

# Creating Futures

Further Education & Training  
Strategy 2026-30

**SOLAS** An tSeirbhís Oideachais  
Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna  
Further Education and  
Training Authority



## Creating Futures: Further Education and Training Strategy 2026-2030

**Vision:** Further education and training in Ireland is at the heart of a thriving, inclusive economy and society, creating opportunities for people through career development, upskilling and lifelong learning.



### Future-Ready Knowledge and Skills

Cutting-edge provision designed with industry partners.

#### Ambition 2030

FET will excel in providing future-ready knowledge and skills that support critical industry sectors and drive innovation.

#### How will we deliver

- Research and data ensuring agility
- Smart specialisation and centres of excellence
- Accelerate reform of apprenticeship system
- AI, digital skills and green innovation
- Engine of the housing and infrastructure response.



### Inclusion for Prosperity and Cohesion

Agile, digital, sustainable methods for lifelong learning.

#### Ambition 2030

Learning opportunities will be accessible to all, universal design fully embedded, learner feedback ensuring impact.

#### How will we deliver

- Accelerate progress on progression pathways
- Universal design vision and principles implemented
- Comprehensive learner feedback shaping system evaluation and development, including social benefits of FET.



## Quality with Innovation

Exceptional learning experiences that inspire and empower every learner.

### Ambition 2030

The quality of FET will be widely recognised, characterised by innovation, agility and contribution to the future of work and society.

### How will we deliver

- Drive reform through FET Colleges model
- Innovate in system performance and agile staffing and workforce model
- Innovate via Enterprise Connect, programme development, eCollege, micro-qualifications.



## Collaborating for Impact

Collaboration with learners, businesses, communities, education and social partners.

### Ambition 2030

FET creates strong, sustainable impact through expert collaboration with key stakeholders nationally and internationally.

### How will we deliver

- Transformative partnerships across full education system, including tertiary
- High-impact collaboration with enterprise community
- All-island, EU and international partnerships.



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# Foreword

I am delighted to present the new Further Education and Training Strategy, which provides an ambitious roadmap for the next five years. The strategy sets out a vision for a modern, agile, and inclusive further education system that supports learners at every stage of life, strengthens communities, and equips our workforce with the skills needed for a rapidly changing world.

Over the past decade, FET has undergone significant transformation. Opportunities have been expanded, pathways into employment and higher education have been strengthened, and a system is now in place that is responsive to learners and employers alike. Yet the pace of change in society, technology, and the labour market demands that we continue to innovate in education and training.

The objectives set out in **Creating Futures** are ambitious. Success will require strong partnerships with employers, communities, and higher education institutions, recognising that collaboration is essential to meeting Ireland's skills needs. The strategy is grounded in evidence and shaped by extensive engagement with learners, educators, employers, and stakeholders across the country. Their insights have been invaluable in identifying what works, where challenges remain, and how we can build a system that is both resilient and future-focused.

This strategy complements and supports a new Tertiary Education Strategy for Ireland which I am also launching this year. Together these two important strategies will guide investment, inform policy, and support the ongoing development of a unified, learner centred education system. We will closely monitor and report on progress, ensuring that the actions we take translate into real and measurable impact.

I want to acknowledge the dedication of those working across further education and training, teachers and tutors, trainers, support staff, and leaders, whose work helps to transform lives every day. I want to thank the many thousands of learners and graduates whose experiences continue to shape the future of FET. And I warmly thank colleagues in SOLAS and my Department.

With this strategy, we reaffirm our belief in the power of education and training to create futures, strengthen communities, and enable a thriving, innovative Ireland. I look forward to working with all partners on bringing this strategy to life.



James Lawless TD,  
Minister for Further and Higher Education,  
Research, Innovation and Science

Further education and training (FET) creates opportunities. It provides pathways to careers and further study for people of all ages and backgrounds. It makes a vital contribution to some of the most important challenges facing Ireland, including housing, infrastructure, ongoing social cohesion and prosperity. As Minister for State for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, I am delighted to welcome **Creating Futures**, the third strategy for further education and training in Ireland. The strategy provides an ambitious vision and objectives for the next five years and builds on the progress made over the period of the last strategy. It sets out the pathway to achieving an agile, future-proofed and accessible skills and knowledge ecosystem that is going to be so important for the country in the period ahead.

Ireland is currently enjoying exceptionally strong economic performance and employment is at record levels. FET has played a crucial part in that success. Our Programme for Government **Securing Ireland's Future** sets out the ambition for FET within an overarching tertiary education strategy. This Government is committed to ensuring that Ireland provides opportunities for all citizens to secure good careers, and to maintain skills in what is a rapidly evolving environment, regionally, nationally and internationally.

I am pleased to see the scale of ambition in this FET strategy, to provide quality education and training full-time, part-time, online and in person that prepares people for an ever more digitalised world, including AI, as well as to develop the green skills needed to tackle climate change. In addition, I note the emphasis on collaboration, a uniquely human skill which is fundamental to making progress on a shared agenda.

This new strategy charts a clear way forward for FET. It is important that we use every opportunity available to us and be fully prepared for future challenges. I would like to express my thanks to the team in SOLAS, the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) who are so vital to the prosperity of communities locally and regionally, and the officials in my Department. My thanks also to learners, employers, unions, other Government departments, state agencies and advocacy groups who have contributed to shaping this strategy. I look forward to FET realising the ambition set out, which will provide immense benefit to students and learners, employees, businesses, the economy, and wider society.



Marian Harkin TD,  
Minister of State for Further and Higher Education,  
Research, Innovation and Science

# Introduction

We are delighted to present **Creating Futures 2026-2030**, the third further education and training (FET) strategy. The vision for this strategy is of FET in Ireland as a core contributor to a thriving inclusive economy and society, providing access and creating opportunities for people through career development, upskilling and lifelong learning.

During the previous FET strategy **Transforming Learning 2020-2024**, FET participation rose from 298,125 learners in 2019 to 439,800 in 2024. This strong growth in participation also created an increased awareness of FET options all around the country, providing a really strong foundation on which to build.

Successful implementation of **Transforming Learning** was delivered through strong partnership and collaboration with FET delivery partners and other key stakeholders. This collaborative approach and an unwavering focus on delivery will underpin the implementation of the successor strategy.

Looking to 2026 and future years, **Creating Futures** provides a roadmap for an agile, future-proofed FET system. The plan has four strategic objectives which are as follows: (i) equipping people with future-ready knowledge and skills; (ii) creating prosperity and social cohesion through inclusion; (iii) ensuring quality alongside innovation; and (iv) collaborating for impact.

Each strategic objective includes practical goals and actions that will deliver on the vision and ambition for FET and for our society and economy. **Creating Futures** will work to enhance economic prosperity whilst supporting social inclusion at a pivotal time regionally, nationally and globally. The needs of learners and graduates are at the heart of the strategy and learner voices will continue to shape and improve the system.

We acknowledge and warmly thank the many stakeholders and in particular Education and Training Board colleagues, ETBI and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science who have played a vital role in development of this strategy and who will be key to successful implementation.

Finally, our thanks to members of the SOLAS Board and the Executive for your ongoing commitment and dedication.

Our strength is in our collective action, we look forward to bringing this strategy to life and through FET, delivering on the twin objectives of economic and social prosperity for all.



Sean Aylward,  
SOLAS Chairperson



Deirdre McDonnell,  
SOLAS CEO

# Strategy summary

Ireland's success depends on how well we innovate and enable people to succeed in a world facing unique challenges and forces of change. Further education and training (FET) is a fundamental part of Ireland's infrastructure. Over the next five years, relevance and agility must drive its response to the needs of learners, enterprise, and communities.

This strategy **Creating Futures** will help deliver the twin objectives of economic prosperity and social inclusion. By creating opportunity for all, Ireland's competitiveness is strengthened in a society that is stable and cohesive.

