Further Education and Training Strategy

2014 – 2019

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

SOLAS

An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
Further Education and Training Authority

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Preface

The Further Education and Training Act 2013 was signed into law in July 2013. It provided for the dissolution of FÁS and the establishment of SOLAS. SOLAS is required by the Act to propose a five-year strategy for the provision of further education and training (FET). SOLAS operates under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills and will, in conjunction with the sixteen Education and Training Boards, be responsible for the integration, coordination and funding of a wide range of further education and training programmes.

The SOLAS Action Plan states that SOLAS will be tasked with ensuring the provision of 21st century high-quality FET programmes which are responsive to the needs of learners and the requirements of a changed and changing economy. The FET Strategy is intended therefore to provide a focus for the setting of investment priorities, and to provide a framework for the establishment and development of a strong FET sector.

The FET Strategy aims to deliver a higher quality learning experience leading to better outcomes for all those who engage in FET. It presents a roadmap and implementation plan to realise the vision of a world-class integrated system of further education and training in Ireland which will: support economic development; increase social inclusion; and meet the needs of all learners, communities and employers who engage with FET. The FET Strategy is set within a context of Government reform of public services.

The FET Strategy also reflects the priorities articulated in the 'Action Plan for Jobs', 'Pathways to Work' and wider policy reform in education. The 'Action Plan for Jobs' is a key component of the Government's integrated response to the unemployment crisis and involves all of Government including the Department of Education and Skills. The education and training system is a core part of the enterprise, development and innovation infrastructure. A key priority for the education and training system, including FET, is to:

- Address the unemployment challenge and provide targeted skills programmes that support job seekers to re-skill and up-skill for areas where sustainable employment opportunities are emerging.
- Modernise and expand the apprenticeship system.
- Implement the new structures for FET to deliver higher quality flexible and responsive programmes.

The 'Pathways to Work' initiative is another key component of Government response to the unemployment crisis. This initiative focuses on unemployed people; in particular those who are long term unemployed and young unemployed people. The aim is to provide priority access for

unemployed people to relevant labour market opportunities to enhance their job prospects through education and training programmes and work experience.

Reform in education is broadly focussed on improving quality, accountability and supporting inclusion and diversity in schools. With regard to higher education and further education and training, reform is focussed on creating the right opportunities for Irish adults.

Clearly, skills development and wellbeing lie at the heart of the FET Strategy. Employers lie at the heart of skill needs, while the learner lies at the heart of the FET service.

The benefits from investment in skills at all levels are numerous and span both the economy and society. Social benefits concern individual's success in effectively and constructively participating in social, civic and working life. The evidence shows that literacy and numeracy skills have a significant impact on gaining employment while community education empowers people to grow in confidence in their own employability and engage effectively with the labour market. It is worth noting that the majority of SOLAS funding is currently targeted at full time FET programmes at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) levels 1-6 and many of these programmes have a vocational and employment aim.

The main focus of the Strategy therefore is to provide the following skills through FET:

Skills as a resource for economic growth: a skilled, innovative and flexible labour force has become a key resource for sustained economic growth. Numerous studies have shown links between economic growth and human capital and increasing returns from education and training.

Skills as drivers of employment growth: employment growth in many developed countries has been concentrated in high skilled areas (e.g. IT services, research and development (R&D), engineering services, financial services and consultancy etc.) which through spin offs drive job creation in other sectors. Creating an indigenous engine of economic growth in Ireland is also central to the revitalisation of the Irish economy. Entrepreneurship, and the start-up companies that emerge as a result, provide employment and the means by which new sectors take root in Ireland.

Skills as drivers of productivity increase: along with technological advances, skills represent a key source of productivity increases.

Skills and 'smartening' of the economy: driven by technological advances and globalisation, all jobs are becoming knowledge intensive and the economy is moving from a capital to a knowledge-based one.

Skills as a driver of social inclusion and social mobility: regardless of age and circumstances, having the right skills and the opportunities to use and develop them in order to gain confidence and self-esteem is essential to contribute to a better society, as well as to improve employability and productivity. The ability to transfer those skills to new situations and to be able to communicate, including through technology, in a way which suits individual circumstances and aspirations is at a premium in an evolving knowledge-based economy.

Skills as an insulator from unemployment: as job security gives way to labour market flexibility and the focus moves from a 'job for life' to 'work for life', only through continuous skills development and lifelong learning can participants in the labour market ensure employability, skills transferability and reduce the risk of unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment.

With regard to skills as an insulator from unemployment, the fact that many of those who have become unemployed in recent years have relatively low formal qualifications has raised the fear that long-term unemployment may become an embedded feature of the labour force of many Western economies (structural unemployment). The high economic and social costs associated with such a scenario have added a sense of urgency to the process of skill-upgrading of unemployed persons.

A common feature in many well-developed education and training systems is an emphasis on the development of skill credentials that are approved by industry, that are often transferable across different sectors and, most importantly, can be arranged or stacked up as a sequence of awards that are accumulated by job-seekers advancing along specific and identifiably viable career pathways.

A significant number of unemployed persons are older workers who have few (or no) qualifications and considerable work experience. The most effective intervention for this group is the adding-on of specific technical skills and competence aimed at qualifying them for work in related and expanding employment markets. Related to this is a need to formally validate skills and knowledge acquired through work experience by means of recognition of prior learning (RPL). Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) will have a lead role to play in this regard.

The key challenge for FET will be to balance the necessary FET reform programme with business continuity and at the same time implement Government priorities with regard to education, such as: ensuring PLC places for school leavers; prioritising the needs of unemployed persons as part of 'Pathways to Work'; and prioritising the needs of young people under the 'Youth Guarantee'.

Success for the FET sector is clearly dependent on a broad range of FET stakeholders, including SOLAS, as well as a range of Government Departments and Agencies, in particular DES, DSP, DJEI, and employers, FET providers and practitioners, the HEA/HEIs and the community and voluntary sector, working collaboratively to implement the FET Strategy. SOLAS and the ETB sector cannot do it alone.

Success also depends on ensuring that jobseekers continue to be referred by DSP to the most suitable and relevant education and training programmes.

In this collaborative context, the FET Strategy will better position FET to more effectively support government policy objectives of increasing employment and reducing unemployment, while also increasing competitiveness and productivity in the Irish economy. In addition, FET will be better positioned to contribute more effectively to the relevant actions in the Government's Medium Term Economic Strategy, as well as to the priorities relating to the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2014-2020, supported by the ESF. The latter Programme places education and training in a central role to support people to get jobs; to help young people enter the labour market; to help people in difficulty, and those from disadvantaged groups, to get skills and jobs and have the same opportunities as others do; to ensure young people complete their education and get the skills that make them more competitive in the job market.

The Strategy is part of a four-strand integrated FET strategic framework. The first strand includes the FET Strategy as well as a companion ESRI study on 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future', commissioned by SOLAS as part of the Strategy development process. An overarching Strategy Implementation Plan and a more detailed Operational Plan will set out specific tasks, performance indicators, ownership and timelines to drive the implementation of the FET Strategy, as well as to assist with planning and monitoring progress in that regard.

The second strand includes the first-ever integrated Annual Services Plan relating to FET. The Plan sets out for the first time, 'base line' details around the type, mix and volume of programmes and services to be delivered by the FET sector in 2014 as well as the associated funding and estimated outcomes relating to programmes and services. The FET Services Plan consists largely of sixteen ETB Plans for 2014 'rolled up' into one national FET Services Plan.

The third strand is the three-year SOLAS Corporate Plan. While the FET Strategy outlines the way forward for key actors in the sector including SOLAS, the SOLAS Corporate Plan outlines the specific contribution that SOLAS will make to progress the FET Strategy and provide clarity on how SOLAS will deliver its mandate as set out in the Further Education and Training Act 2013, including the management of strategic FET programmes such as Momentum and e-College.

The fourth strand includes individual five-year Strategy Statements and the Annual Service Plans relating to each of the sixteen ETBs. The former will outline the way in which the ETBs propose to develop and deliver their programmes and services over a five year period, while the latter sets out the type and volume of programmes and services that will be provided each year. Again, both will be informed, inter alia, by the FET Strategy, Government priorities, and their learner and local employer needs.

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

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

The FET Strategy in Part 2 has 12 sections as follows:

Section 1: *Introduction, Background and Context* outlines the background and context for the FET Strategy including the reform programme in the further education and training sector, which is part of the Government's wider reform of the public service. The approach to the FET Strategy development process and the vision and mission for FET are outlined.

Section 2: *Development, Scope and Standing of FET* looks at the development of FET over the longer-term and the wide-ranging and heterogeneous nature of FET. A definition of FET is provided. The standing of FET compared to academic education remains a feature of many developed economies, including Ireland.

Section 3: *Economic and Labour Market Context* looks at most recent data suggesting the Irish economy and the labour market continue to recover slowly. In the period 2012-2020overall employment will increase by between 100,000 and 270,000 depending on how strongly the economy recovers. Many of the emerging skill needs/employment opportunities arising can be addressed by FET.

Section 4: *Key Messages from Government Reviews and Studies* looks at the NESC Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed. This review pointed out the need to prioritise long-term unemployed and the importance of the alignment of FET with local and regional skills demand and labour market intelligence. The DES-led consultation process on the establishment of SOLAS emphasised that social and as well economic outcomes from FET provision need to be taken into account. The recent Review of Apprenticeship recommended that apprenticeships should be expanded to new business and industrial sectors.

Section 5: *Key Issues Emerging from the ESRI Evidence Base* outlines the key findings from the SOLAS commissioned research on Irish FET by the ESRI. These include substantial variations in the regional distribution of FET places, the weak data infrastructure around FET - particularly by international standards - and the important role played by FET in promoting social inclusion and life-long learning.

Section 6: *Active Inclusion* describes the concept of 'active inclusion' as enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society and this includes having a job.

The role of FET is emphasised in this regard. The development of Government policy around literacy and numeracy since the 1970s is outlined, including the enshrining of a Literacy and Numeracy strategy as part of the FET Strategy in the Further Education and Training Act, 2013. The specifics of a Literacy and Numeracy Strategy complete this section.

Section 7: *Employee Development and Entrepreneurship* reflects the importance of continued education and training for those in work and for those who wish to start and sustain their own business.

Section 8: *Progression for FET graduates to higher education* looks at the scale of progression through existing arrangements. It also highlights the importance for SOLAS/ETBI and the ETB sector to take advantage of existing HE cluster structures and proposed Technological Universities to deliver an increasing number of more seamless progression pathways to HEIs.

Section 9: *Qualifications and Professional Development for staff involved in FET* reflects the need to systematically collect data around the current qualification and skills profile of FET staff with a view to developing and implementing an effective continuous professional development (CPD) strategy.

Section 10: *Guidance and FET* looks at guidance and counselling policy at EU and national level as well as current guidance practice pertaining to the FET sector. Submissions received as part of the FET consultation process call for a FET guidance service that builds on current AEGI integrated guidance counselling aims. The proposed building blocks of an integrated guidance strategy for the FET sector complete this section.

Section 11: *Funding* looks at how state funding of further education and training has tended in many instances to be determined more by legacy than by evidence-based needs. A new "strategic input/outcomes-based" funding model is proposed and outlined.

Section 12: *Core Principles and Strategic Goals* sets out a set of core FET principles and five high-level Strategic Goals. These were developed from the research findings, from international best practice comparisons and from strategies proposed during the consultation process to address the issues.

Finally, SOLAS would like to thank the many individuals and organisations who contributed to the development of the FET Strategy.

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List of Acronyms

AEGI	Adult Education Guidance Initiative
ALCES	Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme
AONTAS	The National Adult Learning Organisation
BIM	Bord Iascaigh Mhara
BTEA	Back to Education Allowance
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
BUSI	Build Up Skills Ireland
CTC	Community Training Centre
CAO	Central Applications Office
CAS	Common Awards System
CDM	Competency Determination Mechanism
CE	Community Employment
CER	Commission for Energy Regulation
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
C&G	City and Guilds of London
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
DSP	Department of Social Protection
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
ECF	Employment Control Framework
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
ELGPN	European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
EI	Enterprise Ireland
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute

ETB	Education and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
EU	European Union
FÁS	Training and Employment Authority
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FET	Further Education and Training
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
FESS	Further Education Support Service
FIT	Fastrack to IT
GNP	Gross National Product
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HET	Higher Education and Training
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Awards Council
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
IACTO	Irish Association Of Community Training Organisations
ICOMOS	International Council of Monuments and Sites
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDA	Industrial Development Agency
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INOU	Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
IoT	Institute of Technology
ISME	Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association
IUA	Irish Universities Association
IUQB	Irish University Quality Board
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
LEO	Local Enterprise Office

LES	Local Employment Service
LTU	Long-term Unemployed Person
MIS	Management Information System
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NARC	National Apprenticeship Review Committee
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NSD	National Skills Database
NSS	National Skills Strategy
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
STP	Specialist Training Provider
LMETF	Labour Market Education and Training Fund
LTI	Local Training Initiative
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
NTF	National Training Fund
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate Course
PLSS	Programme and Learner Support System
PMDS	Performance Management and Development System
QA	Quality Assurance
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning

RSA	Road Safety Authority
SIPTU	Services, Industrial Professional and Technical Union
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SME	Small to Medium-sized Enterprises
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh Agus Scileanna
SST	Specific Skills Training
SUR	Standardised Unemployment Rate
TESG	Technical Employment Support Grant
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

Note: Please see Appendix 1 for Glossary of Terms relating to FET Provision

Part 1

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Introduction & Background

This is the first time in the history of the State that a Five-Year Strategy (2014-2019) for the further education and training sector has been published. The main catalyst for the Strategy lies in the reform programme in the further education and training sector, which is part of the Government's wider reform of the public service. Reform relating to FET involves reform at structural level as well as planning, prioritising, funding and providing a diverse range of FET programmes and services.

Context

The further education and training sector developed and was shaped from a combination of education policies and by the prevailing workforce development strategies. There was an absence of co-ordinated strategic direction. At central level, different departments had responsibility for VECs and for FÁS. This situation militated against strategic co-ordination and co-operation, and was an obstacle to providing a better service to all who engaged with FET.

The response of Government was to streamline the 33 existing VECs into 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and to transfer the training function of FÁS into the ETBs with the aim of bringing local and regional coherence to FET. The former FÁS employment services function was transferred to the Department of Social Protection on January 1st 2012. The Government also decided to create a new authority, SOLAS, The Further Education and Training Authority, under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills. SOLAS is responsible for the strategic co-ordination and funding of the further education and training sector.

One of the first major tasks undertaken by SOLAS was the development of the five-year strategy for further education and training. SOLAS commissioned the ESRI to assist with the process and in particular to carry out new evidence based research of the Irish FET sector for the purposes of assisting SOLAS in the development of a five-year strategy and the associated implementation plan.

In addition, other policy initiatives such as labour market activation, led by DSP, are shaping the role and nature of FET. Examples include 'Intreo', 'Jobpath' and the 'Youth Guarantee'.

Main purpose of the FET Strategy

The Strategy is intended to give direction to and guide transformation of the FET sector for the next five years. It provides a roadmap for a more integrated FET system, articulating the common purpose

that enjoins all FET providers towards achieving a world-class FET system. It provides an overarching framework within which outcomes-based funding and planning based on robust evidence reflect learner and enterprise needs, including the needs of current[1] and future DSP priority groups.

How will we know that the Strategy is successful? (The Vision)

Real and positive impact can be seen in the following ways:

- 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.
- There is greater alignment between FET provision and FET-related employer skills needs.
- Employers, both large and small, will be increasingly engaged in FET education and training and workforce development.
- Learner, community and employer satisfaction with further education and training is very high.
- Literacy and numeracy are being addressed effectively and are not a barrier to participation in FET or in achieving employment or education and training progression outcomes.
- At national and local level, innovative education and training programmes, supports and services are developed on an on-going basis and successfully rolled out.
- Investment in new and more effective FET pedagogy and increased research into adult learning and the transfer of that learning into the workplace is taking place, and better informing policy and practice.
- Forecasting skill-needs is such that the balance between supply and demand can withstand disruptive global, national or local business forces.
- Everybody who engages with FET, whether employed or unemployed or wishing to engage with FET for the purpose of learning, can access a high quality career guidance, counselling and labour market information service.
- The sector promotes and supports 'lifelong learning' for all who engage with FET and is a 'first choice' for many school leavers, employers and others.

[1] Such as long-term unemployed persons and unemployed/inactive youth.

The Purpose of FET (The Mission)

Being one of four discrete sectors of the Irish education framework that also includes primary, secondary and higher education sectors, FET is a distinct and important sector in its own right. The sector provides a wide range of courses not available elsewhere for a diverse range of individuals over sixteen years of age. It is one of the main providers of re-skilling and up-skilling programmes for employees and for those who are unemployed or inactive. It assists individuals to progress to higher education who otherwise could not directly do so. Another important role is to provide 'second chance' education for the many individuals who have not completed second level education.

Serving a uniquely diverse cohort of learners achieve learning outcomes at Level 1 to Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or equivalent, FET enables individuals and communities to achieve their developmental, personal, social, career and employment aspirations. In so doing, FET improves the well-being of individuals, communities and enterprises.

Developing the Strategy

SOLAS, in developing the Strategy, was assisted by the Economic and Social Research Institute and adopted a consultative and evidence-based approach including: a desk-based review of Irish FET; a number of commissioned international reviews from FET experts in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia; forty-six semi-structured key FET informant interviews; a series of SOLAS-led workshops involving a broad range of FET groups; consideration of, inter alia, recently published research relating to FET, including the NESC strategic review of FET provision and the unemployed and the DES commissioned review of apprenticeship.

What the research and consultation process tells us about FET

The research and the consultation process identified the need:

- To improve evidence-based decision-making for FET policy and practice.
- To implement a co-ordinated and integrated planning and funding approach to FET based on the evidence.
- To continually evaluate programmes at all levels using appropriate measures.
- To strengthen engagement with employers both locally and nationally.
- To meet the needs of learners, including those who choose FET and also existing and new priority groups identified by DSP.
- To improve the course matching process so that individuals receive meaningful interventions.
- To build on existing good practice.
- To continually develop staff within the FET sector.

The 'Learner Voice'

One of the most informative parts of the consultation process was the direct involvement of learners in shaping the FET Strategy. Policy makers, providers and practitioners heard their clear expectations from, and experiences of, engaging in FET learning opportunities. Learners endorsed their courses, in particular how they learnt and requested a broader range of learning opportunities. For the majority, getting a job was their primary reason for engaging in FET.

Definition of FET

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.

Development and Scope of FET

The ESRI companion report to the FET Strategy, 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future' considers developments in the FET sector from historical and legislative perspectives. It highlights key timelines and developments noting how vocational education and vocational training evolved separately due to lack of strategic direction at central level.

The full extent of FET provision in the State is very broad-ranging and includes many actors in addition to the former VECs and FÁS. In excess of 200,000 people will enrol in DES-funded FET in 2014. In terms of the annual budget of the FET sector, excluding allowances in lieu of eligible DSP income supports, in 2012 the Department for Education and Skills (DES) spent €309.5m on a range of programmes primarily delivered through the former VECs. In the region of €117.0m million was spent on FÁS training, while €50m was spent on a range of adult literacy and community development programmes (including the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme) with a further €50m of funding provided to Pobal.[2] In 2014, the Department of Education and Skills will provide €826m to support further education and training provision, €640m will be funded through SOLAS.

[2] It should be noted that expenditures to private providers could not be separated out in this data.

Strengths of FET

FET is accessible to all. It has been a first choice for many and another route to success, often providing an alternative pathway to the worlds of work and higher education. For example, adult and community education has meant added enrichment for many, and is a vital component in the delivery of life-long learning in Ireland. A key feature of FET is its approach to learning. It is both learner-centred and participative in its pedagogical approach. Studies of FET indicate that investment in further education and training can be one of the most cost-effective ways of tackling the cumulative effects of learning failure and one of the best ways to remedy past deficiencies, while at the same time delivering a range of economic and social benefits for many individuals, employers and the state.[3]

Standing of FET

The standing of vocational education compared to academic education is still an unresolved problem throughout Europe. The former has a strong standing in some countries but has a relatively low standing in others. In Ireland, the lower standing of FET compared to academic education is no exception. Consequently, the Irish FET sector has to work out its own response to improving FET and its standing in Irish society.

Nonetheless, improvements in intermediate skills are estimated to generate average annual net benefits of 0.4% and 0.45% of GDP respectively, primarily due to enhanced levels of productivity.[4] In addition, there is a similar return from investing in low skilled workers. The main distinguishing factor however, is that low skilled workers are less likely to be offered, seek, or avail of training.[5] There is a greater need therefore, for positive intervention by the FET sector in the development of the human capital of low-skilled adults by the State.

Furthermore, in spite of the increasing numbers participating in HE, the proportion of working-age adults in Ireland who have, at most, lower secondary education remains around the OECD and EU average.

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3 For example: CEDEFOP, (2011) 'The economic benefits of VET for individuals'. Also CEDEFOP, (2011) 'Vocational education and training is good for you; the social benefits of VET for individuals'. Also, The Department of Business Innovation and Skills (UK), (2013) 'The Impact of Further Education Learning'.

4 For example: Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2007) 'Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy', 5th Report, Dublin: Forfás. See also Leitch, L. (2006) 'Prosperity for All in a Global Economy–world class skills', Final Report, London: HM Treasury. See also Brown, P., Green, A., Lauder, H. (2001) 'High Skills: Globalisation, Competitiveness and Skill Formation', Oxford: Oxford University Press.

5 O'Connell, P.J. (2007) 'Who generally trains? The effects of personal and workplace characteristics on training at work', Apeldoom: Het Spinhuis and Dublin ESRI.

Finally, analysis of the most recent PIAAC data has also shown Ireland to score 'below average' in literacy. In addition, about one quarter (26%) of adults in Ireland score at or below Level 1 on the numeracy scale compared to just 20% on average across participating countries. Ireland is around the average in problem-solving in technology-rich environments.[6] The performance of young Irish adults (16-24 years) is also below par in literacy and numeracy.

FET and National Skills Strategy

In terms of participation rates, an additional 500,000 individuals within the workforce will by 2020 need to progress by at least one NFQ level. While Ireland continues to make progress towards achieving 'top line' targets in the National Skills Strategy (NSS), the ESRI research indicates that in terms of accreditation, a relatively low proportion of FET graduates/leavers in 2012 gained a major award (24%), with just over 2,000 (or 5% of total number of major award holders) gaining major awards at Levels 1-3 combined.

This brings into sharp focus the nature of the challenges for individuals and the FET sector to increase the number of individuals who achieve major awards, and particularly awards at the lower levels, during the lifetime of this Strategy.

Economic and Labour Market Context

The most recent data suggests that the Irish economy has begun to recover somewhat.[7] The ESRI forecast around 60,000 new jobs will be created in 2014 and unemployment to fall to around 10% in 2016. The Government is optimistic that all of the jobs lost in the recession can be replaced by 2020.

The labour market also continues to recover slowly. Employment in all occupations is expected to increase by 2020. Employment growth is projected to be strongest for professional occupations and skilled trades. As the recession did not affect all occupations equally, the impact of recovery is expected to differ across occupations.

Employers' skill-needs most relevant to the FET sector relating to the anticipated employment projections have been identified in a series of Forfás/EGFSN reports.[8] An expanding range of FET-

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6 OECD, (2013), Skills Outlook 2013: Results from the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).

7 A Strategy for Growth: Medium Term Economic Strategy 2014 – 2020 (December 2013). Also the ESRI, Quarterly Economic Commentary; 1.8% growth forecast by EU (2014), European Economic Forecast, Winter 2013, European Economy 2/2014; 2% by Central Bank of Ireland and Department of Finance and 2.6% by ESRI.

8 For example, 'Guidelines for VECs in aligning further education provision with the skills needs of enterprise 2013 - Update Guidelines for VECs'. Also Forfás, Future Skills Requirements of the

related skill-needs are emerging such as: the 'greening' of operative, skilled workers and skilled trades in construction;[9] 4,500 immediate vacancies at levels NFQ 5/6 in ICT companies in Ireland;[10] heritage and conservation skills;[11] special skills relating to industrial heritage;[12] growth potential of over 3,000 full time equivalent jobs by 2020 in the sea fisheries and aquaculture (farm fish and shell fish) industries;[13] tourism/hospitality sector culinary, operative, administrative and marketing skills.[14]

IDA and EI have a clear understanding of the skill-needs (both FET and HET) required to attract and sustain the companies supported by them. These companies have specific skill-needs and tend to be located across the country. The ETBs have a presence in every county in Ireland and have a comparative advantage in that regard over other providers. It is essential that the relevant FET skill-needs of IDA and EI supported companies (existing and new) are identified to the relevant ETB and DSP and addressed by them locally in the most appropriate and timely manner.

Matching FET provision to employer skill needs

There have been many studies that find some individuals are over-schooled and underemployed[15] or are in jobs that don't need their level of education (over-educated). Other studies find that there are many individuals in jobs which normally require a higher level of or a longer education (under-educated), in jobs which don't need their particular qualification, in jobs for which they are not qualified (under-qualification), in jobs that don't use all their skills (skills under-use) or in jobs for which they are not fully skilled (under-skilling).[16]

So, on the one hand, while further education and training can supply the relevant skills, they must then be effectively and appropriately deployed by employers in their workplace. On the other hand, FET needs to focus on ensuring that graduates/leavers possess the relevant level and quality of 'job-ready' skills, or as close as is possible to 'job-ready' that employers need, particularly at local level.

Manufacturing Sector to 2020. Also Forfás, Future Skills Requirements of the Wholesale and Retail Sector. Also Forfás, Ireland's Construction Sector: Outlook and Strategic Plan to 2015.

9 Build Up-Skills Ireland (BUSI), a joint IoT, CIF, ICTU initiative and is part of an EU wide initiative.

10 FIT, (2013), ICT Skills Audit Report.

11 International Council of Monuments and Sites, (2009) 'Sustaining our Built Environment, Review of the State of Conservation Education and Training in Ireland'.

12 The Industrial Heritage Association of Ireland.

13 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, (2010), Food Harvest 2020 'A Vision for Irish Agri-Food and Fisheries'.

14 Irish Hotels Federation, Irish Restaurants Association and Fáilte Ireland in individual discussions with SOLAS.

15 See for example OECD, (2013) 'Education at a Glance'.

16 See for example CEDEFOP, (2010) 'The skill matching challenge. Analysing skill mismatch and policy implications', European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, Luxemburg, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3056_en.pdf

In that regard, FET work-based learning such as apprenticeships and traineeships, as well as other FET programmes incorporating an in-company period,[17] represent an important mechanism for the FET sector to respond in a flexible way to meet the specific skill needs of companies, especially SMEs with limited financial resources.[18] The overall aim is to increase the development and roll-out of effective work-based learning models, particularly in the early phase of the FET Strategy roll-out.

The findings from the recent qualitative research carried out by ESRI[19] points to a need to address certain issues relating to the QQI former FETAC Common Awards. Stakeholders reported difficulties in interpreting the published award specifications; dissatisfaction with the balance between generic skills and technical skills within programmes; and a lack of clarity regarding what the awards are intended to achieve. It was also reported that accreditation should have currency, and needs to be responsive to changing labour market needs.

NESC Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed

This recent study by NESC drew out a number of linked findings around the challenges for the ETB sector in meeting existing and emerging employer skill-needs for unemployed persons. The main NESC strategies proposed included: prioritisation of the LTUs in accordance with Government policy, with due regard to the needs of school leavers and those in employment; the alignment of FET with local and regional skills demand and labour market intelligence; use of a stronger evidence base; and close involvement of enterprise in the design and delivery of programmes.

Strategies proposed via submissions to the DES-led Consultation Process on the establishment of SOLAS in 2011/2012

Some of the most widely-mentioned strategies flagged by over 150 submissions to the DES-led consultation process on the establishment of SOLAS in 2011/2012 were that SOLAS should consult directly with employers and other relevant stakeholders about the needs of the labour market; and should measure outcomes that relate to personal development as well as employment outcomes.

Proposed recommendations arising from the Review of Apprenticeship

A recent review of the apprenticeship system published in January 2014 concluded that there is significant scope to expand employer-led apprenticeships at FET level (and also in higher education) into a wide range of occupations in business sectors such as ICT, retail, hospitality, business

17 For example PLCs and Specific Skills Training.

18 EU Commission (2013), Work-based Learning in Europe, Practice and Policy Pointers.

19 ESRI, 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future', Research Series Number 35, March 2014.

administration, medical devices, sport and leisure, childcare and social care, financial services, accounting, hairdressing and beauty care.

Key Issues Emerging from the ESRI Evidence

The Nature of Provision

There are substantial variations in the regional distribution of FET places. Furthermore, the extent to which provision was distributed across full-time, labour market-orientated programmes and those with a community emphasis also varied substantially across regions.[20] The way in which different parts of the FET sector had developed organically to serve different purposes had significant implications for the nature of current provision. Thus, many key stakeholders characterised the resulting FET landscape as being 'fragmented' and 'disjointed', with some duplication of provision across the sector.

The Data Infrastructure

The data infrastructure around FET is weak, particularly by international standards. There is 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 decisionmaking at all levels.

Non-accredited Provision

Interviews with stakeholders revealed important challenges in combining the maintenance of the inclusive ethos of the community education sector (for example), and at the same time matching the needs of employers. Respondents had mixed views with respect to the extent to which accreditation could or should be introduced into all programmes. However, there was a consensus that all programmes should be measured against some form of suitable outcome metric closely related to their objective(s). SOLAS will sustain funding as appropriate for community education until such time as the information exists that will allow for the establishment of a new funding model based on appropriate metrics. This budget will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Active Inclusion

Active inclusion is a European and Government priority and is supported by education and training policy. It means enabling every citizen, including those experiencing barriers to the labour market (for example, people with a disability, early school leavers or those with lower levels of skills) to fully

[20] See accompanying ESRI, 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future', Research Series Number 35, March 2014.

participate in society; to access a range of quality services including education and training; and to have a job. The FET sector will seek to increase levels of active inclusion through the provision of high quality, more accessible and flexible education and training programmes and supports suited to the identified needs of the individual.

