



spotlight on VET
IRELAND

2013/14

VET in Ireland

Most vocational education and training (VET) occurs within the State sector, although private providers also play a role. The country's education and training system is divided into four main sectors: primary, secondary, further (post-secondary non-tertiary) education and training (FET), and higher education. VET is provided primarily within the FET sector, with some in higher education.

The main VET providers are 16 education and training boards (ETBs) spread across the country. Responsibility for funding, planning and coordinating FET programmes at ETBs lies with SOLAS, Ireland's Further Education and Training Authority. Other statutory providers include BIM (seafood industry training) and Teagasc (agricultural training). These bodies are publicly funded. Some programmes are cofinanced by the European Social Fund. Higher VET programmes are the responsibility of the Higher Education Authority (the statutory planning and policy body for higher education).

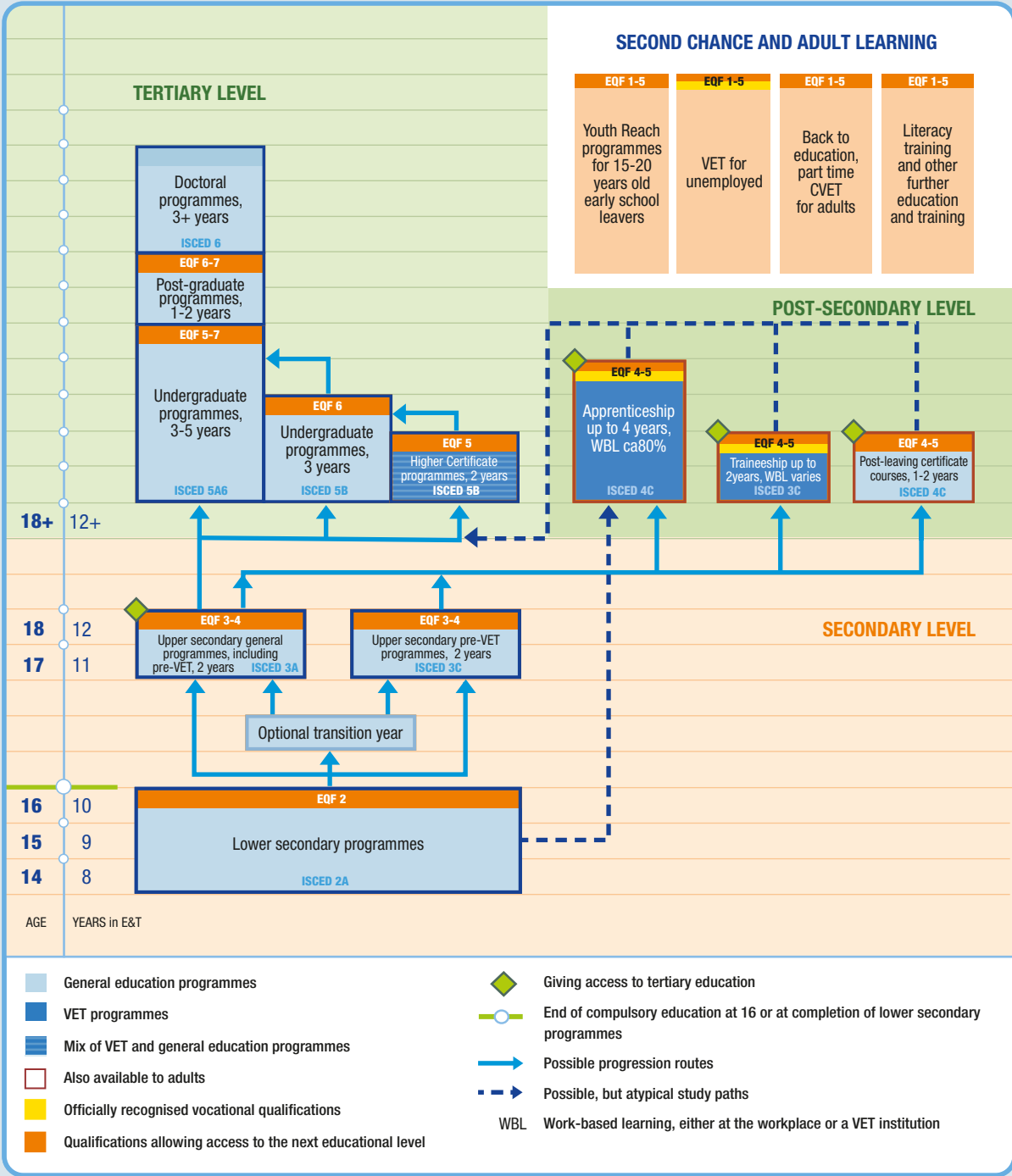
Ireland's 10-level national framework of qualifications (NFQ) is referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF). VET pertains to NFQ levels 5 or 6 (EQF 4 or 5), with some programmes at NFQ 7 (EQF 6). Almost all awards made through the State-funded sector, and many in the private sector, have been placed on the NFQ.

