

FET in Focus 2026

A study into
Youthreach
provision in
Ireland

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May 2026

FET in Focus: Community Training Centres

Further
Education
& Training

SOLAS
learning works




Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Ireland's European Structural and
Investment Funds Programmes
2014-2020
Co-funded by the Irish Government
and the European Union



European Union
Investing In Your Future
European Social Fund



All data is sourced from the Programme and Learner Support Systems (PLSS) database. PLSS collects and processes the personal data of the FET learners who are enrolled in SOLAS funded programmes. Please note that apprenticeship and eCollege data are not included in this report.

The Data Analytics Unit would like to acknowledge the assistance of the ETB staff involved in submitting data to SOLAS.

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Key Findings

- > The number of unique learner enrolments decreased in 2020 by 22% and, despite recent increases in enrolments, remains below pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels.
- > 96% of enrolments were on courses at Level 3 or Level 4.
- > Of the 2,060 learner enrolments in 2022, 971 were full or partial completions of a CTC course (the remainder comprising those who were still 'on course' at the end of 2022 and those who were early leavers), yielding a completion rate of 83%.
- > Of the 971 learners who were full or partial completers of a CTC course in 2022, 329 learners (34%) started another FET course after leaving CTC by the end of 2023, and 44% of these courses were PLCs.
- > The certification rate was 79%, which is higher than the 2022 national average over all FET programmes of 71%.
- > Of those learners who provided information on their ethnicity, 75% identified as white Irish, 13% as an Irish Traveller and 1% as Roma.
- > Using the Pobal HP deprivation index, we found that CTC learners in 2022 were almost five times more likely to come from very or extremely disadvantaged areas than the general population.
- > The median distance travelled by all learners to their CTC was 2.3km, and the maximum median distance travelled by learners to a CTC course was to provision in Kilkenny (15.7km).

Introduction

The National Youthreach programme is a full-time programme delivered in Youthreach Centres and Community Training Centres nationwide. Youthreach provides second chance education for young people who leave mainstream secondary education without completing the Leaving Certificate.

The Youthreach programme is designed to meet the personal and social development needs of early school leavers aged between 15 and 20 years. Its primary aim is to support these young people by offering opportunities for basic education, personal development, vocational training, and work experience. Through this comprehensive approach, Youthreach seeks to establish a foundation for lifelong learning, enabling participants to progress to further education and training or to successfully integrate into the labour market. Furthermore, the programme addresses issues of social inclusion at a broader level.

Youthreach delivers qualifications that are typically at Levels 3 and 4 on the National Framework of Qualifications. The programme operates on a full-time, year-round basis, and applications are accepted throughout the year. Participation is cost-free, and individuals aged 16 or over are entitled to a weekly training allowance, as well as meal, travel, and childcare allowances where appropriate.

The programme is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union, with Youthreach included under Priority 2 and receiving a specific allocation through the Youth Employment Initiative.

Youthreach offers a flexible and inclusive learning environment that combines general education with skills training tailored for young people. The programme gives participants a second chance to access education and training, the opportunity to develop new skills, and the chance to achieve national certification. In summary, Youthreach focuses on equipping learners with the essential core skills needed for ongoing learning and successful participation in further education, training, or the world of work.¹

The motivation for this report is to provide a holistic view of the Youthreach programme. This report focuses on Youthreach at CTC centres and their journey through education and training as well as assessing their outcomes. It is a companion report to our report on Youthreach delivered at Youthreach centres, published in December 2024.²

1 <https://www.esri.ie/news/youthreach-helps-early-school-leavers-to-access-further-education-training-and-employment>

2 <https://a.storyblok.com/f/70398/x/5060a4ad7a/fet-in-focus-youthreach.pdf>

The Department of Education's Inspectorate report on the Youthreach programme³ highlighted the high levels of satisfaction of parents and young people with the Youthreach programme. The commitment of staff to improving learner's self-belief, fostering an ambitious outlook and helping them reach their potential was emphasised. This is particularly important since Youthreach learners often reported negative experiences in mainstream education.

The inspectorate's report did highlight some persistent challenges for the Youthreach programme in general. Among these are attendance (the report acknowledged that the reasons for poor attendance can be complex) and the effective facilitation of literacy and numeracy skills. The report also highlighted the need for each centre to have access to a guidance councillor to help the young people with planning and decisions for their post-Youthreach education and employment.

Within the Youthreach programme, Community Training Centres (CTCs) and ETB-run Youthreach centres operate under two distinct governance structures. ETB Youthreach centres are administered directly by the ETBs, with staffing, policies, procedures, and quality assurance following established ETB systems.

Community Training Centres (CTCs) are onward grantees of the ETBs and deliver a community-based model. They are operated as independent, not-for-profit organisations governed by a Board of Directors who work closely with their local ETB who provide funding for the programme. CTCs are supported by IACTO, as the National Representative Body for CTCs. There is a national framework for CTCs as onward grantees, comprising the governance, funding and operational requirements of the programmes. The community model of the CTCs fosters strong local partnerships.

In this report we found similar challenges facing Youthreach learners at CTCs compared to Youthreach centre learners reported previously. A high proportion of these learners report that they have a long-term medical condition (see Table 1), and the SOLAS report **Key Insights into the Socio-Economic Background of FET Learners 2019**⁴ found that CTC learners had the second lowest median HP deprivation index score of all FET programme categories, indicating that they are likely to be amongst the most disadvantaged Further Education and Training (FET) learners.

In a report exploring the increasing importance of transversal skills of FET learners and their readiness for the future world of work, Leargas (2023)⁵ found that transversal skills such as confidence and resilience were among those skills deemed top priority, particularly since COVID. Even though the acquisition of these skills is difficult to measure from the administrative data (PLSS) used in this study, and our previous study on learners at Youthreach centres, we did find evidence of improved attitude toward education as a high proportion of CTC learners progress to other FET programmes,

3 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/young-people-on-alternative-educational-and-training-pathways-evaluation-of-youthreach.pdf>