While unemployed persons remain an important group of learners that can benefit from FET, we cannot overlook those who are working in low-quality employment and who are at risk of poverty. 'In-work' poverty in Ireland appears to range from 6% of all the workers in the Republic of Ireland,[21] or 8% of the working population aged 18 to 59.[22] A 2008 study showed that over half of Irish workers 'at risk of poverty' worked in the services industry in low-skilled jobs or poorly-paid manual jobs.[23] In addition, those with a lower secondary education or below were more likely to be 'working poor'. The report calls for a twin-track approach on the link between education and poverty i.e. to support young adults to stay in education (and training); and to provide appropriate training and educational supports for low-skilled workers. The Strategy endorses this dual approach.

Equality

It is proposed to merge the Equality Authority and the Human Rights Commission into a newly established Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.[24] Public bodies will have to have due regard in the performance of their functions to: human rights and equality; to eliminate discrimination; and to promote equality of opportunity and treatment. Public bodies within the FET sector can work with the new Commission to ensure that they are in compliance with their duties as public bodies.

Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

The specific objectives of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy include, but are not limited to: a national promotional and awareness-raising campaign to elicit higher levels of engagement in the national literacy programme; ensuring increased participation with regard to priority target groups; broadening access routes and range of provision; and prioritizing numeracy more strongly and supporting staff through continuous professional development (CPD).

The DES review of adult literacy provision highlighted the lack of tutor hours devoted to numeracy, intensive literacy and family literacy. Nevertheless, a sufficiently robust evidence-base does not

[21] Nevin Economic Research Institute, (2013), Quarterly Economic Facts - Spring 2013; Working and living below the poverty line: 'The Working Poor'.

[22] Department of Social Protection and ESRI (2012), Social Inclusion Report No. 3, Work and Poverty in Ireland: An Analysis of the CSO Survey on Income and, Living Conditions 2004-2010.

[23] Combat Poverty Agency (2008) 'The Working Poor in Ireland: An Analysis of EU-SILC' 2005.

[24] Under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill 2014.

currently exist to inform how literacy and numeracy education is best provided across all levels of provision and different types of programmes. Further research is needed on the relative advantages of the integration of literacy skills into specialist course content as opposed to delivery by specialist literacy tutors within a broader course structure. Consequently, SOLAS will sustain funding for literacy and numeracy provision until a sufficiently robust evidence-base exists that will allow for the consideration of embedding literacy and numeracy education across relevant forms of FET provision. This budget will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Employee Development and Entrepreneurship

For many workers, whether in the private, or voluntary and community sector, the workplace represents the only or most viable location to learn and/or develop their vocational practice.[25] More than 'once-off' engagement in initial learning, or perfunctory participation in work practices, is increasingly becoming an essential requirement to maintain competence. The importance of continued employee development was something that was continually emphasised both in the key informant interviews carried out by the ESRI and the SOLAS-led workshops.

Creating a strong indigenous sector is central to the recovery of the Irish economy. Therefore, entrepreneurship and start-up companies are central to the recovery. Entrepreneurial activity also increases levels of innovation in the market place, increases productivity and improves cost efficiency.[26]

The FET sector must continue to provide evidence-based data and intelligence on evolving employee skills-needs and must monitor these changing needs. It must apply the evidence to underpin FET employee development policy and practice with a particular focus on providing the relevant FET skills as well as assisting individuals set up and sustain their new business. In addition, it must provide leadership by providing or funding training and education, expertise and information for those at work. It must also promote the benefits of FET with employers and employees and assist, where appropriate, with the development and/or implementation of appropriate HR strategies in particular for small to medium sized businesses.

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[25] For example, Billett, S. (2004) 'Workplace participatory practices: Conceptualising workplaces as learning environments', Journal of Workplace Learning, vol. 16, no. 6 pp: 312-324.

[26] Entrepreneurship in Ireland 2011; Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Annual Report for Ireland (Enterprise Ireland, Forfás, the European Social Fund and the Department of Justice and Equality, under the Equality for Women Measure 2007-2013, and also by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation).

Progression Paths to Higher Education

The HEA proposes setting a new target for students progressing from further education, planning to make up 6.6% of the entrant cohort in 2014 and 10% by 2016.

New, enhanced partnership agreements should be developed between further and higher education providers on access provision and on routes of progression from further to higher education in order to build on progress to date in that regard. For example, exploratory data matching indicated that (at least) 18% of FETAC major award-holders in 2009 went on to higher education, with a further 21% taking another FETAC qualification.[27] A study completed in 2009 by the National Access Office showed that at least 3,000 students progressed in the previous year to higher education via routes such as the Higher Education Links Scheme - the pilot scheme for Institutes of Technology - and through other informal routes agreed between local further and higher education providers.[28]

The FET sector also intends to align itself with existing HE clusters (and other existing structures incorporating employers such as; the EGFSN, DSP Labour Market Council and local ETB employer forum).

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) within the FET Sector

Interviews with stakeholders point to the specific CPD needs of the sector as a whole, and in particular those engaged directly in the provision of FET programmes. International research indicates that high-quality initial and continuing education for staff involved in direct provision of education and training is key to fostering better learner outcomes.[29] Teachers' competences have powerful effects on learner achievement. SOLAS intends, in partnership with the ETBI and ETBs, to systematically collect data around the current qualification and skills profile of FET staff with a view to developing and implementing an effective CPD strategy.

A new requirement of the Teaching Council is for mandatory qualifications[30] for teachers involved in direct provision of FET in recognised schools. Teachers must now be registered by the Teaching

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27 QQI (2013) 'Where do FETAC (QQI) award holders go?'

28 European Access Network Newsletter Spring 2009, 'Trends in Progression from Further to Higher Education: The Irish Experience', HEA, Ireland.

29 See European Commission, Education and Training, (2013): 'Supporting teacher competence development for better learning outcomes'. See also the Economic and Social Research Council, (2008) 'Challenge and change in further education'.

30 An approved teacher education qualification plus meeting degree qualification requirements. See Further Education: General and Programme Requirements for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Qualifications, 2011, p7, (the accreditation of programmes of initial teacher education (further education) submitted to the Council in accordance with Section 38(1) of the Teaching

Council. This requirement does not apply to a person who is employed as a teacher in a centre for education or other education or training setting. There are ten courses currently accredited by the Teaching Council aimed at teachers within the FET sector.

Feedback from the Strategy consultation process clearly indicates that it is essential to ensure the establishment of a more relevant professional and competency skill roadmap for those entering into and those currently engaged in the FET sector in its broadest sense, for example, former FÁS instructors and private trainers.[31] In this regard the work of the Further Education and Support Service will be built upon, and its work strategically aligned to the CPD strategy.

Guidance and FET

The need for an integrated FET Guidance approach also arose throughout the consultation process. The aim of an integrated model of guidance for the FET sector should build on practice currently in operation within the AEGI services, including development of national referral protocols between Adult Guidance Services and DSP and other national agencies e.g. HSE, disability services etc.

FET Funding

In the past, FÁS received funding under the Department of Education and Skills exchequer vote; from the National Training Fund; and from the European Social Fund. A small amount of other income completed the total funding. Expenditure was incurred by FÁS directly in the training centres, on contracted training to private providers, and on funding for community groups. SOLAS is funded from the same sources as described above.

VECs were funded by the exchequer directly from the Department of Education and Skills where the Department monitored aggregate budgets tightly, but left the composition of course provision largely to the individual VECs. This funding was used for delivering programmes, the staffing and maintenance of buildings, and for management, administration and support services.

In 2014, the Department of Education and Skills will provide €826m to support further Education and Training provision, €640m of which will be funded through SOLAS. The balance relates to the teacher pay element of the PLC programme.

Council Act, 2001, and Regulation Five (Further Education of the Teaching Council (Registration) Regulations 2009.

[31] ETBI, (2013) 'Quality Assuring the Delivery of Further Education and Training: Looking Beyond Section 30' ETBI News, 2013. Also, IITD representatives in discussion with SOLAS.

Expenditure during the 2014 transition phase will include training centre costs run by SOLAS in the first half of the year, and contracted costs and the grant aid of those costs in the second half of the year after the transfer to the Education Training Boards (ETBs). It will also include the grant aid of ETBs and non ETBs for Further Education.

From 2015, the expenditure by SOLAS will consist primarily of grant aid for further education and training, with direct expenditure arising on some national programmes[32] being managed by SOLAS, together with the administration costs of SOLAS. A dedicated capital budget for the FET sector to support the implementation of the strategy will be required to ensure improvements to, or new construction of, facilities and equipment including networks, other ICT investments and for capital maintenance to keep facilities/estates in good repair.

Proposed New Funding Arrangements for FET Provision

A significant amount of state funding of further education and training has tended, in many instances, to be determined more by legacy formulae than by evidence-based needs. Continuing to offer more or less the same course profile from one year to the next is not appropriate. There is broad consensus that the current funding model around FET needs to change and respond to demonstrable demand and need as well as reflecting the local, regional and socio-economic profiles of ETBs. The aim is to replace current funding arrangements for all FET provision, on a phased basis, with a new outcomes-based funding model.

With this new model and with a capital budget available for the FET sector, a meaningful review of the operational structures for FE colleges can be facilitated to inform more flexible models of programme delivery. This will include looking at the feasibility of increasing, within existing resources, the number of places for DSP referred clients and accessibility to this provision all year round.

There will be no significant change to the overall FET provision in the short-term. However, this will be reviewed on an annual basis. Following the evaluation of the different types of FET provision, it is anticipated that the scale and type of provision is likely to change.

[32] Including for example Apprenticehsip, eCollege, Momentum, CSCS/QSCS etc.

Core Principles and Strategic Goals

In order to realise the vision and the mission of FET, core principles underpin the Strategy. These principles take into account the findings of the research and the consultation process, and the necessary action needed to transform the sector. The Strategy is:

- Learner and employer centred
- Evidence-based FET in policy and practice
- Employment focussed and actively inclusive
- Responsive, flexible, innovative, and high quality FET provision
- Consultative and collaborative
- Transparent and accountable
- Value for money.

The High Level Goals

The overall aim of the Strategy is to develop a world-class integrated system of further education and training in Ireland, which will promote economic development and meet the needs of all citizens. Five high level strategic goals are set out below and reflect the findings of the research and the feedback from the consultation process.

While each goal is listed separately in this document, they are all of equal value and it should be stressed that developments in any one area must be informed by, and will be integrated with, developments in the other four. An Overarching Implementation Plan to 'operationalise' the Strategy is detailed in Part 3 of this document.

The five Strategic Goals are as follows:

- Skills for the Economy. The aim of this goal is that FET will address the current and future needs of learners, jobseekers, employers and employees and will contribute to national economic development.
- Active Inclusion. The aim of this goal is that FET provision will support the active inclusion of people of all abilities in society with special reference to literacy and numeracy.
- Quality Provision. The aim of this goal is that FET will provide high quality education and training programmes and will meet the appropriate national and international quality standards.
- Integrated Planning and Funding. The aim of this goal is that FET provision will be planned and funded on the basis of objective analysis of needs and evidence of social and economic impact.
- Standing of FET. The aim of this goal is to ensure a valued learning path leading to agreed employment, career, developmental, personal and social options.

Implementing the Strategy – The Challenges

Some of the main challenges associated with implementing the Strategy are:

- Balancing necessary reform with business continuity and Government priorities with regard to education policy, 'Pathways to Work' and 'Action Plan for Jobs', and maintaining places for school leavers.
- Employers' capacity to provide sufficient and structured workplace learning opportunities in conjunction with 'off the job' formal learning provides by FET providers.
- Additional investment is required; for example with regard to installing a 'fit for purpose' data infrastructure and implementing the new apprenticeships.
- Current operational structures applying to certain elements of FET provision may not be able to meet learner expectations regarding engagement with the labour market or delivering required placements.
- Private/contracted-out provision in the FET sector may need to increase in the future.
- The pedagogy and technical skills for all teachers/trainers of adults will need to keep ahead of the curve.
- Capacity to embed literacy and numeracy in the relevant FET provision will need to be expanded.
- The management of the academic year to deliver the best results for the overall FET system in terms of flexibility vis-á-vis year-round continuity of provision for unemployed persons will be essential.

Implementation Costs

A cost proposal will be prepared separately relating to the areas where additional costs associated with implementing the Strategy are envisaged.

Connecting the main elements of the FET Strategy

Diagram 1 summarises the main elements of the FET Strategy.

FET Vision

A world class integrated FET system, highly valued by learners and employers, where a higher proportion of those who engage in FET including those with barriers to participation, such as persons with a disability as well as current priority cohorts identified by DSP such as long term unemployed persons, stay engaged, complete qualifications, transition successfully into employment or, where appropriate move into higher level qualifications in FET or HET

FET MISSION

Enable individuals and communities to achieve their developmental, personal, social, career and employment aspirations

CORE PRINCIPLES

- Learner and employer centred
- Evidence-based FET policy and practice
- Employment focussed and actively inclusive
- Responsive, flexible, innovative and high quality provision
- Consultative and collaborative
- Transparent and accountable
- Value for money

BENEFITS OF FET

- Consistently high quality education and training
- Learner and employer centred
- High job placement, good progression options
- Flexible and cost effective
- Barrier free access
- Person centred supports

How will we get there?

Strategic Goal 1
Skills for the Economy

Strategic Goal 2
Active Inclusion, Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

Strategic Goal 3
Quality Provision

Strategic Goal 4
Integrated Planning and Funding

Strategic Goal 5
Standing of FET

Implementation Plan

Part 2

FET Strategy

Section 1

Introduction, Vision and Mission for FET

Key points in this Section

- The background to and context for the FET Strategy are explained.
- The reform programme in the further education and training sector is part of the Government's wider reform of the public service.
- The main purpose of the FET strategy is to provide the framework for a more integrated FET system.
- A profile of FET Learners and the FET Partner Network are explained.
- The Vision for FET and Mission of FET are outlined.
- The approach to the FET Strategy development including research, consultation, the learner voice, and key sources are referenced.
- Other models of work-based learning, such as traineeships, will be developed and rolled out in the early implementation phase of the FET Strategy.

1.1 Introduction, Background and Context

The reform programme in the further education and training sector is part of the Government's wider reform of the public service. Reform relating to FET involves reform at structural level as well planning, prioritising, funding and providing a diverse range of FET programmes and services.

The further education and training sector developed and was shaped from a combination of education policies and by the prevailing workforce development strategies. There was an absence of co-ordinated strategic direction.

The former Vocational Education Committees (VECs) developed programmes to address local gaps in education provision with the resources at their disposal, building organically on the post primary sector. Even with the introduction of a range of national programmes, there was still a lack of central strategic direction.

Separately, the 1987 Labour Services Act established FÁS (An Foras Áiseanna Saothair) and incorporated An Comhairle Oiliúna (AnCO), the Youth Employment Agency, and Manpower Service. In June 2000, vocational training for people with a disability transferred from the National Rehabilitation Board to FÁS. FÁS delivered training and employment programmes and employment services aimed at a very diverse range of individuals and groups. These included among others: jobseekers; those in work; unemployed persons including youth and long-term unemployed; persons with a disability; persons in community-based training; company-based training; and in community employment (CE). There was very little systematic engagement or co-ordination with VECs. At central level, different departments had responsibility for VECs and for FÁS. This situation worked against strategic co-ordination and co-operation and was a barrier to providing a quality service to all who engaged with FET.

The recent economic downturn presented a particular challenge for both VECs and FÁS in a context of on-going diminishing resources to respond effectively with programmes and services to meet the needs of an increasing number of individuals who had lost their jobs. At the same time, both the VECs and FÁS sought to offer further education and training programmes and services that were aligned to employer needs and/or addressed the personal, social and employment needs of a diverse cohort of individuals and groups who continued to experience barriers to education, training and the labour market.

The response of Government was to streamline the former 33 existing VECs into 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and to transfer the training function of FÁS into the ETBs with the aim of bringing local and regional coherence to FET. The former FÁS employment services function transferred to the Department of Social Protection on January 1st 2012. The Government also decided to create a new authority, SOLAS, The Further Education and Training Authority, under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills, with responsibility for the strategic co-ordination and funding of the further education and training sector.

The VECs and FÁS were statutory bodies. Substantive legislative change was required to meet the reform aims outlined above. Consequently, two pieces of legislation were enacted in 2013 to provide the statutory basis for the dissolution of the VECs, the dissolution of FÁS, and for the establishment of SOLAS and the establishment of 16 ETBs. With regard to the ETBs, the Education and Training Boards Act was signed into law in May 2013, replacing nine existing Vocational Training Acts with one piece of legislation. The new Act provided for the dissolution of the VECs and, through a process involving a merger of some of the existing 33 VECs, for the establishment of 16 ETBs. The key aim of this legislation is to modernise governance provisions and to more accurately reflect the current mission of ETBs. The functions of the Education and Training Boards were published in the Education and Training Board Act 2013 and can be downloaded at http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2013/en/act/pub/0011/

The Further Education and Training Act 2013 was signed into law in July 2013. It provided for the dissolution of FÁS and the establishment of SOLAS and the phased transfer of the existing FÁS training centre network and associated staff and training provision to the relevant ETBs[33]. The legislation also strengthens consultation between SOLAS, DSP, DJEI and employers to improve FET provision for the activation of unemployed persons on the Live Register and for employers. The Further Education and Training Act 2013 details the mandate of SOLAS. Section 7 (1) of the Act specifies the requirement of SOLAS to, 'prepare and submit to the Minister a strategy in respect of the provision of further education and training in accordance with section 9'. The functions of SOLAS, including funding, were published in the Further Education and Training Act and can be downloaded at http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2013/en/act/pub/0025/

One of the first major tasks undertaken by SOLAS was the development of the five-year Strategy for FET. It was developed with the assistance of the ESRI and in collaboration with key FET partners and organisations.

1.2 Government Reform Agenda

The Strategy has been developed at a time when major reforms of public services, including education and the labour market, are on-going. A number of other reforms impacting on FET to date include:

- Launch of 'Intreo', (2012)
- Planned launch of 'Jobpath', (2014)
- The establishment of Quality and Qualifications Ireland, (2012)
- The Government's 'Pathways to Work' Initiative, (2012), (2013)
- The Government's 'Action Plan for Jobs', (2012), (2013), (2014)
- The Government's Action Plan for SOLAS, (2012)
- Review of the Apprenticeship in Ireland, (2013)
- Introduction of the Government's 'Youth Guarantee', (2014)

There are many other reforms on-going in education including; the early education/framework for early learning, the national literacy and numeracy strategy, and junior cycle reform as well as higher education reform.

[33] Scheduled to be completed by mid-2014.

1.2.1 Higher Education Reform

In May 2013, the Minister for Education and Skills announced a major re-organisation of the country's higher education sector. This announcement followed recommendations made by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on system reconfiguration, inter-institutional collaboration and system governance in Irish higher education. A new system performance framework is also being put in place by the HEA based on key system objectives and indicators noted by Government. A key element in the overall approach will be the implementation of performance funding in the sector. One of the key objectives in the Higher Education System Performance Framework is to promote access for disadvantaged groups and to put in place coherent pathways from second level education, from further education, and from other non-traditional entry routes. Integrated strategic planning between FET and HET will play an important role in achieving this objective. In January 2014, the Minister for Education and Skills announced the publication of the Heads of a Bill which will allow for the future establishment of Technological Universities and the mergers of institutes of technology.

1.2.2 Development and launch of 'Intreo', Department of Social Protection

'Intreo' is a service provided by DSP and provides a single point of contact for all employment and income supports. Designed to provide a more streamlined approach, 'Intreo' offers tailored employment services and supports for jobseekers and employers alike. The new 'Intreo' service is a key part of the 'Pathways to Work' initiative and is focussed on supporting those who are unemployed, or become unemployed, to stay connected to the workforce and to find employment. The intention at the core of 'Pathways to Work' is that no-one who loses their job should be allowed to drift without support into long-term unemployment. The further education and training sector continues to play a key part in ensuring that 'Pathways to Work' initiative is an effective response to the jobs crisis.

1.2.3 'Jobpath' [34]

JobPath is a new programme of employment activation aimed specifically at the long-term unemployed (over 12 months) as well as those most distant from the labour market. It will be delivered by third party providers of employment services under contract to the Department and will

[34] DSP Presentation "Jobpath", Proposed contracting of third party providers of employment services, Information Session, Friday, 26th July 2013, Chartered Accountants House, Dublin.

supplement and complement existing 'Intreo', Local Employment Service (LES) and Job Clubs capacity.

1.2.4 The Irish Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan[35]

The Irish Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan was launched in January 2014. The implementation of the Guarantee is being led by the Department of Social Protection and involves actions relevant for FET, including the delivery of opportunities to young people through relevant and meaningful education and training programmes. The FET sector has a major role to play as a key partner in assisting DSP to deliver the 'Youth Guarantee', and is ready to build on its current achievements in addressing the education and training needs of young people. In considering the allocation of FET places under the 'Youth Guarantee' and 'Pathways to Work', the existing level of places for PLC courses may also need to be taken into account.

1.2.5 'Action Plan for Jobs' 2014

The 'Action Plan for Jobs' is a key component of the Government's response to the unemployment crisis. It involves all Government Departments and 46 Agencies. The 'Action Plan for Jobs' is complemented by other Government Initiatives including 'Pathways to Work' and the Medium Term Economic Strategy. The aim of the 'Action Plan for Jobs' is to have 100,000 more people in work by 2016 as a key platform to enable Government policy objectives of increasing employment and reducing unemployment while also increasing competitiveness and productivity in the Irish economy. The Action Plan for Jobs focusses on: creating an environment conducive to job creation and innovation; helping the unemployed back to work; meeting the skills needs of the economy; and increasing competition through better regulation. FET has a key role to play in collaboration with other government departments and agencies in supporting the aims of the Action Plan and in particular to assist unemployed back to work and to meet the FET skill needs of the economy.

1.2.6 Establishment of the Quality and Qualifications Ireland

On the 6th November 2012, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established as a new integrated agency.[36] QQI is responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher

[35] 'Pathways to Work': The implementation of the EU Council Recommendation for a Youth Guarantee, Ireland.

education and training (including English language provision). In addition to acting as an awarding body, it is also responsible for the quality assurance oversight of providers across further and higher education and training and for promoting and facilitating activities that lead to quality enhancement. It has legislative responsibilities around data and international education. QQI is also responsible for the development of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The FET sector is a key provider of QQI accredited programmes at Levels 1-6 on the NFQ. See http://www.qqi.ie/About/Pages/Strategy-Statement.aspx.

1.3 Purpose of the FET Strategy

This FET Strategy sets 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 economic development actors including education and training providers, employers and the Department of Social Protection, EI and IDA. Local engagement with employers has been identified by the NESC as a significant area for improvement within FET and with effective engagement between ETBs and the DSP, including 'Intreo' offices (and JobPath) being essential for a 'fit for purpose' FET system.

FET learners come from a variety of backgrounds and from different life experiences. They may be school-leavers, employed, unemployed, single parents, carers or those who may be inactive. They may be old or young, highly educated or unqualified or they may have a disability. They may be recovering from addiction, offenders in prison or ex-offenders. They may be highly motivated to learn and to work or they may be hard to reach and require additional supports. They may be studying to improve their skills in work or to progress to higher education and training, learning for personal development, to improve their unemployment situation, to change career or to improve their ICT, literacy and numeracy skills. See figure 1 for a profile of typical FET learners.

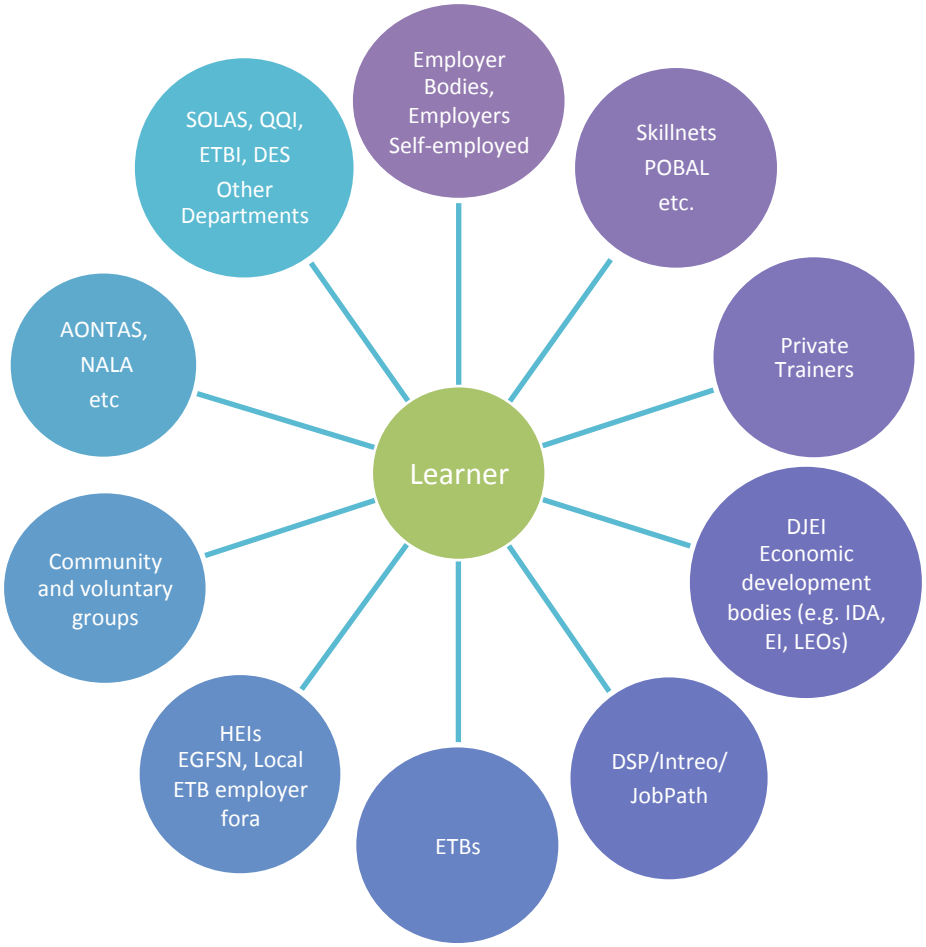
[36] Replacing the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, and incorporating the functions of the Irish Universities Quality Board.

Figure 1: Profile of typical FET learners

The Strategy is intended to provide an overarching framework, within which outcomes-based planning and funding reflect learner and employer needs as well as progressing Government priorities, including the lifelong learning agenda and the National Skills Strategy. Planning and funding will be supported by a strong evidence base so that funding can be allocated to areas of greatest need, directed to what works best in order to provide the greatest return for employment and social inclusion. The Strategy incorporates a comprehensive implementation plan that sets out how the sector can successfully respond to the challenges confronting it now and over the next five years.

ETBs cannot operate alone in providing the type and range of FET provision required by learners, communities and employers. There is a network of FET partners who all play their part in keeping the focus on improving the service for learners. See figure 2 for examples of the main partners in FET.

Figure 2: FET Partner Network



1.4 How will we know that the Strategy is successful? (Vision for FET)

We will see real and positive impact in the following ways:

- 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.
- There is greater alignment between FET provision and employer skills needs.
- Employers are increasingly engaged in FET education, training and employee development. Employers will have confidence that the further education and training system is capable of meeting their current and future skills needs.
- Learner, community and employer satisfaction with further education and training is very high. This means learners and employers of FET graduates will be highly satisfied with the

quality and relevance of the FET provision and their experience of it, irrespective of whether a publicly funded or private provider was used.

- Literacy and numeracy are being addressed effectively and are not a barrier to participation in FET or in achieving employment, education and training progression outcomes.
- At local level, innovative education and training programmes, supports and services are led, developed and rolled out on an on-going basis by ETBs in collaboration with relevant bodies e.g. QQI, DSP, and IDA and EI.
- At national level, innovative education and training programmes, supports and services are led, developed and rolled out on an on-going basis by SOLAS in collaboration with relevant bodies e.g. QQI, DSP,IDA, EI and ETBs.
- Investment in new and more effective FET pedagogy and increased research into, for example, adult learning and the transfer of that learning into the workplace, is taking place and better informing FET policy and practice.
- Forecasting skills needs is taking place so that the balance between supply and demand can withstand disruptive global, national or local business forces.
- Everybody who engages with FET, whether employed or unemployed or engaging for the purpose of learning, has the opportunity to access high quality career guidance, counselling and labour market information service and other supports in a timely manner.
- The sector promotes and supports 'lifelong learning' for all who engage with FET and is a first choice for school leavers, employers and others.

1.5 Mission of FET

One of four discrete sectors of the Irish education framework that also includes the primary, secondary and higher education sectors, FET is a distinct and important sector in its own right. The sector provides a range of courses not available elsewhere for a diverse range of individuals. It is one of the main providers of re-skilling and up-skilling programmes for employees and for those who are unemployed or inactive. It assists others to progress to higher education who otherwise could not directly do so. Another important role is to provide 'second chance' education for the many individuals who have not completed second level education. Serving a uniquely diverse cohort of learners above 16 years of age to achieve learning outcomes at Level 1 to Level 6 on the NFQ or equivalent, FET enables individuals to achieve their employment, career, developmental, personal, and social aspirations. In so doing, FET can improve the well-being of individuals, communities and

employers. FET also makes provision for continuous professional development (CPD) and continuing vocational education and training for those in employment. FET in the Irish context also encompasses many forms of skill formation systems normally regarded as VET in many European countries.[37]

1.6 Approach to Strategy Development

SOLAS, in developing the FET Strategy, adopted a consultative and evidence-based approach that:

- Widened the evidence-base for decision-making around FET policy and practice by commissioning new research[38] by the ESRI which attempted to map provision across the FET sector in order to develop a sense of some of the main issues arising.
- Examined the full extent of FET provision in the State which is very broad ranging and includes many more actors in addition to the former VECs and FÁS.[39] The desk-based research was augmented by evidence from 46 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders to establish evidence-based challenges arising for the sector (see Appendix 2).
- Adopted an outward looking perspective drawing on international expertise abroad to complement FET expertise in Ireland.
- Extended the existing evidence base around Irish FET, including the recently published strategic review of Irish FET provision and the unemployed by NESC.
- Was inclusive and drew upon the results of one-to-one interviews with key FET informants involving among others, providers, employers, policy makers, Government Departments and agencies.
- Organised a series of consultation workshops where a diverse range of individuals and organisations directly involved or with an interest in FET, including ETBs, DSP, learners and employers, policy makers, practitioners, government departments and agencies, were invited to validate emerging themes and issues from the semi-structured interviews and

[37] VET is education and training which aims to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competence required in particular occupations or more broadly in the labour market.

