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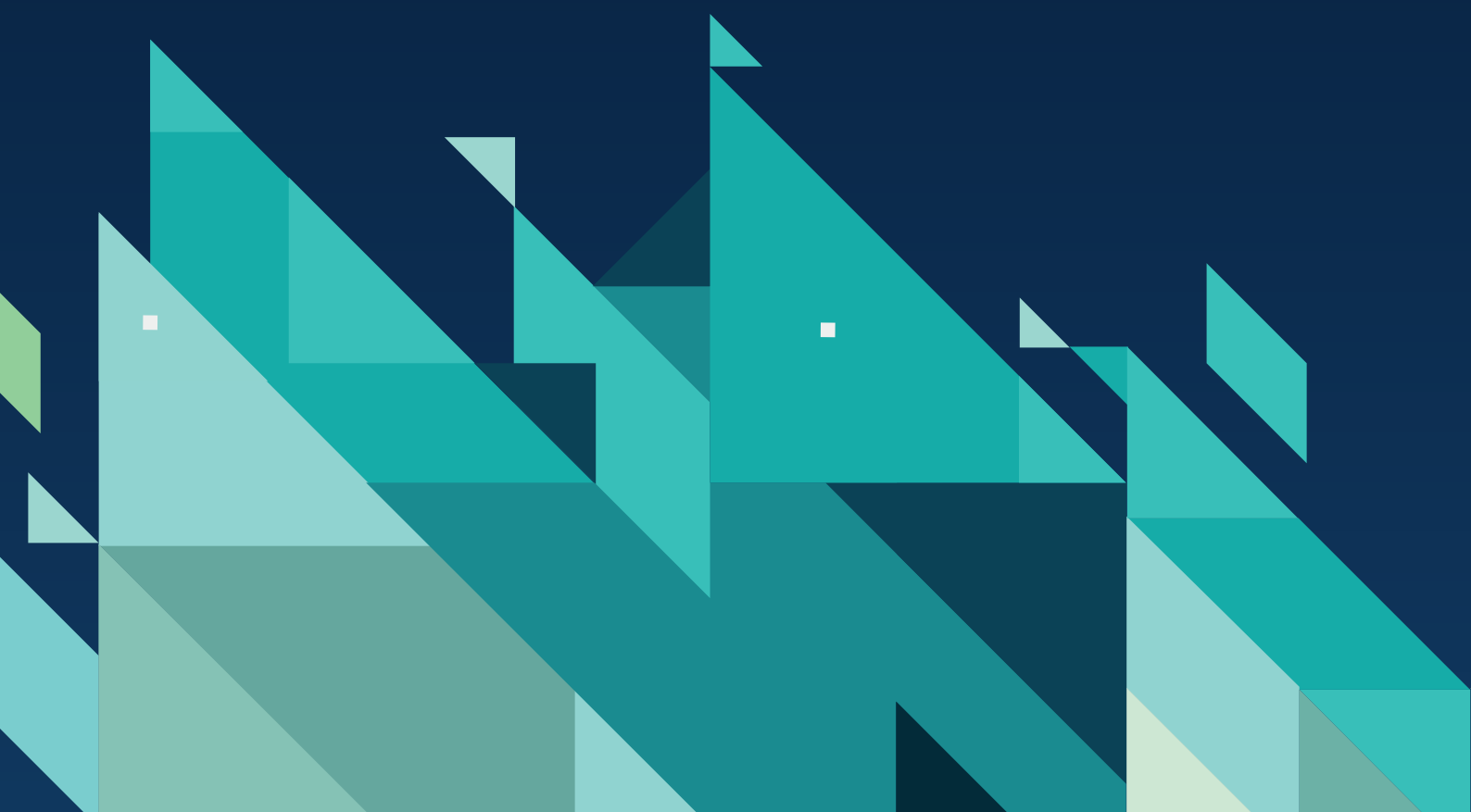
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**AN INSTITUTE
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RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Roadmap for an evaluation of the National Training Fund

**ELISH KELLY, ELISA STAFFA, ADELE WHELAN,
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ROADMAP FOR AN EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL TRAINING FUND

