

Transforming Learning Strategic Performance Agreements

**The Further Education
& Training System 2022-2024**

Annual Progress Report 2022

Foreword

2022 has been an outstanding year for the Further Education and Training system. The Education and Training Boards (ETBs) led the return to the reopening of the sector, following the lockdowns during the Pandemic in 2020 and 2021, to deliver the biggest contribution made to date for learners and citizens since the establishment of SOLAS and the ETBs in 2013.

A significant achievement and enabler of the level of learning activity in 2022 which exceeded participation rates of over 350k people, across the country was the development and implementation of the new Strategic Performance Agreements for the period of 2022-2024. The new agreements, which underpin the implementation framework of the *National FET Strategy, Future FET: Transforming Learning 2020-2024* are shaping and delivering on our national agenda.

Already at the end of 2022, it is evident that in many of the 12 target areas in the agreements, the progress is significant, with learner numbers and participation levels close or in some cases exceeding the levels in the FET system in 2019, prior to the impact of the Pandemic.

In some ways, this is representative of the growth and expansion of the system which was already underway as a result of the targeted and outcomes focused transformation set out in the inaugural Strategic Performance Agreements 2018-2020. However, it is also a testament to the expanding remit and strategic importance of SOLAS and the FET system, now tasked with leading out key new areas, such as in green skills, in delivering the Adult Learning for Life Strategy and in the national delivery frameworks for national policies including Housing for All, the National Recovery Plan and the Pathways to Work Strategy.

In celebrating what has been achieved at the end of the first year of the agreements, we also fully acknowledge and recognise that challenges remain. The ambitious vision set out to Transform Learning in the national strategy and the agreements requires significant collaborative effort across the system, particularly in the areas of green skills and delivering on the retrofitting agenda. The targets can only be fully realised if the enabling themes of the FET Strategy further evolve and progress alongside this performance framework in 2023 and 2024.

There remains uncertainty in the system, with the continued need to respond to the crisis in Ukraine, the very real challenge of the cost of living facing the country and all its implications, as well as the perhaps changing economic situation in terms of recent announcements and job losses.

We remain committed to ensuring an all of system approach to our vision for FET and to strive towards continued success in further expanding our offering and the outcomes for all learners as well as delivering on the national contribution made by FET across Ireland.



Andrew Brownlee
Chief Executive Officer, SOLAS

Strategic Performance Agreements 2022 – Introduction

The Strategic Performance Agreements 2022-2024 mark the most significant advances to date in delivering an outcomes focused framework for the Further Education and Training (FET) system. Building on the initial outcomes focused approach set out in the Strategic Performance Agreements 2018-2020, the vision for Future FET is now fully realised through the establishment of the 12 national system targets in the agreements, alongside the accompanying narrative and commitments to deliver on the Transforming Learning agenda in the FET Strategy.

Set out in detail in the National System [Report](#) are the principles on which the agreements were developed, the national outcomes on how success will be measured and the 12 national system targets and definitions. This 2022 annual progress report should be read alongside the system report and the individual 16 [Strategic Performance Agreements](#). As such, this progress report focuses on both the qualitative and overall progress of the ETBs in delivering on the Transforming Learning agenda, as set out in each of the agreements, as well as at a national system performance level. It also examines the performance across all 12 national system targets.

A summary is also provided which sets out areas of action for 2023, with a future focus on 2024 which will mark the period in which these agreements will end, alongside the National FET Strategy 2020-2024.

Strategic Performance Agreements, Target Performance Framework

The Agreements set out the future plans for development and innovation across the FET system and include the planned contribution from each ETB to the national system targets agreed with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). The agreements are the product of focused and collaborative strategic dialogue between SOLAS and the 16 Education and Training Boards. Each agreement is unique to the ETB and sets out its key strengths and characteristics; a reflection on its performance over 2018-2021; and commitments to the national FET system targets.

Each agreement includes the **learner voice** and **FET leader case studies** which showcase good practice by the ETBs from which sectoral learning can be drawn.

The Strategic Performance Agreements provide for the realisation of the ambition of the Future FET strategy, 'Transforming Learning'. The 12 targets set out in the agreements between SOLAS and the ETBs reflect the priorities of the FET Strategy – Building Skills, Fostering Inclusion; and Creating Pathways. Along with the strategic priorities, the FET Strategy includes a set of Enabling Themes. The Enabling Themes are the key elements which need to be addressed in order for the strategic ambition to be realised.