[38] ESRI, 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future', Research Series Number 35, March 2014.
See also ESRI, (2013), 'Lost in Transition: The Labour Market Pathways of Long-term Unemployed Individuals in Ireland Pre and Post the Great Recession'. See CEDEFOP, (2011) 'The economic benefits of VET for individuals'. Also CEDEFOP, (2011) 'Vocational education and training is good for you; The social benefits of VET for individuals'. The Department of Business Innovation and Skills (UK), (2013) 'The Impact of Further Education Learning'.

[39] For example, it includes Crafts Council of Ireland, Coillte, Teagasc, Fáilte Ireland, BIM, County and City Enterprise Boards, Board Altranais, Skillnets, private training providers, private colleges, National Learning Networks, Irish Prison Services, Institutes of Technology, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, company-based training, Chambers of Commerce etc.

international observations, and then invited to propose credible strategies to address them (see Appendix 3 and Appendix 4).

- Constructively questioned the work of the sector, its aims and outcomes.
- Considered what outcomes from FET ought to be, and how to measure them.
- Understood that FET is not the answer to all unemployment.
- Focussed on further education and training as a driver of employment and economic recovery through skill development.
- Focussed on the important role of community education to enable learners to build satisfying, purposeful and fulfilling lives both as individuals and as members of cohesive communities.
- Understood that Government sees a key role for FET in advancing social inclusion, widening participation and improving levels of literacy and numeracy.
- Established an FET Stratgey Advisory Committee and a Techncial Sub-group as part of the FET Strategy support infrastructure (see Appendix 5 and 6).

1.7 What the research and consultation tells us about FET

The research and the consultation process identified the need:

- To improve evidence-based decision making for FET policy and practice.
- To implement a co-ordinated and integrated planning and funding approach to FET based on the evidence.
- To continually evaluate programmes at all levels using appropriate measures.
- To strengthen engagement with employers both locally and nationally.
- To meet the needs of learners, including existing and new priority groups identified by DSP.
- To improve the course-matching process so that individuals receive meaningful interventions.
- To build on existing good practice.
- To continually develop staff within the FET sector.

1.7.1 The ‘Learner Voice’

One of the most informative parts of the consultation process was the direct involvement of learners in shaping the FET Strategy. Policy makers, providers and practitioners heard their clear expectations as well as their experiences of engaging in FET. Learners welcomed the opportunity to be heard. But they also demanded more such opportunities and to be briefed on progress with regard to developments in FET policy and practice. More regular and systematic direct engagement with learners to hear their ‘voice’ is essential. By ‘voice’ is meant asking learners to provide feedback on

their course and learning experience and also by actively involving learners and supporting them to act as partners with policy makers, providers, practitioners and other agencies in the FET sector.[40]

A range of further initiatives to strengthen the 'learner voice' in a systematic way needs to be considered and progressed by the relevant FET policy makers, providers, practitioners and related organisations to inform FET policy and practice. Examples of such initiatives could include annual national and local learner voice surveys, best practice provider-learner involvement strategies and learner panels.

1.7.2 Other Key Sources used

The work of developing the Strategy was strengthened by some significant external contributions including; the NESC strategic review of FET provision and the unemployed, the DES commissioned review of apprenticeship, and a comprehensive but not exhaustive list of other sources, included in Appendix 7.

[40] Jude. C., (2003) 'Lifelines: Consulting Adults', The National Institute of Continuing Adult Education (NIACE). See also NIACE, (2011) 'Lifelong Learning: Contributing to wellbeing and prosperity'.

Section 2

Development, Scope and Standing of FET

Key points in this Section

- The development of FET is described.
- FET is a distinct and important sector in its own right, holding unique purposes, objectives and strengths.
- A definition of the FET sector in Ireland is outlined in terms of its principal component parts.
- The scope of the FET sector in Ireland is characterised by diversity in terms of providers and learner groups.
- The strengths and benefits of FET are outlined.
- There is a wide range of high quality FET provision at post-secondary level, targeted at a wide range of different client groups, including those in and out of work, and those who will benefit from 'second chance' opportunities.
- The need to improve the standing of FET is a common feature of many developed economies. Ireland is no exception.

2.1 Development of FET

The companion report to the FET Strategy, 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future' considers developments in the FET sector from the historical and legislative perspectives. Using key time points in the sector dating from the 19th century to the present, the report highlights the late development of vocational education as well as more recent developments. Examples include the establishment of pre-employment courses in over 120 schools in 1977, later to evolve

into PLCs, the launch of Youthreach in 1988,[41] the introduction of the Educational Opportunities Scheme on a pilot basis in 1986 and later reconstituted as VTOS in 1989, and the establishment of the Back to Education Initiative in 2002.

The report notes separate developments outside of the former VEC sector in the mid-20th century onwards with regard to the apprenticeship system, to training for employed persons, and to training for unemployed persons more generally, as part of the functions of AnCO and subsequently FÁS. It also notes that Institutes of Technology (IoTs), formally known as Regional Technical Colleges and the Dublin Institute of Technology, continue to play a significant role in the history of FET. They are lead partners with SOLAS in the apprenticeship system which was reviewed in 2013.

Drawing out the contours of FET development from legislative and historical perspectives can provide insights into just how strongly the development of FET and the education and training system more generally is shaped and continues to be shaped by country-specific political, economic and social developments as well as external influences. With regard to country specific developments, the lack of strategic direction for many years at central level gave an 'organic' shape to the development of FET that is not to be mistaken for a lack of purpose for FET.

With regard to external influences on the shape of FET, the European Social Fund (ESF) for example, although now contributing less funding to vocational education and training than in the past, still retains an important influence on government policy. Such developments and institutional arrangements continue to give shape to the purpose, role and identity of FET which can directly impact on the capacity of FET to contribute to national economic and social aims.

Responding to national economic and social aims in an integrated way proved difficult for FET as responsibilities for the Irish education system, including for vocational education, were separate from the vocational training system. There were three levels of administrative responsibility in the publicly funded FET sector and some organisations operated at more than one of these levels including: Government departments which set policy and overall direction and provided public funding for FET; intermediate organisations who were, and still are to a large extent, involved in implementing Government policy as well as channelling funds or acting as a provider of FET programmes; and primary provider bodies such as the former FÁS and the former VECs, now the ETBs.

Another insight is the scale of involvement of other state bodies and actors in FET. For example, this sector-specific FET included Fáilte Ireland which, up to recently, provided on-going training for the

[41] Department of Education centres were run through the VECs and Community Training Workshops through FÁS.

tourism and catering sectors; the Irish Fisheries Board (BIM), for the fishing, processing and aquaculture industries; Teagasc, which provides training (and research) for farmers and for the food processing industry; Coillte, the Irish Forestry Board, which trains forestry workers and Bord Altranais, responsible for implementing continuous vocational education and training for the nursing profession.

Over recent years there have been a growing number of further, non-tertiary vocational education centres and colleges which are community-based or privately run. Many offer courses for young people who have left school without formal qualifications or who wish to add to their school qualifications. Some offer initial vocational training for many of the professions such as the legal and accountancy professions.

The ESRI report points to the lack of clarity on what comprises FET in Ireland. Consequently, defining FET remains elusive. A lot of development in vocational education and training fell outside the system of established qualifications with perhaps the most disparate component of FET provision being the 'adult education sector', again with past difficulties in determining the lead government department for adult education policy seen as resulting in overlap and duplication of functions between DETE (now DJEI) and DES. PLC courses are offered in both second level schools and more specialised further education 'centres' providing predominantly (if not solely) PLC courses. However, while the bulk of PLC courses are taken in specialised further education centres, the operation and control of PLC courses remains within the second level sector, where their administrative, management, staffing and ancillary support structures are those of a second level school.[42]

Finally, with regard to resourcing, feedback from the consultation process highlighted the concern of some providers that the lack of sufficient resources for FET is not a recent phenomenon, rather a long-standing issue that has impacted on service quality. The OECD notes that Ireland, in recent times, has increased its investment in educational institutions more generally to reach the OECD average.[43] Annual expenditure per student from primary to tertiary education was above the OECD average in 2010, and from 2005-2010, expenditure per student in primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education increased by 33%, while enrolment increased by 8%. Tertiary expenditure increased by 28%, while enrolment increased by 9%. The OECD state that as a result of the economic and financial crisis 'there are restrictions of varying degrees in place across all parts of

[42] McIver Consulting (2003), Report to the Steering Group of the PLC Review, Dublin: Department of Education and Science cited in Department of Education and Science and ESRI (2006), The Post-Leaving Certificate Sector in Ireland: A Multivariate Analysis of Educational and Employment Outcomes.

[43] OECD (2013), Education Policy Outlook – Ireland.

the education system including for example operational costs, training and apprenticeship programmes, programmes for disadvantaged students, guidance counselling for vocational and secondary schools, and funding for higher education'.[44]

2.2 Definition of FET

As is the case in many countries, FET provision in Ireland is wide-ranging and heterogeneous in nature, making it a challenge to define. Defining it by what it is not, does little to illuminate its qualities or characteristics. The definition below of FET is linked to its principal component parts.

FET provides education and training and related supports to assist individuals to gain qualifications at Levels 1-6 on the NFQ or equivalent, to attain and refresh economically-valuable skills to access and sustain all types of employment, tackling skills shortages and boosting the future growth and competitiveness of the Irish economy. It provides a range of skills for labour market returners, for those interested in a new career direction, for those wishing to access 'second chance' education, 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.

More specifically, the FET sector provides:

- Work-based initial vocational education, training and skills development, such as apprenticeship programmes, in preparation for an occupation.
- Initial vocational education, training and skills development, such as PLCs and VTOS, in preparation for progression to University, Institutes of Technology and other higher education institutions.
- Occupation-specific education, training and skills development, such as Traineeships, Specific Skill Training, On-Line Learning and Local Training Initiatives, for jobseekers, job returners, job changers and unemployed persons to re-skill/up-skill to meet career and employment aspirations.
- Foundation education and training and skills development, such as Bridging/Foundation programmes, for example for job returners, who after a long period of absence from the labour market wish to access a Level 5/6 programme of further education and training or skill development.

[44] Ibid p16.

- Education, training, skills development and related supports to enable people holding less than upper secondary qualifications with poor levels of literacy, numeracy and/or IT skills to progress on a pathway to engage, re-engage in civil life and/or to prepare for mainstream further education and training through literacy and community-based education.
- Education, training, skills-development and related supports for young people, such as Youthreach, Community Training Centre provision, enabling unemployed early-school leavers, those not in employment, education or training (NEETs), to access /re-entry/completion of mainstream lower and/or upper second level education to meet individual, personal, career and employment aspirations.
- Continuing education, training, skill development for employees, such as Skillnets provision and ETB Skills for Work initiative, to up-skill or re-skill in generic skills, technical skills, digital skills and literacy/numeracy skills.
- Provision of certain types of work-related training and qualifications that are mandatory under legislation in order to practice in particular occupations e.g. Construction Skills Certification System (CSCS), Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point (HACCP), Road Safety Authority (RSA) requirements for professional drivers etc.
- Other systematic and deliberate 'own-time' learning undertaken by individuals for leisure, social and/or personal purposes or for the purpose of learning, such as self-financing education and training during the evening.

ETBs and other publicly funded providers offer a wide range of programmes across many industry and business sectors. It takes place in a wide variety of settings and comes in many shapes and sizes. Learning takes place in ETBs, in community education centres, in companies, in libraries, online, possibly at home or on the move using mobile technology. With regard to ETBs, capacity can be flexed, when needed, via a network of pre-qualified external contractors.[45] See figure 3 for the main types of publicly funded FET provision. A glossary of programme types is outlined in detail in Appendix 1.

[45] For example, private training contractors, individuals providing evening courses, Institutes of Technology providing phases 4 and 6 of the Apprenticeship Programme, unsupported online training programmes vendors, Local Training Initiatives Providers and Specialist Training Providers.

Figure 3: Main Types of FET Provision

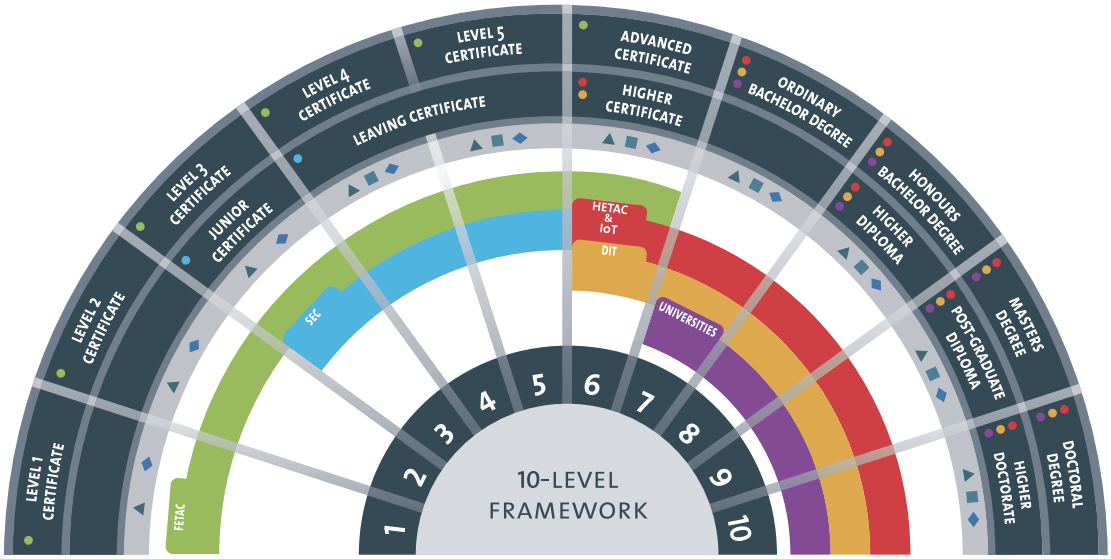
The diversity of the FET provision as outlined above elaborates the essence of the NFQ which, according to the QQI, is designed not only to make learning visible but also, 'to provide the tools necessary to facilitate the expression of learning goals, waypoints and pathways and the documentation of a person's learning paths'.[46] More importantly, the NFQ is meant to provide structured pathways to employment and to further learning, to formalise progression routes and thus provide patterns of incentives for participation in education and training.[47] Therefore the NFQ is a key tool that the FET sector, in collaboration with QQI, DES and the HEA/HEIs, intends to build-on. Particular emphasis will be placed on establishing and formalising additional and more seamless progression pathways from FE to HE level as a practical way to increase social inclusion, social mobility and labour market equity.

46 QQI (2013), Qualifications systems and related concepts – a QQI background paper, May 2013.

47 Ibid.

A significant proportion of the FET provision outlined above is accredited by the QQI or other approved awarding bodies e.g. City and Guilds and is placed at Levels 1 to 6 on the 10 Level national Framework of Qualifications. See figure 4 below. The Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate are placed at Level 3 and Levels 4/5 respectively. The higher education sector including Universities is placed at Level 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. FET shares Levels 3, 4 and 5 with the second level education and Level 6 with some higher education institutes, such as the Institute of Technology sector and the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Figure 4: National Framework of Qualifications



From the definition and description of FET presented above and given the positioning of accredited FET provision on the NFQ, we can say that FET is a distinct and an important sector within the Irish education and training framework. It shares NFQ levels with both the second level and higher education sectors, thus providing access to equality of learning outcomes, certification and progression opportunities for its diverse range of learners.

2.3 Scope of FET

The FET sector in Ireland is characterised by diversity in terms of providers and learner groups. In excess of 200,000 people will enrol in DES funded FET in 2014. FET providers are regarded as providers of accredited provision up to and including NFQ Level 6 or equivalent.[48] In addition to the accredited element, unaccredited provision also takes place, for example, within the community

48 However, ETB schools are also providers of junior and senior cycle second level programmes.

sector. Education and Training Boards, which consist of the former VECs and FÁS training centres (including provision by private providers), account for the majority of accredited provision. For instance, of the 298,552 QQI awards[49] issued in 2012, former VECs accounted for 44%, private providers for 24%, FÁS training centres for 21%, community/voluntary groups for 5%, with all other providers[50] accounting for the remaining 6% (including Teagasc, BIM and Fáilte Ireland). Many learners achieve accreditation from other awarding bodies e.g. ECDL, Microsoft, CompTIA and City and Guilds.[51] A full description of the structure of FET provision is provided in the separate ESRI publication 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future', which was developed in conjunction with SOLAS.

In terms of the annual budget of the FET sector and excluding allowances in lieu of eligible DSP income supports, in 2012 the Department for Education and Skills (DES) spent €309.5m on a range of programmes primarily delivered through the former VECs. This provision includes Post Leaving Certificate courses, VTOS, Youthreach and the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI).[52] In the region of €117.0m million was spent on FÁS training, while €50m was spent on a range of adult literacy and community development programmes (including the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme), with a further €50m of funding provided to Pobal.[53] Furthermore, many individuals also engage with publicly-funded FET provision outside of the ETB network. For example Skillnets, with a budget of around €23m, funded training for 44,000 individuals in 2012.[54] Many thousands more benefit from one or more of the 18 programmes or so managed by Pobal. In summary, the full extent of FET provision in the state is very broad-ranging and includes many actors in addition to the former VECs and FÁS.[55] In 2014, the Department of Education and Skills will provide €826m to support Further Education and Training Provision; €640m will be funded through SOLAS. The balance relates to the teacher pay element of the PLC programme.

49 This is only the QQI disaggregated awards which are a subset of the awards in the FET sector. There are other non-aligned awards.

50 This includes organisations such as Institutes of Technology (IoTs), Skillnets, Teagasc, Fáilte Ireland, BIM etc.

51 Almost 25,000 certificates were issues by other industry recognised awarding bodies (e.g. City and Guilds, Microsoft, CompTIA) to FÁS learners in 2012.

52 DSP have commissioned the ESRI to do a detailed analysis of BTEA, comparing outcomes against a counterfactual control group on the LR.

53 It should be noted that expenditures to private providers could not be separated out in this data.

54 Skillnets Annual Report 2012.

55 These include Crafts Council of Ireland, Coillte, Teagasc, Failte Ireland, BIM, County and City Enterprise Boards, Board Altranias, Skillnets, private training providers, private colleges, National learning Networks, Irish Prison Services, Institutes of Technology, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Company based training, Chambers of Commerce etc.

2.4. Strengths of FET

Notwithstanding FET's somewhat 'organic' development since the foundation of the state, the FET sector continues to make a major contribution to Ireland's economic and social aims. FET is generally accessible to all and has a history of accommodating non-traditional students. FET reaches into practically every community in every locality, both rural and urban, in every county in the state. It has a local focus and is embedded within local networks, often providing flexible and supported learning options for people. Further education and training has been a first choice for many and an alternative route to success for others, often providing an alternative pathway to the worlds of work and higher education. Adult and community education has meant added enrichment for many, and is a vital component in the delivery of life-long learning in Ireland.

A further distinctive feature of further education and training is its linkages with other services such as employment, training, social protection, youth, school, juvenile liaison, justice, community and voluntary sector interests. A wide range of Government Departments, statutory agencies and voluntary and community organisations provide services in this area.[56]

FET is respected for the dedication, commitment and expertise of the staff who serve the sector, and for its heritage and traditions rooted in the first technical education committees set up towards the latter part of the 19th century. Employer skill needs, as well as the voluntary nature[57] and widespread local embedding of FET, have to this day continued to provide FET with inherent advantages, such as relevance and accessibility. It is both learner-centred and participative in its pedagogical approach.

FET has also been recognised for its wide range of high quality provision at post-secondary level, targeted at a diverse range of client groups, including those in and out of work and those who will benefit from second chance opportunities.[58] The NFQ is comprehensive, integrating both vocational and general qualifications and includes a strong commitment to the avoidance of dead-ends and pathways without progression. Collaboration with social partners is a core principle within FET. The

[56] DES (A Brief Description of the Irish Education System) http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/A-Brief-Description-of-the-Irish-Education-System.pdf

[57] The ETB's Adult Education Service acknowledges the role and the invaluable contribution made by volunteer tutors who support the adult literacy programme. Volunteer work may be defined as unpaid work that is chosen freely by a person and is carried out for the benefit of individuals and the community. Volunteer tutors are expected to make a minimum of 24 months commitment to the service. The volunteer tutor provides one-to-one tuition to adults who wish to improve their reading, writing or numeracy skills. Volunteer tutors may also provide assistance in groups under the direction of the group tutor.

[58] OECD, (2010) 'Learning for Jobs: Review of Vocational Education and Training – Ireland'.

apprenticeship system is well-structured with a systematic blend of on-and off-the-job elements. Finally, there are some innovative and effective ways of engaging employers in a bottom-up approach to provision, such as Skillnets and FIT, initiatives widely supported by employers including IBEC.

Studies of FE indicate that investment in further education and training can be one of the most cost-effective ways of tackling the cumulative effects of learning failure and one of the best ways to remedy past deficiencies.[59] Furthermore, occupation and initial vocational education and training[60] and skills development make up a significant part of FET provision, and this provision has been shown to have significant economic benefits for the individual and the broader society.[61]

Studies show that:

- Individuals with vocational qualifications often receive higher wages than those without post-school qualifications.[62]
- The benefits of participation in vocational education and training can be more pronounced for early school leavers in comparison with those who complete school without undertaking further study.[63]
- There is evidence of a positive relationship between vocational skills equivalent to Level 6 on the NFQ and relative average labour productivity performance, especially in the production sectors of the economy.[64]
- Occupation-specific vocational education and training can support labour market participants in meeting the relevant technological, business and regulatory changes in the labour market;[65] and is associated with a reduction in labour turnover,[66] with knowledge

59 The Further Education Funding Council, (1997) 'Learning Works, Widening Participation in Further Education'.

60 For example: PLCs, Apprenticeship, VTOS, Specific Skills Training and Traineeships.

61 ESRI, 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future', Research Series Number 35, March 2014.
See also ESRI, (2013), 'Lost in Transition: The Labour Market Pathways of Long-term Unemployed Individuals in Ireland Pre and Post the Great Recession'. See CEDEFOP, (2011) 'The economic benefits of VET for individuals'. Also CEDEFOP, (2011) 'Vocational education and training is good for you; The social benefits of VET for individuals'. The Department of Business Innovation and Skills (UK), (2013) 'The Impact of Further Education Learning'.

62 Ibid.

63 OECD, (2008) 'Costs and Benefits in Vocational Education and Training'.

64 CEDEFOP, (2014) 'Macroeconomic benefits of vocational education and training'.

65 For example, FET awards (e.g. QQI Level 5) are listed as a pre-requisite in most vacancies advertised in the area of childcare and care. In childcare, the funding under the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) is available to play school service providers where, among other conditions, all pre-school assistants hold a NFQ Level 5 award in childcare. Early Childhood Care & Education Scheme (ECCE), Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

transfer between older and younger workers,[67] with improved quality[68] and with improved customer satisfaction.[69]

For young people who do not continue into higher education, vocational education may offer better prospects for their employability than general more academically oriented upper secondary education.[70] The longer-term prospects and economic outcomes of learners can be improved by high quality vocational education and training such as: better job security; improved future pay and promotion prospects; and undertaking a job with greater responsibilities.[71] There can also be wider benefits[72] of engaging with FET related to both individual mental health and wider community payoffs.

2.5 Standing of FET

The idea of a high skills economy has rightly focussed Irish policy makers. But it has resulted in a substantial emphasis on higher education with a strong focus on promoting higher education programmes related to activities such as ICT, financial markets and high value-added exportable trades and services. However, intermediate skills and especially higher intermediate (Level 6) skills remain essential to the well-being of many advanced economies. Improvements in intermediate (Level 5/6) skills are estimated to generate average annual net benefits of 0.4% and 0.45% of GDP respectively, primarily due to enhanced levels of productivity.[73] In addition, there is a similar return

66 Kenyon, R. (2005) 'The business benefits of apprenticeships: the English employers' perspective'. Education and training, vol. 47, no. 4/5, pp. 366- 373. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00400910510601931
See also Smith, A.; Hayton, G. (1999) 'What drives enterprise training? Evidence from Australia', International Journal of Human Resource Management, vol. 10, no. 2, pp: 251-272. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/095851999340549

67 European Commission, (2006) 'Ageing and employment: identification of good practice to increase job opportunities and maintain older workers in employment: final report'. Brussels: European Commission.
http://www.metiseurope.eu/content/pdf/1_vs_gestion_des_ages_ageingreport_en.pdf

68 Katou, A.A.; Budhwar, P.S. (2007) 'The effect of human resource management policies on organisational performance in Greek manufacturing firms', Thunderbird international business review, January-February 2007, vol. 49, no. 1, pp: 1-36.

69 Ely, R. (2004) 'A field study of group diversity, participation in diversity education programmes and performance', Journal of Organizational Behaviour, vol. 25, no. 6, pp: 755-780. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/job.257

70 OECD, (2013) 'Education at a Glance'.

71 CEDEFOP, (2013) 'Benefits of vocational education and training in Europe for people, organisations and countries'.

72 The Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education UK, (2002) 'The Wider Benefits of Further Education: Practitioner Views'.

73 For example, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, (2007) 'Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy', 5th Report, Dublin: Forfás. See also Leitch, L. (2006) 'Prosperity for All in a Global

from investing in low skilled workers. The main distinguishing factor, however, is that lower skilled workers are less likely to be offered, to seek or to avail of training.[74] There is a greater need therefore, for positive intervention in the development of the human capital of low skilled adults by the state.

Other countries have not been standing still and also have been improving their range of skills, often from a higher base.[75] In terms of educational attainment, Ireland has experienced rapid expansion of participation in tertiary education, with Ireland now ranked fifth out of 36 OECD countries[76] in the proportion of adults aged 25-34 with third-level qualifications. In spite of this shift, the proportion of working-age adults in Ireland, who have at most lower secondary education, remains around the OECD and EU average. Analysis of the most recent PIAAC data has also shown Ireland to score 'below average' in literacy (17th from 24) and numeracy (19th from 24) and around the average in problem solving in technology-rich environments.[77] The performance of young Irish adults (16-24 years) in literacy and numeracy is also below par.

The standing of vocational compared to academic education is still an unresolved problem throughout Europe.[78] In many countries, vocational education and training has a long tradition. However, while it is very strong in some countries, it has a relatively low status in others. For example, at present, in the EU, about half of all students enrolled in upper secondary education participate in vocational programmes. This relatively high average participation masks significant differences, with participation rates of almost 80% in some countries and less than 15% in others.[79] Of the 55,572 candidates who sat Leaving Certificate examinations in 2013, 37,096 (66.7%) candidates followed the more academic established Leaving Certificate Programme, 15,671 (28.2%) the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme while 2,805 (5%) candidates followed the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme.[80]

Economy – world class skills', Final Report, London: HM Treasury. See also Brown, P., Green, A., Lauder, H. (2001) 'High Skills: Globalisation, Competitiveness and Skill Formation', Oxford: Oxford University Press.

74 O'Connell, P.J. (2007) 'Who generally trains? The effects of personal and workplace characteristics on training at work', Apeldoom: Het Spinhuis and Dublin ESRI.

75 OECD, (2006) 'Education at a glance, International comparisons of qualification profiles'.

76 OECD, (2013) 'Education at a Glance 2013, OECD Indicators, Population that has attained tertiary education (2011)' Percentage, by age group, Chart AA.1.

77 OECD, (2013) 'Skills Outlook 2013: Results from the Survey of Adult Skills' (PIAAC).

78 CEDEFOP, (2001), How to improve the standing of vocational compared to general education. A collaborative investigation of strategies and qualifications across Europe.

79 EU Commission (2011), EU policy on vocational education and training – briefing.

80 State Examinations Commission (2013), PRESS RELEASE; LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2013, Over 55,500 candidates receive results today, 14th August 2013.

The standing and esteem in which FET is held by Irish society[81] stands in contrast to the higher esteem in which higher education is held by learners and parents alike.[82] Finally, while many important lessons can be drawn from the experiences of other countries, it is important to bear in mind, that each county has a specific political, economic and social context in which FET is located, making direct transfer of policy and practice from other countries problematic. Consequently, the Irish FET sector has to work out its own response to improving FET[83] and its standing in Irish society. The FET Strategy contributes to this objective.

2.6 FET and National Skills Strategy

The National Skills Strategy states that an additional 500,000 individuals within the workforce will need to progress by at least one NFQ Level in order to achieve the following targets:

- 170,000 to Levels 6 to 10
- 260,000 to Levels 4 & 5
- 70,000 to Level 3.

Ireland continues to make progress towards achieving these 'top line' targets. It is estimated that 42% hold higher education qualifications (target 48%), around 40% have obtained higher secondary/FET qualifications (target 45%), while the proportion of those holding lower secondary or below has dropped, against a target 7%, to just under 20% for the first time since tracking of the progress towards the NSS targets began.[84]

The FET sector provides a range of programmes from Levels 1-6 on the NFQ and targets many of the populations identified by the National Skills Strategy. The ESRI research commissioned by SOLAS indicates that, in terms of accreditation at least, a relatively low proportion of FET graduates /leavers in 2012 gained a major award (24%), with just over 2,000 (or 5% of total number of major award holders) gaining major awards at Levels 1-3 combined. The majority of FET graduates/leavers gain a minor award. This latter situation brings into sharp focus the nature of the challenges for individuals and the FET sector more generally, to engage with and achieve major awards most particularly at the

81 Raffe, (2003) maintains that the relative status of VET is lower than that of general education across countries, although its absolute status may vary.

82 City and Guilds, (2013) 'Young people and vocational choices in Ireland', City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development 2013. See also ESRI, 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future', Research Series Number 35, March 2014.

83 Turbin, J. (2001) 'Policy borrowing: lessons from European attempts to transfer training practices', International Journal of Training and Development, vol. 5, no. 2, pp: 96-111.

84 The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Statement of Activity 2012, April 2013.

lower levels. Notwithstanding this, the FET sector will, over the lifetime of the FET Strategy, need to establish ways within the resources allocated to it, to significantly increase the number of individuals who graduate from FET programmes with full awards across Levels 1-6 inclusive. A review and update of the National Skills Strategy may also be timely.