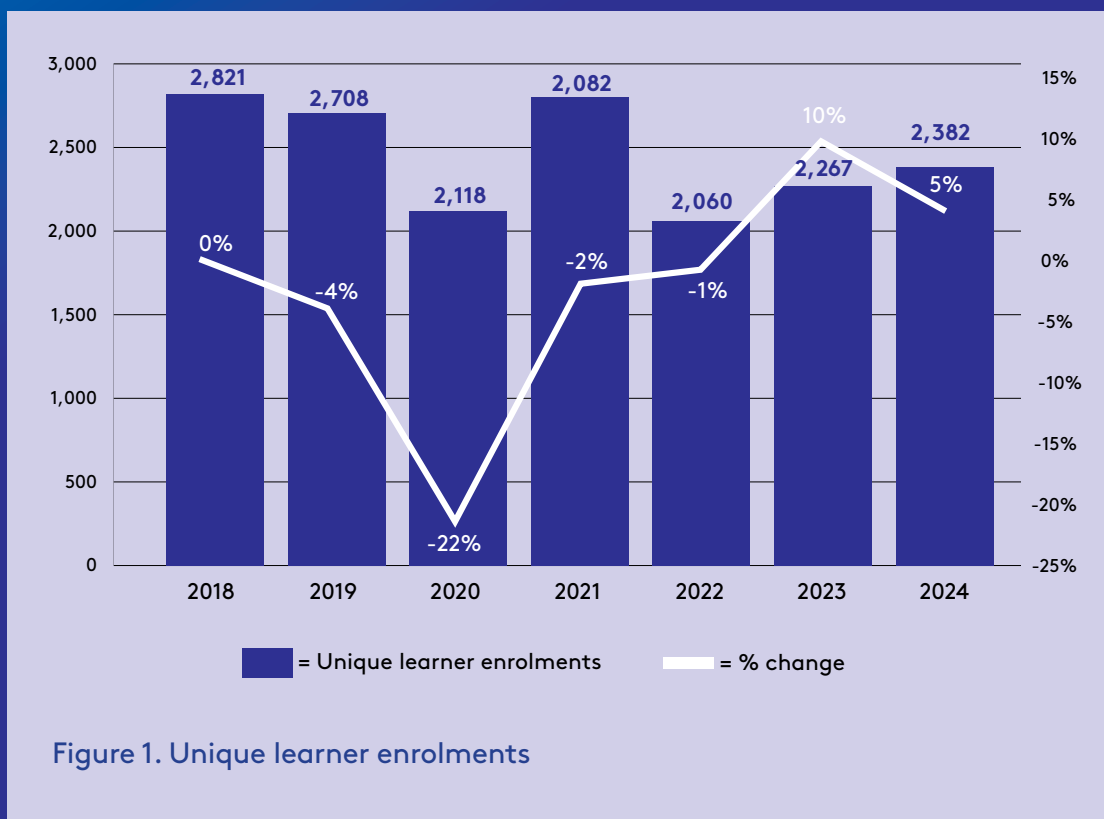
4 <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/45b5072653/solas-key-insights-report.pdf>

5 <https://www.leargas.ie/resource/erasmus-vet-mobility-as-a-route-to-the-acquisition-of-transversal-skills/>

notably PLCs, after they finish the Youthreach programme. This, we conclude, shows that Youthreach programmes can equip the learners with increased confidence as well as resilience and adaptability. This finding is also in line with the conclusions of the ESRI report that overall, the programme had been successful in re-engaging early school leavers with education and enhancing personal and social skills, which are key to success in education and in the labour market.⁶

Unique Learner Enrolments 2018 – 2024

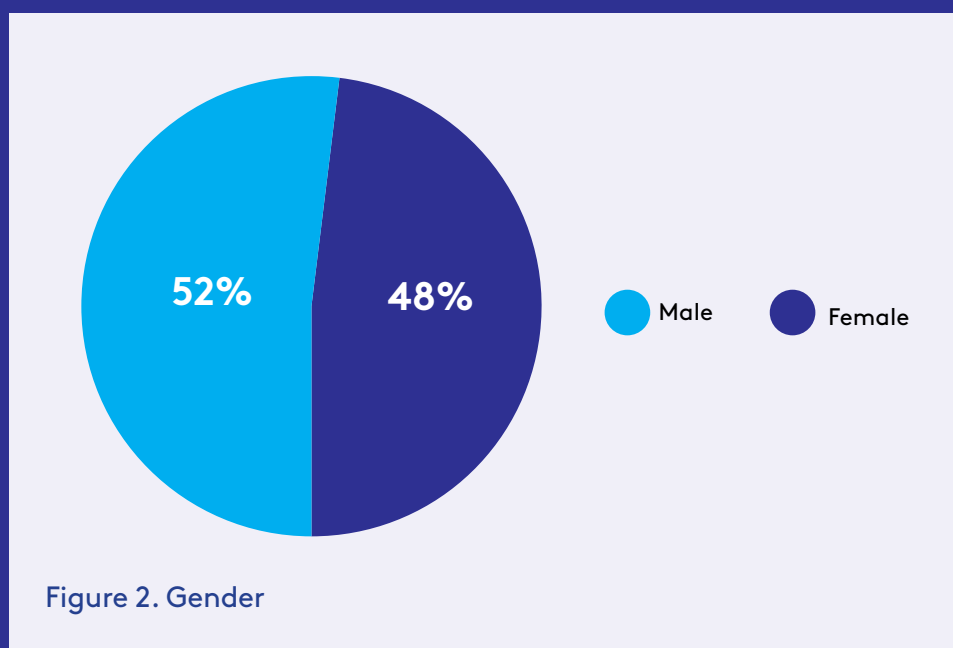
In 2018, there were 2,821 unique learner enrolments in the CTC programme. This number fell by 4% in 2019 and then by a further 22% in 2020, likely due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent years, the number of enrolments in CTCs has increased but is still lower than its peak in 2018. By comparison, enrolments at Youthreach centres fell by 15% in 2020 and in 2024 reached 4,870 learners, higher than their peak in 2019. Enrolments across the entire FET sector fell by 15% in 2020 and are now higher than their pre-pandemic level.



