

Transforming Learning Strategic Performance Agreements

The Further Education & Training System 2022-2024

Annual Progress Report 2023



Further
Education
& Training

SOLAS
learning works



etbi
Education and Training
Boards Ireland
Boird Oideachais agus
Oiliúna Éireann



Riailtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland





Contents

Foreword.....	4
Strategic Performance Agreements at a Glance.....	7
Introduction - The FET System.....	8
Strategic Performance Agreements 2023.....	9
Monitoring Framework.....	10
Strategic Performance Agreements - The Ambition.....	12
Strategic Performance Agreements - The Achievements.....	14
How the FET System Contributes to the Economic, Employment and Social Outcomes in Ireland.....	19
Conclusion.....	21



Foreword



2023 has been an incredible year for FET and it is growing like never before with 375,373 places taken up by almost 219,000 learners, representing a remarkable fifth of an increase on 2022 levels. The Strategic Performance Agreements, covering 2022 to 2024, underpin our implementation of the National FET Strategy, *Future FET: Transforming Learning 2020-2024*. Following on from the success in 2022 of the first year of the Agreements between SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards, 2023 saw even greater levels of achievement across the national system targets. People of all ages and backgrounds are enrolling in FET to get the type of education and training they need to enrich and improve their lives.

FET is in every community and continues to make a strong contribution to national and social economic priorities, and this is evident in the performance of the FET system in 2023. As will be detailed in this System Progress report, significant progress has been made across a range of key targets, in many cases exceeding pre-pandemic levels of learning. For example, ETBs have worked to re-connect with learners from target groups who were most impacted during the pandemic in terms of their learning; been responsive to unemployed people via Skills to Compete; helped employed people reskill and upskill through Level 5 and 6 provision, including Skills to Advance; enabled learners to progress their learning further through pathways in FET, within FET and out of FET to employment or higher education.

In 2022, following the invasion of Ukraine, ETBs proved to be hugely responsive to needs of Ukrainians arriving in Ireland who wished to access English language skills. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, the FET sector supported over 40,000 unique learners from Ukraine, accounting for 43% of all arrivals from Ukraine (15+ year olds) as reported by the CSO.

FET has also been responsive to the climate challenge through upskilling in Near Zero Energy Building skills, and online learning options to make FET learners agents of change on climate. The system has also supported our national housing needs through construction

safety and skills training, and through the certification of thousands of qualified craft apprentices. More broadly in apprenticeship, there are now 73 programme options and there were 8,712 registrations on these programmes in 2023.

However, we recognise that there is still work to be done to fully optimise the potential of FET, and this work continues as part of the implementation of the current FET Strategy. We know that the Enabling Themes of the Strategy need to be further progressed alongside the strategic performance framework. These themes are complex and require a collaborative approach from the sector in order to make the advancements required under staffing and structures; digital transformation; a learner and performance centred approach; and capital development. Reform of the FET funding model is the lynchpin for complete transformation as envisioned in the strategy. Reform of this continues apace, linking FET and apprenticeship resourcing to outcomes and needs in the respective regions. In fully aligning funding, strategy and performance over the next 3 years we can ensure efficiency, effectiveness and value-for-money across FET and apprenticeships.

In 2024 SOLAS and the ETBs will also focus on implementing the final year of the current strategy and the development of the next five-year FET Strategy (2025-2029). 2024 will also see implementation of the final year of the current strategic performance agreements and the development of the next set of three-year agreements. The intent is to build on the remarkable growth in FET as outlined in this report and thus continue to positively contribute to the social and economic fabric of communities across Ireland.



