vision for quality assurance within the ETBs The alignment of programmes offered to disparate groups by the implementation of the strategy and the reduction in duplication of programmes on offer
Areas of performance lag to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding structures cannot react quickly to employer specific skills needs. Tendering restructures has hindered some deliverance of training. Poor work conditions or low pay may still provide a barrier for the success of the FET strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of sufficient capital investment in facilities Lack of robust data to evaluate outcomes Insufficient evidence of employer engagement The systems created for collection of data and reporting do not consider the breadth and variety of courses and programmes that the FET strategy aims to achieve Linkage with DEASP has not proved fruitful in some regions especially with competition for Seetec/Turas Nua There are still inconsistent social welfare payments and allowances which impeded participation. Staffing resources following the moratorium on recruitment and the difficulty in recruiting new teachers in certain subject areas due to a lack of supply and new pay scales
Issues for consideration going forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installing a fit-for-purpose data infrastructure to inform FET policy decisions Upgrade of existing websites which are extremely poor in meeting employers needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of appropriate delivery mechanisms supported by a review methodology adopting KPIs which facilitate prioritisation and modification of activities in response to changing circumstances and emerging needs. Specific objectives and targets around upskilling and flexible learning options

Goal 4	Learner Perspective
<i>Issues for consideration going forward</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make available financial support for part-time learners and begin introduction of more night courses; both of which allow greater work-life balance for learners. • Provide student cards to FET learners. The provision of student cards for FET learners of all ages would in many instances provide access to discounted transportation fees as well as other benefits.

GOAL 5 DETAILED FINDINGS

Goal 5	SIAC / SOLAS SMT Perspective	ETB CEO/FET Director Perspective
Areas of significant progress / impact to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication and Branding Strategy / campaign is being progressed ahead of the timeline Recent apprenticeships campaigns, the development of Regional Skills Fora and local Enterprise Engagement Working Groups has helped to raise awareness of FET. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Campaigns detailing apprenticeship opportunities have been positively received Employer engagement units set up in each ETB QA Officer post sanctioned at a set grade will support quality assurance across the sector
Areas of performance lag to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delayed economic and social impact studies of ETBs The lack of evidence based learner information and sectoral data inhibits the ability of the sector to promote itself. Lack of progress in communicating the role and remit of new organisations including ETBs, SOLAS, QQI and ETBI was not well understood throughout the sector and among the wider public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediate impact of the work being done to improve the standing of FET has not been significant but it provides a basis that should see results in the medium term as strategy becomes a reality in FET sector It has been a challenge to enhance the standing of FET without specific posts in place, however the Director of FET posts has helped to steer the FET Sector and ensure it gets the recognition it deserves
Enablers of Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift in cultural mind-set, informed by a stronger communications strategy - new approach, wider audience, etc. Communication and Branding Strategy must make it clear that the FE “education” is an attractive Option A for learners FET Guidance Review must be completed to evidence political confidence in the FE Sector National Employer Surveys Recognition of the importance of partner engagement and advocacy for the Sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of PLC colleges teachers who are experts in their areas and working in industry Continued buy in from the ETBs Improved linkages with key stakeholders via formalised protocols. Improved course alignment with industry needs via data made available to ETBs. Improved knowledge on outcomes to inform future planning of courses via PLSS and FARR.
Barriers to Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative societal views towards FET sector Unclear who the Strategy “target audience” given the changing economic context Infrastructure not in place to deal with everyone e.g. disability As the economy is improving, SOLAS doesn’t have a “ready-made clientele base” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of hard data to evidence positive learner outcomes - a national follow-up survey is required. No FET offering through CAO Industrial Relations issues are keeping the sector disjointed

Goal 5	Regional Skills Fora Managers	Wider Relevant Stakeholder
Areas of significant progress / impact to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements in communication including the establish of the Regional Skills Fora themselves has improved the perception of FET provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The effective restructuring of FET provision previously provided by two independent agencies (FAS and VECs) into one cohesive delivery entity orchestrated through 16 ETBs / ETBI and coordinated through SOLAS
Areas of performance lag to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing around the advantages of FET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Standing of FET is still at pre-SOLAS levels, this is due partly to the Nation's obsession with Higher Education Many SMEs are unaware of the opportunities and options available to them under the FET Strategy and how these might benefit their companies Perceived lack of buy-in and support from second level schools to ensure the adequate promotion of FET programmes as a real alternative for students who may not be suited to the HE option Attention is needed in building public confidence in the quality standards of FET
Issues for consideration going forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An integrated practical communications strategy at national level for both apprenticeships and traineeships to target specific audiences including for example parents, employers and apprentices An effective branding / marketing campaign to build the awareness towards learning skills for work and engaging better with employers and learners The terms 'FET' and 'ETB' are not used or understood by industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater emphasis is now required on the communication of the FET opportunities which exist for businesses, as well as how businesses can access FET Increased communication to highlight the achievements of FET learners in terms of securing employment or progression opportunities to HET

Goal 5	Learner Perspective
<i>Issues for consideration going forward</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is clear that many learners and their colleagues discovered FET by word of mouth from family and friends. Learners called for more communication, advertising, and promotion of FET nationally alongside more targeted communication, advertising and promotion locally. Advertising needs to be clear and free of jargon and acronyms. Advertising needs to provide the basic information that brings someone to the first step of seeking education, without overwhelming learners. • Promote mental health benefits of FET to learners. • Need for online information such as social media platforms but also offline information for those who cannot access computers or navigate online platforms. • Learners called for 'one stop shops' for education – Online and physical centres with information and people to talk to for advice and help with options.

APPENDIX H: PMO CAPABILITY AND OBJECTIVES

Operational Support

The following tables outline how the proposed PMO functions might operate and the services it could provide.