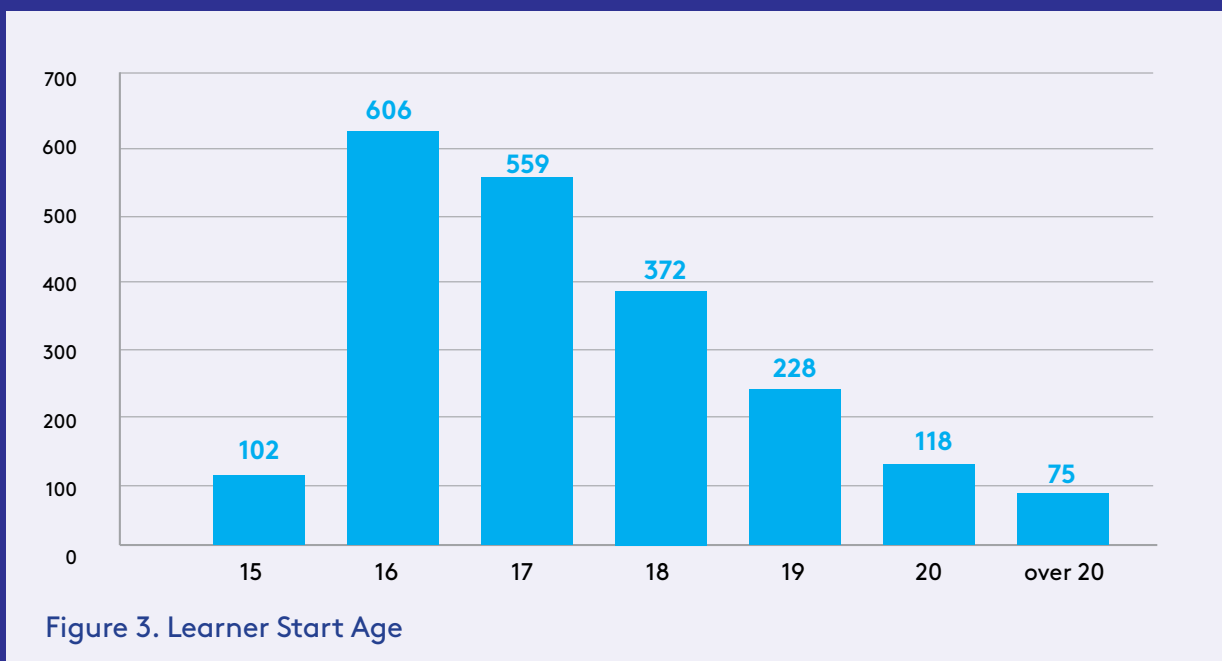
1. Learner Profile

Enrolments 2022

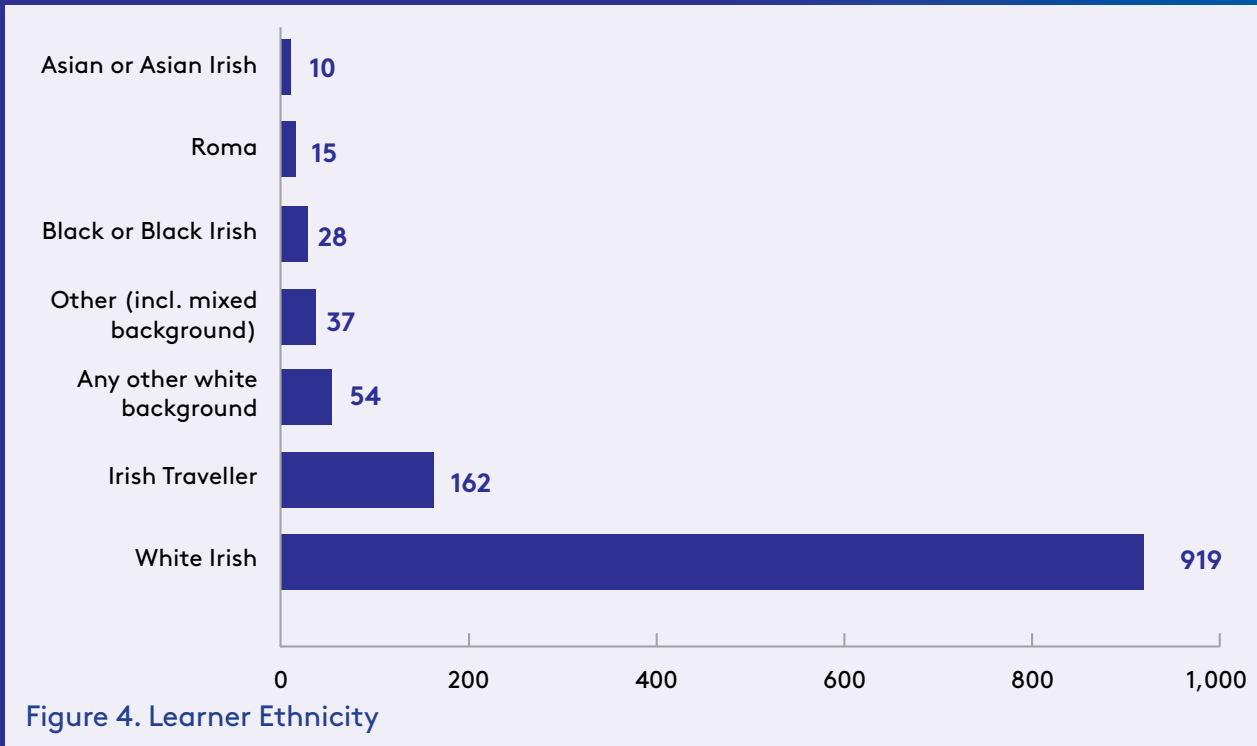
There were 2,060 unique learner enrolments in CTCs in 2022. Of these enrolments, 988 (48%) were female and 1,072 (52%) were male. This gender balance is different to what is observed across the entire FET sector, where 37.9% of learners were male in 2022 and 62.1% of learners were female.



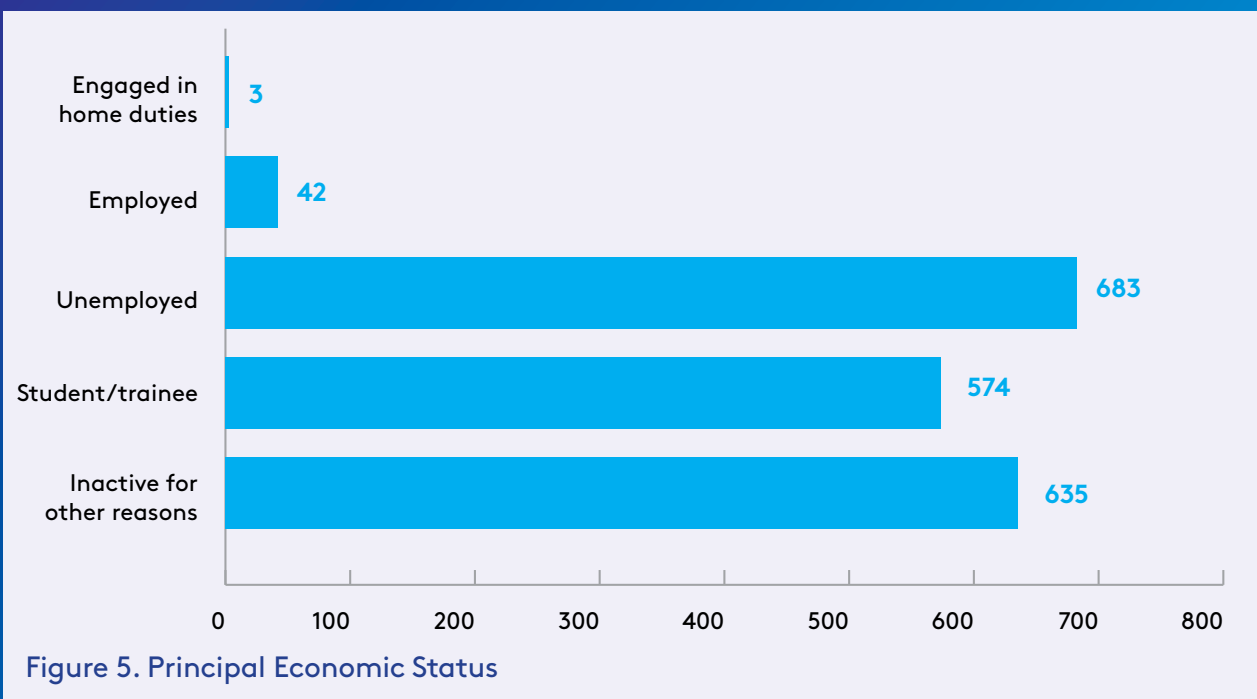
From Figure 3 we see that most learners (57%) were aged 16 or 17 years.