Section 3

Economic and Labour Market Context

Key points in this Section

- The most recent data suggests that the Irish economy has begun to recover somewhat.
- The ESRI forecast that around 60,000 new jobs will be created in 2014 and unemployment is set to fall to around 10% in 2016. The Government is optimistic that all of the jobs lost in the recession can be replaced by 2020.
- In absolute terms, employment in all occupations is expected to increase by 2020. The exceptions are elementary occupations for which, if the EU economy does not resume growth in the medium term, employment would be lower than in 2012.
- The growth projections by occupational family is outlined in this section.
- Other models of work-based learning, such as traineeships, will be developed and rolled out in the early implementation phase of the FET Strategy.

3.1 Economic and Labour Market Context

The international financial collapse had a severe effect on Ireland, partly due to the existence of a property price bubble and excessive bank lending into the property sector. The economic collapse at home led to a severe contraction in tax revenues, partly due to an over-reliance on taxes arising from property development. When combined with the banking-related liabilities that the state accrued as a result of the banking guarantee, a public finance crisis emerged and led to the EU/IMF bailout in 2010.

The most recent data suggests that the Irish economy has begun to recover somewhat.[85] Real GDP forecasts for 2014 range from 1.8 – 2.6%. See figure 5. The ESRI forecast around 60,000 new jobs will be created in 2014 with unemployment set to fall to around 10% in 2016. The Government is optimistic that all of the jobs lost in the recession can be replaced by 2020.

The labour market also continues to recover slowly. There has been a slight increase in the numbers of those in employment in the period 2011–2013. Between Q2 2012 and Q2 2013, unemployment fell back from 15.0% to 13.9% and subsequently to 12% in January 2014. Approximately 61,000 more individuals were at work in 2013 bringing total employment to 1,909,800.[86] See figure 6.

Figure 5: Real GDP Growth Forecasts 2014

Institution	2014
Central Bank (Quarterly Bulletin, October 2013)	2.0
ESRI (Quarterly Economic Commentary, Sep 2013)	2.6
Department of Finance (Budget Statement, October 2013)	2.0
European Commission	1.8

[85] A Strategy for Growth: Medium Term Economic Strategy 2014 – 2020' (December 2013). Also the ESRI Quarterly Economic Commentary, Winter, 2013. Also, Central Bank of Ireland Quarterly Bulletin 4 2013.

[86] CSO, (2014) Quarterly National Household Survey, Quarter 4, 2013.

Figure 6: **Labour force participation**

	2011 Q2	2012 Q2	2013 Q2
Labour Force (Thousand)	2,179	2,159	2,171
Participation Rates (%)	60.5	60.1	60.5
In Employment (Thousand)	1,861	1,826	1,870
Unemployment Rates (%)	14.6	15.0	13.9

3.2 Employment Projections 2012-2020[87]

Publicly-funded education and training systems tend to expand in economic 'good times' and to contract in recessions. However, educational needs travel in the opposite direction; they tend to expand during recessions.[88] The recent recession has seen an increased appetite for more people wanting to invest in education and training, stay longer in schools and postpone their entry into the labour market. At the same time, governments are also promote education and training as a strategy to help people out of unemployment.

The need for increased engagement in FET (and HET) is also being driven by the conclusion that skilled employment will keep growing up to 2020. Furthermore, a number of policy measures are successfully activating older workers (55 and 64 years) to increase their employment rate into the future.[89] An increasing number of individuals can therefore be expected to 'dip into' education and training more frequently, to learn new skills or refresh or upgrade their skillset so that they can access employment, sustain their employability, or change career direction, become more productive or to insulate themselves against unemployment.[90]

Employment projections imply certain skills requirements and associated education and training provision linked to these occupations. While skills have become the global currency of 21st-century economies, they can depreciate as the requirements of labour markets evolve. Securing the best returns on investment in skills requires the ability to assess the quality and quantity of the skills

87 The SOLAS Skills and labour Market Research Unit, (2014) 'Employment Forecasts 2020'.
88 OECD, (2013) Global perspectives on education and skills.
89 To a target of 50%.
90 EU (2013) Growth potential of EU human resources and policy implications for future economic growth Working Paper 3/2013.

available in the population, determine and anticipate the skills required in the labour market, and develop and use those skills effectively in better jobs that lead to better lives.[91]

The fact that skills shortages can co-exist with high unemployment, and that there is persistent evidence of mismatch between employees' skills and job requirements, indicates that a population's skills base (and workforce) and the investment made to develop those skills may be partly going to waste. Building effective systems of labour market/skill intelligence, planning and funding can mitigate this problem.

In the early 1990s, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), through collaboration with FÁS, developed an occupational employment forecasting model.[92] Following the dissolution of FÁS, SOLAS has been responsible for the maintenance and the updating of the model and the production of the employment projections at occupational level. Through this model SOLAS is in a position to provide an indication of how the growth paths outlined in the ESRI Medium Term Review (MTR) 2020 are likely to impact on employment at occupational level over the period 2012-2020.

It is important to keep in mind that projections generated using the model are not predictions of what will happen, but rather an illustration of possible outcomes, particularly in terms of the direction of change. Three scenarios were developed for modelling purposes.[93]

The scenarios are based on assumptions regarding the performance of the Irish economy over the projection period 2012-2020, including the global economy and EU growth path, domestic policies, fiscal responses, etc. In addition, it is also assumed that the shifts in sub-sectoral, occupational and educational profile of employment within sectors observed over the period quarter 1, 2007 and quarter 1, 2013, will continue over the projection period 2012-2020. Occupation projections are

91 OECD Skills Strategy; Developing the right skills and turning them into better jobs and better lives.

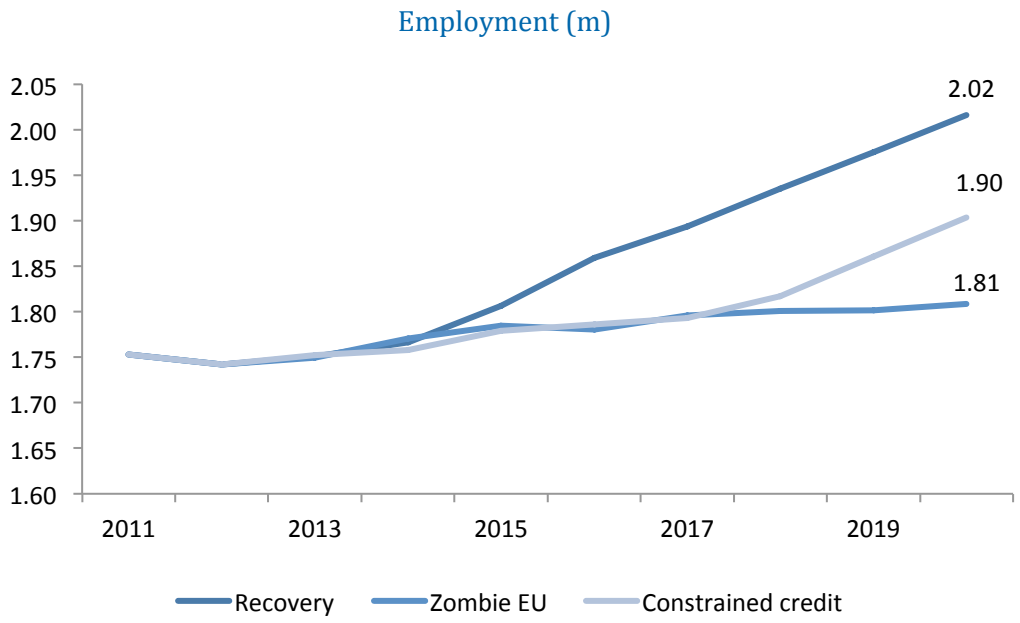
92 Between 1991 and 2007, a series of FÁS/ESRI Manpower Forecasting Studies were published using this modelling framework. In 2009, the model was transferred from the ESRI to the Skills and Labour Market Unit (SLMRU) which was then based in FÁS. Some indication on how the projected occupational employment may impact on the educational composition of the workforce by 2020 can also be provided. The model is based on the shift-share methodology developed by the University of Warwick and represents an extension to the ESRI HERMES macroeconomic model of the Irish economy.

93 Developed by the ESRI: the 'recovery' scenario (in the Strategy referred to as 'strong' growth: the EU economy grows, facilitating growth in the Irish economy, and the domestic policies succeed in restoring the banking system; The 'delayed adjustment' scenario (in Strategy referred to as 'modest' recovery); the EU economy grows, however, there is a failure (due to domestic policy or other reasons) in resolving the remaining issues with the Irish banking sector, resulting in restricted credit supply to the enterprise sector and households; The 'stagnation' scenario (referred in the Strategy as the 'weak' growth), the EU economy stagnates (due to deflationary fiscal policy, collapse of the euro and/or a lower productivity growth than anticipated), preventing growth in the Irish economy.

extended to provide some indication on how the projected occupational employment may impact on the educational composition of the workforce by 2020.

Irrespective of scenario, employment in all occupations is expected to increase in the period 2012-2020. In the broadest sense, overall employment will increase by less than 100,000 in the weak growth scenario ('zombie EU'), by approximately 160,000 in the 'modest' growth scenario (constrained credit) and by approximately 270,000 in the 'strong' growth scenario (recovery). See figure 7.

Figure 7: Projected Employment Levels at 2020 (three scenarios)



Source: SOLAS SMLRU

The exceptions are elementary occupations for which, if the EU economy does not resume growth in the medium term, employment would be lower than in 2012. Employment growth is projected to be the strongest for professional occupations and skilled trades.

The relative share of the different occupational groups in the labour force such as professional, skilled trades, operative and elementary occupations, is not expected to change dramatically during the period 2012-2020, just as they did not over the period 2007-2012. Nonetheless, in most sectors, some shifts are expected. Gains are projected for managerial, sales and IT occupations, while losses are projected for administrative and elementary occupations (e.g. packer). A general move towards higher added-value activities and a focus on increasing global market shares for Irish exports, together with efforts to reduce overheads (administrative costs), operate leaner business and production processes supported by IT (which were observed in the preceding period) are projected to continue.

As the recession did not affect all occupations equally, the impact of recovery is expected to differ across occupations. Occupations which are expected to recover to the peak levels over the medium term include skilled workers (professionals and associate professionals) and managers, as well as the care and other personal service workers.

Occupations which will fall markedly short of the levels recorded at the peak include skilled trades (most of whom are construction workers), agricultural workers and operatives. While the construction sector itself is unlikely to recover to the record levels of activity and employment of the recent past, a recovery of the sector, albeit from a low base, is projected with growth in skilled trades expected. See figure 8 below.

Figure 8: Occupational Employment Projections (000s)

Occupational Group	2007	2012	2020 'Good' growth	2020 'Modest' growth	2020 No growth
Managers	154	136	166	153	147
Professional	336	339	390	380	359
Assoc. Professionals	220	205	238	227	215
Administrative Occupations	234	214	245	234	221
Skilled Trades	407	264	315	291	274
Caring, Leisure and other Services	133	138	152	149	141
Sales and Customer Service	148	137	165	144	145
Operatives	176	139	165	154	143
Elementary Occupations	230	183	199	188	177
Total	**2039**	**1756**	**2035**	**1921**	**1824**

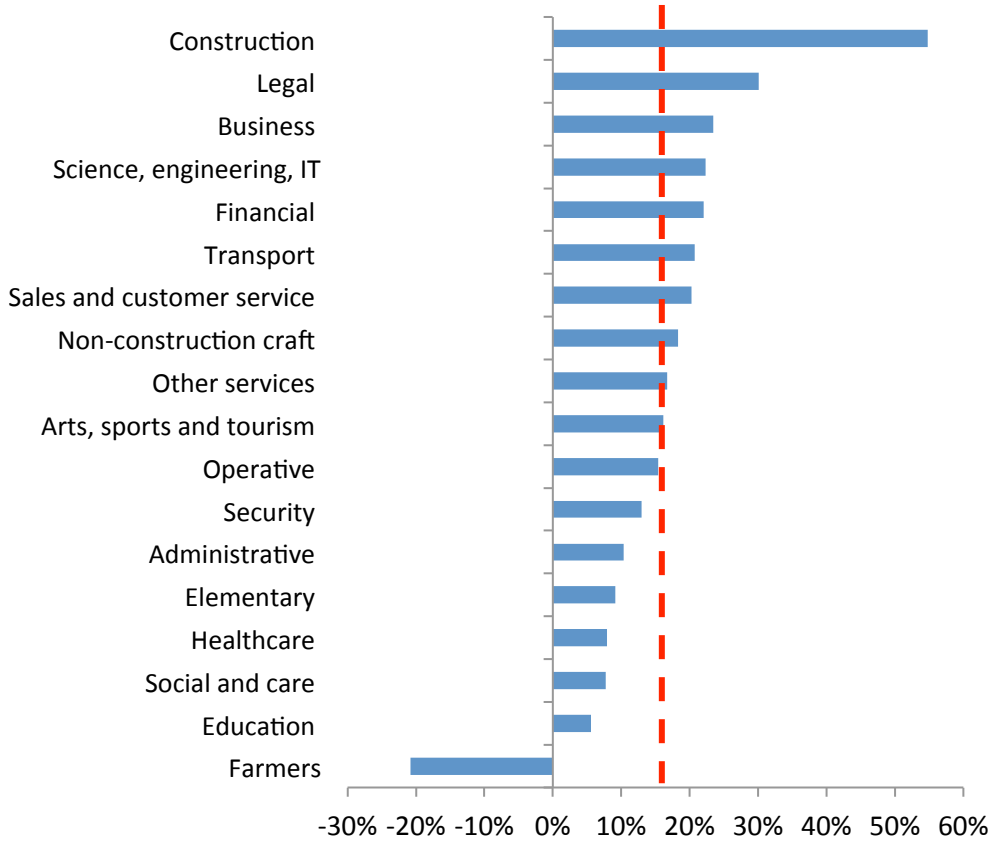
Source: SOLAS SMLRU

In describing these forecasts, occupations with similar skill sets can be categorised into occupational families.[94] Grouped in this fashion, the occupational projections provided below in figure 9 can indicate more clearly the expected expansion demand for different skill types in the recovery. The

[94] For instance; financial managers, financial professionals (e.g. accountants), financial associate professionals (e.g. investment analysts) and financial clerks (e.g. payroll clerks) are grouped into a financial occupational family.

skill types referred to encompasses provision that spans the FET and HET sectors. It can be seen that significant skill set requirements within these occupational families can be addressed by the FET sector.

Figure 9: Employment growth by occupational family 2012-2020 (Recovery)



Source: SOLAS SMLRU

3.3 Growth Projections by Occupational Families

Introduction

The identification of employment opportunities and associated skill needs comes from a range of sources, including the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), SOLAS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) sectoral reports, IDA and EI input around sector job opportunities and associated skill needs, local provider/employer contacts, changes in the legislative and regulatory environment, surveys on course outcomes and on-going engagement and consultation with Department of Social Protection 'Intreo'. The need to balance employers' short-term needs with the economy's and trainees' longer-term interests led to the introduction by FÁS of a career cluster framework for business planning purposes at the training centre and national levels, based on the

identification of groups of jobs related by sectors/skills. The application of this cluster framework is being expanded as part of the integrated FET services planning process for 2014 as recommended by the NESC Strategic Review.[95]

The skill needs of internationally trading enterprises have a strong policy focus across Ireland and state development agencies co-operate with each other and other stakeholders to ensure their skill needs are met. The skills demands of enterprises serving the domestic market, even though they account for the bulk of local economies, tend to receive less attention.[96] SOLAS has also commenced a process of strengthening the regional/local labour market profiles to inform local planning and provision by the new Education and Training Boards.

Agreement with economic development agencies and also, for example, with the ESRI and DSP on where we understand the economy is going, will assist with the harmonisation of sectors and occupational families into a distinct dynamic career cluster framework reflecting the evolving skill needs of employers. This will be a collaborative undertaking by all economic development stakeholders. SOLAS will be a lead partner with the ETB sector in this regard to ensure an effective framework emerges. This in turn will have the potential to send a powerful signal to learners and families with regard to the skills that have or are likely to have a premium in the labour market, and that these skills can lead to satisfying career options.

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has identified a number of sector job opportunities in the 'Action Plan for Jobs', such as manufacturing, tourism, retail, IT, hospitality. IDA and EI have a clear understanding of the skill needs (both FET and HET) required to attract and sustain the companies supported by them. These companies have specific skill needs and tend to be located across the country. ETBs have a presence in every county in Ireland and have a comparative advantage in that regard over other providers. It is essential that the relevant FET skill needs of IDA and EI supported companies (existing and new) are identified to the relevant ETB and addressed by them in the most appropriate and timely manner.

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport as well as other tourism/hospitality-related bodies have identified potential FET skill needs in this sector. These identified skill needs also inform the growth projections relating to the relevant occupational families below.

[95] NESC, Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed, October 2013.
[96] OECD (2013), Local Job Creation: How Employment and Training Agencies Can Help.

Finally, many of the skill needs associated with the occupational families below of particular relevance to FET have already been identified in a range of Forfás/EGFSN reports.[97] For example, there is an important role for FET to address training needs of companies to up-skill their machinists and the targeting of low-skilled general operatives[98] through, for example, the Skills for Work (SFW) programme and wider ETB delivered basic education programmes, building on progress made to date for workers in the food and beverage sector.

There are also good jobs and career pathways available in the retail and wholesale sectors[99] where FET can make a significant contribution. Based on known and anticipated demand for construction in the domestic economy over the period to 2015 and the projected increased level of output from the sector, it will be vital to ensure that the construction sector has the right skills for the anticipated recovery.[100]

With regard to 'green' skills, the EGFSN report 'Future Skills Needs of Enterprise within the Green Economy in Ireland' identifies a range of measures to ensure that the future skills base will drive business and employment growth. The technical skills most relevant to the FET sector at craft and operative levels are linked to manufacturing, installation and maintenance of energy related products and services as well as retrofitting and insulation. In addition, a number of recommendations around the development of 'Operatives Skills Capability' include a suite of mathematical skills modules at various NFQ levels that could be developed to be drawn upon by individuals, business and FET providers.

ICT, science and engineering (STEM) family

This occupational family includes scientists, scientific technicians, engineers, engineering technicians, ICT professionals (e.g. programmers, software engineers, web designers etc.), ICT managers and ICT technicians. This group is also referred to as a STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) family. Over the period 2012-2020, well above average growth is projected for this occupational group under all three growth scenarios. Growth is projected to range from 10,000 in a 'weak' scenario to 23,000 in the 'strong' recovery scenario, with ICT occupations accounting for the significant majority of this increase. If the manufacturing employment growth is in line with more optimistic EGFSN predictions, then employment in STEM

97 In particular, EGFSN, (2013) 'Guidelines for VECs in aligning further education provision with the skills needs of enterprise, 2013 Update'.

98 Forfás: Future Skills Requirements of the Manufacturing Sector to 2020.

99 Forfás: Future Skills Requirements of the Wholesale and Retail Sector.

100 Forfás, (2013) 'Ireland's Construction Sector: Outlook and Strategic Plan to 2015'.

occupations will be higher. It is worth noting that a recent report[101] estimates that there are in excess of 4,500 immediate vacancies (Levels 5/6) in ICT companies in Ireland at the moment. in areas such as Mobile Technologies/Development Platform, Games Development, Web Development/Technologies and Cloud Computing/Virtualisation.

Education, health and social care family

This family includes professionals (e.g. teachers), caring occupations (e.g. childcare workers, carers etc.) and healthcare professionals and associate professionals (e.g. medical practitioners, nurses, therapists). Although belonging to different occupational families, they are dealt with in tandem because a significant share of employment in these occupations is part of the public sector and their employment levels depend, to a significant degree, on the Government policy.

The Government is expected to continue with its current 'contracting' fiscal policy for the foreseeable future. This is expected to negatively impact on employment growth in the public sector. For this reason, the sectoral effect is strong and negative for education, health and social care occupations and reduces the growth potential.[102] Growth is projected to be below average and to range between 2,500-22,000 for health, education and social care occupations combined, which is low given the size of the current workforce in these occupations (over a quarter of a million in total).

Legal, business and financial family

Above average growth is projected for legal (e.g. solicitors), business and financial occupations (e.g. accountants, accounting technicians, economists, investment analysts, insurance underwriters, financial accounts managers, financial administrative workers etc.). Growth is projected to range from 23,000 in the 'weak' recovery scenario to 53,000 in the 'strong' recovery scenario.

Security family

This occupational family includes occupations such as Gardaí, prison officers, fire officers etc. They are primarily employed in the public sector. Again, employment growth is projected to be slow.[103]

101 FIT, (2013) 'ICT Skills Audit'.

102 Implied by overall recovery i.e. the scale effect.

103 With scale effect expected to be reduced by the negative sectoral effect.

Construction family

This occupational family includes construction managers, construction professionals (e.g. civil engineers, architects), construction technicians (e.g. draughtspersons) and construction craftspersons (e.g. bricklayers, plasterers). Employment in this occupational family is expected to grow the strongest, with employment increase range from 20,000 in the 'weak' recovery scenario to over 40,000 in the moderate 'recovery' scenario.[104] This includes a key role for FET in 'greening' the skills set of existing and new entrant construction workers,[105] a pre-requisite to Ireland meeting its renewable energy targets by 2020 (40% of all energy through renewables). Further potential skill needs arising include the ICOMOS Ireland Report published in 2009 "Sustaining our Built Environment"[106] pointing to short-comings in knowledge of traditional materials, techniques and methods of repair of historic buildings. A similar situation exists with regard to our industrial heritage.[107]

Non-construction craft family

This occupational family includes occupations such as fitters, welders, electricians, mechanics, butchers etc. Employment growth in non-construction craft occupations is projected to range between 3,000 ('weak growth scenario) to 22,000 ('strong' growth scenario); however, if employment in manufacturing actually increases in line with higher EGFSN projections (around their more positive 'competitive manufacturing' scenario), numbers employed in this occupational group could be 12,000 greater than in the 'strong' recovery scenario. Again, a key role for FET in 'greening' the skills of existing and new entrants has been identified through BUSI.

Transport family

Transport occupations include transport and logistics managers, transport technicians (e.g. air traffic controllers), transport administrative occupations (e.g. stock control), transport operatives (e.g. drivers, mobile machine operatives etc.). Strong growth is projected for these occupations. The growth is projected to range between 5,000 in the 'weak' growth scenario and 18,000 in the 'strong' growth scenario. Under the Action Plan for Jobs 2014, the EGFSN will undertake a study of the workforce skills and competency requirements of the Freight transport, distribution and

104 The scale effect is projected to be enhanced by a strong positive sectoral effect, as the construction sector re-emerges from the lows to which it had fallen following the housing 'bubble' in 2008.

105 'Green' skills needs identified by the Build Up-Skills Ireland (BUSI) for the construction sector - a joint Institute of Technology sector, Construction Industry Federation and Irish Congress of Trade Unions' initiative.

106 International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), (2009) 'Sustaining our Built Environment, Review of the State of Conservation Education and Training in Ireland'.

107 The Industrial Heritage Association of Ireland.

logistics sector to 2020. The study will be informative with regard to existing and emerging skill needs of this sector relating to FET.

Administrative family

Administrative occupations include all clerks not included in other occupational families. Employment in this occupational family is expected to grow below average. Growth is projected to range from very little growth in the 'weak' growth scenario to 15,000 in the 'strong' growth scenario.

Sales and customer care family

This occupational family includes sales professionals (e.g. marketing directors), sales associate professionals (e.g. business sales executives), sales assistants and customer service workers (e.g. contact centre workers). 'Strong' growth would bring above average employment growth for sales occupations (over 40,000). However, lack of credit or a drag in EU exports, would reduce employment growth to a quarter of that projected for the strong growth scenario. The occupational effect for sales occupations is projected to be positive, as they are expected to continue to gain share in the skill mix of many sectors.

The EGFSN reports on 'Future Skills Needs of Enterprise within the Green Economy in Ireland' and 'Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally' highlight specific skills requirements for example in proceurement, sales and marketing and associated soft skills appropriate to FET. The sector will continue to build on current provision in that regard.

Arts, sports and tourism family

This occupational family includes occupations employed in hospitality (e.g. chefs, waiters/waitresses, catering managers, hotel and restaurant managers etc.) and fitness (e.g. sports coaches), as well as various artistic occupations (e.g. art, media and design professionals). Employment growth in this occupational group is expected to follow closely that of the overall economy, with broadly neutral occupational and sectoral effects. Employment growth is expected to range from 6,000 in the 'weak' growth scenario to 21,000 in the 'strong' growth scenario. It is worth noting that the Tourism/Hospitality sector has identified a range of FET related education and training needs from Levels 4-6 on the NFQ, including culinary, operative, administrative and marketing skills.[108] Forfás/EGFSN is planning to undertake a comprehensive

[108] Irish Hotels Federation, Irish Restaurants Association and Fáilte Ireland in individual discussions with SOLAS.

study of the skills needs in the Tourism/Hospitality sector in 2014 and to identify the most appropriate sector to address identified occupational skill needs.

Farming

The number of farmers is projected to decline by 13,000 in each scenario. Employment in farming continues to decrease over the longer-term, while employment in Forfás assisted companies in the food sector, more generally, increased slightly from the year 2011 to year 2012.[109] However, growth potential of 3,000+ full time equivalent jobs by 2020 has been identified in the sea fisheries and aquaculture (farm fish and shellfish) industries.[110]

Harvest 2020 sees a leading role for Teagasc in maintaining commercial and development management skills training as part of the core curriculum of its training programmes, as well as maintaining and updating the skill sets of the sector more generally together with the Marine Institute, the Universities, IoTs and Enterprise Ireland. Harvest 2020 also calls for an inter-agency, higher education and industry forum chaired by DAFM to discuss and address the sector's on-going skills, training and development needs as well as a DAFM-led inter departmental and agency cooperation, to include Teagasc, LEADER, FÁS (now ETBs and SOLAS) to develop programmes to encourage farm diversification including agri-tourism, eco-tourism, etc. It is essential that ETBs and SOLAS contribute to the success of this sector by developing relevant FET programmes at local and national level and work closely with Teagasc and HEIs to complement the on-going work in this area.

Operatives

This occupational family includes various types of operatives (e.g. food processing, assemblers, routine testers etc.), but excludes drivers. The number of operatives would be negatively affected by the decline in manufacturing employment, but positively affected by the strong growth in the construction sector (construction operative). Overall, the employment increase could range from no growth to an increase of 10,000 in the 'strong' growth scenario. In the EGFSN strong 'competitive manufacturing' scenario, however, employment in operative occupations could be higher than in the 'strong' growth scenario by up to 14,000. This occupational family is projected to have the greatest positive occupational effect of all occupational groups due to expected

[109] Forfás, (2013) 'Annual Employment Survey 2012'.

[110] Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, (2010) 'Food Harvest 2020, A Vision for Irish Agri-Food and Fisheries'.

further increases in the technological intensity of production processes and the associated requirements to replace unskilled workers with skilled operatives.

Elementary

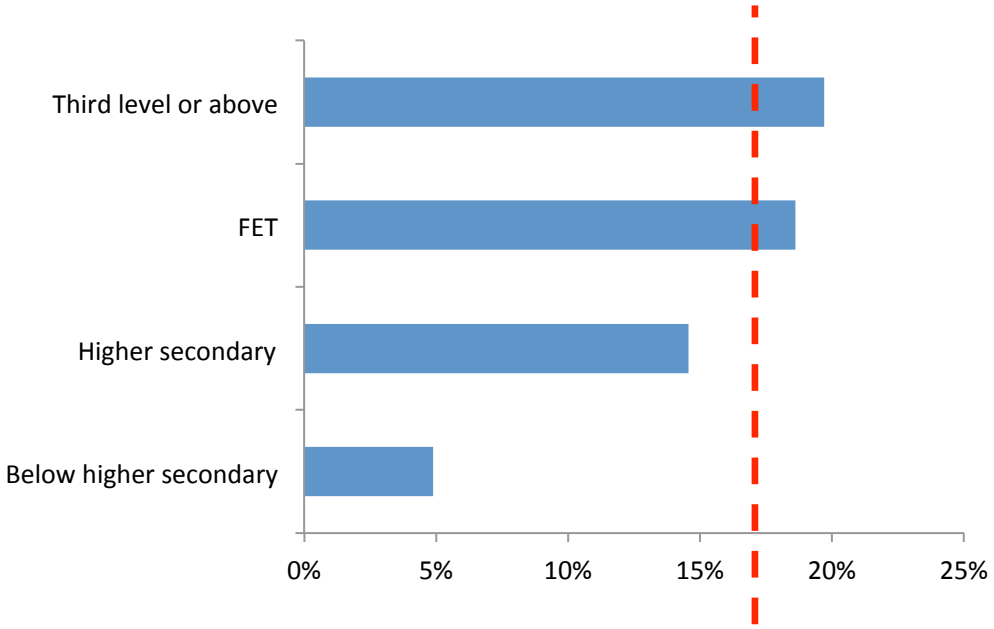
This occupational family includes various types of labourers (e.g. cleaning, security, construction, agricultural etc.). Employment in this occupational family is expected to grow well below average. This occupational family has been losing share in the skill mix of most sectors. This trend is expected to continue as the economy continues on the trajectory towards more knowledge and technology intensive and higher value added services. In the strong growth scenario, employment growth is projected to be 12,000, with the projection in the EGFSN 'competitive manufacturing' scenario of an additional 4,000. However, growth is much lower in the 'moderate' growth scenario (only 3,000), while a contraction is projected in the 'weak' growth scenario (-4,000).

3.4 Educational Distribution of Employment Forecast 2020[111]

The number of people employed in the economy with a higher education qualification has risen since the recession struck. Employment levels for those without a Leaving Certificate are down by over 40% and, for those with a Leaving Certificate but without a FET or HE qualification, is also down by about 25%. The educational distribution of occupational employment is projected to improve further. The share of higher education graduates will increase in all occupations. The share of FET qualifications holders will increase in all occupations except professional, associate professional and administrative. The share of persons with less than higher secondary education will decline in all occupations. In relative terms, the strongest employment growth is projected for both HET and FET qualifications holders, while the employment growth for the higher secondary and below higher secondary education categories is projected to be below the average employment growth. See figure 10.

[111] SMLRU, (2013) 'Employment Forecasts 2020'. See also ESRI, Quarterly Economic Commentary, Winter 2013.

Figure 10 **Projected employment growth by education 2012-2020 ('strong' growth)**



Source: SMLRU

In absolute terms, the projected employment growth for FET may appear to be relatively modest, but in relative terms it will have growth rates similar to higher education i.e. 19% and 20% respectively.