Andrew Brownlee
Chief Executive Officer, SOLAS



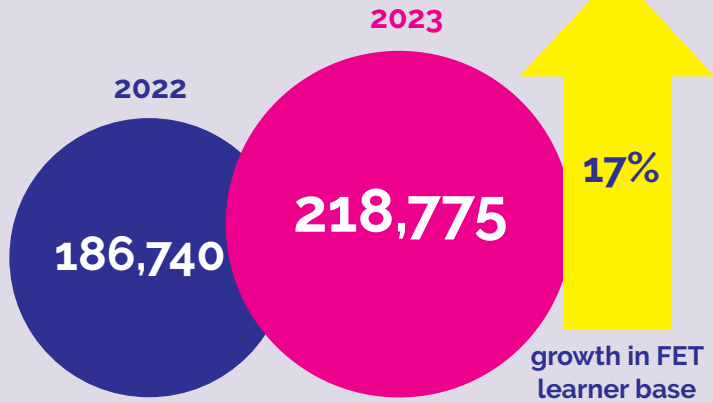
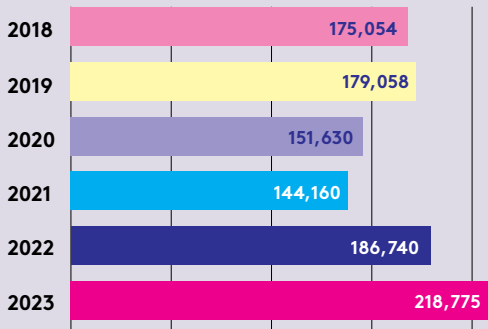
1 in 10 adults in Ireland

have now been impacted in some way by the learning supported by SOLAS (some 425,000 people).

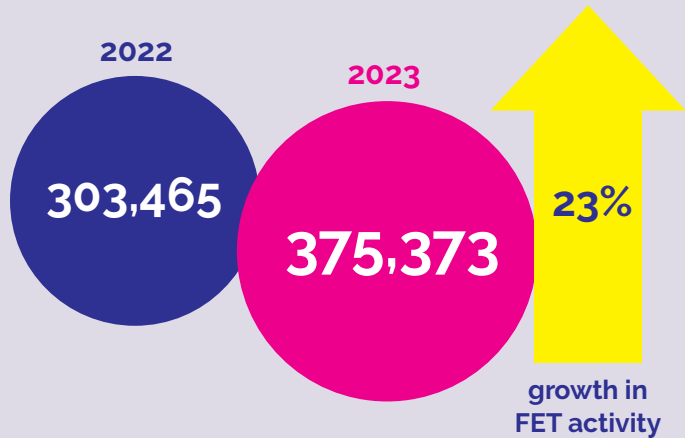
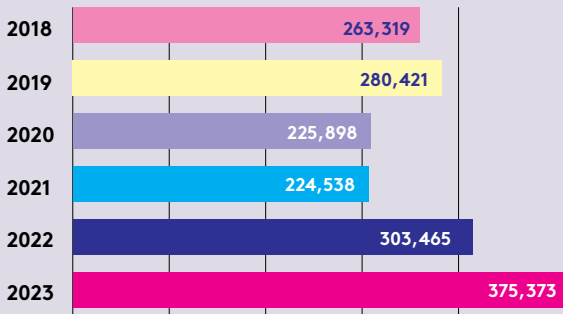
Our ambition is to grow this further to

500,000 people by 2026.