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This report has been accepted for publication by the Institute, which does not itself take institutional policy positions. All ESRI Research Series reports are peer reviewed prior to publication. The authors are solely responsible for the content and the views expressed.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACSS	Apprenticeship Client Services System
ALMP	Active labour market policy
AMS	Application Management System (HEA)
ASI	Annual Services Inquiry
BTEA	Back to Education Allowance
CE	Community Employment scheme
CIE	Counterfactual impact evaluation
CIP	Census of Industrial Production
CPD	Continuing professional development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DETE	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DSP	Department of Social Protection
ELD	Educational Longitudinal Database
ESF	European Social Fund
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
GDP	Gross domestic product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HEA	Higher Education Authority
KPI	Key performance indicator
MDD	Modified domestic demand
MoU	Memorandum of understanding
NAO	National Apprenticeship Office
NTF	National Training Fund
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PES	Public Employment Services
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PLSS	Programme and Learner Support System (SOLAS)
PMOD	PAYE Modernisation
PPSN	Personal public service number
PRSI	Pay-related social insurance
PSM	Propensity score matching
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland

RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
WWLD	Work and Welfare Longitudinal Dataset

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Training Fund (NTF), established in 2000, plays a central role in Ireland's workforce development and employment policy. Its purpose is to fund training that: i) supports individuals in employment; ii) assists jobseekers in entering or re-entering the labour market; and iii) contributes to identifying current and future skill needs. Administered by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), the NTF supports approximately 18 major initiatives across these three areas, which are delivered by multiple agencies, including the Higher Education Authority (HEA), SOLAS, Skillnet Ireland and others.

Funded by a levy on employers, the size of the NTF has grown significantly in recent years, driven by both increased levy rates and overall employment growth. Annual spend from the NTF rose from €357 million in 2017 to approximately €909 million in 2023. This reflects the scale of public investment in developing Ireland's human capital and highlights the importance of ensuring that these resources are used effectively. As of the end of 2023, the NTF held a surplus of approximately €1.54 billion, and this was estimated to be €1.8 billion at the end of 2024. In April 2025, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science received approval from the Government to prepare a bill to amend the Act under which the NTF was established (the 2000 National Training Fund Act), so that the fund's surplus could be used to provide additional supports to the higher education sector; this sum amounts to €1.485 billion over a six-year period between 2025 and 2030.¹

The NTF has played a significant role in funding workforce development initiatives in Ireland over the past 25 years. In doing this, its aim has been to assist individuals to acquire new skills, enhance their employability and, ultimately, progress within the labour market. In 2023, over 87 per cent of NTF funding was directed towards 13 major labour market-focused programmes, including SOLAS's Training People for Employment and Apprenticeship schemes, and a number of HEA-managed initiatives (e.g., Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision, Consortium-Led Apprenticeships and Springboard+). While some individual initiatives of the NTF have been reviewed on an ad hoc basis over time, this is the first systematic overview that has been undertaken to assess the extent to which all initiatives funded under the NTF can be evaluated using counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE) and, where CIE is not feasible, the most suitable methodologies based on project structure and objectives. CIE is recognised internationally as being the best tool for identifying the casual link between policies and/or programmes and their

1

Please see Regulatory Impact Assessment – National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill 2025.

effects. It allows for a deeper understanding of the true impact of an intervention, helping to isolate the effects directly attributable to a policy or programme. It is a matter of national importance to ensure that evaluations of publicly funded training initiatives are undertaken, and that they are done in a timely, independent and methodologically sound manner, so that policymakers can make data-driven decisions to optimise the effectiveness of NTF investments in employee and workforce development. While many public policies, programmes and initiatives are evaluated ex-post, the ideal approach would be to consider how they might be best evaluated at their design stage, so that they can be developed in a way that will facilitate CIE, including identification and collection of the data needed for CIE.

Recent advances in Ireland's data infrastructure make it possible to apply CIE to a large portion of NTF-funded activities. Of particular importance is the development of the Central Statistic Office's (CSO) Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD) and the Department of Social Protection's (DSP) Work and Welfare Longitudinal Dataset (WWLD), as these two pieces of data infrastructure enable researchers to track training participants over time and assess long-term outcomes. Based on current data availability, the report finds that programmes accounting for over two-thirds of NTF expenditure are now potentially suitable for rigorous impact evaluation using CIE methods. These are primarily labour-market-focused initiatives with strong individual-level data coverage.

