

Education and Training Boards Ireland

Our Vision for the Future





etbi

Education and Training
Boards Ireland
*Boird Oideachais agus
Oiliúna Éireann*

1.0 ABOUT EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS IRELAND AND ETBS

Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) is the national representative association for Ireland's 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs); and negotiates on behalf of the ETB sector at various forums within the education sector and at national, European, and overseas levels. Our mission is to lead and advance the continued development of education, training and youthwork in Ireland and our vision is to harness our strength to influence and promote a strong education and training sector through collaboration and collective effort. ETBI is guided by the core values of excellence, care, equality, community, and respect.

Collectively, the 16 Education and Training Boards have responsibility for 30+ Community National Schools and 250+ post-primary schools with over 117,000 students. ETB post-primary schools are the largest provider of education through the medium of Irish with 48 schools. ETBs are also the largest provider of multid denominational education in Ireland. ETBs deliver Further Education and Training (FET) to over 226,000 FET learners each year across 500+ learner locations; and play a central role in the delivery of apprenticeships and traineeships in partnership with employers. ETBs also support, monitor, and deliver youth services. The ETB sector employs over 32,000 people and has a combined annual spend in excess of €2bn.

2.0 OUR CORE BELIEFS

1. No matter what their background or where they come from, everyone deserves excellence in education and training.
2. ETBs offer excellent, equality-based, inclusive educational opportunities to learners of all ages, helping to build an inclusive Ireland.
3. ETBs are proud to support Ireland's diverse population of learners and have a proven track record of doing so (e.g. through the REALT programme, which supports Ukrainian refugees; through the provision of ESOL classes in community education centres nationwide; through Youthreach, literacy, second-chance and special needs education programmes; and through working in partnership with minoritised groups in settings such as prisons and Direct Provision centres).

3.0 OUR PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

We have four key priorities for the future and are calling on the Government – and all political parties – to support us in our objectives to:

- Increase the number and profile of Community National Schools nationwide;
- Increase the Deputy Principal allocation in ETB post-primary schools with DEIS designation;
- Increase funding for Further Education & Training; and
- Restore funding for youth work to pre-austerity levels, and ensure pay parity for youth workers.



Priority 1: Increase the number and profile of Community National Schools (CNSs) nationwide.

- Since 2016, successive governments have set a target of reaching **400 multi-denominational primary schools by 2030**. However, progress on achieving this target has been painstakingly slow.
- Currently, there are only **152 multi-denominational schools** out of a total of 3,116 primary schools – and only 4 new multi-denominational schools (3 CNSs and 1 Educate Together) have come on stream since 2021.
- **248 additional multi-denominational schools are needed** to reach the 2030 target.
- To ensure this happens, we are seeking the following commitments from each political party in their election manifestoes:
 - i. A significant increase in the number of multi-denominational schools available to families in all counties in Ireland – with targets based on regional data on existing provision, parental preference, and changing demographics; and
 - ii. Promotion of Community National Schools as the option for school communities engaging in discussion around transferring patronage.

Why does this matter?

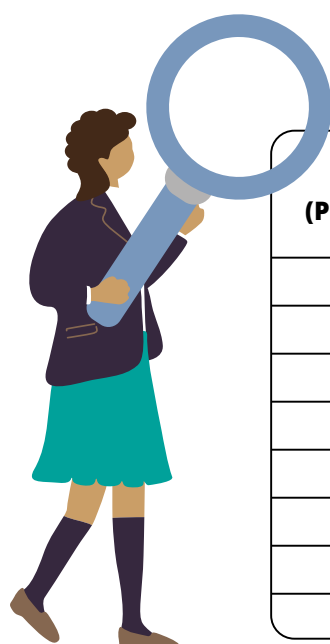
- This matters because every family should have access to quality, multi-denominational education in their local area, regardless of their ethnicity, culture or religious beliefs.
- The 2022 Census shows that only 69 per cent of people in Ireland now consider themselves to be Roman Catholic. 14% of the population now identify as having no religion. There are also significant increases in those identifying as having other religious beliefs. Research conducted by ETBI (Opinions, 2022) shows that 61% of people nationally – of all religious backgrounds and none – want multi-denominational schools rather than religious-run schools. However, 90% of primary schools are still under the patronage of the Catholic Church.
- Ireland's failure to provide primary education options that cater to all families has been criticised by international human rights bodies, including the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which recommended in 2023 that the State develop "a time-bound strategy, with adequate resources, for meeting its targets for increasing the availability of multi-denominational schools by 2030".
- ETBs are State-funded and, as such, should be the State's first option / preferred patronage model for reconfiguring schools.