Emerging technologies, shifting industries, and evolving societal needs demand learning and qualification opportunities for people throughout their lives. Those opportunities must be high quality, accessible and flexible, to power critical sectors of the economy, sustain vibrant communities, and assist new citizens to fully integrate and participate.

The last strategy **Transforming Learning 2020-2024** grew learner participation. 439,800 people were participating in FET in 2024, an increase from 298,125 in 2019. FET provides an important pathway to careers and to higher education. Creativity and delivery focus have driven success, despite unprecedented challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic. The 2023 OECD Skills Strategy underlined the important contribution FET must continue to make in Ireland as globally, all countries grapple with new, tough challenges and strive to safeguard stability and prosperity.

Successful implementation of **Creating Futures 2026-2030** will require innovation and an unwavering commitment to delivering world-class provision. Evidence of impact via data collection and analysis will become ever more important. Further education and training opportunities must remain accessible, high quality and relevant. Flexible, digital modes of learning must expand, and incorporate responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and green expertise.

**Creating Futures** includes a vision and guiding principles for the next five years. It is structured into four strategic objectives. These are (i) **Future-Ready Knowledge and Skills**; (ii) **Inclusion for Prosperity and Cohesion**; (iii) **Quality with Innovation**; and (iv) **Collaborating for Impact**. Each strategic objective includes practical, forward-focused goals, and associated actions, underpinned by an implementation plan.

Collaborative commitment and effort across the sector and with key stakeholders will be vital for success. The unique strength of Ireland's education system is in its people. By working together, we will continue to thrive and contribute to Ireland's social and economic present and future.

# 1. Context

## Building on progress 2020-2024

The **Creating Futures 2026-2030** strategy builds on progress made since 2020 and sets out an ambitious plan for the next five years. Success will ensure delivery of key recommendations from the 2023 OECD Skills Strategy and continued progress in the contribution further education and training makes to Ireland's economy and society.

FET in Ireland is provided through 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs), along with community-based providers and via the national eCollege platform.

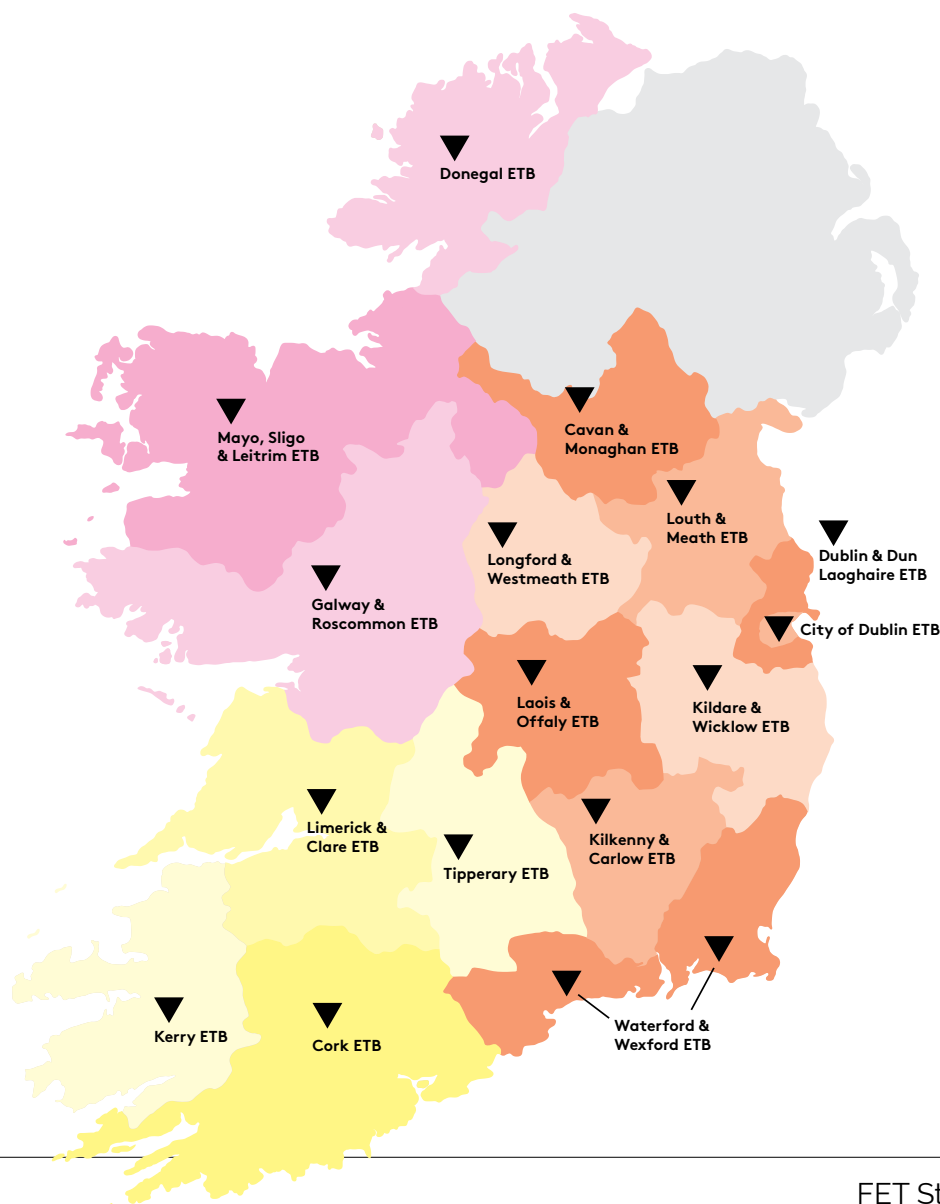
FET learners achieve qualifications primarily at Levels 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Learning is provided full-time, part-time, and online to those over 16 years of age. Learners are of all ages and backgrounds and include school leavers, jobseekers, employees, and employers. The variety of courses and qualifications available is extensive, from micro-qualifications and fully online courses to Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, Youthreach and Community Training Centre programmes, apprenticeships, traineeships, employee upskilling and reskilling via the 'Skills to Advance' initiative, community-based and adult education including construction skills, language learning and literacy and numeracy programmes.

As part of the last strategy, several enabling reforms were progressed. These included:

- **A new funding model:** Moving away from a legacy programme structure to an approach linked to outcomes.
- **New 'FET Colleges' model:** As part of a new operational model for FET to reform and integrate the system through simplifying the FET structure and building provision around a distinct and diverse community-based FET Colleges. To assist with this transformation, major capital investment in the FET Colleges estate was sanctioned to address deficits in capital stock and ensure quality, consolidated learning environments.
- **Performance Agreements with ETBs:** The concept and practice of strategic Performance Agreements were established with each ETB and in partnership with Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI).
- **A single ETB financial system:** Progress on modernisation and standardisation of financial systems and on consistent coding and reporting.
- **Reform of the apprenticeship system:** Planning for reform of the apprenticeship system advanced during 2023-2025, through the National Apprenticeship Office

and with extensive stakeholder consultation via the National Apprenticeship Alliance and other stakeholder fora.

- **Development of micro-qualifications:** The concept of micro-qualifications was developed and implemented in collaboration with enterprise partners.
- **Quality infrastructure across FET:** Inaugural FET quality reviews by QQI in tandem with investment in quality enhancement arrangements by ETBs has provided a foundation for agile programme development.
- **A first national FET strategy for the green transition: Green Skills 2030** was prepared in response to the climate emergency. This strategy outlines how FET can contribute as Ireland moves to more sustainable ways of living and working.



# FET progress in numbers as of 2024

## Goal

## Outcome

A greater overall reach of FET across the population of Ireland.