While it is possible to proceed to apprenticeship training following completion of lower secondary education (ISCED 2), most learners (around 90%) continue to complete upper secondary education, which in Ireland is general, rather than vocational, in nature.

Post-secondary non-tertiary programmes are aimed mostly at those who have completed upper secondary education. Training includes:

- apprenticeships: people acquire craftsman status by combining off-the-job training (in ETBs and institutes of technology) and on-the-job training (with an employer). Training leads to an NFQ level 6 (EQF5) craft certificate. Partial awards are also made;
 - post-leaving certificate courses (PLCs): delivered in ETB colleges or second-level schools; they comprise general or vocationally oriented education, or both. Typically, training is in areas such as technical knowledge, personal/core skills and work experience; PLCs lead to an NFQ level 5 or 6 award (EQF 4 or 5). Partial awards are also made;
 - training for other occupations: delivered by second-level schools, ETB colleges, private or sectoral providers (e.g. for tourism, agriculture or fishing). Awards, full or partial, are made, usually at NFQ level 5 or 6 (EQF 4 or 5).
- VET at tertiary level (ISCED 5B) is provided mostly by institutes of technology and, to a lesser extent, by universities and other higher education providers. Courses are mainly in business, science and technology and lead to an NFQ level 6 or level 7 award (EQF 5 or 6).
- For second chance education and training for the unemployed, VET is also offered in the form of:
- VTOS (vocational training for the unemployed); Youthreach (for early school leavers aged 15-20); and the back to education initiative (part-time for adults). Full and partial awards are made at NFQ levels 1-6 (EQF 1-5);
 - traineeships: training for the unemployed for a range of occupations (such as financial advisor assistant, pharmacy sales assistant). It leads to an NFQ level 5 or 6 (EQF 4 or 5) award (full or partial);
 - specific skills training: training for the unemployed in a vocational skill (such as computer hardware maintenance), delivered by ETBs (on average, 16 weeks). There is a range of awards, full and partial, at NFQ levels 3-5 (EQF 2-4).

VET in Ireland's education and training system



NB: ISCED 1997 was used on the chart. Conversion to ISCED 2011 is ongoing.
Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Ireland.

Distinctive features of VET

Most VET takes place on completion of upper secondary education. VET programmes are mostly at post-secondary level, rather than at secondary level as is the case in many other European countries.

The introduction of the NFQ in 2003 provided a system for coordinating and comparing awards, aiding learner progression and mobility between different sectors of the education system. As a result, those with FET/VET qualifications can move up a ladder system of progression to gain more advanced awards in the FET sector, or even to tertiary level. Tertiary-level colleges such as institutes of technology now reserve a number of places for those with certain types of FET awards (including apprenticeship qualifications).

Aligning FET/VET with labour market needs has been an important aspect in recent years. Work carried out on identifying skills needs is used to assist education and training (including VET) providers in aligning relevant courses with labour market requirements. Ireland has developed a solid mechanism for identifying the economy's skills needs. The work is overseen by the Government-appointed expert group on future skills needs, which is made up of representatives of government (including the ministries of Education, Enterprise and Finance), employees' and employers' representatives, and education and training providers.

FET/VET planning and provision is coordinated and funded centrally following FET sector reform (2013). The FET authority SOLAS was established and a five-year FET strategy was published (SOLAS, 2014). The structure of FET has been reformed to create a clear, integrated pathway for learners within the FET sector, responding to the needs of learners and the labour market.

Challenges and policy responses

Attractiveness of VET. In Ireland, general and academic education enjoys a higher standing when compared to FET/VET. The preferred option for upper secondary graduates is to proceed to tertiary education: in 2010, approximately 50% entered tertiary education, while 22% entered FET (PLC courses, 20%; FÁS/SOLAS courses (including apprenticeship), 1%). To address this issue, part of the remit of the newly-established Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) is to improve the attractiveness of FET/VET programmes in society.

Expanding the apprenticeship system.

Formal apprenticeship is currently made up of just 25 trades, with 80% of apprentices in construction and related areas. A review of the apprenticeship system (DES, 2014) concluded it should be expanded to include new apprenticeships in areas including ICT, retail, hospitality, business administration, medical devices, and financial services.