FET unique learners

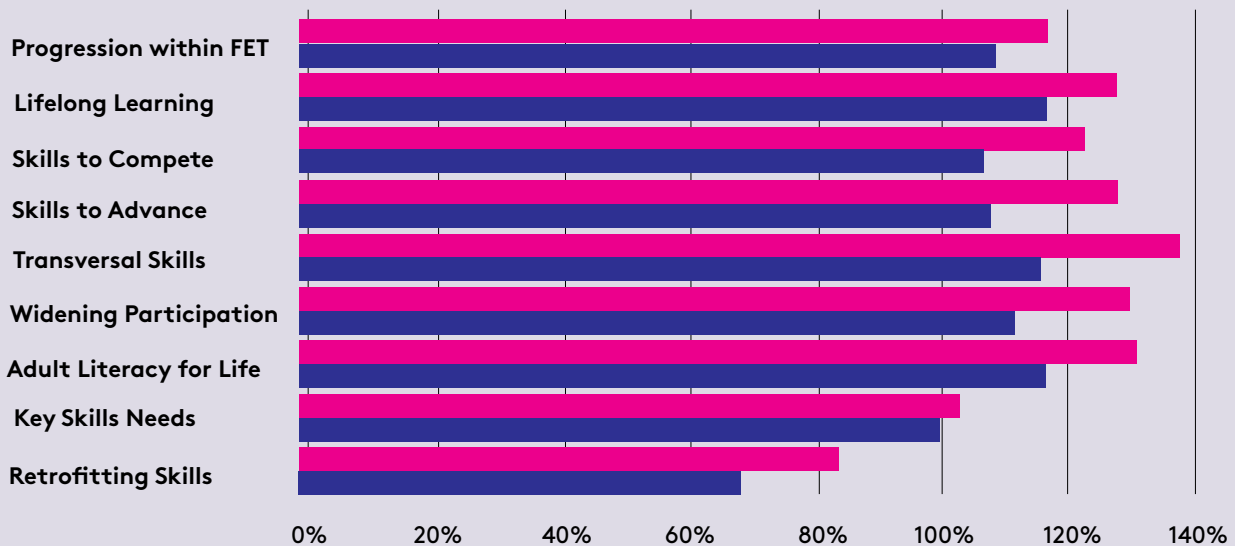


FET learner activity



2022 to 2023 Comparison

2023 2022



Strategic Performance Agreements at a Glance

There are 12 National System Targets spanning a 3 year period from 2022 to 2024. In keeping with the growth in the number of learners across the FET system, the performance of ETBs in delivering on national targets in 2023 also increased, from the previous year.

Target	Achieved in 2023
Supporting Jobs	
Jobs: Return employment outcomes to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	Awaiting update from CSO
Skills to Compete: Deliver 50,000 places to support those who lost their job to find a pathway back to sustainable work	26,627

Creating Pathways	
Progression within FET: Return progression movements within FET to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	39,114
Progression from FET-HE: Grow levels of progression by 10% by 2024	Awaiting 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	40,984
Widening Participation: Return participation levels by key target groups to 2019 levels and resume growth	23,763
Adult Literacy for Life (ALL): Increase provision for literacy and numeracy	84,937

Upskilling Through Lifetimes & Careers	
Lifelong Learning: Return engagement in lifelong learning to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	135,814
Skills to Advance: Continue to grow workforce upskilling enrolments	23,591

Targeting Key Skills Needs	
Key Skills Needs: Grow the number of places addressing key skills needs	33,439
Retrofitting Skills: Expansion of reskilling provision to meet retrofitting needs	4,452
Green Skills for All: Embedding of core green skills module across FET courses	15,648

Introduction



The Further Education and Training System

The ultimate goal of **Transforming Learning** (the National Further Education and Training Strategy 2022–2024) which is to substantially grow the contribution and impact of FET, is being realised with incredible expansion through 2022 and 2023 to well beyond pre-pandemic levels. With one-in-ten adults now impacted in some way by the learning supported by SOLAS, and our ambition is to grow this further to half-a-million people by 2026. The Strategic Performance Agreements 2022-2024 have played a substantial part in generating a pipeline of skilled workers, in fostering inclusion of those most marginalised from society and providing a range of pathways into, within and out of FET.

Prior to the detailed review of achievement of system targets as described later in this System Progress Report 2023, it is worth noting key trends and features of the wider FET system over the past year.

Around 219,000 unique learners undertook further education and training courses in 2023, with some 375,000 places taken up during the year (as many of our courses are short and many FET learners take more than one in a year).

PLC enrolments (a prime destination for school leavers) are up 11% year-on-year and over 23,000 employees are upskilling via the Skills to Advance initiative, up by 7,612 on 2022 levels. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, the FET sector supported over 40,000 unique learners from Ukraine, accounting for 43% of all arrivals from Ukraine (15+ year olds) as reported by the CSO.

Participation on eCollege courses grew to just over 31,000 learners, gradually approaching the mass demand levels seen during COVID when we opened up the online resource to everyone. This has been fuelled by diversifying the offering, with green skills now part of the eCollege portfolio, and further plans to develop it as a gateway into FET in 2024.

Fueling the workforce required for construction and seriously contributing to targets set out in the Government's Housing for All Strategy over 5,000 people trained in Nearly Zero-Energy Building (NZEB). Over 150,000 people undertook construction safety training via the Construction Skills Certification Scheme, the Quarries Skills Certification Scheme and SafePass. The apprenticeship population has now reached over 27,000 with offerings across 73 different apprenticeship options.

The level of investment in ETB provision in 2023 was €946,918,771.