3.5 Matching FET Provision to employer needs

While skills are at the heart of the FET Strategy, employers are at the heart of the skills equation. However employers often still cite limited flexibility and responsiveness of education and training institutions to employers' fast-changing needs.[112] SOLAS and the ETB sector can help create solutions that respond to employers evolving needs while creating high quality skills which are genuinely valued. Success in early identification of skill needs rests upon a number of co-ordinated strategies such as: forging strong partnerships between employers, employees, trade unions and training providers supported by Government[113] (in the case of FET, SOLAS and other Government departments and agencies); building solid bridges between the world of work and training providers; continuous workplace training and lifelong learning, enabling workers and enterprises to adjust to an increasingly rapid pace of change; anticipating and building competence for future need; and

112 OECD (2013), Employer Engagement to Enhance Skills Investment, OECD Skills Strategy Spotlight No. 2

113 Ibid.

sustained dialogue between employers and trainers, coordination across government institutions, labour market information and employment services.[114]

SOLAS and the ETBs therefore need to enter into a dialogue with employers to establish their immediate shorter-term skill needs and their more medium-term needs to ensure company sustainability. Simultaneously, SOLAS and ETBs need to enter into discussions with all the relevant economic actors in the light of international economic and education and training trends and ask employers to get behind national skill development systems. Encouraging employers of all sizes to play an active role in steering and actively supporting national, regional and local skills development is essential for the success of FET.

Three points are worth bearing in mind with regard to employer engagement. Firstly, SMEs are one of the most important components of economies. They account for the majority of companies and employment in Ireland. However, SMEs in general are less likely to invest in job training than larger companies due to the small expected return on their investment. They may lack the financial resources to invest in training, may not have access to the proper information, and may experience significant staff co-ordination problems.[115]

Secondly, the 'not for profit' sector is substantial and the term 'employer' also includes this sector. For example, a 2009 report stated that there were at least 11,700 organisations employing over 100,000 people, involving over 560,000 volunteers in their work and managing turnover of €5.75bn i.e. around 3.25% of national income.[116] Just over half the sector's income comes from statutory grants and contracts (ETBs provide significant funding for this sector[117]), with approximately one-quarter coming from individual donations. However, around two-thirds of organisations have taken steps to reduce spending on staff payroll since the economic downturn.[118] In addition, a significant proportion of charities are now dealing with an increasing number of human resource issues such as restructuring.[119] Nevertheless, the nature of education and training needs for new entrants and

[114] ILO (2011), A Skilled Workforce for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth A G20 Training Strategy.

[115] World bank (2010), The Investment in Job Training: Why are SMEs Lagging So Much Behind? Social Protection Discussion Paper No. 1004.

[116] A Portrait of Ireland's Nonprofit Sector; A Report by The Wheel October, 2012.

[117] For example, this sector provides specialist training provision for persons with a disability on behalf of the former FÁS organisation (now the ETB sector).

[118] Ibid.

[119] Russell Brennan Keane, (2012), Charity & Not for Profit Sector Survey Results, 2012 conducted by Millward Brown Lansdowne.

existing employees in areas such as IT, communications, marketing and finance are largely similar to most other sectors.[120]

Thirdly, FET cannot be expected to be the solution for all employment and skill needs for a number of reasons.[121] Skills by themselves do not automatically translate into better economic and social outcomes or even to more and better jobs.[122] Skills policies must be part of a broader set of policies that are conducive to high rates of growth and investment. Furthermore, according to the OECD and ILO, a gap persists between the kind of knowledge and skills that are most in demand in the workplace and those that education and training systems continue to provide. In addition, assessing the continued relevance and quality of training institutions and programmes, relative to their cost, remains a challenge. We therefore need to fully understand which FET skills are the most relevant to the needs of the labour market, and that contribute most to achieving better economic and social outcomes. In addition, FET providers and employers need to ensure that the right skill mix is being learned and that companies make effective use of these skills.

While employers, in general, may look for a common set of skills, individual employers tend to look for a specific combined set of skills and attributes for their particular circumstances.[123] Since the combinations of skills and attributes (e.g. passionate, committed, likeable, hard-working) that individuals might offer when they graduate from FET and that employers might need are mathematically enormous, the chances of making a complete match are much lower than presumed.

There have been many studies that find some individuals in jobs are over-schooled and underemployed[124] or in jobs that don't need their level of education (education under-use). Other studies find that there are many individuals in jobs which normally require a higher level of or a longer education (under-education), in jobs which don't need their particular qualification, in jobs for

120 Rand Corporation (2012), Financial Sustainability for Nonprofit Organizations; A Review of the Literature.

121 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2010) 'Innovative Workplaces: Making Better Use of Skills within Organisations', Paris, http://dx.doi.org/9789264095687-en. See also Anderson, D. (1998) 'Chameleon or Phoenix: the metamorphosis of TAFE', Australian & New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research, vol. 6, no. 2 pp: 1-44. Rauner, Felix and MacLean, Rupert, Handbook of Technical and Vocational Education and Training Research, Springer.

122 OECD, (2013) 'Fostering relevant skills and employability through education'. See also ILO, (2011) 'A Skilled Workforce for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth', A G20 Training Strategy.

123 University of Sydney Business School; Graduate Career Australia where top ten skills and attributes that employers look for in prospective employees include a combination of interpersonal and communication skills (written and oral), drive and commitment/industry knowledge, critical reasoning and analytical skills/technical skills, cultural alignment/values fit, emotional intelligence (including self-awareness, confidence, motivation). http://sydney.edu.au/business/careers/students/identifying_your_skills_and_attributes.

124 For example: OECD, (2013) 'Education at a Glance'.

which they are not qualified (under qualification), in jobs that don't use all their skills (skills under-use) or in jobs for which they are not fully skilled (under-skilling).[125]

So, on the one hand, while further education and training can supply the relevant skills, they must then be effectively and appropriately deployed by employers in their workplace. On the other hand, FET needs to focus on individuals who graduate with the relevant level and quality of skills to make them 'work' ready or very close to being so, including: being able to deploy the appropriate range of higher-order analytical skills; being autonomous; able to manage their careers in an increasingly disruptive economic and business environment; and able to engage in discretionary learning to support innovative workplaces.

While many thousands of individuals have become unemployed, many employers report that they cannot find people with the skills they need.[126] A lack of workplace experience and the related skills is often cited as one of the main factors contributing to the 'skills gap'.[127] High quality workplace learning opportunities are effective in increasing labour market entry rates, in particular for young people.[128] FET work-based learning that alternates between 'on' and 'off-the-job' learning, for example apprenticeships and traineeships, as well as FET programmes incorporating a module of work experience in a company, such as PLCs and Specific Skills Training, represent an important mechanism for the FET sector to respond in a flexible way to meet the specific skill needs of companies, especially SMEs with limited financial resources.[129] The overall aim is to increase the supply of 'job ready' individuals through the further development and roll-out of effective FET work-based learning models, including new employer-led apprenticeships and traineeships, particularly in the early phase of the FET Strategy roll-out.

Ensuring that further education and training courses continue to be effective in the years ahead will require substantial investment, particularly capital investment in facilities as well as investment in the areas of standards and curriculum development and on-going up-skilling of lecturers, tutors, resource workers, trainers/instructors etc.

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125 For example: CEDEFOP, (2010) 'The skill matching challenge: Analysing skill mismatch and policy implications', European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, Luxemburg http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3056_en.pdf.

126 Accenture, (2013), 'Closing the Skills Gap in Ireland, Employers at the Heart of the Solution'.

127 European Commission (2013), Work-based Learning in Europe, practices and Policy Pointers.

128 European Commission (2013), Apprenticeship and Traineeship Schemes in EU27:Key Success Factors, A Guidebook for Policy Planners and Practitioners, December 2013.

129 Ibid.

The findings from the recent qualitative research carried out by ESRI[130] point to a need to address certain issues relating to the former FETAC Common Awards. Stakeholders reported difficulties in interpreting the published award specifications, dissatisfaction with the balance between generic skills and technical skills within programmes, and a lack of clarity regarding what the awards are intended to achieve. It was also reported that accreditation should have currency and needs to be responsive to changing labour market needs. This is supported by National Economic and Social Council (NESC)[131] research which refers to, 'a notable lack of confidence in certification by employers who find that award holders still cannot do the jobs for which they have been recruited, due to lack of skills'.

It is not just employers who lack faith in many awards, but learners also expressed dissatisfaction that awards they laboured to acquire do not win them a job.

130 ESRI, 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future', Research Series Number 35, March 2014.

131 NESC, (2013) 'A Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed'.

Section 4

Key Messages from Government Reviews and Studies

Key points in this Section

- The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) 'A Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed' in 2013 pointed out the need to prioritise long-term unemployed people in accordance with Government policy, with due regard to the needs of school leavers and those in employment and the importance of the alignment of FET with local and regional skills demand and labour market intelligence.
- The DES-led consultation process on the establishment of SOLAS in 2011/2012 emphasised social and as well economic outcomes from FET provision need to be taken into account by SOLAS.
- The recent Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland, January 2014, recommended that apprenticeships should be expanded to new business and industrial sectors. The Review Group concluded that there is significant scope to expand apprenticeships into a wide range of business sectors such as ICT, retail, hospitality, business administration, medical devices, sport and leisure programmes, childcare and social care, financial services, accounting, hairdressing, and beauty.

4.1 A Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed - National Economic and Social Council

The recent study by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) drew out a number of linked findings that questioned the capacity of ETBs to meet rapidly-changing workforce development needs, and especially the needs of long term unemployed persons. Some ETBs do not agree with this view. Nevertheless the challenges for the ETB sector are not underestimated. The review pointed out, among many others things, that:

- There is a lack of systematic and authoritative labour market intelligence on the skills needs of their local economies, in particular of the SMEs who are predominant in them.
- There is a notable lack of confidence by employers in certification who find that award holders still cannot do the jobs for which they have been recruited.
- A wide range of employers have skill needs which the FET sector can supply, in particular the exporting sectors' intermediate skill needs, but these are not as widely known by FET learners or their families.

The NESC review also points to the variable quality across the FET sector around the matching of individuals to the most suitable and meaningful education and training programme. The OECD review of vocational education and training in Ireland recommended that effective career guidance and information support consists of a combination of both career counselling and guidance, where the individual bases their choices on both their own strengths and aptitudes best aligned with labour market opportunities. It is essential that protocols and procedures are further developed and improved that enable the collaboration of ETBs and Intreo/JobPath at the local level to have maximum impact. Again according to NESC, it is the responsibility of DSP to make accurate referrals to the ETBs. ETBs can then carefully select between referred individuals for particular courses but may not 'park' them.[132]

Even if this situation improved overnight around FET provision, NESC maintains that it would not be sufficient in itself to deliver improved outcomes for learners. Among the reasons:

- There is no agreed arrangement between 'Intreo' and the Adult Education Guidance Service (AEGS) whereby the expertise of the latter is available on a priority basis for LTUs enrolling on FET.

[132] NESC, (2013), A Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed.

- The 'labour market justification' test applied to proposals for new PLC courses is cursory and the continuing labour market justification for existing courses is poorly monitored.
- The relevance of a significant proportion of SST training remains a significant concern.
- The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) has only one-in-five advancing to employment.
- Generally little is known about what the unemployed (and the 20 percent employed) use BTEI for i.e. how long they stay on it, what awards they achieve, what employment impacts the awards have, etc.[133]
- Adult Literacy programmes are allocated on a 'first come, first served' and this leads to under-representation of those with most acute needs.

4.1.1 The Main Strategies proposed in the NESC Review include:

- Prioritisation of the LTU, in accordance with Government policy, with due regard to the needs of school leavers and those in employment.
- Alignment of FET with local and regional skills demand and labour market intelligence.
- Close involvement of enterprise in the design and delivery of programmes.
- Seamless linkages between 'Intreo' offices and their local ETBs.
- High level strategic co-operation between SOLAS and 'Intreo' about the design of relevant FET provision and referral arrangements.
- Movement towards flexible provision with shorter duration, dualist delivery models incorporating extended work placements and on the job training.
- Comprehensive data collection and evaluation of all courses against appropriate metrics of progression or employment.
- Utilisation of competitive tendering and payment on results where appropriate, with ETBs becoming regional hubs for FET procurement.
- Re-organisation of provision around effective programmes using the strategic funding responsibility of SOLAS.

[133] A review of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) by DSP is planned (at the time of writing).

4.2 DES-led Consultation Process on the establishment of SOLAS

The most widely-mentioned strategies flagged by over 150 submissions to the DES-led consultation process on the establishment of SOLAS in 2011/2012 are as follows:

- SOLAS and/or ETBs should continue to encourage and facilitate the delivery of community education through community groups.
- There should be only one data bank of information on every learner, which can be accessed appropriately.
- SOLAS should consult with employers and other relevant stakeholders about the needs of the labour market.
- SOLAS should use ETBs and local centres as a network for accessing information on the needs of learners.
- SOLAS should measure outcomes that relate to personal development as well as employment outcomes.

4.3 Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland

The current apprenticeship system dates from the 1990s and is beginning to recover from the recent property crash. A recent review of the apprenticeship system (January 2014) confirmed the merits of the existing system (and identified a number of weaknesses also) and recommended that apprenticeships should be expanded to new business and industrial sectors. The Review Group concluded that there is significant scope to expand employer-led apprenticeships at both further FET and HET levels into a wide range of business sectors.[134] It is worth noting at this point that the Craft Council of Ireland have identified a range of Council-approved craft occupations (100 approximately), many of which are suited to the FET sector, that would significantly benefit from development into 'new' apprenticeships.[135]

Collaboration between education and industry will be crucial to the success of a revitalised apprenticeship system. Education will provide 'off-the-job' training while industry will identify the areas for new apprenticeships and ensure there are meaningful placements.

134 Such as ICT, retail, hospitality, business administration, medical devices, sport and leisure programmes, childcare and social care, financial services, accounting, hairdressing, and beauty care.

135 http://www.education.ie/en/PressEvents/Events/Review-of-Apprenticeship-in-Ireland/Submissions/Crafts-Council-of-Ireland.pd

The report also recommended that existing apprenticeship programmes should be reviewed and adapted over time and that the curriculum for trades should be examined and updated as a matter of urgency. In addition and where feasible, common modules should be provided across apprenticeships. Skills such as literacy, numeracy, maths, science and ICT should be integrated into courses. The findings of the apprenticeship review will be subject to further consultation led by the Department of Education and Skills. SOLAS will, in collaboration with the ETB sector, continue to develop the necessary architecture, centred on employer engagement to allow for the appropriate DESapproved recommendations arising from the apprenticeship review relating to the FET sector, to be implemented.

Close co-operation and practical interfacing between FET and HET sectors will be critically important during the life-time of this strategy. One of the most tangible examples is the current apprenticeship system, which is a jointly-delivered programme commencing for apprentices in the FET sector and progressing seamlessly into the HE sector. The current joint delivery of apprenticeship, which takes place as a partnership arrangement between FET and HET, should be maintained and strengthened where possible.

Section 5

Key Issues Emerging from the ESRI Evidence

Key points in this Section

- With regard to the nature of provision, there are substantial variations in the regional distribution of FET places.
- The extent to which provision was distributed across full-time labour market orientated programmes and those with a community emphasis also varied substantially across regions, leading to a FET sector that developed organically to serve different purposes.
- The data infrastructure around FET is weak, particularly by international standards.
- FET plays an important role in promoting social inclusion and life-long learning.
- A significant proportion of ETB provision (including ALCES and community–based education) did not lead to any form of accreditation.

5.1 Major Issues that Strategy can address with Immediate Effect

5.1.1 The Nature of Provision

The research from both the ESRI and NESC observed that FET provision has tended to grow organically over time. In particular, the ESRI research observed that there are substantial variations in the regional distribution of FET places. Furthermore, the extent to which provision was distributed across full-time labour market orientated programmes and those with a community emphasis also

varied substantially across regions.[136] The majority of stakeholders interviewed for the ESRI study felt that the way in which different parts of the FET sector had developed organically to serve different purposes had significant implications for the nature of current provision. Thus, many key stakeholders characterised the resulting landscape as being 'fragmented' and 'disjointed', with some duplication of provision across the sector. Provision was seen by many to be driven by the nature of supply 'by who's already in place' as well as by the availability of European funding. As a result, many stakeholders felt that there was 'a lack of structure and planning and coordination within the sector'.

The apparent lack of any form of centralised planning is at odds with provision in other countries and this was obvious from the international comparisons undertaken. For instance, in the Netherlands, new qualifications are developed at a national level in co-operation with employers; similarly, in Germany, programmes within school-based VET and in vocational schools are all set up with the involvement of employers. Within the UK, the Commission on Employment and Skills provides strategic leadership while Sector Skills Councils are responsible for assessing skill needs within occupations.

It is clear that the absence of overarching central direction has led to some problems with a relatively poor connection between the composition of full-time labour market orientated provision and the requirements of the labour market. The ESRI research demonstrates a number of apparent imbalances in some areas between FET generated labour supply and labour demand.

The lack of any centralised planning function also restricts the extent to which the FET sector can respond quickly to emerging labour market issues. The relatively poor synergy between FET provision and the labour market was again also borne out in the key informant interviews. Here stakeholders identified considerable scope for a greater engagement with employers in identifying skill needs, in providing work placements, and in offering an input into the composition and content of courses. Particular challenges were seen in relation to involving small and medium-sized enterprises. There was a consensus on the importance of identifying emerging skill needs, but opinion differed somewhat on whether this was more appropriate at the national, regional or local level.

In order to ensure that the FET sector better meets the requirements of both learners and employers and is simultaneously responsive to emerging policy priorities at a national level, SOLAS will lead the implementation of the following over the initial two years of the strategy:

[136] ESRI, 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future', Research Series Number 35, March 2014.

1. A review, in collaboration with ETBs, of existing FET provision to ensure that its objectives, outcomes and development processes are appropriate to current needs. The review will assess the appropriateness of provision and take account of measures of completion, accreditation and progression.
2. Devolution of responsibility to ETBs to co-ordinate and organise the provision of FET in the relevant ETB areas.
3. Installation of a new integrated FET planning model (mechanism) to ensure the relevant employment led provision (PLCs, SSTs, Traineeships, BTEI, VTOS) is informed directly by employers; that it reflects and responds to emerging labour market challenges; and that it is under-pinned by an effective system of labour market intelligence and data infrastructure.
4. The installation of a new strategic inputs/outcomes-based funding model managed by SOLAS and using measures appropriate to the FET provision in question.
5. The use of existing advisory infrastructures to facilitate the FET sector to engage directly with employers to identify employer skill needs at local, regional and national level such as HE regional clusters, DSP Labour Market Council, the EGFSN, Department of Environment social and economic councils, local ETBs employer forum etc.

5.1.2 The Data Infrastructure

The data infrastructure around FET is weak, particularly by international standards. There is 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 ESRI desk-based study of the Irish FET sector states that, “the current data collection within the FET system is wholly inadequate for the purpose of performance measurement on key indicators, such as course completion rates, accreditation levels and progression patterns”.

In that regard, a DPER-led inter-departmental group including DES and DSP are currently working to identify the necessary data systems, including current data deficiencies and linkages between DSP and DES [and Revenue] systems, to track individuals as they move between unemployment, education and training programmes, re-entry to the workforce or return to the live register, so as to enable evaluation of outcomes and relevant expenditure programmes to facilitate on-going policy development. More specifically, SOLAS has commenced initial scoping and development of a national FET programme database system, a national FET programme calendar scheduling system and a national FET learner database referred to as the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS).

The lack of a consistent data infrastructure severely hampered the ability of the desk-based research to effectively scope the nature of FET provision, with the issue also identified as a major constraint within the NESC report. The lack of an acceptable data infrastructure was also at odds with the situation in other countries; in the Netherlands, for instance, a detailed history of student academic performance is held which is then linkable to other datasets. In the Scottish FET sector, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) database contains details of the post-school qualifications taken by each learner. Concerns regarding the lack of appropriate data were also consistently raised during the key informant interviews, with many indicating their inability to assess the adequacy of current levels of course completion and progression to further study or employment.

The inconsistency and lack of data has serious implications for FET policy and practice and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Firstly, it impacts negatively on decision-making at all levels of FET (DES, teacher/trainer, provider, ETB, SOLAS). Secondly, it fails to support learners in their education and training choices since they are unable to obtain full information on the range of possible courses open to them. Thirdly, it fails to adequately support a range of policy makers who rely on FET and creates a barrier to effective evaluation. Finally, it militates against efforts by FET institutions 'on-the-ground' to align their provision with local as well as national skill needs of the economy, and works against any attempt to measure socio-economic or value-for money impacts of FET/ETBs at individual, local or national levels.[137] The FET sector will benefit from the essential data collection and evidence-based planning, based on a strong data infrastructure and effective learner tracking systems.

There are a least four pre-requisites for a 'fit for purpose' FET data infrastructure. These are:

1. A national FET programme database that is simple to navigate, is up-to-date and provides an accurate listing all of the relevant programme details such as content, certification learning outcomes etc.
2. A national FET course calendar identifying when courses are due to start and the places available.
3. A 'real time' FET learner database where a broad range of performance indicators can be used to gauge, monitor and improve the 'whole' experience of the individual FET learner, capturing the cost effectiveness of provision, the profile of learners in particular courses, rates of course completion and levels of accreditation or other metrics.

[137] For example there is significant participation by people at work (28 per cent of participants 2011) and by people outside the labour force in adult literacy programmes. It is almost certainly the case that there are significant wider social benefits (social participation, health etc.). But there are no reliable metrics to capture them. See NESC Report 'A Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed' 2013.

4. The development of follow-up surveys to identify labour market outcomes for learners across the spectrum of FET, including initial and longer-term destinations (including employment and further study), as well as the wider benefits of learning.

All of the above are especially important for the work of DSP and Intreo in referring clients, especially those who are long-term unemployed to the FET sector where course information, course capacity, and the ability to refer clients to appropriate FET programmes is essential to underpin the 'Intreo' caseload management system and implement the 'Pathways to Work' and 'Jobs Initiatives'.

5.2 Major Issues requiring Further Evidence for Strategy Development

5.2.1 Non-accredited Provision

It was clear from the ESRI research that the FET sector is seen by the vast majority of stakeholders as playing an important role in promoting social inclusion and life-long learning. From the desk-based research it was also apparent that a significant proportion of ETB provision (including the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme and other community–based education) did not lead to any form of accreditation. Information provided by Pobal for 2011 indicated that just under one third of successful enrolments were in unaccredited programmes. With respect to AONTAS (The National Adult Learning Organisation), the data suggests that 41.7% of enrolments on courses were accredited in 2012. The integrated 2014 FET Services Plan indicates that a significant proportion of FET provision may not be accredited.

While the breakdown was not available for VEC courses at the time the research was being carried out by the ESRI for data relating to 2011, approximately 5% of FÁS enrolments in 2012 were in non-accredited programmes. Interviews with stakeholders revealed important challenges for ETBs and for SOLAS in balancing the maintenance of the inclusive ethos of, for example the community education sector, with the economic ethos of vocationally-orientated provision such as PLCs and Specific Skills training. Monitoring the quality of provision and providing learners with a stepping-stone to other forms of education and training was also seen as a significant challenge. Thus, respondents had mixed views with respect to the extent to which accreditation could, or should, be introduced into all programmes; however, there was a consensus that all programmes should be measured against some form of outcome metric, but one which was closely related to their objectives.

Arising from these findings, SOLAS will sustain funding, as appropriate, for community education until such time as the information exists that will allow for the establishment of a new funding model based on appropriate metrics. This budget will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Section 6

Active Inclusion/Literacy and Numeracy

Key points in this Section

- Active inclusion means enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job.
- The FET sector will seek to increase levels of active inclusion through the provision of high-quality, more accessible and flexible education, training and skill development interventions and supports suited to the individual.
- The Further Education and Training Act 2013 provides the legislative context for the development of a strategy for the provision of FET programmes aimed at promoting, developing and encouraging literacy and numeracy.
- The specific objectives of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy include but are not limited to: a national promotional and awareness raising campaign to elicit higher levels of engagement in the national literacy programme.

6.1 Active Inclusion

In October 2008, the European Commission published formal policy guidance for Member States which advocated a three-pillar policy for 'active inclusion of persons excluded from the labour market'. Active inclusion means enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job.[138]

[138] EU Commission Recommendation of 3 October 2008 on the 'Active Inclusion of People Excluded from the Labour Market' (notified under document number C(2008) (5737) (2008/867/EC). http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1059&langId=en. Also policy orientation briefing by the

Active inclusion has three strands and, in practical terms, means:

1. Adequate income support together with help to get a job. This could be achieved by linking out-of-work and in-work benefits, and by helping people to access the benefits they are entitled to.
2. Inclusive labour markets. Making it easier for people to join the work force, tackling in-work poverty, avoiding poverty traps and disincentives to work.
3. Access to quality services. Helping people participate actively in society, including getting back to work.

The EU Commission[139] also identified a number of key findings of the PIAAC survey, to inform education and training policies which are particularly relevant for progressing active inclusion. For example, approximately 20% of the EU working age population has low literacy and low numeracy skills; high-skilled individuals are progressing well through adult learning but people with low proficiency are easily caught in a 'low skills trap' as they are less likely to participate in learning activities; around 25% of adults lack the skills to effectively make use of ICT; sustaining skills brings significant positive economic and social outcomes.

In addition, the percentage of the Irish population at risk of poverty or social exclusion is among the highest in Europe.[140] At the core of EU education and training policy is the view that access to employment is regarded as the best way out of poverty and social exclusion. Access to services such as childcare, housing, healthcare, education and life-long learning contributes to the reduction of inequality and to the fight against poverty. This is achieved by supporting people's access to the labour market and more generally by strengthening their overall resilience and participation in society. There has been an increase in the rate of 'in-work poverty' in Ireland since 2006.[141] Success of

ESF representatives on the ESF/ Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2014-2020 and ESF Article 3 in particular, arranged by DES, the ESF managing authority in Ireland, January 2014 in Dublin.

139 EU Commission, (2013) The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC): Implications for education and training policies in Europe.

140 EU Commission, (2013), EUROPE 2020 TARGETS: POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION, ACTIVE INCLUSION STRATEGIES; 'Europe 2020 in Ireland' Report. At risk is defined as living with an income below 60% of the national median income after social transfers. Percentage of population at risk is 40% in Bulgaria (47.1%), Romania (40.4%) and Latvia (40.1%), between 25% and 35% for Lithuania, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland and Spain, and below 20% for 10 Member States (Germany, France, Slovenia, Denmark, Luxembourg, Finland, Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden and the Czech Republic).

141 European Commission (2013), Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2013. 'In-work poverty' is defined as people in employment living under the poverty threshold. Reasons include wage moderation, the reduction of workinh hours of those already in employment due, in a large part, to the use of short-term working arrangements, temporary workers. It is also related to too few adults working in the household, too few hours working or working only part of the year.

active inclusion and access to employment will depend on many individuals, particularly those with lower level skills, avoiding a 'circular' move from jobless poverty to 'in-work poverty' and back again.[142]

6.1.1 Equality

It is proposed to merge the Equality Authority and the Human Rights Commission into a newly established Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.[143] Public bodies will have to have due regard, in the performance of their functions, to human rights and equality; and to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and treatment. Under this new arrangement, public bodies within the FET sector can seek assistance from the new Commission to ensure that they comply with their positive duties. Where relevant, they can work with the Commission, for example, with regard to guidelines, codes of practice, performance measures, operational standards and preventative strategies around FET policy and practice to ensure that they comply with equality legislation.

6.1.2 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning (RPL) can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility. There is a broad range of FET key stakeholders who could play an important role in RPL. These include the QQI, SOLAS, FET providers, employer organisations, individual employers, trade unions, employment services and bodies involved in and approved in recognising and certifying professional qualifications.

Under an EU Council Recommendation, Member States must have arrangements in place for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, no later than 2018[144] and under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, QQI is required to establish policies on recognition of prior learning within the policies and criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP). In addition, FET providers must subsequently establish, have approved and publish their own policies and criteria for ATP, including those for credit accumulation, credit transfer and

142 Ibid.

143 Under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill, 2014.

144 Recommendation number (2012/C 398/01) EU COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

identification, and formal assessment of the knowledge, skills or competence previously acquired by learners.[145]

Learners themselves may also apply directly to QQI for awards where they meet standards that QQI has established and in this regard QQI may request the assistance of providers to assess learners' prior learning for the purposes of making awards. According to QQI, there is a market gap for providing RPL services.[146] It is clear that there is a need for a coherent and co-ordinated national strategy to provide direction to the FET sector on best practice RPL and associated processes. Even with a national strategy in place, it should be noted that RPL is complex and challenging to implement with additional investment likely to be required. In addition, implementing a meaningful RPL system that will apply across all FET provision including community education will require a strong collaborative approach led by QQI with all of the main FET stakeholders including SOLAS and the ETB sector.

6.1.3 Low Quality Employment

The impact of the recent financial crisis can be seen in the doubling of the numbers of people living in households without any income from work in Ireland (as well as Greece and Spain). Poorer households have lost greater shares of their incomes than the better-off or benefited less in the recovery – particularly in Ireland (as well as Italy and Spain) and young people in Ireland are now at a greater risk of poverty than before the crisis.[147] Another group that has emerged in recent times are those who are working and at risk of poverty, the so-called 'working poor'. There are many definitions of 'working poor'[148] and the concepts of 'at risk of poverty' and 'working poor' are complex and multifaceted. Definitions of 'working poor' can more generally be summarised as a situation where an employed person lives in a poor household.[149] It is this latter understanding that

145 QQI, (2013), Green Paper on the Recognition of Prior Learning and taking account national circumstances and specificities.

146 Ibid.

147 OECD (2014), Society at a Glance.

148 'Living on an income which is less than the official poverty line' (Nevin Economic Research Institute, Quarterly Economic Facts - Spring 2013; Working and living below the poverty line: 'The Working Poor'. 'The proportion of employed persons living below the poverty line' OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms. 'Individuals who are employed but who fall below an accepted poverty line'. ILO, 'Poverty, income distribution and the working poor indicator. 'In-work poverty is an indicator that focuses on those at work, either full-time or part time, and asks whether they are in households with incomes below the 60% poverty threshold' Department of Social Protection and ESRI (2012), Social Inclusion Report No. 3, Work and Poverty in Ireland: An Analysis of the CSO Survey on Income and, Living Conditions 2004-2010.