While significant progress has been made in terms of data infrastructure relating to individual trainees, a number of challenges remain regarding the existing data infrastructure when it comes to assessing the effectiveness of the NTF-funded firm-level initiatives. In particular, firm-level programmes, representing approximately 7 per cent of NTF funding, currently lack complete data on supported businesses. Inconsistent collection of firm identifiers and outcomes limits the ability to conduct full CIEs. Strengthening data collection and linkage with, for example, administrative or nationally representative survey data, will be essential to enable robust CIE assessment of these programmes. In addition, any current legal framework issues that are preventing the sharing of firm-level data, specifically for initiatives supported by the NTF, need to be addressed to ensure that CIE can be undertaken (e.g., the disclosure information clause within the Industrial Development (Enterprise Ireland) Act, 1998).

The study also found that some higher education initiatives, including Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision (accounting for 16.4 per cent of NTF funding), cannot be evaluated at present due to the absence of identifiable data on funded participants. In addition, a small proportion of initiatives (receiving approximately 5.6 per cent of funding) are only suited to performance monitoring rather than full CIE. However, many of these lack clear objectives, baseline data and/or predefined performance indicators, making even basic monitoring difficult at present. Given

the scale of NTF funding, these are all issues that need to be addressed, including the gaps in firm-level data, to ensure that the effectiveness of the fund's initiatives can be monitored and assessed.

The report proposes prioritising evaluation of the largest labour market initiatives where CIE is currently feasible, while taking steps to strengthen data infrastructure for programmes that cannot yet be fully evaluated. Improved data collection, access, research capacity and evaluation skills will be essential to fully leverage Ireland's administrative data, and to ensure the effective use of NTF resources. The data conditions for rigorous evaluation are now increasingly in place. With appropriate prioritisation and further progress with data systems, this can help the NTF to deliver maximum value for individuals, businesses and the wider economy.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND CONTEXT

The National Training Fund (NTF), established under the 2000 National Training Fund Act, was set up to support employment-focused training. In particular, the goal of the fund is to support schemes that raise the skills of those currently in employment and provide training to those seeking employment. A small amount of the fund is also allocated to researching skill requirements in the economy, both existing and future.² In 2023, the fund was supporting 18 initiatives,³ which were under the remit of the following grantee organisations: i) the Higher Education Authority (HEA);⁴ ii) SOLAS;⁵ iii) Skillnet Ireland;⁶ iv) the Department of Social Protection (DSP);⁷ v) Enterprise Ireland;⁸ vi) IDA Ireland;⁹ vii) Engineers Ireland;¹⁰ and viii) The Wheel.¹¹ The NTF is managed by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). Some of these 18 initiatives consisted of a number of sub-programmes (see Figure 1.1 and Tables 2.1 and 2.2).

The NTF is funded through a levy on employers that is collected through pay related social insurance (PRSI).¹² Up until 2017, the rate of levy was 0.7 per cent. In 2016, the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education recommended that the levy be increased, as a means by which employers could contribute to the

² It has been proposed that, going forward, a proportion of the NTF will be directed towards funding capital infrastructural projects (i.e., equipment).

³ For further information on these 18 initiatives, please see Figure 1.1 and its supporting notes.

⁴ The HEA is a state agency tasked with governing and regulating the higher education system, and its institutions, in Ireland.

⁵ SOLAS is a state agency charged with overseeing the further education and training sector in Ireland.

⁶ Skillnet Ireland is a business support agency of the Government of Ireland. Its primary objective is to advance competitiveness, productivity and innovation of businesses operating in Ireland through enterprise-led workforce development.

⁷ The DSP is Ireland's government department that promotes active participation and inclusion in society among those not in employment (e.g., the unemployed, lone parents, pensioners) through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services.

⁸ Enterprise Ireland is an Irish government enterprise development agency tasked with supporting Irish businesses operating in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector.

⁹ IDA Ireland is a statutory investment promotion agency that assists multinational companies to grow and expand into Ireland.

¹⁰ Engineers Ireland is the representative body for the engineering profession in Ireland.