Strategic Performance Agreements 2023

The Strategic Performance Agreements between SOLAS and the 16 Education and Training Boards are the key driver of the National Further Education and Training Strategy, *Future FET: Transforming Learning 2020-2024*. Each ETBs Strategic Performance Agreement is closely aligned with the FET Strategy pillars of Building Skills, Fostering Inclusion, Creating Pathways. The strategic performance agreements also incorporate the key priorities listed under the Enabling Themes in the FET Strategy.

The Strategic Performance Agreements set out the context, strategic priorities and individual ETB's contribution to the achievement of key national Further Education and Training (FET) sector targets agreed with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The targets are similar to the national targets specified in the inaugural Strategic Performance Agreements for 2018–2020 and continue to focus on supporting jobs, learning pathways, inclusion, lifelong learning and targeting key skills needs. The agreements also factor in established targets around Skills to Compete, Adult Literacy for Life and Skills to Advance. Using Strategic Performance Agreements, the sixteen ETBs have committed to ambitious targets in order to collectively see the FET system grow and prosper through to the end of 2024.

Monitoring Framework

In 2023 there was exceptional commitment to the strategic performance process on behalf of ETBs.

SOLAS reviews and monitors system performance as well as individual ETB performance. A monthly report is produced and presented to SOLAS' senior leadership team. In keeping with the strategic dialogue upon which the agreements were built, regular *informal* dialogue with ETBs regarding performance and outcomes occurs.

Introduced at the end of 2022, the live data dashboard displays key metrics and progress indicators and is the first of its kind for the Further Education and Training sector in Ireland. Described by ETBs as a "game changer", this transformative digital resource underpins the Strategic Performance Agreement process. The dashboards were fully embedded in 2023 and provide a host of benefits to SOLAS and the ETBs.

The benefits of the dashboards are extensive:

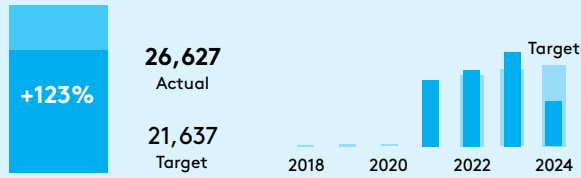
- ETBs have the capacity to track their own progress and benchmark where they are in relation to the national average.
- SOLAS has a wide-angle lens on the performance of the entire Further Education and Training system.
- It allows ETBs to see and celebrate achievements.
- The dashboards support early identification of issues and risks.
- They can be used as a tool for ETB management.
- The dashboards support business intelligence and allow for data driven decision making.
- SOLAS has noted improvements in the quality of data reported.
- Timely reporting from SOLAS to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

A review of performance is planned for early 2024, just ahead of the last full year of these Strategic Performance Agreements which complete in December 2024. The System Report committed to a system update to be produced for each year of the Strategic Performance Agreements. The Annual Progress Report for 2022 was published and launched with the sector in May 2023.



