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Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future

Seamus McGuinness, Adele Bergin, Elish Kelly,
Selina McCoy, Emer Smyth, Adele Whelan,
Joanne Banks

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An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
Further Education and Training Authority



Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future

Seamus McGuinness, Adele Bergin, Elish Kelly, Selina McCoy, Emer Smyth, Adele Whelan, Joanne Banks

April 2014

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Glossary of Abbreviations

ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
ASME	American Society of Mechanical Engineers
ATI	Accounting Technicians Ireland
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
BTWA	Back to Work Allowance
CE	Community Employment
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CIBTAC	Confederation of International Beauty Therapy & Cosmetology
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
CTCs	Community Training Centres
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DJEI	Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation
DSP	Department of Social Protection
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
EN	Mandatory Goods and Services Standards in European Countries
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETBs	Education and Training Boards
FÁS	Training and Employment Authority
FET	Further Education and Training
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Awards Council
ICM	Institute of Commercial Management
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IoTs	Institutes of Technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITABE	Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education
ITEC	Irish Training and Education Centre
IUQB	Irish University Quality Board
LTU	Long-Term Unemployed
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NUTS III Regions	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEX	Probability of Exit
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
QNHS	Quarterly National Household Survey
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
QSCS	Quarry Skills Certification Scheme
RSS	Rural Social Scheme
SILC	Survey on Income and Living Conditions
SOLAS	An Seirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
VEC	Vocational Education Committees
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

Executive Summary

BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

In July 2011, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., announced that a new further education and training authority called SOLAS (An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna) would be established leading to the dissolution of FÁS. The Bill providing for the establishment of SOLAS was issued on 25 January, 2013, while the Further Education and Training Act¹ that gave effect to the new organisation was published on 19 July, 2013. The Establishment Order that brought SOLAS into being was signed by the Minister of Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., on 29 October 2013.

This report provides an evidence base for the purposes of assisting SOLAS in the development of a five-year strategic plan for the Irish Further Education and Training (FET) sector and an associated implementation plan. Specifically, this research attempts to map provision across the FET sector in order to develop a sense of some of the main issues facing the FET sector.

The study is unique as it represents the first attempt to map FET provision in Ireland in a systematic way, with the objective of identifying the principal features of the sector within both a national and international context.

The report sets out the historical evolution of FET provision in Ireland. It examines current patterns of provision in terms of both the overall distribution of places and the balance between full-time labour market orientated programmes and part-time provision with a more community education focus. The pattern and rates of accreditation are examined, and the connectivity between labour market orientated programmes and the structure of the vocational labour market is also assessed. Qualitative evidence is analysed on a range of issues, including the role of FET, the quality and relevance of awards and the qualifications of staff. From all of this, a series of policy implications emerging from the evidence are developed.

¹ Department of Education and Skills (2013). *Further Education and Training Act 2013*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

THE COMPOSITION AND OBJECTIVES OF FET

As is the case in many countries, FET provision in Ireland is wide-ranging and heterogeneous in nature, making it extremely difficult to define. FET provision in Ireland currently addresses many areas of provision:

- i. Providing initial vocational education and training, including high quality apprenticeships;
- ii. A re-entry route for individuals to education and training, including literacy and basic education;
- iii. Professional or vocational development of individuals in the workforce or re-entering the workforce;
- iv. Community education and training, and;
- v. Other systematic and deliberate learning undertaken by adults in a wide variety of settings and contexts, both formal and informal.

Total spending on the sector in 2012 stood at €688.7million, of which spending on programmes delivered through the former VECs accounted for 58 per cent, the FÁS share stood at 35 per cent with Pobal accounting for the remaining 7 per cent of total spending.

Of the 298,552 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) awards issued in 2012, former VECs accounted for 44 per cent, private providers for 24 per cent, FÁS training centres for 21 per cent, community/voluntary groups for 5 per cent, and all other providers accounted for the remaining 6 per cent. In addition to the accredited element, a good deal of unaccredited provision takes place within the community sector.

The research highlighted that the diverse nature of the sector was seen as making it difficult to form a clear identity for FET. The FET sector was viewed by stakeholders as being less clearly defined and of lower perceived status than Higher Education (HE). This was regarded as reflecting broader societal norms and expectations, but was also seen as relating to the fragmentation of FET provision and perceptions of current provision.

Stakeholders differed somewhat in the relative emphasis they placed on the two objectives of the FET sector, namely meeting labour market needs and countering social exclusion. In the context of recession, many representatives from statutory bodies and training providers emphasised the urgency of reducing unemployment by providing courses to meet labour market needs. On the other hand, representatives from the community education sector pointed to the continued need to provide education and training designed to enhance the skills of learners without necessarily having a direct labour market focus. However, the

vast majority of stakeholders viewed FET provision as addressing *both* labour market and social inclusion agendas.

PATTERNS OF PROVISION

In 2011 there were a total of 69,133 full-time equivalent enrolments within the former VECs, with the majority of enrolments — approximately 70 per cent — in full-time programmes, mainly PLCs. Part-time programmes then accounted for around 30 per cent of all full-time equivalent enrolments. The distribution of full-time equivalent enrolments broadly reflects the funding by programme type: around 80 per cent of total FET spending was directed towards full-time programmes in 2011 and 2012.

There is a substantial amount of variation in the regional distribution of full-time equivalent enrolments within the former VECs. Relative to their population shares, levels of provision appeared above average in the Border, Dublin, South-West, Mid-West and South-East regions. Provision was found to be somewhat below average in the Mid-East, Midlands, and West regions. Similar patterns were found with respect to the distribution of FÁS training places.

National policy does not appear to play a central role in the determination of places across regions, or regarding the balance of full-time and part-time provision within regions. Based on their documented objectives, full-time courses (e.g., PLCs, Youthreach and VTOS) all have a clear labour market focus, whereas part-time courses (e.g., Back to Education Initiative and Adult Literacy) often cater for individuals further from the labour market and play a social inclusion role. Across regions, there was substantial variation in the relative balance between full-time and part-time provision. For example, there was a relatively high focus on full-time labour market provision in regions such as Dublin and the South-West, while social inclusion related programmes accounted for a relatively high share of overall provision in the Midlands, Mid-West and West.

Stakeholders interviewed for the study emphasised the need to address existing fragmentation and diversity within FET provision. In particular, many agreed that the organic development of the system had resulted in too many providers and possible duplication of provision in some areas. Provision therefore lacked a national focus. Stakeholders also agreed that the quality of provision was inconsistent, with some centres developing a strong reputation based on local initiatives, while others were seen as weaker.

ACCREDITATION

In 2012, a total of 298,551 QQI FETAC accredited awards were issued by the FET sector. The majority of these (80.4 per cent) were minor awards, indicating a lower volume of learning. Major awards were most heavily concentrated in National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Levels 5 and 6, whereas minor awards were most common at NFQ Levels 4 and 5. When the awards data for 2012 was sorted by centre-type, the former VECs represented the most significant provider within the sector, accounting for 42.5 per cent of total qualifications issued; a further 24 per cent of certificates were achieved through private providers, while 19 per cent were issued by FÁS.

Based on the available data for 2011, it was estimated that the percentage of students enrolled on full-time courses that went on to successfully achieve major accreditation was 49.2 per cent for PLCs, 61.1 per cent for VTOS and 48.9 per cent for Youthreach.

Non-FETAC accreditation accounted for almost 30 per cent of total FÁS certification in 2011, with City & Guilds representing the single largest awarding body (outside of FETAC). Of City & Guilds accreditation in 2012, 88 per cent was at Levels 1 and 2, which are broadly comparable to NFQ Levels 3 and 4.

A proportion of provision within the FET sector does not lead to any formal accreditation. The lack of accreditation is more typical in programmes with a strong community ethos, or those that are targeted at individuals whose personal circumstances result in them being some distance from the labour market.

Across all stakeholder groups, the prevalence of non-accredited programmes was seen as a significant issue and for many a 'strong weakness' in the system. Three out of five stakeholders interviewed indicated that the prevalence of unaccredited courses was a weakness 'to a large extent' or 'to some extent'. In addition, the vast majority of individuals that were interviewed felt there was a need to develop some form of measurement metrics in currently unaccredited programmes.

Overall, stakeholders offered two main views on minor awards: some felt minor awards held a valuable place in the FET system, while others expressed a concern about their prevalence and a view that the system, and providers, should be placing greater emphasis on major awards. In general, representatives of

statutory bodies and providers tended to fall into the latter category, while a broader spectrum of stakeholders placed a value on these awards.

There was a general consensus among stakeholders that there should be a balance between Irish and other awards; both were seen to have a role to play. Further, stakeholders noted that national awards systems, notably the former FETAC system, suffered from a lack of international recognition, while counterparts like City & Guilds could be more strongly placed internationally.

LABOUR MARKET ALIGNMENT

The study assessed, at a broad level, the extent to which the pattern of the outputs of the FET sector matched the structure of labour market demand for sub-degree vocational labour. Accepting that there should be only limited weight attached to methodologies centred on occupational forecasting, overall, it was found that the distribution of major awards across field of study did not appear to strongly reflect the structure of the vocational labour market. Crucially, there appears to be little or no provision in areas of labour demand such as Manufacturing or Transport/Logistics.

Stakeholders felt that current FET provision was aligned with the labour market only 'to some extent'. The importance of aligning provision with national skill requirements was emphasised, but at the same time the capacity to respond to regional or local labour market needs was seen as important. Employer engagement was viewed as crucial in ensuring an alignment between FET provision and labour market needs, whether at local or national level.

Many of the stakeholders raised concerns around a lack of responsiveness of providers to changing demands in the labour market. Specifically, many see the sector as having a 'lack of agility' and being slow to respond to employer needs.

IRISH FET IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

A number of international reports were commissioned from FET experts in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia. These countries were chosen due to the availability of established literature and expertise in each country. In addition, Germany, Denmark and Australia are acknowledged as areas of best practice in (Vocational Education and Training) VET while the Scottish FET sector has many similarities with FET in Ireland. Compared to the German, Dutch and Australian systems, Irish FET is much more fragmented and is much less focused around

vocational labour market demand. Irish FET governance structures have historically been highly decentralised relative to any of the comparator countries. Both the VECs and FÁS have largely had autonomy with respect to the composition and nature of provision with little strategic direction coming from national authorities. The historic lack of any governance or planning function within the Irish sector FET will certainly have meant that the Irish system is less well equipped to respond to national priorities.

Higher levels of employer engagement and work placement in any FET system ensures that programmes are more fully aligned with the vocational labour markets, both in composition and content, thereby reducing the requirement to plan provision at a national level. Relative to Germany, Denmark and Australia, the Irish and Scottish FET systems appear poorly defined as a consequence of simultaneously seeking to serve a diverse range of interests. Nevertheless, despite their similarities, Ireland appears to be somewhat behind Scotland in terms of the integration of employer engagement into provision, labour market connectivity and the perceived status of FET among learners.

Data provision on FET in Ireland was poor in comparison to the situation in Denmark, Germany, Australia and Scotland.

Irish FET provision is relatively strong in some aspects. For instance, compared to the Netherlands, Irish FET appears to have more adequately integrated the needs of the unemployed into provision. Furthermore, the Irish model of organising apprenticeship has been seen to offer lessons for the UK and its system of Modern Apprenticeships.

DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

There is a lack of reliable data on FET provision in Ireland and this proved to be a major constraint in underpinning the research process. There exists no single information source that tracks FET participants so as to enable the accurate and integrated measurement of enrolments, completion rates, levels of accreditation and progression by subject area and level of study. The current research could only be undertaken by using a number of different datasets, of varying quality and consistency, which provided snapshots of FET students at different points in time.

The majority of stakeholders interviewed were critical about the data available in relation to FET provision, progression and outcomes. The interviews highlighted a

number of key issues, including a lack of data and poor quality of available data, with many stakeholders highlighting areas where data could and should be collected. Many suggested ways in which data could be collected or improved, such as the creation of a single integrated database or system of measurement in which to track participants and outcomes over time.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE STUDY

It is clear from both the national and international evidence that the Irish FET system has historically lacked an appropriate governance structure that gives strategic direction to providers. This makes it difficult for providers to react to the changing requirements of both the labour market and wider society in a timely and appropriate manner. It is, therefore, vital that SOLAS fulfils a more proactive and unifying governance function across the sector. International best practice would suggest that Ireland should move towards a governance approach that provides strategic direction at a national level, while simultaneously allowing providers sufficient autonomy to respond to local needs.

The reform of provision will require SOLAS to implement a funding model that ensures that poorly performing programmes are no longer financed, with available resources directed towards areas identified as being of significant importance on the basis of emerging national or regional intelligence.

More research work is required to harness the views of employers at all stages of the provision planning process, from the development of national strategic advice on the direction of provision to the design and evaluation of specific programmes and courses.

In the case of unaccredited programmes, there is a clear requirement to develop appropriate metrics, related to the programme objectives, which will allow such provision to be evaluated.

In order to provide direction on the needs of employers and emerging labour market trends, not only will it be necessary to develop a detailed labour market intelligence system that provides national and regional detail on current and future trends in vocational employment, but data gaps with respect to existing provision need to be addressed as a matter of priority as well.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The establishment of An Seirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS) has prompted an assessment of the nature of current further education and training (FET) and an exploration of future directions. This report provides an evidence base for the purposes of assisting SOLAS in the development of a five-year action plan for the Irish FET sector and an associated strategy implementation plan. This research attempts to map provision across the FET sector in order to identify the main issues facing the FET sector. The full extent of FET provision in the State is very broad ranging and includes many actors in addition to the major providers, the former VECs and FÁS.² The research draws on (a) a desk-based study drawing together available data from a wide range of sources (b) evidence from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and (c) a series of reports commissioned from a number of international experts describing FET provision in their home countries under a number of specified themes. The evidence collected is designed to inform both the SOLAS strategic plan and associated implementation plan.

The research is unique as it represents the first comprehensive attempt to map FET provision in Ireland in a systematic way, with the objective of identifying the principal features of the sector within both a national and international context. The study examines the historical evolution of FET provision in Ireland, and the current patterns of provision in terms of both the overall distribution of places and the balance between full-time labour-market orientated programmes and part-time provision with a more community education focus. The pattern and rates of accreditation are examined and the connectivity between labour-market orientated programmes and the structure of the vocational labour market is assessed. Qualitative evidence is analysed on a range of issues including the role of FET, the quality and relevance of awards and the qualifications of staff in the sector. A series of policy implications emerging from the evidence are then drawn.

² For example, it includes Crafts Council of Ireland, Coillte; Teagasc; Fáilte Ireland; BIM; County and City Enterprise Boards; Board Altranais; Skillnets; Private Training providers; Private Colleges; National learning Networks; Irish Prison Services; Institutes of Technology; Irish Congress of Trade Unions; Company based training; Chambers of Commerce etc. Legislative definitions of FET since 1930 and terminology are set out in Appendix 1.

1.2 RESEARCH BARRIERS

Given the novel exercise being undertaken, the research process was, not surprisingly, less than straightforward. A primary objective of the desk-based component was to map FET provision in terms of key performance measures, such as enrolments, course completion rates and first destination patterns.³ Ideally, as happens internationally, all of this information would be collected at the individual level by providers using a standardised administrative data capture tool. Unfortunately this has not been possible in Ireland and, consequently, the lack of individual tracking data means that we cannot (1) accurately connect enrolments directly to course completion levels, (2) measure rates of certification by qualification level and field of study, and (3) reliably measure progression to the labour market or further study by both completers and non-completers. In short, the data infrastructure is not in place that would enable policy makers to measure the effectiveness of current provision either in terms of achieving accreditation or satisfactory progression. Therefore, a key issue arising from the desk-based research was that the current data collection within the Irish FET system is wholly inadequate for the purpose of performance measurement on key indicators, such as course completion rates, accreditation levels and progression patterns.

In order to overcome the data constraints, the mapping exercise in this report relies on multiple data sources of varying levels of quality and detail, none of which are directly connected to each other at the individual level. As a consequence, our observations are somewhat less concrete than would be the case for an FET system underpinned by an appropriate administrative data infrastructure. In terms of our definition of the FET sector, this is far from straightforward as no standard definitional approach exists within the Irish academic or policy literature. For the purposes of this study, the mapping exercise incorporates all providers of accredited provision up to level 6⁴ in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) that takes place outside second-level schools.⁵ In addition to the accredited element, the study also incorporates unaccredited provision delivered outside of second-level schools and third-level institutions. While the definitional approach is wide-ranging, from the perspective of accreditation the Education and Training Boards (former VECs and FÁS training centres) and private providers account for the bulk of provision. For

³ First destination data track post-qualification progressions to further study; employment; unemployment; inactivity; emigration; etc.

⁴ An award-type is a category of named awards which have common features and the same NFQ level. Examples of award-types include: Junior Certificate (NFQ level 3), Advanced Certificate (NFQ Level 6), and Honours Bachelor Degree (NFQ Level 8).

⁵ However, VEC schools are included in the analysis, as they are providers of both junior and senior cycle second-level programmes and Post Leaving Certificate courses.

instance, of the 298,552 Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) awards⁶ issued in 2012, former VECs accounted for 44 per cent, private providers⁷ for 24 per cent, FÁS training centres for 21 per cent, community/voluntary groups for 5 per cent, with all other providers⁸ accounting for the remaining 6 per cent. A similar pattern is evident from the distribution of funding to providers by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Excluding training allowances, DES spent €309.5million on a range of programmes primarily delivered through the former VECs (on courses within the Post-Leaving Certificate, VTOS, Youthreach and the Back-to-Education Initiative streams), €117million on FÁS training, while €50million was spent on a range of adult literacy and community development programmes with a further €50million of funding provided to Pobal.⁹

1.3 MACROECONOMIC AND LABOUR MARKET CONTEXT

Since the mid-1990s, the Irish economy has experienced periods of growth and contraction that are large by international and historic standards. Figure 1 shows rates of growth in real GDP and real GNP for the period 1996 to 2011, clearly highlighting the contrasting performance of the Irish economy over the period. In the mid- to late 1990s, the Irish economy grew at annual rates in the region of 10 per cent. Growth moderated in the early years of the 2000s, with annual rates of growth around 5 per cent, so that Ireland's economic performance still looked remarkably healthy. However, when the global crisis of 2007/08 emerged, the Irish economy was found to be extremely vulnerable.

The international financial collapse had an exceptionally severe effect on Ireland, mainly due to the existence of a property price bubble and excessive bank lending to the property sector. Ireland's real GDP fell each year between 2008 and 2010, by 2 per cent, 5 per cent and 1 per cent respectively. Indeed, the decline was even more pronounced in terms of GNP, with the economy contracting by 8 per cent in 2009 alone based on this measure. The economic collapse led to a severe contraction in tax revenues, partly due to an over-reliance on property-related taxes. When combined with the banking-related liabilities that the State accrued as a result of the banking guarantee, a public finance crisis emerged and led to the EU/IMF bailout in late 2010.

⁶ This is only the QQI disaggregated awards which are a subset of the awards in the FET sector. There are other non-aligned awards.

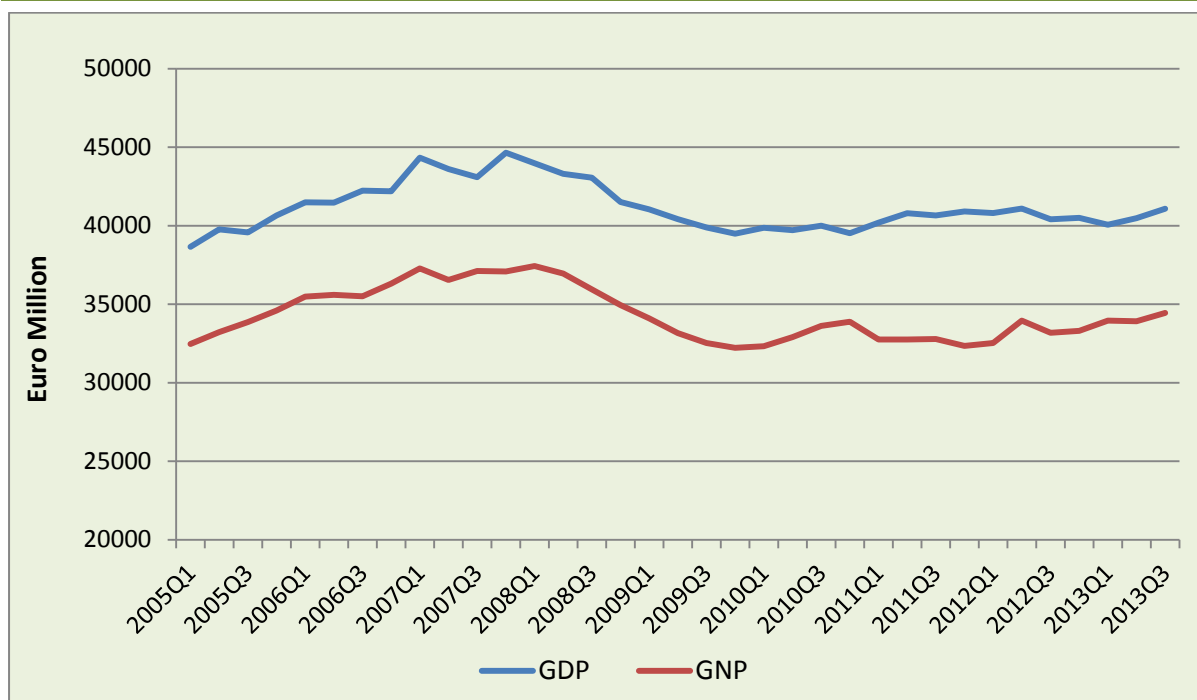
⁷ Private providers include private colleges and private training companies.

⁸ This includes organisations such as Institutes of Technology (IoTs), Skillnets, Teagasc, Fáilte Ireland etc.

⁹ It should be noted that expenditures to private providers could not be separated out in these data.

Overall, for 2013 GDP was expected to have grown by between 0.2 per cent and 0.7 per cent. However, Irish GDP was particularly affected by a large fall in the profitability of the pharmaceutical industry (ESRI, 2013): therefore, for 2013, GNP arguably represents a more reliable measure of performance. The most recent data for the Irish economy show real GDP and GNP growth remained relatively flat between Q1 and Q3 2013 (Figure 1.1). In terms of the macroeconomic outlook, the Irish Central Bank has revised its forecast for real GDP growth in 2013 down slightly from 0.5 per cent to 0.4 per cent, while revising expected growth for 2014 up marginally from 2.0 to 2.1 per cent (Table 1.1). In its latest *Quarterly Economic Commentary*, the ESRI downgraded its 2013 and 2014 real GDP growth estimates slightly to 0.3 per cent and 2.7 per cent respectively. Growth estimated for 2015 varies from 2.3 per cent (Department of Finance) to 3.2 per cent (Irish Central Bank).

FIGURE 1.1 Level of GDP and GNP at Constant Market Prices, Seasonally Adjusted



Source: Quarterly National Accounts 2013 Q3, Central Statistics Office. Available at: www.cso.ie - Accessed: 5/1/2014.

TABLE 1.1 Real GDP Growth Forecasts 2013, 2014 and 2015

Institution	2013	2014	2015
		%	
Central Bank (<i>Quarterly Bulletin</i> , January 2014)	0.4	2.1	3.2
ESRI (<i>Quarterly Economic Commentary</i> , December 2013)	0.3	2.7	
Department of Finance (<i>Budget Statement</i> , October 2013)	0.2	2.0	2.3

In terms of the labour market, the numbers employed peaked in 2007 at a level of 2.1 million. By Q2 2012, the number employed had fallen to 1.8 million, a decline of over 14 per cent. Such a large and rapid fall in employment has inevitably led to a significant increase in unemployment and this is seen in the last line of Table 1.2. The unemployment rate had been relatively constant at around 4 to 4.5 per cent between 2000 and 2007, but the jump between 2007 and 2009, from 4.6 per cent to 13 per cent, was another striking feature of the downturn. The rate continued to increase and by 2012 stood at 14.2 per cent. Furthermore, by the end of 2012, long-term claimants accounted for approximately 60 per cent of the total existing population of unemployed. Although the trend in the participation rate tends to attract less attention, the figures in Table 1.2 are noteworthy. From a peak of 63.9 per cent in 2007, the participation rate fell to 60.4 per cent in the last quarter (Q4) of 2013, contributing to a decline in the labour force of approximately 4 per cent between 2008 and 2013.

The dramatic movements in Ireland's economy have also been mirrored in the migratory movements into and out of Ireland. Although the height of the economic boom occurred in the late 1990s, the surge in inward migration was observed in the period after 2004. The main reason for this was the EU enlargement in 2004, along with the fact that Ireland was among only three countries that allowed citizens of the New Member States (NMS) full access to its labour market from 1 May 2004. In 2007, net inward migration peaked at over 100,000, representing 2.4 per cent of Ireland's population, measured at 4.2 million in 2006. The economic crisis has led to a reversal of net migration with net outward migration consistently in evidence since 2009. In the year ending April 2012, the net outflow was over 34,000, which in absolute numbers means that the rate of net outflow is now approaching that of the late 1980s, when Ireland last experienced large net population outflows.

In line with the general macroeconomic outlook, the most recently released data indicated continued recovery in the labour market. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate fell from 12.7 per cent to 12.1 per cent between Q3 and Q4 2013, having stood at 13.6 per cent in Q2 2013. The long-term unemployment rate fell from 8.2 per cent to 7.2 per cent during Q4 2013; however, in Q4 2013 the long-term unemployed accounted for 61.4 per cent of the total unemployed compared to 59.9 per cent in the previous quarter. Seasonally adjusted employment grew by approximately 14,000 during the last quarter of 2013, with the labour force also increasing by around 5,000 leading to a 0.1 per cent rise in the participation rate.

TABLE 1.2 Ireland's Labour Market Trends, 2007 to 2013

	2007Q4	2008Q4	2009Q4	2010Q4	2011Q4	2012Q4	2013Q4
Labour Force (Thousand)	2,269	2,265	2,206	2,174	2,168	2,149	2,169
Participation Rates (%)	63.9	63.1	61.3	60.4	60.3	59.8	60.4
In Employment (Thousand)	2,159	2,087	1,924	1,858	1,847	1,846	1,906
Unemployment Rates (%)	4.9	8.1	13.0	14.7	14.9	14.2	12.1

Source: CSO, "Seasonally Adjusted Standardised Unemployment Rates (SUR)". Available at: www.cso.ie - Accessed: 5/1/2014.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The lack of appropriate data or a developed academic literature on Irish FET meant that a mixed methods research approach was necessary in order to develop a clear picture of the underlying structure of FET provision and the key issues associated with it. Mixed method studies are increasingly popular in the social sciences, especially in the field of education, where a combination of research methods can '...answer research questions that could not be answered in any other way' (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). For this study, the quantitative analysis of a range of newly compiled data sources provided insights into key aspects of the FET system, but qualitative research with key stakeholders across the FET landscape provided additional understanding of how different dimensions of the FET system are experienced and viewed from a range of perspectives. Hence, the approach taken offers a greater depth of understanding of the system and assists in the identification of important directions for future policy and provision. The key components of the research strategy are detailed below:

- A desk-based review drawing together existing data from a range of agencies such as Department of Education and Skills (DES), FÁS and the QQI. The research sought to scope current FET provision in terms of key indicators such as the structure of provision, levels and patterns of accreditation, the distribution of provision by subject area and the alignment of FET outputs with labour demand. The desk-based research also provides a review of existing studies both from the Irish and international perspectives.
- A number of international reports were commissioned from FET experts in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia. These countries were chosen due to the availability of established literature and expertise in each country. In addition, Germany, Denmark and Australia are acknowledged as areas of best practice in (Vocational Education and Training) VET while the Scottish FET sector has many similarities with FET in Ireland. The international experts were asked to describe the nature of provision in their home countries around key themes that had been identified, during the desk-based research and initial consultations, as challenging within the Irish

context. The experts were asked to describe FET provision in the home country in terms of its underlying rationale and objectives, governance, planning, funding, monitoring and data infrastructure. The international reports were then synthesised into a comparative analysis around key issues.

- In total 46 stakeholders were interviewed as part of the qualitative phase of the study. The stakeholders were chosen to capture a range of policy, provision and practitioner groups: statutory departments and bodies (19 interviews), Employers (8 interviews), statutory providers of FET (5 interviews) other providers and awarding bodies (7 interviews), and the community and adult education sector (7 interviews). Stakeholders were interviewed on a one-to-one basis by a member of the ESRI research team.¹⁰ All interviews were audio recorded with the interviewee's prior consent and transcribed verbatim. The interviews followed a structured format, with a list of questions (both open-ended and pre-coded) serving to guide the interviews. The analysis involved firstly, identifying and grouping emerging themes followed by a more in-depth examination of patterns and relationships where we compared and contrasted the different groups of stakeholders. The interviews explored a range of themes including the overall structure of provision of FET, labour market and social inclusion objectives, the balance between full- and part-time provision, accreditation, alignment with the labour market and quality of provision (see Appendix 2 for the interview schedule). Systematic analysis of these data identified both common and diverging views across these main themes. This process of analysis was then completed by representing the accounts of stakeholders to give an overall picture and ensure confidentiality. As with all qualitative research, quotations are selected to reflect both overarching perspectives and variations in opinions across groups. Examples, therefore, are not meant to be quantitatively representative but rather to illustrate the different perspectives of respondents. To preserve anonymity, no individuals or organisations are identified in the analysis.

During the course of the research, the ESRI team was given full access to a range of key information resources by organisations such FÁS, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, The Department of Education and Skills, Pobal and Aontas.

¹⁰ Three interviews were group interviews.

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 describes the development of vocational education and training in Ireland, followed by an outline of recent legislation and policy developments. Chapter 3 outlines the objectives and status of FET in Ireland from the perspectives of key stakeholders in the sector. Chapter 4 examines the pattern of enrolments across Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) in 2011 and FÁS training centres in 2012. Chapter 5 examines stakeholder perceptions of provision, highlighting in particular issues around the perceived adequacy of current provision, the issue of system responsiveness, the profile of FET teaching staff and the perceived quality of existing data. Chapter 6 examines the extent of non-accredited FET provision and looks at accreditation patterns within the FET sector in 2012. The chapter also addresses stakeholder perspectives on the value of accreditation and the appropriate balance between major and minor awards. Chapter 7 measures the degree to which the composition of FET provision matches the structure of the vocational labour market and assesses progression patterns among FET qualifiers. Chapter 8 examines Irish FET in an international context. Chapter 9 concludes with a summary of our findings.

Chapter 2

Historical Context and Legislative Changes

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers developments in the FET sector from two angles — historical and legislative - providing an important backdrop to the analyses presented in the report. In considering historical changes in the sector, the chapter charts a range of key timepoints in the sector dating from attention being placed on the role of ‘technical education’ in schools towards the end of the nineteenth century. The chapter sets out a range of subsequent developments and influences on the sector, including the role of external influences such as the EEC and OECD. Key legislative developments are also considered, particularly surrounding the establishment of SOLAS, the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). The chapter concludes with an overview of some recent relevant research, including the PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) study, the NESC Strategic Review of the Further Education and Training Sector (2013) and the Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland (2013).

2.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN IRELAND

Ireland experienced a late development of vocational education, largely because of its late industrialisation, the low status of manual work and the emphasis of Church-run schools on providing an academic education (Coolahan, 1981). Some key features of the development of vocational education in Ireland are worth outlining as context for the current study. The 1889 Technical Instruction Act established the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. This played a supportive function rather than providing new educational services and focused on the application of science and art to industry rather than the teaching of trades. Activities were funded through a combination of central government funding and local rates. The City of Dublin Technical School was established at Kevin Street in 1885, funded by a grant from Dublin Corporation and resources from a committee of interested individuals. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a good deal of concern about the dearth of technical education in Ireland; for example, in 1899 the Commission on Intermediate Education criticised the academic nature of the school curriculum. Over this period, some existing institutions were converted to technical schools and a small number of day trade preparatory schools were established. However,

development was constrained by the lack of capital funds for new buildings and the lack of trained teachers (Coolahan, 1981).