The 2022 – 2024 agreements carry over some targets from the first set of Strategic Performance Agreements for the period of 2018-2020 while also incorporating new key national priorities such as Green Skills and Workforce Upskilling. Given the challenges faced by the Further Education and Training Sector as a result of the Pandemic, the targets for 2022 were set with the aim to 'reboot' the system and return learner numbers to 2019 levels (pre-COVID).

The 12 National System Targets

Target Theme	Target Measure
Supporting Jobs	Jobs: Return employment outcomes to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024
	Skills to Compete: Deliver 50,000 places to support those who lost their job to find a pathway back to sustainable work
Creating Pathways	Progression within FET: Return progression movements within FET to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024
	Progression from FET-HE: Grow levels of progression by 10% by 2024
Fostering Inclusion	Transversal Skills: Return certification at NFQ levels 1-3 to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024
	Widening Participation: Return participation levels by key target groups to 2019 levels and resume growth
	Adult Literacy for Life (ALL): Increase provision for literacy and numeracy
Upskilling through Lifetimes and Careers	Lifelong Learning: Return engagement in lifelong learning to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024
	Skills to Advance: Continue to grow workforce upskilling enrolments
Targeting Key Skills Needs	Key Skills Needs: Grow the number of places addressing key skills needs
	Retrofitting Skills: Expansion of reskilling provision to meet retrofitting needs
	Green Skills for All: Embedding of core green skills module across FET courses

For most targets, further growth of 10% is anticipated by 2024 unless the target is directly derived from National Policy or a National Strategy as is the case with the Adult Literacy for Life target as highlighted below. The national strategic operating framework also includes the below components.



Skills to Compete, the FET reskilling response initially developed in order to respond to the Pandemic funded under the National Recovery and Resilience Programme. Now embedded within the agreements and the performance framework as the national initiative to support people who are unemployed.



Skills to Advance, the FET workforce upskilling initiative positioning it as a key resource for enterprise.



Pathways to Work 2021-2025, the National Strategy to support people into employment, linked to the National FET Strategy and the Skills to Compete initiative. Interconnected outcomes and priorities including the target to ensure 50,000 people who are long term unemployment access training and reskilling opportunities.



Adult Literacy for Life (ALL), with a range of commitments and actions in place across four pillars to: ensure people can understand their needs and where to go to have them met; that they can access all of the learning and support they need; that the learning and support available can expand to meet this massive challenge; and that we empower people and communities to make a real difference to their lives.

		<p>Apprenticeship Action Plan 2021-2025, with FET expected to make a strong contribution to increasing apprenticeship registrations to 10,000 per annum.</p>
<p>National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021</p>	<p>Green Skills Action Plan, part of the National Recovery and Resilience Programme, targeting upskilling to support the national retrofitting plan, and the embedding of green skills across all FET Provision. FET commitments include a dedicated green skills module, now available via the eCollege platform. Also included in this and the National Recovery Plan are commitments for delivery under Skills to Compete as referenced above.</p>	

Performance of the National Further Education and Training System

The table below sets out the targets which are needed to help the FET system grow and prosper through to the end of 2024. Each ETB has agreed what their contribution will be and this is set out in the Strategic Performance Agreement for each ETB.

Strategic Performance Agreements Targets 2022 – 2024

TARGET	2022	2023	2024
Supporting Jobs			
Jobs: Return employment outcomes to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	27,410	28,830	30,172
Skills to Compete: Deliver 50,000 places to support those who lost their job to find a pathway back to sustainable work	20,065	21,637	22,956

	2022	2023	2024
Creating Pathways			
Progression within FET: Return progression movements within FET to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	30,219	33,419	35,958
Progression from FET-HE: Grow levels of progression by 10% by 2024	5,859	6,238	6,672

	2022	2023	2024
Fostering Inclusion			
Transversal Skills: Return certification at NFQ levels 1-3 to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	25,378	29,639	32,398
Widening Participation: Return participation levels by key target groups to 2019 levels and resume growth	16,788	18,266	19,474
Adult Literacy for Life (ALL): Increase provision for literacy and numeracy	59,316	64,987	70,095

