Further information


www.heca.ie/Files/HED%20Key%20Facts%202010-11%20Final_0.pdf [accessed 11.12.2012].


The Irish education and training system

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary level (ages 4-12)</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Basic education for children aged 6 to 12 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior cycle</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Secondary education for ages 12 to 15 years. Programs include Leaving Certificate (LC) or LCVP.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior cycle</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Further education for ages 15 to 18 years. Highly academic program for students planning to enter higher education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Further education &amp; training (FET)</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Further education and training courses for adults aged 18 and over.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education (undergraduate)</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>University education for those who have completed upper secondary education. Includes Bachelor's degrees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education (postgraduate)</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Graduate and professional programs. Includes Master's degrees and PhD programs.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Structure**

The national framework of qualifications (NFQ) launched in 2003, is a system of 10 levels that describes the Irish qualifications system. Each level is based on nationally agreed standards of knowledge, skill and competence and reflects what an individual is expected to know, understand and be able to do following successful completion of a process of learning. Almost all awards made through the State-sector funded, and many made in the private sector, have been referenced to the NFQ. Most awards made to VET participants are made at NFQ levels 5 or 6, with a smaller share at NFQ 7. The NFQ was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in 2009.

**Governance**

In Ireland, the main providers of VET are the National Training and Employment Authority (FÁS – a non-commercial semi-State body, part of the public sector) and vocational education committees (VECs – public sector bodies at county level responsible for vocational and continuing education). Other statutory providers include BIM (seafood industry training) and Teagasc (agricultural training). Among these bodies are funded by the exchequer and some programmes receive assistance from the European Social Fund. Most VET occurs within the State sector, although private providers also play a role.

VET is provided at different levels, although the bulk occurs on completion of upper secondary level education. While it is possible to proceed to apprenticeship training following completion of lower secondary education (ISCED 2), most (around 90%) pupils continue to upper secondary education in Ireland.

Post-secondary non-tertiary programmes are primarily, although not exclusively, aimed at those who have completed upper secondary education. Training can take the form of:

- Apprenticeships (2% of total first year enrolments): young people acquire craftperson status by participating in a work-based learning programme where they are employed by an employer while participating in formal training. Training leads to an NFQ 6 craft certificate; partial awards are also made;
- Traineeships (4%): delivered by FÁS for a range of occupations (such as financial advisors assistant, hardware maintenance, hairdressing) with a work-experience component delivered by FÁS; training leads to an NFQ 6 craft certificate; partial awards are also made;
- Further education & training (FET) (2 years): programmes include: VTOS (vocational training programmes for the unemployed), youthreach (for early school-leavers aged 15 to 20) and the back to training initiative – for early school-leavers; FÁS provides funding and training for the unemployed, youthreach and the back to training initiative (part-time FET for adults). There are a range of awards, full and partial, at NFQ levels 1-6.

-VET is also offered in the form of second-chance education; programmes include: VTOS (vocational training for the unemployed), youthreach (for early school-leavers aged 15 to 20) and the back to education initiative (part-time FET for adults). There are a range of awards, full and partial, at NFQ levels 1-6.

**Distinctive features of VET**

There are only 27 trades which are part of the formal apprenticeship system in Ireland. Most initial vocational skill training in Ireland is provided either by FÁS or a VEC and is of relatively short duration. Several vocationally-oriented education courses are provided by the tertiary sector, mainly through institutions of technology.

**Challenges**

Early school-leavers: although Ireland has made steady progress in improving its early school-leaver rate (decreasing from 14.6% in 2002 to 10.3% in 2011) and compares favourably with most other EU countries, it lags behind the top performing countries (such as the Czech Republic). Further, at 12.5%, the proportion of messy early school-leavers remains considerably above that of females (8.7%). The challenge in Ireland is to address the gender gap and to continue to reduce the early school-leaver rate, particularly as those with lower education attainment are at greatest risk of unemployment.

Unemployment: in 2011 the unemployment rate in Ireland stood at 14.3% (quarter 4); however, unemployment rates were considerably greater for those with less than upper secondary education (24.7%).

Lifelong learning (LLL): while the State funds a range of industry initiatives designed to upgrade the skills of those in employment, there are still large categories of FÁS participants who received little in the way of upskilling or reskilling. There is a growing recognition that effective labour market activation measures and a sustained focus on upskilling and reskilling is necessary to meet the challenges of the future.

**Spotlight on VET**

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Recent reforms in Ireland's VET, which were part of overall reforms, have focused on:

- improving transparency and progression opportunities of VET by aligning almost all State-sponsored training, and much in the private sector, with the national framework of qualifications;
- improving relevance of VET training by aligning provision with labour market needs.

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