**1 in 10** adults (438,000 people) learning via FET in 2024 – up 33.4% since 2018.

**30,000** Ukrainians developing English language skills.

A greater share of school leavers choosing FET or apprenticeship options.

**51%** increase in apprentice registrations between 2019-2024.



Alternative progression pathways being delivered.

**6,395** learners enrolled in 2024-2025 academic year in Youthreach or Community Training Centres.

Growth in flexible, online, and blended learning.



**36,717** eCollege enrolments in 2024, up from 7,698 in 2019.

Expansion of national apprenticeship system.

**30,114** apprentices in training on 77 programmes.



A significant and growing cohort of people in employment participating in upskilling.

**26,267** employees participated in upskilling in 2024 via Skills to Advance, up from 5,717 in 2019.

Increase in progression levels through FET.

Between 2019 and 2024 progression of learners within FET increased by

**+27.2%**

Increase in people moving between further and higher education.

**6,000** moving between further and higher education in 2024.

New tertiary degrees introduced.

**360** students on new joint tertiary degree courses.

Expansion of construction and safety-related training.

**138,986** Safe Pass, CSCS and QSCS Construction courses completed in 2024.

**7,000** trained in Zero-Energy Building and retrofitting skills.

## Developments in national and international policy and strategy

National and international studies and policy developments are shaping the plan for the next five years. These include work Ireland completed with the OECD on its national skills strategy during 2022-2023, international and EU policy developments and framework recommendations, and a forthcoming Government strategy for the tertiary system (further and higher education and research) in Ireland. A listing of the key policies and strategies consulted is in Appendix 1.

### OECD Ireland Skills Strategy project

During 2022-2023, a review of Ireland's skills strategy was led by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in partnership with the OECD. The project took the form of extensive policy analysis by the OECD and stakeholder engagement on skills issues facing Ireland, within the OECD's established Skills Strategy Framework. A report was published in May 2023. It concluded that while a focus on skills has been central to Ireland's strong economic performance and improvements in well-being, the scale and pace of change globally require our skills ecosystem to evolve apace. In particular, **Ireland needs to deliver a better balance in skills demand versus supply**. This will be achieved by fostering greater participation in lifelong learning, leveraging skills to drive innovation, and strengthening skills governance, including availability of data and data methodologies and analysis plus an enhanced whole-of-Government approach to skills policy.

The 2023 report underlined the importance of FET in Ireland and its potential to make an even more significant contribution on Ireland's current and future skills needs. Building school-FET pathways, coordinated programme development capacity in ETBs, and universal FET-HE transitions were identified for further development.

In tandem with the skills strategy project, the OECD Skills Dashboard serves as a useful comparative tool for Ireland, providing a snapshot of skills performance relative to other countries in the EU and internationally. The Dashboard is in two parts. The first is 'developing relevant skills' and it includes 10 indicators. The second is 'putting skills to effective use' and it includes 6-8 indicators. Indicators include, for example: 'Are the skills of youth improving?' 'Are skills of adults being developed inclusively?' 'Is the use of skills at work improving?' with a detailed set of data combining to create an output for each country. A version of the Dashboard published by the OECD in 2020 (**OECD Skills Strategy Northern Ireland**) presents Ireland's performance as 'average', scoring in the top 20% in just 3 of 16 indicators. In contrast, countries such as Finland and New Zealand are top performers, with Finland in the top 20% in 10 indicators and New Zealand excelling across 8 indicators.

Publications on the future of work from the World Economic Forum (WEF) have been considered in the Irish context. A January 2025 WEF report cites analytical thinking as the most sought-after core skill among employers and identifies AI and big data as topping the list of fastest-growing skills. Furthermore, the report estimates that two fifths or 39% of workers' current skills will be transformed or become outdated by 2030.

## **EU skills policy 2020-2025**

Over decades, Ireland has engaged and continues to engage closely with European Commission skills policy. During 2020-2025 EU Declarations on vocational education and training on sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience and just transitions to digital and green economies have been incorporated into policy and practice in Ireland. Recent policy initiatives include the Union of Skills which was communicated in March 2025, and which aims to provide an EU-wide impetus on 'more and better skills' for people, including in AI.

In August 2025, an EU Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning was adopted, identifying eight competences needed for personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion.

In September 2025, the Herning Declaration was agreed by the 27 EU countries to strengthen cooperation on vocational education and training. An output of the Danish EU Presidency, the Declaration underlined the need for quality, mobility and 'future-proofing' of vocational education and training to increase competitiveness and quality jobs across Europe to 2030.

A report by Mario Draghi on European competitiveness which was commissioned by the EU Commission, published in 2024 and revisited in September 2025, underlines the need to treat skills as an essential piece of infrastructure, equal in importance to housing, health, or transportation. In several areas including skills there is a message on agility and collaboration:

**“A different path demands new speed, scale and intensity. It means acting together, not fragmenting our efforts. It means focusing resources where impact is greatest. And it means delivering results within months, not years.” (Mario Draghi, Keynote Speech, Sept 2025)**

## **Forthcoming new strategy for a tertiary education system in Ireland**

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science has a policy objective to create a more coherent, coordinated tertiary education system. This is intended to create more seamless access and progression pathways, to accelerate achievement of shared knowledge and skills objectives and to benefit students and learners of all ages and backgrounds, as well as employers, communities, regions and the wider economy and society. Work has been underway on an overarching strategy for the tertiary education system; this is due to be published early in 2026.

# The landscape 2026-2030

Entering the second quarter of the twenty-first century, changes to the future of work, digitalisation, adopting AI, climate change, plus global conflict and instability are all creating challenges for education systems around the world. In Ireland, it is vital that further education and training remains relevant, has appropriate staffing structures to enable agility, and continues to equip people for careers or further study.

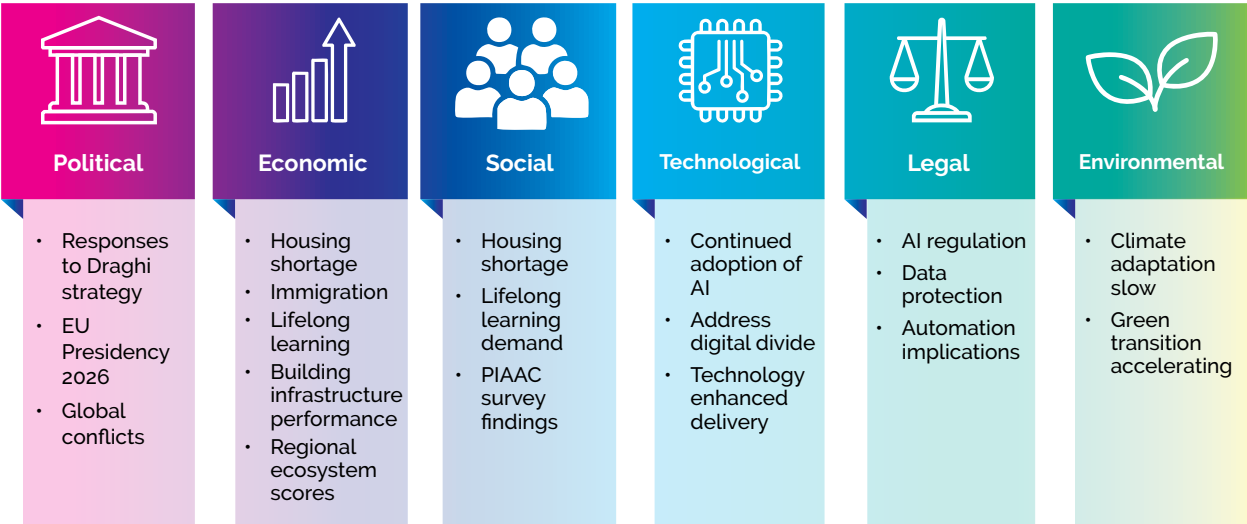
Following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, over 100,000 Ukrainians arrived in Ireland during 2022-2025, needing comprehensive assistance and supports. Ireland mobilised to provide education and training, including English language skills. Over 80,000 Ukrainians continue to shelter in Ireland, with many in need of upskilling for work and to support social integration.