	2022	2023	2024
Upskilling Through Lifetimes & Careers			
Lifelong Learning: Return engagement in lifelong learning to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	97,325	106,176	113,605
Skills to Advance: Continue to grow workforce upskilling enrolments	14,854	18,501	22,290

	2022	2023	2024
Targeting Key Skill Needs			
Key Skills Needs: Grow the number of places addressing key skills needs	29,667	32,502	35,008
Retrofitting Skills: Expansion of reskilling provision to meet retrofitting needs	3,006	5,270	7,150
Green Skills for All: Embedding of core green skills module across FET courses	18,428	41,000	64,000

Overall Performance of the National Further Education and Training System in 2022

Target Theme	Target Measure	National % Achieved in 2022
Supporting Jobs	Jobs: Return employment outcomes to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	Not yet available as waiting data update CSO
	Skills to Compete: Deliver 50,000 places to support those who lost their job to find a pathway back to sustainable work	107%
Creating Pathways	Progression within FET: Return progression movements within FET to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	109%
	Progression from FET-HE: Grow levels of progression by 10% by 2024	Not yet available as awaiting data update from CSO
Fostering Inclusion	Transversal Skills: Return certification at NFQ levels 1-3 to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	116%

	Widening Participation: Return participation levels by key target groups to 2019 levels and resume growth	112%
	Adult Literacy for Life (ALL): Increase provision for literacy and numeracy	117%
Upskilling through Lifetimes and Careers	Lifelong Learning: Return engagement in lifelong learning to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	117%
	Skills to Advance: Continue to grow workforce upskilling enrolments	107%
Targeting Key Skills Needs	Key Skills Needs: Grow the number of places addressing key skills needs	100%
	Retrofitting Skills: Expansion of reskilling provision to meet retrofitting needs	69%
	Green Skills for All: Embedding of core green skills module across FET courses	Not available in 2022

Spotlight on Building Skills

	% Achieved	2022 Target	2022 Actual	2023 Target	2024 Target
Supporting Jobs*	-	27,410		28,830	30,172
Skills to Compete	107	20,065	21,497	29,639	22,956
Skills to Advance	107	14,854	15,954	18,501	22,290
Key Skill Needs	100	29,667	29,538	32,502	35,008
Retrofitting	69	3,006	2,069	5,270	7,150
Green Skills	0	18,428	0	41,000	64,000

*CSO data update received for 2021

**Key Skill Needs numbers to be finalised in May 2023

Supporting Jobs

Data for the 'jobs' target comes from the Central Statistics Office annually and is broken down by ISCED/Skills Cluster. The target measures employment outcomes, that is; the number of learners who enter the labour market directly after participating in some aspect of FET provision. The new level 5 and level 6 proposition goes some way towards building skills to support getting learners into jobs. FET is moving away from legacy programme labels such as PLC, traineeship, SST and evening training and re-packaging courses at NFQ level 5 and 6 as courses for employment. Despite the reform of further education and training, the FE + T retained their distinct identities. The vision for the FET College of the Future involves ETBs with flagship modern facilities (funding announced by the DFHERIS for 13 new capital projects) which are beacons of learning in

communities and where courses for employment, courses leading to progression to higher education and courses which promote inclusion can all be accessed under one roof.

Skills to Compete

Skills to Compete was conceived as an initiative to offer people who lost their job as a result of COVID. The premise was that upskilling in relation to employability, digital and specific sectors/occupations that would provide people with a pathway back into sustainable work. As such it worked across the FET portfolio, rather than through specific budget lines or via a specific programme. Skills to Compete was also included in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2022. SOLAS is committed to keeping it as a tailored offering for the unemployed to help them get back into work. Collectively, ETBs achieved over and above the 20,065 target for Skills to Compete in 2022. Both of the Dublin ETBs had an impact on the overall national target for Skills to Compete. Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB exceeded their target for Skills to Compete and ranked 2nd overall in 2022 for that target. For City of Dublin ETB, it was their highest target with a large cohort enrolled in Health Service Skills and Business Administration.