Upon application to the CTC programme, learners have the option of providing information on their ethnicity.⁷ We see from Figure 4 that of those CTC learners who provided ethnicity information, 75% (919 learners) described themselves as white Irish, 13% (162) as Irish travellers and 1% (15) as Roma.



The principal economic status of the learners is summarised in Figure 5. Among CTC enrolments who answered this question, 2% (42 enrolments) were employed, 35% (683 enrolments) were unemployed, 30% (574 enrolments) were a student or trainee and 33% (635 enrolments) were inactive for other reasons.⁸



⁷ The response rate to the ethnicity question was 58%.

⁸ The response rate for the principal economic status question was 94%.

25

Dependents
in a jobless
household

125

Dependents
of welfare
recipients

374

Had a
long-lasting
condition

Also, of the 2,060 unique learner enrolments in the CTC programme, 374 had a disability, 125 were dependents of a welfare recipient, and 25 were dependents in a jobless household. The distribution of learner disabilities is shown in Table 1.

| Disability/Long-lasting condition | Frequency |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Other Illness or condition | 38 |
| Mobility impairment | 14 |
| Intellectual disability | 30 |
| Learning or remembering difficulty | 252 |
| Vision disability | 12 |
| Hearing disability | 8 |
| Psychological disability | 105 |

Table 1. Learner disability distribution. Note that learners may report having more than one disability.

Pobal HP Deprivation index of CTC learners in 2022

The Pobal Haase-Pratschke (HP) deprivation index is a metric which scores each census small area (approximately 100 households) on a scale from very affluent to extremely disadvantaged using census information on educational attainment, age profile, employment etc. Since PLSS contains learner addresses, the CTC learner enrolments subset of PLSS can be linked to census small areas and the Pobal HP deprivation index. If a learner is from a small area deemed to be disadvantaged, then we infer that the learner is also likely to be disadvantaged.

The cohort of 2022 CTC learner enrolments were placed into the following categories by calculation of the Pobal HP deprivation index. Note that the census small areas used, and the HP deprivation index derived from them, correspond to the 2022 census.

| HP Index Deprivation Category | % of Learners |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Very affluent | 0.1 |
| Affluent | 5.6 |
| Marginally above average | 22.9 |
| Marginally below average | 29.3 |
| Disadvantaged | 23.4 |
| Very disadvantaged | 15.8 |
| Extremely disadvantaged | 2.9 |

Table 2. HP Deprivation Index

Inspection of Table 2 clearly shows the tendency for CTC learners to come from more disadvantaged areas (their median HP deprivation index score was -7.3). At the launch of the 2022 index, it was noted⁹ that 4% of the general population resided in census small areas that were classified as very or extremely disadvantaged. Table 2 reveals that almost 19% of the 2022 CTC cohort resided in census small areas designated as very or extremely disadvantaged areas. This is in line with previous SOLAS research in **Key Insights into the Socio-Economic Background of FET Learners 2019**¹⁰ that found that CTC learners had the second lowest median HP deprivation index of all FET programme categories, indicating that they are likely to be amongst the most disadvantaged FET learners.

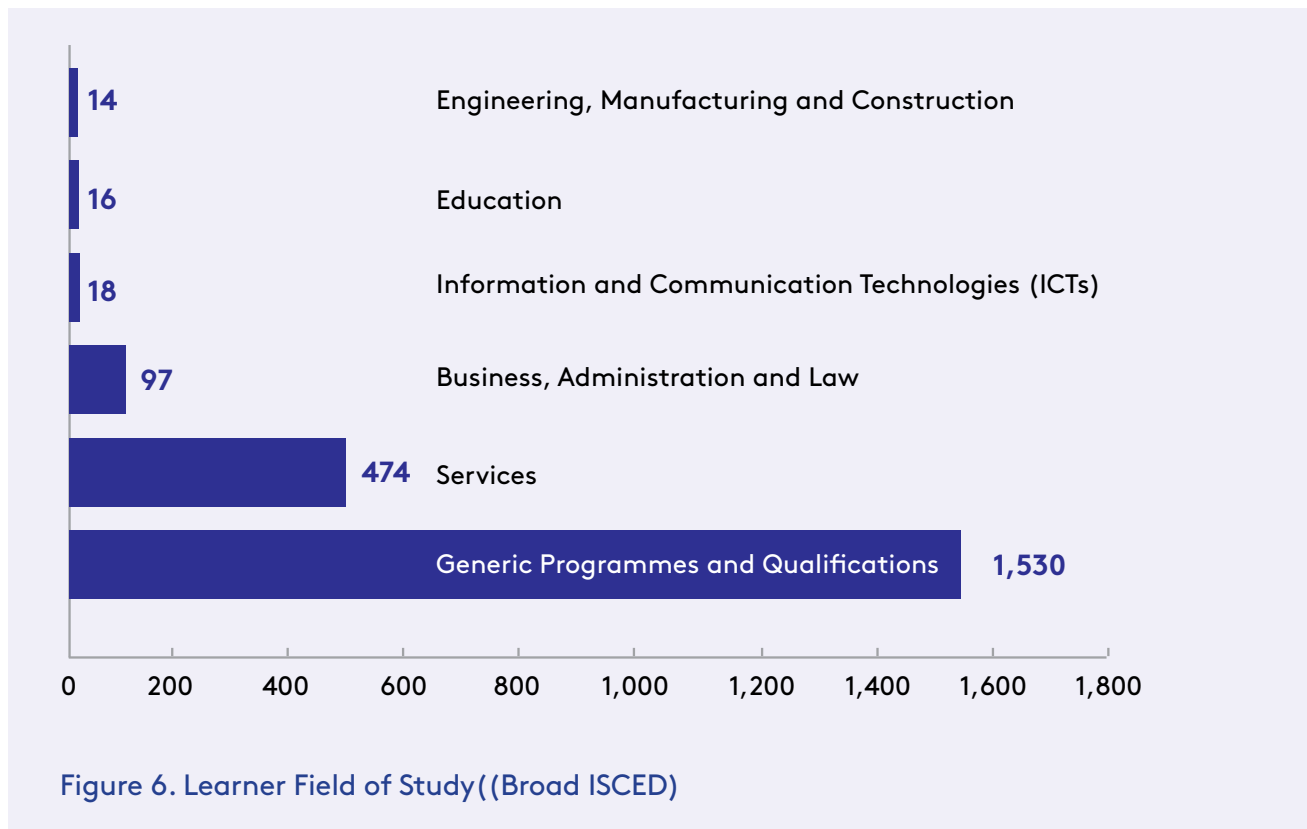
9 Further details are available at <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2023/11/Pobal-HP-Deprivation-Index-Briefing.pdf>