A high priority for Ireland over the coming years is to address a large housing shortage and to accelerate development of infrastructure across transport, energy, health and other social services. In December 2025, Government published an action plan on infrastructure delivery. The plan identifies the 'vital' role of FET in expanding capacity and accelerating skills development to meet the needs of the construction sector.

These challenges feature in an 'education-relevant' PESTLE analysis (political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental) for Ireland within a global context. It is summarised below, with more detail provided in Appendix 2.

## Ireland’s education and training landscape 2026-30 - PESTLE analysis

**Vision:** Creating Futures, a future focused, inclusive FET system with enterprise and communities.



**Impact if addressed:**  Productivity and Innovation  Social Inclusion and Mobility

Successfully responding to the elements identified in this analysis will increase productivity and innovation, smart specialisation and competitiveness, social inclusion and mobility, social belonging and connection, and community and resilience.

Through implementation of **Creating Futures**, further education and training in Ireland will excel as a relevant, future-focused, and inclusive system. It will empower learners at every stage of life, partner closely with enterprise, and contribute to Ireland's social and economic resilience.

Through implementation of this strategy, Ireland's further education and training sector aims to provide a vital contribution to the increasingly complex demand for skills and talent, driven by the AI, digital and green revolution. Learners and emerging graduates will reflect the broadest possible span of ages, backgrounds and abilities in Ireland, through lifelong learning and development of the full range of human capabilities.



## Summary of the strategic ambition 2026-2030

**Creating Futures** sets out the strategic objectives, goals, and actions that FET aims to deliver over the next 5 years to ensure a good balance between skills demand and supply, and to reach the largest possible pool of diverse learners and graduates. There is an economic and social imperative: by fuelling Ireland's competitiveness we will foster successful, sustainable and cohesive communities.

Why	
<b>Purpose</b>	<b>To upskill Ireland's people</b> in the core competencies needed for an innovative and inclusive economy and society and progressing towards OECD best-in-class levels (eg. Finland, New Zealand).
<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Economic and social gains/outcomes</b> include higher productivity and innovation, smart sectoral specialisation and competitiveness, social inclusion and mobility, belonging, connection and resilience.
What	
	<b>Core competencies</b> (based on European Commission and UNESCO frameworks) are foundational (literacy), interpersonal, horizontal (AI+, green), sector-specific, expressive, and engagement-based.
Who	
<b>Lifelong learners</b>	<p><b>Individual learners</b> (currently over 400,000) adult population engaged in <b>lifelong learning</b> from diverse backgrounds of income, gender, location, origin.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforces in key growth sectors and subsectors that are the foundation of Ireland's economy.</li> <li>• The economically active in paid employment, (including lower-pay workers), with opportunities for career development and progression at all levels.</li> <li>• Jobseekers - CSO estimates over 400,000 people are unemployed, underemployed, potentially available, as of Oct 2025.</li> <li>• The economically inactive, including people with disabilities, low literacy, lone parents.</li> <li>• Those contributing unpaid work as carers, volunteers, others.</li> <li>• People who seek to learn for self-realisation and engagement, community development and volunteering. Individuals at all levels contributing to initiating and leading in communities and as citizens.</li> </ul>
<b>Enterprise community</b>	<p><b>Enterprises of all sizes</b> (micro/small, medium, large, self-employed) with a focus on micro/smaller companies with ≤20 employees and those with ≤50 employees, and on supervisors/managers who are key agents of change. Smaller (20 employees) businesses engage about a third of the workforce, and over half in regions outside the main cities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Private and public sector organisations</b>, agencies and institutions.</li> <li>• <b>Community and voluntary</b> (social economy) sector. ETB/LEO alliances via SOLAS and Enterprise Ireland.</li> </ul>
<b>Targeting</b>	Targeting those <b>individuals, groups and enterprises who in different ways are disadvantaged</b> in accessing opportunities and skills in the labour market and community participation. Skills supply, greater productivity and innovation alongside social cohesion through greater inclusion, mobility and resilience is increased.
How	
<b>Delivery</b>	FET <b>delivers upskilling</b> in core competences through a range of <b>delivery platforms and locations</b> online and in-person across a range of settings and generally at NFQ levels 1-6.
<b>Pathways</b>	FET <b>makes linkages</b> that enables individual learners to progress through <b>customised pathways</b> helped by individual and employer <b>guidance, recognition</b> of prior learning, <b>modularisation</b> and credits for progression, <b>work placement</b> and <b>work-based learning</b> .
<b>Networks</b>	<b>Networking to align priorities</b> with individual groups of employers of all sizes and sectors, secondary schools, higher education, communities, voluntary groups and development agencies and bodies.
<b>Resources</b>	An appropriate level of resources is required to progress towards OECD best-in-class, with current funding of €1.2bn from taxpayers' financing and the National Training Fund.

# 2. Strategic objectives, goals and actions 2026-30

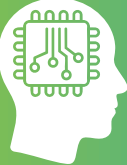

Four strategic objectives will guide progress and achievement over the next five years. These are as follows:

- To provide **future-ready knowledge and skills**
- To build **inclusion for prosperity and cohesion**
- To develop **quality with innovation**
- To **collaborate for impact**


Each objective includes goals and actions that will deliver on the ambition for 2030.

## Creating Futures: Further Education and Training Strategy 2026-2030

**Vision:** Further education and training in Ireland is at the heart of a thriving, inclusive economy and society, creating opportunities for people through career development, upskilling and lifelong learning.

 <p><b>Future-Ready Knowledge and Skills</b></p>	 <p><b>Inclusion for Prosperity and Cohesion</b></p>
<p>Cutting-edge provision designed with industry partners.</p>	<p>Agile, digital, sustainable methods for lifelong learning.</p>
<p><b>Ambition 2030</b></p>	<p><b>Ambition 2030</b></p>
<p>FET will excel in providing future-ready knowledge and skills that support critical industry sectors and drive innovation.</p>	<p>Learning opportunities will be accessible to all, universal design fully embedded, learner feedback ensuring impact.</p>
<p><b>How will we deliver</b></p>	<p><b>How will we deliver</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and data ensuring agility</li> <li>• Smart specialisation and centres of excellence</li> <li>• Accelerate reform of apprenticeship system</li> <li>• AI, digital skills and green innovation</li> <li>• Engine of the housing and infrastructure response.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accelerate progress on progression pathways</li> <li>• Universal design vision and principles implemented</li> <li>• Comprehensive learner feedback shaping system evaluation and development, including social benefits of FET.</li> </ul>

The objectives, goals and actions draw on extensive consultation across the FET sector, with learners, ETBs and other FET providers, industry partners and colleagues in Government departments and public agencies. They identify how, where and for whom FET can provide the greatest impact. They aim to ensure that FET is 'future-proofed', playing a strong role in meeting the technological, sustainability, demographic and globalisation/deglobalisation needs that will emerge in the years ahead.



**Quality with Innovation**

Exceptional learning experiences that inspire and empower every learner.

**Ambition 2030**

The quality of FET will be widely recognised, characterised by innovation, agility and contribution to the future of work and society.

**How will we deliver**

- Drive reform through FET Colleges model
- Innovate in system performance and agile staffing and workforce model
- Innovate via Enterprise Connect, programme development, eCollege, micro-qualifications.



**Collaborating for Impact**

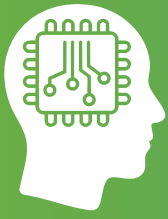
Collaboration with learners, businesses, communities, education and social partners.