Skills to Advance

A resource for enterprise and employees. Skills to Advance is a focused upskilling initiative which has expanded rapidly since its establishment in 2018, helped by additional funding provided by Government via annual allocations. It works across different legacy programmes and types of courses rather than serving as a standalone programme in itself. With the support of SOLAS and the continued commitment by Government to upskill people in employment, ambitious targets have been agreed with all ETBs to expand this area. Skills to Advance has a new process to develop and validate micro credentials in key areas like green skills, digital business and manufacturing. Skills to Advance had over 14,000 participants in 2022. A number of those participants came from Kildare Wicklow ETB who were strong on Skills to Advance in 2022. A good proportion of learners were engaged in Business and Administration Skills to Advance Courses. Cavan and Monaghan ETB have continued on a steady trajectory, gradually increasing the number of Skills to Advance learners with a view to achieving at least 850 learners in 2024.

Key Skills Needs

The labour market in 2022 can be characterised by a record number of people in employment *but* a shortage of skills in a number of sectors. In fact the growth in employment resulted in an intensification of existing skills shortages, but also the emergence of additional shortages across a range of occupations. The Irish economy needs more ICT professionals and engineers, roles in healthcare, construction, hospitality and transport. Skill requirements are also changing for roles affected by technological change and the transition to a low carbon economy.

While final figures for the Key Skills Needs target in the Strategic Performance Agreements will not be available until May 2023, the performance to date is encouraging. Limerick and Clare ETB (LCETB) has been consistently successful at meeting key skills needs since 2019, ranking either 1st or 2nd in comparison with the other 15 ETBs. LCETB has a strong focus on provision in identified key skills needs, growing the offering despite a decline in overall FET provision due to the pandemic.

Innovative new skills offerings in development, in response to growing skills needs include in the areas of HydroCarbons, training on Composite Work, Solar Panel Installation and Maintenance, Industrial Automation provision as well as the development of the Work Boat Master Traineeship to meet demands of planned renewable energy projects on the Shannon Estuary. Enhancing female participation in FET e.g. Coding for Women is also a key priority given the need for more females in STEM and coding roles in industry.

Retrofitting

There are now 5 Centres of Excellence for NZEB/retrofitting operational in Waterford Wexford ETB; Laois Offaly ETB; Limerick Clare ETB; Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB and Cork ETB with the City of Dublin ETB due to commence activity in the 6th Centre in 2023. It was Waterford and Wexford ETB that piloted and successfully implemented the national provision in the areas of NZEB and Retrofit, paving the way for the other 5 centres. Mount Lucas in County Offaly will host the Modern Methods of Construction Demonstration Park which aims to support the Government's Housing for All (HfA) Strategy, and the government's commitment to delivering high-quality, affordable homes to meet the housing needs of all citizens. Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) programmes offered include:

- AutoCAD 2D & 3D
- Revit
- TEKLA
- RC Detailing
- BIM (Building Information Modelling)
- Offsite Construction
- Construction Assembly and Installation
- BIM Awareness

Although the retrofitting target of 3,006 learners was not met in 2022, delays in construction and the recruitment of senior and expert staff in this area partly explain this. Over 2,000 people were however trained in 2022, which is significant progress, considering the delays and impact of the Pandemic across 2020 and 2021. SOLAS and the ETBs will collaboratively be striving towards greater levels of activity in this priority area in 2023.

Green Skills

There is consensus that green skills will be critical to future sustainable development and the realisation of climate action and housing targets. As Ireland's future competitiveness will be increasingly linked to its ability to decarbonise, the FET sector plays a crucial role in the green transformation of the economy and society, delivering the requisite skills to guarantee a greener future for all¹. As such, the FET Green Skills Action Plan became an integral part of the National Recovery and Resilience Programme for Ireland which was agreed between the Government and the European Commission during the pandemic.

Although the FET system has over achieved in many of the targets, there is one that bucked the trend. The green skills target of 18,428 for 2022 has not been reached. A number of new initiatives were envisaged that would support ETBs to meet their green skills targets, however, it was not until late 2022 that these modules became available.

The strategic performance agreements acknowledged that meeting some of the targets such as the green skills target would be dependent on SOLAS making the online module 'Energy and you: Reduce your Use' available via eCollege. New Level 4 and Level 5 micro qualifications in Environmental Sustainability Awareness were also expected to contribute to the targets.

SOLAS has taken ownership of the contributing factors which led to unmet targets and is confident that targets can be met in 2023. As part of the overall monitoring framework, the appropriateness of the ETB targets will be continuously monitored and adjusted if required.