Priority 2: Increase the number of Deputy Principals in ETB post-primary schools with DEIS designation.

- By the end of 2024, working with sectoral partners and relevant policymakers, we are aiming to ensure increases to Deputy Principal numbers for DEIS post-primary schools.



Our targets:



School Size (Pupil Numbers)	Current Allocation - FTE	Increase Requested - FTE	Target Allocation - FTE
1-150	0.25	0.5	0.75
151-300	0.5	0.5	1
301-400	0.75	0.5	1.25
401-599	1	1	2
600-699	2	0	2
700-899	2	1	3
900-1199	3	0	3
1200+	3	1	4

Why does this matter?

- This matters because DEIS schools are attended by the most vulnerable young people in Irish society, and these young people need and deserve adequate supports. The Deputy Principal role within these schools is a crucial one: the high administrative burden placed on Principals means the Deputy Principal is, typically, the staff-member available to identify challenges or risks for the student body or individual students; to provide support to students experiencing difficulties; to keep a watching eye on at-risk students (e.g. ensuring they receive a hot meal at school each day); and to liaise with other support services (e.g. home school community liaison) to ensure all students get the care and attention they need.
- From the feedback we have received from our Principals to date, increasing the DP allocation will help relieve the administrative burden and free them up for a greater focus on teaching and learning, providing increased support for student wellbeing, and professional support for their teachers.
- The success of a child in school is very much dependent on a number of key factors including quality teaching and learning, student wellbeing, attendance, etc. Close school / parent communications in this area are crucial. Additional DP allocation will support stronger parent / school engagements, allowing the school to work more closely with parents.



Priority 3: Increase funding for Further Education and Training.

- In the 2025 Budget, we want to see the level of funding allocated for FET reflecting the proportion of learners within the sector; the devolved capital for each ETB to be increased; and the limit of €125K incl. VAT per individual project to be increased to €350K incl. VAT.
- ETBI anticipates that a number of FET Colleges of the Future will commence on-site in 2028 and are seeking ring fenced funding of €600M in the estimates for ETBs to complete these projects.
- FET is more local, accessible, flexible and affordable for many people than HE. As a result, it attracts more diverse learners.
 - Only 36.6% of those in HE in 2022/2023 were aged above 24, for example, compared to 69.5% of those in FET.
 - In 2021, there were 1,130 enrolments in FET by members of the Traveller community and 270 enrolments by learners of Roma ethnic origin. In contrast, only 119 students from a Traveller background were enrolled in higher education for the 2020 / 2021 academic year (no statistics are currently available for the numbers of Roma in higher education)¹.
 - Furthermore, FET provides invaluable learning pathways for those who may not have completed formal education their first time round: in 2022, over a quarter of those enrolled in FET courses had a lower secondary education or below.

Increased Funding for Further Education and Training

- For the 2022/2023 academic year, there were a total of 256,785 Higher Education (HE) students for all modes of study, compared to 186,740 unique learners enrolled in Further Education and Training (FET) courses. The Higher Education sector is approximately **1.4 times bigger** than the size of the FET sector.
- However, the level of funding allocated to the HE sector is **2.6 times more than that allocated to FET**.
- ETBs are the current providers of FET across the State – and are best placed to continue being so. Based in every town, city and county, ETBs provide community-based, inclusive further education and training for the benefit of all learners.
- Community-based education is critical to meeting the State's skills shortages and attracting female and mature returners to the workforce. However, to ensure the FET sector can continue to develop and respond to the changing landscape, the significant disparity in funding between FET and HE needs to be addressed.

¹ <https://www.solas.ie/research-lp/fet-statistics> and <https://www.tudublin.ie/media/website/news/2023/main/What-works-in-supporting-Travellers'-Access-and-Participation-in-Higher-Education.pdf>



Devolved capital for each ETB to be increased, and the limit of €125K incl. VAT per project to be increased to €350K incl. VAT.