149 COPE Research/EU Commission, (2012), In-work Poverty in Europe - Extent, Structure and Causal Mechanisms, Oldenburgh University, Germany. It is the distinction and interplay between

is used in the context of the FET Strategy, whereby FET can provide access to the skills necessary to improve the quality of employment and remuneration open to the individual, and thereby promote social mobility objectives that lie at the core of the Europe 2020 Strategy.[150]

In the EU in 2010, almost 6% of all full-time employed persons lived in households with a disposable income below the poverty threshold, indicating that employment alone is no longer a sufficient guarantee for preventing poverty. 'In-work' poverty in Ireland appears to range from 6% of all the workers in the Republic of Ireland,[151] or 8% of the working population aged 18 to 59.[152] 'In-work poor' in 2010, still differed from the typical worker in as much as working poor were much more likely to be self-employed or farmers (44 per cent) and this percentage had increased since 2004 (from 27 per cent).[153] A 2008 study showed that over half of Irish workers 'at risk of poverty' worked in the services industry in low-skilled jobs or poorly paid manual jobs.[154] In addition, those with a lower secondary education or below were more likely to be 'working poor'. The report calls for a twin-track approach on the link between education and poverty i.e. to support young adults to stay in education (and training); and to provide appropriate training and educational supports for low-skilled workers.[155] The Strategy endorses this dual approach.

A new strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training[156] up until 2020, attempts to support Member States in further developing their educational and training systems to enable citizens to realise their potential, as well as ensure sustainable economic prosperity and employability. The framework takes into consideration the whole spectrum of education and training systems from a lifelong learning perspective, covering all levels and contexts including non-formal and informal learning. There are four strategic objectives for the framework, making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship to enable all citizens to acquire and develop skills and

individual characteristics and the household context that is crucial for understanding the concept, causes of in-work poverty and the strategies that may work to address it.

150 The European Union's ten-year growth strategy.

151 Nevin Economic Research Institute, (2013), Quarterly Economic Facts - Spring 2013; Working and living below the poverty line: 'The Working Poor'.

152 Department of Social Protection and ESRI (2012), Social Inclusion Report No. 3, Work and Poverty in Ireland: An Analysis of the CSO Survey on Income and, Living Conditions 2004-2010.

153 Ibid.

154 Combat Poverty Agency (2008), The Working Poor in Ireland: An Analysis of EU-SILC 2005.

155 Described in the National Skills Strategy (2007), as…'low-skilled…their highest level of educational attainment below upper secondary level…[and]…those at the lower skill levels i.e. those with below Level 5 qualifications'.

156 "Education and Training 2020" (ET 2020), a new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training that builds on its predecessor, the "Education and Training 2010" (ET 2010) work programme.

competence needed for their employability and foster further learning; enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

The FET sector will continue to progress and build on active inclusion through the provision of high quality accessible and flexible education, training and skill development interventions and supports suited to the individual. More specifically, community education is aimed at individuals who are distant from education, training and the labour market, and is generally developed in local community projects and centres.[157]

6.1.4 Community Education

Community education is a critical access point for many adults who left school early and/or who have personal, familial or communal experience of socio-economic exclusion. It facilitates many people to participate and work in their local communities. It forms one of the pillars of FET to progress active inclusion because among other things, it enables individuals to develop new personal skills and knowledge as well as empower them to identify actions needed to address a range of issues relating to their wellbeing. Therefore, it is important that the community education sector continues to be supported in its work and that it can clearly demonstrate the benefits, outcomes and progression options for learners. Clear access and progression routes from this provision to other FET and to higher education will need to be developed.

A recent literature review[158] of European, UK and Irish community education policy, research and practice, demonstrates that community education does not reject the current economic reality but empowers people to grow in confidence in their own employability and engage with the labour market. Community education can provide a vital link for unemployed persons who do not have qualifications on the pathway to future work. As with the question of embedding literacy and numeracy across all FET provision that we highlight below, there is need to gather a more robust evidence base on what works best in the field of community education, particularly in relation to employability, labour market activation and active citizenship.

The incorporation of a literacy and numeracy strategy within the FET Strategy underpins active inclusion more generally as a strategic objective for the FET sector, while more particularly it assists

[157] AONTAS, 'What is Community Education?' http://www.aontas.com/whatnext/7/community-education/

[158] CEFA, (2014), Community Education and the Labour Activation Challenge; A Literature Review on Community Education in a Context of Labour Market Activation, Employability and Active Citizenship in Ireland and the EU.

thousands of individuals to progress their personal, career and employment aspirations. The success of community education and the literacy and numeracy strategy to deliver these outcomes for many individuals will be one of the best ways to judge the overall success of the FET Strategy.

6.1.5 Disability Strategy

The National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan (2013-2015) includes a high level goal which is centred on maximising the potential of people with disabilities. More specifically the goal states that, "people with disabilities get the education and training that enables them to reach their potential". Action items and outcomes arising from this goal include: persons with disabilities benefit from relevant training and education that enable their progression to employment opportunities; ensuring provision of vocational education for people with disabilities by the ETBs; and participation by persons with disabilities in education programmes. In order to facilitate the realisation of this goal, SOLAS, through the annual business planning process with the ETB sector and in conjunction with DES, DSP/Intreo and the disability sector, will agree FET targets and associated supports for people with disabilities participating in FET.

6.2 Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

In 1973, higher standards of literacy were identified as a requirement 'if one is to function satisfactorily in work and everyday life'.[159] In the same year, the 'Adult Education in Ireland Report' was published, referred to as the 'Murphy Report'. It was the first official acknowledgement of an adult literacy problem in Ireland[160] when the Commission[161] identified 22 points necessary to develop adult education in Ireland, including the need for a special report on how to address the needs of adults with low literacy. The report had little impact. In 1974, the Archdiocese of Dublin established the first adult literacy service in its Dublin Institute of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning. In 1980 the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) was established.[162] At that time literacy and numeracy issues were not regarded as being a priority, rather a 'dis-quietening phenomenon' within education

[159] Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick's College, (1973), The Irish Journal of Education: Iris Eireannach an Oideachais, Volumes 7-14, p6.

[160] National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (2006), 'Review of Adult Learning and Literacy', Volume 6, Connecting, Research, Policy and Practice, Taylor and Francis e-Library.

[161] Established by the Government and chaired by Mr. Con Murphy, Rights Commissioner in the Labour Court.

[162] As a result of a recommendation by an AONTAS sub-committee on adult literacy to establish a separate body to focus exclusively on adult literacy.

more generally, with 'indications of public concern' around literacy and numeracy.[163] In 1983, the Government established a Commission[164] on adult education. The 'Kenny Report' *Lifelong Learning* was the first State report to have lifelong learning as a central theme, including the needs of adults with basic education needs. Again, this report had little impact.

The International Adult Literacy Survey conducted in 1995 and published in 1997 by the OECD, found that one in four Irish adults had problems with the simplest of literacy tasks.[165] Subsequently, adult literacy was first enshrined in government policy with the publication of the White Paper on Adult Education in 2000 and this envisaged a central role for community education in meeting the needs of the most marginalised communities and individuals.[166] The report identified a need for an expansion of the adult literacy service.

In 2013, DES published its review of adult literacy provision. The VEC Adult Literacy programme had never been reviewed. The objectives of the review were, among other things, to respond to: commitments made in the Programme for Government; recommendations by an Oireachtas Joint Committee; calls from stakeholders for a review; to serve as a basis for future policy decisions that might be made by SOLAS. The report set out 32 recommendations to improve adult literacy provision. The Literacy and Numeracy strategy set out below is informed by these recommendations and the recommendations of the NESC report[167] with regard to adult literacy and employees at high risk of unemployment and unemployed jobseekers.

Later in 2013, the Government enshrined an adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy as part of the FET Strategy to be developed by SOLAS, in the Further Education and Training Act.

It is important to acknowledge at the outset the many individuals and organisations that have contributed considerably to adult literacy work in Ireland. In 2014, an estimated 46,000 adults will attend ETB adult literacy courses nationwide delivered by approximately 1,500 paid tutors and around 4,000 volunteers. Literacy and numeracy support are also offered as part of the former FÁS funded CTCs, in Specialist Training Centres and Local Training Initiatives. It is also important to acknowledge the important work and central role of NALA in promoting and developing adult literacy and numeracy provision.

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163 White Paper on Educational Development: Laid by the Government Before Each House of the Oireachtas, December 1980 p31, p48.

164 Chaired by Ivor Kenny of the IMI, Dublin.

165 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS).

166 Department of Education and Science, (2000), 'White Paper on Adult Education', p118.

167 NESC (2013), Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed.

The DES Operational Guidelines[168] define literacy as, 'the provision of basic education, including reading, writing and numeracy skills, and ICT for adults who wish to improve their literacy and numeracy competencies to enhance their participation in personal, social and economic life'. NALA defines literacy as involving listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information which increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change.[169] Literacy is not just an end in itself but is regarded as a means to other goals, for example, national economic well-being.[170] The attainment of literacy and numeracy is held to be fundamental to personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability, by enhancing participation in personal, social and economic life.

Results from PIAAC 2012 study indicate that levels of literacy and numeracy among the adult population in Ireland are below the average for countries included in the study. As might be expected, there is a clear and strong relationship between literacy levels and levels of educational attainment, with the lowest literacy scores among those with primary education only. At the same time, over a tenth of those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education fall into the group whose literacy skills are at Level 1 or below.

Current DES policy states that adult literacy programmes should be primarily focussed on learning outcomes at NFQ Levels 1-3. The DES review of adult literacy provision published in 2013 highlighted the lack of tutor hours devoted to numeracy, intensive literacy and family literacy.[171] The integration of basic skills, in particular literacy, into all publicly funded education and training provision, insofar as is possible, is Irish Government policy and has been recommended in a number of strategy documents, including the National Skills Strategy. The SOLAS FET strategy agrees with this approach and proposes that literacy and numeracy support should be integrated or embedded in FET programmes, as appropriate. However, according to the ESRI, a sufficiently robust and extensive evidence base does not currently exist to inform how literacy and numeracy education can and should be embedded across all levels of FET provision and different types of programme.

Arising from the above findings, SOLAS will sustain funding, as appropriate, for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy provision until a sufficiently robust evidence base exists that will allow for more

168 DES (2013), Adult Literacy Programme: Operational Guidelines for Providers. Dublin: DES.

169 A Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policies, Prepared for NALA by the NRDC, Institute Of Education, London. March 2011.

170 National Literacy Campaigns, historical and comparative perspectives, Arnoff, R., Graff, H., Plenum Press, New York 10987.

171 DES (2012). Adult Literacy Review. Dublin: DES.

informed decision-making with regard to the type of FET provision where embedding of literacy and numeracy education is the more appropriate and effective option. Additional funding may be required where embedding of literacy and numeracy is deemed appropriate. The budget therefore will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The elements of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy are:

1. Initiate a national promotional and awareness-raising campaign to elicit higher levels of engagement in the national literacy programme. The campaign could include publicity events, awareness-raising through social and other media, and other promotional events aimed at the adult population (over 18) planned and commissioned in 2014 with a view to launch by mid-2015 and establish a national steering committee hosted by SOLAS and including NALA, AONTAS, ETBI, ETBs, DES, DSP, IBEC, ISME, Skillnets, BIM, Teagasc, Failte Ireland, learners etc.
2. Encourage increased participation and completion and attainment of major awards at Levels 1, 2 and 3 with regard to priority target groups in alignment with the existing National Skills Strategy (or with a new National Skills Strategy when published).
3. Broaden access routes and range of provision, including distance and blended learning.
4. Target better outcomes through accredited provision.
5. Develop and enhance availability of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and establish a working group to examine the Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs on RPL and to make recommendations for action (QQI, ETBI, DES, Skillnets, IBEC, NALA, AONTAS, learners etc.).
6. Facilitate literacy provision for personal, family, social and community contexts and provide continued funding for non-accredited group provision with emphasis on the recruitment of specific priority target groups.
7. Prioritise numeracy more strongly and increase the amount of numeracy provision offered as integrated and standalone options.
8. Focus on data collection and analysis with intensive feedback to providers to support evaluation and programme review. Data relating to educational and literacy levels on entry of participants should be correlated to provide a more complete picture of the Adult Literacy cohort.
9. Provide clear policy for ESOL provision with priority to low-skilled and unemployed migrants. Assess language competency level on entry of ESOL learners to ETB provision.
10. Develop more reliable and fit-for-purpose screening and assessment systems by conducting research to identify and develop effective screening and assessment instruments to systematically identify the literacy and numeracy problems of those who come into contact with training.

11. Support staff through CPD and review existing CPD structures and conduct audit of appropriate skills within ETB sector relating to literacy and numeracy (in context of wider CPD strategic plan for FET staff).
12. Identify and develop priority research areas with a focus on improving literacy and numeracy practice, in particular by conducting robust research into the practice and impact of integrating literacy and numeracy into all FET programmes at various levels and various settings in order to identify and disseminate best practice in that regard.

Section 7

Employee Development and Enterpreneurship

Key points in this Section

- For many workers, the workplace represents the only or most viable location to learn and/or develop their vocational practice.
- More than 'once-off' engagement in initial learning, or perfunctory participation in work practices, is increasingly becoming an essential requirement to maintain competence.
- The importance of continued employee development was something that was continually emphasised both in the key informant interviews carried out by the ESRI and the SOLAS workshops.
- Recognition of employee learning needs requires further research and development.
- FET needs to provide programmes to assist people to start and sustain their own business.

7.1 Employee Development

Much of Ireland's future growth must come from improved productivity of those already at work and those entering the workforce. Thus, there now needs to be an increased focus on the skills of those at work. Higher levels of productivity improvements across the whole economy will be essential. This, in turn, requires higher levels of education and skills, on-going lifelong learning and up-skilling, and higher levels of workforce participation. For many workers, the workplace represents the only or

most viable location to learn and/or develop their vocational practice.[172] More than 'once-off' engagement in initial learning, or perfunctory participation in work practices, is increasingly becoming an on-going requirement to maintain competence.

Time and again during the consultation workshops, Skillnets was highlighted as an example of an effective model of workforce development. Working with around 10,000 companies and co-investing €13m in addition to €10.9m from employers for 37,000 employees and 7,000 jobseekers, Skillnets adopts an enterprise-led model to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of its support for both employees and jobseekers. Its programmes are recognised by industry as flexible, effective and industry-specific and are conducted in partnership with Irish companies. An independent report[173] published in 2012, has endorsed the added value of Skillnets approach to training.

The importance of continued employee development was also something that was continually emphasised in the key informant interviews carried out by the ESRI. The current recession was seen as shifting attention away from the need for up-skilling, particularly in 'certain sectors which change all the time and are quite vulnerable'.

Consequently, the Strategy acknowledges that working and learning are interdependent and that workplace learning is a critical element in the state's overall skills strategy. The concept of learning at work has gained increased attention among policy makers and researchers in more recent years.[174] In general, employees at all levels report that significant learning occurs outside of the classroom setting and, in particular, from the challenges of work itself. Learning is not something that always requires time out from being engaged in productivity.[175] While education and working were traditionally regarded as separate entities, there is a need to strive for increased productivity combined with on-going education and learning. This requires a shift in attitude.[176] To this end, further research is warranted on formal recognition of workplace-learning and how it can be embedded in the FET system. In addition, there is a need to develop a suitable framework to

172 Billett, S. (2004) 'Workplace participatory practices: Conceptualising workplaces as learning environments', Journal of Workplace Learning vol. 16, no. 6 pp: 312-324.

173 Indecon, (2013) 'Evaluation of Skillnets TNP and Finuas Network Programmes – 2012'.

174 Billet, S. (2001) 'Learning in the Workplace: Strategies for effective practice'. See also Billet, S. (2004) 'Workplace participatory practices: Conceptualising workplaces as learning environments', The Journal of Workplace Learning, vol. 16, no. 6, pp: 312-324.

175 European Commission (2001) 'Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning, Communication from the Commission',COM, (2001) 678 Final (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities).

176 Pillay, H.; Boulton-Lewis, G.; Wilss, L. and Lankshear, C. (2003) 'Conceptions of work and learning at work: impressions from older workers', Studies in Continuing Education, vol. 25, no. 1, pp: 95-111.

understand and assess the quality of learning environments in the workplace as well as the incidence and type of FET-related education and training taking place in workplaces. The FET sector, through evidence-based data and intelligence, should identify evolving employee skill needs and monitor these changing needs.

The FET sector, including ETBs, SOLAS and DES, must provide leadership by providing or funding training and education, expertise and information for those at work with the objective of increasing overall investment in further education and training of the employed and to address identified gaps. The enterprise-led model of Skillnets is instructive in this regard.

The sector must actively promote the benefits of FET with employers and employees and assist, where appropriate, with the development and/or implementation of appropriate HR strategies for small to medium sized businesses in particular.

In this way, the groundwork will be in place to devise a credible FET Employee Development Strategy in conjunction with employers, providers, the IDA and EI that will:

- Identify the opportunities, barriers and solutions to employer engagement with FET providers for the purposes of acquiring training for their existing workforce or potential workforce.
- Provide or fund timely further education and training, as appropriate, to address identified skill needs.
- Focus on how the FET sector can assist existing companies or companies considering locating in Ireland better identify and meet their FET skill needs.
- Support targeted interventions to up-skill SME management and the employed, particularly those with low-level skills and older workers, so that they will have portable skills that are nationally-certified.
- Provide cost effective and accessible mechanisms that help individual employees gain new skills and qualifications.

7.2 Recognition of Workplace Learning

According to the National Qualifications Authority (2001) now QQI, recognition of prior and experiential learning refers to learning that may have been achieved on a non-formal basis, or perhaps in the workplace. The National Framework of Qualifications supports the further development of prior learning recognition as a broad concept that can enable entry to a training or education programme, credit towards an award, or even eligibility for a full award without participating in a formal training or education programme (NQAI 2001). In order to advance this

concept, further new conceptualisations of RPL will need to be devised by QQI in collaboration with the FET sector taking account of best practice in that regard. See also section 6.1.2.

7.3 Entrepreneurship and Self-employment Training

Government ambition is for Ireland to be among the most entrepreneurial nations in the world and acknowledged as a world-class environment in which to start and grow a business.[177] Given the unemployment challenge that Ireland is currently facing, growing the number of entrepreneurs and start-ups is hugely important for Ireland's economic development. As part of the Action Plan for Jobs, Government therefore aims to build the pipeline of entrepreneurs by increasing the numbers of those who will be actively engaged in creating business start-ups and employment across the country. In addition, it also aims to build capability by developing the requisite skills among the general population to nurture entrepreneurial thinking and talent.

The National Skills Strategy and other reports have also pointed to the importance of skills for enterprise development. These are the skills which are viewed as the basis for the survival, growth and success of enterprises in the knowledge economy. Encouraging and promoting an enterprise culture is also an important area of activity for the CEBs (City and County Enterprise Boards).[178] The CEBs have strategically focussed much of their endeavour in the field of entrepreneurship development on the education sector as a critical element in the future development of small business in Ireland.

It is acknowledged that the range of skills and knowledge needed by aspiring entrepreneurs can be quite challenging as they try to get started in business. The FET sector and ETBs will continue to play their part in providing relevant training and education programmes. This will require collaboration with other relevant bodies (such as Pobal, Skillnets, LEOs etc.) as a means of co-ordinating provision and furthering government aims of building entrepreneurial capability. It is noted that Business Appraisal and Start Your Own Business courses are already part of the existing ETB provision throughout the country.

177 'Action Plan for Jobs', 2014.

178 The local Government Reform Act 2014 makes provisions relating to community development in the context of local government, involving the establishment of Local Community Development Committees in place of the City and County Development Boards.

Section 8

Progression for FET Graduates to Higher Education

Key points in this Section

- Exploratory data matching (QQI, 2013) indicated that at least 18% of FETAC major award-holders in 2009 went on to higher education, with a further 21% taking another FETAC qualification.
- The HEA proposes setting a new target for students progressing from further education, planning to make up 6.6% of the entrant cohort in 2014 and 10% by 2016.
- It is important that SOLAS/ETBI and the ETB sector take advantage of existing cluster structures and proposed Technological Universities to deliver an increasing number of more seamless progression pathways to HE and to identify employer skill needs at local and regional level.

Levels from further to higher education in Ireland have increased significantly in recent years. The vast majority of this group enter courses in the Institutes of Technology, however an increasing proportion are entering courses in the universities and other institutions.[179] Key measures to increase movement between FET and other forms of education and training are the availability of the data infrastructure to accurately track learner pathways. Exploratory data-matching indicated that at least 18% of FETAC major award-holders in 2009 went on to higher education, with a further 21% taking another FETAC qualification.[180] In September 2010, a HEA Taskforce on access courses finalised new

[179] European Access Network Newsletter Spring 2009, 'Trends in Progression from Further to Higher Education: The Irish Experience', HEA, Ireland. See also the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013, HEA. Also the ESRI, 'Leaving School in Ireland Study' due for publication will provide further insights into post-school experiences of a cohort of young people who left school in 2007/2008.

[180] QQI, (2013) 'Where do FETAC (QQI) award holders go?'

policy advice which recommended that new, enhanced partnership agreements should be developed between further and higher education providers on access provision and on routes of progression from further to higher education.

QQI has a key role to play if better progression routes from FET to HET are to become a reality. The 2012 Qualifications Act defines Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) for movement into and between programmes of education and training with recognition for knowledge, skill and competence previously acquired. A general function of QQI in the opening to the legislation, Part 2 Section 9 (g), is to determine policies and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners and monitor the implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners by providers. QQI therefore sets the basis for ATP; approves/facilitates and advises (depending on the type of provider) the provider's ATP procedures; and monitors and reviews effectiveness of implementation of those procedures.

More general routes of access from further to higher education were assessed in 2009; a study completed by the National Access Office showed that at least 3,000 students progressed in the previous year to higher education via routes such as the Higher Education Links Scheme, the Pilot Scheme for institutes of technology, and through other informal routes agreed between local further and higher education providers.[181] The HEA proposes setting a new target for students progressing from further education, planning to make up 6.6% of the entrant cohort in 2014 and 10% by 2016. Since 2013, a new scoring system has been in place for further education learners to apply through the CAO for higher education places.

Regional HE clusters have been established as part of the reform work in higher education. There are two priorities set out for the clusters: in the first instance, to develop new pathways to and within higher education and co-ordinated academic planning within HE. It will benefit both FET and HET sectors to ensure clear and strong joining-up of strategy and actions so that further and higher education are perceived in principle and in practice as a coherent, complementary and well-functioning part of the Irish education framework.

At the recent HEA first round of strategic dialogue, which included meetings with cluster groups as well as individual higher education institutions (HEIs), new liaison work between the HEIs and ETBs was evident, building on existing pathways and links. To further support this work, it is planned that the HEA will develop guidance for the HEIs on what would constitute appropriate pathways and

[181] Europena Access Network Newsletter Spring 2009, 'Trends in Progression from Further to Higher Education: The Irish Experience', HEA, Ireland.

address the real challenges that have been there for some time. It is important that SOLAS/ETBI and the ETB sector works closely with the HEA and QQI to take advantage of existing structures to, inter alia, deliver more seamless progression pathways for FET graduates and to learn at first hand from employers what their FET skills are and the effectiveness and relevance of FET programmes.

In addition to the progression from FET to higher education it is important to note that a significant number of people with a higher education qualification access and benefit from FET upskilling and reskilling options. For example, around half of the individuals who were referred to FÁS training programmes by DSP in 2012 had a Leaving Certificate or higher education qualification. Of the circa 12,000 people who took part in eCollege programmes in 2013, 33% had a higher education qualification.

Section 9

Qualifications and Professional Development for Staff involved in FET

Key points in this Section

- International research indicates that high-quality initial and continuing education for staff involved in direct provision of FET is essential to fostering better learner outcomes.
- Interviews with stakeholders point to the specific CPD needs of the sector as a whole, including those engaged directly in the provision of FET programmes.
- SOLAS intends, in partnership with the ETBI and ETBs, to systematically collect data around the current qualification and skills profile of FET staff with a view to developing and implementing an effective CPD strategy.

The Further Education and Training Act 2014, Section 7 (k), states that SOLAS will provide or assist in the provision of training to persons charged with the delivery of further education and training programmes. The SOLAS Action Plan also called for standards around staff qualifications in the FET sector.

Research consistently demonstrates that teaching quality is the greatest in-school influence on student engagement and outcomes.[182] There is now also a general agreement about effective teaching practices, as identified by major international studies. The following teacher practices and attributes have been consistently highlighted:

- Monitoring and feedback.

[182] Barber, M. and Mourshed, M. (2007) 'How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top'. See also OECD, (2009) 'Evaluating and rewarding the quality of teachers: International practices'.

- Strong subject knowledge.
- Explicit teaching techniques.[183]

However, there has been little data on the profile of those staff engaged directly in the delivery of further education and training in Ireland. Interviews with stakeholders point to the specific needs of the sector that seeks to marry pedagogical skills with up-to-date industry-relevant expertise. International research indicates that high quality initial and continuing teacher education is essential to fostering better learner outcomes.[184] SOLAS intends to ensure that information on the current qualification and skills profile of FET staff is collated with a view to assessing CPD[185] needs of the sector which in turn will inform the development of a CPD strategy for the sector.

A new requirement of the Teaching Council is for mandatory qualifications[186] for teachers involved in the direct provision of FET.[187] There are ten courses currently accredited by the Teaching Council aimed at teachers within the FET sector.

There are a number of dimensions to qualifying and up-skilling FET tutors namely, subject specific (vocational) competence, pedagogical competence and the potential barriers to deploying teaching/training resources to meet business needs. A further complication is that while teachers at every level need to have their pedagogical competence regularly updated via appropriate continuous professional development (CPD) programmes, FET tutors must ensure that their vocational competence is regularly upgraded, as it is their responsibility to prepare learners for current and emerging skill needs. ETBI are of the view that those with the vocational competence relevant to delivering FET programmes may not necessarily have a degree, nor may a degree be relevant to

183 New South Wales Government, (2013) 'Great Teaching, Inspired Learning, What does the evidence tell us about effective teaching?' Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, Education & Communities Office of Education.

184 European Commission, Education and Training, (2013), 'Supporting teacher competence development for better learning outcomes'. See also the Economic and Social Research Council, (2008) 'Challenge and change in further education'.

185 Continuous Professional Development relating to FET.

186 An approved teacher education qualification plus meeting degree qualification requirements. See Further Education: General and Programme Requirements for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Qualifications, 2011, p7, (the accreditation of programmes of initial teacher education (further education) submitted to the Council in accordance with Section 38(1) of the Teaching Council Act, 2001, and Regulation Five (Further Education of the Teaching Council (Registration) Regulations 2009.

187 The paymaster will be prohibited by law from paying any person who is employed as a teacher in a recognised school unless he/she is registered with the Teaching Council. Section 30 does not apply to a person who is employed as a teacher in a centre for education or other education or training setting.

delivering such programmes effectively.[188] With regard to staff deployment, the Section 30 requirement may have the potential to curtail flexibility within the different ETB environments, some of which may or may not require staff to be qualified under Section 30.

Those involved in the facilitation of learning operate in different environments and it is essential to ensure the establishment of a clear and consistent professional and competency skill roadmap for those entering into and those involved in the FET sector in its broadest sense for example, former FÁS instructors and private trainers.[189] A focus needs to be placed on training competency in subject matter areas and an appropriate pedagogical approach in the delivery of training to various cohorts, i.e. a standard professional qualification and CPD requirement for those employed in the FET sector.

188 O'Mahony, P. (2013) 'Quality Assuring the Delivery of Further Education and Training: Looking Beyond Section 30', ETBI Education Research Officer, ETBI News, Winter 2013. Also, IITD representatives in discussion with SOLAS.

189 Ibid.

Section 10

Guidance and FET

Key points in this Section

- Guidance and counselling policy at EU and national level, as well as the practice in the FET sector, were included in the process.
- The need for an integrated FET guidance approach was frequently mentioned during the consultation process. The referral process needs to be improved.
- Submissions received as part of the FET consultation process call for a FET guidance service that builds on current AEGI integrated guidance counselling aims.
- The proposed building blocks of an integrated guidance strategy for the FET sector complete this section.

Guidance takes different forms across the breadth of FET provision.[190] Learners generally access courses and services through self-referral or having been referred to courses and services through Intreo/DSP. For example with regard to PLCs, school leavers or adults generally choose the course and apply directly by letter or on-line to the school or college offering that course. In some instances they will be called for an interview before final selection.

With regard to apprenticeship, the person must first obtain employment as an apprentice in their chosen trade. The employer must be approved to train apprentices and must register the person with SOLAS as an apprentice within two weeks of recruitment. The registered apprentice is then called for training by SOLAS.

With regard to Intreo, potential learners who are unemployed and on the live register and who would benefit from further education or training are referred to waiting lists for ETB/SOLAS courses through

[190] Guidance, counselling and information services incorporating learning options, career options, employment and progression options in the context of matching the right person to the right opportunity.

a course recruitment system. Individuals can then be called for an interview to establish suitability for the course.

Both the research and the consultation process clearly indicated that the nature and quality of guidance provision appear to vary across the different access points into the FET sector. The need for an integrated FET Guidance approach was frequently mentioned during the consultation process. The aim of an integrated model of guidance for the FET sector should build on practice currently in operation within the AEGI services including development of national referral protocols between Adult Guidance Services and 'Intreo' and other national agencies e.g. HSE, disability services etc.

For PLC courses provided in FE colleges or secondlevel schools, ex-quota guidance provision was previously allocated on the basis of number of students. However, these schools and colleges are now expected to meet needs within the existing quota of teaching staff. Participants in second-chance education fall under the remit of the Adult Guidance Service established by the DES in 2000. Individuals referred by 'Intreo' or 'Jobpath' to training courses, (formerly provided by FÁS and now under the ETB remit), have an opportunity to access adult guidance on an individual and group basis.

The National Guidance Forum (2007) proposed a lifelong guidance framework which covered the spectrum of learner needs. However, an evidence base is needed on the role of guidance in FET, which should include: research on potential variation in access to formal and informal guidance across different parts of the sector; the role of guidance in matching learners to courses (especially, but not limited to, the 'Intreo'/'Jobpath' process); the role of guidance in progression to employment and further study; guidance to second level students about further education options, and the role of guidance to assist employees to up-skill and re-skill.