Delivering on Apprenticeship

Although apprenticeship is not a specific national system target in the context of the strategic performance agreements, the strategic importance of apprenticeship is referenced in each ETBs Agreement through the commitments and ambition set out in terms of both expanding provision as well as ongoing operations. Apprenticeship has its own set of targets which are articulated in the National Apprenticeship Action Plan 2021 - 2025. In 2022, there were 13,000 craft apprentices trained off-the-job, apprentice registrations reached 8,286 and new electrical hubs were established to further tackle waiting lists.

Spotlight on Inclusion

	% Achieved	2022 Target	2022 Actual	2023 Target	2024 Target
Transversal Skills	116	25,378	29,319	29,639	32,398
Widening Participation	112	16,788	18,810	18,266	19,474
Adult Literacy for Life	117	59,316	69,136	64,987	70,095

¹ <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/06922e8fb4/greenskills-for-fet-2021-2030.pdf>

All of the targets under the strategic priority area of inclusion have been achieved in 2022. Most encouraging to see is the target for Widening Participation which was exceeded by over 2,000 unique learners. ETBs had communicated during the strategic dialogue phase of building the agreements, that particular target groups had found it difficult to continue their learning online and often disengaged from their course and the ETB. ETBs were exemplary however in their efforts to re-engage lost learners and support those who were struggling, employing all manner of creative solutions from circulating physical materials, making regular phone calls to learners and customising courses to suit the new learning landscape.

Transversal Skills

Transversal skills (communication skills, team-working skills, customer handling skills, problem solving skills, learning skills and planning and organisation skills) allow learners to integrate and engage effectively with society. They are highly transferable and be used in a wide variety of jobs and sectors.

There was a major decline in certification levels for transversal skills during COVID. For this reason the achievement of certification for Levels 1-3 as a target in the agreements was deemed to be critically important. It is acknowledged that not all learners will want to pursue certification, but it should be an option across all courses for all learners, as a key enabler of learning pathways.

Despite the decline in certification at Levels 1 – 3 across the board, the decline in LMETB was significantly lower than the national average. In 2022, the transversal skills target was achieved by the overall FET system to the value of 116%. Louth Meath ETB ranked 1st in comparison with the other 15 ETBs, and surpassed their target, coming in at 154% target achieved. Donegal ETB and Cork ETB also did particularly well in meeting their targets for transversal skills, ranking 2nd and 3rd respectively.

Widening Participation

The impact of the Pandemic on community education and the reach to learners from priority cohorts was significant. With FET facilities closed, many learners found it challenging to engage in online learning. As a result, a substantial number of learners at a national level were 'lost' particularly from priority cohorts such as; learners who self-declare a disability, learners from the Traveller and the Roma Communities, as well as migrants and asylum seekers. It should be noted however this trend has reversed and to date in 2022, it is evident many learners are now reengaging with FET and with the ETBs, given the full reopening of the FET system from late 2021.

The national system target for widening participation for 2022 was 16,788, at the end of the year ETBs had collectively engaged with 18810 unique learners. The breakdown of learners by priority cohort was as follows:

Asylum seekers – 1,132
Persons with a Disability – 12,578
Refugees – 3,448
Roma community – 333
Traveller community– 1,319

Longford Westmeath ranked first out of the 16 ETBs for Widening Participation and in fact have held the top spot since 2019. Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim performed well in this area during Covid years and that trend has continued into 2022.

Adult Literacy for Life

The ALL Strategy launched by Government in September 2021, set out an ambitious 10-year cross-Government and cross-society approach to addressing unmet literacy needs. ETBs have a pivotal role in the delivery of the strategy, hosting Regional Literacy Coordinators who will drive collaboration with local stakeholders via a Regional Literacy Coalition and produce a Literacy Action Plan which will feed into a national ALL office. The aim of the ALL target in the strategic performance agreements is to increase provision for literacy and numeracy in line with the strategy.

Galway and Roscommon ETB rank highest of all ETBs in relation to the Adult Literacy for Life target. Literacy supports are successfully offered and well-integrated into apprenticeship delivery. This includes innovative and consistent practices where apprentices are given supports through a variety of mechanisms, including in evening courses. Tipperary ETB ranked second overall with much of the education and training being delivered in the area of ESOL.