- The current FET capital estate extends to 500 buildings, approximately 200 of which are owned by the relevant ETB. In most cases, these are old vocational schools – typically built from the 1930s to the 1970s – that have been repurposed.
- For decades, FET-owned buildings have suffered from chronic under-investment.
- Currently, the annual capital budget for FET amounts to €100 million, most of which is accounted for years in advance. While this investment will bring huge improvements for the selected projects, we urgently need to look at the remaining buildings, most of which do not comply with current building regulations and are unfit for purpose.
- ETBs value the enhancements that they can bring to their FET Estate through this very effective mechanism of devolved funding. The previous increase in the threshold empowered ETBs to complete much needed projects that address the acute needs of learners in a timely fashion and achieve excellent value for money.
- The sanction of additional capital devolved in this current year and for future years and the raising of the limit from €125K incl. VAT per individual project to €350K incl. VAT will have an even more significant impact on the FET estate.



Why does this matter?

- The historical funding disparity between ETB FET and HE institutions is matched by a historical disparity of esteem. **A Government commitment to, and investment in, community-based inclusive FET provision and the FET capital estate is critical to attract both school-leavers and older learners into key areas to meet skills shortages.**
- **Everyone deserves excellence in education and training:** the inclusive and personal attention that ETBs bring to learners ensures equality-based further education and training for all learners. Furthermore, all FET learners should have a right to the same standard of accommodation / facility as available to HE learners, no matter where they are situated in the country. When facilities are substandard, it hinders effective service delivery. Improving and upgrading the existing stock of FET buildings will enhance the overall learning environment, attract learners, ensure the wellbeing of all stakeholders, and support high-quality education and training outcomes.
- The misconception of ETBs being less prestigious than HE institutions has historically hindered the development of the sector. To address this challenge, efforts to improve the reputation of FET institutions and raise awareness of their value should be prioritised through a dedicated and properly resourced FET communications function in each ETB.
- In relation to staff development and retention, FET institutions currently face challenges in attracting and retaining high-quality staff. To address this challenge, targeted investment in professional development, competitive remuneration, capital spending, and improved working conditions for FET staff needs to be considered as a priority.
- The refurbishment and upgrading of existing FET structures makes sense for both financial and environmental reasons. Unfortunately, at present, the rate of degradation of the FET building stock is outstripping the current level of maintenance investment, resulting in a deteriorating estate. The objective of increased devolved capital for each ETB facilitates the modernisation of FET facilities, ensuring they are fit for purpose and can provide high-quality education and training.

Ring-Fenced Funding in 2028 for FET Colleges of the Future

- ETBI anticipates that a number of FET Colleges of the Future will commence on-site in 2028 and are seeking ring fenced funding of €600M for ETBs to complete these projects.
- The investment in the FET infrastructure aligns with Future FET: Transforming Learning strategy, addressing capacity deficits and preparing the sector for future educational and industry requirements.

Priority 4: Restore funding for youth work to pre-austerity levels, and ensure pay parity for youth workers.

Under the ETB Act 2013, ETBs have a statutory function to coordinate youth work. In 2023, they administered over €53 million to youth services across Ireland, on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). This funding was dispersed across several schemes, including:

- UBU Scheme: €46,314,528
- Youth Information Centres: €1,534,012
- Local Youth Club Grant Scheme: €2,500,000
- Capital funding: €1,753,795.78
- Integration Fund: €1,250,000

In addition to administering funding on behalf of DCEDIY, ETBs are the lead partner in the delivery of various youth initiatives, including Music Generation and the Local Creative Partnerships. In total, over 380,000 young people benefit from the youth services provided by ETBs each year. Informed by our extensive involvement in the youth-work sector, ETBI is calling for:

1. The immediate restoration of youth work funding to pre-austerity levels, adjusted in line with inflation and population growth, and factoring in the increased cost of service delivery.
2. Increased funding and pay parity for youth workers.

Funding:

- Funding for the youth work sector has decreased significantly since the 2008 economic crash. In that year, funding for youth organisations and special youth projects was €90.5 million. By 2015, this had fallen to €50.53 million, a reduction of over 44%.
- There have been small increases (of approximately 3% to 4%) since 2020, and funding now stands at approximately €73 million, still significantly lower (by almost 20%) than it was 16 years ago – despite a 26% increase in the youth population since 2006.



