

# Future FET

Transforming Learning Update

Q1 2022 Progress Update

**SOLAS**  
learning works



**etbi**  
Education and Training  
Boards Ireland  
*Boird Oideachais agus  
Ollúna Éireann*

**Further  
Education  
& Training**



**QQI**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

## Welcome

**The continued development of FET and roll-out of the Transforming Learning strategy has been a focus for the first quarter of 2022. An essential element of this has been the start of strategic dialogue sessions with Education and Training Boards across Ireland which will plot the direction of travel for the next three years of FET in each ETB area.**

While the easing of the covid pandemic restrictions has assisted in facilitating a return to in person learning in the Further Education and Training sector it should be acknowledged the great work that was done by staff and learners across FET during lockdown.

However, we have also unfortunately seen another international event which, like Brexit and COVID-19 before it, will have major implications for our society and economy and which will require a strong response from our FET system. The invasion of Ukraine has already brought over 20,000 people seeking international protection into the country.

Moving forward in this second year of the FET Strategy the vision continues to be to drive and transform the FET sector through improvement and change. This quarter's eZine highlights the work that is happening across the Sector to make that transformation.



Andrew Brownlee,  
CEO of SOLAS

# Future FET: Transforming Learning, Q1 2022 Highlights

Strategic dialogue sessions have commenced with ETBs to plot out plans and develop strategic performance agreements over the period 2022-2024. Representatives from the management teams of SOLAS and individual ETBs have been meeting onsite at an ETB FET facility to discuss how the future FET strategy, Transforming Learning, will be implemented over the period. The meetings provide a platform for the development of new agreements which will set out overall FET strategy, plans and commitments, support required to enable delivery, and agreed contributions to National FET system targets. It is intended to have all agreements in place before the summer.

## Strategic Performance Agreements 2022 - 2024



## Green Skills Summit

The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris TD opened the first-ever FET Green Skills Summit which took place in Wexford County Hall in March. The event was organised and hosted by SOLAS, ETBI and Waterford Wexford ETB.

After the opening addresses from Minister Harris and SOLAS CEO Andrew Brownlee the agenda for the summit focused on the:

- Providing an overview of national and international green skills research from the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit in SOLAS
- Providing a briefing from industry leaders on the green and sustainable business environment and future skills needs to deliver on green commitments
- A panel discussion on how best the FET sector can meet the skills needs of the future and support the transition to a green future for Ireland

## Capital Funding

The Department of Further and Higher Education recently announced an allocation of €430 million in capital investment for tertiary education. The funding will deliver on the expansion of education and training centres and technological universities. There are two strands of capital investment, the first aimed at projects over €5million which will deliver on the FET College of the Future commitment. The second strand is focused on projects from €100k to €5million with an emphasis on upgrading strategic infrastructure across the sector.

## National Apprenticeship Office

The recently established National Apprenticeship Office will provide the opportunity for SOLAS and the HEA to further enhance the existing close cooperation between the two organisations to manage apprenticeship delivery across the further and higher education sector. The office will be accountable to the Boards of both SOLAS and the HEA for the management of apprenticeship. The appointment of interim Director for the National Apprenticeship Office was made at the end of 2021 and Dr. Mary Liz Trant formerly Executive Director in SOLAS has taken up this position.



## Difficult to Fill Vacancies Survey

Published in January 2022. This paper reports the findings of the Recruitment Agency Survey conducted in October 2021. This survey gathers the reviews of selected agencies in Ireland in respect of occupations that require skills which are in short supply, and in their view, are proving difficult to fill.