With the foundation of the State, technical education fell under the brief of the Department of Agriculture but transferred to the Department of Education in 1924. In 1924, there were 65 technical schools, providing full-time pre-employment courses (with a limited range of courses, largely comprising agriculture for males and domestic crafts for females) and evening trade instruction, the latter making up the bulk of students. A Commission on Technical Education report in 1927 pointed to the need for radical change in the existing structures, a recommendation which culminated in the 1930 Vocational Education Act. This established 38 VECS (successors to the Technical Instruction Committees) which received funding from local rates. These schools provided two year full-time 'continuation education', designed to prepare young people for the labour market, along with evening courses ('technical education') designed to improve the skills of the employed. The continuation courses included subjects such as Irish, English and Maths but focused on the areas of technical, domestic science, commercial and rural skills. Such continuation education did not involve 'general education' and its emphasis was designed to be severely practical and vocational, according to the Minister John Marcus O'Sullivan at the time (O'Reilly, 1989). There had been some concern about the role that religion would play in the new structures, with the result that that the 1942 Memorandum V.40 specified that religious studies would be included in the curriculum along with a greater emphasis on Irish language and culture. The new VEC structures, with a significant role for local representatives, both elected and nominated, created a new power group in the educational process; however, pre-existing Church and State educational projects were not unduly disturbed by this group (O'Reilly, 1989). From 1936, the Department of Education recognised the technical school examinations but schools continued to submit students for City and Guilds awards. In 1947, the Group Certificate was introduced in vocational schools for students at the end of the two year continuation course. The curriculum and examination structure in these schools differed from that of voluntary secondary schools as they did not provide the more academic Intermediate and Leaving Certificate courses. As a result, the schools acquired lower status and tended to have student intake from lower socio-economic groups (Hannan and Boyle, 1987).

The 1950s saw increasing criticism of vocational education, which centred on a number of concerns. Vocational schools were viewed as taking the 'less academic students' with more academic students increasingly attending secondary schools. Vocational schools were also seen as having less qualified staff, and limited

numbers of students in these schools progressed to further education.¹¹ The introduction of the Intermediate Certificate in 1966 (which saw a broadening of the curriculum) was an attempt to provide a more comprehensive curriculum in both vocational and secondary schools. Many VECs adopted a community college model in the 1970s, reflecting their role in providing adult and further education as well as ‘traditional’ second-level education. Towards the end of the 1970s, VECs appointed Adult Education Organisers (AEOs) to coordinate adult education provision. These developments over the 1970s broadened the mandate of VECs considerably.

Parallel to these developments, the 1931 Apprenticeship Act set up apprenticeship committees comprised of employer and employee representatives and Ministerial nominees to regulate training. However, this Act accomplished little because of the lack of enforcement and no compulsion on employers to let trainees attend courses (Coolahan, 1981). The 1959 Apprenticeship Act established the National Apprenticeship Board with the power to require employers to send apprentices to courses. In 1963, CERT was set up to coordinate education and training for the hotel, catering and tourism industry. The 1967 Industrial Training Act set up AnCO (An Comhairle Oiliúna) which subsumed the functions of the Apprenticeship Board. It was funded by grants from government and, after 1973, from the European Social Fund. It was responsible for training at every level: training within industry, training centres and apprenticeship training.¹² It was noted at the time that the proliferation of programmes to improve the prospects of unemployed (school leavers) raised issues of duplication and overlap between school and non-school vocational preparation courses and highlighted the need for clarification and definition of roles (Williams and McNamara, 1986). FÁS was established in 1987 under the Labour Services Act to consolidate the work of AnCO, the Youth Employment Agency and the National Manpower Service. At a later point, the 1992 Culliton Report on Industrial Development argued for a greater focus of FÁS resources on training for those in employment rather than the unemployed.

2.2.1 Apprenticeships

1973 saw the introduction of a system of one year off-the-job training for apprentices, with apprentices spending their first year in an AnCO training centre, thereafter combining on-the-job training with attending day release or block

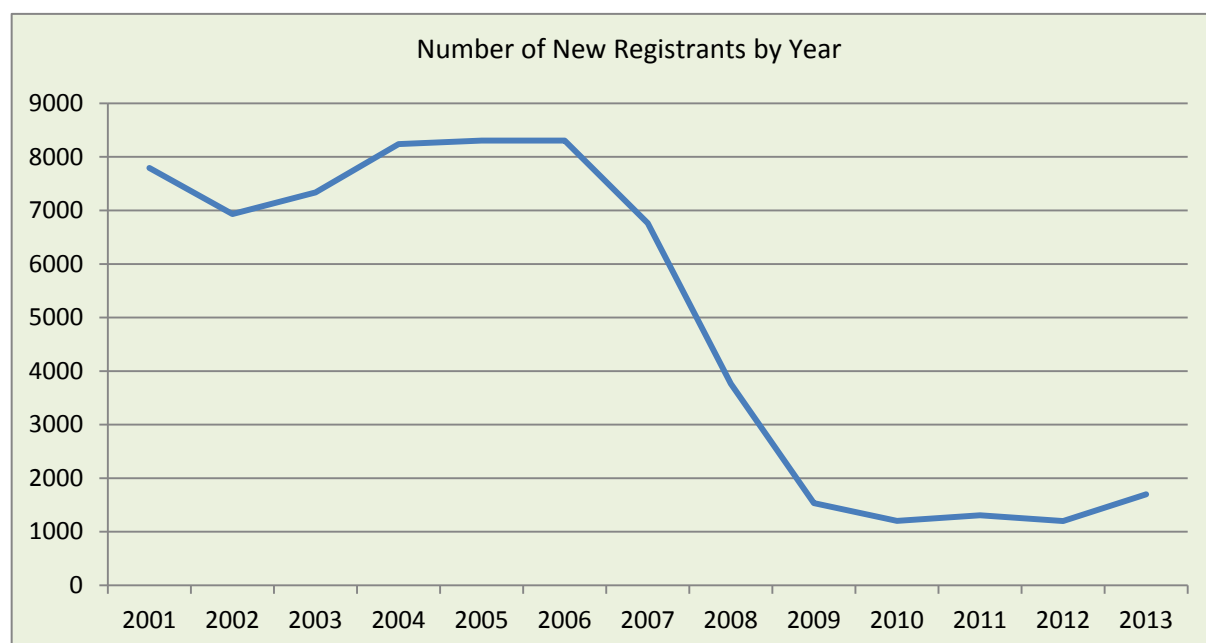
¹¹ The definition of Further Education in this context may be taken to include Higher Education as well as other non-mainstream education (Higher Education was referred to as Further Education up until the mid-eighties).

¹² This excluded agricultural education, for which the National Advisory and Training Body (ACOT) took over responsibility in 1980.

release courses in Institutes of Technology (O'Connor, 2006). In 1976 the apprenticeship period was reduced from 5 to 4 years. In 1992, it was reorganised around competency-based standards with a modular structure. The on-the-job phases are funded by employers while the off-the-job phases are funded by the State. The Irish system is unusual in comparative context in that this move arose from a social dialogue between unions and employers (Field and O Dubhchair, 2001). Entry was also opened up to broader groups, e.g., adults, through a pre-apprenticeship course, but Field and O Dubhchair (2001) note that employers continue to recruit young people, mainly those with Leaving Certificate qualifications. While the new system was seen as commanding support from employers and apprentices, issues were raised about the lack of transparency of the work-based training in terms of quality assurance (Field and O Dubhchair, 2001; O'Connor, 2006). The apprenticeship system has recently been subject to review under the auspices of the Department of Education and Skills; the results of this review are outlined in the following section.

With regard to the current apprenticeship system the level of new entrants (registrations) by employers reduced significantly in the period 2006-2012 from 8,306 to 1,434 respectively (Figure 2.1). There was a slight increase in registrations from 1,307 in 2011 to 1,434 in 2012. The demand for Engineering, Motor, Electrical and Plumbing trades increased in 2013.

FIGURE 2.1 Trends in Apprenticeship Registration 2001-2013



In 2013, apprenticeship programmes continue to be provided for an estimated 1,700+ new registrants and more generally for an existing apprentice population of approximately 9,000 at various stages of both on and off-the-job phases of their apprenticeship. The population of redundant apprentices (made redundant during their training) was 2,600 at the end of 2012 (56 per cent were in construction-related trades while 21 per cent were in the electrical trade). Existing initiatives introduced ensured that a significant cohort of this redundant apprentice population completed their apprenticeship.

2.2.2 Other Developments Over Time

The EEC has been very influential in shaping vocational education and training in Ireland (Coolahan, 1981; O’Sullivan, 2005). The European Social Fund provided funding for the establishment of pre-employment courses in over 120 schools in 1977. These courses were targeted at post-junior cycle students and aimed to provide social, general and technical education combined with work experience. They were initially confined to vocational and community/comprehensive schools. In 1984 they were redeveloped as Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT) courses, VPT1 and VPT2, and were extended to secondary schools. The structure of the programmes comprised of vocational studies, work experience and general studies (NESC, 1993). A second year was added to the courses in 1985. VPT2 courses became commonly known as Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses.¹³ As noted by McNamara (1990), while the emphasis was on improving the employability of young people, by making good certain shortcomings in their basic skills, it was argued that the implications of this changing emphasis were not fully considered. In particular, the skills in question were not defined and the evidence has not been provided to show that these skills were in short supply or that such shortages caused high unemployment levels (*ibid.*, p.163). Youthreach, aimed at early school leavers, was launched in October 1988 – Department of Education centres were run through the VECs and Community Training Workshops through FÁS. The Educational Opportunities Scheme was introduced on a pilot basis in 1986 to provide one year full-time education for those aged over 24 who had been unemployed for a year or more. It was reconstituted as Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) in 1989, with ESF funding, and broadened to include those over 21. More recently the Back to Education Initiative was established in 2002 to provide part-time courses for young people and adults, targeting those with less than upper secondary education and/or in receipt of a social welfare payment.

¹³ The term PLC was often used before this time to describe courses in higher level institutes, i.e., post-Leaving Certificate.

A lot of development in vocational education and training fell outside the system of established qualifications (Granville, 2003), with a lack of standardisation in assessment and certification (in, for example, VPT courses, see NES, 1993). This ‘further education’ sector (a term first used in the 1995 White Paper on Education¹⁴) was created from the bottom up, with local networks of providers developing programmes in response to local needs:¹⁵

The present situation regarding further education within the Republic of Ireland did not emerge in a planned and ordered way, but instead resulted from many and varying influences. (Geaney, 1998, p. 55.)

Growing participation rates in this sector led to the establishment in 1991 of the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) to provide certification. It used a modular framework, integrating general studies and vocational modules with a focus on the development of personal and interpersonal skills (Trant, 2002). This ‘...succeeded in building a common and accepted code of practice among diverse sets of learners, providers and users’ (Granville, 2003, p. 263). However, barriers to progress included lack of resources, rigid contracts (reflecting second-level teaching), lack of progression routes and, more importantly, the continued low status of vocational education (Trant, 2002). The 1999 Qualifications Act established the National Qualifications Act Ireland (NQAI) and subsumed the NCVA into Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) as well as the FÁS and CERT certification systems; the new qualifications framework included all qualifications, including vocational awards. The Act also gave legislative status to the FET sector, defining FET as ‘education and training other than primary or post-primary education or higher education and training’, nevertheless, FETAC (2005) points to the lack of clarity on what comprises FET in Ireland.

In keeping with a commitment in the White Paper on Adult Education (2000), the Department of Education and Science established a steering group to ‘...examine and make recommendations as necessary regarding the organisational, support, development, technical and administrative structures required in schools and colleges with large scale PLC provision’. Mclver Consulting was engaged to undertake extensive research and consultations on behalf of the Steering Group

¹⁴ The term was not, however, defined in the White Paper (although the relevant chapter included adult education, apprenticeships and PLCs) and was not used in the 1992 Green Paper or in earlier policy documents by the Department of Education (Geaney, 1998). The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) gives the following definition: “Further Education: i.e. education and training which occurs between second and third-level. This includes programmes such as Post Leaving Certificate courses, second-chance education such as the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme for the unemployed, Adult Literacy and Basic Education, and self-funded adult education programmes” (pp. 27-28).

¹⁵ There were some exceptions to this. For example, the International Teleservices VPT2 course, which was established by national government and industry: PLC centres were resourced specifically for this course with language labs and teachers set up in a number of centres.

and reported their findings in 2003. A number of recommendations were made, relating to a range of key issues in the PLC sector:

- *Recognising the distinctiveness of the sector:* where the scale of provision is sufficient, colleges providing both Further Education and second level provision should normally be divided into separate institutions, and have their management and organisational structures staffed accordingly;
- *Flexibility:* increased diversity of provision including full-time provision but with different start and end times during the college day or over the year, part time options, twilight, evening and weekend courses, provision for Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) students, other groups and industry clients and part-time self-funded courses;
- *Addressing the teaching/academic non-teaching workload:* allocations of staff should be calculated on the basis of State-funded Full-Time Equivalent students registered on Further Education (FE) courses in the previous academic year. A reduction in contracted teaching hours from 735 to 601 per annum for FE teachers to free up time for improved organisation and planning, co-ordination of assessment and quality assurance, improved learning and guidance supports for students, continuing professional development, development of programmes, syllabi and support materials, and for review and improved external linkages;
- *Improving senior and middle management structures:* senior management should consist of a Principal or Director, a Registrar or Head of Academic Affairs and a Head of Administration. Senior management roles would include such areas as management of academic departments; quality assurance; course planning and development; certification liaison; industrial liaison; student services; marketing; student admission. Middle management role would include supporting cross-curricular linkages, marketing, co-ordination, student access and supports, industry and community links and co-ordination of work experience placements;
- *Buildings, facilities and student services:* the Department of Education and Science should develop separate specifications for FE colleges, along the lines which apply in Institutes of Technology. Key requirements also include increased space for study, circulation, tutorial, staff and students working areas; crèche, student union, canteen and recreational facilities; specialist and library facilities, storage and disability access issues;
- *Support structures:* including FE Office for Industry and International Links; FE Office for Quality Assurance and Course Development; FeNET – to provide internet connectivity, develop national FE IT guidelines, host web sites and support a National FE Information Systems Strategy Study;
- *External linkages:* larger colleges should establish an industry advisory group. Each VEC should put in place a written framework policy on the

relationship of the VEC with its FE colleges in terms of planning and development, management, college input into appointments, and staffing and resources. VECs should delegate greater control over spending to FE colleges;

- *Teacher qualifications, staff induction and development:* the basic qualification for new appointments should be a primary degree, or alternatively a high-status professional qualification in a subject area where no suitable degree level qualification is available. There should be a compulsory induction programme for teachers new to the FE sector, an annual training plan for each department, and an increased budget for staff development;
- *Duration and level of courses, progression:* DES policy should be framed in such a way that allows for FE colleges to provide higher-level courses accredited by Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) in specific circumstances. Policy on access to higher education should recognise the PLC sector's role in providing access to post-second level education for groups not well represented at higher education, and in facilitating access to higher education for those groups;
- *Funding:* costs of implementing these recommendations are significant and they can only be implemented on a phased basis. This should be negotiated between the Department, the relevant union and management bodies, taking full account of the available resources, competing demands for funds and the potential impact on other levels of the system.

Most of the recommendations of the *Review* remain to be implemented.

Analyses of leavers from Post-Leaving Certificate courses formed a component of the School Leavers' Surveys, undertaken at the ESRI almost annually from 1980 to 2007. Given the status of PLC courses within the second-level system, administrative data (the so-called 'October Returns') from these schools and colleges were included within the Post-Primary Pupil Database, which provided the sampling frame for the six most recent surveys. This has allowed some analysis of the experiences and outcomes of young people who participated in PLC courses over this period and provided important insights into the changing role of this sector over nearly three decades. One report, Watson, McCoy and Gorby (2006), was dedicated solely to an analysis of PLC participants and leavers and provided important insights into the experiences of this group. As well as showing the changing profile of entrants to further education in Ireland, with a

clear shift towards non-school leaver entrants,¹⁶ and the steady growth in overall levels of participation over time, the results provided evidence on the labour market outcomes of participants. Most notably, the results showed those who participate in PLC courses were less likely to be unemployed one year after completion of the course than those who entered the labour market after the Leaving Certificate.¹⁷ Participants in PLC courses were also less likely to progress to further study than other school leavers of similar characteristics (in terms of age, gender, Leaving Certificate performance and social background). In other words, PLC courses were found to be an alternative, rather than a route, to third-level education. The report concluded that given the high price paid for educational failure in Ireland, particularly in a European context (McCoy and Smyth, 2003), the important role of the PLC and apprenticeship sectors should not be underestimated, particularly in terms of boosting the skills and qualifications of those who choose not to go on to third-level education or of those who are not eligible for entry to third-level education.

The OECD (1995) in its survey of the Irish economy argued that Ireland fared particularly weakly in terms of the low emphasis placed on vocational education and training (when compared to many other EU countries). Subsequently, a review of provision of vocational education and training in Ireland was undertaken by the OECD in 2010 (Kis, 2010). The report pointed to a number of positive features of the Irish system, especially: the comprehensive national qualifications framework, the well-structured apprenticeship system and the good range of provision at post-secondary level. The challenges identified centred on: the lack of attention to literacy and numeracy difficulties, the lack of pedagogical training among instructors,¹⁸ the fragmented nature of career guidance services, and the absence of detailed data and research. In particular, the report highlighted the narrow range of ('male') occupations in which apprenticeships were available, which was seen as a particular issue as these employment sectors had been declining since the crisis.¹⁹ The costs of the off-the-job components of apprenticeship, especially in Institutes of Technology,

¹⁶ This pointed to the emerging role of the PLC sector in providing a route to 'second chance' education and lifelong learning. The number of PLC participants over the age of 21 years is significant, particularly when compared to the numbers in more formally defined 'second chance' programmes such as VTOS. In 2003/04, over 14,000 participants in PLC programmes were over age 21, compared to less than 5,700 participants in the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) scheme.

¹⁷ Drawing on a series of follow-up surveys of school leavers, 5-6 years after leaving school, Hannan *et al.* (2003) further showed important occupational status and career mobility gains for participants in PLC courses.

¹⁸ The report also highlights the differential requirements of VET trainers depending on the sector in which they work, with DES trainers (other than Youthreach) required to be registered with the Teaching Council while 'vocational' instructors are not.

¹⁹ Earlier research indicated that apprenticeship in the 1980s and 1990s was almost exclusively limited to skilled manual jobs in Ireland but covered a much broader array of occupations in the Netherlands and France, with Scotland occupying an intermediate position (Hartkamp, 2001).

were seen as high in comparative terms. A second important issue raised related to the lack of integration of workplace training into FET programmes; work experience in PLCs (and other programmes) was seen as 'very limited' (Kis, 2010). Hannan *et al.* (1998) also raised issues of fragmentation and rigidity in the system of vocational education in Ireland. In particular, they called for greater institutional flexibility in education provision to facilitate part-time and second-chance education participants (particularly older adults), and to provide a greater mixing of education/training courses in cumulative credit arrangements. They pointed to the need to unify, or at least provide more 'bridges' and mutually accredited progression routes, between vocational education and training and general education, and on to further and higher education. They concluded that Ireland had extremely weak provision in these respects. They argued for more strategic concentration on PLC level expansion in a restricted range of subjects, in particular, to address the variable regional coverage of, and apparent difficulty in restraining the academic drift in, short cycle third-level provision (*ibid.*, p.135).

Most recently, the Leaving School in Ireland study has tracked the experiences of young people from their entry into second-level education (in 2002) to their experiences 3/4 years²⁰ after leaving school. The study is close to completion and will provide valuable evidence on the experiences of young people on transition to further education and training, their levels of preparedness, their post-course outcomes and reflections on the pathways they took. The report is currently being prepared for publication (McCoy, forthcoming 2014), and has formed part of the evidence base on the further education sector in Ireland.

Perhaps the most disparate component of FET provision is the 'adult education sector', with past difficulties in determining the lead government department for adult education policy seen as resulting in overlap and duplication of functions between DETE (now Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI)) and DES (Murtagh, 2009). The 2000 White Paper on Adult Education distinguished between 'self-funded part-time adult education courses' and 'community education'. The White Paper was noteworthy in emphasising not only the potential economic contribution of adult education (through improving human capital) but in stressing social and community goals (Connolly, 2006; Grummell, 2006). Second-level schools are seen as a major provider of self-funded part-time adult education ('night courses'), mostly in VEC schools but increasingly in the community/comprehensive sector (Government of Ireland, 2000). During the mid-1980s FÁS (then AnCO) began offering night courses on a fee-paying basis.

²⁰ Depending on whether they participated in the Transition Year programme, young people were surveyed either 3 or 4 years after leaving school.

This provision continues today and forms a significant part of FÁS training provision. Currently many unemployed clients avail of night training and there is now a fee waiver system in operation for clients in receipt of qualifying Department of Social Protection (DSP) payments.

Community education is described as “...a process of personal and community transformation, empowerment, challenge, social change and collective responsiveness. It is community-led reflecting and valuing the lived experiences of individuals and their community. Through its ethos and holistic approach community education builds the capacity of groups to engage in developing a social teaching and learning process that is creative, participative and needs-based. Community education is grounded on principles of justice, equality and inclusiveness. It differs from general education provision due to its political and radical methodologies” (AONTAS, 2011, p.3). These groups began to emerge in the 1980s, mostly in urban working-class areas. Community education has been funded through a range of sources, including local area partnerships, community development programmes and the DES through VECs. The DES funds community education through two programmes: the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES) funded through tutor hours and/or small grants to community groups through VEC Community Education Facilitators (CEFs), and the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) Community Education Strand funded directly from DES to community groups (Aontas, 2010). Courses tend to focus on hobbies/arts and participants tend to be from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a significant proportion of women and older people (Aontas, 2010). The White Paper also led to the introduction of the National Adult Literacy Programme, with NALA as the executive agency and provision directed through VECs, FÁS and community/voluntary groups, with a significant increase in the adult literacy budget from 1997 to 2006 (Murtagh, 2009).

The past two years have seen further significant developments in FET policy; these are outlined in the following section.

2.3 RECENT LEGISLATION AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

2.3.1 Establishment of SOLAS

In July 2011, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., announced that a new further education and training authority called SOLAS (An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna) would be established leading to the

dissolution of FÁS.²¹ The Bill²² providing for the establishment of SOLAS was issued on 25 January, 2013, while the Further Education and Training Act²³ that gave effect to the new organisation was published on 19 July, 2013. The Establishment Order that brought SOLAS into being was signed by the Minister of Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., on 29 October 2013.

The remit of the new FET authority, which operates under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), is to oversee funding, planning and co-ordination of a wide range of training and further education programmes across the country. When SOLAS was established in October 2013, it was also given a mandate to ensure the provision of 21st century high-quality further education and training programmes to jobseekers and other learners. It is envisaged that SOLAS will fulfil a role for the further education and training sector similar to that exercised by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for higher education institutions. It will draw on its own expertise and that of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) to help identify skills gaps, point to weaknesses and duplication in existing provision, and link courses more closely to both the needs of the individual and the labour market. In undertaking this work, SOLAS will also work closely with a wide range of stakeholders including learners, employers, Education and Training boards (ETBs), Government departments, State bodies, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the HEA, Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and representative organisations.

The core goal of SOLAS is to strengthen the FET sector. Within this, SOLAS has three strategic objectives:

1. Leading and co-ordinating the change management process of integrating FET institutions and programmes,
2. Co-ordinating and managing the funding and performance of FET programmes, and
3. Leading the modernisation of FET programmes to ensure that they are focused on the lifelong needs of learners, especially jobseekers, and are flexible and relevant to the needs of the labour market.

²¹ The Community Employment and Employment Services component of FÁS was transferred to the Department of Social Protection (DSP). With this transfer, *Intreo*, the DSP's new one-stop shop for employment services and income support, has become the first point of contact for jobseekers and for unemployed individuals seeking training support. Former FÁS Training Centres, which were the other main component of FÁS, are currently being transferred to the new Education and Training Boards (ETBs); this process will be completed during 2014. The ETBs are now responsible for the management of training provision.

²² Department of Education and Skills (2013). *Further Education and Training Bill 2013*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

²³ Department of Education and Skills (2013). *Further Education and Training Act 2013*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

The functions of SOLAS, which are set out in the Further Education and Training Act 2013, are:

- To prepare a strategy in respect of the provision of further education and training,
- Promote an appreciation of the value of further education and training,
- From time to time, consult with the Minister for Social Protection, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and employers on the types of further education and training programmes that SOLAS should be advancing,
- Fund ETBs and other bodies engaged in the provision of further education and training programmes,
- Provide training and retraining for employment and assist in coordinating the provision of such training by other bodies,
- Evaluate ETBs and other further education and training programme providers to ensure that they are performing their functions in an economic, efficient and effective manner,
- Promote, encourage and facilitate the placement of persons identified by the Minister for Social Protection in consultation with the Minister for Education and Skills,
- Promote co-operation between ETBs and other bodies involved in the provision of further education programmes,
- Promote equality of opportunity in the provision of further education and training,
- Develop, and facilitate the development, of new and existing further education and training programmes; including the establishment of systems designed to monitor the quality of the education and training being delivered with the intention of ensuring that those programmes serve their purpose,
- Provide or assist in the provision of training to those charged with the delivery of further education and training programmes,
- Conduct, or arrange for the conduct of, research concerning any matters relating to the functions of SOLAS, and
- Advise the Minister in relation to any matter connected with the functions of SOLAS.

Under the FET legislation, the strategy that SOLAS prepares for the FET sector needs to cover provision for the next five years. In addition, the strategy needs to include a plan for the provision of FET programmes aimed at promoting, developing and encouraging literacy and numeracy.

Employers will feature prominently in the work of SOLAS, most particularly in advising the body, on an on-going basis, with regard to existing and emerging workplace skills needs. SOLAS will seek to establish effective mechanisms to achieve this.

With the disbandment of FÁS, its apprenticeship function, as set out in the Industrial Training Act of 1967, has been transferred to SOLAS. A comprehensive review of the apprenticeship programme has just been completed. The findings from the review, which were published on 21 January, 2014, are discussed in detail below. SOLAS is an integral part of a wider programme of institutional reform that is being undertaken by the Government to achieve its labour-market activation agenda. The other main institutional entities that are involved in this reform process are discussed briefly in the next subsection.

2.3.2 Establishment of the Education and Training Boards (ETBs)

In the past, the Vocational and Educational Committees (VECs) have traditionally been the main providers of further education in Ireland. In June 2011 the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., announced that the Government had approved a revised re-configuration of the VEC system. Specifically, the 33 VECs that existed at that time were to be merged and re-configured into 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The Education and Training Bill²⁴ providing for the establishment of the 16 ETBs was published on 5 October, 2012, while the Act²⁵ establishing the new ETB system was issued on 1 July, 2013. This act sets out the general functions of the ETBs, which include:

- Establishing and maintaining recognised schools, centres for education and education or training facilities in its area;
- Plan, provide, co-ordinate and review the provision of education and training, including education and training for the purpose of employment, and services ancillary thereto in its area;
- Enter into arrangements with, and provide support services to, education or training providers;
- Establish scholarships;
- Adopt a strategy statement;
- Co-operate with any body nominated to carry out the internal audit functions;
- Provide education and training at the request of, and on behalf of, any body which funds training out of money provided to that body by the Oireachtas;
- Support the provision, co-ordination, administration and assessment of youth work services in its functional area and provide such information as

²⁴ Department of Education and Skills (2013). *Education and Training Boards Bill 2013*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

²⁵ Department of Education and Skills (2013). *Education and Training Boards Act 2013*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills. The new Act replaced the 9 Vocational Education Acts that had governed the VECs sector prior to this.

may be requested by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in relation to such support; and

- Assess whether the manner in which it performs its functions is economical, efficient and effective.

Sixteen former FÁS training centres are currently being transferred to the ETBs: this phased handover will be completed during 2014.

Regarding the relationship between SOLAS and the ETBs, the ETBs are responsible for the delivery of co-ordinated education and training programmes across Ireland, while SOLAS will focus on planning, funding and driving the development of a new integrated FET sector.

2.3.3 Establishment of the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

On 6 November 2012, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established as a new integrated agency, replacing the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). QQI is responsible for the maintenance, development and review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). It is also the body in charge of quality assurance of further and higher education and training (including English language provision) in Ireland. In addition, QQI validates programmes and makes awards for certain providers in these sectors.²⁶ Since its establishment, QQI has been progressing the development of its qualifications and quality assurance services. However, until it develops its own award standards and processes, QQI will continue to make awards based on standards developed by FETAC and HETAC.

2.3.4 Development of Integrated Employment and Support Service - *Intreo*

In October 2012, the Department of Social Protection (DSP) launched a new integrated employment and support service called *Intreo*. This new service provides a one-stop shop for employment services and incomes supports. The plan to develop this new service model was published under the heading of the

²⁶ Dempsey, R., R. O'Neill and N. Tickner (2013). "Where do FETAC (QQI) Award Holders Go?", Working Paper 2013-1. Dublin: Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

National Employment and Entitlements Services in August 2011,²⁷ and the plan for *Intreo* itself was published in the *Pathways to Work Initiative* in February 2012. *Intreo* is a key part of the Government's *Pathways to Work Initiative*,²⁸ which is one of the elements of the Government's dual approach to tackling the unemployment crisis that arose with the Great Recession. The *Action Plan for Jobs* is the other component of the Government's plan to deal with the unemployment crisis. The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has responsibility for this initiative. The first action plan, which was published in February 2012,²⁹ set out 270 actions to help improve competitiveness, promote investment and incentivise employment. A second plan was published in February 2013³⁰ and it contained 333 actions to be implemented in 2013 by 16 Government Departments and 46 agencies engaged in delivering enterprise and job supporting measures. A third action plan was published in February 2014:³¹ it contains 385 actions and, again, involves all Government Departments and 46 agencies.

The objective of *Intreo* is to provide individualised supports to jobseekers to assist them in getting back to work and increasing their employability. As part of the *Pathways to Work Initiative*, *Intreo* is focused on supporting those who are unemployed, or who become unemployed, to stay connected to the workforce and to find employment. The sentiment at the core of the *Pathways to Work* policy is that no-one, who loses their job, should be allowed to drift without support into long-term unemployment.

There are five key elements that make up the *Intreo* service:

- Integrated reception providing a one-stop shop incorporating all strands of the Department's employment and income support services;
- A single decisions process leading to quicker decisions/claim processing;
- Activation measures including client profiling, early group engagement and one-to-one meetings focused on customised employment supports and monitoring of client progress;

²⁷ Department of Social Protection (2011). *Project Plan for the Development and Implementation of the National Employment and Entitlements Service*. Dublin: Department of Social Protection.

²⁸ Government of Ireland (2012). *Pathways to Work: Government Policy Statement on Labour Market Activation*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

²⁹ Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (2012). *Action Plan for Jobs 2012*. Dublin: Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

³⁰ Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (2013). *Action Plan for Jobs 2013*. Dublin: Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

³¹ Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (2014). *Action Plan for Jobs 2014*. Dublin: Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

- A ‘social contract’ between the service and its clients; and
- Enhanced employer engagement at national and local level to maximise access to job opportunities and to ensure the service is responsive to the needs of employers.

The roll out of the new integrated employment service began in 2012, and it will be available in all areas of the country by the end of 2014. The DSP will work closely with both SOLAS and the ETBs in relation to the referral of individuals for Further Education and Training.

2.3.5 The Youth Guarantee

In response to the youth unemployment crisis that arose after the Great Recession, the European Commission recommended the establishment of a Youth Guarantee scheme in December 2012.³² The principle of this scheme, which was endorsed by EU countries in April 2013, is that all young people under the age of 25 (whether registered with employment services or not) get a good-quality, concrete offer of a job, apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. When implemented, the Youth Guarantee will help to address three out of the five Europe 2020 targets: 1) increasing the employment rate, 2) reducing the extent of early school leaving, and 3) lifting people out of poverty and social exclusion. To support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee scheme across countries, the European Council announced a €6 billion Youth Employment Initiative for the period 2014-2020. The EU will also top-up national spending on the Youth Guarantee scheme through the European Social Fund. Furthermore, it was agreed at the EU level that the Guarantee would be introduced from 2014 onwards on a phased basis in those countries with severe budgetary constraints, such as Ireland.

The European Commission has helped each country to develop its own Youth Guarantee plan. The Irish Government also asked the OECD to assist it in the design and delivery of a Youth Guarantee for Ireland. The OECD did this and published its recommendations, which are based on the experiences of other countries in designing similar strategies, in a report called *Options for an Irish Youth Guarantee*.³³ This report was published in January 2014 on the same day

³² European Commission (2012). *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Establishing a Youth Guarantee*. Brussels: European Commission.