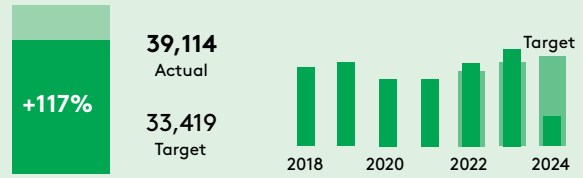
Supporting Jobs

Skills to Compete



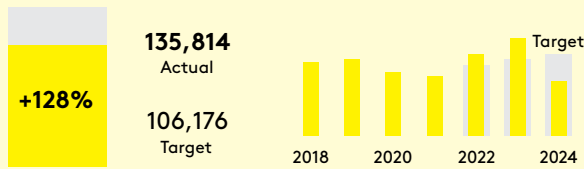
Creating Pathways

Progression within FET

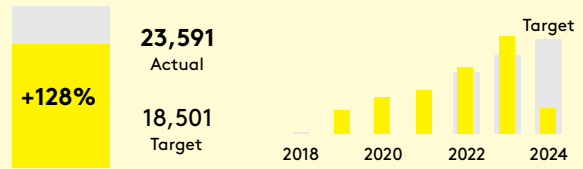


Upskilling Through Lifetimes and Careers

Lifelong Learning

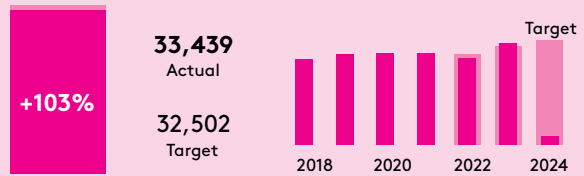


Skills to Advance

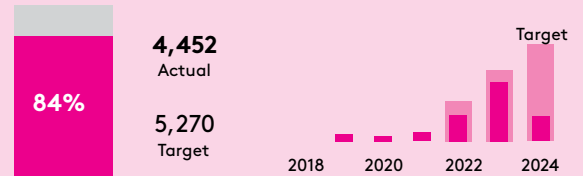


Targeting Key Skills Needs

Key Skills Needs

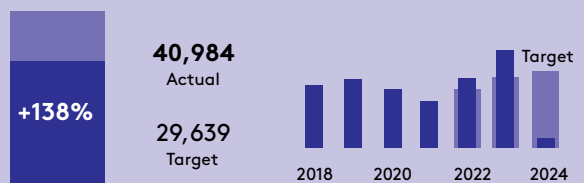


Retrofitting Skills

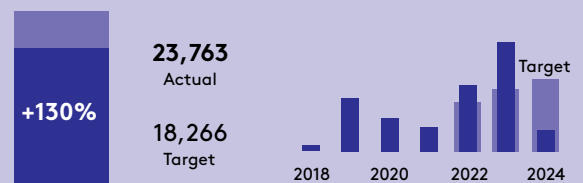


Fostering Inclusion

Transversal Skills



Widening Participation



Adult Literacy for Life

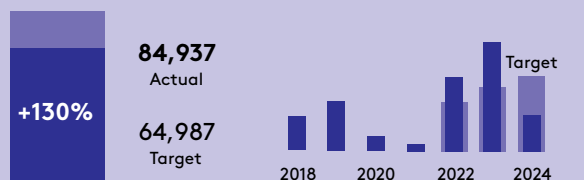


Figure 1. Strategic Performance Agreements Dashboard, Homepage

Strategic Performance Agreements

The Ambition

The Strategic Performance Agreements set 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.

The level of growth exhibited by the FET system is evidenced in the data that SOLAS and the ETBs have been collecting since 2017. The first full year of data available was 2018 meaning that SOLAS now has 6 complete years of data at its disposal. This allows for identification of trends and performance, prediction of outcomes, ultimately leading to informed decision making and strategic planning.

Learner Numbers	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
FET Learners*	175,054	179,058	151,630	144,160	186,740	218,775
FET Beneficiaries*	263,319	280,421	225,898	224,664	303,465	375,373
Apprenticeship Registrations	5,648	6,177	5,326	8,607	8,286	5,612

Supporting Jobs	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Jobs: Return employment outcomes to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	25,874	26,776	19,642	23,501	Not yet available	Not yet available
Skills to Compete: Deliver 50,000 places to support those who lost their job to find a pathway back to sustainable work	31,123	33,675	7,968	27,163	21,497	27,039

Creating Pathways	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
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	27,166	32,876	39,015
Progression from FET-HE: Grow levels of progression by a further 10% by 2024	26,869	29,328	24,406	Not yet available	Not yet available	Not yet available

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Fostering Inclusion						
Transversal Skills: Return certification at NFQ levels 1-3 to 2019 levels and grow by a further 10% by 2024	52,609	59,325	44,279	40,740	29,319	40,984
Widening Participation: Return participation levels by key target groups to 2019 levels and resume growth	11,930	17,271	14,803	13,807	18,810	23,763
Adult Literacy for Life (ALL): Increase provision for literacy and numeracy	103,603	105,783	88,656	83,981	69,136	84,937

Upskilling Through Lifetime & 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	114,238	135,814
Skills to Advance: Continue to grow workforce upskilling enrolments	27,880	30,290	30,330	30,447	15,954	23,591

Targeting Key Skills Needs						
Key Skills Needs: Grow the number of places addressing key skills needs	27,880	30,290	30,330	30,447	29,538	33,439
Retrofitting Skills: Expansion of reskilling provision to meet retrofitting needs	49	500	342	749	2,069	4,452
Green Skills for All: Embedding of core green skills module across FET courses	0	0	0	0	153**	19,525