In addition to the research, a number of policy documents/EU council recommendations can inform an integrated guidance strategy for FET.[191] In addition to these documents, the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) is currently supporting EU Member States to test at national level the Guidance Frameworks for Quality Assurance and evidence-based practice and the development

[191] The EU Council Resolution 2008 on better integration of lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies; EU Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee to ensure that young people have full access to information about the services and support available; 'EU Commission document Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes refers to the importance of career guidance in contributing to the reduction of numbers of low skilled adults; Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020"), to promote adult learning, to increase the quality of guidance systems, and the need to complete the process of implementation of national lifelong learning strategies, paying particular attention to the validation of non-formal and informal learning and guidance.

of career management skills.[192] Ireland is currently participating in this process and the findings can add to our understanding of what works best.

From submissions received as part of the FET consultation process, a FET Guidance Service ought build on current AEGI integrated guidance counselling aims; *to offer a guidance service to adults and young people over the age of 16 who have left post primary school early, which includes impartial adult education information, one-to-one guidance and group guidance, which will help people to make informed educational, career and life choices.* The building blocks of an integrated guidance strategy for the FET sector should include:

1. Development of national referral protocols between Adult Guidance Services and DSP and other national agencies – HSE, disability services etc.
2. Widening of the remit of the Adult Educational Guidance Services to become the Adult Guidance and Information Services for the FET sector and general public, providing quality impartial education and career/vocational information and quality guidance provision through one-to-one guidance, group guidance and outreach provision.
3. The Adult Guidance Service would develop and ensure collaboration with PLC-based guidance provision, and will include those guidance counsellors who are currently working within and across other ETB programmes.
4. All guidance staff employed by ETBs, outside of the current AEGI and PLC structure, would be linked to the adult guidance service to ensure quality assurance of service, reporting mechanisms and access to national supports and continuous professional development programmes.
5. Implementation of a national quality assurance system for the guidance services based on national and EU good practice and guidelines.
6. A national advisory committee of representatives from DES/SOLAS/NCGE/ETBI and other relevant stakeholders to ensure a national approach to the guidance provision within the FET sector.

[192] http://ktl.jyu.fi/img/portal/23229/ELGPN_resource_kit_2011-12_web.pdf?cs=1350649791

Section 11

Funding

Key points in this Section

- In 2014, the Department of Education and Skills will provide €826m to support further education and training provision, €64m will be funded through SOLAS.
- A significant amount of state funding of further education and training has tended, in many instances, to be determined more by legacy formulae than by evidence-based needs.
- Continuing to offer more or less the same course profile from one year to the next is not appropriate.
- There is broad consensus that the current funding model around FET needs to change.
- The aim is to replace current funding arrangements for all FET provision and replace it on a phased basis with a "strategic input/outcomes-based" funding model. In this new approach, elements of the funding to providers are weighted in accordance with the type of provision and a range of strategic, economic and social inclusion performance indicators.
- FET requires a capital budget for maintenance and upgrading of education and training facilities/estates.

11.1 Funding

FÁS received funding under the Department of Education and Skills exchequer vote, the National Training Fund and the European Social Fund which was channelled to FÁS. A small amount of other income completed the total funding. Expenditure was incurred by FÁS directly in the training centres, on contracted out training and funding for community groups.

VECs were funded by the exchequer directly from the Department of Education and Skills. The Department monitored aggregate budgets tightly, but left the composition of course provision largely to the individual VECs.[193] This funding was used for delivering programmes, the staffing and maintenance of buildings, and for management, administration and support services.

SOLAS is funded from the same sources as described above for FÁS. Expenditure during the 2014 transition phase will include training centre costs run by SOLAS in the first half of the year, and contracted-out costs and the grant aid of those costs in the second half of the year after the transfer to the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). It will also include the grant aid of ETBs and non ETBs for Further Education. From 2015, the expenditure by SOLAS will fund places for FET through ETBs, excluding the teacher pay element of the PLC programme. Funding will consist primarily of grant aid for further education and training, with direct expenditure arising on some programmes being managed by SOLAS together with the administration costs of SOLAS. The FET sector will require a dedicated capital budget to maintain and progress FET over the life-time of the Strategy and to ensure improvements to (or construction of) facilities or to purchase new (or improve existing) campus and training centre equipment and infrastructures, including networks, other information technology investments and for capital maintenance to keep facilities/estates in good repair.

In 2014, the Department of Education and Skills will provide €826m to support further education and training provision, €640m will be funded through SOLAS, primarily to fund FET provision by the ETBs. A proportion of this budget will be allocated to support CPD and professional associations for example the Adult Literacy Organisers Association (ALOA) to FET Agencies and Bodies for example, Aontas, NALA and the Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed (INOU). A proportion of the budget will also be allocated to 12 non-ETB school/colleges who provide opportunities relating to PLC and BTEI. In addition, SOLAS will also co-ordinate funding for specific organisations (FIT and IACTO) within the education and training sector.

Current FET provision funded by SOLAS is also offered through the 'not for profit sector' as well as through private trainers using the contracted training system[194] and through public, 'not for profit' and private education and training providers using Momentum.[195] It is envisaged that funding for

193 OECD (2013), Local Job Creation: How Employment and Training Agencies Can Help.

194 A procurement system supported by SOLAS and operated by the ETBs for the outsourcing and management of training provison where a rapid response is required - such as company closures or start-ups, new course development and testing, or where extended geographic reach is required or where additional volumes of training are required or where specialist expertise is required such as specialist training provision for persons with a disability.

195 Part of the Government's Jobs Initiative, aimed at long term unemployed persons referred to Momentum by DSP. Public, 'Not for Profit' bodies and private education and training providers

flexible delivery models, such as contracted training and Momentum will be continued as part of any new funding arrangements.

Finally, a total of €186m of the €826m overall budget will be utilised to provide for teacher salaries in the context of PLC courses and co-operation hours. While SOLAS will not have responsibility for payment of teacher salaries, it will have responsibility for approval of PLC provision and co-operation hours.

11.2 Proposed New Funding Arrangements for FET Provision

Current provision at NFQ Levels 1 to 6 is diverse and dispersed, and entry and progression pathways are often not clearly evident to prospective learners. The effectiveness of a significant part of the FET provision currently on offer has been questioned by the NESC, especially provision such as PLC, BTEI, VTOS and the former FÁS provided specific skills courses with a primarily vocational/employment objective and remit. The ESRI research also points to poor accreditation and employment outcomes from FET provision more generally and PLCs in particular.

PLCs are full time courses with around 30,000+ places taken up each year. So their potential for positive impact all round is very significant indeed. However there are a number of issues around the stated objectives of and outcomes from PLCs provision.[196] For example, there are limited opportunities for PLC graduates to progress to higher education courses, and while it is claimed that PLC courses provide an important progression route to higher education through the Institutes of Technology, the extent to which such progression is actually occurring has not been identified.

There is a particular need for, and potentially large benefits to be gained from, successfully engaging employers to achieve a step increase in the quality of work experience associated with the PLC programme.[197] There is a large number of school completers and others who access PLC courses. Given the importance of the occupations being targeted to local economies and domestic sectors, there is potentially a major return if the ETBs and SOLAS prioritise the development of a more systematic and effective engagement with local employers. In that regard a key aim is to incorporate,

propose education and training solutions to maximise employment outcomes for participants. A 'payment by results' funding model applies to Momentum.

196 Dorothy Watson, Selina McCoy and Shirley Gorby, (2006) 'The Post-Leaving Certificate Sector in Ireland: A Multivariate Analysis of Educational and Employment Outcomes'.

197 NESC, (2013) 'Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed'.

as part of the PLC programme, more comprehensive, relevant and structured skills development opportunities in the workplace.[198]

A significant amount of state funding of further education and training has tended, in many instances, to be determined more by legacy formulae than by evidence-based needs. Continuing to offer more or less the same course profile from one year to the next is not appropriate. There is broad consensus that the current funding model around FET needs to change and respond to demonstrable demand and need as well as reflecting the local, regional and socio-economic profiles of ETBs. The aim is to replace current funding arrangements for all FET provision, on a phased basis, with an outcomes-based funding model.

In this new approach, a range of elements of funding to providers will be weighted in accordance with, for example, the type of provision in question, the scale and profile of industry within the ETB catchment area and the profile of learners being served. The funding approach will operate on the continuous improvement model, whereby SOLAS will evaluate the FET provision of each ETB (against the agreed criteria above) and agree corrective/preventative actions if required. The relative priority of the funding elements listed above may vary from time to time, depending on available evidence.

With this new funding model together with a capital budget for the FET sector; a meaningful review of the operational structures for FE colleges can be facilitated to inform more flexible models of programme delivery. This will include looking at the feasibility of increasing, within existing resources; the number of places for DSP-referred clients and accessibility to this provision all year round. Currently funded and administered under the secondary school model, colleges have evolved within the confines of this structure. A new, more flexible model must be designed in order to allow the colleges to meet the needs of all learners and employers. This will involve the revision of the current operational model to allow greater flexibility of management, administration and delivery within the FE college sector in order to enhance the learner experience and learner and employer outcomes.

There will be no significant change to the overall FET provision in the short-term. However, this will be reviewed on an annual basis. Following the evaluation of the different types of FET provision, it is anticipated that the scale and type of provision is likely to change.

[198] NESC, (2013) 'Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed'.

Section 12

Core Principles and Strategic Goals

Key points in this Section

The principles underpinning the Strategy are:

- Learner- and employer-centred
- Evidence-based FET policy and practice
- Employment-focussed and actively inclusive
- Responsive, flexible, innovative and high-quality provision
- Consultative and collaborative
- Transparent and accountable
- Value for money

The Strategic Goals are:

Strategic Goal 1 Skills for the Economy

Strategic Goal 2 Active Inclusion

Strategic Goal 3 Quality Provision

Strategic Goal 4 Integrated Planning and Funding

Strategic Goal 5 Standing of FET

Sections 1 to 11 set out the FET context as well as the economic and labour market environment including employment projections for the period 2012- 2020. Key messages and issues arising from the research and consultation together with strategies proposed were outlined (see Section 1). The strengths and weaknesses inherent in the current FET provision were also referenced. This concluding section summarises the research findings and consultation outcomes and act as an evidence base for the strategy. This enables the identification of core principles underpinning the Strategy as well as the

five strategic goals and their associated objectives. The goals and objectives are subsequently framed to develop a detailed implementation plan for the overall Strategy.

12.1 Core Principles underpinning the FET Strategy

The role of FET is defined by its vision and mission. In order to realise the **vision** and the **mission** of FET and to transform the sector, the following principles underpin the Strategy:

- **Learner- and employer-centred:** Ensure that the learner and employer voice is at the centre of evidence-based decision making.
- **Evidence-based FET policy and practice:** Ensure that robust research and evidence is at the centre of FET planning and funding.
- **Employment-focussed and actively inclusive:** Meet the personal, social and economic needs of learners and employers.
- **Responsive, flexible, innovative and high quality provision:** Promote innovation and identify what works best in FET.
- **Consultative and collaborative with all stakeholders:** Foster consultation and collaboration within the FET sector.
- **Transparent and accountable to all including funders and learners:** Embed a culture of transparency and accountability across the FET sector.
- **Value for money:** Informs all decision-making with regard to policy and practice without compromising quality.

12.2 Strategic Goals for FET

The overall aim of the Strategy is to develop a world-class integrated system of further education and training in Ireland, which will promote economic development and meet the needs of all citizens. The goals are linked to three major themes of relevance, quality, and inclusion, and are intended to lay out the contours of the roadmap for FET, while an Implementation Plan to 'operationalise' and make it work is detailed in Part 3 of this document.

There are five Strategic Goals and the FET sector believes that they are necessary, credible, and achievable and reflect a realistic assessment of the evidence and the current and projected environment impacting on FET. While each goal is listed separately in this document, they are all of equal value and it should be stressed that developments in any one area must be informed by, and will be integrated with, developments in the other four areas. Each goal is underpinned by a number of objectives which are set out as follows:

Strategic Goals	Strategic Objectives
Skills for the Economy *The aim of this goal is that FET will address current and future needs of learners, jobseekers, employers and employees and will contribute to national economic development*	Strategic Objective 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. Strategic Objective 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. Strategic Objective 3 - Implement the new apprenticeship system. Strategic Objective 4 – Provide further education and training programmes for employees supported by a new FET employee development strategy. Strategic Objective 5 – Provide further education and training programmes to assist people to start and sustain their own business.
Active Inclusion *The aim of this goal is that FET provision will support the active inclusion of people of all abilities in society with special reference to literacy and numeracy*	Strategic Objective 1 – Support Active Inclusion across FET. Strategic Objective 2 – Devise and implement a strategy to promote literacy and numeracy across FET.

Strategic Goals	Strategic Objectives
Quality Provision *The aim of this goal is that FET will provide high quality education and training programmes and will meet appropriate national and international quality standards*	Strategic Objective 1 – Respond to the needs of learners. Strategic Objective 2 – Ensure excellence in FET programme development. Strategic Objective Action 3 - Upgrade the guidance service within FET and extend it to all who engage with FET, including employees. Strategic Objective 4 - Develop standards for staff qualifications in the FET sector. Strategic Objective 5 – Provide effective pathways for FET graduates to Levels 7 and 8 within the higher education sector.
Integrated Planning and Funding *The aim of this goal is that FET provision will be planned and funded on the basis of objective analysis of needs and evidence of social and economic impact*	Strategic Objective 1 - Implement a new integrated and co-ordinated FET planning model. Strategic Objective 2 - Develop and install a 'fit-for-purpose' data infrastructure to support FET policy and provision. Strategic Objective 3 – Introduce performance-related funding (appropriate to the type of FET provision and defined strategic outcomes). Strategic Objective 4 - Evaluate the effectiveness of all current FET provision.
Standing of FET *The aim of this goal is to ensure a valued learning path leading to agreed employment, career developmental, personal and social options.*	Strategic Objective 1 – Promote and provide high quality FET responsive to the needs of industry and learners. Strategic Objective 2 – Conduct an economic and social impact study of each ETB.

Each objective is underpinned by an Overarching Implementation Plan (in Part 3 of this document). A companion Operational Plan will set out in more detail the operational implications including:

a. The specific action(s) required;

b. The key component(s);

c. The performance indicator(s);

d. The time-frame(s); and

e. Ownership.

Linked and complementary activity supporting the implementation of the FET Strategy will consist of the following:

a. The FET Strategy Implementation Plan (Part 3 of this document).

b. A national annual integrated FET Services Plan managed by SOLAS.

c. Individual 5-year strategic plans developed and managed by ETBs and further supported by individual annual services plans developed and managed by ETBs.

d. The SOLAS Three-Year Corporate Plan setting out the corporate high-level goals of SOLAS and an associated Implementation Plan setting out, inter alia, what SOLAS will do to support and progress the FET Strategy.

e. Regular progress reports by SOLAS on strategy implementation and agreed corrective action (if required).

12.3 Connecting the Main Elements of the FET Strategy

Diagram 1 illustrates how the main elements of the Strategy are connected i.e. the FET Vision and Mission, Core Principles, Strategic Goals and Implementation Plan.

Diagram 2 illustrates, using a number of examples only, how the Strategy will translate into a better experience and improved service for the learner. There are numerous skills and learning pathways open to individuals depending their needs and aspirations.

- *Example 1* (red line) shows the education and training path of a school leaver commencing a career in business and administration at entry level NFQ 5, or could be an unemployed 20 year old with a pass LC who is commencing a career, or who has an ordinary degree in interior design (NFQ Level 7) and is re-skilling in business administration and management via a PLC course (*dotted red line to NFQ*).

- *Example 2* (blue line) shows the education and training path of a 45 year old skilled construction operative, qualified to Junior Cert level, long-term (12 months+) unemployed, now moving via RPL into the renewable energy sector (e.g. insulation, water harvesting etc.)
- *Example 3* (green line) shows the education and training path of an employee, holding a NFQ 6 award in IT, wishing to add an IT module to their current skills set.
- *Example 4* (brown line) shows the education and training path of a 50 year old who has completed a hobby course in the community and voluntary sector, has no second level qualifications, who is articulate and does not require learning supports and who wishes to seek employment as a qualified Level 5 childcare or healthcare worker and would benefit from an introductory or bridging course at Level 3.

12.4 Implementing the Strategy – The Challenges

Some of the main challenges associated with implementing the Strategy are:

- Balancing necessary reform with business continuity and Government priorities with regard to education policy, 'Pathways to Work' and 'Action Plan for Jobs' and maintaining places for school leavers.
- Employers' capacity to provide sufficient and structured workplace learning opportunities in conjunction with 'off the job' formal learning provided by FET providers.
- The additional investment required; for example with regard to installing a 'fit for purpose' data infrastructure and implementing the new apprenticeships.
- Current operational structures applying to certain elements of FET provision may not be able to meet learner expectations regarding engagement with the labour market or delivering required placements.
- Private/contracted-out provision in the FET sector may need to increase in the future.
- The pedagogy and technical skills for all teachers/trainers of adults will need to keep ahead of the curve.
- Capacity to embed literacy and numeracy in the relevant FET provision will need to be expanded.
- The management of the academic year to deliver the best results for the overall FET system in terms of flexibility vis a vis year round continuity of provision for unemployed persons will be essential.

Diagram 1: FET Strategy Diagram

FET Vision

A world class integrated FET system, highly valued by learners and employers, where a higher proportion of those who engage in FET including those with barriers to participation, such as persons with a disability as well as current priority cohorts identified by DSP such as long term unemployed persons, stay engaged, complete qualifications, transition successfully into employment or, where appropriate move into higher level qualifications in FET or HET

FET MISSION

Enable individuals and communities to achieve their developmental, personal, social, career and employment aspirations

CORE PRINCIPLES

- Learner and employer centred
- Evidence-based FET policy and practice
- Employment focussed and actively inclusive
- Responsive, flexible, innovative and high quality provision
- Consultative and collaborative
- Transparent and accountable
- Value for money

BENEFITS OF FET

- Consistently high quality education and training
- Learner and employer centred
- High job placement, good progression options
- Flexible and cost effective
- Barrier free access
- Person centred supports

How will we get there?

Strategic Goal 1
Skills for the Economy

Strategic Goal 2
Active Inclusion, Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

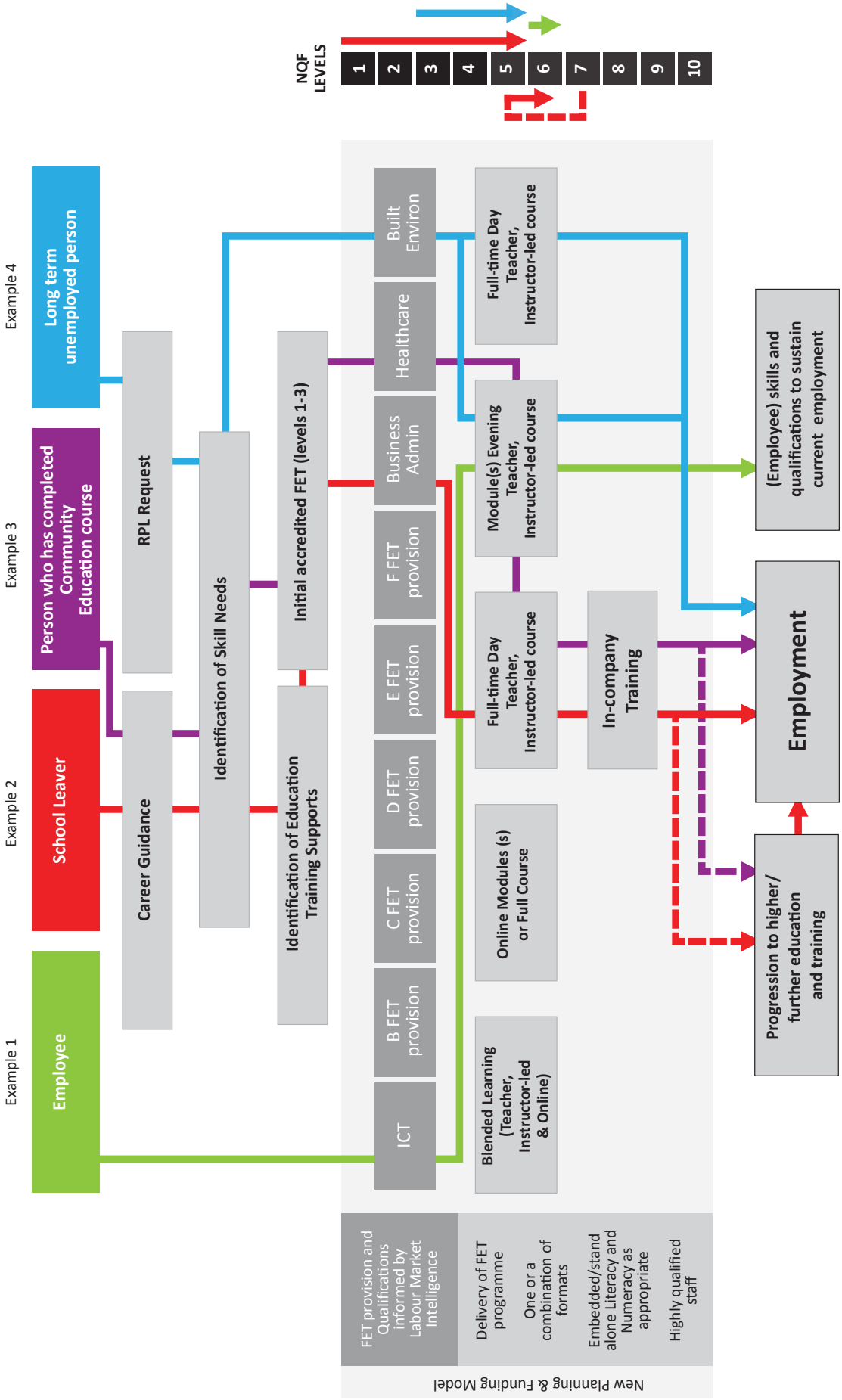
Strategic Goal 3
Quality Provision

Strategic Goal 4
Integrated Planning and Funding

Strategic Goal 5
Standing of FET

Implementation Plan

Diagram 2: **Examples of alternative skills paths through FET**



Part 3

Overarching Implementation Plan

Overarching Implementation Plan

Purpose

The purpose of this Overarching Implementation Plan is to propose the key actions, lead responsibility and target time-lines for the strategic goals and associated objectives as set out in the FET Strategy 2014-2019.

Implementation Oversight

On-going management of the implementation process will be overseen by the SOLAS Board and by the Department of Education and Skills. Other Government Departments and Bodies, for example DSP, DJEI, ETBI, ETBs and QQI as well as organisations with a stake and/or interest in FET were consulted as part of the development of this plan and the implementation process.

Implementation Monitoring

Overall monitoring of Strategy implementation will be the responsibility of the SOLAS Board. The implementation of recommendations that are identified as the responsibility of SOLAS will be monitored by DES. The SOLAS Executive will be tasked with following-up on individual activities that support the delivery of the strategic goals and objectives, providing an Annual Progress Report on Strategy Implementation for consideration by the SOLAS Board.

SOLAS will undertake this task in collaboration with its main partners. These are DES, ETBI, ETBs and other Government Department such as DSP and DJEI and Bodies such as QQI, as well as employers and learners and organisations involved in FET, such as NALA and AONTAS.

Targets

DES sets FET policy and provides direction on a range of targets for FET provision including Government targets relating to the 'Pathways to Work' Initiative and the Jobs Initiatives. The Annual FET Service Plan as well as the individual Annual ETB Service Plans will reflect the DES agreed targets. Overarching responsibility for standards and awards development and overall monitoring of quality assurance provision is primarily the responsibility of QQI.

Implementation Cost

The overall delivery of the Strategy will be predicated on introducing a number of initiatives, including for example, a 'fit for purpose' FET data infrastructure; improving the overall capacity of the FET sector to respond rapidly to employer and learner needs; improving overall outputs such as accreditation, progression, placement and completion levels; revitalising FET provision that has a primarily equity focus and, in that regard, introducing more robust targeted outcomes.

A detailed cost proposal will be prepared that will, in the first instance, take into account the need to widen the funding base if possible and to identify efficiencies. The annual FET Services Plan and the annual individual ETB Service Plans will reflect funding allocations to ensure the priorities in the FET Strategy can be implemented on or before the target timelines.

There are opportunities to become more efficient in respect of individual ETBs deploying resources within the individual ETB as well as within the ETB sector as a whole. In addition, there are opportunities for SOLAS to use its strategic funding function to target what works well and to withhold funding for what does not work, or until programmes or services are upgraded.

The elimination of the costs of potential duplication of provision (excess demand) across different ETBs, and across different institutions within ETBs providing a range of similar employment-focussed programmes[199] and/or a similar range of social inclusion focussed programmes,[200] is another case in point. In addition, potential synergies following the transfer of former FÁS training centres and resources to the ETBs with regard to optimising all available expertise may, through flexible deployment of such resources, leverage greater efficiencies. Increasing the placement from employment-focussed programmes into jobs is another way to generate higher returns on FET investment.

While Government budget spend on a diverse range of labour market-related programmes has more than doubled since 2007, spending on training (and job creation) has declined per unemployed person by nearly one half.[201] The increased spend on activation has been principally absorbed by income support.[202]

While the proportion of the total costs met through non-exchequer investment could theoretically increase, for example, by the introduction of course fees/increasing existing fees across all or some provision, many of the client groups served by FET such as unemployed and hard-to-reach groups, are not in a position to pay fees/increased fees. The introduction of increased costs of education and training at individual level could act as a further barrier to increased participation, engagement/re-engagement in the learning necessary to progress personal, career and employment aspirations.

199 Such as PLCs, new Apprenticeships, former FÁS provided Specific Skills Training and Traineeships.

200 Such as Youthreach and literacy and numeracy.

201 IMF Country Report No. 12/265 p 62-63. Most of the increase was directed to welfare benefits owing to the rapid rise in the number of persons registered as unemployed. Expenditure on training (and job creation programmes) has risen less than the unemployment rate, so the share of such spending fell from 34 percent to 20 percent, and level of spending per unemployed person halved. See also OECD (2013), *2013 Economic Review-Ireland* (Table 3).

202 NESC, (2013), Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed.

Recurrent annual funding for publicly-funded FET is currently running at around €800m+. This would need to be maintained just to provide current nominal levels of resourcing per learner.[203] The Strategy is calling for better outcomes from participation in FET (and in the labour market) across a diverse range of individuals, including those experiencing barriers, such as persons with a disability, early school-leavers and long term unemployed persons. The cost of effective education and training programmes to address the needs of these individuals, for example, specialist training provision for persons with a disability and community training workshops for early school leavers, tends to be higher than 'standard' programmes.

The on-going maintenance and development of the capital stock of the FET sector as well as QQI validation costs/certification fees, are not the only sources of financial pressure on the FET sector.

Any serious reform will require additional investment and more detailed costing will be worked on. While the current economic climate poses challenges for the FET sector and for the Strategy, it is worth keeping in mind that the timeframe for the Strategy is five years and the situation is likely to improve considerably in the meantime. Some key actions where additional funding may be required are listed below.

Figure 11: Key actions where additional funding may be required

Item
Data Infrastructure – roll out and implementation
CPD
Enhanced research and support for programme reviews and identification and roll-out of FET best practice across the sector
Funding of new apprenticeships
Capital Development

203 Not taking into account inflation adjustments.

Overarching Implementation Plan

Introduction

The following Overarching Implementation Plan sets out each Strategic Objective which is broken down into a number of action points with a suggested 'Lead' organisation and the suggested 'Support' organisation(s). When reading the Implementation Plan it is worth remembering that almost all of the strategic objectives and related actions are inter-connected and inter-dependant. For example, employer engagement of one sort or another is either explicit or implicit in all of the strategic objectives and many of the associated actions. The same holds for active inclusion and meeting learner needs. With regard to planning, SOLAS will participate and contribute to the determination of national skills priorities in consultation with 'Intreo', HEA, the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs and other departments/agencies. Both SOLAS and ETBs will contribute to local skills advisory and economic development networks and connect with local HEI planning structures. SOLAS and ETBs will be lead partners in this regard.

A more detailed operational plan outlining how each action under each Strategic Objective will be will be operationalised and the related time-line will be developed in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

Overarching Implementation Plan by each Goal and related Objectives

Strategic Goal 1 : Skills for the Economy

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

Strategic Objective 1.1: Install an appropriate advisory infrastructure to ensure the relevant provision is informed directly by employers and reflects/responds to emerging labour market challenges.

Proposed Action – Timeline 2015	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Develop a coordinated mechanism (using and building on existing arrangements) to engage with industry at national, regional and local level (including local SMEs in particular and other key stakeholders) to ensure alignment of FET with local, regional and national skills demand and labour market intelligence to ensure on-going relevance and quality of FET provision.	SOLAS/ETBs	ETBI, QQI, Employers' Associations (such as IBEC, ISME and CIF), Employers, DES, DSP, IDA, EI, LEOs, FIT, Skillnets, ICTU, DJEI, Trade Unions, Forfas, ESRI, IITD.
Through ETBI, the ETB sector will engage in the development by DJEI of protocols between various relevant agencies and the new Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs).	DJEI	DES, ETBI, ETBs, LEOs, SOLAS.
Ensure FET provision reflects employer-based occupational/personal profiles and industry standards, as appropriate.	QQI, SOLAS	ETBs, Employers' Associations (such as IBEC, ISME and CIF), HEA, IDA, EI, Skillnets, FIT, Forfas, ESRI, EGFSN, NESC, OECD, IITD.

Strategic Objective 1.2: Provide further education and training programmes for a diverse range of individuals including unemployed people and particularly long-term unemployed and young unemployed people.

Proposed Action –Timeline 2015	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Review current provision and develop new further education and training programmes and services to meet the needs of learners and employers at local level and in particular for long-term unemployed people and unemployed young people.	ETBs	QQI, DSP, IDA/EI, DJEI, DES, ICTU, Local Authorities, Employers' Associations (such as IBEC, ISME and CIF), Forfas, ESRI, EGFSN, NESC, OECD, IITD, INOU
Review and develop national further education and training programmes, where appropriate to meet the emerging needs of the economy with emphasis on potential growth areas.	SOLAS	
Provide an integrated guidance service to improve the matching of people to the most suitable and relevant learning opportunity.	DSP/DES	ETBs (AEGI), NCGE, SOLAS, ETBs, Intreo.