**Ambition 2030**

FET creates strong, sustainable impact through expert collaboration with key stakeholders nationally and internationally.

**How will we deliver**

- Transformative partnerships across full education system, including tertiary
- High-impact collaboration with enterprise community
- All-island, EU and international partnerships.



# Future-Ready Knowledge and Skills

## Ambition 2030

FET will excel in providing future-ready knowledge and skills that support priority enterprise sectors and drive innovation.

**Goal: Develop and implement a labour market data strategy that expands skills forecasting and insights to anticipate and meet priority knowledge and skills needs regionally and nationally.**

Collaborating with industry and tertiary education and training partners, and engaging with the National Skills Council, skills forecasting, analysis and insights will be further enhanced. An expanded data strategy will include consideration of the modernisation of work practices, digitisation, productivity, and innovation.

### Actions

- Further develop data analysis capability, building on the work of the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU), working closely with tertiary partners, industry, the National Skills Council and international partners including the OECD, supporting establishment of a National Skills Observatory.
- Advance analysis and reporting on skills needs in smart specialisation sectors, including life sciences, software/digital business services, production engineering (including semiconductors), agrifood, financial services, hospitality and creative industries, manufacturing, construction, renewables, energy, the environment, education, retail and the care sector.

**Goal: Advance smart specialisation to meet priority industry needs.**

Specialist centres of skills development by regionally based ETBs have expanded in recent years. They include biopharma in Cork, aviation in Limerick and Dublin, advanced manufacturing in Louth, the National Demonstration Park for Modern Methods of Construction in Mount Lucas, Offaly, and several Zero Energy Building (ZEB) Centres of Excellence around the country. Courses are co-designed, developed with industry for industry, and range in length and delivery format. This approach will underpin the **Creating Futures** strategy, aligned with national policy and industry demand, including green skills as set out in **Green Skills 2030**.

## Actions

- Further develop smart specialisation at regional, state, and all-island levels through continued collaboration, innovation, research and development with industry partners and between further and higher education.
- Advance research and development contribution through targeted training for technicians and support personnel (who account for 50% of research and development business headcount - CSO).

### **Goal: Advance FET as an agile, industry-aligned partner, delivering knowledge and skills that meet current and emerging labour market needs.**

Through a holistic **Enterprise Connect** initiative, by 2030 FET aims to become a 'go to' knowledge and skills hub for enterprise. This will be achieved in collaboration with Regional Skills Fora, Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), Enterprise Ireland, and partners in higher education as part of a joined-up knowledge and skills ecosystem. Given its local and regional footprint, FET can be particularly effective in supporting micro and small businesses and self-employed people around the country.

## Actions

- To deliver **Enterprise Connect**, coordinate enterprise engagement teams within ETBs to provide a 'one-stop-shop' service with local and regional industry partners.
- Establish closer local and regional collaboration between further and higher education, Regional Skills Fora, LEOs, Skillnet Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to better align skills demand and supply.
- Use industry advisory boards to co-design knowledge and skills content.
- Accelerate delivery of leadership and management development programmes within small businesses ( $\geq 20$  employees and  $\geq 50$  employees) to assist in innovation and growth.
- Design and deliver strategic marketing plans to raise awareness among Irish businesses of **Enterprise Connect**.

### **Goal: Deliver future-proofed knowledge and skills in the green transition and digital competency of all citizens, including in AI.**

The continued competitiveness of the Irish economy will depend on the ability to meet current and future skills gaps, with AI and core digital skills becoming increasingly essential for all citizens. FET will prioritise knowledge and skills for the tech sector and digital specialisation including AI, cybersecurity, and digital skills, in construction, and to enable the green transition in construction, manufacturing and other priority industry areas. Provision, which will include short courses and micro-qualifications as well as longer courses and apprenticeships, will draw on up-to-date research on skills needs and forecasting. Planning and implementation will ensure access and inclusion for marginalised cohorts of learners.

## Actions

- Align FET provision with the technology needs of employers, using co-design and drawing on up-to-date skills research and forecasting with a focus on AI, cybersecurity, and core digital skills.
- Explore with industry partners the demand for reform and expansion of 'tech/digital' apprenticeships.
- Expand eCollege offerings to include access to knowledge and skills in AI, cybersecurity and other emerging areas of skills need.
- Develop strategic partnerships with public and private entities to deliver digital learning content on emerging technologies.
- Improve staff capacity and capability in digital teaching and learning.
- Expand digital learning - in-person, blended, and online - to ensure all learners have access to essential digital skills and competencies.
- Resource a digital learning network to help implement standards that are guided by the EU Digital Competence Framework for Citizens.
- Deliver agreed sectoral and strategic actions as set out in **Green Skills 2030**.

**Goal: Advance development of enterprise training capability in businesses of all sizes and sectors, with a priority focus on very small and small businesses.**

There is a need to develop 'in-house' capability within Irish businesses to advance innovation and growth. As part of the **Enterprise Connect** initiative, it is intended to collaborate with enterprise partners and other key stakeholders on building this capability of businesses to deliver work-based training and work placement.

## Actions

- Focus on upskilling of supervisors, mentors and frontline managers as key agents in 'in-house' skills development, prioritising very small and small businesses ( $\leq 20$  employees and  $\leq 50$  employees).
- Support delivery of leadership and management development training within very small and small businesses. in collaboration with LEOs and other regional and national partners.
- Support provision of agile training and support for graduate and other skilled employment to help bridge the recruitment gap, in collaboration with the development agencies and with a priority focus on SMEs.
- Develop programmes to support mental health at work, building on peer buddy initiatives such as the Generation Apprenticeship R U OK? initiative.
- Support initiatives to reinvigorate the strategic focus on workplace innovation in Ireland as a means of improving business productivity and performance.

**Goal: Respond to housing and other key infrastructure needs, ensuring an adequate skills pipeline for the construction sector.**

FET aims to be a key delivery partner on a skilled construction workforce to meet Ireland's housing and broader infrastructure needs. This can be delivered through apprenticeships and a variety of other course provision, including micro-qualifications, short courses and traineeships. Significant progress has been made in recent years in the modernisation of construction training to meet the challenges of housing supply and sustainable construction. In addition to Mount Lucas, five Zero Energy Building Centres of Excellence have been opened, in Wexford, Cork, Limerick, Sligo and Dublin.

**Actions**

- Work with key partners in Government to produce skills needs analysis, forecasting and planning that meet national infrastructure requirements.
- Support delivery by 2030 of 12,500 apprentice registrations per year, of which two-thirds will be craft apprentices, expanding the skilled construction workforce.
- Embed a sustainability focus across all construction programmes, aimed at reducing carbon footprint and energy consumption, scaling provision of green construction techniques and certifications.
- Drive Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) training through the National Demonstration Park for MMC and the National Construction Training Campus.
- Expand capacity across Zero Energy Building Centres of Excellence.

**Goal: Accelerate reform of the national apprenticeship system.**

Reform and development of the national apprenticeship system is a priority focus through the National Apprenticeship Office, and it will underpin the next **Action Plan for Apprenticeship**. Industry involvement is essential to the success of the apprenticeship model, along with robust employee representation and collaboration among tertiary education partners. SOLAS continues to hold overall statutory responsibility for the national apprenticeship system. The National Apprenticeship Office which a joint entity of SOLAS and the HEA, will coordinate its management, oversight, and development.

**Actions**

- Accelerate reform of apprenticeship along with work-integrated learning pathways and course options that support national infrastructure delivery and the target of 12,500 apprenticeship registrations per annum as per the Programme for Government.
- Continue to develop data collection, analysis, forecasting and budgeting capability.
- Reassign craft programme, assessment and awarding roles from SOLAS and QQI to education providers.
- Review the 10-step development process for creating new apprenticeships and align with other work-based learning pathways, such as traineeships.
- Develop an appropriate apprenticeship IT platform and technology supports for the expanding system.