Pay Parity:

- Youth work staff are currently employed using a variety of terms and conditions, and with different rates of remuneration, depending on which Government funding stream covers their salary. Staff funded by DCEDIY are on different pay grades, depending on whether their funding is coming through Tusla Section 56 grants or through the UBU scheme administered by ETBs. Ultimately, staff on the schemes administered through ETBs are disadvantaged, as they are on lower pay grades than their counterparts whose roles are funded through Tusla.
- At the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) last October, unions secured an agreement in relation to the long-running pay dispute between workers in Section 39 (health and disability services), Section 56 (services to children) and Section 10 (homeless and addiction services) organisations. This resulted in an 8% increase to staff on grant schemes administered by Tusla. Meanwhile, ETBs administering UBU funding, including salaries for staff employed under the scheme, received a mere 2% increase, not enough to meet costs of inflation in most cases.
- Despite ETBs having statutory responsibility for coordinating and developing youth work, we are competing with Tusla (and, indeed, employers in other sectors, both public and private) when it comes to offering attractive pay, terms and conditions to youth work organisations to deliver services. To become competitive, and to recognise the professionalism of all youth workers, we are calling for an additional 8% increase in funding for salaries of youth workers employed in UBU services – in line with the increase provided for Tusla-funded staff.

These asks are in line with the recommendations made by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in their report on 'The Future of Youth Work'² in July 2023. They are also in line with the demands of wider stakeholders across the sector, including Youth Work Ireland³.



² https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_children_equality_disability_integration_and_youth/reports/2023/2023-07-11_report-on-the-future-of-youth-work_en.pdf

³ <https://www.youthworkireland.ie/2024/04/youth-work-irelands-oireachtas-briefing/>

Why does this matter?

- Youth work plays an essential role in ensuring social cohesion and improving outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds.
- Data from the national 'Growing Up in Ireland' survey, however, indicates that only 34% of the surveyed young people had the opportunity, at the age of 13, to participate in a youth group of some kind.
- While the youth population has grown significantly over the past two decades, there have also been significant – and stark – social changes that impact on young people's lives:
 - o Over the last 10 years, there has been an increase of 370% in the number of children living in emergency accommodation, with 4,170 children currently living in emergency homeless services.
 - o TUSLA Education and Welfare Services (TESS) recorded a 22% increase in new cases for the 2022/23 academic year.
 - o In 2022, there were 33,990 disclosures of domestic abuse against women and children, including 5,412 reports of abuse of children (Womens' Aid).
 - o The legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic is being sharply felt amongst young people in Ireland. Indeed, according to research from the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), young people who were already deemed 'most at risk' became the most disconnected from youth services and supports as a result of Covid-19.
- Against this backdrop, the need for quality and extensive youth services has never been greater. The rise of Far Right sentiments, increasing polarisation, disinformation, and restlessness caused by economic inequalities in Irish life are all feeding into a need to ensure early interventions for at-risk youth. Investment in youth work is an investment in young people's lives, providing opportunities for them to engage in non-formal learning and a range of protective factors, including positive relationships, community engagement, connection and identity.
- ETBs are excellently placed to play a central role in Ireland's youth-work sector. They are at the heart of every community, reaching those often on the margins and providing them with opportunities that enable them to either remain in or return to education or employment. ETBs enable the personal development of young people, and are trusted across local communities because of their track record in delivering primary and post-primary education, and FET services.



How you can help:

Elected representatives:

- Visit your local ETB to find out more about what they offer.
- Promote the ETB's priorities within your party.
- Raise these issues at local and national levels of Government.
- Ensure these priorities are included in your party's manifesto for the next General Election.
- Support our campaign on social media by using **#SupportYourLocalETB**.

Policy makers:

- Ensure the ETB's priorities are integrated into financial estimates and department strategies/plans.

ETBs:

- Raise these issues with your elected representatives and policy makers.
- Make the link from local to national – Councillors to local TDs to national Government.
- Get your ETB Board members who are elected representatives involved.
- Support our campaign on social media by using **#SupportYourLocalETB**.

ETB Staff, parents and learners:

- Support our campaign on social media by using **#SupportYourLocalETB**.



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