10 <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/45b5072653/solas-key-insights-report.pdf>

2. Course Profile

The overwhelming majority of learners (2,045 or 99.3%) were engaged in full-time CTC courses, whereas there were only 15 part-time enrolments. Furthermore, all enrolments were classroom based (there were no enrolments on blended delivery courses).

The distribution of learner fields of study is shown in Figure 6.



Among ISCED broad fields of study, 71% (1,530) of enrolments were on generic programmes and qualifications in 2022¹¹ and 22% (474 enrolments) were on Services courses. Some example course titles are shown in Table 3.

¹¹ Learners are unique within each ISCED field of study, but not necessarily across.

| Level | Course title |
|-----------------------|--|
| Level 3 Certificate | Pre-apprenticeship construction skills |
| | Sound engineering and music performance |
| | Employability skills |
| | Hospitality and tourism |
| Level 4 Certificate | Hairdressing services |
| | General Learning Level 4 |
| | Business skills |
| | Childcare studies |
| | Computer and Office skills |
| Level 4/5 Certificate | Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (Year 1) |
| | Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (Year 2) |
| Level 5 Certificate | Beauty Therapy Level 5 |

Table 3. Examples of courses offered

The distribution of course award levels is displayed in Figure 7, where we see that 96% (2083) of enrolments were on courses at Level 3 or Level 4.¹²

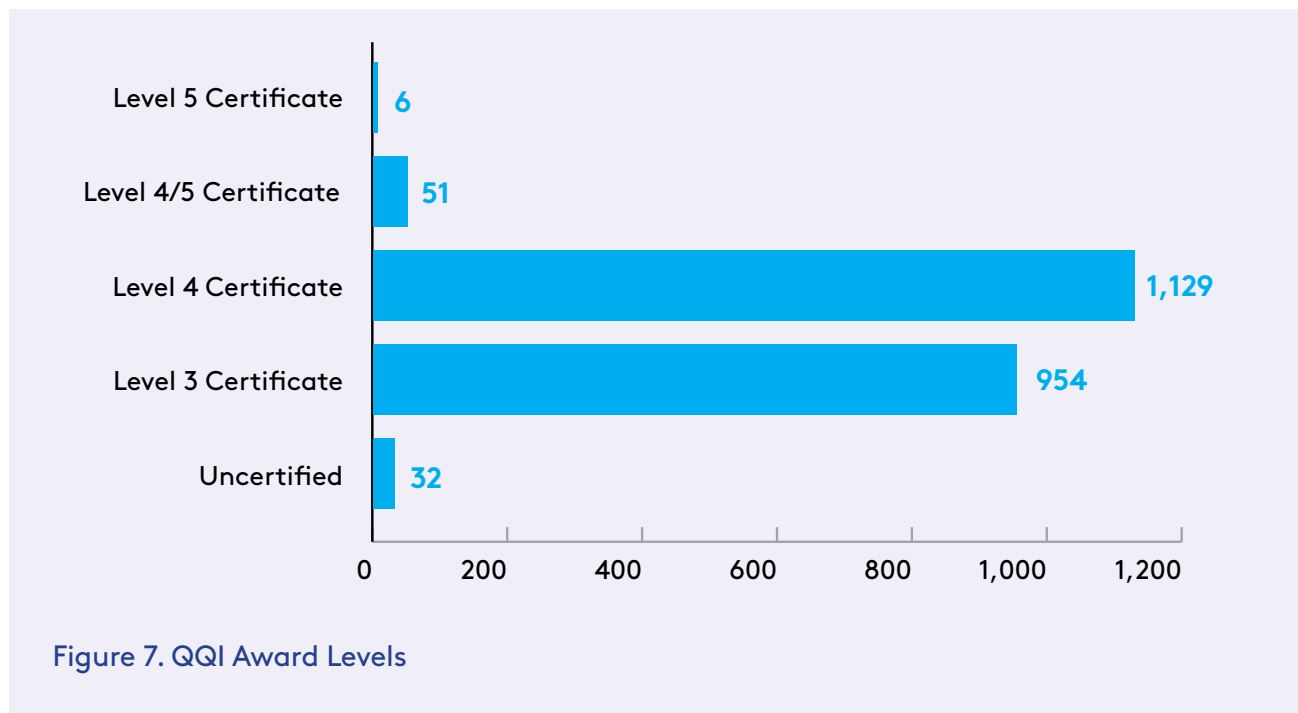


Figure 7. QQI Award Levels

12 Learners are unique within each award level but not necessarily across award levels.

Learner Completions and Certifications

Of the 2,060 CTC unique learner enrolments, 971 learners were full completions (i.e. those learners who have completed 90% or more of a course and its requirements in 2022) or partial completions (i.e. those learners who have completed more than 25% but less than 90% of a course and its requirements in 2022), see Figure 8 below, yielding a completion rate of 83%.