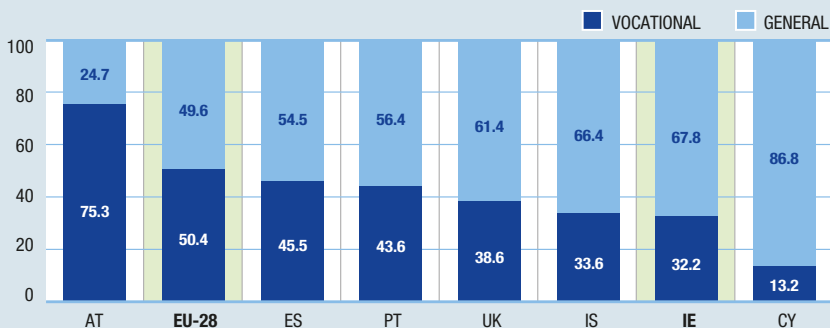
Unemployment. At 13.1% in 2013, Ireland's unemployment, according to Eurostat, was higher than the EU average (10.8%) and even higher for those under 25 (26.8%). Data from the National skills bulletin (2014) also show the younger the individual and the lower their educational qualifications, the more likely they are to be unemployed. The challenge is to ensure that the FET/VET programmes provide learners with skills in demand in the labour market, while assisting those with lower (or no) educational qualifications to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to progress. In response, the Momentum programme was established in 2012 as part of the government's action plan for jobs. Under Momentum, jobseekers can avail of free training (which includes on-the-job training modules) to gain in-demand skills and access to work opportunities in identified growing sectors, such as ICT, tourism and manufacturing technologies.



Education and training in figures

Learners in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational and general programmes

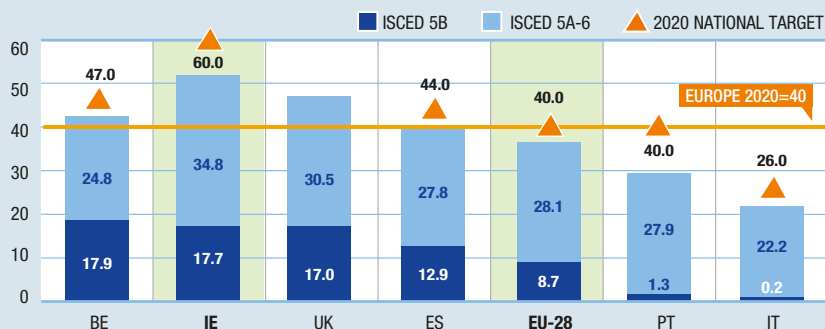
% of all students in upper secondary education, 2012



Source: Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 30.5.2014.

Tertiary education by type

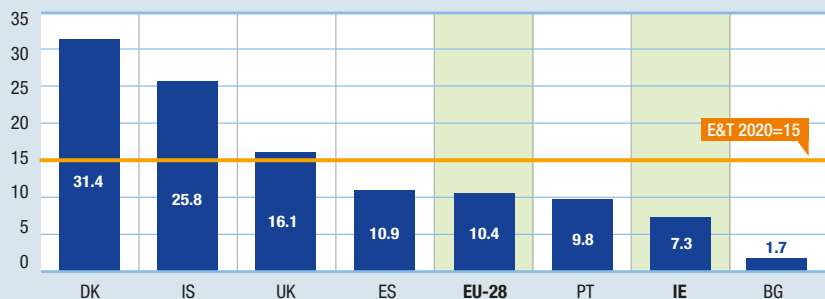
% of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary education by type, 2013



Source: Cedefop calculations based on Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.

Lifelong learning

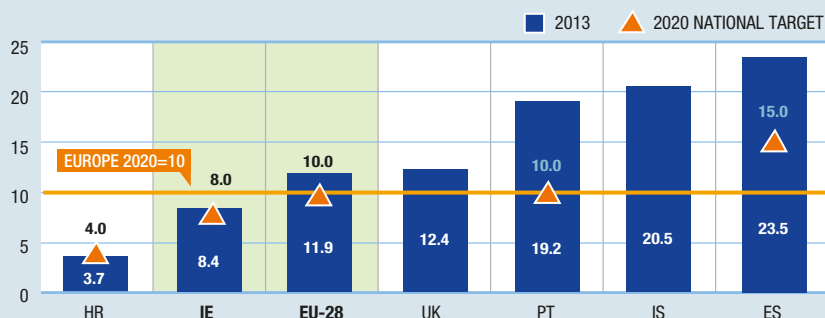
% of population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2013



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.

Early leavers from education and training

% of early leavers from education and training, 2013



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.



Further information

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www.fas.ie/en/refernet	ReferNet Ireland
www.education.ie	Department of Education and Skills
www.solas.ie	SOLAS, Further Education and Training Authority
www.skillsireland.ie	EGFSN, expert group on future skills needs
www.qqi.ie	QQI, Quality and Qualifications Ireland
www.heai.ie	HEA, Higher Education Authority
www.examinations.ie	State Examinations Commission

This spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Ireland.