## FET Response to the Ukrainian Crisis

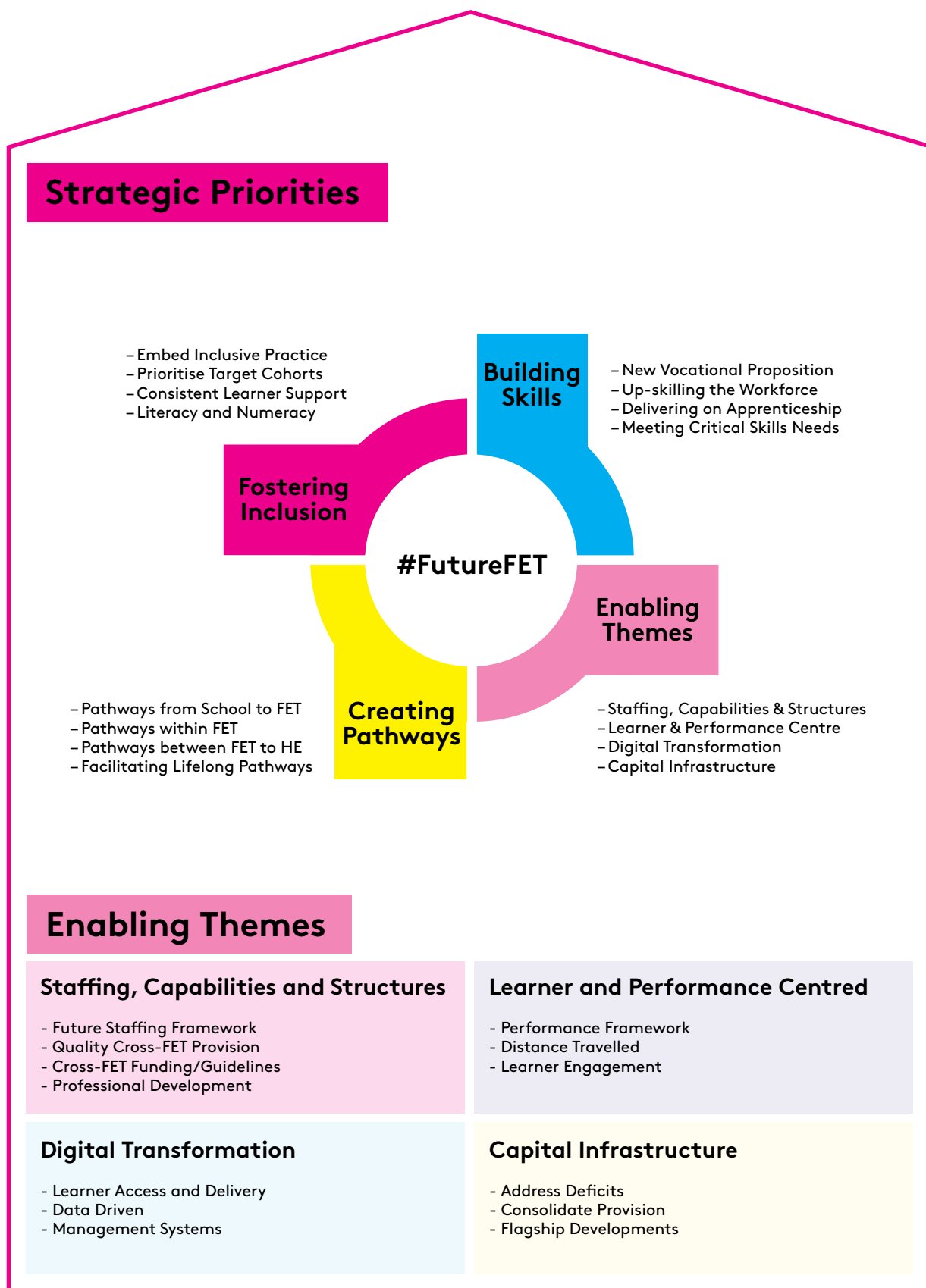
The Ukrainian crisis is expected to result in tens of thousands of people arriving in Ireland seeking international protection. FET and the ETBs have a long track record of offering support to people in

this situation, with a substantial offering of English language training for speakers of other languages (ESOL), a refugee resettlement programme and supported access to other mainstream FET provision. ESOL capacity has supported 20,000 learners in the system in recent years, and with levels of English in those presenting thus far relatively low, an immediate priority is to use the spare capacity that exists, and ramp-up provision as required.

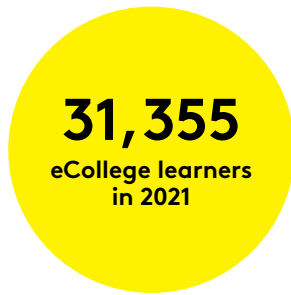
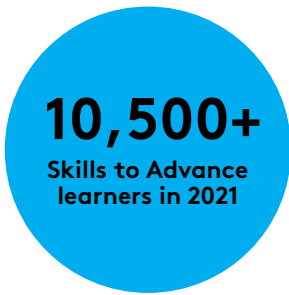
An emergency task force has been set up involving the Department of Education (around 40% of those arriving thus far are children), DFHERIS, ETBI and SOLAS to coordinate a response, and other initiatives being progressed include:

- Agreement on a shared and common referral process from the Department of Social Protection to ensure access to FET for those who need it
- Identification of single contact points across the ETBs for people seeking access to FET and associated support
- Consideration of family literacy and learning approaches to develop English language skills across Ukrainian families
- Use of the newly launched ESOL assessment approach to identify individual English language competency and support needs
- Costing of the roll-out of expanded support programmes if demand increases in line with projections
- Recognition of 14 Ukrainian qualifications that are comparable to Irish awards from Levels 3-10 of the National Framework of Qualifications and can be recognised for those seeking to work or study while resident in Ireland
- On construction and apprenticeship, a process to recognize previous qualifications and learning for applicants from Ukraine is being examined.

The strategic priorities outlined in the **Future FET: Transforming Learning Strategy** for the FET system include:



# Key Achievements



## Capital funding

**€48m** capital budget for 2022

Call for applications for capital funding issued

**28** applications for FET College of the Future (+€5m)

**29** applications for Strategic Infrastructure Upgrade Fund (under €5m)

**Capital investment announcements:** Kerry College of FE, Listown campus, Dunboyne College, new training facility GRETB and LWETB Columb Barracks Training Facility

## CAO.ie/options referral traffic

**15,500** visits from CAO to fetchcourses.ie

**27,800** visits from CAO to apprenticeship.ie

**Phase 3 of promotional campaign commencing May 2022**



## Skills

As the three core pillars of the strategy, we have outlined the developments in the last year on skills, pathways and inclusion, and the systemic, capital, structural and digital measures being implemented to facilitate this development.



**Three retrofitting centres** of excellence established. Two more to be established in 2022



Vendor selected to provide **online Safe Pass courses** for renewals



Plan to address **craft apprenticeship backlog progressing**. 8,400 apprentices progressed since peak in July 2021



First meeting of new **National Apprenticeship Alliance** held in March 2022



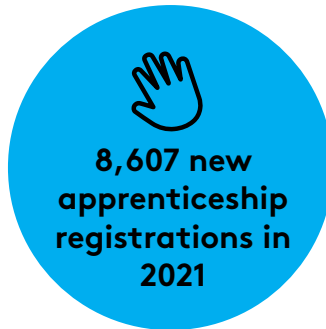
**Two new QQI approved green skills micro qualifications** Environmental Sustainability Awareness Level 4 and Environmental Sustainability Level 5.



**Three new projects under Skills to Advance Innovation Fund.**



## Skills - Apprenticeship



## Skills - Construction & Green Skills

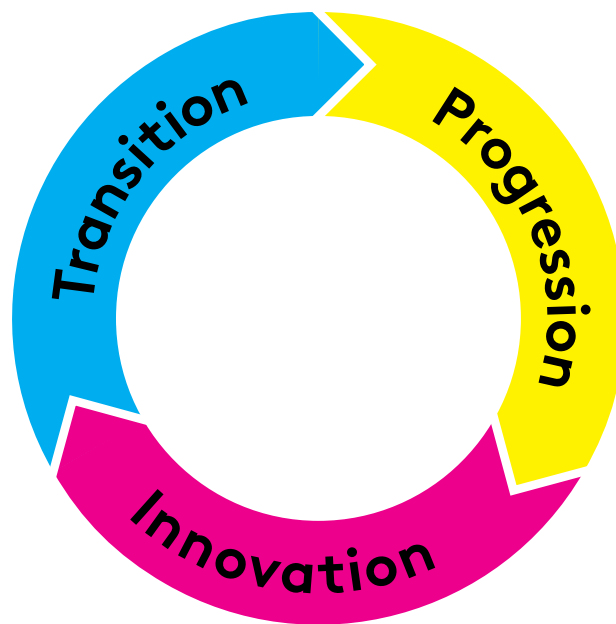


## Skills - Research

- Regional Skills reports
- Burning Glass, Shifting Sands report to examine career pathways to most in demand jobs
- FET in Numbers reports

## Pathways

1. On-going and planned FET and Apprenticeship via CAO campaigns.
2. Mapping of Transition Year taster modules underway.



1. FET – HE Transitions Reform progressing.
2. Research to be undertaken on barriers to entry to FET.
3. Standardisation of university entry requirements for FET graduates.
4. Research underway on progression outcomes by QQI level.