³³ OECD (2014). *OECD Youth Action Plan: Options For An Irish Youth Guarantee*. Paris: OECD.

that the Irish Government announced its Youth Guarantee Plan.³⁴ This plan, which was forwarded to the European Commission, details how the Youth Guarantee scheme will be implemented in Ireland over the course of 2014 and 2015. Given the Government's focus on the long-term unemployed, Ireland's Youth Guarantee will initially target interventions on young people that are at high risk of becoming long-term unemployed. Such individuals, which the Government estimate to number around 30,000, will receive a Youth Guarantee offer within four months. During 2014, and for completion by the end of 2015, unemployed youths with a medium-to-high probability of finding employment will receive a Youth Guarantee Offer if they are still unemployed nine months after the commencement of their unemployment spell.

Given the financial constraints faced by the Government, Ireland is fortunate to already have in place many of the main components of a Youth Guarantee, as identified by the EU. These include:

- Reformed public employment services that combine the delivery of welfare with job search assistance and employment engagement (i.e., *Intreo*);
- A reformed Public Employment Service (i.e., *Intreo*), that focuses on assisting unemployed individuals to find work, training or education;
- An apprenticeship system and work-focused training programmes (e.g., Momentum);
- State-supported internships (e.g., JobBridge);
- Targeted employment subsidies (e.g., JobsPlus);
- Work experience programmes (e.g., Tús);
- Second-level education offer for all individuals aged under 18;
- Second-chance education/training options for early school leavers through Youthreach and Community Training Centres; and
- Free access to third-level and further education programmes.

Some of the new measures being introduced by the Government for unemployed youths aged under 25 will build on existing programmes:

- Young people that enter an *Intreo* office will be prioritised for case-officer support and a personal progression plan;
- The unemployment duration threshold for JobsPlus eligibility will be reduced from 12 months to 4 months for unemployed youths;

³⁴ Department of Social Protection and the Department of Education and Skills (2014). *Pathways to Work: The Implementation of the EU Council Recommendation for a Youth Guarantee – Ireland*.

- With the support of employers, an additional 1,500 places will be made available through the JobBridge internship scheme for the most disadvantaged youths;
- 1,000 places on the Tús work scheme will be targeted at unemployed young people; and
- A minimum of 2,000 places will be set aside on the Momentum programme, which is an education and training programme to assist long-term unemployed individuals.

Through programmes such as Youthreach, Momentum, VTOS, Apprenticeships and PLCs, the FET sector is a central player in delivering Ireland's Youth Guarantee scheme to tackle youth unemployment.

2.3.6 Literacy and Numeracy

As indicated earlier, the Further Education and Training Act 2013 sets out that the FET strategy needs to include a strategy for the provision of FET programmes aimed at promoting, developing and encouraging literacy and numeracy.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) defines literacy as involving listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information which increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change.³⁵

In 1994, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) found that 25 per cent of the Irish adult population had very low literacy levels.³⁶ Of the various countries included in the IALS study, Poland was the only country that recorded a lower literacy rate. After this finding emerged, adult literacy became a greater policy priority in Ireland. In 2000, adult literacy took precedence in the Department of Education and Skills (DES) White Paper³⁷ on Adult Education. Following this White Paper, the DES developed its first national adult literacy policy and set targets for the participation of adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy in VEC provision. This resulted in an increase in the number of adult literacy

³⁵ NRDC, Institute of Education, London (2011). *A Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policies*. Prepared for NALA by the NRDC. Dublin: NALA.

³⁶ Department of Education and Science (1997). *International Adult Literacy Survey: Results for Ireland – Education 2000*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

³⁷ Department of Education and Science (2000). *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*. Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

programmes provided by the VEC Adult Literacy Service. Additional funding was also provided to NALA, which had been established in 1980 to act as a coordinating body for all involved in adult literacy work, and also to raise awareness of the literacy issue.³⁸

In October 2013, the results from the OECD's 2012 adult skills survey, known as the PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies), showed that fewer Irish adults had low literacy skills than was the case in 1994 according to the IALS survey.³⁹ After the OECD recalculated the IALS data to make it comparable with the PIAAC, the revised data showed that the percentage of the Irish population with low literacy levels fell from 22 per cent in 1994 (25 per cent before recalculations) to 18 per cent in 2012. Overall, however, Irish adults were found to be slightly below the survey average in literacy, being placed 17th out of 24 participating countries. In relation to numeracy, Ireland also performed below the survey average.

Following the publication of PISA findings which indicated unsatisfactory literacy levels among Irish teenagers, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., stressed the importance of implementing the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, which was published in 2011.⁴⁰ The objective of this strategy, which covers the period 2011 to 2020, is to improve the literacy and numeracy standards among children and young people in the education system so that they will have the skills that they need to participate fully in the education system, live rewarding lives, and participate as active and informed individuals in society. The actions set out in the strategy focus on improving the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy. In particular, the strategy targets the following six areas:

- Enabling parents and communities to support children's literacy and numeracy development;
- Improving teachers' and early childhood education and care practitioners' professional practice through changes to both pre-service and in-service education;
- Building the capacity of school leadership to lead improvements in the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy in schools;

³⁸ <http://www.nala.ie/literacy/literacy-in-ireland/policy-and-funding>.

³⁹ Central Statistics Office (2013). PIAAC 2012: Survey Results for Ireland from the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. Dublin: Stationery Office.

⁴⁰ Department of Education and Skills (2011). Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

- Getting the content of the curriculum for literacy and numeracy right at primary and post-primary levels by making sure that the curriculum is clear about what we expect students to learn at each stage;
- Targeting additional available resources on learners with additional needs; and
- Improving how teachers, schools and the educational system use good assessment approaches to plan the next steps for each learner and monitor progress.

The ETBs now run Ireland’s Adult Literacy Service, and they do so under Operational Guidelines issued to them by the DES. These Guidelines, the most recent of which were issued in 2012,⁴¹ are targeted at ETB staff managing, administering and delivering adult literacy programmes funded by the DES. For the purposes of the Guidelines, Adult Literacy is defined as “...provision of basic education, including reading, writing and numeracy skills, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for adults who wish to improve their literacy and numeracy competencies to enhance their participation in personal, social and economic life” (DES, 2013, p. 3).⁴² According to the most recent Operational Guidelines, the priority target cohort for the Adult Literacy programmes are adults whose literacy and numeracy levels do not match those at Level 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Annual funding for adult literacy has increased from €1 million in 1997 to €18 million in 2004,⁴³ and since 2007 funding has been at the level of €30 million per annum.⁴⁴ The number of adult literacy programme participants has increased from 5,000 in 1997 to over 57,000 in 2012. In addition to the courses provided through the Adult Literacy Service, NALA offers an interactive website (www.writeon.ie) that allows learners to study in their own time: almost 30,000 individuals have availed of this tuition mechanism. As well as this, employees can undertake courses in literacy and basic education through the Skills for Work Programme, which is a programme funded by the DES and run by the ETBs: in 2012, over 2,600 employees completed courses under this programme.

⁴¹ Department of Education and Skills (2012). *Adult Literacy Programme: Operational Guidelines for Providers 2013* (<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Further-Education-and-Training/Adult-Literacy/Adult-Literacy-Programme-Operational-Guidelines-for-Providers.pdf>).

⁴² Department of Education and Skills (2012). *Adult Literacy Programme: Operational Guidelines for Providers 2013*.

⁴³ <http://www.nala.ie/literacy/literacy-in-ireland/policy-and-funding>.

⁴⁴ Department of Education and Skills (2013). *PIAAC 2012: Survey Results for Ireland from the OECD’s Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies – Information Note* (<http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Programme-for-the-International-Assessment-of-Adult-Competencies-PIAAC-2012-Survey-Results-for-Ireland-Information-Note.pdf>).

A review of adult literacy provision was undertaken in 2012 and the results from this process were published in 2013.⁴⁵ The report made a total of 32 recommendations on how to further develop and enhance literacy provision in order to enable services to meet current and future needs of learners, employers and the Government. The review examined the level and nature of provision, and on foot of this recommended more intensive options, group tuition, numeracy tuition, family literacy, distance and blended learning options. The report also made recommendations on learner assessment, availability of accredited options, identifying learners (including the unemployed), the integration of literacy in other programmes⁴⁶ and the training of staff. It is expected that SOLAS, through its FET strategy, will play an important role in the implementation of some of the recommendations contained in the adult literacy review report.

2.3.7 NESC Report: A Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed

The recent NESC strategic review⁴⁷ of FET and the unemployed assesses current provision and recommends changes to both meet the skills needs of the economy and the unemployment challenge. It recommends:

- Prioritisation of the long-term unemployed (LTU), in accordance with Government policy, with due regard to the needs of school leavers and those in employment;
- Alignment of FET with local and regional skills demand and labour market intelligence;
- Close involvement of enterprise in the design and delivery of programmes;
- Seamless linkages between *Intreo* offices and their local ETBs;
- High level strategic co-operation between SOLAS and *Intreo* about the design of relevant FET provision and referral arrangements;
- Movement towards flexible provision with shorter duration, dualist delivery models incorporating extended work placements and on the job training;
- Comprehensive data collection and evaluation of all courses against appropriate metrics of progression or employment;

⁴⁵ Department of Education and Skills (2013). *Review of ALCES funded Adult Literacy Provision*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

⁴⁶ NALA has undertaken research on literacy and numeracy practice in Ireland (e.g., NALA (2013). *What Really Counts: Case Studies of Adult Numeracy Practice in Ireland*. Dublin: NALA), as well as research on the integration of literacy and numeracy in FET (e.g., Hegarty, A. and Feeley, M. (2009). *Literacy-friendly Further Education and Training*. Dublin: NALA; McSkeane, E. (2009). *Living Literacy: A Whole-organisation Approach to Integrating Literacy in a Vocational Training Setting*. Dublin: NALA.

⁴⁷ Sweeney, John. NESC. (2013) "A Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed – A Review for the Department of Education and Skills". Available at: [http://www.nesc.ie/assets/files/Sec_Non_NESC_Papers/A per cent20strategic per cent20review per cent20of per cent20FET per cent20and per cent20Unemployed_Oct13.pdf](http://www.nesc.ie/assets/files/Sec_Non_NESC_Papers/A%20per%20cent20strategic%20per%20cent20review%20of%20per%20cent20FET%20and%20per%20cent20Unemployed_Oct13.pdf)

- Utilisation of competitive tendering and payment on results where appropriate, with ETBs becoming regional hubs for FET procurement;
- Re-organisation of provision around effective programmes using the strategic funding responsibility of SOLAS.

2.3.8 Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland

The review of the apprenticeship system in Ireland was published in December 2013 and addresses a number of themes: the labour market and policy content for apprenticeships and education and training programmes; the strengths and weaknesses of the current model of apprenticeship; what improvements can be made to its current structure; an examination of alternative methods of work-based training in Ireland; consideration of the structural mechanisms and criteria under which collaboration with industry-employers can be pursued into the future.

The review states that there is a current weakness of FET programmes in helping people to access employment while acknowledging the rapid increase in higher education levels, high unemployment rates, large proportions of those in the labour force (employed and unemployed) with low skills and a low ranking for Ireland in the recent PIAAC study. It points to the establishment of SOLAS and the ETBs along with the implementation of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 as reforms to address this.

The apprenticeship system and other work-based training play a significant role in promoting a skilled workforce and tackling unemployment. The review notes that a key element of a successful apprenticeship and vocational system is to ensure the continuing relevance of qualifications in a rapidly changing labour market by engaging enterprises both in the design of the curricula and in the delivery of programmes. The main criticisms of the apprenticeship system are not related to the quality of the programmes but instead to its rigid structure and duration. The report points to an over-reliance on a small group of occupations, predominately in the construction sector. The advantages of traineeships are a strong work-based learning element explicitly designed to be tailored to employer needs and higher progression rates to employment when compared to other further education and training programmes.

The conclusions and recommendations draw on some of the principles on which several European systems are based but it notes that Ireland cannot simply adopt the well-established dual systems of countries such as Austria, Denmark and

Germany. However, the review commends a flexible system which can create new apprenticeships rapidly, react to the emerging needs, and target resources and training towards sectors with high potential growth. This is in line with the recommendations made by the OECD and the European Commission.

2.3.9 Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN)

The report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs predominantly focuses on the skills challenges identified relating to higher skills areas (graduate and postgraduate level). However, their report on the Biopharma-Pharmachem Sector (2010) outlines provision for FET graduates at NFQ levels 4, 5 and 6 for medium-skilled and entry-level positions. This report suggests that the operative role in the sector will change and it is necessary to develop an upskilling programme to allow operatives to be flexible and skilled in a number of areas including I.T., analytical offline testing, mechanical changing of equipment, chemical engineering, chemistry and developing team-working skills. The EGFSN report on the wholesale and retail sector (2010) also identifies a large number of career paths available for those with relatively low levels of educational attainment leading to rewarding careers and proposes a Skills Framework for the sector aligned to the National Framework of Qualifications. There are other sectors that have significant levels of demand for intermediate and foundation skill levels that need to be analysed further on behalf of the FET sector.

2.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has provided an overview of the historical developments in the FET sector from the recognition of a dearth of ‘technical’ education in Ireland towards the end of the nineteenth century through to the development of apprenticeships in the 1970s and the emerging impact of the EEC and OECD on the sector in recent decades. More latterly, developments in the ‘adult education sector’ are also set out, in particular charting the impact of the White Paper on Adult Education in 2000. The chapter then considered legislative developments shaping the sector, particularly surrounding the establishment of SOLAS and its functions as set out in the Further Education and Training Act 2013. The establishment of the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and the consequent re-configuring of the VEC system are also described. A number of other key pieces of legislation are also discussed including legislation establishing the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) agency, the development of Integrated Employment and Support Service (*Intreo*) and, at an EU level, the Youth Guarantee Scheme (2012).

Chapter 3

Stakeholders Perceptions of the Objectives and Status of the Further Education and Training (FET) Sector

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the qualitative evidence regarding how the current system of FET is viewed by relevant stakeholders. Stakeholders discussed provision as reflecting the long and varied development of vocational education and training over the last century (see Chapter 2) and these views are discussed in Section 3.2. Stakeholders were asked a range of questions about the perceived objectives of the FET sector and the possible ways in which the sector could change in the future (Section 3.3). The fourth section of this chapter, Section 3.4, examines the status of the sector as understood by stakeholders, students participating in FET and Irish society more broadly. Throughout the chapter the focus is on presenting both overarching perspectives on these aspects of the FET sector, and key points of divergence in stakeholder views.

3.2 PERCEIVED OBJECTIVES OF THE FET SECTOR

There was much agreement that in its current state the sector is very broad, with some describing it as ‘varied and complex’ (Other provider group) with ‘everything from one to six [FETAC levels]’ (State provider group) from many different types of providers:

It’s anything and everything ... anything that’s certified from levels one to six on the framework up to advanced certificate, which would be the old FETAC level one to six. (Statutory department/body.)

As a result, many viewed this as a ‘fundamental weakness’ since instead of being a sector, FET is simply a ‘collection of provision types’ (Statutory department/body).

The majority of respondents described the current system as being two-pronged, incorporating both labour market and social inclusion objectives. Most felt there was little need to distinguish between these two primary goals:

I don’t think these are mutually exclusive. I think the primary purpose is to help people engage in the labour market ... but there can be a social dimension to that because there will be certain people who are starting from further behind. (Statutory department/body.)

It's a fairly phoney division. There's an implication that there's some conflict between labour market outcomes and social justice or community education. They actually should feed off each other. (Employer group.)

Some suggested that the two aspects of meeting labour market needs and enhancing social inclusion complement one another through the provision of such varied programmes:

There are programmes which are primarily economic driven, [in] other words, they have this close relationship with labour market and enterprise needs and there are programmes which are primarily driven by a broader social inclusion approach which could include a personal development within that ... they are not discrete. Even those programmes which have a prime purpose of social inclusion will have some objectives which are linked to labour market outcomes. (Statutory department/body.)

In this way, the programmes apply to different groups of learners with different needs:

I think there seems to be an idea that ... it's either social justice and inclusion or labour market, that it's either one or the other. I actually think it's not an exclusive choice, that you can have both ... you can maintain both with different cohorts of learners. ... I think there's a danger in seeing it as one or the other. (State provider group.)

Other stakeholders, however, differed from this view and felt that the two elements of FET (social inclusion and labour market) have different roles for different groups. Some emphasised how a key aspect of FET provision was about 'developing the human person' through aspects such as 'lifelong learning and the social inclusion agenda' (Statutory department/body):

We're not talking just about an economy, it's about a society. It's not about just making jobs, it's about building a better Ireland for everyone. (Community Education group.)

Some stakeholders argued that the relative emphasis on social inclusion should be increased:

Everything can't just be about work, it has to be about the course, it has to be about communities ... it has to be about society and the type of society that ... we're trying to create here. (Community Education group.)

It's not just about labour market preparation or job preparation. It's about social justice, social inclusion, becoming adaptable, developing critical thinking, communities developing resilience, individuals becoming active citizens. (Community Education group.)

Some felt that ‘the best mechanism for social inclusion is to actually gain employment’ (Statutory department/body) or to ‘give someone a job and that’s why the labour market stuff is so important’ (Employer group.):

A job is near oxygen because it’s the fastest way of bringing somebody in to kind of being a constructive citizen, being fulfilled, being able to look after their own affairs and so on. (State provider group.)

Others also raised the issue of excluding ‘wider social inclusion interests’, particularly among those who ‘are not in the labour market’ (Community Education group) or other vulnerable groups such as women wishing to return to work and those with disabilities:

Even groups like people with disabilities who don’t feature. And who would repeatedly then have to lobby to get included. And then get included to a certain extent. (Statutory department/body.)

Referring to more vulnerable groups, some stakeholders argued that social inclusion formed a significant part of labour market preparation and without this preparation there would be challenges:

Some of them may have left school very, very early. So, I mean ... forcing people to get into the labour market without being prepared for it, that is a challenge. And it’s something that doesn’t work ... we have to make sure that that balance is right. [This requires] a lot of supports ... a lot of hand holding and guidance ... not just career guidance, you’re talking about counselling as well. (State provider group.)

Many spoke about the importance of keeping a balance between the labour market focus and the needs of the learners. This balance, they felt, is currently ‘under threat’ (Community Education group.):

Since the recession happened, social inclusion ... is kind of gone out the window to an extent. Nobody really talks about it to the same degree that they did during the boom. (Community Education group.)

One stakeholder described how the social inclusion side of things ‘lost out badly in the crisis’ (Statutory department/body) and others voiced concerns that certain groups ‘are being left behind in this’ (Statutory department/body.)

In stark contrast to these views, however, some of those interviewed felt strongly that although the focus is broad, FET is ultimately about the labour market and its role is primarily to ‘provide economy with the skills and expertise, training and education that is needed ... at national, regional and local level’ (Statutory department/body). Other stakeholders echoed this view:

If we take a hierarchy of need, and we take into that a government focus, the labour market focus is the prime one. (Statutory department/body.)

Really at the end of the day, this is about getting people into jobs ... the key measurement is employability. (Other provider group.)

It [FET] should be ninety per cent about that. It should be labour market preparation, specific training, skills training for jobs. (Other provider group.)

Some argued that 'it would be wrong to see FET as a primary instrument of social inclusion' (Statutory department/body) but instead saw its sole focus to target 'learners who are going to be in a position to add to the Irish economy' (Statutory department/body). The sector can therefore act as an 'economic driver' involved in 'building human capital' (Statutory department/body).

Some stakeholders acknowledged the importance of social inclusion within FET but argued that this was secondary and that 'getting the people back to work' (State provider group) should be given priority:

The primary service of FET ... is to equip people with the skills to compete in the labour market, to acquire income, to determine a future for themselves, their families and their communities. So for ... the majority of people the way out of poverty is a job ... every course should have some element of lifelong learning in it but the end game is skills for work and skills for jobs. (Other provider group.)

Others acknowledged the importance of social inclusion but suggested that this falls into a different space:

I think that there should be actually a much more focused strategy on the labour market ... and I think the lifelong learning which is a continuum and an ongoing piece in somebody's life falls into a different strategy. The two are not necessarily meshed would be my judgement. (Employer group.)

Some stakeholders made reference to how the objectives within FET can change in response to changing economic circumstances. Some suggested that the emphasis on social inclusion should be reduced (Statutory department/body), particularly during a time of recession where greater emphasis should be on full-time labour market training in order to reduce the numbers on the live register:

In the current circumstances the priority should be the people who are on the live register. (Statutory department/body.)

In particular, the role of FET in on-the-job training and upskilling current workers was raised by a number of stakeholders during the interview process. Given the recent focus on job seekers, the long-term unemployed and getting ‘people back in the work force’, many argued that there is insufficient emphasis on ‘keeping those in employment in employment’:

There is an over-emphasis now on FET as it applies to job seekers or get people back in the work force and there isn’t half enough focus on keeping those who are in employment in employment and the role that FET plays in recognising ongoing small nuggets of learning that’s taking place within organisations. (Other provider group.)

A lot of the emphasis has been on labour market activation, probably quite correctly at one level, but you can’t ignore the skills of people who are actually in employment and particularly within certain sectors which change all the time and are quite vulnerable so they need this constant upskilling. (Employer group.)

Some stakeholders suggested that this could be done by engaging employers to enable them to offer accredited learning and accrediting experiential learning for individuals (Other provider group).

In sum, stakeholders varied considerably in their views on the role of FET in Ireland, with diverging views particularly apparent on the relative balance between labour market and social inclusion agendas within and across the FET sector.

3.3 WHAT CAN BE DONE?

A major focus of the qualitative interviews was to gather opinions on what stakeholders would like to see changed within the current FET system. Many of the issues raised relate to rectifying the issues outlined in the previous section and in Chapter 5 concerning structure, quality and flexibility of provision. Some stakeholders highlighted, however, that in devising a new FET strategy that ‘we’ have a responsibility and a unique opportunity:

This is the one chance you might get ... this chance may never come again. ... So we’re given this brief, this role to this journey and that’s why leadership, courage and determination are not taking no for an answer and getting, getting there. (Statutory department/body.)

Others also acknowledged the potential for reform and ‘bringing it [FET] all together’ incorporating both the social inclusion and labour market agendas, education and training, and full- and part-time provision. To do this FET could

provide a 'continuum' where 'some people will need to start at one end and work their way through and they may need to take breaks, they may need to step back ... and for other people it's maybe something very specific' (Statutory department/body). Other stakeholders also recognised the need to achieve social inclusion and labour market goals within one programme:

Part of the problem I suppose is ... maybe that the dichotomy [between labour market and social inclusion] is sharper than it should be, you know. ... [We need] to ensure that there are programmes that are, are meeting both needs at the same time. ... People need to be welcomed initially but they also need to be challenged. And the question of embedding these sorts of transversal skills into more labour market orientated activities, I mean I think that's something ... we need to be doing. (Statutory department/body.)

In relation to changing perceptions of FET more generally, one stakeholder argued the need to establish a further education sector in its own right:

Post-secondary institutions should be established on a statutory basis ... taken out of the post-primary sector. (Statutory department/body.)

Many stakeholders made reference to the ways in which FET can be more effectively structured. Views differed somewhat as to whether FET should be structured to reflect local or national needs.

If there is a system of demand, local analysis, where the demands are, where the job are and having employers more involved in terms of what needs to be provided and tweaking the courses to meet the demands. (Statutory department/body.)

Much of the focus of the discussion around the future of FET centred around the importance of improving responsiveness and flexibility. These issues around local and national labour market needs and the bases for securing system responsiveness are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

3.4 STATUS OF THE FET SECTOR

International research has indicated that vocational education tends to be perceived as lower in status than academic routes (Raffe, 2003). In the Irish context, recent survey data indicate that a significant proportion of young people are unclear about the meaning of vocational education and do not see it as a realistic option for the future (Pullen *et al.*, 2013). The perceived status of the FET sector was explored in the in-depth interviews with stakeholders.

3.4.1 Status Relative to Higher Education

There was a strong consensus that FET was seen as having a lower status than other parts of the educational system, especially higher education. Stakeholders repeatedly used terms like ‘the poor relation’ and ‘the Cinderella sector’ to characterise public perceptions of the sector. Trends in post-school educational participation were seen as having established higher education as the cultural norm, with FET seen as a second-best option in this context:

You go to secondary school, you get your Leaving Cert, you go to university and any kind of deviation from that is seen as second-class education. (Employer group.)

It’s the aspiration of most Irish families for their kids to go to higher education, and apprenticeships and further education, all that kind of thing, are seen almost as a badge of academic failure. (Employer group.)

It’s a historical hangover ... the academic system was held up as the holy grail ... people who wanted to better themselves would focus on that and ... the more vocational training ... not as prestigious. (Community Education group.)

This orientation to higher education was seen as prevailing even in a context where it was not suitable for many young people:

The third level, the universities, the institutes of technology is the first route way. Even though it might not suit students at all ... And so therefore there has to be some sort of a change among, be it, students and their parents to realise that this is an alternative route and it’s a quality route and it’s a much more appropriate route than pushing in the other direction. (Employer group.)

We seem to have gone almost entirely for pushing people through a pipe which is aimed at taking people into a traditional type of university and I think it has failed a fair number of young people. (State provider group.)

As a result of this perceived hierarchy, FET was seen as catering for students who failed to obtain a higher education place rather than as a valued pathway in its own right:

It’s something you’re forced into if you don’t get into higher education (Statutory department/body.)

Perception is it’s something people go in to if they fail to go in to college rather than something people go into to actually give them a qualification that will help them find a job. (Statutory department/body.)

It's not an attractive place right now. Because when everything else has failed really, you're looking at it as a last resort.
(Statutory department/body.)

As a result, working-class learners and those who had attended disadvantaged schools were seen as over-represented among FET entrants:

In Ireland when you look at the socio-economic backgrounds of those in FET or VET, they're from disadvantaged backgrounds and it's very much associated with that. (Statutory department/body.)

One stakeholder felt that FET was often seen as an 'appropriate' route for those who had attended Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) schools:

[They are] actually encouraged to come to FE ... and some [DEIS] schools will actively promote it as a stepping stone. ... They'd be concerned that putting them [students] into a totally self-regulating environment as they would in higher education ... that they won't survive and that they'll find it difficult, whereas FE provides a stepping stone and a bridge where they can ... move a little bit away from the minded environment of second level.
(State provider group.)

This is likely to reflect a complex causal relationship, given that the profile of learners may further contribute to the esteem of certain educational pathways:

There is this issue around esteem and what some of these courses are seen as — are they seen as being automatically for the weaker students, the lower level students who are not performing? (Statutory department/body.)

In this context, FET has also come to be seen as a 'back door' into higher education rather than an end in itself:

A lot of second-level students see it as an avenue maybe into something that might take them onto higher education. (State provider group.)

3.4.2 Awareness of FET

Lack of awareness of the range of FET options was seen as a factor in influencing the poor status of FET, with guidance viewed as potentially playing a significant role in this respect:

Neither students nor guidance counsellors [at second level] are as informed about the alternative options to HE. (Statutory department/body.)

I think a lot of school leavers are going on to third-level education because there isn't a clear path. (Statutory department/body.)

The view among second-level students themselves [is] that generally their guidance would be towards third level ... The chain around our necks is that guidance teachers will say if you're good with your hands go in this direction. (State provider group.)

Lack of awareness of FET among employers was viewed as a further factor influencing the lack of value placed on FET courses.

I would say the overall view, certainly among employers, is mixed. (Statutory department/body.)

The issue of employer engagement is discussed further in Chapter 7.

A number of stakeholders felt that status varied depending on the type of FET provision considered and/or the learner group at issue. Several interviewees considered adult learners to be more positive about the sector than school leavers:

It has its highest profile and its highest currency ... among adult learners. (Other provider group.)

I do believe that school leavers view it as the weaker ones going through there ... Then the adult learners actually are very happy to engage in further education because ... it's a second-chance education. And they're coming back into it and so they're engaging very, very well with it. Employers, not so sure, I don't think they really are aware of it, as such. I don't think we've done enough to link them to it, I think we've a lot of work to do there. The general public probably aren't too aware of it either. (State provider group.)

I think the adult learners that access the FE at the moment would have a different attitude [to school leavers]. They're very, very positive about the experience when they access it. They see it as a way of, you know, undoing some of the missed opportunities that they've had in the past. (State provider group.)

3.4.3 Variation within the Sector

Some stakeholders felt that more labour market-oriented provision, especially apprenticeship, was seen as having higher status than other parts of the sector:

I think that the apprenticeships, traditional apprenticeships, FÁS are held in very high esteem. (Statutory department/body.)

The apprenticeship is obviously seen as the kind of the jewel in the crown to some extent. (Statutory department/body.)

Variation was also seen to be evident between individual courses or colleges/training centres:

FET depends on what the course is. Some of the courses have very high regard, the more specialist ones, I suspect. (Statutory department/body.)

I would say ... individual programmes and individual colleges, or individual programmes on individual FÁS training centres, lots of them have a very good reputation but it is course or programme specific or perhaps location specific. (Statutory department/body.)

3.4.4 Distinct Identity

A more general issue, however, was the relationship between esteem and identity, with FET viewed by many as lacking a distinct identity, raising issues around the need for 'branding':

I think if you asked them [the public] what was FET they wouldn't know what you were talking about. (Statutory department/body.)

Further education is caught really between a school concept of education and a training concept and it hasn't really fleshed out what it is. (Community Education group.)

This lack of identity was seen as at least partly relating to the wide range of provision and diversity of learner profile within the sector:

I would think if you asked people what do they think of FET in Ireland, they would probably struggle because it doesn't have an identity ... because people use lots of terms, we use training, we use further education, we use vocational education, we use those in different way, we use community education, adult education, programmes for this, programmes for that, but we don't have a clearly identified brand such as higher education. (Statutory department/body.)

[Learners don't see] further education and training as being a single access point but they'd be familiar with a lot of the ... more localised pieces. And I think that, that in itself is a weakness. You know when you talk to anyone ... third level is very clear. (Other provider group.)

Many stakeholders felt that a restructuring and rebranding of the sector would enhance the perceived value of FET qualifications:

I think actually it's one of the big tasks that SOLAS has is to get to a space that the participants who take part in educational courses ... that they have confidence that the course they have done has an accepted standard and is recognised and that it has credibility out there in the economy. (Employer group.)

Thus, improved status was seen as following on naturally from enhancing the quality and coherence of the sector.

3.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has drawn on in-depth interviews with key stakeholders to explore their perceptions of the objectives of the FET sector. Stakeholders differed somewhat in the relative emphasis they placed on the two objectives of meeting labour market needs and countering social exclusion. In the context of recession, many representatives from statutory bodies and training providers emphasised the urgency of reducing unemployment by providing courses to meet labour market needs. Representatives from the community education sector pointed to the continued need to provide education and training designed to enhance the skills of learners without necessarily having a direct labour market focus. However, the vast majority of stakeholders viewed FET provision as addressing *both* labour market and social inclusion agendas. The diverse nature of the sector was seen as making it difficult to form a clear identity for FET. Thus, the FET sector was viewed by stakeholders as being less clearly defined and of lower perceived status than higher education. This was regarded as reflecting broader societal norms and expectations but was also seen as relating to the fragmentation of FET provision; perceptions of current provision are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4

Pattern of Provision

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section of the report, we examine the pattern of enrolments across Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and FÁS training centres. While this approach includes the majority of enrolments in the FET sector it is not all-inclusive.⁴⁸ The data infrastructure, as outlined in Chapter 1, does not allow a complete analysis of all enrolments in the FET sector. We begin by providing a brief overview of the programmes provided by the VECs. Then we provide information on national enrolments and regional enrolments using data provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The brief overview of the programmes provided by the FÁS training centres is followed by our expanded information on national enrolments and regional enrolments using data provided by FÁS.

4.2 OVERVIEW OF VEC PROGRAMMES

The VECs provide a number of full-time programmes: Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and Youthreach. The PLC programme is designed to provide specific vocational skills to those who have completed senior cycle, adults returning to education deemed to have the necessary competencies, and those who are unemployed and seeking to upskill. In 2011, data from the DES show that 61 per cent of PLC participants were female and 49 per cent were less than 21 years of age.

The VTOS programme is an educational and training opportunities scheme for unemployed persons designed to develop employability or further opportunities leading to employment. In 2011, VTOS learners were an evenly mixed gender cohort with 59 per cent between the ages of 25 and 44. Those unemployed for more than 12 months numbered 52 per cent, 23 per cent unemployed for less than 12 months, and the remainder were in receipt of other benefits such as Disability Allowance and One Parent Family Payment. Amongst participants' 44

⁴⁸ For example, FET in Ireland also includes Crafts Council of Ireland, Coillte, Teagasc, Fáilte Ireland, BIM, County and City Enterprise Boards, Board Altranais, Skillnets, Private Training providers, Private Colleges, National learning Networks, Irish Prison Services, Institutes of Technology, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Company based training, Chambers of Commerce, etc.

per cent highest educational attainment was below upper second level National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ level 4).