Strategic Objective 1.3: Implement new apprenticeship system.

Proposed Action – Timeline 2014-2018	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Establish new models of work-based training within FET which advances the recommendations of the DES Apprentice Review.	SOLAS	DES, ETBs, HEA, IBEC, ISME, CIF, ICTU, CIF, HSE, Craft Council, Failte Ireland, Skillnet, FIT, QQI, IDA, EI.
Align existing apprenticeship programmes, where appropriate, to advance the recommendations of the DES Apprentice Review.	SOLAS	HEA, QQI

Strategic Objective 1.4: Provide further education and training programmes for employees supported by a new FET employee development strategy.

Proposed Action –Timeline 2015	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Determine the nature, appropriateness and incidence of employee development on an annual basis and use findings to inform FET provision. Identify barriers to employee development and research strategies to address same.	SOLAS	NESC, ESRI, Employers' Associations (such as IBEC, ISME and CIF) Skillnets, FIT, ICTU OECD, ETBs, DSP, IDA, EI, DJEI, DES Local Authorities, IITD.

Strategic Objective 1.5: Provide further education and training programmes to assist people to start and sustain their own business.

Proposed Action –Timeline 2015	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Ensure that further education and training programmes are developed in line with the needs of entrepreneurs. Identify best practice education and training for entrepreneurship, and develop strategies to implement same.	SOLAS/ETBs	NESC, ESRI, Employers' Associations (such as IBEC, ISME and CIF), Skillnets, FIT, QQI, ICTU, OECD, ETBs, DSP, IDA, EI, DJEI, DES, IITD Local Authorities.

Strategic Goal 2: Active Inclusion

- FET provision will support the active inclusion of people of all abilities with special reference to literacy and numeracy.

Strategic Objective 2.1: Support Active Inclusion across FET.

Proposed Action – Timeline 2015 - 2017	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Ensure equality of opportunity and access to FET and equal treatment of learners by identifying strategies to address psychological, social and economic barriers to participation of groups experiencing socio-economic exclusion/distance from the labour market.	DSP/ETBs	DES, DSP, ETBI/ETBs, SOLAS, Skillnets, Pobal, AONTAS, Employers, Trade Unions, Equality Authority, NDA, NALA.
Ensure that FET serves the needs of priority cohorts identified by DSP including LTU people, young people, lone parents etc, and that these individuals are guided, supported and matched to the most appropriate/suitable FET programmes and services.	DSP/ETBs/ SOLAS	AEGI, ETBI, LCDPs, FIT, NALA, Intreo.
Agree, develop and implement a QQI approved RPL system for FET provision.	QQI	DES, SOLAS, HEA, HEIs ETBs, ETBI, DSP, Aontas, INOU, Youth Council of Ireland, Employers' Associations.

Strategic Objective 2.2: Devise and Implement a strategy to promote literacy and numeracy across FET.

Proposed Action – Timeline 2015 - 2019	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Improve literacy and numeracy levels amongst the adult population with a particular focus on providing individuals with the necessary competencies to achieve their personal, social, career and employment aspirations by promoting literacy and numeracy provision.	SOLAS	NALA, AONTAS, ICTU, IBEC, DES, DSP, ETBI, ETBs, LCDPs.
Support FET staff through CPD to attain the necessary knowledge, skills and competence to respond effectively to the literacy and numeracy needs of learners and provide intensive literacy tuition.	ETBs/ETBI	NALA, FESS, SOLAS.
Embed literacy and numeracy within FET provision as appropriate, and conduct research to identify best practice models across all FET levels and settings.	SOLAS	NALA, ETBI, ETBs, FESS, DES, QQI.
Set appropriate targets and objectives for literacy and numeracy programmes (with regard to priority target groups) and monitor and evaluate against the agreed objectives.	SOLAS	DES, NALA, Aontas, ETBs.

Strategic Goal 3: Quality Provision

- FET will provide high quality education and training programmes to meet appropriate national and international quality standards.

Strategic Objective 3.1: Respond to the needs of learners.

Proposed Action – Timeline 2014 (1st action) and 2016 onwards (2nd action)	**Suggested Lead**	**Suggested Support**
Review priorities and criteria for engaging independent FET service supports and providers. Consideration to include: value for money, accountability and effectiveness.	SOLAS	All relevant providers and support services.
Systematically benchmark learner's views and satisfaction with their FET programme on an on-going basis through the establishment of a Learner Forum and appropriate Learner Surveys.	ETBs, AONTAS	SOLAS, DES, DSP, Learners, INOU, NALA, AONTAS, QQI.

Strategic Objective 3.2: Ensure excellence in FET Programme Development.

Proposed Action – Timeline 2014 (1st action) 2015 onwards (2nd action)	**Suggested Lead**	**Suggested Support**
Develop a framework to ensure that evolving skills needs within the economy are reflected in up to date programme design.	SOLAS/ETBs	ETBI, DES, IBEC, IDA, EI, HEA, FIT Skillsnet, INOU, LDCPs, LESN NESC, IITD, QQI.
Ensure employer involvement in the development of new and the review of exisiting standards for NFQ awards. Providers' quality assured programme development and review process includes engagement with employers.	QQI	SOLAS, DES, ETBI, IBEC, Skillsnet, FIT, HEA Industry Awarding Bodies, Private Providers, IITD, QQI Standards Development Groups.
Ensure effective CPD is in place to support quality of provision across the sector.	ETBs/ Providers	SOLAS.

Ensure excellence in FET by introducing, for example, further research into best practice adult learning and the transfer of learning into the workplace.	ETBI	SOLAS, ETBs, IBEC, ICTU, ESRI, NESC, HEIs level institutions, NALA, QQI.

Strategic Objective 3.3: Upgrade the guidance service within FET and extend it to all who engage with FET including employees.

Proposed Action – Timeline 2014 - 2016	**Suggested Lead**	**Suggested Support**
Devise and implement an integrated FET Guidance Strategy for the FET sector.	DES, DSP, NCGE ETBs	DES (NCGE), ETBs (AEGI), SOLAS, ETBs, DSP.
Provide career management skills to learners on FET courses to manage flexible career pathways, increasing employability thereby empowering learners to manage their skills development and career goals.	ETBs(AEGI)	DES (NCGE).
Ensure career guidance initiatives are systematically evaluated to establish what works best.	SOLAS	DES(NCGE), ETBs, DSP, POBAL.

Strategic Objective 3.4: Develop standards for staff qualifications in the FET sector

Proposed Action – Timeline 2014-2019	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Develop standards for staff qualifications in FET sector. Introduce appropriate and consistent qualification criteria and standards for all FET staff, including new entrants and existing staff engaged in the delivery of FET provision.	DES	SOLAS, ETBI, ETBs, DES, HEA, Teaching Council, QQI.

Strategic Action 3.5: Provide effective progression pathways for FET graduates to higher education.

Proposed Action – Timeline 2016 onwards	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Remove barriers to progression and participation through the establishment of nationally recognised Higher Education entry criteria from FET programmes (Level 5/6 into Level 6/7/8) - facilitating progression pathways (also linked to Objective 2.1).	QQI	SOLAS, HEA, ETBI/ETBs, IUA, IoTI, All providers.

Strategic Goal 4: Integrated Planning and Funding

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

Strategic Objective 4.1: Implement a new integrated and co-ordinated FET planning model.

Proposed Action – Timeline immediate and on-going	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Implement a new integrated FET planning model to ensure relevant learner centred, flexible and employment-led provision with a clear focus on reducing duplication and overlap of provision. The process to take account of Government priorities e.g. 'Pathways to Work', 'Action Plan for Jobs', 'Youth Guarantee'.	SOLAS	ETBs, All providers.

Strategic Objective 4.2: Develop and install a 'fit-for-purpose' data infrastructure to support FET policy and provision.

Proposed Action - Timeline immediate and on-going	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Develop and implement an integrated Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) for the FET Sector and stakeholders including; a national FET programme database system, a national FET programme calendar scheduling system, and a national FET learner database.	SOLAS	DES, DSP, ETBI, ETBs, QQI.
Undertake appropriate skills needs research, including collaboration with the HEA-led *National employer survey of Irish Higher Education outcomes* (now to include employer views on FET provision) as per the Action Plan for Jobs 2014, to determine demand for entry and intermediate skills across business/industrial sectors and communicate findings to FET providers, learners and the general public.	SOLAS/HEA	IBEC, Skillnets, ESRI, ETBI, ETBs, FIT, DSP, QQI.

Strategic Objective 4.3: Introduce performance-related funding (appropriate to the type of FET provision and defined strategic outcomes).

Proposed Action – Timeline immediate and on-going	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Introduce strategic outcomes-based, performance-related funding model across all FET programmes.	SOLAS	ETBs, ETBI, DES, DSP.
Sustain funding (to be reviewed annually) for programmes which focus on social inclusion while alternative performance-related funding model is being devised.	SOLAS	ETBI/ETBs, AONTAS, NALA.

Strategic Objective 4.4: Evaluate the effectiveness of all current FET provision.

Proposed Action – Timeline 2014-2018	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Evaluate existing FET provision to ensure relevance to the labour market and effective progression for learners.	SOLAS	ETBI, ETBs, Employers' Associations (such as IBEC, ISME and CIF), QQI, DES, IDA, EI, Skillnet, FIT, Pobal, Trade Unions, ESRI, OECD, HSE, IITD, Learners.
Examine the range of social welfare payments and training allowances associated with FET provision to determine apparent disincentives and anomalies which could impede participation in FET provision.	DSP	SOLAS, DES, ETBI.

Strategic Goal 5: Standing of FET

- The aim of this goal is to ensure a valued learning path leading to agreed employment, career, developmental, personal and social options.

Strategic Objective 5.1: Promote and provide high quality FET responsive to the needs of industry and learners.

Proposed Action – Timeline 2014 – 2017	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Plan and conduct a comprehensive communications campaign to raise awareness of the benefits of FET with enterprise, learners and more generally.	SOLAS	ETBs, DES, DSP, ICTU, Employers' Associations (such as IBEC, ISME and CIF), INOU, Pobal, AONTAS, IITD.
Ensure provision facilitates mobility across Europe and globally.	SOLAS	ETBI, ETBs.
Ensure greater access for priority cohorts to FET and demonstrate the benefits in terms of skills acquisition and progression to employment.	SOLAS/ DSP/ETBs	ETBI, AEGI, NCGE, Employers' Associations (such as IBEC, ISME and CIF), INOU, LEOs, AONTAS, IITD, LCDCs, QQI, FIT, NALA.

Strategic Objective 5.2: Conduct independent research on the local, regional and national economic and social benefits of FET provision in each ETB (impact studies) and raise awareness of these benefits to improve the standing and appreciation of FET.

Proposed Action – Timeline 2016 onwards	Suggested Lead	Suggested Support
Conduct economic and social impact study of ETBs.	SOLAS	ETBs, ETBI, DES, DSP, Employers' Associations (such as IBEC, ISME and CIF), INOU, NESC, AONTAS, IITD.

Appendix 1

Glossary of Terms relating to FET Provision

FET Provision formerly provided by VECs and now provided by ETBs.

Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Courses

The PLC programme is the principal alternative to higher education entry for young people who complete senior secondary education and is the largest single, initial training programme for a wide range of intermediate skilled occupations in the economy. Through the Higher Education Links Scheme, PLC courses also provide an alternative route to higher education in the Institutes of Technology. The aim is to provide participants with a combination of general studies, vocational studies and opportunities for work experience so that they are able to enter (or re-enter) intermediate skilled jobs in the labour market. Courses are delivered in a wide range of disciplines, such as business studies, childcare, community care, computing and technology, e-commerce, horticulture, multimedia production, sport and leisure, and tourism. They are usually delivered in one academic year on a full-time basis and are not modularised. The courses generally lead to major awards at NFQ Level 5 and 6.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)

The VTOS scheme provides a range of courses to meet the education and training needs of unemployed people. It gives participants opportunities to improve their general level of education, gain certification, develop their skills and prepare for employment, self-employment and further education and training. VTOS is aimed in particular at unemployed people. Some examples include ICT, Art and Design, Business Administration, Childcare and Digital Media. They are usually delivered over two academic years on a full-time basis of 30 hours per week. The courses lead to a range of awards across NFQ levels.

Youthreach

Youthreach is a full-time programme, usually over two years, directed at unemployed early school leavers aged 15-20. It offers participants the opportunity to identify and pursue viable options within adult life and lead to major awards typically at Levels 3 and 4 on the NFQ. Youthreach offers a flexible programme of integrated general education, vocational training and work experience. Learners are facilitated in setting individual learning plans aimed at increasing their self-esteem, skills and knowledge base and employability. The programme places a strong emphasis on personal

development. Overall the programme aims to enable individuals to participate fully in society and to progress to further education and training, e.g. VTOS, PLCs or to gain employment.

Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)

The BTEI provides part-time Further Education programmes for young people and adults. The aim is to give participants an opportunity to combine a return to learning with family, work and other responsibilities. It was initially conceived as an access route to the full suite of existing FET i.e. opening up full-time courses to include part-time learners and to link with adult literacy provision in particular. Programmes are offered in partnership with a number of agencies throughout the country on a flexible part-time basis. Classes are offered throughout the year in the morning, afternoons, evenings or weekends. Courses lead to a range of accreditation at Levels 1-6 on the NFQ.

Community Education

Community Education works with adults who wish to return to or continue their education, offering a learner-centred approach involving personal supports and tuition leading to positive personal, social and economic outcomes. It focusses its work on people who are distant from education and the labour market, and is generally developed in local community projects and centres. Community Education offers a diversity of courses to meet the needs of a diversity of learners including courses leading to accreditation from Level 3 – 8 on the NFQ, informal and non-formal courses which are not accredited, short introductory courses, full-time year-long programmes, and courses in everything from life skills to professional qualifications. Community Education is delivered all over Ireland by a range of providers including independently managed not for profit groups and statutory organisations. It takes place in a wide variety of community projects, resource centres, voluntary organisations etc.

Adult Literacy (AL)

Adult Literacy programmes are provided to people inside and outside of the labour force who want to improve their communication skills, i.e. reading, writing, and numeracy and information technology. Programmes are typically delivered for two to four hours per week during the academic year. The Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) programme is offered on the basis of six hours (delivered in two or three sessions per week) for 14 weeks. It is for all literacy students and takes place in a group setting.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

New community members in Ireland come from a wide range of cultural, linguistic, educational and social backgrounds. ESOL classes are provided across the country to meet the needs of learners who may be highly educated with professional and skilled backgrounds who are attending classes to learn English or improve their English. However, there are also a significant number of learners who are

learning English who may have missed out on formal education in their country of origin and who lack the basic literacy skills to participate fully and benefit from 'standard' English language classes.

Skills for Work

Skills for Work is a national programme aimed at providing opportunities to help employees deal with basic skill demands of the workplace. The programme contributes towards the creation of a well-educated workforce and also promotes the concept of lifelong learning in the workplace. Where possible the programme is run in company premises, or an alternative convenient location such as the local ETB Adult Education Centre. Programmes are 35 hours duration and designed in a flexible way to meet the needs of employer and employees. Most programmes are accredited.

FET Provision formerly provided or funded by FÁS and now provided or funded by ETBs.

Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is the recognised means by which people are trained to become craftspeople in Ireland. The main craft trades come within the scope of the Statutory Apprenticeship system. Currently there are 26 designated trades within the Standards Based Apprenticeship system. Apprenticeship is organised by SOLAS (formerly FÁS) in co-operation with the Department of Education and Skills, employers and unions. The apprenticeship system typically consists of seven phases in total with three off-the- job phases (one phase is delivered in an approved training Centres and two phases are delivered by the Institutes of Technology) and four on-the-job phases (delivered by employers). The overall duration is usually four years. Successful completion of an apprenticeship leads to a Level 6 NFQ award called the Advanced Certificate Craft. Apprenticeship is a demand-driven programme for employed people aimed at developing pre-defined levels of skills knowledge and competence which are agreed and determined by industry.

Specific Skills Training (SST)

Specific Skills Training courses typically take six-plus months full-time to complete and are designed to meet the needs of industry across a range of sectors leading to accreditation at Levels 4-6 on the NFQ or certification from a recognised external accredited body. Courses are full-time and all year round to facilitate those entering the labour market for the first time and persons wishing to up-date or acquire new skills. Examples of courses include; Computer Applications and Office Skills, Retail Skills Health and Beauty, Business Administration, IT Security Management, Business Process Improvement, Manual and Computerised Payroll and Book-keeping, and Life Sciences Manufacturing Operations.

Traineeship

Traineeships typically take from four to nine months full-time to complete and provide occupation-specific training and integrate formal training and workplace coaching with a host employer. Courses are full-time and all year round to facilitate those entering the labour market for the first time and persons wishing to up-date or acquire new skills. All programmes lead to accreditation at Levels 4-6 on the NFQ or certification from a recognised external accredited body. Examples include; Beauty Therapist, Outdoor Activity Instructor, Business Systems Service Technician and Software Developer.

Bridging/Foundation courses

Bridging and Foundation courses are primarily developed and offered to facilitate access by learners to a mainline market-led course or entry level employment. These courses may be short or long duration. They are generally accredited at Levels 3 and 4 on the NFQ. These courses are aimed at individuals who are distant from the labour market, or who wish to return to employment or education and training after a long period of unemployment. These individuals normally require training interventions that emphasise personal development, career planning, and confidence building as well basic occupational/vocational skills.

Short modular type courses

Short modular type courses are approximately ten weeks in duration and were introduced to allow individuals to quickly upgrade their skills. The majority of the programmes on offer are QQI (formerly FETAC) or externally accredited. Examples of courses include: Kerb, Flag and Paviour Laying; Welding MMA Flat Horizontal; Domestic Solar Hot Water; Oil Fired Appliances Servicing; and HGV and Information Technology Applications. Courses are full-time and all year round.

Blended learning courses

Blended learning courses can last up to six months and utilise the best mix of classroom, lab, practical, on-line training and tutor support to suit the need of those individuals who need a more flexible way to meet their training needs. Examples include CAD 3D Parametric Modelling, Industrial Automation-Electrical/Electronic Control Systems and Management Development, Manual and Computerised Payroll and Bookkeeping. Courses are delivered all year round and lead to accreditation at Levels 4-6 on the NFQ or certification from a recognised external accredited body.

Refresher Training

Refresher Training is aimed at unemployed craftworkers to refresh skills developed in the past as part of their apprenticeship/workplace activity but which may not have been practiced over time and now need refreshing. Examples of courses include Testing and Verification of Electrical Installations. Courses are generally short in duration.

Part-time Courses

- Part-time day courses include: Executive Networking and Support programme; Multi-media Training; Microsoft Certified Associate; and Windows Server 2008 in Advertising, Marketing, Sales and PR.

- Part-time Evening courses of typically 30 hours duration over ten weeks provide short up-skilling modules for both unemployed (primarily) and employed persons. Examples of courses include; Welding TIG, Interior Design, ECDL, CAD, Door Security, Supervisory Management, and Start Your Own Business. Courses generally lead to accreditation at Levels 4-6 on the NFQ or certification from a recognised external accredited body.

Community Training Provision

a. The Local Training Initiative programme (LTI)

The LTI is a project-based training and work experience programme carried out *in* the local community run *by* local community groups. The programme is designed for people who are unemployed, primarily those aged 18 – 35 years who are experiencing difficulty in gaining entry to the labour market due to personal, social or geographic disadvantage. Literacy difficulties are not a barrier to entry. Around 200 LTIs support many organisations engaged in a wide range of initiatives including genealogy, environmental, heritage, tourism, theatre, sports, and coaching. Some projects are targeted at specific groups in society. Training on Local Training Initiatives leads to accreditation at levels on the NFQ at Levels 3, 4 and 5. Courses are full-time and delivered all year round.

b. Specialist Training Providers (STPs)

18 STPs country-wide are contracted to deliver training programmes to people with disabilities. This client group requires more intensive support than learners on mainline courses. The features of this specialist vocational training include: additional training duration; adapted equipment; transport arrangements; enhanced programme content.

Enhanced trainer-learner ratio is available in non-specialist training provision. All people with disabilities are encouraged to avail of and participate in a broad range of mainline training options. Examples include ICT and vocational multi-skills. Courses are generally one to two years in duration, are delivered all year round and lead to accreditation at Levels 1-6 on the NFQ.

c. Community Training Centres (CTCs)

CTCs are independent community-based organisations, catering for the training and employment needs of early school leavers, primarily aged between 16 and 21. The training is certified leading to recognised awards on the National Framework of Qualifications. There are 38 community

training centres around the country. Examples of programmes offered include employability skills, personal and social employment skills and science skills. All programmes offer personal and social skills development through modules such as communications, personal effectiveness, teamwork, career planning and literacy and numeracy support, which are integrated with the vocational training modules. Courses are generally one year in duration and are full-time and lead to major awards on the NFQ at Levels 3 and 4.

FET Provision formerly managed by FÁS and now managed by SOLAS

Momentum

Momentum was launched in December 2012 and was delivered in 2013 as part of the Government's '*Action Plan for Jobs'* initiative. It offered training to approximately 6,500 longer-term unemployed people to gain skills in identified growing sectors (including ICT, Gaming, Sales & Marketing, Manufacturing and Food Processing) and to provide them with access to a range of education and training projects, work placement/support and relevant industry and NFQ accreditation.

On-Line Learning (eCollege)

On-Line learning courses typically take from 14-24 weeks to complete and cater for individuals who are IT literate and who wish to work at their own pace and in their own time. Courses are offered with and without e-tutor support. Learners can register for on-line courses through www.ecollege.ie. Examples include; CompTIA Network+, Mobile Technology, Java Professional Developer and Microsoft.

Construction Skills Certification Scheme/Quarrying Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS/QSCS)

The Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) and the Quarrying Skills Certification Scheme (QSCS) provides for the training, assessment, certification and registration of non-craft operatives within the construction and quarrying sectors. Courses are up to one week in duration and are delivered all year round.

Appendix 2

1-2-1 Interview Process

The following organisations were invited to take part in the semi-structured interview process:

- Adult Education Guidance Initiative
- Adult Education Officers Association
- Adult Literacy Organisers Association
- American Chamber of Commerce
- AONTAS
- Awarding Bodies
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara
- Community Education Facilitators Association
- Chambers of Commerce
- Department of Education and Skills
- Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
- Department of Public, Expenditure and Reform
- Department of Social Protection
- Enterprise Ireland
- Education and Training Boards Ireland
- Education and Training Boards
- Fáilte Ireland
- Fast track to IT
- Forfás
- Irish Business and Employers Confederation/Small Firms Association
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
- Irish Small & Medium Enterprises
- National Adult Literacy Agency
- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
- National Disability Authority
- National Youth Council of Ireland
- Pobal
- Private Trainers
- Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union
- Skillnets
- SOLAS
- Teagasc
- Teachers Union of Ireland

Appendix 3

SOLAS-led Further Education and Training Workshops

The following were invited to attend the SOLAS-led consultation workshops:

- Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources
- Department of Education and Skills
- Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (plus Local Authorities)
- Department of Food and the Marine
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Department of Health and Children
- Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
- Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform
- Department of Public, Expenditure and Reform
- Department of Social Protection
- Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
- Bord Bia
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara
- Enterprise Ireland
- Fáilte Ireland
- Forfás
- The Craft Council of Ireland
- The Equality Authority
- The Food Safety Authority
- The Health and Safety Authority
- The Heritage Council
- The National Economic and Social Council
- Irish Sports Council
- Sustainable Energy Ireland
- Teagasc
- Irish Farmers Association, Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association, Macra na Tuaithe
- Association for Higher Education Access & Disability
- Carlow Institute of Technology
- Limerick Institute of Technology
- City & Guilds
- CMD Group
- CPL Learning & Development
- Dublin City University
- Dublin Institute of Technology
- Higher Education Authority
- Hi-Tech Associates

- Institutes of Technology Ireland
- Irish Universities Association
- Irish Institute of Training & Development
- National University of Ireland, Maynooth
- National University of Ireland, Galway
- Microsoft Ireland
- Prodigy
- Pulse College
- Trinity College Dublin
- University College Dublin
- AONTAS
- Dublin Adult Literacy Centre
- Eco Unesco
- Further Education Support Service
- Involve Youth Services
- Irish Association of Community Training Organisation
- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
- Irish Rural Link
- National Adult Literacy Agency
- National Centre Guidance in Education
- National Co-Ordinator (Youthreach)
- National Disability Authority
- National Learning Network
- National Youth Council of Ireland
- Pobal
- Social Justice Ireland
- St. Vincent De Paul
- Young Mens Christian Association
- Chambers Ireland
- Games Ireland
- Hotels Federation of Ireland
- IMPACT Trade Union
- Irish Banks Officials Association
- Irish Business and Employers Confederation
- Irish Congress and Trade Unions
- Irish Small & Medium Enterprises Association
- Mandate Trade Union
- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
- Services Industrial Professional and Techncial Union
- Small Firms Association
- Department of the Taoiseach
- Teachers Union of Ireland
- Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board

- City of Dublin Education and Training Board
- Construction Industry Federation
- Dublin & Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board
- Institute of Technology Ireland
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Irish Institute of Training & Development
- Kerry Education and Training Board
- Pobal
- Quality & Qualifications Ireland
- Skillnets
- Technical Engineering & Electrical Union
- Tipperary Education and Training Board
- Learners
- SOLAS Staff
- SOLAS Board

Appendix 4

Further Education and Training Strategy - Consultation Workshop

Clock Tower, Department of Education & Skills Marlborough Street, Dublin 1.

Agenda

8.30 - 9.00 Registration – Tea and Coffee

9:00 – 9:15 Opening Address & Purpose of Workshop – To propose solutions to the challenges based on the evidence presented (Paul O'Toole, CEO SOLAS)

9:15 – 9:30 Summary of FET Reforms including 5 year FET Strategy development to-date (Fiona Hartley, Executive Director SOLAS)

9:30 – 10:00 Evidence-based emerging themes and interview findings (ESRI),
Observations from international experts on themes and findings (ESRI)

10:00 – 11:30 What key priorities and actions ought to be incorporated into the FET Strategy and how, based on the ESRI presentation

Round Table Discussions

11:30 – 12:00 Break

12:00 – 12:40 Feedback from Tables

12.40 – 1:00 Summary and close of Workshop (SOLAS)

1:00 Tea/Coffee/Refreshments

Further Detail:

- Registration 8:30am
- Approximately 25 people per workshop
- Facilitator for each table to be organised by SOLAS with agreement prior to the workshops
- Objective is to have proposed solutions to the themes, presented from each table.

Appendix 5

FET Strategy Advisory Committee

Kathy Hall (Chairperson)	University College Cork
Alan Nuzum	Skillnets
Anna Murphy	Quality & Qualifications Ireland
Anne Ryan	National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Berni Brady	AONTAS
Brid O'Brien	Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
Bryan Fields	SOLAS
Cecilia Munro	SOLAS Board Member
Colm McEvoy	Kerry Education and Training Board
Dermot Carey	Construction Industry Federation
Dermot Nolan	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Eamon Devoy	Technical Engineering & Electrical Union
Fiona Hartley	SOLAS
Fionuala McGeever	Tipperary Education and Training Board
Inez Bailey	National Adult Literacy Agency
Jacinta Stewart	City of Dublin Education and Training Board
Jerry Murphy	POBAL
John McKeon	Department of Social Protection
Liz Carroll	Irish Small & Medium Enterprise
Marie Bourke	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
Marie Griffin	Dublin & Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board
Martin O'Brien	Cavan & Monaghan Education and Training Board
Mary-Liz Trant	Higher Education Authority
Paul O'Toole	SOLAS
Peter Baldwin	Department of Education & Skills
Peter Rigney	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Sinead Heneghan	Irish Institute of Training & Development
Tony Donohue	Irish Business & Employers Confederation
Jim Murray	Institute of Technology Ireland

Appendix 6

FET Strategy Techncial Sub-group

Fiona Hartley (Chairperson)	SOLAS
Ann-Marie Lacey	Cavan & Monaghan Education and Training Board
Brian McCormick	Department of Social Protection
Bryan Fields	SOLAS
Caitriona Murphy	SOLAS
Derek Walsh	SOLAS
Jasmina Behan	SOLAS
John Fitzgibbons	Cork Education and Training Board
John McGrath	SOLAS
Martin Gormley	Donegal Education and Training Board
Peter Davitt	Fastrack to Information Technology
Phil O'Flaherty	Department of Education and Skills
Rhona Dempsey	Quality & Qualifications Ireland

Appendix 7

Examples of Key Sources

- Updated 'Pathways to Work' strategy - 50 Point Plan to Tackle Long-term Unemployment (2013).
- 'Action Plan for Jobs' (2014).
- The SOLAS Implementation Group (SIG) Action Plan (2011).
- Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education, (2000).
- Feedback from 150+ submissions relating to the DES-led consultation process in 2011 on the establishment of SOLAS.
- The FET Strategy Advisory Committee established by SOLAS and the Technical Subgroup.
- Many observations/comments and proposals from a range of FET partners and key informants including employers, learners and ETBs through the FET Strategy consultation process (interviews and workshops).
- Expert comparative observations benchmarking Irish FET against international best practice FET developments and strategies.
- The SOLAS/SMLRU 'Employment Forecast 2020' Report (2014).
- Various Forfás sector skill reports e.g. Retail and Whole, ICT, Manufacturing.
- FIT ICT Skills Audit (2013).
- EGFSN, Guidelines for VECs in aligning further education provision with the skills needs of enterprise, 2013 Update.
- Government's 'A Strategy for Growth: Medium Term Economic Strategy 2014 – 2020' (December 2013).
- Department of Education and Skills, Review of ALCES funded Adult Literacy Provision, January 2013.
- Department of Education and Skills, Adult Literacy Programme, Operational Guidelines for Providers (2012) and the updated Guidelines (2013).
- Revised Guidelines for Adult Guidance/BTEI/VTOS, DES.
- AONTAS, "More than just a course", February 2011.
- NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work (2013).
- NALA Strategic Plan (2013).
- NALA/IVEA Working Paper; 'The Integration of Language, Literacy and Numeracy in VEC Further Education Courses' (2012).
- National Disability Strategy 2013-2015 and Implementation Plan 2013.
- 'National Competitiveness Council's Submission' to the 'Action Plan for Jobs', December 2013.
- HEA Strategy.
- QQI Strategy.
- ESRI, 'The Leaving School in Ireland Study' – to be published.

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