1. Phase 2 of CAO project underway
2. Further development of SOLAS Smart Choices platform.
3. Need for integrated vocational, technical and creative options including in senior cycle review.

# Inclusion

## Strategic Research



- Initial scoping of the community education framework has commenced, building on recent reports and publications from ETBI and a study in December 2021 on non-Irish nationals across the FET system.
- ALL Strategy: Phase 1 of The Adult Literacy for Life Awareness Campaign concluding in January with impact of campaign to be reviewed.
- First meeting of the ALL-Strategy Implementation Group, chaired by Minister Harris, took place in Dec 2021. Engagement with key stakeholders around activities including 'Ireland Reads Day' (25th February).
- Launch of guidelines for supporting persons with Intellectual Disability in the ETB-based Adult Literacy Services; in partnership with NALA and ETBI. SOLAS Learner Support Team has published a set of case studies and a background research report on the implementation of these guidelines in ETBs.
- Research into driving FET Participation in Key Target Groups who were 'lost' because of the pandemic is being considered across two strands – Qualitative research around barriers with AONTAS and as part of the FET learner forum and surveying marginalised groups who do not engage with education like the survey carried out by the UK's Learning and Work Institute.

## Targeted Funding



Over 800 community education projects supported through the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund.



€6.795 MAEDF funding in 2021.

# Staffing Capability & Structures

## Future Staffing Framework

- The SOLAS Staffing Framework Working Group is now established, and its work is ongoing with key stakeholders.

## Quality Cross-FET Provision

- The first ETB/QQI Inaugural Review continues, with all Phase 1 reports now published on the QQI website. Phases 2 and 3 completed.

## Cross-FET Funding/Guidelines

- The FET Funding Model Project Group is continuing its work, and final report has been submitted.

## Professional Development

- Following the publication of FET Professional Learning and Development Strategy 2020-2024, the implementation of relevant structures is ongoing.

# Learner and Performance-Centered

## Performance Framework

- The Strategic Dialogue sessions are currently taking place between all sixteen ETBs and SOLAS, which are the basis for the new Strategic Performance Agreements (SPA) for the FET Sector for the duration of the *Transforming Learning National FET Strategy to 2024*. The new SPAS are due to be completed by June 2022.

## Learner Engagement

- Following the launch of the National FET Learner Forum Annual Synthesis Report 2020-2021, work is ongoing between SOLAS and key stakeholders to build on the work of the initial FET Learner Voice Forum.

## Distance Travelled

- A joint SOLAS and CSO project to explore apprenticeship outcomes has begun.
- The scoping of the new Community Education Framework will work with ETBI and key stakeholders, including POBAL and AONTAS on social impact assessment metrics, such as the distance travelled tool.

# Digital Transformation of FET

## Learner Access and Delivery

- A bespoke digital and accessible careers explorer platform - *Smartchoice.ie* is now fully updated and live with existing data and insights from the National Skills Bulletin and other relevant resources/reports.
- New access route enabling Skills to Advance (STA) learners to access eCollege through ETBs is now in place.

## Data Driven

- The SOLAS Data Strategy Group has been established and will support the digital transformation in SOLAS and FET.

## Management Systems

- Wave 2 of the Learner's Payroll Project went live in February 2022 for Youthreach and VTOS learners. This project once fully completed will integrate PLSS and the SUN financial system to ensure learners are registered through PLSS by the ETBs, with payments processed by the Education Shared Business Services (ESBS).

# Capital Infrastructure

## Address Deficits

- Minister Harris announced in February 2022 a new capital fund, including a Strategic Infrastructure Upgrade Fund (SIUF) for smaller scale investment in FET for projects with an estimated cost of between €100k and €5 million.
- Capital Call sent to all ETBs in Feb, with support workshops delivered by SOLAS in March 2022.
- Following the completion of Capital Estates project logging 450 FET properties, recruitment of Building Officers for each ETB commenced and is ongoing.

## Consolidate Provision

- The Capital Call for ETB includes the submission of a Strategic Overview (SO) and Strategic Assessment Report (SAR) from each ETB. These will outline each ETB's progress on implementation of the key pillars of the FET Strategy in the FET College of the Future.
- The SO and SAR will form each ETB's initial business case for the Capital Call.

## Flagship Developments

- FET College of the Future Major Projects (€5m+) – The Capital Call announced by Minister Harris also includes a fund for consolidation of provision in high quality facilities, integration of further education and training, realisation of centres of excellence. This fund is for projects over €5 million.
- The FET Sectoral property group has now been established to progress this capital call and include representatives from ETBI and DEFHRIS.