Youthreach is directed at unemployed early school leavers aged 15-20 and provides the opportunity to identify viable options within adult life and acquire certification. The Youthreach programme seeks to provide early school leavers with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to participate fully in society and to progress to further education, training and employment. Young people enrolled on Youthreach programmes typically suffer from economic and social disadvantage as well as educational disadvantage. In 2011, the most common age of participants was 17 years old; 77 per cent entered directly from school, 16 per cent entered from unemployment and 7 per cent were not in the labour market. A higher proportion of males are observed in the Youthreach data, 58 per cent in 2011, and this reflects the higher rate of early school leaving amongst young males (European Commission Education and Training Monitor 2012). Youthreach learners are almost entirely (93 per cent) at NFQ Level 3 or lower upon entry into the programme. Cost estimates for each programme were generated by Sweeney (2013) and wide variation was found in State spending per participant mainly due to differences in durations and intensity of the training and education involved. Youthreach was found to entail very substantial spending per participant,⁴⁹ whereas, per capita spending on part-time VEC programmes was found to be relatively light.

Part-time programmes provided by the VECs are: Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Community Education, Adult Literacy, Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). BTEI provides part-time courses for over 16s who have left education, with priority given to those with less than upper secondary education. BTEI covers a wide range of ages but the majority of learners in 2011 were within the 25-54 year old cohort (65 per cent) with a higher proportion of females (68 per cent). Educational attainment on entry was lower secondary and below for 60 per cent of participants, suggesting a strong targeting of this group.

Community Education works with adults who wish to return to or continue their education, with a focus on people who are distant from education. Community education is grounded on principles of justice, equality, social inclusion and citizenship leading to positive personal, social and economic outcomes. The

⁴⁹ State spending per capita on part-time VEC programmes is estimated to be €4,775 for PLC, €6,084 for VTOS, and €13,703 for Youthreach.

highest representation of female learners is in Community education, where three-quarters of learners were female in 2011. Learners have a relatively older profile with almost half the learners over 55 years of age.

The VEC Adult Literacy Service focuses on literacy and numeracy tuition, in both one-to-one and group based settings, focusing on the unemployed and the low skilled in employment. The programme gives individuals the opportunity to combine a return to learning with family, work and other responsibilities. ITABE is a model of tuition in adult literacy and basic education (numeracy, literacy and computers) for adults who are educationally disadvantaged. ESOL is concerned with developing speaking and listening skills for everyday use.

4.3 NATIONAL DES ENROLMENTS

TABLE 4.1 Compositional Distribution of Provision, DES

Programme	2011 Enrolments	%
Full-Time	47,745	24.6
PLC	38,774	20.0
VTOS	5,650	2.9
Youthreach	3,321	1.7
Part-Time	146,360	75.4
BTEI	32,030	16.5
Community Education	57,939	29.8
Adult Literacy	43,099	22.2
ESOL	11,238	5.8
ITABE	2,054	1.1
All Programmes	194,105	100.0

Table 4.1 shows total enrolments from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in 2011 by programme type. In 2011, a total of 194,105 enrolments were recorded. The majority of enrolments (75.4 per cent) were in part-time programmes, mainly community education, adult literacy and Back to Education Initiative (BTEI). Full-time programmes accounted for less than 25 per cent of all enrolments. The vast majority of enrolments in full-time courses are PLCs. In order to properly analyse provision, it is necessary for us to adjust part-time enrolments to full-time equivalents as each of the part-time programmes have different hourly requirements which are much lower than the full-time programmes. This adjustment will provide us with a more accurate reflection of the share of resources allocated to each area of provision.

Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolments are estimated using data on the hourly duration of the part-time courses, relative to the full-time hours of a one-year PLC course (800 hours). The FTE enrolments are given in Table 4.2 below.⁵⁰ For example, the BTEI programme is 400 hours in duration per year so equivalent to 0.5 of a full-time PLC course. Re-estimating enrolments as full-time equivalents has a significant effect on the composition distribution of provision. For instance, community education changes from 30 per cent of enrolments to 3 per cent and PLC enrolments change from 20 per cent of enrolments to 56 per cent.

TABLE 4.2 Part-time Enrolments Estimated as Full-time Equivalents (FTE), DES

Programme	Duration (Hrs)	FTE (800 hrs)
Adult Literacy	38	0.05
ESOL	46	0.06
ITABE	84	0.11
Community Education	34	0.04
BTEI	400	0.5

TABLE 4.3 Compositional Distribution of Provision as Full-time Equivalents (FTE), DES

Programme	2011 Enrolments	%
Full Time	47,745	69.1
PLC	38,774	56.1
VTOS	5,650	8.2
Youthreach	3,321	4.8
Part-Time (FTE)	21,388	30.9
BTEI	16,015	23.2
Community Education	2,318	3.4
Adult Literacy	2,155	3.1
ESOL	674	1.0
ITABE	226	0.3
All Programmes	69,133	100.0

Table 4.3 shows a total of 69,133 FTE enrolments, with the majority of enrolments (69 per cent) in full-time programmes, mainly PLCs. Part-time programmes account for around 30 per cent of all enrolments. The ratio of part-time to full-time programmes is totally reversed from the initial enrolment figures in Table 4.1. Furthermore, the composition distribution in Table 4.3 using FTE enrolments broadly reflects the funding by programme type as shown in Table

⁵⁰ All course durations were provided from the DES or estimated with average course duration where course length varied.

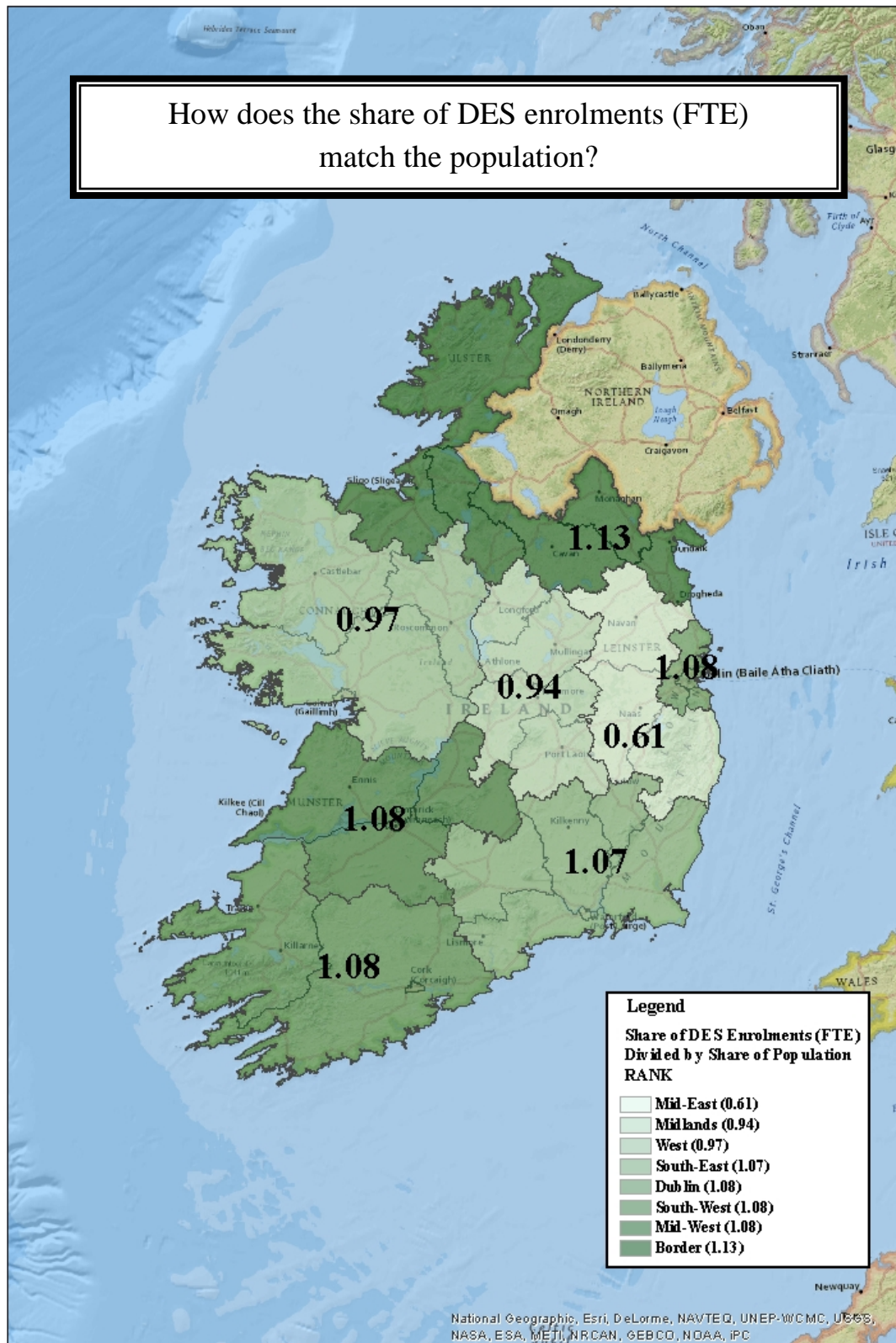
A4.1. Around 80 per cent of total current spending was directed towards full-time programmes in 2011 and 2012. The data show that BTEI was the part-time course that required the most resource hours in terms of FTE enrolments and the funding figures are also in line with this.

4.4 REGIONAL DES ENROLMENTS

In terms of the distribution at a regional level, we examined the share of FTE over eight regions at NUTS III level.⁵¹ A substantial amount of heterogeneity across regions is shown using a ratio of FTE enrolments weighted by population data in 2011. Figure 4.1 maps the regions and shows those with ratios above average are Border, Dublin, South-West, Mid-West and South-East. The regions with ratios below average are Mid-East, Midlands, and West. Table A4.1 further shows the difference mapped across regions.

⁵¹ It should be noted that the NUTS regions do not equate to the newly configured ETBs. The analysis is merely designed to illustrate that regional variations in provision exist.

FIGURE 4.1 Regional Distribution of Full-time Equivalent Enrolments, DES



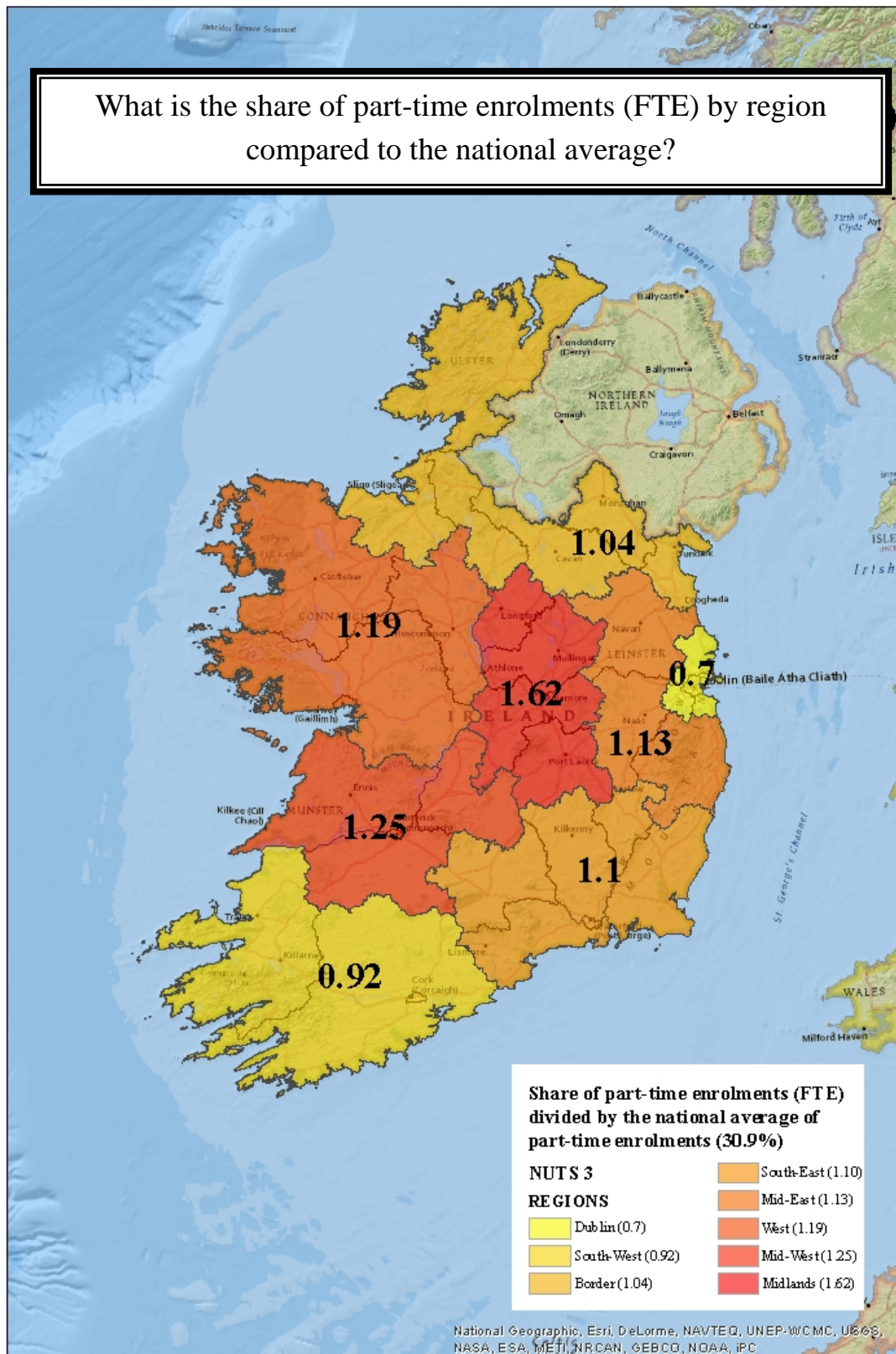
Source: Data from CSO and DES; maps by authors.

Based on their documented objectives, it is reasonable to assume that full-time courses should have a clear labour market focus, whereas part-time courses often cater for individuals further from the labour market and play a social inclusion role.⁵² To analyse further the balance between full-time and part-time provision, we examine how the balance varies at a regional level and how the balance has evolved nationally over a ten-year period.

A regional examination of how the ratio of part-time enrolments (as FTE) varies compared to the national average in 2011 is shown in Figure 4.2 and Table A4.4. Again, the data shows a substantial amount of heterogeneity regionally. Dublin (0.7) and the South-West (0.92) have part-time enrolments that are considerably lower than the national average, whereas the Midlands (1.62), Mid-West (1.25) and West (1.19) all have part-time enrolments that are much larger than the national average. The reason for these regional differences does not appear to be policy driven but instead is due to the fact that these programmes have grown organically over time (see Chapter 2 on historical developments). The question is whether this system is fit for purpose.

⁵² Interviews with stakeholders indicated that this distinction may not always be clear-cut (see Chapter 3).

FIGURE 4.2 Regional Balance between Part-time and Full-time (FTE) in 2011, DES



Source: Data from CSO and DES; maps by authors.

Table A4.3 shows how total enrolments have grown over the period 2002 to 2011 from 39,176 to 66,897, an increase of 70.8 per cent, in terms of full-time equivalent enrolments. The proportion of those enrolled in full-time courses, relative to part-time courses, has decreased from 94.3 per cent to 68 per cent over the same period. The growth of part-time courses was significantly impacted by the introduction and growth of the BTEI programme.

4.5 OVERVIEW OF FÁS PROGRAMMES

FÁS training provision is part of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system which, itself, is part of the Further Education and Training and the Higher Education and Training sectors. VET may be job-specific or aimed at a broader range of occupations. It is this occupational focus that has informed FÁS vocational training provision. FÁS vocational training can take the form of apprenticeships, traineeships or specific skills training delivered by FÁS for a range of occupations. Relatively shorter duration courses in vocational training are also provided. FÁS offer a range of different types of programmes which vary substantially by duration. We have categorised the enrolments for different programmes into a full-time/part-time basis in a similar way to the analysis of DES data.

4.6 NATIONAL FÁS ENROLMENTS

Table 4.4 shows a total of 65,046 enrolments in FÁS programmes in 2012 by broad programme type.

TABLE 4.4 Compositional Distribution of Provision, FÁS

Programme	2012 Enrolments	%
Full-Time > 812.5 hrs	12,806	19.7
Full-Time < 812.5 hrs	16,402	25.2
Part-Time	26,575	40.9
eCollege ⁵³	8,701	13.4
Blended ⁵⁴	562	0.9
Total	65,046	100.0

As with the DES data, it is necessary to adjust the FÁS enrolments to full-time equivalents. In this case, there is variation in hours across the types of

⁵³ eCollege provides a range of interactive online learning courses.

⁵⁴ Blended learning courses provide a mix of online training with enhanced learner supports including telephone, email, E-tutor and instructor led workshops

programmes and substantial variation within the different programme types summarised in Table 4.4. The adjustment provides a more accurate reflection of the learner effort and the share of resources allocated to each area of provision. SOLAS have provided detailed duration data on individual programmes. For the FTE calculation, we assume that the average FT course duration is 26 weeks and that average FT hours are 31.25 hours. This works out as an FTE of 812.5 hours. All enrolments that have smaller hourly durations are adjusted relative to the FTE benchmark of 812.5 hours and Table 4.5 shows the FTE FÁS enrolments.⁵⁵

TABLE 4.5 Compositional Distribution of Provision as Full-time Equivalent (FTE), FÁS

Programme	2012 Enrolments	%
Full-Time > 812.5 hrs	12,806	44.9
Full-Time < 812.5 hrs	8,011	28.1
Part-Time	1,542	5.4
eCollege	5,872	20.6
Blended	296	1.0
Total	28,527	100.0

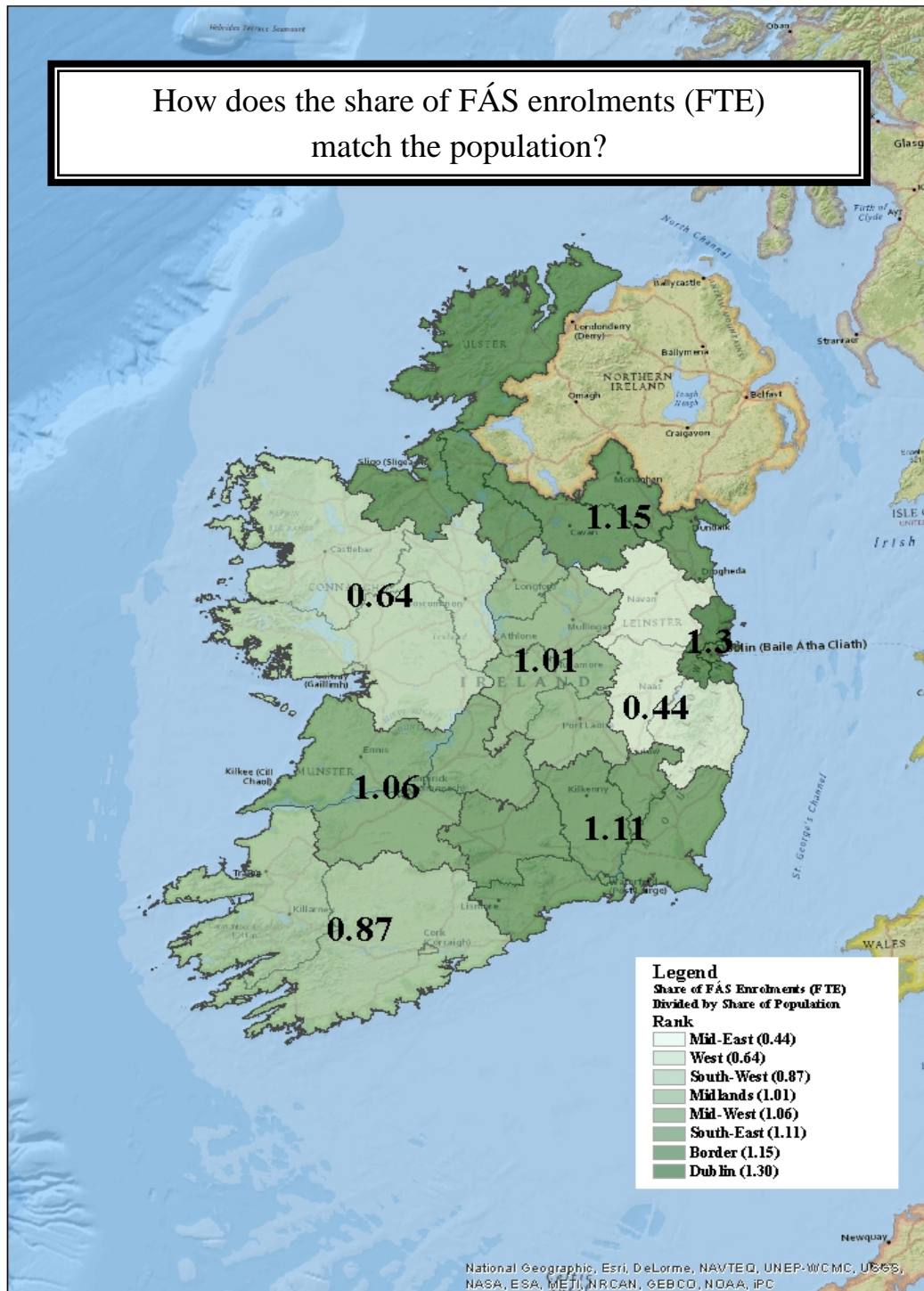
4.7 REGIONAL FÁS ENROLMENTS

In terms of the distribution at a regional level, we examine the share of FTE enrolments over eight regions at NUTS III level.⁵⁶ Similar to the DES analysis, a substantial amount of heterogeneity across regions is shown using a ratio of FTE enrolments weighted by population data. Figure 4.3 shows those with ratios above average are the Border, Dublin, South-East and Mid-West regions. The regions with ratios below average are Mid-East, West and South-West. Table A4.5 further shows the difference mapped across regions.

⁵⁵ FÁS provided detailed assumptions on course length and learner hours on an individual course basis and these were used for the calculations in Table 4.5.

⁵⁶ In Table 4.6 enrolments in online programmes are not included (5,871) and apprenticeship phase 2 starters are not included (1,218). The table also excludes CSCS/QSCS enrolments (10,189) which mostly run over 1 or 2 days.

FIGURE 4.3 Regional Distribution of Full-time Equivalent Enrolments, FÁS



Source: Data from CSO and FÁS; maps by authors.

4.8 SUMMARY

Based on the available data from the DES and FÁS, we observe a substantial amount of heterogeneity with respect to provision: the regional distribution of provision and the balance between full-time and part-time provision. The patterns of provision are unclear; however, national policy does not appear to play a central role in the determination of places across regions or regarding the balance of full-time or part-time provision within regions. In the next chapter, we augment this desk-based research by evidence from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders on their perceptions of provision.

Chapter 5

Stakeholder Perceptions of Provision

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Following on from Chapter 3 which focused on the patterns of enrolments across VECs and FÁS training centres, this chapter examines stakeholder views of FET provision in Ireland. Here we outline a number of key issues that arose during the interviews regarding the diversity of FET provision, the responsiveness of FET to labour market and other demands, issues around the teaching staff working in the FET sector in addition to data issues highlighted by respondents.

5.2 DIVERSITY AND FRAGMENTATION OF FET PROVISION

Chapter 2 details the incremental and organic development of vocational education and training in Ireland over the last century. Many of those interviewed attributed issues in the current system of provision to ‘historical patterns [which have] built up over time’ (Statutory department/body) and the system is therefore ‘driven by who’s already in place’ (Employer group). The majority of stakeholders were in agreement that the sector was ‘very disparate’ as it has ‘grown in such a disparate and an organic kind of way’ (Community Education group):

They’re actually determined on a, on a historical basis for the allocation of budgets and whatever that historical basis was, that’s been maintained over the whole time. (State provider group.)

Given the nature of this development over time, some stakeholders felt that ‘overall there are probably too many providers with partnership companies, private providers, community educators and FÁS’ and as a result ‘the market is flooded’ (Community Education group). This, some felt, presents a challenge if there is a lack of knowledge of other components of FET among the providers themselves (e.g., ETBs or FÁS), particularly in bringing together ‘different ways of doing things’ (State provider group). Providers are seen therefore as ‘competing with each other, trying to snatch numbers, trying to get learners in ... [they] aren’t strategically planned’ (Community Education group). Some argue, however, that private providers are more likely to reflect need as ‘they’re not going to be in business if they’re not doing it right’ (Employer group). Fáilte Ireland and Teagasc also appeared to be seen to reflect specific needs within the industry.

Many felt that the organic development of FET over time has resulted in a fragmented system of provision which has not linked local demands with national objectives:

The problem is it's fragmented... I think there's been a national voice missing if you like in some of the debates that have happened, because of that, of that localness and the fragmentation. (State provider group.)

With the emphasis on responding to local needs, this has meant that the national picture hasn't been addressed, with one stakeholder stating that 'its ability to speak with one voice isn't good' (State provider group). Some were extremely critical of this fragmentation of provision which they believe stems from a 'lack of structure and planning and coordination within the sector' (State provider group). As a result, the 'activity would appear to be quite diverse and not particularly joined up' (Other provider group). Others spoke about the lack of 'vision or a plan' (Community Education group) which has resulted in a 'bit of a mish-mash of what courses are where' (Other provider group).

Some raised the issue of communication between various providers which also appears to vary with 'some VECs [with] a strong connection between the training services, community services and in other places there was turf war' (Community Education group). Another stakeholder pointed to the lack of linkage between further and higher education and 'in different parts of education, they just operate in their own little bubbles' (Employer group).

Stakeholders also raised the issue around supply or demand-led provision of courses:

One of the criticisms over the years from various reports has been that it's driven by the availability of instructors and facilities to provide the training... if you look at the provision of programmes, it's largely driven by the supply of available instructors and trainers that we have. And then you try to cater those existing courses, to match needs that sometimes are, are quite difficult to match up, you know ... let's be honest it's supplier driven still, largely, rather than demand. (Statutory department/body.)

One stakeholder raised the issue of duplication or 'overlap' in certain programmes:

In a town like [name of town], two providers might be offering the same programme – nursing skills, childcare, care of the elderly. Nobody is offering science and technology, but there is a need for science and technology at Level 5. (Employer group.)

5.3 QUALITY OF FET PROVISION

In addition to these issues around provision, the interviews highlight a perception around inconsistency in quality and a variation in the standards across different FET components and across providers/centres:

There are pockets that are extremely good and extremely effective and supply the necessary skills set but overall ... I suppose it's not joined up thinking. (Employer group.)

Most acknowledged that different elements of provision were good but that greater structure and consistency was needed. One stakeholder believes FET provision is therefore 'not strategic in any shape or form. It's happened by chance' (Other provider group) and has therefore produced 'a mixed bag of varying standards' (Other provider group).

Some individual training centres seemed to have developed 'a reputation out in industry' (Employer group) but this appeared to be the result of local initiatives rather than the result of planning:

It's actually responded in pockets very well, but that was despite rather than because of the policy, you know.. various VECs would have come up with initiatives which are actually quite valuable in their own communities but not because of any direction. (Employer group.)

FÁS, in particular, appears to be viewed favourably in terms of the quality of instructors, monitoring of results and links to the labour market. Employers were positive about the apprenticeships:

On the FÁS side, there's a clear identification of what is done and there's a clear fit to the labour market (Employer group).

One employer stressed how the apprenticeship model could be extended to other occupations and highlighted how 'a well-trained electrician, a well-trained carpenter, a well-trained plumber would stand it anywhere, either here or abroad ... that's a really good story for the FETs'. Others interviewed were very positive about the Skillnets model:

Skillnets course is actually a very good model, it's very responsive, it has genuine employer engagement and works quite well in pockets (Employer group).

Some stakeholders, however, were dissatisfied with inconsistent standards in some providers with some PLCS 'very focused' (e.g., sound engineering in

Ballyfermot) but ‘there’s an awful lot of them that are just the old secretarial courses rebranded’ (Employer group).

5.4 LACK OF RESPONSIVENESS TO LABOUR MARKET NEEDS

Many of the stakeholders also raised concerns around a lack of responsiveness of providers to changing demands in the labour market. Many see the sector as having a ‘lack of agility’ and being slow to respond to employer needs. One stakeholder felt that the process of reviewing of programmes is ‘very often ... done from a desk setting and based on a person’s perception of what changes need to be made. And very often they’re cosmetic rather than based on labour market requirements’ (Other provider group). Others suggest that the lack of flexibility stems from providers being entrenched in a ‘curriculum that they, you know, are used to it and it takes time to react’. Many believe that the supply-driven tendency among providers results in the system being ‘very slow in being able to readjust demand on low population growth areas to higher population growth areas’ (Statutory department/body).

One respondent felt there is a need for flexible provision instead of programmes which continue to produce more of the same regardless of labour market needs:

We talk all the time about the need for flexible provision, being able to identify an area of need quickly. Put in provision for that. Make sure that the people at the other end of the process have placements to show the success of that particular training and then as soon as people come out you know in that cohort, that you stop. (State provider group.)

They gave an example of how providers can over-supply the labour market if they are not responsive enough:

There was a need identified for beauty therapists a number of years ago. We developed a very good beauty therapy programme across the country in loads of different areas and now there is a surplus of trained beauty therapists, with an expectation that they will get work because ... they’re quite skilled but there isn’t work for them. (State provider group)

The interviews also highlighted issues around the nature of contracts for FET teaching staff which they felt created inflexibility in provision:

We have teachers on full-time contracts and they provide the training that they can rather than what necessarily the industry needs or the learners needs. (Other provider group.)

It's a weakness that the contract rights of the tutors determine the programme. (Community Education group.)

Because of the legislation and the fixed term work act that's now caught us into a situation of CIDs [Contracts of Indefinite Duration], but we don't have the option of making people redundant. (State provider group.)

By employing tutors on a permanent basis, some felt that they were 'locked into keeping them' (Community Education group) which has clear implications for the extent to which provision can respond to demands. In addition to the nature of contracts, stakeholders highlighted a number of key issues regarding teaching staff within the FET sector which are outlined in the following section.

5.5 TEACHING STAFF

There has been a lack of information on the number and profile of staff teaching in the FET sector. This is complicated further by the way in which FET teaching staff can be divided into three distinct categories: PLC teachers, FÁS trainers and Community Education tutors. Teacher quality has been the subject of policy discussion in recent years. For example, the White Paper on Adult Education (DES, 2000) pointed to the need for adult education to have '...the flexibility and freedom to draw from a wide range of sources and expertise' but at the same time indicated '...it is vital that, over time, qualifications for the teaching and practice of Adult Education be accorded formal recognition'. Since 2013, applicants for registration for the further education sector must have attained a Teaching Council approved teacher education qualification in addition to meeting degree qualification requirements. Currently, ten courses aimed at teachers within the FET sector are accredited by the Teaching Council. In their specification of teaching programme requirements, the Teaching Council (2011) highlights the distinctive nature of the teacher-learner relationship within FET, which should be reflected in teacher education programmes:

Teacher education programmes for further education should recognise the distinctive characteristics of that sector, with particular reference to the profile of learners and to the context within which further education initiatives are located. ... Teaching in further education is characterised by learner-teacher relationships based on mutual respect and equality. ... Certification of programmes of further education study is based on the achievement of stated learning outcomes rather than on coverage of centrally defined syllabi. A crucial requirement of the further education teacher therefore is the capacity to analyse learners' needs, to develop a programme of study in response to those needs and to assess learner progress. (Teaching Council, 2011, p. 9.)

The specific skills necessary for teaching within FET were discussed by the stakeholders interviewed for the current study. Many stakeholders felt that FET staff need both a teaching qualification and relevant expertise acquired in industry:

Further education and training deliverers, tutors, teachers, whatever you wish to call them, are a peculiar kind of group in that many of them cannot come from the teaching gene pool – right – they must have up to date current competencies in terms of what’s happening in the work force – right – and we have to find a way of ensuring that they have the pedagogical skill and the currency of practice in the workplace. (State provider group.)

The importance of up-to-date experience of industry requirements was emphasised by many stakeholders.

Things change very rapidly in industry and somebody, even maybe five years training and out of industry that long, could have lost touch. (Employer group.)

If the training is in an area that is genuinely intended to be labour market preparation, well then there has to be a connection between what’s required now in the world of work. (Other provider group.)

This was seen as allowing provision to better reflect the needs of employers.