# Inclusion for Prosperity and Cohesion

## Ambition 2030

Learning opportunities will be accessible to all, with universal design principles fully embedded and learner feedback ensuring ongoing improvement and impact.

**Goal:** Ensure every community has access to further education and training, prioritising adult literacy needs and using targeted approaches with under-represented groups.

FET will continue to drive educational opportunities through the **Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) strategy (2021)** and the **Community Education Framework (2024)**. Reducing unmet literacy needs and providing quality community-based education are essential to create social cohesion, encourage active citizenship and support diverse communities. In addition, they will help to address the general decline in literacy, reading and concentration due to increased digital media consumption. In response to the 2023 PIAAC results for Ireland, a Literacy Provision Expert Group was established in 2025 to recommend standards for literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy provision across ETBs, including a common approach to assessment, learner supports, and practitioner development. The Expert Group will also identify gaps in provision and propose operating guidelines to improve access and coherence in literacy services. Such community-based education will also help address the general decline in literacy, reading and concentration resulting from the information processing transformation.

Relevant legislative requirements and frameworks will continue to guide policy and practice. These include the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, disability legislation, the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, and the Irish Sign Language Act.

### Actions

- Implement the next phase of the **Adult Literacy for Life** strategy, informed by the work of the Expert Group for literacy provision and outcomes of a mid-term review of the ALL strategy.
- Implement the **Community Education Framework**.
- Within community-based education, excel in delivery of holistic knowledge and skills, spanning foundational, interpersonal, expressive, horizontal, sector-specific, and participative components.
- Ensure ongoing development of leadership, innovation, critical thinking, listening, memory training, community development, volunteering, and citizenship engagement capabilities within FET programmes.
- Implement innovative initiatives in collaboration with D/SP regionally and nationally to upskill jobseekers for the labour market and explore with D/SP relevant work placement and related supports for younger jobseekers as a particular target group.

- Continue to deliver English for Speakers of Other Languages, seeking to reflect recommendations from the ESOL review in 2025 as appropriate.
- Continue to provide language training in Irish.
- Use targeted approaches to expand learning opportunities with jobseekers, people with disabilities, older people, lone parents, carers, the Traveller and Roma communities and to develop 'place-based' approaches based on the Pobal HP Deprivation Index with the most socially and economically disadvantaged.

**Goal: Place learners at the heart of decision-making by strengthening the learner voice throughout the system.**

FET learners are diverse, they are of all ages and backgrounds. They participate in a wide variety of course options, part-time and full-time, online, in person, and via blended delivery. Actions will be implemented to help ensure that the feedback and experiences of all FET learners are captured and used for evidence-based decision and policy making.

**Actions**

- Design and administer a comprehensive annual survey of learners in partnership with Aontas, which will inform continuous improvement of learning experience and opportunity.
- Develop additional formal and informal learner feedback mechanisms, including enhanced representation on Boards, Councils and other governance structures, learner forums, on campus and online.
- Embed learner feedback in programme design, delivery, and evaluation.
- Grow participation of diverse learner groups through community-based and remote learning.
- Identify opportunities to support and progress learner-focused initiatives, including student travel cards and student-union style structures.

**Goal: Ensure inclusion through universal design and tailored learner supports for under-represented groups.**

FET has a strong track record in supporting under-represented groups. Further strides will be made through implementation of the Altitude Charter for universal design in tertiary education and through specific targeted programmes for learners with additional learning needs, including those with disabilities and with long-term health conditions. Data collection, methodologies, and analysis will be enhanced to support evidence of impact and further investment.

**Actions**

- Use the Altitude Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education to implement inclusive learning and assessment, supports and services in FET.
- Deliver tailored initiatives to ensure successful participation and outcomes for particularly under-represented groups, who include those with additional educational needs, carers, both professionals and family/partners, and women returning to work.
- Identify opportunities to enhance integration with other Government services and better support learners from under-represented groups.

- Co-ordinate with D/SP and other Government departments and agency bodies to ensure consistency of learner payments and grants, and to support and signpost FET learners facing structural inequalities such as access to childcare, transport and housing.

**Goal: Diversify and widen the learner base through new methods of outreach and a commitment to inclusion.**

Learning opportunities will continue to be enhanced for students progressing into careers or on to higher education. There is an emerging challenge at second level with higher drop-out rates and absenteeism that is affecting the ability of young people to participate in society and in the labour market. As young people graduate from further and higher education, there has been evidence in 2025 of erosion of entry level employment due to AI and related trends along with an entry barrier where employers are increasingly requiring a minimum of six months previous work experience. Overall, a rise in unemployment for younger people (up to 20% for 15-19-year-olds in Q3 2025) is part of an international trend. To counter this, pathways and the connection between second level and further education will be strengthened under this strategy, along with high quality, accessible advice and guidance. SOLAS will continue to work with ETBs and other providers and with support from international partners including the OECD to ensure relevant data on inputs and outcomes are captured and inform work on access, progression and completion.

**Actions**

- Further develop data collection, data methodologies and analysis of access, progression, and completion.
- Further develop advice and guidance services for learners of all backgrounds, building on the iVET modular initiative and engagement with the CAO portal.
- Develop initiatives to help respond to emerging challenges for school leavers progressing to further study or employment, to include potential bridging courses and AI upskilling, in collaboration with education and enterprise partners.
- Continue to support early school leavers with education and careers development through Youthreach and Community Training Centre provision.
- Explore how FET can be further integrated into a consolidated tertiary education application process.
- Embed the principles of access and equality in programme design, planning and upskilling of FET practitioners.
- Take practical steps to enhance the learning experience for Irish language speakers and communities, in line with the Official Languages Act.



# Quality with Innovation

## Ambition 2030

The quality of learning will be recognised nationally and internationally, characterised by relevance, innovation, and contribution to the future of work and society.

**Goal: Develop the new FET Colleges model to consolidate existing provision within an integrated college structure.**

The previous FET strategy highlighted the need to consolidate existing FET provision within a single integrated college structure that would incorporate the previous functions of both colleges of further education and training centres. To build on this ambition, this strategy seeks to develop reform policy interventions to accelerate the delivery of this concept, centred on a network of FET Colleges. The result will be FET provision that is easy to access; has simplified pathways; offers a consistent learner experience; and has a clearer identity.

### Actions

- Develop a blueprint or framework for the new FET Colleges model, outlining guiding principles to ETBs for leadership, management and governance structures of FET Colleges.
- Develop integrated FET Colleges settings and brands/identities.
- Maximise opportunities to consolidate and streamline FET provision.

**Goal: Reform FET staffing structures to enable a responsive, agile system.**

The current FET staffing landscape is complex. A mapping of existing roles has been undertaken, along with an international benchmarking exercise. To realise the ambition set out in **Creating Futures**, staff capacity and capability needs to be transformed. ETBs must have agile staffing structures and be able to recruit, upskill and retain staff with the relevant knowledge and skills.

### Actions

- Design an agile FET workforce structure for the future that builds on the existing role mapping and benchmarking.
- Implement a system-wide workforce planning approach that is responsive to future skills needs, assessing current workforce capabilities and forecasting future demands (new qualifications, regulatory requirements, technological advancements).
- Enhance staff capability in areas that include quality assurance, programme development and AI.
- Strengthen the talent pipeline of staff through collaboration and partnership with higher education, industry, and local government.