Spotlight on Pathways

	% Achieved	2022 Target	2022 Actual	2023 Target	2024 Target
Progression within FET	109	30,219	32,876	33,419	35,958
Progression from FET to HE*	-	5,859	-	6,238	6,672
Lifelong Learning	117	97,325	114,325	106,176	113,605

*Available when released by CSO in 2023

Progression within FET

The strategic goal behind the progression within FET target is to dismantle the 34 programmes offered by FET providers and simplify the offering so that learners partake in courses which are either:

- foundational in nature at NFQ Level 1 and 2,

- courses which support learners to engage in prior to moving on to the next level (3 and 4) and,
- courses which are designed to get learners into third level education or employment at Levels 5 and 6.

Learners who progress to the same level or higher within FET are counted for the purposes of the target. The lion's share of the progression within FET in 2022 was from BTEI, ESOL, Adult Literacy and PLC. The system reached its target and grew progression to 109%.

Waterford Wexford ETB have been successful in returning their progression within FET levels to what they were in 2019, when they were ranking 3rd out of all ETBs. The ETB regained the third spot in 2022 thanks to a comprehensive approach to progression by the Adult Guidance Service and also the amalgamation of services under one roof, where students can develop an appetite for other FET courses. The ETB surpassed their target by 313. Also above the national average for Progression within FET was Kilkenny and Carlow ETB who had significant offerings in 2022 at levels 3 and 5 on the NFQ.

Progression from FET to HE

A new National Tertiary Office has been established within the Higher Education Authority to support the Government policy in delivery of a unified third level tertiary system. The office will develop joint further and higher education degree programmes with 13 disciplines being advanced this year. The project is jointly managed by the HEA and SOLAS and governed via an MOU between both organisations. This landmark policy will see students commence their third level experience in further education, but will complete the remainder in higher education colleges.

Data for the Further Education and Training to Higher Education target is provided annually by the Central Statistics Office. The FET to HE progression measure includes anyone who had a finish date in the same year, e.g., learner in FET in 2022 who enrolled in HE in 2022. The target for 2022 is 5,859 unique learners.

Reaching the FET to HE targets requires the formation/strengthening of partnerships with Higher Education institutions local to each ETB. The establishment of the Technological Universities provides an opportunity to revitalise those relationships and work collaboratively to increase progression from FET to HE.

Lifelong Learning

For the purposes of the agreements, lifelong learning is restricted to learners aged 25 to 64, in line with the EU definition. The system has more than achieved the 2022 target for lifelong learning, owing to ETBs exploring and embracing opportunities to develop and roll out micro qualifications to facilitate a dip in, dip out system. The maturation of PLSS in the last few years has shown us that

learning is not a linear pathway. Learners move into courses at the same level, at higher level in FET and into HE. The reverse is also true: FET is used by graduates to upskill in a specific discipline which might be required for an existing job, a new job or for personal development. The Further Education and Training Strategy 2020 – 2024 calls for more flexible options, the availability of credits that can be built up over time and bite sized learning so that individuals can acquire and build on their learning all throughout their lives.

Guidance services are pivotal to lifelong learning, providing learners with course and pathways information which enables them to make informed educational, career and life choices. A National Policy Working Group has now been established to ensure that there is a coherent national long-term policy on guidance and is supported by the newly established FET Guidance Steering Committee.

Recognition is an important feature of lifelong learning, it ensures the skills and knowledge gained through life outside of formal education and training is evaluated and validated. A major asset of Donegal ETB is its expertise in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and ability to deliver this at scale. It has enabled hundreds of people to reengage with education and embark on learning pathways and this is reflected in the dashboard where they rank 3rd for lifelong learning in 2022. Kerry ETB were just outside of the top 3 for lifelong learning, however the ETB achieved well in excess of the target of 3,200 learners in 2022.

Spotlight on Enabling Themes

Learner Voice

Ultimately the Further Education and Training system is first and foremost accountable to its learners. While all ETBs have engaged in some method for capturing learner voice there is room for improvement at sectoral level. QQI's Sectoral Report on Quality Assurance in the FET Sector recommends "strengthening this aspect of quality assurance would include making arrangements for learners to be represented in decision-making groups as well as ensuring there are more structured opportunities for learners to provide feedback, and to see how their views contribute to decisions"².

In 2023 SOLAS with the FET system will further support the well established AONTAS FET Learner Forum by ensuring a high-level national benchmarking exercise of the Learner Voice.