Because of the different profile of learners in the FET sector, stakeholders felt that staff were required to be more than ‘teachers’ and that interpersonal skills were a crucial component:

You need different skills ... There’s a relationship. There’s social problems, you’re minding them ... You can’t just walk in give your spiel and walk back out. (Other provider group.)

Class management and experience counts for a lot. (Other provider group.)

A number of stakeholders cautioned against an over-emphasis on formal teaching qualifications. This was seen as potentially leading to the loss of valuable resources and expertise:

As the sector maybe tries to apply standards, you could end up losing very good trainers and tutors. (Statutory department/body.)

Furthermore, it was seen as potentially down-grading the importance of industry experience:

[FÁS instructors] come from a trade background ... they understand what they're teaching compared to teachers who come from a more middle-class background. (Employer group.)

A number of stakeholders also felt that it did not take account of the specific needs of the sector and the emphasis on applied skills, instead applying the model already developed for second-level education:

The further education staff are the round peg to fit into the post-primary square hole ... You cannot get a degree in animal grooming, you cannot get a degree in hairdressing. Yet they are perfectly legitimate further education and training provisions. (Statutory department/body.)

I think they are looking at a second-level model without understanding the nature of the whole sector. (Community education group.)

The people who were writing these [FET teacher programmes] did not understand the world of vocational educational training. (Community education group.)

The emphasis on formal qualifications was seen as having particular implications for the community education sector:

Many [tutors] won't have any teacher training done, many won't even have a degree, but what they will have will be experience ... they've learned from on the job learning. (Community Education group.)

At the same time, there was a recognition of the need for consistency of standards across teaching staff within the sector:

It depends on the quality of the individuals in many cases that are providing the training. (Community Education group.)

The profile is very varied ... there's no national norm for a tutor. ... That lack of clarity and that lack of uniformity is not a good thing for the sector. (State provider group.)

One stakeholder pointed to the need to systematically assess the skills and competencies required of FET teaching staff:

Somebody, SOLAS or Teaching Council, has to take responsibility for re-defining the competence framework for teachers ... I don't believe we can carry on with the old notion of a school teacher, or the notion of an instructor ... many are teaching the way they were taught 20 years ago. (Community Education group.)

Over and above the role of initial teacher education, continuous professional development (CPD) was seen as crucial, given ‘the rate of change and the necessity to change and adapt to the needs’ (State provider group):

[If] we don’t have in-service and up-skilling components within that, we will have no progress or change. (Other provider group.)

CPD was also seen as playing a role in increasing flexibility within the sector to drop obsolescent programmes and introduce new ones.

5.6 PERCEPTIONS OF DATA AVAILABILITY

A final key issue highlighted by respondents during the interview process related to data within the FET sector. The majority of stakeholders interviewed were critical about the data available in relation to FET provision, progression and outcomes. The interviews highlighted a number of key issues including a lack of data and poor quality of available data, with many stakeholders highlighting areas where data could and should be collected.

Many felt that the data were of ‘low quality and unfit for purpose’ (Employer group) in that they are unable to measure ‘the achievement of the sector’ (Statutory department/body). Some stakeholders pointed to the lack of information on completion from FET such as labour market outcomes or progression to higher education (State provider group):

[We] need to be able to track participation, progression, work placement. (State provider group.)

We really don’t have any feel for what, on a evidence base, for what is actually the output for FE [PLCs]... (Statutory department/body).

Data on outcomes, there is really, really poor information (Statutory department/body).

Do people get jobs out of this ... completion rates ... path progression rates. (Employer group.)

No data on dropout. (Community Education group.)

Some believed that there is a need to develop a tracking system in order to measure outcomes:

We really don’t have data of what people do after they leave .. we need some tracking system. (Other provider group.)

There is a need for a tracking system with learners assigned a unique ID which could be linked to DSP and other data to determine outcomes. (Other provider group.)

This information could then be used carry out an 'early review of programme outcomes to ensure revision where not delivering'.

Others felt that data existed particularly 'at the national level' but it was not fully utilised by the sector (Community Education group). One stakeholder suggested that the existing data was 'sufficient' but 'not sufficiently utilised'. He believed there are resource difficulties in asking teachers to follow up on learner outcomes and although first destination surveys might be helpful, they are a 'crude measure'. (State provider group). Another stakeholder felt that they are asked for a lot of data which is fed back to SOLAS but also felt that it was 'not sufficiently utilised' (Other provider group).

The majority of those interviewed suggested key areas in which new data could be collected or existing data could be improved. Some suggested creating a single integrated database (Community Education group) where data on gender, age, social background, region and level of certification could be collected. Information could then be collected on first destination but also later post-progression outcomes (Employer group). In relation to who would be responsible for this data collection, one stakeholder suggested that a 'coordinated body' could both collect the data and 'analyse it properly' (Other provider group). Others suggested that data collection should be done by 'a department linked to ETBs or SOLAS' whose brief is research and development. This would lead to 'formal linkages with employers' and 'data would form the basis then for future planning and development of training and education interventions' (Other provider group).

5.7 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on a number of key issues stemming from in-depth interviews with stakeholders on FET provision in Ireland. Stakeholders firstly emphasised the need to address existing fragmentation and diversity within FET provision. In particular, many agreed that the organic development of the system had resulted in too many providers and possible duplication of provision in some areas. Provision therefore lacked a national focus. Stakeholders agreed that the quality of provision was also inconsistent, with some centres developing a strong reputation based on local initiative while others were seen as weaker. In

particular, many stakeholders viewed the FÁS apprenticeship model as being successful.

This chapter also highlighted stakeholder views around the lack of responsiveness of providers to changing labour market demands. Many discussed how the sector lacks agility, being slow to respond to employer needs. Stakeholders also provided their views on those teaching within the FET sector. Many emphasised the need for up-to-date experience of industry requirements. Some stakeholders cautioned against an over-emphasis on formal qualification among FET teaching staff given the importance of industry experience. Many agreed, however, that there is a need for consistency in standards and argued that CPD was crucial in developing and maintaining flexibility within the sector. The final section in this chapter examines the views of stakeholders regarding data availability and data quality within the FET sector. Many of those interviewed were critical of the data available on various aspects of FET, including provision, progression and outcomes. Many suggested ways in which data could be collected or improved such as the creation of a single integrated database or system of measurement in which to track participants and outcomes over time.

Chapter 6

Accreditation

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter brings together data on accreditation from Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) with stakeholder views on accreditation from the in-depth interviews. We begin by outlining the range of courses that are unaccredited and then look at the patterns of accreditation within the FET sector. Levels and disciplines of accreditation are examined nationally and across centre types. Ideally, the information on enrolments from Chapter 4 would be collected at the individual level and mapped to accreditation information allowing us to provide course completion rates. However, this is not possible due to the data infrastructure but a partial picture of accreditation rates is possible.

Interviews with stakeholders also highlighted a number of key issues around accreditation across the FET sector. Stakeholders were cognisant of the significance of non-accredited programmes, particularly in the community and adult education sectors. The prominence of minor awards also provoked some discussion. A third issue arose relating to the quality of awards, which also forms part of the qualitative analysis presented in this chapter.

6.2 NON-ACCREDITED PROGRAMMES

A proportion of provision within the FET sector does not lead to any formal accreditation. The lack of accreditation is more typical in programmes with a strong community ethos or those that are targeted at individuals whose personal circumstances result in them being some distance from the labour market. It should be noted that there is some debate around the extent to which there is a clear dichotomy between the labour market and more socially orientated programmes and indeed, these issues are explored in the key informant interviews. Within the literature Gregg (2008), referring to labour market activation, appears to argue that there is a clear continuum of work-readiness, ranging from the 'work-ready group', to the 'progression-to-work group', to 'no-conditionality group'. With respect to FET, while the bulk of provision is focused on the 'work-ready' and 'progression-to-work group' who have strong connections to the labour market, the programmes targeted on the 'no-conditionality group', i.e., those receiving welfare support without any requirement to seek work, can often in many instances also lead ultimately to the labour market. For those furthest away from the labour market accreditation may

not be a realistic objective but for those closer to the labour market it is certainly more relevant.

Community Education is delivered all over Ireland by a range of providers including statutory organisations and independently managed not-for-profit groups. It takes place in a wide variety of community projects, resource centres, voluntary organisations, etc. A large proportion of community education funding has been traditionally provided by the VECs (56,000 learners in 2012) either through direct provision or by means of a grant allocation to community providers. Community Education is co-ordinated through a Community Education Facilitator in each VEC. Other sources of funding (30,000 learners in 2012) include government departments, FÁS, local development companies through Pobal, drugs task forces, private trusts, learner fees, etc.

Information provided by Pobal for 2011 indicates that just under one-third of successful enrolments⁵⁷ were in unaccredited programmes. With respect to Aontas (The National Adult Learning Organisation), the ESRI conducted their own survey of a sample of members⁵⁸ accessing funding outside of the VEC facilitated courses. Information was collected on both the principal area of operation and the proportion of provision that is unaccredited. Information collected to date suggests that 41.7 per cent of enrolments on courses provided by Aontas members were accredited in 2012⁵⁹ (Table 6.1). While no breakdown was available for VEC courses, approximately 5 per cent of FÁS enrolments were in non-accredited programmes (Table 6.2). While there is without question a need for unaccredited provision within the FET sector,⁶⁰ there is also arguably a need to evaluate the extent to which all public monies expended within the sector are being effectively allocated. We conclude that, given that a significant proportion of FET provision is non-accredited, there is a potential need to develop a framework for evaluating this component of provision using metrics that are in line with programme objectives. Stakeholder views on the role of such metrics are highlighted in Section 6.3 below.

⁵⁷ Successful enrolments exclude individuals who did not complete programmes or modules and those whose completion status was unknown.

⁵⁸ The sample was provided to us by Aontas who also provided important assistance in achieving an acceptable response rate.

⁵⁹ Based on a 62 per cent response rate. Bailey, N. (2010). *More than just a Course: Exploring the Outcomes and Impact of Department of Education and Skills Funded Community Education*. AONTAS: Dublin.

⁶⁰ Unaccredited courses are particularly important when engaging with vulnerable groups, returning to education, and furthest from the labour market.

TABLE 6.1 Balance between Accredited and Non-Accredited Courses in 2011, Pobal

	Successful 2011 Enrolments	%
Accredited	4,279	31.2
Non-Accredited	9,452	68.8
Total	13,731	100.0

TABLE 6.2 Balance between Accredited and Non-Accredited Courses in 2012, FÁS, on a FTE basis

Status	FTE Enrolments in 2012	%
Accredited	26,973	94.6
Accredited – FETAC (Basic Level 3)	2,668	9.4
Accredited – FETAC (Advanced Level 4-6)	20,521	71.9
Accredited (Non-FETAC)	3,784	13.3
Non-Accredited	1,554	5.4
Overall Total	28,527	100.0

Notes: Apprenticeship Phase 2 Starters not included: 1,218. Also, the table excludes 10,189 CSCS/QSCS enrolments – these courses run over a number of days with most being run over 1 or 2 days – In 2012, 34 learners attended a Financial Advisor Traineeship Programmes where one module is aligned to level 7 on the NFQ. All other FÁS provision is at level 3 to 6.

6.3 PATTERNS OF ACCREDITATION

In this section of the report, we examine data from Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and the Department for Education and Skills (DES) on credentials generated by the FET sector. Table 6.3 shows the total number of awards achieved by FET students in 2012 by level of accreditation.

TABLE 6.3 Total Awards by Level from QQI, 2012, Unweighted

Level	Awards	%
Major	42,593	14.27
Level 1	314	0.11
Level 2	666	0.22
Level 3	1,080	0.36
Level 4	2,246	0.75
Level 5	26,666	8.93
Level 6	11,621	3.89
Minor	240,094	80.42
Level 1	634	0.21
Level 2	3,464	1.16
Level 3	25,818	8.65
Level 4	47,367	15.87
Level 5	137,623	46.10
Level 6	25,188	8.44
Special Purpose	15,134	5.07
Level 4	377	0.13
Level 5	11,446	3.83
Level 6	3,311	1.11
Supplemental	730	0.24
Total	298,551	100.00

In 2012 a total of 298,551 QQI FETAC accredited awards were issued by the FET sector, the majority of which (80.42 per cent) were minor awards, indicating a lower volume of learning. It is recognised that minor, special purpose and supplemental awards have a value in their own right, as do awards made by industry-recognised awarding bodies. Programmes leading to these awards are well aligned with labour market requirements and also with DSP-referred client requirements.⁶¹ Major awards, which constitute a higher volume of learning, accounted for less than 15 per cent of total awards.⁶² Major awards were most heavily concentrated in NFQ levels 5 and 6, whereas minor awards were most common at NFQ levels 4 and 5. When the awards data for 2012 was sorted by centre type, the former VECs represented the most significant provider within the sector, accounting for 42.5 per cent of total qualifications issued; a further 24 per cent of certificates were achieved through private providers, while 19 per cent were achieved through FÁS.⁶³ It should be noted that many programmes are designed to lead to minor awards only or special purpose awards. In many cases, this is to address a particular labour market requirement or to provide short training interventions that are in demand by DSP referred clients. For example, the Momentum Programme, administered by FÁS in 2013, is delivering training to over 6,000 long-term unemployed clients. Many of the programmes deliver minor, special purpose and industry-recognised certification in sectors where job opportunities exist. Not all lead to major awards. This also applies to many short courses delivered throughout the former FÁS training centre network and FÁS eCollege.

However, we are primarily interested in measuring the numbers of individuals achieving accreditation in 2012 and as individuals gaining component certificates (comprised of minor awards) tend to gain two minor awards on average, Table 6.4 presents estimates of the number of persons gaining accreditation in 2012 after deflating the minor awards data. An estimated total of 178,505 individuals gained qualifications in 2012, 67.3 per cent of whom attained minor awards with 23.9 per cent achieving major awards.

⁶¹ For example, City & Guilds Diploma in IT Applications, City & Guilds Certificate in Computer Aided Engineering, Beauty Therapy ITEC award, etc. In the case of some engineering disciplines there are no FETAC awards above level 3, e.g., welding; yet coded welders are trained to international standards such as ASME and EN. Component awards, such as Turning, Milling, etc. or special purpose awards, are often well aligned to the labour market requirements; hence the high numbers of minor awards.

⁶² A major award on average is composed of eight minor awards.

⁶³ Tables available from the authors on request.

TABLE 6.4 Estimated Number of Persons Receiving Qualifications in 2012, QQI⁶⁴

NFQ Level	Individuals (estimated)	%
Major	42,593	23.86
Level 1-3	2,060	1.16
Level 4-6	40,533	22.71
Minor (adjusted)	120,048	67.25
Level 1-3	14,958	8.38
Level 4-6	105,091	58.88
Special Purpose	15,134	8.48
Supplemental	730	0.41
Grand Total	178,505	100.00

Table 6.5 distributes the 42,593 major awards issued in 2012 by centre type and NFQ level of accreditation, where basic relates to NFQ levels 1 to 3 and advanced to NFQ levels 4 to 6. The data show that FÁS and the former VECs were the biggest providers of major awards, accounting for almost 80 per cent of the total. Private providers accounted for just fewer than 10 per cent of all major awards issued during 2012. The vast majority of major awards were achieved at the advanced level; however, in addition to the former VECs and FÁS, community and voluntary bodies were also important providers of basic major awards. Table 6.6 shows the distribution with respect to individuals receiving minor awards, with the former VECs accounting for just under 45 per cent of the total, followed by private providers who accounted for just under 27 per cent. Individuals attending FÁS training centres accounted for just under 17 per cent of the total receiving minor accreditation. As was the case with major awards, the vast majority of minor awards were achieved at FETAC levels 4 to 6. Community and voluntary organisations were again prominent in the provision of basic minor awards.

TABLE 6.5 Distribution of Major Awards by Centre Type from QQI, 2012

Centre Type	Basic	Advanced	Total
VEC/Schools	51.7	58.6	58.3
Private Providers	0.0	10.0	9.6
FÁS	19.4	20.8	20.7
Community/Voluntary	24.5	3.7	4.7
Other	4.4	6.8	6.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
#	2,060	40,533	42,593

⁶⁴ The number of minor awards was deflated by two as individuals gaining component certificates (comprised of minor awards) tend to gain two minor awards on average. As typically only one major award is achieved per person, no adjustment was necessary in this aspect of the data.

TABLE 6.6 Estimated Number of Persons⁶⁵ Receiving Minor Awards by Centre Type from QQI, 2012

Centre Type	Basic	Advanced	Total
VEC/Schools	63.2	42.2	44.8
Private Providers	3.3	30.3	26.9
FÁS	17.8	16.8	16.9
Community/Voluntary	11.7	4.9	5.8
Other	4.0	5.9	5.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
#	14,959	105,090	120,049

The distribution of awards by NFQ level of accreditation, field of study and centre type is given in Table A6.1.⁶⁶ Across the system generally, disregarding NFQ level of accreditation and centre type, a number of fields of learning are relatively dominant. Approximately 17.2 per cent of all qualifiers received awards in Security related studies in 2012; 15 per cent in Education; 14 per cent in Core Skills; 11 per cent in Administration; 8 per cent in Health/Welfare and 7 per cent in Business (Table A6.2). However, there was substantial heterogeneity within the system and it is best to analyse the data by centre type. Within the former VECs, major awards account for 32 per cent of total awards with these most heavily concentrated in Education/Training (29 per cent), Business (14 per cent) and Health Care (13 per cent). Minor awards within the former VECs were most common in Core Skills (23 per cent), Administration (16 per cent) and Education/Training (11 per cent). With respect to FÁS, approximately 30 per cent of trainees achieved major awards, with these most frequently gained in Engineering (23.9 per cent) and Housing/Building Construction (15.6 per cent). Administration (25.4 per cent) and Security⁶⁷ (21 per cent) accounted for nearly half of FÁS qualifiers gaining minor awards.

Finally, turning to the private providers, just under 6 per cent of total awards were major awards, with major accreditation most common in Education/Training (53 per cent) and Health/Welfare (31 per cent). Security (52 per cent) and Education/Training (15 per cent) were the main areas of minor accreditation for students attending private provider institutions.

⁶⁵ The number of minor awards was deflated by two as individuals gaining component certificates (comprised of minor awards) tend to gain two minor awards on average.

⁶⁶ These data are deflated so as to represent accreditation at an individual level. Furthermore, special purpose and Supplemental awards have been excluded.

⁶⁷ Security as per QQI Fields of Learning includes Door Security, Commercial Security, and Emergency Services (which in turn encompasses, for example, Occupational First Aid, Safety and Health at Work and Workplace Safety).

The lack of accurate tracking data matching enrolments with accreditation makes it difficult to assess the extent to which accreditation levels are satisfactory given the allocation of resources to the sector. The predominance of minor awards (that do not progress to a major award) is somewhat concerning, particularly given that the highest levels of expenditures and estimated manpower hours within the VECs are concentrated around programmes such as PLCs, VTOS and Youthreach, which, in theory at least, are designed to equip individuals with major awards. A partial picture of accreditation rates was derived using data on the number of major awards issued in each full-time course, provided to us by DES, mapped against enrolments in previous years. For PLC courses, this was relatively straightforward as awards relate directly to enrolments in the preceding year. For two year programmes such as VTOS and Youthreach, we assume that major awards in any one year will equate to 60 per cent of enrolments two years previously.⁶⁸ Estimated major award accreditation rates by course type (funding stream) are given in Table 6.7, while the detailed enrolments and awards information that underpins the estimates is presented in Table 6.8. As can be seen, major awards achieved outside of the FETAC accreditation system are incorporated into the estimates. Based on the available data, we estimate that the percentage of enrolled students who go on to achieve major accreditation in 2011 was 49.2 per cent for PLCs, 61.1 per cent for VTOS and 48.6 per cent for Youthreach.⁶⁹

With respect to FÁS, the situation is somewhat less clear cut as the average duration of programmes varies substantially; however, on the basis of full-time participants on courses with annual durations of more than 800 hours, we would expect FÁS to be generating a minimum of 14,518 major awards in 2012.⁷⁰ In 2012 FÁS generated 8,816 major awards, equating to an estimated accreditation rate of 61 per cent; however, this is likely to be an over-estimation as it ignores the possibility that participants on part-time courses, or full-time programmes of less than 800 hours, may also have been expected to achieve major awards. Based on the available data we draw a further observation that, given patterns of enrolments and the level of spending, the FET system appears to generate a relatively low number of major awards compared to what we expect from examining enrolments of full-time courses.

⁶⁸ Thus assuming a 20 per cent drop-out rate between years one and two of the programme.

⁶⁹ Due to their relatively disadvantaged profile, a substantial proportion of Youthreach qualifiers gained credentials, such as the Leaving and Junior Certificates, generally associated with the school level system.

⁷⁰ This is based on a 2012 enrolment figure and thus assumes little variation between 2011 and 2012 enrolments. The assumption of 800 hours on a full-time basis is in line with participation on a PLC course.

TABLE 6.7 Estimated Major Award Accreditation Rates for Full-Time Programmes, DES, 2011

Programme	Major FETEC Accreditation Rates (% of enrolments)
PLC	49.2
VTOS	61.1
Youthreach	48.6

TABLE 6.8 Major Award Accreditation Rates, DES, 2011

	PLC	VTOS	Youthreach
Duration of Programme (years)	1	2	2
Major FETAC Awards Achieved in 2011	15,318	1,797	558
Major FETAC & Non-FETAC Awards Achieved in 2011	19,040		
Major FETAC Awards & Full JC/LC/LCA Achieved in 2011		2,041	1,007
Enrolments in 2010	38,660		
60 per cent of enrolments in 2009		3,341	2,071
Major FETAC accreditation rates (per cent)	39.6	53.8	26.9
Major FETAC & Non-FETAC accreditation rates (per cent)	49.2	61.1	48.6

As can be seen from the above table, a certain proportion of accredited post-secondary provision within the FET sector is not awarded by QQI (FETAC). We have data on non-FETAC provision sponsored by the VECs and FÁS; however, we have no information on the extent of such accreditation among private providers. Table 6.9 shows the distribution of VEC non-FETAC aligned awards to PLC learners for 2012; in total, 3,670 awards were issued with BTEC and ITEC representing the largest awarding bodies. The vast majority of these awards are equivalent to major awards, in terms of their volume of learning and aligned to level 6 on the National Framework Qualifications (NFQ).⁷¹ Adding the FETAC and known non-FETAC awards suggests that the VECs issued 46,263 major awards in 2012, with non-FETAC awarding bodies accounting for just under 8 per cent of the total.

⁷¹ The average level is 5.8, therefore, awards are mostly level 6.

TABLE 6.9 Certification of non-FETAC Awards to DES Learners in 2012

Awarding Body ⁷²	No. Certified	Certificate	Diploma
ACCA	43	43	0
ATI	88	79	9
BTEC	1,051	334	715
City & Guilds	131	102	29
CIBTAC	694	43	651
Edexcel	125	15	110
ICM	70	16	54
ITEC	694	117	577
OTHER (28)	774	554	221
TOTAL	3,670	1,303	2,366

Table 6.10 gives the break-down of FETAC and other awarding bodies for FÁS in 2012. Non-FETAC accreditation accounted for almost 30 per cent of total FÁS certification in that year, with City & Guilds representing the single largest awarding body (outside of FETAC). Of City and Guilds accreditation in 2012, 88 per cent was at levels 1 and 2 which are broadly comparable to NFQ levels 3 and 4.⁷³ City & Guilds qualifications can also be equivalent to major FETAC awards. Finally, Table 6.11 provides the breakdown of FÁS-sponsored City & Guilds certifications by subject area. IT qualifications account for almost two-thirds of FÁS-sponsored City & Guilds qualifications with Business Support Skills accounting for a further 19 per cent.

TABLE 6.10 Overview of Total Certification Achieved by FÁS Learners, 2012

Awarding Body	Total Certificates in 2012	% of Overall
FETAC	60,312	70.88
City & Guilds	15,193	17.86
ICS	3,446	4.05
Microsoft	1,056	1.24
EN and ASME Welding	1,434	1.69
Others ⁷⁴	3,646	4.29
Overall Total	85,087	100.00

Note: This shows the total number of certificates awarded, not individuals; Data above does not include Apprenticeship or Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS)/ Quarry Skills Certification Scheme (QSCS) data; Approximately 12,000 clients take part in online accredited (mainly industry accredited) programmes through eCollege annually.

⁷² See Glossary page v.

⁷³ Details available from the authors on request.

⁷⁴ Other relates to Industry recognised certification, e.g., COMPTIA, ITEC (International Therapy Examination Council), RSA etc.

TABLE 6.11 Certification from City & Guilds to FÁS Learners by Subject, 2012

Discipline	Certificate Issues	%
Business Support Skills	2,934	19.3
Construction and Building	278	1.8
Engineering and Transport	1,475	9.7
Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy	65	0.4
I.T.	9,622	63.3
Management	780	5.1
Media and Photography	39	0.3
Total	15,193	100.0

6.4 STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON ACCREDITATION

Earlier in this chapter, the analysis highlighted a number of issues around accreditation across the FET sector. In particular, the analysis has highlighted the significance of non-accredited programmes across the FET landscape, particularly in the community and adult education sectors. The results also show the prevalence of minor awards across a number of programme and provider areas. In addition, interviews with stakeholders across the FET sector provoked much discussion around these two issues, with some divergence in viewpoints clearly identifiable. A third issue also emerged strongly from the stakeholder interviews, namely the quality of awards, with much of the feedback expressing concerns over quality.

6.4.1 Non-accredited Programmes

Across all stakeholder groups the prevalence of non-accredited programmes was seen as a significant issue and for many a ‘strong weakness’ in the system. Three out of five stakeholders interviewed indicated that the prevalence of unaccredited courses was a weakness ‘to a large extent’ or ‘some extent’. In addition, the vast majority felt there was a need to develop some form of measurement metrics in currently unaccredited programmes.

While there was general acceptance of the need for performance metrics across the FET system, there was some variation in terms of how that is best achieved and what exactly should be measured. For employers the skills of the individual are seen as paramount ‘the certification isn’t necessarily what they’re interested in. It’s actually the gaining of the skill’. The need for ‘appropriate’ metrics was also highlighted:

... a lot of the economic metrics are completely inappropriate ... we are going to give you the skills you need to get a job. We are going to bestow these on you like a coat of paint. (Statutory department/body.)

A number talked about the need to think 'creatively' about measuring outcomes and the need for measurement to be 'non-threatening' to (potential) participants:

There is a perception on the part of the learner that maybe because of the place they're coming from that they're not able to be measured. And when you start talking about the measurement, they start thinking about exams and so on like that. Measurement doesn't have to be of that nature, it can be introduced in the ways and that which can measure what's happening without, without being threatening. (State provider group.)

The only piece that is not accredited is the Community Ed[ucation] and I do think we need to hold onto that piece ... but I do think it needs to be accredited ... I know it is qualitative, but metrics have been developed and we need to come up with creative ways to measure. (Community education group.)

... a lot of the people they are dealing with, just accreditation would, they'd just run for the door [if you introduced accreditation]. (Statutory department/body.)

For some, it was argued that measurement should focus on 'soft skills' and 'capturing the wider benefits of learning' but doing so in a careful way. As one stakeholder notes there is a danger of:

... unintended learner selection, and it excludes learners for who[m] accreditation might be a barrier. So other success metrics could be developed. They give credit for attendance, improved self-confidence or study techniques.

Others felt that 'accreditation isn't the sole measure of outcomes' (Other provider group) but argued that programmes need to demonstrate that learners have made progress which might involve projects, practicals, orals or other metrics.

In terms of who should develop performance metrics, many stakeholders spoke of the role of SOLAS in consultation with the providers. A number of stakeholders highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach:

A more collaborative approach to the development of metrics would be more appropriate ... if everybody can buy into the metrics it makes it more

effective ... [otherwise] you end up with a cooking the books kind of exercise. (Statutory department/body.)

However, one stakeholder felt that currently 'there is a lack of skills needed to develop other performance metrics' (Other provider group).

One issue that arose was the potential unintended consequences of the imposition of accreditation across the board and many stakeholders spoke about the need to examine what exactly is measured. A representative of the State provider group cautioned that there is a danger that accreditation can drive content: 'sometimes accreditation results in stuff being done for the sake of it of getting accreditation'.

The issue of accreditation was seen as particular in the community education sector, where some felt non-accredited courses served a valuable role, sometimes as an entry route into accredited provision and for progression to other education and training pathways.

The whole ethos of community education was to be non-accredited. Which meant that, they were kind of, just to get people engaged in, you know, group work, talking, sharing, all that kind of thing. ... From that you'll find that a lot of them then, would move on to more accredited programmes. (State provider group.)

Conversely, for some stakeholders measurement of outcomes was seen as an important part of progression pathways:

We should be offering accreditation. We should be measuring what we're doing, otherwise we don't know whether we're doing the right things. And we're not giving something to somebody of value that they can use as the stepping stone to the next part of the journey. (State provider group.)

We would see accreditation as being part of the value, part of the transfer ability, portability, that you create. (Other provider group.)

Others felt that the lack of accreditation across the community and adult education sectors was a reflection of a perception that it would 'put off' potential learners, an argument which they didn't necessarily accept:

There's an ethos I suppose around community education and community development and that ... it's very much, it's learner focused which we, everybody accepts. But I think there's ... a view put forward that learners do not want to be recorded that you know this is an invasion of privacy and

if you start invading their privacy because these are largely coming from vulnerable groups they won't engage. ... Well they won't show up for courses, they won't engage in programmes. And they talk about accreditation like and certification and that and they don't want to be certified. (State provider group.)

However, many stakeholders acknowledged the particular challenges around accreditation and measurement for participants in some programmes. As one representative of the other provider group noted, there is a challenge in measuring performance 'with people who are uncomfortable in an academic scenario ... bad memories of school'. While a member of the community education group argued:

... if you are looking at people who have the least possible skills and the least possible connection to the education and training you are going to frighten the bejesus out of them to put them into an accredited programme.

Across the stakeholder groups, it was felt that 'accreditation should have currency' and needs to be responsive to changing labour market needs:

... in some cases employers and employees just require the skills quick, you know, and the accreditation system takes a while to catch up. (Other provider group.)

There was also a recognition that accreditation and measurement can also serve to validate good provision:

[We need performance metrics] if for no other reason than to give some of the excellent providers doing it for very strong social justice reasons the kudos they deserve. (Statutory department/body.)

6.4.2 Minor Awards

Overall, stakeholders offered two main views on minor awards: some felt minor awards held a valuable place in the FET system, while others expressed a concern about their prevalence and a view that the system, and providers, should be placing greater emphasis on major awards. In general representatives of statutory bodies and providers tended to fall into the latter category while a broader spectrum of stakeholders placed a value on these awards.

Overall, just over half of stakeholders indicated that the prevalence of minor awards within the sector was adequate 'to a large extent' or 'to some extent'. Representatives of the statutory bodies and State providers appear less likely to

consider minor awards as important. However, other stakeholder groups also expressed concerns about minor awards. As one employer representative stated ‘you either stay the distance and get the bit of paper [major award] or you don’t’. In contrast, another felt ‘if you tell somebody before they start this is a minor award [then] half the battle is lost’ (Employer group). A representative of the statutory group also felt that the ultimate aim for all learners should be a major award:

FET provision should at least aim to bring people to a major award. Otherwise there is a danger of people becoming serial kind of learners. (Statutory department/body.)

Among those reflecting positively on the place of minor awards in the system, many spoke of the flexibility these awards offered, allowing learners the opportunity to build up their skills over time and in a manner that suits their own particular situation:

We think minor awards are appropriate for part time courses which many learners want. Minor awards are appropriate for those who find it difficult to undertake a full award at a single session and need time to build on modules. ... The balance should be struck by reference to the learner needs. (State provider.)

Minor awards were seen to be particularly useful for two groups of people: existing workers looking to update their skills and those ‘more removed from the labour market’, who may need to build up their confidence. For the existing workforce, stakeholders argued ‘modularised learning is quite important, particularly again for company employees who will take it in smaller chunks’. A number questioned the assumption that ‘full-time is better, more appropriate to the needs of industry than part-time’, and argued that this is not the case (Employer group). Similarly, for some:

Minor awards are very important within the work place, in that people do not necessarily want a major award because of a, a small amount of cross skilling, or a small amount of up skilling that are needed specifically at this moment in time. (Employer group.)

The potential to gain specific, relevant skills was also seen as central to the minor awards system:

It would be much better to have, you know, ten minor awards or six minor awards that were in the right subject areas of smaller pieces of learning, accredited in the right way than it would be to have some over the top doctorate that actually didn’t teach you anything about being what you needed to be. (Other provider.)