Apprenticeship						
Phase 2 Places: The number of phase 2 places that have apprentices	3,895	4,220	3,551	3,283	5,557	5,612

Construction						
CSCS (includes experienced, new entrants, renewals and CSCS to QSCS short course)	20,578	24,594	17,951	14,611	18,876	23,459
QSCS (includes experienced and renewals)	638	1,031	746	564	648	685
Safe Pass (includes new and alternative renewals)	105,361	108,612	73,443	81,473	125,081	123,396

e-College						
Enrolments (number of unique learners)***	-	-	28,732	40,008	21,153	25,261

Strategic Performance Agreements

The Achievements

SKILLS

Supporting Jobs

Supporting Jobs outcomes for FET learners are provided by the Central Statistics Office on an annual basis and are only counted 1 year after a learner exits a FET course. As such, 2023 data on jobs is not yet available.

Skills to Compete

123%

Target
21,637
Actual
26,627

All unemployed as per criteria for Skills to Compete. The top 3 categories of formal education prior to entry on the course, were all level 5 or under. There were some learners with Bachelors degrees but less with Postgraduate qualifications.

Lifelong Learning

128%

Higher than any of the preceding 5 years. Similar number of employed and unemployed undertaking lifelong learning. The highest level of formal education achieved was the Leaving Cert though there were significant numbers of students who had already achieved an Honours Bachelor degree, Ordinary Bachelor Degree and Junior Cert. Top 5 ISCED course categories are Generic Programmes, Business and Administration, Health and Welfare, Services, Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction.

Target
106,176
Actual
135,814

Skills to Advance

128%

Popular courses include NZEB, Accounting and Technical Writing for Manufacturing sector. The top 5 ISCED categories are Business and Admin, Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction and Generic Programmes and Qualifications, Information and Communication and Health and Welfare.

Target
18,501
Actual
23,591

Key Skill Needs

103%

An overwhelming majority of learners, 19,721, are enrolled in level 5 courses. 14,544 of the learners have secondary education as their highest level of education prior to embarking on the course. Top 5 ISCED course categories are Health and Welfare, Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, Services, Education and Generic Programmes and Qualifications.

Target
32,502
Actual
33,439

Green Skills

While Green Skills provision has not been as strong as other targets in terms of growth, we know that green skills and initiatives which respond to climate change will increase with time. SOLAS and the ETBs will continue to support climate actions which meet national policy objectives.

Retrofitting Skills

84%

6 Centres of Excellence – LOETB, MSL, CDET, WWETB, CETB, LCETB. Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB) courses. A significant majority of male learners. Not all Centres of Excellence were up and running at the beginning of 2023, yet the 84% target was still achieved. It is expected that 2024 targets will be met and perhaps even over-achieved.

Target
5,270
Actual
4,452

INCLUSION

Transversal Skills

138%

The lion's share of this target is made up of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Adult Literacy Groups. The target focuses on Certification at levels 1 to 3. 7,749 were certified at level 1, 14,143 were certified at level 2 and 19,092 were certified at level 3.

Target
29,639
Actual
40,984

Widening Participation

130%

Most learners undertook Generic programmes and qualifications. The target was aimed at increasing participation of learners from 5 priority cohorts. The spread among the priority cohorts was as follows:

- Learners with Disabilities - 14,807
 - Refugees - 4,404
 - Asylum Seekers - 2,728
 - Traveller - 1,411
 - Roma - 413

Target
18,266
Actual
23,763

Adult Literacy for Life

131%

This target is focused on increasing provision for literacy and numeracy in line with the 10-year ALL Strategy. Similar to the Transversal Skills target, much of the provision was through ESOL, Adult Literacy Groups and BTEI groups.

Target
64,987
Actual
84,937

PATHWAYS

Progression with FET

117%

Of note are the 1,678 Post Graduate students, participation of whom shows that pathways are not only in one direction, people are moving up and down the National Framework of Qualifications according to what their needs are. English language skills, Early Learning and Care, General Learning, NZEB Fundamentals, Nursing Studies.