### **Goal: Continue to develop the FET estate.**

Implementation of the FET Colleges Major Capital Programme will continue, to address deficits in current FET infrastructure and to support projects that drive reform of the sector. This will be achieved through consolidation and integration of further education and training provision, unified tertiary provision and the realisation of Specialist Centres of Skills. FET aims to provide access to fully inclusive learning and assessment practices, supports and services, smart classrooms, specialised laboratories, virtual learning tools, industry standard equipment, collaborative spaces, advanced software, and online learning platforms. Delivery will ensure there is appropriate infrastructure in place to meet the needs of all our FET learners and teaching staff.

#### **Actions**

- Deliver the FET Colleges Major Capital Programme.
- Incorporate universal design principles within the new FET Colleges, providing inclusive, future-proofed space, staffing, learner supports, and services.
- Embed sustainable development principles across the capital projects pipeline to meet public sector national targets and align to the tertiary sector's Climate Action Vision.

### **Goal: Enhance system performance, governance, agile budgeting and funding.**

Economic and social shifts are resulting in rapidly changing learner expectations and labour market requirements. Adequate governance and funding are key to enable FET to adapt to these changes in a way that is sustainable, agile, and responsive. Following publication in 2022 of the **FET Funding Model Review**, the funding of ETBs has transitioned to a five-category funding allocation approach. The model allows a more efficient and effective resource allocation, and more autonomy for ETBs to target investment in areas of greatest regional need. Over the duration of this strategy, implementation of the revised approach will be advanced, working closely with ETBs, D/FHERIS and other key stakeholders. When fully implemented, the reformed approach will deliver a transparent and streamlined model for the allocation of funding, spanning core funding and targeted funding aimed at supporting initiatives responding to critical skills demand and essential services.

#### **Actions**

- Continue implementation and ongoing evaluation of the revised funding allocation model, in collaboration with ETBs and other FET providers.
- Transform funding approaches and technology in SOLAS and ETBs to deliver consistently agile and transparent profiling, financial reporting, budgeting, financial governance and monitoring.
- Enhance the FET sector's capabilities through ongoing professional development in financial systems and reporting, governance, and accountability.
- Ensure fully robust and transparent links between financial allocations and service planning and performance within ETBs and other service providers.
- Agree and implement 'Performance Agreements' with each ETB to support and structure ongoing improvement and innovation.

**Goal: Embed quality across the system, through strategic engagement and collaboration with QQI, agile programme design and streamlined processes.**

FET must be agile and capable of responding to rapid economic and societal shifts while upholding excellence in quality and learner experience. Programme development and validation processes in partnership with industry must become quicker, more adaptable and streamlined. Other governance processes need to evolve so that development and delivery can be responsive in an environment of ongoing change in learner and enterprise needs, and in the regional, national and international context.

**Actions**

- Strengthen the strategic sectoral relationship with QQI to drive key projects including exploration of options to streamline validation, revalidation, and other awards-related processes.
- Establish coordination structures to drive capacity-building, development skillsets, use of existing research, and targeted research to ensure relevance and to avoid duplication in programme development regionally and nationally.
- Implement agile programme development methodologies, with an initial focus on craft apprenticeships, technical programmes, and development of transversal skills.
- Scope development of a standardised admissions, guidance, and registration system.
- Reduce duplication of service provision through sharing of resources between FET providers and as part of an integrated tertiary system.

**Goal: Advance a flexible, learner-centric ecosystem, through modular provision, micro-qualifications and other micro-learning initiatives.**

To enhance responsiveness and flexibility, policy and practice in recognition of prior learning (RPL) will be advanced, along with expansion of modular learning, micro-qualifications, digital badging and other micro-learning methods, co-designed with enterprise partners.

**Actions**

- Take practical steps to expand recognition of prior learning (RPL).
- Develop and deliver modular, blended, and year-round learning options that support flexible entry points.
- Scale up micro-qualifications options nationally and scope out enhanced digital badging and micro-learning.
- Explore the potential to adopt a single credit system.

**Goal: Transition to an integrated digital ecosystem that delivers a tailored learner experience and is underpinned by shared digital systems.**

It is intended that stand-alone digital FET services will transition to an integrated digital ecosystem by 2030. A design-led approach aligned to the **Better Public Services 2030** strategy will ensure that quality and accessibility are at the heart of the learner experience. As part of wider efforts around establishing an integrated digital ecosystem, cross-institutional collaboration and economies of scale will be advanced. FET providers will benefit from more opportunities to share resources, good practice, digital content and platforms. This work requires reviewing the current FET operational/digital systems, with a view to planning for the potential development of new management information systems.

**Actions**

- Maximise eCollege's role as a national resource, expanding beyond individual learners to include service streams for employers, particularly SMEs, and access to key digital knowledge and skills, including AI and cybersecurity.
- Develop a consolidated, learner web platform that provides accessible information, a simple application process, and an enhanced user experience for learners.
- Scope out an integrated approach to managing digital identity that enables access to shared digital services.
- Scope out reform and development of FET operational/digital systems.



# Collaborating for Impact

## Ambition 2030

FET creates strong, sustainable impact through collaboration with key stakeholders, including learners, businesses, communities, education, and social partners.

### **Goal: Strengthen partnerships across education to deliver integrated and inclusive pathways for learners.**

An integrated tertiary system is a priority for Government, with a tertiary education strategy due to be published early in 2026. FET will proactively participate in this transformation project, engaging with D/FHERIS, higher education partners, and other key stakeholders. Areas for tertiary collaboration include data analysis capabilities and methodologies, evaluation, and evidence-based planning to enable a whole-of-Government response on knowledge and skills, drawing on OECD and ESRI findings and recommendations. Big strides forward will be possible on access and progression pathways based on shared learning capabilities. There will be extensive shared work on co-design of programmes content and delivery. Collaboration with primary and second level will continue to be vitally important, on access pathways, guidance, and programme development. There is an emerging challenge as young people graduate from tertiary education with evidence of erosion of entry level employment due to AI and related trends. Development of more bridges into employment at entry level will be a shared objective.

### **Actions**

- Participate in implementation of the new Tertiary Education Strategy.
- Embed a collaborative tertiary system through new and shared partnerships with higher education, industry, and other key stakeholders.
- Invest in data collection, analysis and reporting, and strengthen the role of the SLMRU in a joined-up approach on knowledge and skills provision.
- Develop evaluation methodologies in consultation with the OECD, ESRI and other partners which demonstrate the impact of FET provision on core economic and social goals and outcomes (including competitiveness, productivity and social mobility).
- Expand the number and reach of Tertiary Degrees.
- Further develop partnerships with primary and second level through high-impact access, guidance, and programme development initiatives, drawing on the broad-based composition of Education and Training Boards.
- Invest further in high quality information and guidance for learners and employers as education and enterprise adapts to evolving skills needs, AI and related trends.
- Develop initiatives to support transition to employment for further and higher education graduates as the impact of AI and related trends becomes more visible.

**Goal: Expand partnerships and collaboration with industry and representative bodies, drawing on existing structures and integrating with higher education as part of the tertiary education strategy.**

As part of the **Enterprise Connect** initiative and implementation of the tertiary education strategy, there will be strategic review and development of liaison and partnerships with industry. This will help ensure that feedback from industry is regular and structured, and that FET, working with higher education, remains relevant and responsive to industry and learners. Regional partnerships and development will be a backbone, through Regional Skills Fora, Local Employment Offices (LEOs) and other regional structures.

### **Actions**

- Evaluate current industry partnerships and engagement as part of the **Enterprise Connect** initiative and supporting research.
- Identify actions and initiatives to streamline enterprise engagement across tertiary education.
- Invest in data collection, analysis and reporting to inform enterprise engagement and outputs.
- Design and implement further regular, structured opportunities for engagement and feedback from enterprise partners, spanning micro, small, medium, and large businesses, and including CEOs, HR personnel, and employees.
- Expand engagement with Government Departments, agencies and bodies who liaise with the enterprise community, including D/FHERIS, D/ETE, D/Social Protection, D/Transport, D/PER, Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Ibec, Science Foundation Ireland, Chambers Ireland, local/regional Chambers, Regional Skills Fora, Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Managers, Regional Assemblies, Local Enterprise Offices.