Among those with less (positive) experience of the educational system, minor awards were seen to be valuable in allowing people to ‘try out’ and ‘dip their toe in the water’ before committing to a longer term course.

It’s a big undertaking to take on a major award ... if we’re trying to encourage people to come to formal education then it’s important that there is a capacity for them to effectively dip their toe in the water. (Other provider.)

You are trying to, you know, encourage people along a path and giving them too big a chunk may put them off. (Other provider.)

They’re scared ... eight modules in a year, it’s a lot to take on ... but they’re willing to do maybe two [modules] this year and two next year. (Statutory department/body).

For many stakeholders, having the opportunity to progress and follow ‘a logical plan’ was also seen as key to the success of a system offering both minor and major awards: ‘The whole thing of credit accumulation, that was proclaimed as a wonderful thing’ (Community education group.)

Members of the community education sector alluded to the centrality of minor awards to provision in their sector, and to the origins of the FETAC system, allowing a level of flexibility in provision which was seen as vital to the system. While minor awards would be ‘the norm within further education provision internationally’ (Statutory department/body), some argued that minor awards are ‘devalued or misunderstood from a provider level’ and ‘so undervalued’ in the Irish context. There was also a fear expressed that provision of minor awards is now under threat:

FETAC was developed to ensure there was a lot of flexibility around gaining accreditation and that people, adult learners could build the credits as they go ... it was ground-breaking really ... there’s beginning to be a domination of ... you must do a major award or nothing at all ... a push towards a whole major award system is going to screw us up a lot. (Community education group.)

Finally, among all stakeholder groups, there was a perception of a lack of clarity for learners and employers regarding what minor awards represent. They felt these awards needed greater attention and, in particular, a ‘better packaging’ (Community education group.)

6.4.3 Quality of Awards

A number of participants in the stakeholder interviews commented on the strength of having an overall qualification framework, Level 1 to 10 awards, and the comprehensiveness of that system:

... the accreditation structure of level one to eight and such like, I think that has become very, very well embedded and people understand it and so therefore from the employers side, from providers side, there's, that's to me is essential and then the progression routes within that is essential. So for that, that is a real strength em, of the sector. I think it makes the stretch, the sector strong particularly in that the progression routes are very clear and transparent. (Employer group.)

Similarly, another stakeholder from the employer group also stated 'our accreditation system and our framework of qualifications is a fairly unique strength of the Irish system' and there is 'very high awareness' of the framework.

However, stakeholders alluded to a number of difficulties in the system as it currently stands. The first related to variability in the delivery of awards across providers and programme, as one State provider representative noted: there may be a weakness in 'the monitoring of the actual level of the awards, the delivery of the programmes leading to the awards and that isn't as robust as it possibly should be. And it's perceived [as being] maybe less well at level six from Centre X [which] isn't as good as you know from Centre Y.' Another stakeholder contended:

[there are] huge differences in what is being delivered on the ground. ...Huge differences in the assessors, the external assessors who are coming to centres to authenticate awards ... what can be acceptable to one may not be acceptable to another. (Community education group.)

An external authenticator would view all the evidence ... but there's huge diversity in the standards they're applying. (Other provider group.)

To some extent this was seen to stem from a lack of clarity, particularly a lack of clarity over the standards pertaining to awards and a lack of clarity on what kind of skills follow from the different qualification levels.

It should be clearer, much much clearer in these awards as to what they stand for. What, what they mean, what do they stand for, what have you achieved if you have achieved this. So I think again a whole lack of clarity all around that is a big piece you know. (Employer group.)

Some stakeholders felt that there were weaknesses in specific areas of provision. One stakeholder from the other provider group contended that QQI awards in ICT 'have been poor quality, out of date, not responsive to the needs of employers or learners, too theoretical'. This arose, he felt, because 'I don't believe that there is enough, sufficient dialogue between industry and providers'. Further it was felt that there is a need for constant review and updating of awards because of the FÁS pace of change, particularly in technical skills:

Some of the qualifications that I would see in Ireland are very long life cycle ... if you don't change them, then they're not fit for purpose. (Other provider group.)

The issue of lack of responsiveness to employer needs was also seen to have led to a reliance on other awarding bodies like City and Guilds 'if the system was satisfying their needs, they wouldn't need [City and Guilds]'. It was felt that certification needs to be responsive, as with provision: 'things don't get off the framework fast enough, the framework doesn't change quickly enough'. (Other provider group.)

There was also a concern over the complexity of the system and the common awards system approach was seen as:

unwieldy ... it doesn't lend itself to a provider being able to respond to the needs of industry ... the process that has to be undertaken in order to get a new awards developed is totally incompatible with the State being able to respond to the needs of industry.

It was argued that this is because of the length of time involved and the 'lack of clarity'. At the moment there are 'emerging sectors' but QQI, 'they're not open to submissions for new awards'. (Other provider group.)

There is also a perceived lack of flexibility from the learner perspective:

The awards are very prescriptive now in terms of content ... there's not opportunity to tailor to ... a specific individual's needs or ... a particular organisation's needs. The learning outcomes are all prescribed in very fine detail ... and as such there's no room for a company to say actually you know this is what we need and what we'd like accredited. ... So there's no flexibility around developing something bespoke that meets a particular need. It is very assessment heavy. (Other provider group.)

A number of stakeholders alluded to a perceived lack of support for providers in terms of implementation of the awards system and in providing an understanding

of how the system works – a number argued for the need for QQI to campaign on how the model works to improve awareness. Difficulties in translating awards into implementation were noted by a number of stakeholders:

[There is] loads of documentation ... completely swamped in documentation ... when you start translating it into implementation there's this huge void, people are doing whatever they think best and there's very little peer learning going on. (Community education group.)

Finally, a number of stakeholders felt that there was an imbalance in favour of generic skills, the common awards process errs 'too much on the side of the generic' skills, 'sometimes there can be a serious imbalance'. Similarly, it was felt that:

... a lot of the generic ones [skills] are a bit wishy washy ... they ask the learner to do too much on the work experience one, too many journals and too many logs. (Other provider group.)

There was general acceptance of the need for a range of awarding bodies; it was also felt that there is scope to allow other accrediting bodies 'as long as their programmes match the requirements here' (State provider group). Overall, the interviewees felt that there should be a balance between Irish and other awards; both were seen to have a role to play. Further, stakeholders noted that national awards systems, notably the former FETAC system, suffered from a lack of international recognition, while counterparts like the City and Guilds could be more strongly placed internationally:

[International bodies such as City and Guilds] have a global reach, their qualifications are accepted by industries around the globe. (State provider group.)

Far, far too much of the certification is through FETAC now ... and I don't think it has the international recognition and I don't think it has the credibility that it should have unfortunately. (Other provider group.)

6.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has addressed a number of important issues around accreditation in the FET sector. A significant proportion of provision within the sector does not lead to any formal accreditation, particularly in programmes with a strong community ethos or programmes targeted at those 'more removed from the labour market'. Across stakeholder groups there was strong recognition of the need for these forms of provision, but it was also felt that there is a need to evaluate provision and ensure *appropriate* metrics are developed to measure outcomes from such programmes. The vast majority of awards made across the

FET sector are minor awards, which are seen to provide specific learning or training opportunities. In many cases these are designed to address a particular labour market requirement or to provide short training interventions that are in demand by DSP referred clients.

The main providers of major awards are FÁS and the former VECs, with many awards achieved at the advanced level. The lack of accurate tracking data matching enrolments with accreditation makes it difficult to assess the extent to which accreditation levels are satisfactory given the allocation of resources to the sector. However, stakeholders across the sector did recognise the value of minor awards, allowing learners the opportunity to build skills and qualifications incrementally and providing flexible opportunities for existing workers to update their skills. Finally, concerns emerged regarding the quality of awards in the sector, including concerns over variability in the delivery of awards, complexity of the awards system and perceived lack of flexibility from the learner perspective.

Chapter 7

Alignment with the Labour Market

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we begin by examining the alignment between further education and training provision and the needs of the labour market: this analysis is conducted using a combination of occupational data from the *Quarterly National Household Survey* (QNHS), Ireland's labour force survey, and sectoral projections from the ESRI *HERMES* model. We then look at how the economic returns to a post-secondary education and training qualification compare with other education levels (e.g., Third-level). Next we analyse the progression pathways of FET participants. Finally, we conclude the chapter by outlining the findings from the in-depth qualitative interviews with stakeholders on the FET system's alignment with the labour market.

7.2 LABOUR MARKET COMPOSITION

Ensuring an adequate flow of skilled workers to the labour market is of critical importance to the economy. The FTE-weighted data indicate that around 70 per cent of VEC enrolments are in full-time programmes, and 45 per cent of FÁS enrolments are in full-time programmes with durations of more than 812.5 hours. These full-time programmes should have a relatively strong labour market focus. For example, PLC programmes are "...designed to provide successful participants with specific vocational skills to enhance their prospects of securing lasting, full-time employment or progression to other studies"⁷⁵ and the objective of VTOS is to "...give unemployed people education and training opportunities which will develop their employability" and "...to prepare people to go into paid employment or on to further opportunities leading to paid employment".⁷⁶ In addition, the DES recently published a document providing guidelines for VECs in aligning further education with the skills needs of enterprise, where they comment on how the FET sector has a role in addressing skills and labour market needs.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the FÁS 2013 Action Plan states that the "...primary focus of FÁS training is on the preparation of individuals for working life. More

⁷⁵ See "Post Leaving Certificate Programme 2013/2014, Conditions of Approval", available from Department of Education and Skills at: http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Further-Education-and-Training/Post-Leaving-Certificate-PLC-Programme/plc_information_note.pdf

⁷⁶ See: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Vocational-Training-Opportunities-Scheme.aspx>

⁷⁷ See: <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Further-Education-and-Training/Back-to-Education-Initiative-BTEI/2013-Guidelines-for-VECs-on-meeting-the-skills-needs-of-Enterprise.pdf>

specifically, the focus is on the development of the preparatory, occupation-specific technical and interpersonal skills and competencies or the progression to further/higher education and training in order to meet their career and employment aspirations.”⁷⁸

Given the clear labour market focus of these full-time programmes, it is important to assess the adequacy of supply to meet future labour market needs for sub-degree vocational qualifications. We generate estimates of potential FET labour supply over the next five years by taking the numbers qualifying in the main subject areas, which are directly related to a set of occupations, by age group and projecting these groups forwards using the ESRI’s demographic model. We concentrate on major awards, as these can represent the numbers qualifying from the FET sector that among others can be regarded as most labour market ready. Table 7.1 shows QQI data on the distribution of major awards by subject area⁷⁹ and Table 7.2 shows similar data on certification from City & Guilds to FÁS learners used in the analysis. Unfortunately, limited information is available on other awards by field of study from private providers that are not FETAC accredited and so we cannot take account of these in the analysis.

⁷⁸ See: Service Plan for FÁS Training Provision 2013, available at: <http://www.fas.ie/NR/rdonlyres/2431A911-8EAD-4D7B-BD6E-39CC641526D7/2942/ServicePlanforF per centC3 per cent81S2013.pdf>

⁷⁹ The awards in Core Skills and General Studies cannot be easily related to any occupation and so are excluded from the analysis.

TABLE 7.1 Distribution of All Major Awards by Main Subject Area in 2012, QQI

FETAC Fields of Learning	Basic, %	Advanced,%	Total
1.1. Agriculture	-	7.5	7.1
1.2. Science	-	0.5	0.4
1.3. Computing (not applications)	-	2.5	2.3
2.1. Arts	-	1.0	1.0
2.2. Visual, Arts Craft & Design	-	3.7	3.6
2.3. Media	-	3.1	3.0
3.1. Business	-	11.0	10.5
3.2. Administration	12.1	5.8	6.1
4.1. Planning and Design	-	0.2	0.2
4.2. Housing/Building Construction	-	3.7	3.5
4.3. Civil	-	-	-
5.1. Core Skills	66.2	4.3	7.3
5.2. Language (Ex. Culture)	-	-	-
5.3. General Studies	21.5	0.9	1.9
6.1. Education/Training ⁸⁰	-	28.3	27.0
6.2. Health/Welfare	-	13.7	13.1
7.1. Engineering	0.1	6.0	5.7
7.2. Manufacturing Processing	-	0.1	0.1
8.1. Personal	-	2.6	2.5
8.2. Logistics	-	-	-
8.3. Security	-	0.0	0.0
9.1. Tourism	-	1.0	0.9
9.2. Hospitality	-	0.9	0.8
9.3. Sport	-	3.2	3.0
#	2,060	40,533	42,593

Source: QQI Data.

Note: Basic is defined as FETAC Levels 1-3 (4.8 per cent of major awards) and Advanced as FETAC levels 4-6 (95.2 per cent of major awards).

⁸⁰ The Education/Training FETAC Field of learning includes courses in Childcare, of which the majority of the major awards belong to, Youth Work, Community Care and Social Work.

TABLE 7.2 Certification from City & Guilds to FÁS Learners by Subject and Level, 2012

Discipline	L1 (NFQ L3)	L2 (NFQ L4)	L3 (NFQ L5)	L5 (NFQ L6/7)	Multi- Level	No Level Assigned	Total Cert. Issued
Business Support Skills	34.6	12.5	-	-	-	-	19.3
Construction and Building	-	-	-	-	-	31.0	1.8
Engineering and Transport	-	4.3	56.8	-	100.0	69.0	9.7
Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy	-	0.9	-	-	-	-	0.4
IT	65.4	75.8	16.0	-	-	-	63.3
Management	-	6.6	21.9	100.0	-	-	5.1
Media and Photography	-	-	5.3	-	-	-	0.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
#	5,752	7,577	731	123	114	896	15,193

Source: City & Guilds Data.

These supply projections are mapped against demand projections generated by a combination of occupational data from the QNHS and sectoral projections from the ESRI *HERMES* model. To project potential FET demand, we begin by identifying occupations from the QNHS that have a vocational labour component. Table 7.3 gives an example of a broad occupation group and the vocational labour occupations included in the group. Of course, depending on the quality of the education and training, some individuals may be accessing occupational groups such as ‘Associate Professionals’. Furthermore, it is also highly likely that individuals with transferable vocational skills will be demanded by employers outside of their specific field of training; thus, the supply figures should be interpreted as potential as opposed to actual supply.

These occupations are then grouped into fields of study that largely match the fields of study used on the supply side.⁸¹ The demand figures by field of study are generated by taking the weight of each occupation/field of study in sectoral employment (from the QNHS) and applying these to the sectoral employment projections from the “Recovery Scenario” contained in the July 2013 *Medium-Term Review* (ESRI). We assume the replacement rate is 3.5 per cent and this rate is constant across fields and time.⁸² The analysis considers both expansion demand and replacement demand.

⁸¹ Details of the grouping approach available from the authors.

⁸² In this context, the replacement rate refers to replacement demand which is labour demand arising through retirements and job changes. The estimate is based on data from the *Survey on Income and Living Conditions* (SILC) for

TABLE 7.3 Examples of Occupations with Vocational Labour Component

	Construction
5315	Carpenters and joiners
5319	Construction and building trades n.e.c.
5314	Plumbers and heating and ventilating engineers
5312	Bricklayers and masons
5321	Plasterers
5330	Construction and building trades supervisors
5316	Glaziers, window fabricators and fitters
5322	Floorers and wall tilers
5313	Roofers, roof tilers and slaters
8149	Construction operatives n.e.c.
8142	Road construction operatives
8141	Scaffolders, staggers and riggers
8221	Crane drivers
3122	Draughtspersons
3121	Architectural and town planning technicians
5323	Painters and decorators
5241	Electricians and electrical fitters
5311	Steel erectors

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS).

Table 7.4 shows the overall demand and supply balance and the balances by field of study.⁸³ Benchmarking the estimated supply against labour demand signals the capacity of the labour market to absorb the FET completers. Skill shortages can adversely impact firm-level performance and so can be costly for the economy. Before discussing the results, it is important to note some of the limitations associated with occupational forecasting. The SOC (Standard Occupational Classification System) codes used in identifying labour demand change at a slower rate than the structure of occupations so we do not have a complete picture of the current structure of some occupations. This will particularly affect more dynamic sectors, such as ICT. For example, the SOC codes in the ICT area are not sufficiently flexible to allow us to include all demand for sub-degree level ICT (e.g., in digital media, gaming development etc.) and so we are likely to understate demand in ICT. As a result, the projections presented should be viewed as broad indicators rather than as forecasts of absolute occupational demand. Overall, the table shows that demand slightly exceeds supply. It is important to note that any imbalances between supply and demand create incentives for other actions to occur. For example, relative wages or the level of migration could change in response to imbalances in the labour market. The table also reveals that imbalances in the labour market are likely to occur at the field of

2010. The comparable estimate from 2006 SILC data is 5.6 per cent, so the estimate of the replacement rate is arguably conservative.

⁸³ It should be noted that the supply in some of the categories, or sub-sets of these categories (e.g., construction), is through the apprenticeship route which in turn is controlled by employer recruitment patterns and, therefore, is not solely controlled by FET providers.

study level. An important caveat here is that not all workers will find themselves in the same occupations as their field of study due to individual preferences or information asymmetries. A crucial point to note is that there are some areas (e.g. manufacturing, construction, and transport and logistics) where there is very little provision. Although there are substantial numbers of construction workers who are currently unemployed there will still be a need for new apprentices as any increase in the level of construction will generate a demand for both experienced and trainee labour. It is important to note that the large volume of provision in areas such as health and education is related to regulatory requirements and that the demand side is strongly affected by the fiscal constraint facing the Government. Of course, if the fiscal constraint were to be relaxed, then factors like population ageing would lead to an increase in demand in the health area. It is also important to note that in the ICT area, in additions to the caveats above, that the demand projections are likely to be an underestimate as it is hard to identify vocational occupations in this area in the QNHS as many of the people who qualify in this area may ultimately find employment in the professional occupations in the QNHS. While there are weaknesses with the methodology; overall, we observe that the distribution of major awards across field of study does not appear to strongly reflect the structure of the vocational labour market.

TABLE 7.4 Potential VET Supply and Demand, Thousands

	Average over Period 2014-2018	
	(Net) Demand	Supply (Major)
Agriculture	0.0	2.3
Business and Administration	8.6	7.9
Civil, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering	2.3	2.4
Construction	12.9	1.3
Craft and Design	0.3	1.2
Education	0.5	8.6
Health	2.5	4.3
Hospitality and Leisure	2.9	2.8
Manufacturing Processing	3.4	0.0
Retail, Personal and Protective Services	4.9	1.1
Science and Computing	0.8	8.1
Transport and Logistics	3.4	0.6

Source: Estimations based on QNHS occupational data and ESRI HERMES sectoral projections.

Despite the fact that there seems to be some imbalances in the labour market, there is evidence to support the fact that those with post-secondary education and training who gain full-time employment are relatively successful in terms of their earning levels. Table 7.5 shows the rates of return to various qualifications for full-time employees who are aged between 25 and 59 years in 2003 and 2006. The table shows that those with a post-secondary qualification earned 19 per cent more than individuals with primary or no formal education in 2003, falling to 14 per cent in 2006. When we break down the economic returns by gender, we can see that the post-secondary wage premium between 2003 and 2006 fell somewhat for females while remaining relatively constant for males.

TABLE 7.5 Rates of Return to Education: 2003 and 2006

	All		Males		Females	
	2003	2006	2003	2006	2003	2006
Educational Attainment (Ref = Primary or Less):						
Junior Certificate	0.060***	0.045***	0.051***	0.074***	0.060***	-0.027*
Leaving Certificate	0.139***	0.103***	0.133***	0.120***	0.140***	0.065***
Post-Secondary	0.191***	0.142***	0.195***	0.177***	0.153***	0.045***
Third-level Non-Degree	0.249***	0.185***	0.250***	0.187***	0.232***	0.153***
Third-level Degree	0.473***	0.347***	0.465***	0.353***	0.455***	0.309***

Source: Reproduced from Benchmarking, Social Partnership and Higher Remuneration: Wage Setting Institutions and the Public-Private Sector Wage Gap in Ireland.⁸⁴

7.3 PROGRESSION

In the last few years, the Government has been emphasising the need for more evidence-based research for effective policymaking. From a FET perspective, this would mean knowing the pathways pursued by FET participants so that the effectiveness of course provision could be evaluated. This evidence could then be used to inform subsequent course design and spending decisions. Given the importance of progression data for evaluating the effectiveness of the FET sector, and the data constraints already discussed, we draw on four separate information sources in this section to provide some information on the destination patterns of FET participants. These four data sources are as follows:

1. Progression data by programme type from the Department of Education and Skills (DES);
2. Principal Economic Status data for newly qualified individuals from the

⁸⁴ Kelly, E., S., McGuinness and P.J. O'Connell (2009). "Benchmarking, Social Partnership and Higher Remuneration: Wage Setting Institutions and the Public-Private Sector Wage Gap in Ireland", *The Economic and Social Review* 40 (3): 339-370.

Central Statistic Office's QNHS;⁸⁵

3. Data on the destinations of FETAC award holders compiled by QQI, which was facilitated by the Central Statistics Office;
4. Post-programme outcome information from a follow-up survey of FÁS course participants.

There are, however, important caveats associated with each of the data sources. In relation to the DES national statistics, while it is possible to assess the destinations of FET participants by programme type, there are a lot of 'unknowns' (see Tables 7.6 and 7.7). In addition, no progression data exists for Community Education. In relation to the QNHS data, it is not possible to identify the exact nature of the post-secondary qualification held (e.g. PLC, FÁS course, apprenticeship etc.). Furthermore, it is not possible to separately identify third-level from continuous FET from the QNHS's education progression data. Regarding QQI data, information only exists for FETAC major award learners and is confined to a single year of reference. Thus, FET participants that pursued their course through another awarding body are not captured in the QQI data. In addition, the QQI data were derived through an administrative data-matching exercise⁸⁶ and the categories of learner outcomes were not made to be mutually exclusive. Thus, within the QQI data, for example, an FET participant could be simultaneously classified as both 'employed' and 'in Higher Education'. Finally, FÁS post-programme data are based on a survey of participants as opposed to the full population; thus, the pathways pursued by the sample may not be completely representative of all FÁS course participants. All these data limitations should be borne in mind when assessing the progression outcomes of FET participants that are discussed next.

(i) DES Data

The DES national progression data, which is for FET learners that completed their courses in 2012, is the most comprehensive of the four data sources used in this section, as it gives a break-down of destinations by programme type.⁸⁷ However, as mentioned in the Introduction, there are a significant number of unknowns. In relation to the labour market related programmes provided by VECs, PLCs have the highest rate of unknowns (45 per cent), while the percentage of unknowns

⁸⁵ The Higher Education Authority (HEA) has data on FETAC entrants to Higher Education (HE), but this data is not comparable to the data sources used in this chapter as the HEA data only contains information on FETAC recipients, and not individuals from other components of the FET sector. In addition, the HEA data is only on FETAC individuals that pursue HE but not on the pathways followed by the other FETAC/FET participants.

⁸⁶ The data sources used in this data matching exercise were as follows: HEA Student Record System, FETAC awards database, Department of Revenue income data (P35 data), Department of Social Protection client records, CSO Business Register, and Income Tax returns to Revenue (Form 11).

⁸⁷ Apart from Community Education.

for all of the non-labour market courses is above 50 per cent. Given this issue, the progression information presented in Tables 7.6 and 7.7 is based on calculations that exclude the unknowns and is, thus, subject to error.

Focusing firstly on the outcomes of those that undertook a full-time labour market related course (Table 6.1), Youthreach and VTOS learners pursued similar progression pathways in 2012. Unemployment was the most common outcome (28-29 per cent), followed by progression to a PLC course (20 per cent) and employment (18-19 per cent).⁸⁸ The main variation between these two learner groups was in relation to Higher Education (HE) with 20 per cent of VTOS participants pursuing HE compared to only 2 per cent of Youthreach completers. However, given that a Leaving Certificate (or Level 5 course) is required to participate in HE, it is not surprising that such a small proportion of Youthreach individuals go directly into HE. Youthreach learners appear to undertake 'Other Further Education' and 'Other Training' courses instead (20 and 5 per cent respectively). Of VTOS learners 8 per cent also transitioned to a Community Employment (CE)/Rural Social Scheme (RSS)/Back to Work Allowance (BTWA) programme. The main progression pathways of PLC learners in 2012 were to another PLC course (27 per cent), employment (25 per cent) and Higher Education (24 per cent). A further 9 per cent undertook a FÁS training/CERT/apprenticeship course, while 15 per cent transitioned to unemployment.

TABLE 7.6 Progression Pathways of 2012 Full-time FET Learners

	Youthreach	VTOS	PLC
Employment	17.8	16.6	25.2
Self-Employment	0.0	1.9	0.0
Unemployment	28.1	29.0	14.8
Higher Education	2.2	20.0	24.4
PLC	20.4	20.1	26.6
BTEI / Continuing BTEI	1.3	0.0	0.0
VTOS	0.0	0.0	0.0
FÁS training /CERT / Apprenticeship	5.7	4.4	9.0
Other Further Education	19.9	0.0	0.0
Other Training	4.5	-	-
CE/RSS/BTWA ¹	-	7.9	-
Group Literacy	0.0	0.0	0.0
Remained at Current Level	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Unknown	12.2	8.8	44.9

Note: ¹CE is Community Employment, RSS is the Rural Social Scheme and BTWA is the Back to Work Allowance.

Source: Constructed using progression data provided by the DES.

⁸⁸ With self-employment included.

TABLE 7.7 Progression Pathways of 2012 Part-time FET Learners

	BTEI	Adult Literacy	ESOL
Employment	8.6	3.1	2.6
Self-Employment	0.0	0.0	0.0
Unemployment	0.0	0.0	0.0
Higher Education	1.2	0.0	0.0
PLC	0.0	0.0	0.0
BTEI / Continuing BTEI	76.1	6.9	11.9
VTOS	0.0	1.2	1.1
FÁS training/CERT/Apprenticeship	0.8	1.5	0.1
Other Further Education	13.3	0.0	0.0
Group Literacy	0.0	25.3	22.0
Remained at Current Level	0.0	62.0	62.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Unknown	50.9	67.7	76.6

Source: Constructed using progression data provided by the DES.

In relation to the outcomes for part-time participants (Table 7.7), 62 per cent of ESOL⁸⁹ and Adult Literacy learners maintained their 2011 status in 2012, with 76 per cent of BTEI learners doing likewise. At 9 per cent, the BTEI had the highest number that progressed to employment, with 3 per cent of Adult Literacy and ESOL learners moving into work. For Adult Literacy and ESOL participants that did maintain their current status, Group Literacy and BTEI were the main pathways pursued.

(ii) QNHS Data

In the QNHS microdata, we can examine the principal economic status (PES) of individuals one year after they completed their highest level of education. The PES categories are: i) employed, ii) looking for first regular job, iii) unemployed, iv) student and v) other. In Table 7.8, we present this information for three educational groups: i) upper secondary, ii) post-secondary and iii) ordinary degree holders, and for two time points: i) 2006, which was just prior to the economic downturn, and ii) 2012, which was when the economy had begun to recover from the recession. In the QNHS data, individuals that pursue and obtain an FET award are classified in the educational attainment data as having a post-secondary qualification. Unfortunately, as was mentioned earlier, we cannot distinguish between the type of FET award obtained (e.g., PLC, apprenticeship, major, minor, etc.). In addition, we cannot separate out the exact education pathway pursued by FET individuals on completion of their post-secondary qualification, whether it was third-level or another FE or training course, from the

⁸⁹ English for Speakers of Other Languages.

PES education category (referred to as 'student' in Table 7.8). However, the advantages of the QNHS data are that it allows us to compare the PES outcomes for FET learners with other qualification holders. In addition, we can examine the outcomes for different educational attainment groups over the business cycle.

Prior to the recession, 70 per cent of FET individuals who obtained their qualification in 2005 were in employment the following year (Table 7.8). This compares with 57 per cent of newly qualified Ordinary Degree holders and 29 per cent of those with an Upper Secondary qualification. However, a higher proportion of FET individuals were also unemployed in 2006: 9 per cent compared to 3 per cent of those with an Upper Secondary qualification and 2 per cent of Ordinary Degree holders. Compared to the two other educational attainment groups, a smaller proportion of FET individuals had progressed to education/training in 2006: 12 per cent compared to 61 per cent of Upper Secondary individuals and 26 per cent of Ordinary Degree holders. Since the recession, the follow-on pathways of newly qualified FET individuals have become somewhat bleak. In 2012, 19 per cent of those that qualified in 2011 were unemployed compared to 8 per cent of Upper Secondary education holders and 13 per cent of Ordinary Degree individuals. Of FET individuals 43 per cent were in employment in 2012, which compares favourably with the Upper Secondary group (12 per cent) but not with Ordinary Degree holders (57 per cent). With the recession, and the lack of job opportunities that this situation entails, only 22 per cent of FET individuals took the decision to pursue education/training on completion of their course. This percentage is similar to Ordinary Degree holders (23 per cent), but is much lower than Upper Secondary individuals (71 per cent).

TABLE 7.8 Principal Economic Status of Newly Qualified Individuals: 2006 and 2012

	Upper Secondary		Post Secondary		Ordinary Degree	
	2006	2012	2006	2012	2006	2012
Principal Economic Status:						
Employed	28.9	12.0	70.0	42.9	63.2	56.6
Looking for First Regular Job	3.1	5.9	1.8	3.1	2.1	3.8
Unemployed	3.4	8.1	9.1	19.1	2.4	12.9
Student	61.2	70.9	11.5	22.2	25.8	22.8
Other	3.4	3.1	7.7	12.7	6.5	4.0
Total	50,520	47,540	17,047	31,585	22,811	25,074

Note: In the QNHS data, FET individuals would be classified as having a Post Secondary qualification.

Source: Constructed using QNHS Quarter 2 microdata.

(iii) QQI Data

Given the lack of data on the pathways pursued by FET learners, in early 2013 the QQI, enabled by the Central Statistics Office, undertook a data exploration exercise to identify if this gap could be filled through the linking of various administrative data sources. It is the findings from this piece of work that are presented in this Section. It should be noted, however, that progression outcomes within the QQI data are not mutually exclusive, i.e., individuals can be recorded in more than one future outcome category.

According to the QQI data (Table 7.9), of the 28,241 FETAC major award recipients in 2009 over half (56 per cent) progressed to employment at some point in 2010, while almost a quarter (24 per cent) were recorded as being unemployed. Nearly 40 per cent received education at some time point in 2010, with 18 per cent present in Higher Education and 21 per cent in Further Education (specifically FETAC). Just over a quarter of FETAC major award recipients in 2009 recorded no activity in the administrative data records that were evaluated in the construction of the QQI progression data. Some of these may have emigrated.

TABLE 7.9 Destinations of 2009 FETAC Major Award Holders

From FETAC 2009:	To HEA 2009/10	To FETAC 2010	To Employment 2010	To Unemployment 2010	To Self-Employment 2010	Not Recorded
28,241	5,079	5,852	15,918	6,780	683	7,457
100%	18%	21%	56%	24%	2%	26%

Note: Destinations are not mutually exclusive.

Source: Reproduced from "Where Do FETAC (QQI) Award Holders Go?", QQI Working Paper 2013-1 (P.10).

(iv) FÁS Data

Approximately every two years, FÁS commission independent researchers to carry out a follow-up survey of its training and employment programme participants to identify their post-programme pathways.⁹⁰ It should be noted that the vast majority of FÁS training provision is targeted at the unemployed and this should be borne in mind when considering progression patterns. The most recent survey covered a sample of FÁS learners that completed their course during the summer of 2010⁹¹ and identified their position 13-18 months later.⁹² Of this

⁹⁰ The survey covers all of the FÁS full-time training programmes, the Community Employment programme, the Work Placement Programme and Blended Learning. A separate survey of participants on FÁS's Specialist Training Programmes is also undertaken.

⁹¹ The response rate for the survey was 34 per cent. The sample (1,397) was then reweighted to make it representative of the course population that completed their course during the summer of 2010 (21,723).

cohort, 46 per cent were unemployed 13-18 months later, 30 per cent were employed (17 per cent full-time and 13 per cent part-time), 22 per cent were in further education/training, while 2 per cent were in home duties (FÁS, 2012).⁹³ Of all the full-time training courses, Short Specific Skills training had the highest unemployment rate (53 per cent), while the Traineeship course had the lowest rate (29 per cent). The Traineeship courses also had the highest employment rate (51 per cent), while the Bridging/Foundation programme had the lowest (18 per cent). Of the other FÁS-provided courses, Community Employment had the lowest employment rate (16 per cent) while the Work Placement Programme had the highest (52 per cent). Community Employment also had the highest unemployment rate (46 per cent) and the Work Placement Programme the lowest (24 per cent). While the most recent follow-up survey for 2010 indicates that 46 per cent of FÁS course participants were unemployed 13-18 months after they completed their course, the proportion of FÁS learners that were unemployed just prior to the recession (2006/7) was still quite high at 22 per cent. The proportion employed was also higher during that time point at 48 per cent compared to 30 per cent in 2011 (FÁS, 2013).