## FET Green Skills Summit – Collaboration and Innovation

**“If I was to describe today in one word, I think it is collaboration”** said Simon Harris, TD and Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, in his opening address to the first ever FET Green Skills Summit.



The event focussed on the role of FET in the delivery of the Green Skills commitment in the *Transforming Learning* national FET Strategy, and on FET’s strategic role in action on climate change.

The event was hosted in a collaboration between ETBI, SOLAS, Waterford Wexford ETB (WWETB) and Wexford County Council (WCC). The Council’s Town Hall was the venue, with guest speakers, and exhibition stands showcasing different ETB’s innovative course provision in Green Skills.

A highlight of the day was the graduation of the first ever cohort of FET teaching and instructing staff receiving their *“Train the Trainer”* award in Net Zero Energy Building (NZEB) standards. This award was delivered in a partnership between the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) and WWETB through the SOLAS Skills to Advance Innovation and Collaboration Fund.

Other organisations presenting at the event included ETBI (Fiona Maloney), the Irish Green Building Council (Marion Jammet), the Irish Road Haulage Association (Paul Jackman), SOLAS (Andrew Brownlee, Nora Condon and Nessa White), TUS (Seamus Hoyne), WCC (Tony Larkin) and WWETB (Kevin Lewis).



The Summit was presented with an update on the three main strands of the FET sector's strategy.

# Green Skills for Construction, Careers, Life.

## Green Skills for Construction

- To build on the existing technical skills of craft/tradespeople and to ensure a pipeline of future employees with the skills for retrofitting and new green building technology.
- To develop NZEB retrofitting centres of excellence for FET delivery in five (5) ETBs:
  - Waterford Wexford ETB – courses running in Enniscorthy and Waterford.
  - Laois and Offaly ETB – the National Training Centre in Mount Lucas is also running FET courses.
  - Limerick Clare ETB – Green Innovation campus due to start course delivery in Q2 2022.
  - Cork ETB – due to start courses in Q3 2022.
  - Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB – due to start courses by Q4 of 2022, in Sligo.
- To accommodate the needs of industry for flexible and up-to-date upskilling and reskilling through blended learning and micro-credentials that can adapt seamlessly to developing technologies. A particularly important recent development is the agreement by QQI to fast-track the validation of micro-credentials. This will ensure an agile FET response to the Green Skills needs of the construction sector.
- To consider how apprentices will be equipped with NZEB and retrofitting skills as part of their ongoing training.
- To provide upskilling opportunities for staff in the FET sector, such as through the new *NZEB Train the Trainer* programme.

## Green Skills for Careers

- To expand and innovate by creating new FET centres of excellence offering learners the opportunity to follow a Green Skills career. Examples of such courses include:
  - Sustainability – in diverse areas, such as agriculture and fashion.
  - Eco-tourism.
  - Smart driving.
  - Electrical vehicle maintenance.
  - Renewable energies.

The new Outdoor Education Strategic Framework for the ETB sector is also an example of FET collaboration and innovation in sustainability and environmental education and training.



## Green Skills for Life

- To deliver on the commitment given in the national FET strategy that all provision will integrate the development of knowledge and understanding of the environmental impact of critical climate change. This will empower FET learners and graduates to become agents of change in climate action.
- To embed delivery throughout FET of a new micro-credential at QQI Level 4 for sustainability, in a blended learning format. Validation by QQI is expected in Q2 2022, with delivery to commence in the six pilot ETBs thereafter. The award will then be made available for differentiated validation to the other ten ETBs by Q3 of 2022.
- To underpin the rollout of this new Level 4 award incrementally, embed the module through CDP for FET practitioners, supported by the development of an open-access online resource for the FET sector.



The ongoing collaboration and innovation by FET was the focus of a panel discussion on *Green Skills: The FET Response*. The panel comprised speakers from Kerry ETB (Con O’Sullivan), City of Dublin ETB (John Moriarty), WWETB (Michael O’Brien) and SOLAS (David Smith), hosted by the South East Regional Skills Forum’s Edmond Connolly.

Attendees at the event included elected public officials, staff from ETBs, ETBI and Higher Education and SOLAS, as well as representatives from industry, employers, and employer groups.

The event was live streamed, and the recording is also available [here](#).