² QQI, Quality Assurance in the FET Sector – Sectoral Report, 2023

Capital Infrastructure

The advances of the FET College of the Future in 2022 through a dedicated and formal programme in partnership with the DFHERIS has been instrumental in shaping the future landscape,

The Capital Estates Strategy will be developed in 2023 to further inform and support the strategic ambition of the system,

Staffing, Structures and Capabilities

The commitment by DFHERIS to progress the many legacy issues in the FET system was formally advanced in 2022 with a dedicated new team positioned to lead out this work, with SOLAS and the FET System through a dedicated Organisational Design II initiative. It is recognised this is a national priority and both SOLAS the FET system will continue to progress this in 2023.

Digital Transformation

The innovation and impacts of the Pandemic in terms of advancing the digital transformation ambition in FET is now further crystallising through the emerging work on a national remote and blended learning framework, in partnership with QQI.

Progress on SOLAS Commitments

Throughout the Strategic Performance Agreements, references are included which relate to the commitments made by SOLAS to ensure support for the ETBs to deliver on the national system targets and their plans and ambition by 2024. These commitments along with progress made are summarised here:

- **To work with the ETBs, in collaboration with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to ensure the vision for a new Staffing framework can be realised.**

Update - DFHERIS has now established a dedicated FET Transformation function to focus in particular on moving a future FET staffing framework forward.

- **Roll out the new funding model for the FET system in order to meet the Future FET ambition and deliver on system outcomes**

Update - full implementation of the funding model will be dependent on effective and consistent financial systems across ETBs. There is ongoing work by the Education Shared Services Board (ESBS) to migrate and stabilise all systems across to SUN. A project is underway with ESBS to design a system on SUN which will support the development of the new recommended 5 pot funding model.

- **Enable the national vision for the FET Colleges of the Future by providing the necessary system capabilities to support capital infrastructure.**

Update - In 2022, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris announced capital funding for 13 FET Colleges of the Future around Ireland. A new FET College of the Future unit in SOLAS has been established.

- **Develop and empower the ETBs through bespoke Data Performance Dashboards required for monitoring and reviewing the national system targets for the duration of the agreements**

A live data platform dedicated to the Strategic Performance Agreements has been launched with ETBs. Training has been provided to all ETBs and a technical guide has been issued to support clarity on the data behind the dashboard.

- **Further progress the tools and mechanisms in partnership with the FET system to evidence distance travelled and qualitative outcomes of learners at a national level**

This initiative will progress in tandem with the Learner Voice activities planned in 2023.

- **Continue to develop and modernise the data, research and funding infrastructure across SOLAS to ensure alignment with the ETB ambition in the agreements.**

The Data Analytics Unit and the Skills and Labour Market Unit continue to produce vital reports on FET learners and the current and future skills and labour market landscape. A number of reports were published in 2022 which can support ETBs to meet their targets particularly in relation to jobs and key skill needs. These include:

- Difficult – to – fill vacancies survey
- National Skills Bulletin 2022
- Monitoring Ireland's Skills Supply 2022
- Community Education Report and Accompanying Magazine
- ESMI Burning Glass and SOLAS Shifting Sands Paper on the Pandemic

• Work closely with the Central Statistics Office to explore reporting of outcomes of employment and progression to Higher Education to determine what additional reporting may be possible

SOLAS are engaging with strategic partners to advance this and a progress update is expected in 2023.

• Engage with Northern Ireland and UK authorities and agencies to explore how to gather outcome data of FET graduates who progress to other learning or employment opportunities outside Ireland

SOLAS are engaging with strategic partners to advance this and a progress update is expected later in 2023.

• Continue to engage with all ETBs and review targets and areas in line with any changing economic or policy led initiatives

A dedicated new function has been established in SOLAS to lead on the ongoing review and performance of the agreements. ETBs have at all times, a direct contact to SOLAS in relation to any issues or concerns relating to the Strategic Performance Agreements. Ongoing dialogue with each of the 16 ETBs will be a feature of performance monitoring and SOLAS will continue to review targets, in collaboration with ETBs up to 2024.