7.4 STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON LABOUR MARKET ALIGNMENT

Section 7.2 has shown a mismatch between FET supply and labour market demand in certain fields. In the in-depth interviews, stakeholders were asked about their perceptions of the extent to which FET provision was aligned with skill needs in the labour market. Most felt that current provision was aligned only 'to some extent' with labour market needs at the national and local levels. Increasing the alignment with employer requirements was seen as a policy priority for the FET sector:

Building links with employment and I think building links with employers ... is the single, biggest challenge. (Statutory department/body.)

Representatives of the employer group felt that employability in the form of specific skill acquisition was a key requirement:

What we would be looking from the FET systems is people who are employable from the word go. (Employer group.)

In addition, many emphasised the need for workers to possess generic as well as specific vocational skills:

⁹² A follow-up survey relating to 2012 has been completed but the results were not published at the time of this report.

⁹³ FÁS (2012). *2011 Follow-Up Survey of FÁS Participants*. Dublin: FÁS.

Those [generic] skills are the sort of things that will equip people to adapt as the economy changes, as well as just training them for specific vocational positions. (Employer group.)

Interestingly, stakeholders did not explicitly refer to the relative balance between firm-specific and more transferable specialist skills, though this issue may be important in planning the content of provision and could usefully form the basis for further research.

The vast majority of stakeholders interviewed felt that there should be a stronger relationship between provision and employer requirements:

Employers are the end users of further education and training, that's the reality, and we must, I think, plan everything around that and I think unfortunately employers are not involved in the process to the same degree that they should be. (Other provider group.)

It [provision] does need to be linked to the labour market. So, we have a lot of work to do to ensure that we're linked to what employers are looking for ... and where the opportunities are. ... At least if the opportunities for employment are there, then we need to be offering the training that will link them to it. (State provider group.)

Several stakeholders emphasised that such a planning process should reflect not only immediate skill requirements but should incorporate an analysis of medium- and long-term labour market needs:

The number of places ... should be based on where the jobs are going to be, where they are now, where they're going to be longer term. (Employer group.)

We're keen to see an alignment between the skills of job seekers and the needs of business ... not just the short-term needs of industry, I think it's really essential that there's long-term planning involved. (Employer group)

7.4.1 Orientation to National or Local Skill Requirements

There were some differences among stakeholders in views concerning the level at which such needs should be best determined. One group felt that provision should reflect the complex interplay between local, regional and national needs:

We have to be tied into a national agenda ... [but] we still have to be very cognisant of what's happening at a local level. (State provider group.)

It has to be a far more strategic response to the demographics, social and economic needs, regional priorities ... global markets ... some sort of taking a steer in terms of the overall dialogue with industry ... research into the needs ... it can't be passive, has to be proactive, has to be national and regional and local and global all interacting. (Other provider group.)

The national should be relevant to local need, they are not mutually exclusive. (Statutory department/body.)

Other stakeholders felt that national rather than local labour market requirements should be the key driver of provision:

If it's right at national level, then people will be able to localise it. (Other provider group.)

In this way, national-level analysis of future skill needs could lead to the development of national targets which then could be implemented at local level:

I think you could do that at a national level ... over the next five years we need to be producing people with qualifications, say in IT at a minimum of level six, at least three areas in level six and we need X of them or a thousand places to be provided nationally and from that work it down through your strategy and then say okay and look up where the major hopes for those employment opportunities are going to be. Is it that they're around Dublin, Cork, wherever it might be? And then to the ETBs delivering it say well okay you know, these are the demands and then we project from the overall national demand, X is going to be required in your area. (State provider group.)

Another group of stakeholders argued for prioritising local labour market needs, arguing that the diversity in employment profiles between regions meant that a 'one size fits all' approach could not be adopted:

If you are talking about pharmaceutical industries and biopharmaceutical industries, say, ... you would want ... the Cork Educational and Training Board. If you are talking about medical devices, then Galway is the big place for medical devices. (Statutory department/body.)

I think local level is more important than the national level. ... Everybody would like to do a web design course but there are no jobs for web design in Donegal. (Other provider group.)

Some of the differences in view reflected expectations regarding the mobility of workers. For some, FET provision was seen as fostering the development of the local labour market, operating to retain employment within the local area:

In a particular area there are particular companies that are taking on employees so it's appropriate that the FE domain responds to those local demands. ... And if you have a bland national decision about, you know, we need so many jobs in IT and there is no particular way for people in a local area to access those job opportunities ... You're saying to people yeah we will train you in something that will make sure that you never work in this area, in this local area where you grew up and belong. (State provider group.)

In contrast, others highlighted the fact that it might not be practical to provide specialised skills in every local area and some allowance would have to be made for worker mobility:

If you got an intake of fifty or sixty kids into a programme, there's not fifty or sixty jobs locally. You know, your best bet is to, you know, kind of almost acknowledge the fact they will be migrating, in Ireland or outside. (Statutory department/body.)

The relative balance between local and national levels may also reflect the diversity of the learner group, with age operating as a factor in potential mobility for employment:

There should be a kind of national perspective because training, particularly for younger participants, there is a willingness to be mobile. After a certain point, particularly people who were made unemployed ... and who are, say, older, you are going to have to be very clued into the regional employment opportunity. (Statutory department/body.)

Lack of systematic data was seen as a crucial barrier to aligning provision with labour market needs (see Chapter 4). A lack of flexibility in provision was also seen as a significant constraint on developing FET courses in new fields and on dropping courses which were no longer relevant (see Chapter 4).

7.4.2 Employer Engagement

Employer engagement was seen by stakeholders as vital in ensuring an alignment between provision and labour market needs. A significant group of stakeholders felt that employers were at best only engaged 'to some degree' in providing placements for students and providing training for existing workers.

It's very hard to get work placements. (State provider.)

Levels of employer engagement in providing input into the nature and content of courses was seen as even lower, reflecting the lack of structures in place to ask for their input: 'they're very, very seldom asked' (Other provider group.)

There is no opportunity for them [employers] to start making comments; programme content is either preset by the Department or by the FETAC modules. So if it's not in the module the learners don't get to avail of it. (Community education group.)

It was recognised that there was often effective liaison with employers in particular local areas but such engagement tended to be based on informal relationships rather than formalised structures:

There's pockets of brilliance in different areas. But it is very much, you know, somebody in the provider side and somebody in the employment side getting together. Once it's built up and that relationship is built up it seems to work really, really well. (Employer group.)

Most FE colleges would have some way of making sure that teachers on a course are engaged through the work place, the work experience part of their programmes, so they're in and out to employers all the time talking. But it's not formalised and sometimes then the information that's caught is caught for that particular area in that particular college at that particular time. It doesn't extend, the learning isn't extended and then there are other colleges where they don't do that, that much at all. So I'd say it's patchy. (State provider group.)

In discussing employer engagement, there was widespread recognition of the diversity among employers in their contact with the FET sector and involvement in training their own workers. One employer representative usefully distinguished between three groups of employers: 'those who ... understand the value of skills and are prepared to invest in it', 'the second group who try ... they'd like to but they don't know how to engage' and 'small companies ... a lot of them are hanging on by their fingertips ... they're not interested in all this stuff'. (Employer group.)

A particularly important distinction was drawn between small and medium-sized enterprises and larger employers. The lack of specialist human resources staff within SMEs was seen as a constraint on their engaging in placements and training:

They're very thinly resourced so they tend not to have big learning departments or training departments and so on you can interact with. (Employer group.)

Smaller companies don't have the resources . and they don't see it as their job. (Employer group.)

SMEs were also seen as having less of a voice when it came to the national or regional determination of skill development:

They're the ones that ... can't lobby a university and say you know we want a programme on X okay. (Employer group.)

Smaller companies were considered to have greater difficulties in releasing employees to engage in training:

Small companies just don't have the flexibility to allow people to disappear for days on end. (Employer group.)

This was seen, in part, as reflecting a mismatch in expectations between employers and providers as to the kind of training that is appropriate:

In principle they're [employers are] engaged but they are not prepared to release people for seven days to do a small piece of learning they really feel should be happening in two days. (Other provider group.)

Employers themselves reported that in many instances there was a disparity between the kind of provision on offer and their own skill requirements; courses could require the release of workers for a protracted period of time whereas they often wanted 'something sort and sharp to get you up to a certain level' (Employer group.)

In spite of specific difficulties for SMEs, certain barriers were seen as applying to a wide range of employers. These obstacles centred on lack of time and resources:

Time is the big thing; companies don't have time for this stuff. (Employer group.)

An additional difficulty related to lack of employer awareness of the nature and value of FET ('a lack of familiarity with the system', Employer group) and its relevance for their business:

I think a lot of employers just don't see any need to be engaged. ... How do you get employers engaged when they really, not only do they maybe not see any point to it, maybe fearful of it, that if they put in the investment they'll lose the staff and possibly to their competitor. (Statutory department/body.)

The absence of structures for employers to have an input into the nature and content of provision was seen as an impediment to their involvement:

The structures are local and regional level aren't really there ... they're not systematised to ... a sufficient extent. Employers are just busy ... I think it's a big part, we don't necessarily make it easy for them to ... engage either and obviously particularly in the SME sector, it's very difficult. (Statutory department/body.)

Where there are established mechanisms for structured engagement by employers, employers are highly engaged. Where they are absent, they are not. (Statutory department/body.)

Lack of understanding between the two groups, providers and employers, was identified as a potential barrier:

I think there's perception within the traditional FET sector of employers that they don't want to engage. ... On the other hand, I think there's a perception on the employers' side that what a lot of what the FET sector is doing isn't for them, isn't work related, is wasteful ... I think there's sort of strong views on both sides. (Other provider group.)

Employers ... wouldn't necessarily see it [FET] as something that's there to support them. (Other provider group.)

They [employers] only provided work placements or whatever if there is something in it for them, if we as the providers are providing the skills they actually need, but we are not going to be able to do that unless there is kind of meaningful engagement. (Statutory department/body.)

Stakeholders offered varied suggestions for better engaging employers with FET provision. A key feature was the need to be user-friendly and to emphasise the value of engagement for employers themselves.

You've got to make it as easy as you possibly can; it's more likely to happen at a regional level. (Employer group.)

It's around understanding the needs of the employers, particularly SMEs, and reaching out to them and involving them in recruitment, running the courses, designing the courses and so on. (Employer group.)

Thus, stakeholders considered that employers often need to be convinced of the value of training for their particular enterprise:

In fairness to them there has to be something in it for them so a trained worker with a recognised standard, recognised high standard of training, is a far better, more valuable entity to them than not. Plus it relieves them of the necessity to have the in-house training and so on, so if they start to build confidence in that piece. (Employer group.)

They [employers] are totally unconvinced of the relevance of it [training].
(Community education group.)

Critical, I think, in employer engagement is helping them to understand, if you like, what's in it for them. (Other provider group.)

Employers will only engage when they see this is of benefit to them. The benefit to them is that we are providing them with employees or potential employees who have the skills they need. (Statutory department/body.)

Engagement was seen as requiring more than consultation in that employers need to be involved in designing course content to really engage with FET:

It's not enough simply to ask employers what skills provision do you think you'll need either for your employees or for people that you might hire in the future or whatever. You have to actually go further, if you really want them to engage, you've got to go further than that and actually get them involved in critiquing the content. ... At the point in which you engage with employers and get them critiquing and, you know, involved in the composition of it, you actually sign, get them signed up for work placements then. (Other provider group.)

Stakeholders saw a place for consultation with employers at the national or sectoral level, for example, through sectoral skills councils:

There is an onus on us to establish proper forums, in which employers can articulate, their views. And which we can challenge them on that and then in which we can engage. (Statutory department/body.)

However, most stakeholders saw local level engagement as key in developing links with employers and thus responding to labour market needs.

There should be people within the management structures of any FET body whose remit is connecting with employers as opposed it being just some add-on optional extra. (Other provider group.)

There has to be consultation at that regional level, to make sure that the skills needs are identified and to make sure that the courses are relevant enough and rigorous enough, to give people the skills necessary to ... the places that are available. (Employer group.)

We can have a fairly good match at national level ... The reality is that we need effective systems at local level. (Statutory department/body.)

Different forms of local contact were suggested, with some stakeholders seeing a potential role for the local Chamber of Commerce and others seeing the ETBs as playing the central role in employer engagement at local level:

We need more industry representatives on the ETB boards. (Statutory department/body.)

Such contact would require 'an input from employers on a regular basis and not just, you know, we'll set the curriculum at the beginning and then it'll run forever and a day. ... You can't just do a one off thing' (Other provider group.)

7.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter, we began by examining the alignment between further education and training provision and the needs of the labour market. As indicated in Chapter 3, meeting labour market needs is seen as a central objective of the FET sector. This analysis concluded that mismatches exist between supply and demand in certain vocational fields. In spite of the existence of such imbalances, an examination of earnings data showed that those with a post-secondary education and training qualification who gain full-time employment do relatively well. Specifically, in both 2003 and 2006 such individuals were found to earn more than those with second-level qualifications. Unfortunately, it is not feasible to draw firm conclusions concerning the progression pathways of FET participants as no single data source exists that tracks their future outcomes.

Reflecting the quantitative findings, stakeholders felt that current FET provision was aligned with the labour market only to some extent. The importance of aligning provision with national skill requirements was emphasised but at the same time the capacity to respond to regional or local labour market needs was seen as important. Employer engagement was viewed as crucial in ensuring an alignment between FET provision and labour market needs whether at local or national level. The system was seen as currently lacking the formal structures to involve employers, especially in providing an input into the nature and content of courses, relying instead on good practice developed on an informal level. Stakeholders pointed to considerable potential to better involve employers in the FET sector but identified a number of barriers, especially for SMEs.

Chapter 8

Irish FET in an International Context

International comparative research is an important tool for informing policy in FET provision. Comparative research on the relationship between education, training and the labour market has tended to focus on two aspects of education/training systems: standardisation (the extent to which curricula, assessment and certification are nationally or regionally standardised) and track differentiation (the division between vocational and academic/general tracks) (Allmendinger, 1989; Maurice *et al.*, 1986; Müller and Shavit, 1998). Later research has identified other dimensions which should be considered, including the extent to which the system leads to occupationally specific skills, the nature of linkages with employers and the role of labour market regulation (Smyth *et al.*, 2001). These different dimensions of the framework have been found to interact to produce clusters of national systems. A broad continuum of European systems is evident, ranging from countries with high standardisation, strong track differentiation and strong linkages between education and the labour market (for example, Germany and the Netherlands) to countries with equally high standardisation but much weaker track differentiation and school to work linkages (for example, Scotland, albeit with strong market signals in terms of educational qualifications) (Smyth *et al.*, 2001). From this perspective, Ireland can be characterised as a system which has high standardisation but less differentiation into academic or vocational tracks; qualifications in terms of levels and grades are found to act as a strong signal to employers within the Irish labour market. It should also be noted, however, that different parts of an education/training system may have different characteristics. This characterisation of the Irish system can be regarded as largely reflecting the nature of school-based education.

In terms of the existing international evidence, for the most part, differentiation into academic/general and vocational tracks occurs within upper secondary and/or post-secondary non-tertiary levels, although in some countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands, the allocation of learners into different tracks occurs at a much earlier stage. At upper secondary level, vocational qualifications can be obtained through different institutional settings, with dual system arrangements in Austria and Germany and school-based training in the Netherlands and Finland (Müller and Gangl, 2003). Across most European

countries,⁹⁴ those with higher level educational qualifications have much lower rates of unemployment; over and above the effect of educational level, vocational training contributes to lower unemployment risks, especially in labour market systems which are organised around specific occupational skills (Müller and Gangl, 2003). These patterns reflect the way in which vocational training provides more applied skills and offers more concrete pathways into employment, speeding up the transition from education to work (see also CEDEFOP, 2013). Until recently, comparative research focused on Western European countries as well as highly developed industrialised countries such as the United States and Japan.

Nevertheless, the research highlights the importance of caution in assuming that particular forms of education and training will have the same consequences across different systems. The implications echo the arguments of commentators who criticise the notion of ‘policy borrowing’, in which international best practice is identified and then transplanted into the local context. Instead, observers highlight the value of a ‘policy learning’ paradigm, using international evidence not for a quick-fix solution but to inform thinking about policy development in the specific national context, looking at how good rather than best practice varies by context, time and place (Raffe, 2011). In the remainder of this section, we draw on country reports on Australia, Germany, the Netherlands and Scotland to identify issues which may inform policy learning in the Irish context. These countries were chosen due to the availability of established literature and expertise in each country. In addition, Germany, Denmark and Australia are acknowledged as areas of best practice in VET while the Scottish FET sector has many similarities with FET in Ireland. The reports were commissioned from leading experts on FET provision in each country. Following on from the preliminary findings and emerging issues regarding FET provision in Ireland, the international experts were asked to provide brief descriptions of their sectors in terms of the underlying rationale, governance structure, funding arrangements, planning, monitoring, the data infrastructure etc. While each expert will not have been in a position to provide detail on each component of provision, the reports facilitated a comparative analysis under a number of key headings of relevance to the Irish FET sector. The key results from the country reports are synthesised under the main headings below.

⁹⁴ The relationship between educational qualifications and labour market outcomes is found to be more complex in Southern European countries (Müller and Gangl, 2003).

8.1 UNDERLYING STRUCTURE AND RATIONALE

There has never existed a clear definition of FET in Ireland,⁹⁵ nor has any specific rationale underlying FET provision been articulated. Irish FET provision currently seeks to cater for the needs of school leavers, employees, firms, the unemployed and those on the margins of society without any clear mission objective relating to any particular component of provision. In terms of its purpose, Irish provision appears similar to the Scottish FET system which is also more diverse, combining occupationally-specific vocational education with an additional focus on raising educational standards among poorly qualified adults. In contrast, the underlying objectives of the Dutch, Australian and German FET systems are very much focused on preparing individuals for work in specific vocational occupations. We now briefly describe the underlying structures and objectives of FET provision in each of the comparator countries.

Within German, Australian and Dutch systems, the emphasis and underlying rationale is very much on vocational education and training (VET),⁹⁶ with specialist colleges focused on providing occupationally-specific education. In both Germany and the Netherlands, students are tracked into vocational tracks in lower secondary school, while in Scotland and Australia individuals choose their pathway on leaving secondary education. In Germany, post-secondary school based vocational education takes place in vocational schools which can be categorised as *Berufsfachschule*, *Fachoberschule* and *Berufsoberschule*, which provide vocational education to specific competency levels⁹⁷. In the Netherlands post-secondary vocational education is provided in vocational (MBO) colleges with programmes taken on one of two formats that are distinguished depending on the extent of classroom-based learning.⁹⁸ In Australia, post-school VET education takes place primarily in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges. VET education in Australia maintains a strong emphasis on apprenticeship. In contrast, in Scotland provision is delivered through colleges of further education, with a somewhat broader focus than VET. In Scotland, the main priorities and rationale of provision are to promote economic growth and development and to address social exclusion arising from economic inactivity. In all four comparator countries, progression routes to further and higher vocational

⁹⁵ The term is relatively new in Ireland, only in use since the 1990s.

⁹⁶ VET is a distinct sector from FET in Germany.

⁹⁷ *Berufsfachschule* offer training in a range of occupations and generally require students to have a low or medium level school diploma. *Fachoberschule* requires a medium level diploma as an entry pre-requisite, with vocational programmes providing a platform for entry to the University of Applied Sciences. *Berufsoberschule* are higher vocational schools which enable individuals who have completed training in the dual system to obtain a higher education entrance qualification.

⁹⁸ MBO-BOL courses are school based with practical training taking up between 20 per cent and 60 per cent the course. MBO-BLL courses are work based with practical training taking up more than 60 per cent the course.

study appear well defined.⁹⁹ Notwithstanding all of the above, Germany is exceptional as, unlike the Netherlands, Australia and Scotland, the vast majority of VET provision is not predominantly school based, i.e., around two-thirds of German school leavers undergo training in the dual system for between 2 and 3 years. Under the dual system, training is carried out simultaneously in the workplace and in a vocational school (Berufsschule) with successful completers immediately able to begin work in one of 350 recognised occupations.

In summary, both Germany and the Netherlands stream individuals for vocational and academic pathways within the secondary education system, whereas in Australia, Scotland and Ireland individuals choose their pathways on leaving school. The German VET system is heavily focused around the dual system, whereas the emphasis in the UK and Ireland, and to a lesser extent the Netherlands and Australia, is more centred towards school-based VET. In terms of the underlying rationale for FET, the link between VET and the labour market is heavily emphasised in Germany, Australia and the Netherlands, while the Scottish and Irish systems tend to stress the importance of both economic development and social inclusion.

8.2 GOVERNANCE

Within the Irish system, financial allocations were made to the VECs on the basis of the financial year, to cover pay and non-pay costs, and were paid as a block grant from the Department of Education and Skills (DES). VECs were given a high level of autonomy in the management and appropriation of their budgets in line with their individual priorities. Similarly, Ireland's former training agency FÁS operated in a largely independent fashion with its budget set annually by central government. The situation has been transformed by recent legislation under which the new training agency, SOLAS, will have overall strategic responsibility for all aspects of FET provision, which includes the former VECs and FÁS training centres, both of which have now been amalgamated into ETBs. Nevertheless, governance arrangements have yet to evolve and seem somewhat unclear as the ETBs have been constituted as statutory authorities, which seem to suggest some continued level of autonomy. Thus, Ireland's governance structure could be characterised as one that is moving away from a highly decentralised system of governance towards a more layered approach, the parameters of which have yet to be defined.

⁹⁹ In the case of Germany, it is important to note that access to traditional universities is limited to those who took the Abitur in Gymnasias. Those in *Fachoberschulen* can take a qualification which allows them access to *Fachhochschulen* but not traditional universities.

The previously decentralised model that was prevalent in Ireland is in contrast to the German system under which the Federal Government has responsibility for firm-based vocational training and further vocational education, while the federal states (Lander) control school-based vocational training. With respect to the dual system, which encompasses both firm- and school-based training, the federal government and the Lander set and agree fundamental principles, training rules and regulations for providers involved in dual provision. This shared responsibility for dual-based training is overseen by a Co-ordinating Committee for Vocational Education and Training¹⁰⁰ which, in addition to oversight, undertakes roles such as the re-structuring of occupations requiring training and harmonising training regulations and curricula.

In the Netherlands, the governance of vocational MBO programmes combines both centralised and decentralised elements. National authorities¹⁰¹ determine the content of programmes and have also responsibility for monitoring the quality of programme delivery.¹⁰² However, so as to ensure a better match between provision and regional labour market conditions, the Dutch VET (MBO) schools have a large amount of autonomy in determining the programmes they offer. Furthermore, the MBO schools also have full autonomy with regard to budget allocation.

In Australia, the governments of the States and Territories have responsibility for VET; however, the Commonwealth government also influences provision through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).¹⁰³ In 2011 the COAG standing council on Territory Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE) was established and given the responsibility for high level skills and employment policy development for the national territories. SCOTESE also has responsibility for VET education and workforce development.

Finally, in Scotland, the overall responsibility for VET policy development lies with the Directorate for Employability, Skills and Lifelong Learning, while Skills Development Scotland (SDS) have specific responsibility for Modern Apprenticeships. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is an “arms length” body that oversees both the universities and colleges. In addition to regional bodies, the UK Commission of Employment and Skills provides strategic leadership in the

¹⁰⁰ This was established in 1972.

¹⁰¹ Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

¹⁰² Carried out by the Education Inspectorate which is part of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

¹⁰³ The COAG consists of representatives from the Australian Commonwealth government, the state territories, trade unions and employers.

area of skills development, primarily through a labour market intelligence function. Finally, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), which cover a range of occupations and operate at a UK wide level, have responsibility for defining occupational standards and developing a range of Modern Apprenticeships.

In summary, it would seem that Irish FET governance structures have historically been highly decentralised relative to any of the comparator countries. Both the VECs and FÁS have largely had autonomy with respect to the composition and nature of provision with little strategic direction coming from national authorities. The establishment of SOLAS and its strategic and oversight function has the capacity to change governance structures more in line with international norms; however, it remains unclear exactly how the governance function of SOLAS will materialise at an operational level.

8.3 PLANNING

From the earlier research and consistent with the view of a decentralised governance model, it is apparent that Irish FET provision has evolved in a largely organic fashion with little evidence of planning or direction at a centralised level. Nevertheless, in general, the planning of provision in our comparator countries appears not to be highly specific. Rather, national authorities tend to issue broad guidance on areas of provision with providers having some degree of autonomy with respect to their own delivery plans. For instance, in Germany, the role of the State is largely restricted to laying down the principals that underpin provision and developing regulations relating to financing and the organisation of provision. The general rationale for the less prescriptive planning approach is that the rapidly changing needs of individuals and firms can best be met by a diverse and competitive training provider network. Nevertheless, it should also be stated that the predominance of the dual system in itself ensures that provision is appropriately aligned with the needs of the labour market, thus reducing the need for a more prescriptive approach; furthermore, all programmes are set up with the involvement of employers and final examinations follow clearly defined standards. The situation in Scotland is somewhat similar in that it combines general national planning principals with autonomous local provision. The Scottish government provides only broad policy guidance in the form of annual letters to both the SFC and SDS. Both the SFC and the SDS share a skills committee which facilitates strategic co-ordination between school and work based provision. On the basis that regions form the most appropriate unit for planning FET provision, the number of Scottish colleges has been reduced, through a series of amalgamations, from 40 colleges to approximately one for

each of the thirteen regions.¹⁰⁴ Regarding Australia, as stated, at the national level, SCOTese has high level responsibility for VET policy; however, once again, the focus appears to be on providing high-level guidance. For instance, in 2013, SCOTese published its National Workforce Planning and Regional Development Report which articulates “...ten best practice principles” and a “...best practice framework” and “...provides a valuable resource to help workforce planning and development stakeholders and practitioners turn widespread but fragmented goodwill into best practice”. Finally, the Dutch approach to planning is perhaps the most regularised. In the Netherlands new qualifications are developed at a national level in cooperation with representatives of employer associations by the 17 sectoral ‘knowledge centres’ that work together in the so-called *Samenwerking Beroepsonderwijs en Bedrijfsleven (SBB)* (‘collaboration vocational education and industry’). However, after the development stage, schools have full autonomy in deciding how students can achieve those qualifications (teaching and examination). It is argued that employer involvement in the design and evaluation of programmes combined with school-level autonomy in delivery ensures that the FET can system respond flexibly to both national and local needs.

Thus, in summary, the relative autonomy of local providers in determining provision, as has historically been the case in Ireland, is not unusual within a comparative context. Nevertheless, the lack of any systematic central policy direction in Irish FET and low levels of systemised employer engagement in programme design and evaluation appears to be more exceptional.

8.4 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The use of monitoring and evaluation is widely seen as a vital tool to ensure the continued improvement of effective programmes and the closure or reform of courses that fail to meet set objectives. To date, perhaps largely as a consequence of a combination of insufficient data and a lack of effective governance, there has been little evidence of monitoring or evaluation in the Irish FET sector. There has been some activity in the area, for instance, FÁS have maintained effective data, through the use of a follow-up survey, on the progression rates of learners¹⁰⁵ by programme type.¹⁰⁶ Progression data for VEC students by programme have been very limited and associated with high proportions of unknowns. However, there is little evidence that the limited monitoring data that does exist has been used systematically to inform policy or

¹⁰⁴ A number of regions will retain more than one college.

¹⁰⁵ See 2011 Follow-Up-Survey of FÁS participants. FÁS Planning and Research, May 2012.

¹⁰⁶ However, FÁS have not to date evaluated their programmes using a counter-factual approach.

influence the nature of provision in either the former VEC or FÁS training sectors.¹⁰⁷

In contrast, monitoring and evaluation in Germany is much more systematic, The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and training (BIBB) is a centre of excellence for VET research. The BIBB operates under the auspices of the federal Ministry of Education and Research and has the general remit of providing an evidence base for the further development and progress of VET in Germany. In general, educational research institutes that are subordinate to the federal government or Lander, or those jointly funded by both (such as BIBB), have the responsibility of quality assurance and programme evaluation of German VET.

Similarly, in Australia, the monitoring and evaluation of VET programmes is carried out by the National Centre for Vocational Research (NCVER) which is a not for profit company owned by the commonwealth and federal ministers responsible for VET. NCVER is an independent body responsible for collecting, managing, analysing, evaluating and communicating research and statistics about vocational education and training (VET) nationally. In addition to carrying out research in its own right, NCVER routinely commissions research¹⁰⁸ into the effectiveness of various VET programmes and initiatives.

With respect to the Netherlands, the Education Inspectorate officially monitors the quality of teaching and the quality of examinations of MBO schools; furthermore, the schools are themselves required to set up and maintain a quality assurance system. Under recently introduced rules, if a study programme is not meeting the criteria with respect to labour market relevance, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science can decide to shut the programme down. Finally, monitoring appears less systematic in Scotland with the main performance indicators published for colleges relating to their completion and success rates, typically broken down by subject group, duration of study and the age and gender of students. Data are also published on student characteristics, the qualifications of staff, as well as the level of enrolment on different types of courses.

¹⁰⁷ An exception is Apprenticeships which are demand-led and the volume of provision is dictated by employers, therefore, provision is informed by labour market requirements.

¹⁰⁸ Typically carried out by university research centres such as the Melbourne Institute for Applied Economic & Social Research (MIAESR) or the National Institute for Labour Studies (NILS).

In summary, it is clear that the level of monitoring and evaluation in Ireland is well below that of all the comparator countries. However, what is not clear from the international reports is the extent to which outcomes of monitoring and evaluations studies impact on actual provision.

Finally, we contrast the FET data infrastructure in Ireland with the comparator countries. Appropriate data is a necessary condition for effective monitoring and evaluation. As was obvious from our desk-based study, it was necessary to exploit a number of data sources to generate estimates of enrolments, completion rates and accreditation in Ireland, with the resulting analysis somewhat partial at best. This is in contrast to the Netherlands, where the main data source on students is the *Basisregister Onderwijs (BRON)* ('basic register for education'), in which all students are registered. This register is managed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The data consists of the entire school history of each student (i.e. which study programme in which school, when diplomas were obtained, etc.). The BRON can also be linked to other register data, so that background variables like age, gender and residence can be identified and incorporated. In Australia, the *Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY)* is the most widely used dataset in terms of assessing and monitoring VET performance. LSAY, which is based on a representative sample, tracks young people as they move from school into further study, work and other destinations. In addition to information on academic achievement, labour market status etc., the LSAY data contains a wide variety of control variables on students ranging from socio-economic background to aspirations. Respondents¹⁰⁹ enter the survey at age 15 and are tracked for a subsequent nine years. In Scotland, the SQA's database has details of all SQA qualifications from school onwards taken by each learner (identified by a unique Scottish Candidate Number). While administrative data on academic achievement is relatively available, information on post-qualifications status and progression is more inconsistent. The SDS does conduct a regular survey of school leavers, which is reported annually at local level, but this does not record employment or education outcomes in any detail and it only covers the first post-school year. Finally, although the expert failed to provide us with any detail on the German data infrastructure, it is well recognised that Germany has a strong administrative data system¹¹⁰ which is augmented by high quality datasets, many of which are longitudinal in nature.

¹⁰⁹ This is a multi-cohort dataset.

¹¹⁰ Such as those managed by the Federal Statistical Bureau and Statistical Offices of the Lander.

8.5 IRISH FET RELATIVE TO COMPARATOR COUNTRIES

Notwithstanding the above observations relating to specific dimensions of Irish FET provision, some broader comparative observations on the structure of FET are also possible. Compared to the German, Dutch and Australian systems, Irish FET is much more fragmented and is much less focused around vocational labour market demand. Germany, the Netherlands and Australia all have long-standing governance and support institutions that provide the intelligence and direction required to ensure the continued evolution of provision remains in line with economic and labour market development. FET provision in these countries appears to be almost wholly focused on VET with defined pathways to further and higher study in vocational subjects, although there is some variation in the clarity of pathways between countries. The emphasis on VET education in all three countries has led to the systematic involvement of employers in the provision-planning process. Furthermore, higher levels of employer engagement and work placement in any FET system ensures that programmes are more fully aligned with the vocational labour markets, both in composition and content, thereby reducing the requirement to plan provision at a national level. In comparison, both the Irish and Scottish FET systems appear poorly defined as a consequence of simultaneously seeking to serve a diverse range of interests. Nevertheless, despite their similarities, Ireland appears to be somewhat behind Scotland in terms of the integration of employer engagement into provision, labour market connectivity and the perceived status of FET among learners.