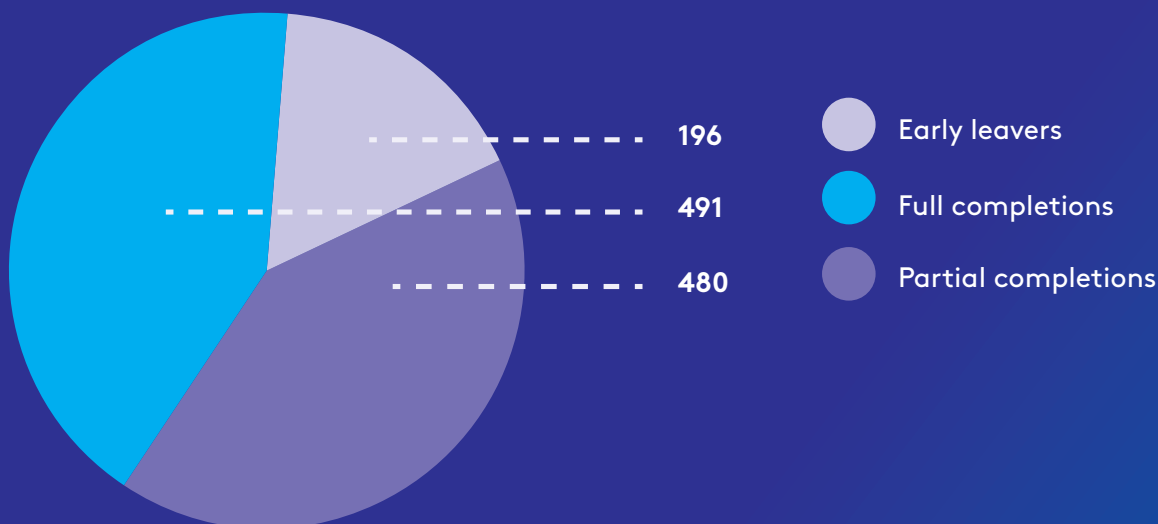


Figure 8 Learner Completions

Of these 971 learner completions (full and partial completions), 939 were certified completions. The distribution of certification outcomes is presented in Figure 9. The certification rate (the number of full and partial certifications divided by the total number of certified completions) was 79%. This should be compared to the national certification rate across all programmes of 71% (published in SOLAS's FET Facts & Figures 2022 report).

An ESRI report on Youthreach (provision at Youthreach centres and CTCs) using survey data in 2017 highlighted the difficulty in capturing programme 'completions' in the administrative system (FARR) used at that time, since not all learners remain for two years and progress from one qualification level to another. They speculated that this may lead some centre managers/coordinators to view them as non-completions.

Our findings, based instead on PLSS, allow for the counting of full and partial completions and certifications and are at the granularity of individual courses/QQI award levels. Thus, for example, when we speak of a full completion we are referring to the full completion of a CTC course and not of the (two year) CTC programme.



Figure 9. Certified Completions

In Table 4 below the number of certified completions (full or partial) by award level is presented.

From the table we see that 58% of certified completions were at Level 4 or higher.

| Certified Completions by Award Level | Learners | % |
|--------------------------------------|----------|-------|
| Level 3 Certificate | 309 | 41.8% |
| Level 4 Certificate | 404 | 54.7% |
| Level 4/5 Certificate | 20 | 2.7% |
| Level 5 Certificate | 6 | 0.8% |

Table 4. Certified completions by award level

3. Geographical Distribution of Learners

The following Table shows the distribution of the number of learners enrolled on a CTC programme across the ETBs:

| ETB | Learners |
|------------------------------|----------|
| City of Dublin ETB | 453 |
| Cork ETB | 164 |
| Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB | 185 |
| Galway and Roscommon ETB | 45 |
| Kerry ETB | 40 |
| Kildare and Wicklow ETB | 82 |
| Kilkenny and Carlow ETB | 141 |
| Laois and Offaly ETB | 113 |
| Limerick Clare ETB | 199 |
| Longford and Westmeath ETB | 156 |
| Louth and Meath ETB | 49 |
| Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB | 104 |
| Tipperary ETB | 172 |
| Waterford and Wexford ETB | 163 |

Table 5. Learner count in each ETB

Table 5 shows that of the 2,060 unique learners enrolled in the CTC programme, enrolments were spread over 14 of the 16 ETBs. The largest number of enrolments were in Dublin and there are no CTCs in Cavan and Monaghan ETB or in Donegal ETB.

Distance travelled by learners to their CTC centre

PLSS contains data on learners' addresses and the addresses of CTC centres in a form (longitude and latitude) convenient for the calculation of ('straight-line') distance travelled. Note that of the 2,060 learners enrolled in CTC in 2022, we had geocoded addresses for 1,681 learners.

In Figure 10 we present the median one-way straight-line distances travelled by learners to their CTC venue¹³ in 2022, based on address data in PLSS, in the form of a venues heatmap, with larger and greener markers corresponding to further distances travelled.

The median distance travelled by learners to their CTC centre was 2.3km. The maximum median distance to a venue was 15.7km, which was to courses organised by KCETB in Kilkenny.

13 Note that circles in Figure 10 refer to a location where CTC learners enrolled in a course in 2022, not necessarily to a CTC. For example, two venues in County Kildare are displayed but only one, in Newbridge, is a CTC. Only venues with greater than 5 learners are displayed.