Conclusion - Strategic Performance Agreements in 2023

Acknowledgement of the journey travelled in 2022 is important, the ETBs have grown and recovered significantly. However it is not yet clear what the future holds and work and engagement will continue in 2023. Key to delivery of the targets, and wider transformation of the system, will be the reform of the funding model for FET. The independent review of the existing funding approach was completed in 2022 and sets out a clear roadmap for change. This includes moving to a simplified 5 pot funding approach, linking funding to learner outcomes, and investing in ETB core capabilities. Plans are in place for further reform in 2023 and this will be a key area of discussion as the year progresses.

Appendix 1

Strategic Performance Agreements Driving FET Outcomes

Recognising that the Strategic Performance Agreements are the key driver of the FET Strategy, it is expected that by 2024 the FET system will be delivering:

- An increase in sustainable employment outcomes of over 12% from pre-pandemic levels, with over 30,000 FET graduates in 2024 securing sustainable work.
- A single Skills to Compete re-skilling offering which will support circa 20,000 people experiencing unemployment to find a pathway back to sustainable employment
- A refocusing on learning pathways within FET to address the decline since COVID and grow the number progressing onto other FET courses to over 35,000 by 2024
- Supporting a unified tertiary system by growing FET-HE progression levels by almost 25% from the most recent data available (2020)
- Addressing the major decline in certification levels for transversal skills during COVID and increase these outcomes by over 10% from pre-pandemic levels
- Widen participation in FET by key target groups by over 10% on pre-pandemic levels by 2024
- Increase provision relevant to the Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) strategy by 10,000 places by 2024
- Grow FET lifelong learning levels by over 7% on pre-pandemic levels
- More than double Skills to Advance workforce upskilling provision by 2024 (from its 2021 level)
- Continue to focus on critical skills needs by further expanding relevant provision by 15%
- Ramp up NZEB/retrofitting skills development via FET centres of excellence to over 7,000 places a year by 2024
- Embed green skills across all FET provision by rolling out a Level 4 blended and an online module to over 50,000 FET learners.

Appendix 2

Strategic Performance Agreements Targets

OVERALL FUNDING & OUTPUTS	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022			
Final Funding Allocated				€794,262,447	€900,640,000			
FET Learners*	175,054	179,058	151,630	144,160	186,740			
FET Beneficiaries*	263,319	280,421	225,898	224,538	303,465			
Apprenticeship Registrations	5648	6177	5326	8607	8286			
TARGET	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 Target	2022 Actuals	2023 Target	2024 Target
Supporting Jobs								
Jobs: Return employment outcomes to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	25,874	26,776	19,642	23,501	27,410	Not yet available	28,830	30,172
Skills to Compete: Deliver 50,000 places to support those who lost their job to find a pathway back to sustainable work	0	0	7,968	18,170	20,065	21,497	21,637	22,956
Creating Pathways								
Progression within FET: Return progression movements within FET to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	31,123	33,675	27,531	27,163	30,219	32,876	33,419	35,958
Progression from FET-HE: Grow levels of progression from FET-HE by 10% by 2024	5,412	5,364	5,553	Not yet available	5,859	Not yet available	6,238	6,672
Fostering Inclusion								
Transversal Skills: Return certification at NFQ levels 1-3 to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	26,869	29,328	24,406	19,549	25,378	29,319	29,639	32,398
Widening Participation: Return participation levels by key target groups to 2019 levels and resume growth	11,930	17,271	14,803	13,803	16,788	18,810	18,266	19,474
Adult Literacy for Life (ALL): Increase provision for literacy and numeracy	52,609	59,325	44,279	40,740	59,316	69,136	64,987	70,095
Upskilling Through Lifetimes & Careers								
Lifelong Learning: Return engagement in lifelong learning to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	103,603	105,783	88,656	83,981	97,325	114,238	106,176	113,605
Skills to Advance: Continue to grow workforce upskilling enrolments	479	5,605	8,758	10,558	14,854	15,954	18,501	22,290
Targeting Key Skills Needs								
Key Skills Needs: Grow the number of places addressing key skills needs	27,880	30,290	30,330	30,447	29,667	29,538	32,502	35,008
Retrofitting Skills: Expansion of reskilling provision to meet retrofitting needs	49	500	342	749	3,006	2,069	5,270	7,150
Green Skills for All: Embedding of core green skills module across FET courses	0	0	0	0	18,428	153**	41,000	64,000

*Inclusive of unique learner enrolments as reported on PLSS 2018-2022

**Green Skills Module made available in December 2022



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