Irish FET provision is relatively strong in some aspects, for instance, compared to the Netherlands, Irish FET appears to have more adequately integrated the needs to the unemployed into provision. Furthermore, the Irish model of organising apprenticeship has been seen to offer lessons for the UK.¹¹¹ It should be noted that each FET system has evolved to reflect differing goals, needs and contexts and, consequently, cross-country variation in the structure and nature of FET is not necessarily evidence of inferior provision. Nevertheless, the historic lack of any governance or planning function within Irish FET will certainly have meant that the Irish system has been relatively less well equipped to respond to national priorities.

¹¹¹ P. Ryan (2000) The institutional requirements of apprenticeship: evidence from smaller European countries. *International Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 42-65.

Chapter 9

Summary and Policy Implications

This research draws together quantitative and qualitative evidence examining a range of dimensions of provision in the Irish Further Education and Training (FET) sector. The aim of the study is to support the development of a five year strategic plan for FET by identifying some of the key challenges facing the sector going forward. The research for this report has been difficult due to a lack of appropriate data combined with the fact that research on Irish FET sector is extremely under-developed by international standards. Nevertheless, a number of central observations emerge from the work, some of which have important implications for policy. The principal findings of the study are discussed below under seven headings: Governance, Planning, Major and minor awards, Non-accredited programmes, Alignment to the labour market, Data provision and Policy implications.

9.1 GOVERNANCE

There exists no clear definition of FET in Ireland; the sector encompasses a range of education and training bodies, voluntary organisations and semi-state bodies with a variety of differing mission objectives. The FET sector was seen by stakeholders as being less clearly defined and of lower perceived status than higher education and lacking in an overall identity. This was viewed as reflecting broader societal norms and expectations but was also seen as relating to the evolution of the system and aspects of current FET provision. The composition of Irish FET means that it encapsulates a range of diverse activities including initial vocational education, adult education and training (including literacy and basic education), workforce development and community education and training. The heterogeneous structure of FET provision in Ireland is not dissimilar to the UK model but it is somewhat at odds with provision in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Australia. In these countries, the focus is very much on providing vocational education for specific occupations. Interviews with stakeholders across the FET sector highlighted the diverse objectives of the FET system. While there was general acceptance that the objectives were largely two-pronged, incorporating both labour market and social inclusion agendas, there was some diversity in terms of the relative emphasis on each and whether they are competing or complementary agendas. Many acknowledged the centrality of labour market objectives and the role of FET as an economic driver, particularly in the current context, but stakeholders also felt that social inclusion goals should not be lost sight of and there was a need to maintain a balance in provision.

9.2 PLANNING

The initial analysis of FET enrolments revealed that approximately 70 per cent of resources¹¹² were devoted to full-time programmes, such as Post-Leaving-Certificate programmes (56 per cent), VTOS (8 per cent) and Youthreach (4 per cent), all of which had underlying labour market objectives. The remaining 30 per cent of provision was devoted to part-time programmes with less explicit occupational objectives, such as Back to Education (23 per cent), Community education (3 per cent) and Adult literacy (3 per cent). A substantial amount of heterogeneity was observed with respect to patterns of provision, both in terms of the overall regional distribution of places and the balance between full-time and part-time provision across regions. It was very apparent from the outset that FET provision in Ireland has developed in a very organic manner with relatively little influence from central government. Within the Irish system, the former VECs were given high levels of autonomy in the management and appropriation of their budgets in line with their individual priorities. Similarly, Ireland's former training agency FÁS operated in a largely independent fashion with its budget set annually by central government. From an international perspective, it is relatively common for training providers to have a good degree of autonomy at a local level; nevertheless, the Irish FET system is somewhat unusual in that local decisions on provision did not appear to be supported by any centralised planning function that provided strategic direction on changing labour market and social conditions.

9.3 MAJOR AND MINOR AWARDS

A number of findings emerged with regard to patterns of accreditation. During 2012, an estimated 178,505 individuals were awarded qualifications from FET providers; of these, 24 per cent received major awards, 67 per cent received minor awards with special purpose awards accounting for the residual. With respect to rates of accreditation, it was estimated that the percentage of students enrolled on full-time courses achieving major awards varies from just below 50 per cent for PLC and Youthreach programmes to 61 per cent for VTOS courses. Stakeholders across the sector were somewhat divided in their views on minor awards. Some stakeholders argued that the ultimate aim for all learners should be a major award and most, if not all, provision should be based on major awards. Others felt minor awards held a valuable place in provision, in particular in terms of the flexibility these awards offered. They were seen as particularly useful for workers looking to update their skills and among potential learners 'more removed from the labour market' and needing to build their confidence.

¹¹² Estimated on a full-time equivalent basis.

9.4 NON-ACCREDITED PROGRAMMES

A significant proportion of FET provision targeted towards community development was found to be non-accredited. This was seen as an important issue among stakeholders and, for many, a strong weakness in the system. They highlighted the need for performance metrics across the FET system, but varied somewhat in terms of how that is best achieved and what exactly should be measured. Many highlighted the need for creativity in measurement and the importance of capturing the wider benefits of learning. They also pointed to the importance of avoiding potentially unintended consequences of accreditation. The quality of awards also emerged as a significant issue across all stakeholder groups, including concerns about variability in delivery standards, complexity of the awards system and a lack of flexibility, and insufficient support for providers.

9.5 ALIGNMENT WITH THE LABOUR MARKET

The absence of any strategic governance or planning function may well be an important factor in explaining our finding that the distribution of major awards, which emanate predominantly from full-time programmes with explicit labour market objectives, was relatively poorly aligned with the structure of the vocational labour market in Ireland. The research found that, for the forecast period 2014 to 2018, the current structure of FET provision would generate surpluses in occupations such as Education, Science & Computing and Health and shortages in occupations related to Construction, Manufacturing and Retail and Protective Services. Stakeholders were conscious of these issues and the vast majority felt that there should be a stronger relationship between provision and employer requirements, reflecting not just immediate skill requirements but also medium- and longer-term labour market needs. They varied somewhat in terms of the level at which such needs should be met – local, regional or national. Stakeholders also expressed a need for greater employer involvement in provision – although there was a need for greater understanding among both providers and employers about the value of engagement and the need for structures and consultation fora to facilitate that engagement.

9.6 DATA PROVISION

There is a lack of reliable data on FET provision in Ireland and this proved to be a major constraint in the research process. There exists no single information source that tracks FET participants so as to enable the accurate and integrated measurement of enrolments, completion rates, levels of accreditation and progression by subject area and level of study. The lack of an appropriate data infrastructure makes the task of effective monitoring and evaluation impossible as it cannot be ascertained the extent to which programmes meet their stated

objectives. The paucity of an FET database is at odds with the situation in our comparator countries of Australia, Germany and Australia. Stakeholders across the sector were critical about the data available on FET provision and progression. They raised a range of issues around the lack of data and the poor quality of available data. Going forward they highlighted the need for a single integrated database, capturing a range of information on participants, including their first destinations and progression outcomes. They also raised a number of issues around the need for more information on, and analysis of, the number, profile and qualifications/skills of teaching staff across the FET sector.

9.7 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In terms of the policy implications arising from this report, it is clear from both the national and international evidence that the Irish FET system has historically lacked an appropriate governance structure that gives strategic direction to providers, enabling them to react to the changing requirements of both the labour market and wider society in a timely and appropriate manner. It is clear from the existing legislation that, in the future, SOLAS will fulfil a more proactive and unifying governance function. There are a number of prerequisites to SOLAS's ability to fulfil its role in an effective and efficient fashion. In order to provide direction on the needs of employers and emerging labour market trends, not only will it be necessary to develop a detailed labour market intelligence system that provides national and regional detail on current and future trends in vocational employment, data gaps with respect to existing provision must also be addressed as a matter of priority. Ideally information on completion, accreditation and progression should be collected at an individual participant level, allowing for course level performance aggregates to be compiled and ineffective provision identified. In the case of unaccredited programmes, there is a clear requirement to develop appropriate metrics, related to the programme objectives, which will allow such provision to be evaluated. The reform of provision will require that SOLAS implement a funding model that ensures that poorly performing programmes are longer financed, with available resources directed towards areas identified as being of significant importance on the basis of emerging national or regional intelligence.

In general, the countries included in our comparative study have adopted a governance approach that provides strategic direction at a national level, while simultaneously allowing providers sufficient autonomy to respond to local needs; arguably, this is one aspect of delivery where a policy learning approach could be adopted. There are other areas where arrangements may need to change if the FET sector is to be sufficiently responsive, particularly to the needs of employers. The current system whereby provision is restricted to the school term calendar is

not sufficiently flexible to meet the ongoing training requirements of employers and learners. Provision should ideally consist of a range of different course types with varying durations that reflect the needs of different groups of learners in a continuous and evolving way. A policy learning approach would also suggest that much more needs to be done to harness the views of employers at all stages of the provision planning process, from the development of national strategic advice on the direction of provision to the design and evaluation of specific programmes and courses.

There are a number of aspects of provision that have emerged during the course of the research that require more evidence before an appropriate policy approach can be developed. Stakeholders raised concerns around the extent to which the current composition of teachers, trainers and tutors employed within the FET sector was adequate to meet the needs of the sector and further work is required on this issue. In addition, a more thorough understanding of the concerns of stakeholders around the current qualifications framework is necessary if policy is to be progressed in this area. We need to know more about the current level of engagement between employers and the FET sector in the area of employee professional development, as well as the opportunities and barriers for progress in this key component of FET provision. Finally, further work on the utilisation of VET skills in the labour market and the relative demand for generic skills among FET graduates will help inform future course provision.

Appendices

APPENDIX TABLE A4.1 Regional Distribution of Full-time Equivalent Enrolments, DES

Regions	2011 FTE Enrolments	Population	Ratio
1. Border	12.6	11.2	1.13
2. Midlands	5.8	6.2	0.94
3. West	9.4	9.7	0.97
4. Dublin	29.9	27.7	1.08
5. Mid-East	7.1	11.6	0.61
6. Mid-West	9.0	8.3	1.08
7. South-East	11.6	10.8	1.07
8. South-West	15.7	14.5	1.08
9. National Total	100.0	100.0	
#	69,133	4,588,252	

APPENDIX TABLE A4.2 Current Spending across Programmes

	PLC	VTOS	Youthreach	BTEI	AL / ITABE / CE / ESOL	FÁS	POBAL
FTE Enrolments in 2012	38,774	5,650	3,321	16,015	5,373 [2,155 (AL) + 2,318(CE) + 674 (ESOL) + 226 ITABE]	36,977 (out of 65,204 enrolments)	-
2012 Current Spending	€158.032m* [€138.598m less student support]	€79.792m [€34.276m less allowances]	€68.428m [€49.146m less allowances]	€22.695m	€36.170m [€24.067m (AL) + €9.435m (CE) + €2.013(ITABE) + €1.773m (NALA) + €0.915m (AONTAS) +€0.520m(WIT/NALA) + €0.416m (PIAAC) = €39.139m]	€251.37m [€116.99m actual less direct allowances]	-
2011 Current Spending	€182.820m* [€134.481m]	€80m	€67.200m	€17.395m	€50.531m	€240.71m [€112.049m]	€50.533m

* Estimated PLC (Pay, capitation and student grants).

Notes: (i) 1,218 apprentices not included.

(ii) Only provisional figures were given from DES for 2011. Excel did not include outturn as in 2012.

APPENDIX TABLE A4.3 Distribution of Enrolments (FTE) over the Period 2002-2011, DES

Programme	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	TOTAL
Full Time	94.3	94.1	76.3	73.5	71.1	69.8	69.5	71.6	71.4	68.0	74.5
PLC	73.1	73.4	59.3	57.3	55.9	54.3	55.1	58.0	57.7	54.6	58.9
VTOS	13.9	14.2	11.4	10.8	10.0	9.8	8.9	8.4	8.6	8.4	10.1
Youthreach	7.3	6.6	5.6	5.3	5.3	5.7	5.5	5.2	5.0	5.0	5.5
Part-Time (estimated as FTE)	5.7	5.9	23.7	26.5	28.9	30.2	30.5	28.4	28.6	32.0	25.5
Adult Literacy	3.6	3.9	3.4	3.5	3.8	4.2	3.9	2.7	3.1	3.2	3.5
Community Education	2.0	2.0	1.6	1.6	2.2	2.2	3.7	3.3	3.3	3.5	2.7
BTEI	-	-	18.6	21.5	22.9	23.5	22.4	21.2	20.9	23.9	18.8
ESOL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.9	1.0	1.0	0.4
ITABE	-	-	-	-	-	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2
All Programmes	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
#	39,176	40,265	49,444	51,251	54,034	55,130	60,570	66,419	66,995	66,897	550,182

Notes: The data above do not include PLC (non-VEC) or BTEI (non-VEC).
The figure attributed to PLC (VEC) above is 65 greater in this time series data than other data files received from the DES.

APPENDIX TABLE A4.4 Regional Balance between Part-time and Full-time (FTE) in 2011, DES

Programme	Border	Midlands	West	Dublin	Mid-East	Mid-West	South-East	South-West	National Total
Full-Time	68.0	49.9	63.2	78.4	65.2	61.3	65.9	71.5	69.1
PLC	55.4	24.7	39.8	64.1	44.6	40.3	48.9	60.9	52.8
PLC (Non-VEC)	2.5	12.6	9.2	0.8	0.4	8.0	3.3	0.6	3.3
VTOS	5.1	7.3	8.8	9.0	12.6	7.9	9.7	6.2	8.2
Youthreach	5.0	5.3	5.5	4.5	7.5	5.1	4.1	3.7	4.8
Part-Time	32.0	50.1	36.8	21.6	34.8	38.7	34.1	28.5	30.9
Adult Literacy	3.9	3.5	3.0	3.0	5.0	3.1	2.6	2.1	3.1
Community Education	4.8	2.2	3.9	2.4	2.4	2.5	4.0	4.5	3.3
BTEI	20.4	38.0	24.5	14.0	25.8	26.4	23.7	18.6	21.0
BTEI (Non-VEC)	0.8	3.8	4.0	1.1	0.4	5.0	2.7	2.6	2.2
ESOL	1.7	2.2	0.9	0.8	0.8	1.1	0.9	0.5	1.0
ITABE	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.3
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
#	8,744	3,988	6,244	20,149	4,912	6,207	8,036	10,855	69,135

APPENDIX TABLE A4.5 Regional Distribution of Full-time Equivalent Enrolments, FÁS

Regions	2012 FTE Enrolments	Population	Ratio
1. Border	14.7	11.2	1.31
2. Midlands	6.3	6.2	1.01
3. West	6.8	9.7	0.70
4. Dublin	32.1	27.7	1.16
5. Mid-East	5.3	11.6	0.46
6. Mid-West	9.1	8.3	1.10
7. South-East	12.1	10.8	1.12
8. South-West	13.7	14.5	0.94
9. National Total	100.0	100.0	
#	22,599	4,588,252	

APPENDIX TABLE A6.1 Total Awards by Centre Type from QQI, 2012, Unweighted

Centre Type	Total	%
BIM - Bord Iascaigh Mhara Centre	176	0.06
CEP - Community Employment Prog.	1,830	0.61
CMS - Community/Comprehensive Sch.	1,990	0.67
CPD - Training for People w Disabilities	4,864	1.63
CTC - Community Training Centre	3,064	1.03
CVS - Community/Voluntary Sector	15,520	5.20
EMP - Employer/Work Based Learning	881	0.30
FÁS - FÁS Training Centre	56,907	19.06
FEC - VEC Further Education College	45,921	15.38
FIC - Fáilte Ireland Centre	78	0.03
HOS - Hospital CNE	379	0.13
IOT - Higher Education Institute	836	0.28
JUS - Dept. Justice Centre	4	0.00
LTI - Local Training Initiative	289	0.10
LTS - VEC Literacy Service	12,481	4.18
OTH - Other	151	0.05
PEC - VEC Prison Education Centre	1,961	0.66
PRC - Private Provider - College	8,011	2.68
PSA - Public Service Agency	1,388	0.46
PTC - Private Provider - Company	59,918	20.07
PTI - Private Provider - Individual	3,113	1.04
SCS - Voluntary Secondary School	2,852	0.96
SKN - Skillnet	2,344	0.79
SPS - Special School (DE&S)	585	0.20
SRB - Sectoral Representative Body	3,213	1.08
TAG - Teagasc Centre	2,840	0.95
TEC - VEC Traveller Education Centre	1,185	0.40
VEA - VEC Adult Education Centre	29,582	9.91
VOC - VEC School	20,292	6.80
VTC - VEC VTOS Centre	10,679	3.58
YRC - VEC Youthreach Centre	4,900	1.64
YTS - Youth Service	318	0.11
Total	298,552	100.00

APPENDIX TABLE A6.2

Subject Distribution of Awards by Programme Group (Minors re-weighted, excluding S.P & Supp.) in 2012, QQI

FETAC Fields of Learning, and relationship to ISCED	VEC (11)			Private Providers (2)			FÁS (5)			Community/Voluntary (2)			Others (11)			Grand Total
	Major	Minor	Total	Major	Minor	Total	Major	Minor	Total	Major	Minor	Total	Major	Minor	Total	
1.1. Agriculture	3.7	2.1	2.6	0.1	1.1	1.0	1.9	0.5	0.9	1.7	1.4	1.5	67.0	4.7	23.2	3.1
1.2. Science	0.7	2.4	1.9	-	0.3	0.3	-	1.0	0.7	-	0.6	0.4	-	0.4	0.3	1.1
1.3. Computing (not applications)	3.3	4.7	4.3	0.9	0.6	0.6	1.5	2.7	2.3	-	1.7	1.3	0.2	1.5	1.1	2.8
2.1. Arts	1.6	1.4	1.4	0.0	-	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.8	0.6	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.8
2.2. Visual, Arts Craft & Design	5.8	5.2	5.4	0.6	0.2	0.2	0.4	1.2	0.9	-	1.5	1.1	0.2	1.1	0.8	2.9
2.3. Media	4.0	2.8	3.2	3.2	0.4	0.7	1.6	0.3	0.7	-	2.7	2.1	0.5	0.8	0.7	2.0
3.1. Business	14.1	5.3	8.1	8.6	6.2	6.5	5.3	7.9	7.1	2.3	5.0	4.4	2.6	5.4	4.6	7.1
3.2. Administration	6.2	16.5	13.2	0.4	1.4	1.3	11.1	25.4	21.1	2.4	13.7	11.1	0.0	10.2	7.2	11.5
4.1. Planning and Design	0.4	0.5	0.4	-	0.0	0.0	-	0.3	0.2	-	-	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3
4.2. Housing/Building Construction	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.0	1.3	1.2	15.6	1.9	6.0	-	0.6	0.5	-	-	-	1.5
4.3. Civil	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.1	4.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.8
4.4. Restoration/Traditional/Heritage	-	0.0	0.0	-	-	-	-	0.0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0
5.1. Core Skills	5.4	22.9	17.4	0.0	4.8	4.3	12.1	13.4	13.0	28.0	27.2	27.3	4.5	17.2	13.4	14.0
5.2. Language (Ex. Culture)	-	3.0	2.1	-	0.7	0.7	-	0.0	0.0	-	1.8	1.4	-	0.5	0.4	1.2
5.3. General Studies	2.7	0.5	1.2	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	3.9	0.3	1.1	1.6	0.1	0.6	0.8
6.1. Education Training	28.9	10.7	16.4	53.2	15.0	19.2	10.9	4.1	6.2	56.5	23.3	30.8	1.7	6.6	5.2	15.4
6.2. Health/Welfare	12.5	7.8	9.3	30.8	8.8	11.2	8.8	0.9	3.3	5.1	10.1	9.0	11.7	4.8	6.9	8.5
7.1. Engineering	1.2	0.8	0.9	0.4	1.0	0.9	23.9	3.5	9.7	-	0.2	0.2	0.8	2.4	1.9	2.5
7.2. Manufacturing Processing	-	0.1	0.0	-	0.0	0.0	-	0.3	0.2	-	-	-	1.0	3.8	2.9	0.2
8.1. Personal	2.8	1.1	1.6	-	0.5	0.5	4.2	0.4	1.6	0.0	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.1	1.2
8.2. Logistics	-	0.0	0.0	-	0.0	0.0	-	2.3	1.6	-	0.2	0.1	-	0.2	0.2	0.3
8.3. Security	-	7.2	5.0	-	52.0	46.2	0.2	21.0	14.7	-	7.1	5.5	-	36.0	25.3	17.2
8.4. Environmental Protection	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9.1. Tourism	1.4	0.2	0.6	0.7	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	-	-	-	0.4
9.2. Hospitality	0.4	1.9	1.4	0.4	4.9	4.4	0.2	5.0	3.5	-	0.9	0.7	7.5	2.5	4.0	2.6
9.3. Sport	4.4	2.7	3.2	0.4	0.1	0.2	1.9	1.4	1.5	-	0.6	0.5	0.3	1.1	0.8	1.9
10.0. Unclassified	-	-	-	-	0.0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0
TOTALS	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
#	24,826	53,801	78,627	4,070	32,291	36,361	8,829	20,282	29,111	2,005	6,917	8,922	2,863	6,758	9,621	162,641

Appendix 1: Legislative Definitions of FET

1930 Vocational Education Act

For the purposes of this Act the expression *continuation education* means education to continue and supplement education provided in elementary schools and includes *general and practical training* in preparation for employment in trades, manufactures, agriculture, commerce, and other industrial pursuits, and also general and practical training for improvement of young persons in the early stages of such employment.

For the purposes of this Act the expression *technical education* means education pertaining to trades, manufactures, commerce, and other industrial pursuits (including the occupations of girls and women connected with the household) and in subjects bearing thereon or relating thereto and includes education in science and art (including, in the county boroughs of Dublin and Cork, music) and also includes physical training.

Industrial Training Act 1967

to provide for ...*the training of persons for the purposes of any activity of industry*, and to promote, facilitate, encourage, assist, co-ordinate and develop the provision of such training by such means as An Chomhairle considers necessary or desirable...pay fees to persons providing *further education* in respect of persons who receive it *in association with their training* in courses provided or approved by An Chomhairle.

Labour Services Act 1987

To provide, or arrange for, encourage and foster the provision of, ...*training and re-training for employment* and to assist (whether financially or otherwise) in, and co-ordinate, the provision of such training by others.

1999 Qualifications Act defines FET as encompassing ...*education and training other than primary or post primary of higher education and training*.

NQAI defined further education and training awards as ...*those made by FETAC at levels 1-6 on the NFQ*.

White Paper on Adult Education 2000, pp. 27-28, defines... '*further education*' as that which occurs between second and third level, e.g., Post-Leaving Certificate courses and Adult Literacy. It defines 'continuing' education and training, inter alia, as the vocational development of people re-entering the workforce regardless of level.

Further Education and Training Bill, 2013, Part 1, Section 2, (30) states that... '*further education*' includes *further education provided for the purpose of obtaining an award at a level that is not higher than level 6* specified in the NFQ.

"FET is an education and training service provided to learners over 16 years of age who are no longer attending mainstream second level education or higher education" (CDVEC).

Further Education and Training is regarded as all education and training (outside of mainstream 2nd level) which is delivered from level 1 to 6 on the national framework and certified heretofore by FETAC (NAPD).

Appendix 2: Stakeholder Interview Schedule

SOLAS FET Strategy Consultation Process November/December 2013

Introductory remarks – thanks for agreeing to participate, purpose of the stakeholder interviews, request to audio record, anonymity.

We will be asking a combination of open ended questions and questions with response categories and will indicate this as we progress through the interview. You do not have to respond to every question, please feel free to skip any questions you feel you do not have expertise on.

A. General Views on FET in Ireland

- 1. What is your current role/position?**
- 2. What do you see as the scope of the Further Education and Training (FET) sector in Ireland? Probe re social justice/inclusion versus labour market preparation.**
- 3. Overall, to what extent do you think Ireland has a strong FET sector?**

Probe:

- a. How are you involved in the sector? Do you think the system as it stands is fit for purpose?
- b. What about the different components of the sector – VECs, FÁS (ETBs), Community Education (POBAL, AONTAS, NALA), Private Providers, Others (Failte Ireland, Teagasc)?

- 4. Overall, what do you see as the main weaknesses of the FET sector?**

Probe:

Are these weaknesses confined to particular components of the sector?
Why have they arisen?

- 5. Overall, how would you describe the status of FET in Ireland ?**

- a. Probe among different groups – school leavers, adult learners, employers, the general public?
- b. Probe: To what extent does the FET sector have its own identity?
Does it have parity of esteem with Higher Education? If not, why not?

- 6. Can we ask you to think about the profile of teaching staff in FET?**

Probe about their opportunity to participate in continuous professional development (CPD) and other training.

- 7. Can we ask you to think about the profile of entrants to FET; in relation to *school leaver entrants*:**
- a. What role does FET play?
 - b. How do you think FET is viewed among second-level students? Levels of knowledge, guidance on FET – before, during, after FET
 - c. Which groups of young people participate in FET? (probe re. social class, gender, special educational needs/disability, academic ‘ability’, particular school contexts (DEIS schools etc)
 - d. What impact do you think FET has on their educational and labour market outcomes?
- 8. In relation to lifelong learning, and the needs of *those in the labour market*:**
- a. What role does FET play in Ireland?
 - b. In your view, how effective is FET in meeting the needs of participants?
 - c. Does it have a potential role for those currently outside the labour market (e.g. women thinking of returning to the LM)?
- 9. In planning for the future and developing this Strategy for FET, what do you see as the single most important issue to be addressed?**

We now wish to focus on 9 main aspects of FET provision in Ireland:

Structure of provision	Balance between FT and PT provision
Levels of accreditation	Balance between Major/minor awards
Alignment with the labour market	Employer engagement
Data on FET	Levels of Progression
Social inclusion	

B. Structure of Provision

Analysis so far has found substantial variation in FET provision, particularly across different regions.

10. To what extent do you believe that the current geographical distribution of places in ETBs reflects need?

To a large extent To some extent To a small extent Don't know

11. To what extent do you believe that the current geographical distribution of places in programmes administered by community education organisations such as Pobal and Aontas reflects need?

To a large extent To some extent To a small extent Don't know

12. To what extent do you believe that the current geographical distribution of places in programmes administered by private providers such as private colleges reflects need?

To a large extent To some extent To a small extent Don't know

13. To what extent do you believe that the current geographical distribution of places in programmes administered by other FET providers such as Failte Ireland, Teagasc etc. reflects need?

To a large extent To some extent To a small extent Don't know

14. How is provision across and within regions currently determined?

15. How do you think it should be determined? Probe re: number of places; balance between different kinds of provision; target groups

16. What management structures would be needed within the FET sector to ensure that the composition and content of provision meets the needs of both learners and employers?

C. Balance between Full-Time and Part-Time Provision

The balance between Full-time and Part-time provision within the VECs was also found to vary substantially. At a broad level this reflects the balance between labour market (FT) and adult literacy, community education (PT) provision.

17. Overall, do you believe the level of provision of labour market orientated programmes (such as many PLC, Youthreach, VTOS programmes, Specific Skills Training) within the ETBs is:

- Too high About right Too low

18. How do you think the appropriate balance between labour market and adult \ Life-long learning should be determined?

a. How might this be achieved?

D. Levels of Accreditation

A good deal of FET provision, particularly, in areas related to community education and adult development, is unaccredited.

19. Overall, to what extent do you see this as a weakness in current provision?

- To a large extent To some extent To a small extent Don't know

20. To what extent do you think it is necessary to develop some form of measurement metrics to track performance in currently unaccredited programmes?

- It is very necessary There is some need There is no need

21. What, in your view, are the principal barriers to developing measurement metrics for currently unaccredited programmes?

Probe: To what extent should all lifelong learning be accredited?

22. Who should have responsibility for developing such metrics?

E. Balance between Major and Minor Awards

23. The majority of awards in the FET sector are Minor Awards, do you believe that this is adequate?

- To a large extent To some extent Not at all

24. Looking forward, in your view to what extent should the balance between Major and Minor Awards be addressed?

25. Do you have any views on the Quality of Awards in the FET sector?

Probe: Views of the QQI common awards process. Is there a good balance between technical and generic (communication, team work, personal development) modules in these awards?

26. Do you have any views on accreditation outside FETAC, such as City and Guilds?

F. Alignment with the Labour Market

27. In your view, to what extent is current FET provision sufficiently aligned with the needs of the labour market at a *national* level, providing students who are qualified in areas where there is a strong demand by employers?

To a large extent To some extent Not at all

28. In your view, to what extent is current FET provision sufficiently aligned with the needs of the labour market at a *local* level, providing students who are qualified in areas where there is a strong demand by employers?

To a large extent To some extent Not at all

29. Do you believe that policy should focus more on ensuring FET provision more closely reflects the needs of the labour market at a *national* level and, if so, how might this be achieved?

30. Do you believe that policy should focus more on ensuring FET provision more closely reflects the needs of the labour market at a *local* level and, if so, how might this be achieved?

G. Employer Engagement

31. Overall, in your view to what extent is the pattern of current FET provision across subject areas in line with the requirements of the labour market?

To a large extent To some extent Not at all

32. Overall, to what extent does the content of FET courses meet the work-related skills requirements of employers?

To a large extent To some extent Not at all

33. Regarding work related skills, what do you think is the appropriate balance between formal off the job training and on the job training/work placements?

a. Probe: any weaknesses in off-the-job training curricula?

34. In your view, to what extent are employers sufficiently engaged with the FET sector in terms of providing placements for students?

Highly engaged Engaged to some degree Not very engaged

35. In your view, to what extent are employers sufficiently engaged with the FET sector in terms of providing training for existing workers?

Highly engaged Engaged to some degree Not very engaged

36. In your view, to what extent are employers sufficiently engaged with the FET sector in terms of providing inputs into the composition of provision and the content of courses?

- Highly engaged Engaged to some degree Not very engaged

37. What, in your view, are the main barriers, if any, to effective employer engagement with the FET sector in Ireland?

38. In your view, how might the level of employer engagement with the FET sector be improved?

H. Data

39. In general, how would you describe the quality of data *collected* on FET participants on key metrics such as enrolments, completion rates, first destinations etc.?

- Data collected is of high quality and fit for purpose
 Data collected is of sufficient quality
 Data collected is of low quality and unfit for purpose

40. In general, to what extent is data on FET participants on key metrics such as enrolments, completion rates, first destinations etc. sufficiently *shared and analysed*?

- Data collected is well utilised
 Data collected is fairly well utilised
 Data collected is not sufficiently utilised

41. Overall, what do you see as the main priorities for the future in terms of data on FET participants?

42. In your view, to what extent should data on FET participants be used to guide policy developments in this sector?

I. Levels of Progression

43. How satisfied are you with current rates of course completion within FET? What, in your opinion, are the principal barriers to completion?

44. To what extent do you believe that the proportions of FET completers progressing to *further study*, either within FET or to HET, is sufficient:

- Progression rates to further study are good
 Progression rates to further study are sufficient
 Progression rates to further study are low

45. What, in your opinion, are the principal barriers to progression *to further study* for FET completers?

46. In your view, how might progression for FET completers be improved?

47. To what extent do you believe high proportions of FET completers successfully progress to employment?

- Progression rates to employment are good
- Progression rates to employment are sufficient
- Progression rates to employment are low

48. In your view, how might progression to employment for FET completers be improved?

J. The role of FET in Social Inclusion

49. From a social inclusion perspective, what groups of learners should FET provision be targeting?

50. Do you believe that current provision within the FET sector aimed at enhancing social inclusion is:

- More than sufficient to meet current requirements
- Sufficient to meet current requirements
- Insufficient to meet current requirements

51. In your view, to what extent does FET play an important role in second chance education in Ireland:

- To a large extent
- To some extent
- Not at all

52. In your view, to what extent does FET have an important role in combating poverty and social exclusion:

- To a large extent
- To some extent
- Not at all

53. Overall, in your view, should the relative emphasis on social inclusion within the FET sector be increased or reduced?

K. Concluding Remarks

54. Finally, are there any additional comments / views that you would like to express regarding FET provision in Ireland?

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