Target
33,419
Actual
39,114

ISCED categories of courses and course types indicate that FET is moving into provision in more specialised fields of learning. While general learning programmes continue to be popular (they offer a first step in the education journey), there are an array of specialised courses in education, forestry, agriculture and fish, natural sciences, mathematics for example. The traditional courses remain as valued aspects of FET but room is being made for more specialised and employment focused courses promoting greater diversity across FET.

Progression from FET to HE

The figures depicting movement from Further Education to Higher Education are derived from the Central Statistics Office and were not yet available at the time of publication. However, there have been advances over the past couple of years which should have an impact on the number of learners progressing on to Higher Education. In 2021, for the first time, school leavers had visibility of their Further Education & Training (FET) and Apprenticeship options on the CAO website. The National Tertiary Office takes a strategic approach to enhancing the pathways between the Further Education and Training and Higher Education sectors in 32 specific programme areas. These collaborations between Higher Education Institutions and Education and Training Boards see that students commence their third level experience in further education and complete it in a partner higher education institution.

In summary, ETBs have collectively achieved not only their targets for 2023 but have also outperformed by meeting targets set for 2024, in some instances. As a result SOLAS is asking ETBs to continue to meet targets given the strong performance and the tight fiscal environment for 2024. FET has recovered exceptionally well after COVID, and is growing at a significant rate. The focus on transformation has made FET more relevant now than ever before and it offers everyone a pathway for wherever they want to go.

How the FET System Contributes to the Economic, Employment and Social Outcomes in Ireland

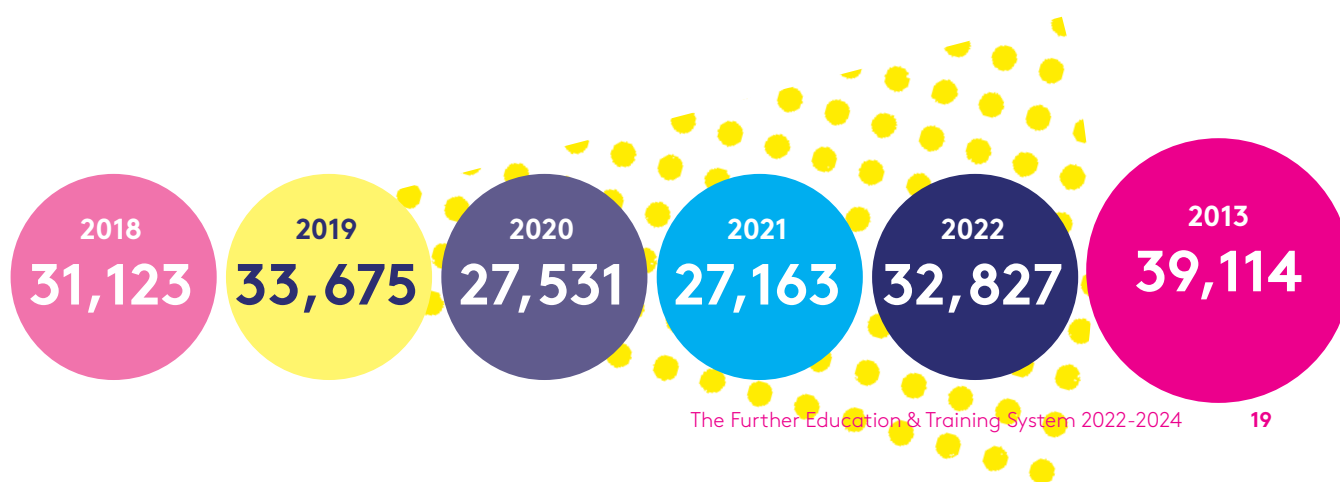


In a world that is changing rapidly, and where skills needs are constantly evolving, Ireland’s social and economic prosperity is dependent like never before on our ability to adapt and produce a highly skilled workforce. A short overview of Strategic Performance Agreement outcomes, Certification outcomes, Social Cohesion and Employment outcomes generated by FET follows.