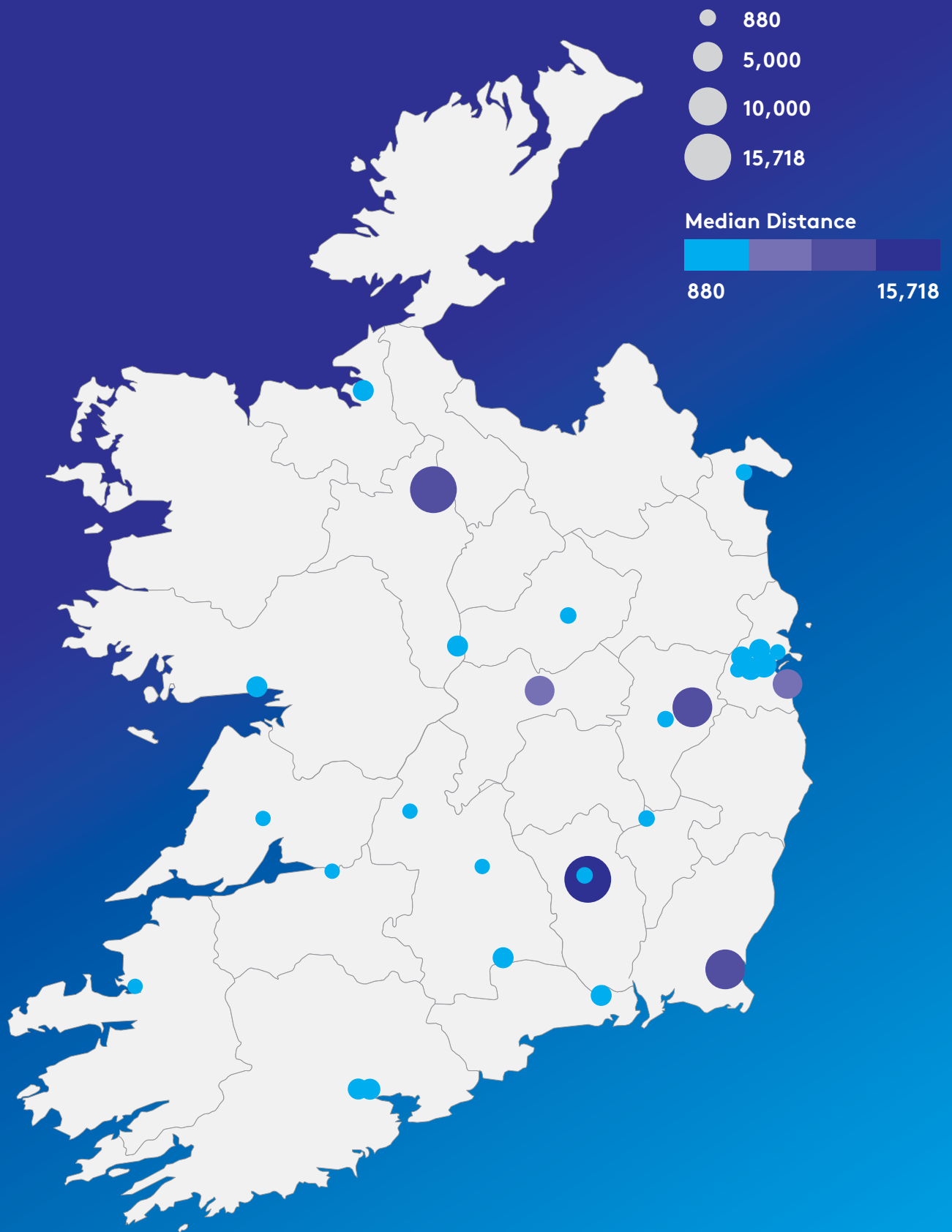


Figure 10. Median distance travelled to CTC venues

In Table 6 below, we present the median distance travelled by learners to their CTC centre by QQI award level.

| QQI Award Level | Median distance travelled (m) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Level 3 Certificate | 2,320 |
| Level 4 Certificate | 2,309 |
| Level 4/5 Certificate | 2,195 |
| Level 5 Certificate | 7,849 |
| Uncertified | 3,574 |

Table 6. Median distance travelled by award level

From Table 6, we see that learners travel a median distance of 2.1 - 2.3 km for Level 3, Level 4 and Level 4/5 (leaving certificate) courses. A small number of learners travel much further (a median distance of 7.8 km) to enrol in Level 5 courses, while students enrolling in the (uncertified) **Deciding Your Future – Linked Work Experience (WYTEC)** travel a median distance of 3.5km.

4. Outcomes: Pathways

beyond CTC

Of the 971 learners who were full or partial completers of a CTC course in 2022,¹⁴ 329 learners (34%) started another FET course after leaving CTC by the end of 2023.

In Figure 11 we present a Sankey diagram to visualise the destinations of these 329 learners. The column on the right represents the programme category with the highest award level that the learner enrolled in after CTC by the end of 2023. We can see that 44% (146) of these learners enrolled in PLCs after CTC.

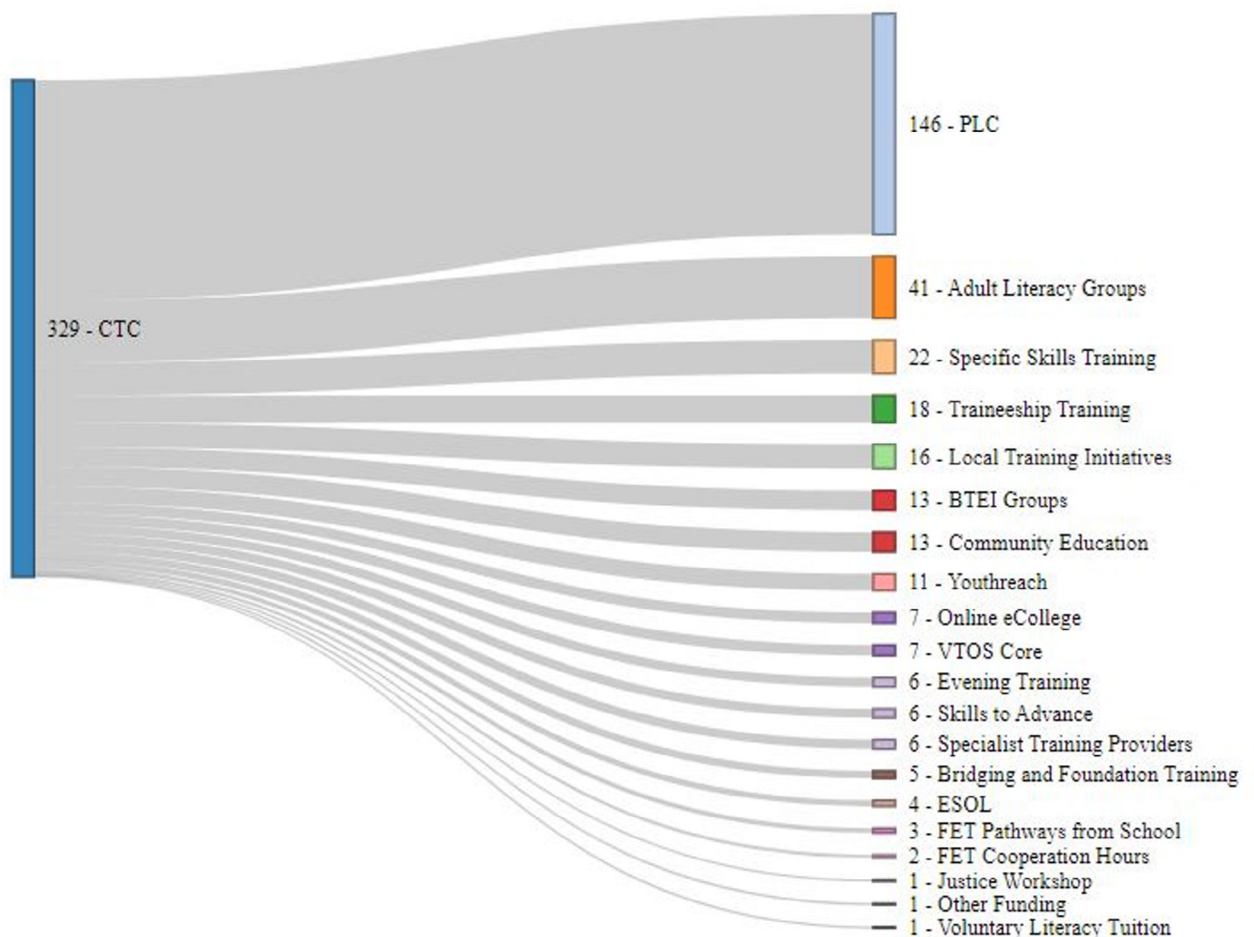


Figure 11. The programme categories with the highest award level that learners enrolled in after CTC

¹⁴ We again emphasise that we refer to completers of a course in CTC and not the two-year CTC programme.

Figure 12 below summarises, by award level, the path taken by learners who were full or partial completers from their highest award level within CTC (the left column of the flow chart), to their highest award level after CTC (the right column of the flow chart), up to the end of December 2023. We can clearly see that most learners move to courses at the same or higher award level.