Function	PMO Responsibility
Schedule Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PMO will build and/or review (as necessary) operational project plans and corresponding schedules. • The PMO will be responsible for methods that review and ensure plans are realistic for implementation. • This includes managing version controls of plans, establishing schedule metrics, identifying dependencies, and ensuring contracts are aligned to the schedule. • The PMO will work with DES and SOLAS staff to ensure plans are current and managed effectively. • The PMO will manage resources and staff; including maintaining a master calendar of key events. • The PMO will provide software tools for managing schedules and plans.
Performance Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PMO will work with DES and SOLAS to establish operational metrics for delivery of the FET's Strategic Objectives • While activities may be delivered by other PMOs and staff, the FET PMO will be charged with evaluating and measuring performance and ensuring Actions are taken to mitigate poor performance. • The FET PMO will ensure contracts include proper service level agreements and other performance-based metrics to maximise performance.
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PMO will be responsible for establishing a risk management process. • The PMO will be responsible for cataloging key risks for the program; including development of mitigation strategies for each risk. • The PMO will perform risk analysis functions as necessary to support critical operational decision making. • The PMO will provide necessary tools (software) to manage risk as appropriate.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PMO will work with stakeholders to build a communication plan that catalogs stakeholders and outlines effective communication mechanisms and channels for communication. • The PMO will provide messaging services and support the development of presentations and other material as needed by FET • The PMO will facilitate meetings as necessary, including producing agendas and meeting minutes. • The PMO will produce a status reporting mechanism for DES and SOLAS

Issue Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PMO will be responsible for establishing an issue management process. • The PMO will be responsible for cataloging key issues for the program; including development of mitigation strategies for each risk. • The PMO will ensure risks are properly managed and resolved. • The PMO will perform analysis functions as necessary to support critical operational decision making and/or issue resolution.
Knowledge and Document Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PMO will establish a process for archiving and ensuring version control for all related documents
Scope Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PMO will ensure robust change management processes for project scope. This includes managing scope within contracted services. • The PMO will establish a formal change control process for DES and SOLAS to facilitate the review and approval of changes that impact timelines, budget, or the Strategic Objectives of FET.

PMO Governance Structure

How the PMO interacts with DES and SOLAS staff and PMOs – including their reporting structure and roles is one of the first critical activities the PMO.

Capability	PMO Role	Related Objectives
Program Structure	Facilitate and Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with DES AND SOLAS, a program model is structured to ensure a culture of high-quality delivery, accountability, collaboration, and transparency.
Strategic (Program) Planning	Facilitate and Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a clear and realistic Implementation Roadmap to deliver FET's goals. Prioritisation and sequencing of Objectives and Actions; this includes ensuring budgets and resourcing aligns to the Implementation roadmap.
Schedule Management	Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects are setup for success and are effectively planned with realistic timelines, dependencies, deliverables, and staffing.
Performance Management	Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metrics and service level agreements are established and managed which ensure projects are delivered on time and within budget. Performance issues are effectively identified and resolved.
Risk Management	Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A highly effective method for identifying and mitigating operational, technical, and financial risks is in place and provides a basis for critical leadership decisions.
Communication	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication support to result in highly informed stakeholders. This plan maximises multiple communication channels and has evaluative mechanisms to improve communication effectiveness.

Organisational Change Management	Facilitate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational planning has been successful in building a qualified and scalable infrastructure to support FET in the future.
Issue Management	Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflicts and issues are actively identified and tracked through to resolution. Automated workflow for issue identification and tracking are operational.
Knowledge and Document Management	Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A secure but accessible library of key documents, deliverables, and other documentation is operational for the FET for both internal and external usage.
Quality Assurance	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear quality assurance processes are defined and operational for business and technical operations.
Scope Management	Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes for managing project-level scope of work are operational.

Quality Assurance

The PMO will be responsible for deliverable quality assurance. This includes providing relevant input and quality assurance services on the following deliverables:

- Status reports
- Communication
- Internal Deliverables
- Management Presentations

Key Deliverables

The following table outlines the key deliverables that the PMO is expected to provide for the remaining 18-months of the FET strategy.

PMO Deliverable	Description
PMO Roles and Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities are finalized and approved by DES
Project Plans and Schedules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For individual projects, these are used to identify and track detailed tasks. The plan details interdependencies amongst tasks, key project milestones, critical path tasks, and resource accountability
Status Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project status reports summarize key information related to the status and health of the implementation process. Status reporting meetings are held at agreed intervals
Issue Management Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue Management processes support the recording, tracking and resolving issues that are impacting the implementation process

Risk Management Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management describes the process of recording, tracking and mitigating project risks and their impact on the project. Risks are defined as uncertain events or conditions that can have a negative or positive effect on the objectives of the project.
Communication Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Communication Plan will identify stakeholders and details communication mechanics and channels. The goal of this plan is to share timely information with affected parties and gather their valued input and experience.
Communication Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication materials may include presentations, webinars, meeting meetings, and other communication-based deliverables.
Quality Assurance Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Quality Assurance Plan exists detailing the activities the project team will perform to help ensure that quality is built into the review of project deliverables. This includes providing quality assurance of grant applications.
Organisational Change Management Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisational change management plan is used to ensure changes to the organisation are well planned, communicated, and executed effectively.
Knowledge and Document Management System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of a core document management repository solution for program artifacts. • Includes processes for version control, data backup, and access controls.
Performance Management Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of key PMO metrics to ensure high quality management of the program.

Other deliverables and artefacts may require review – the PMO must a process that improves overall quality of deliverables and materials. In addition, the PMO will be responsible for providing document version controls and providing an infrastructure for managing documents and deliverables.