One of the key principles underpinning the Strategic Performance Agreements 2022 – 2024 was that they would be outcomes focused. The outcomes of the Performance Agreements, to date, are outlined in this section of the report.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Unique Learners	175,054	179,058	151,630	144,160	186,740	218,775
Activity	263,319	280,421	225,898	224,664	303,465	375,373

- The growth in the number of people benefitting from FET courses has not been higher in the last 6 years than it was in 2023. In fact, learner numbers in 2023 are the highest on record since the reform of the sector in 2013. While a dip in the number of learners in COVID years was fully expected, the extent of the steep trajectory of learner numbers is extremely positive to see.
- 2021 Progression from FET to HE was 5,705. This figure is a count of unique learners and includes eCollege progression. At the time of publication, 2022 FET to HE numbers were unavailable from the Central Statistics Office, though it is expected that the national FET system figure will be shared during Q2.
- Skills to Compete has become the ETBs tailored offering for the unemployed to help them get back into work. Skills to Compete supported 26,627 people in 2023.
- Skills to Advance is a national initiative that provides upskilling and reskilling opportunities to employees in jobs undergoing change and to those currently employed in vulnerable sectors. Working closely with small and medium-sized enterprises, Skills to Advance helps employers identify skills needs and invest in their workforce by providing subsidised education and training to staff. In 2023 23,591 learners enrolled in Skills to Advance courses. The emergence and growth of Skills to Advance since 2018 has been a real success story for FET.
- The Transversal Skills target was the stand out target out of all 12 targets identified as national priorities. The target was achieved at a rate of 138%. In numeric terms, the aim was to increase certifications at NFQ Levels 1-3 to 29,639. The count for 2023 was 40,984.
- There was particularly strong Progression *within* FET in 2023, with an increase on the previous year of 6,287 (diagram below).



Certification Outcomes

- The number of learners attaining FET and HE awards from QQI increased in 2023 for a fourth consecutive year since 2020. The increase is particularly significant in FET which increased by 15% from 2022, the largest increase since 2014. It suggests further recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which was significant across 2020 and 2021.
- The number of **QQI FET major awards** increased in 2023 from 2022 at all levels of the NFAQ. The increase is more noticeable at the lower levels of the NFAQ (levels 1-3) and at level 6. The increase is partly explained by a rise in awards made to apprentices.
- **Craft apprenticeship** certification was significantly impacted by COVID-19 but certification volumes have recovered in the years since 2021. In 2023, certification of these awards increased 56% from 2021 and 28% from 2022.
- In relation to **non-major awards**:
 - There was a notable increase in the volume of special purpose awards made in the FET sector up 30% from 2021 and 44% from 2022. The increase in 2023 was partly explained by a significant number of awards made in two newly certified awards: 'Door Security Practices' and 'Security Guarding'.

Social Cohesion

The social outcomes of education have long been documented – increased confidence, better health and greater civic participation to name just a few. Further Education and Training has the potential to change lives for the better; increasing employment opportunities, preparing students for the workforce of the future, and paving the way for ongoing learning. It can also have a transformative financial impact on learners in terms of earnings. In addition, FET reaches the most vulnerable groups in society. While the participation of disadvantaged groups in FET reduced during COVID, ETBs have demonstrated their skills and reach within communities in order to re-engage this cohort, as evidenced in the Widening Participation target.

Employment Outcomes

The FET System is making significant strides in increasing the number of available education/training places for occupations highlighted as being in particular demand (e.g. across an array of healthcare and teacher training courses) along with significant investment in the apprenticeship system to meet the demand for construction workers and a number of other key areas.

A report by the CSO on FET graduates in 2021 found that one year after graduation:

- **43%** of graduates were in both Employment & Education
- **31%** Employment only
- **18%** Education only¹

1 CSO statistical publication, 04 March 2024. Further Education Outcomes - Graduation Year 2022

Conclusion

FET in Ireland is undergoing significant growth as it becomes more established. It provides opportunity for individuals to learn new skills to achieve their personal ambitions. It promotes social cohesion by tackling disadvantage and supporting vulnerable learners to succeed and thrive. FET also supports job creation by providing cutting edge skills needed by our enterprise base. This in turn supports business to grow and achieve their ambitions.

This is evidenced in this report on the 2023 system progress and the outcomes from the stellar work of our sixteen ETBs.





SOLAS
Block 1, Castleforbes House
Castleforbes Road
Dublin 1
D01 A8N0