**Goal: Support all-island linkages and partnerships.**

FET will promote and participate in all-island linkages as part of **Creating Futures**. Partnerships established between FET providers and stakeholders on a North-South basis will be further expanded to accelerate shared learning and mobility. Opportunities to leverage the Shared Island Fund will be implemented. Joint meetings of Skills Councils and other high-level engagements will expand, building on the work of the cross-border tertiary clusters. Liaison with Scotland, England and Wales will also be advanced, working with higher education colleagues, D/FHERIS and other stakeholders.

### **Actions**

- Expand participation in all-island initiatives regionally and nationally.
- Develop partnerships with FET/VET partners and industry bodies such as Invest Northern Ireland and Intertrade Ireland.
- Implement initiatives as part of the Shared Island Fund across tertiary education and training.
- Support D/FHERIS and Government in promoting shared island partnerships and reconciliation.

**Goal: Expand EU and international partnerships to enhance shared learning and innovation.**

Since the end of the pandemic, engagement with EU and international partners has accelerated, delivering shared benefit and insights. It is intended that the scope and impact of this activity will grow as part of **Creating Futures**.

**Actions**

- Contribute proactively to Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union (July-December 2026).
- Develop targeted actions to expand EU and international partnerships, research, and engagement.
- Further develop mechanisms to share learning and insights from engagement with EU and international partners, to include seminars, webinars, and conference opportunities.
- Expand participation in ERASMUS+ and other EU programmes.



# 3. Delivering the strategy

Delivering this strategy will require strong and positive collaboration. SOLAS, ETBs, and other FET providers will, as proactive, enabling, listening and learning organisations, work in close partnership with all stakeholders including Government, industry, and communities. An appropriate level of resourcing will be required to implement the strategy and so move Ireland towards the OECD 'best in class', building on funding of €1.2bn in 2026 from the Exchequer and the National Training Fund.

Delivery will include the following steps:

- **Record** progress on KPIs/targets that will define success
- **Recognise** different strengths and specialisms of providers
- **Resource** the strategy with reprioritisation on areas of greatest need and opportunity
- **Reward** providers who grow and innovate
- **Reform** the critical barriers to an integrated FET system
- **Reflect** allocation of responsibility clearly in implementation plan.

## Performance Agreements

Progress through the period of the last strategy has initiated a move towards a more strategic, integrated, quality and outcomes-focused approach in FET and within the wider tertiary system. The introduction in 2018 of Performance Agreements between SOLAS and the 16 ETBs have been instrumental. They provide an important link between national strategy and regional FET provision, covering a multi-year planning period. Two iterations of agreements have been completed between 2018-2024. A third round of agreements will commence in 2026.

The Performance Agreements with each ETB will:

- set out each ETB's strategic priorities
- reflect the unique characteristics and needs of the ETB area and where it is contributing/ will contribute to regional and national priorities
- detail the resources and infrastructure available to ETBs to meet these needs
- summarise the baseline provision in terms of FET
- identify challenges and risks arising
- highlight the contribution by each ETB to delivering on **Creating Futures**
- set out a reporting and monitoring framework for management of the agreements with each ETB, drawing on good practice nationally and internationally, including via the OECD.

# Implementation Plan

An implementation plan with timelines will accompany the strategy. SOLAS will coordinate implementation and provide the overall governance framework. The approach to achievement of the strategic objectives, goals and actions will be further articulated in the Performance Agreements with each ETB.



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# Appendix 2

## Framework of key competencies across education and training

Key competence categories	Components
<b>Foundational</b>	Adult literacy and numeracy, self-management, brain/memory training, financial literacy
<b>Interpersonal</b>	Communications, teamwork, collaboration, listening, emotional intelligence
<b>Horizontal</b>	Artificial intelligence (AI) and digital skills Green/sustainability skills Critical and systems thinking Technology and Engineering (STEM) RDI skills (researchers, technicians, support)
<b>Sector-specific</b>	Range of skills for 10+ key sectors that drive the Irish economy - construction, life sciences and so on
<b>Expressive</b>	Languages, arts Creativity competence Cultural awareness and expression
<b>Engagement</b>	Community place-making, volunteering, citizenship Entrepreneurship and innovation capabilities Competence to lead, supervise, manage, mentor

# Appendix 3

## PESTLE analysis (education and training) for Ireland as of December 2025

### Political

The next national elections are due in 2029 with policy set out in the current Programme for Government. Ireland has the EU Presidency July-December 2026 and will be involved in shaping EU responses on the Draghi strategy. All-island opportunities and challenges are becoming more visible.

Globally, several large-scale conflicts are underway, in the Ukraine, the middle East, Sudan, with geopolitical tensions that involve powerful countries and blocs, including the US, Russia, China and the EU.

### Economic

There is steady growth in the real economy. Ireland's overall real productivity is higher than the EU average, although there are variations within significant segments of the Irish economy. There are, for example, indicators of underperformance in building infrastructure and housing. Overall, however, Ireland's economy is more buoyant than is the case globally.

Regionally, Ireland continues to have imbalances in competitiveness, reflected in EU Regional Competitiveness Index scores (2022). Data from the EU Commission Regional Ecosystem Scoreboard (RES) between 2017 and 2021 shows a decline in Ireland's regional ecosystem scores, driven by low innovation and employment in SMEs. Enterprise partners have called for a long-term shared agenda for sectoral development and specialisation across the island of Ireland. There is a call for innovation and ambition, focus and urgency in sector strategy development and implementation. FET can make an important contribution through collaboration with education and enterprise partners nationally, regionally, and locally.

### Social

A housing shortage is a major social issue at present in Ireland, and increasingly it is affecting youth emigration. Related, there are visible social tensions over the numbers of refugees and immigration. Building social trust, inclusion and community cohesion are live challenges, amidst deglobalisation, economic volatility and movement of people. Ireland's population is projected to grow by one million by 2040. The National Development Plan Review 2025 outlines ambitious targets for new homes, retrofitting, and major upgrades to transport, water and energy systems.

The national population is both growing and ageing. While the number of people living in Ireland has increased, the proportion aged 65 and over has also risen. As people live and work longer, there is a growing demand for lifelong learning. Ireland improved its lifelong learning participation rate in 2024, to 16%, up from 14% in 2023. However, this places the country fourteenth in the EU, just above the average and well behind the top performing countries of Sweden (42%), Finland (32%), and Denmark (32%).

The 2023 PIAAC survey indicates that one in five adults in Ireland still struggle with basic literacy. One in four struggle with numeracy. Despite Ireland's overall progress and position as a leader within the EU in digital skills, a digital skills divide persists, particularly for older people, those with disabilities, and communities facing socio-economic disadvantage. As more aspects of daily life move online, accessible digital training, including in use of AI will be essential to ensure that no one is left behind.

## **Technological**

AI and broader digital literacy are the big challenges for Ireland currently. So far, Ireland is performing well on AI adoption and is ranked third in a forthcoming OECD study. Globally, there is intense focus on the opportunities and challenges of AI, sometimes framed as a fourth industrial revolution.

## **Legal**

Regulation of AI and related digital platforms and activity will be an important activity over the coming years. There may be trade-offs required in areas such as AI and data protection. Managing the implications of accelerating automation are expected to feature also.

## **Environmental**

In Ireland, adaption to climate change has been slower than intended. The national emission target for 2030 is challenging but there are indications that momentum is increasing. Globally, a warming planet is resulting in crisis consequences. It is driving improvements in the cost of renewables become much cheaper. A green transition is in train.