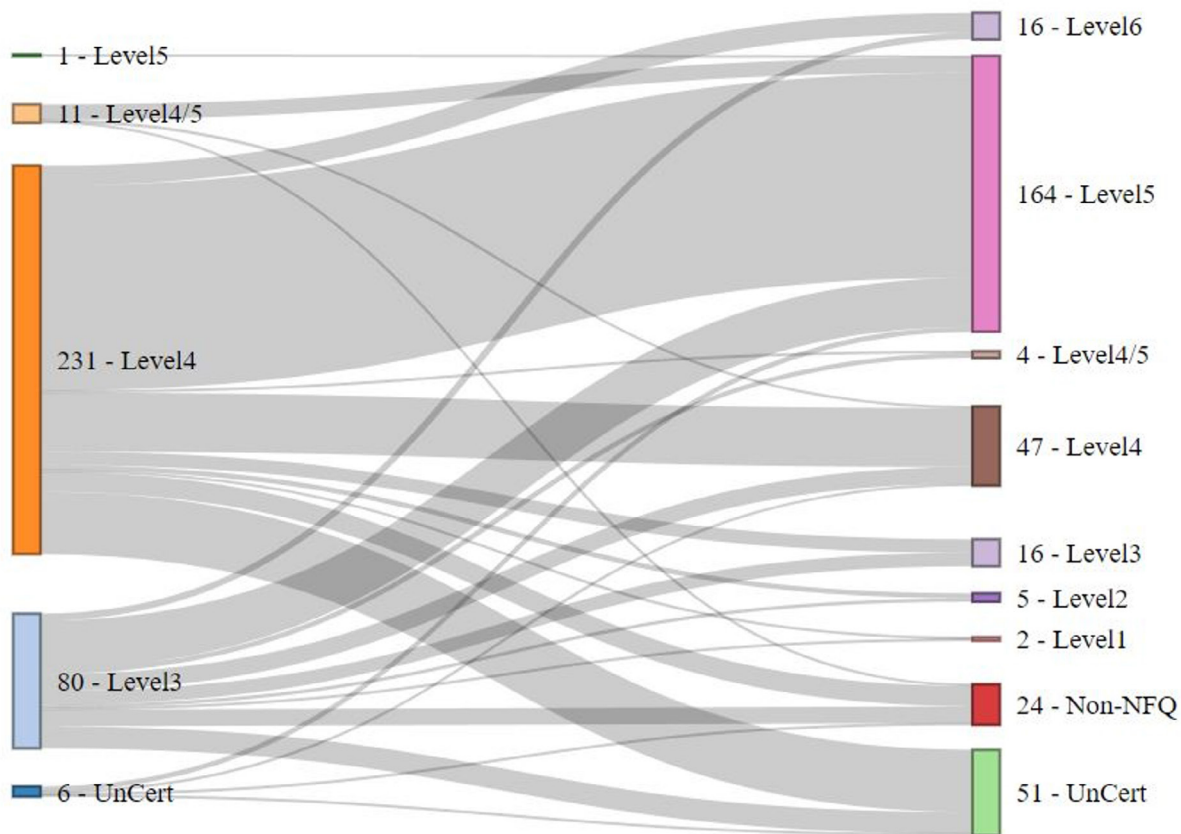


Figure 12. Pathways from learners’ highest award level within CTC to their highest award level after CTC

For example, of the 231 completers whose highest award level whilst in CTC was at QQI Level 4, 15% (35 learners) had a highest award level in FET after CTC during this period also at Level 4, whilst 58% (135 learners) transitioned to a Level 4/5, Level 5, or Level 6 course. The remaining 27% (61 learners) transitioned to a course at a lower NFQ level or a non-NFQ Aligned FET course or an uncertified course.

Figures 11 and 12 summarise the post-CTC outcomes of full and partial completers of a CTC course in 2022. If we instead consider the early leaver cohort in 2022 (196 learners), we found that 31% (61 learners) enrolled in another FET course up to the end of 2023 and 21% (13 learners) of these enrolments were on PLCs. It is important to note that some learners leave for positive reasons, such as to take up employment, and we have not analysed this group further (the ESRI report in 2017 found using survey data that 27% of those who completed the programme (at a Youthreach centre or CTC) took up employment directly).

Conclusion

Our findings and conclusions mirror those from our earlier study of the Youthreach programme at Youthreach centres.

Our analysis has revealed that despite the challenges CTC learners may be facing, such as a high probability of residing in census small areas classified as disadvantaged and a high proportion of these learners reporting that they experience a long-term medical condition(s), they achieved a course completion rate of 83% and a certification rate above the national average for FET in 2022.

We also found encouraging evidence that the CTC programme had equipped learners with the commitment and self-belief to re-engage with education, as of the 971 learners who were full or partial completers of a CTC course in 2022, 329 enrolled in another FET course after leaving CTC up to the end of 2023 and 44% of these enrolments were PLCs.

This change in attitude of early school leavers as they re-engage with education, after often negative experiences in mainstream secondary education, is a positive impact of the programme and potentially transformative in their future careers where lifelong learning will play a critical role.



Definition of Terms

Activity

The sum of learners multiplied by the number of courses which they have been enrolled in or completed within a programme or across different programmes, or providers during 2022.

Certified Completions

In the FET sector, not all learner completions lead to an award through a recognised awarding body in the FET sector. Therefore, certified completions refer only to the total number of certified completions in 2022.

Certification Rate

The sum of only full and partial learner completions that gained an award through a recognised awarding body in 2022.

Completions

Total number of learners who have a finish date of a course (regardless of whether the course is certified or not) in 2022. Completions include partial and full completers but exclude early leavers.

Enrolments

Enrolments are defined as learners who are on course or have completed a course during 2022.

Field of Study

This is defined and categorised by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Both broad (2-digit) and detailed (4-digit) fields of study are used for categorising Further Education and Training course fields of study.

Full Completions

Learners who have completed 90% or more of the course and its requirements in 2022.

Inactive

This term is used according to the Eurostat and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition which defines inactive as individuals who are neither employed nor unemployed and are not working and not available or looking for work.

Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

This is a framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way. The many different types and sizes of qualifications included in the NFQ are organised based on their level of knowledge, skill and competence.

Learner

A unique individual who has progressed onto a course in the application process. The total number of learners is the sum of all unique individuals in Further Education and Training in 2022.

Non-NFQ Aligned courses

This includes completions with certification not aligned with the NFQ.

On Course

This refers to those learners who were still on course as of December 31st, 2022.

Partial Completions

Learners who have completed more than 25% but less than 90% of a course and its requirements in 2022.

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