¹¹ The Wheel is Ireland's national association of charities, community groups and social enterprises. They provide leadership, along with advice, training and other opportunities, to people working or volunteering in the charity and community sector.

¹² The levy is imposed on Class A and Class H PRSI employees: these make up 75% of all insured employees.

increase in higher education funding. As a result, the rate increased to 0.8 per cent in 2018, 0.9 per cent in 2019, and since 2020 it has been 1 per cent.

Income allocated to the NTF has increased significantly in recent years. In 2017, the annual income was €436 million. By 2022, however, the annual income had increased to €951 million, and to €1,080 million by 2023.¹³ The increase in the levy rate is part of the reason for this. However, as the fund's income tends to be pro-cyclical, over the last few years the main driver for the rise in the fund's income has been the robust performance of the economy, with greater numbers of people in employment and increases in earnings.¹⁴ Specifically, unlike after the Great Recession, the economy rebounded well after the COVID-19 health pandemic, and it is continuing to perform strongly, with modified domestic demand (MDD) forecast to be 3.8 per cent in 2025 and 2.9 per cent in 2026.¹⁵ The numbers in employment are also expected to grow, increasing from 2.757 million in 2024 to 2.813 million in 2025 and to 2.858 million in 2026 (Barrett at al., 2025). The implications of this for the NTF is likely to be the continued growth in the availability of funds to support those initiatives focused on raising the skill levels of those currently in employment, as well as programmes that will provide employees and graduates with the skills required to meet future labour market needs. With our current unemployment rate standing at 4.6 per cent (Barrett at al., 2025), there is currently a lower share of NTF funding being allocated to initiatives that are supporting those seeking employment. Nevertheless, after a period of expansion, economies naturally go through a contraction (a recession). Recognising this is important for ensuring that the NTF remains flexible in how it allocates resources, particularly to initiatives that support both employed individuals and jobseekers.

The issue of skill shortages has been highlighted in *The Government response to Ireland's competitiveness challenge 2024*,¹⁶ and, more widely for Europe, in the *Draghi report: A competitiveness strategy for Europe*.¹⁷ Presently, the NTF has an accumulated surplus. This stood at €1.54 billion at the end of 2023, and is

¹³ NTF income information for 2023 was provided by DFHERIS. The NTF expenditure figures for these three years were: €357 million (2017), €681 million (2022) and €909 million (2023). Estimated expenditure of the NTF is included within the expenditure ceiling of DFHERIS. Given this, increases in NTF spending need to be considered within budgetary policy and EU fiscal spending rules. For further information, see: [2025-09-23_general-scheme-briefing-paper-national-training-fund-amendment-bill_en.pdf](#) [accessed 16 October 2025].

¹⁴ The fund's income tends to be pro-cyclical, increasing during periods of high employment and decreasing when employment falls.

¹⁵ Similar to GDP, modified domestic demand (MDD) is a measure of domestic economic activity. Specifically, MDD covers personal and government consumption, and modified investment (i.e., total investment less leased aircrafts and imports of research and development and intellectual property from intangibles). MDD is a smaller number than GDP, and is seen to more accurately reflect how households, the Government and domestic corporations in Ireland are doing. For further information on MDD see, for example, CSO, 'Total domestic demand and modified total domestic demand.'

¹⁶ See [the-government-response-to-ireland-s-competitiveness-challenge-2024.pdf](#) [accessed 15 September 2025].

¹⁷ See *The Draghi report on EU competitiveness* [accessed 15 September 2025].

estimated to have been €1.77 billion at the end of 2024.¹⁸ While some of this surplus has been earmarked for a funding package for the tertiary education sector, for the period 2025 to 2030,¹⁹ given the aim of the NTF, its income can also be considered for use to support initiatives that will help address the skills shortages issue.²⁰ While the employment permit system was expanded in 2023 to assist in addressing Ireland’s skills shortages issue, shortages remain.²¹ NTF-funded initiatives could help to address this issue by focusing on provision of education and training needed to address the identified shortages.

A review of the NTF was carried out in 2018 (Indecon, 2018). This review identified four key areas of reform, one of which was ‘improvements in monitoring and evaluation of NTF’.²² It made 14 detailed recommendations across the four areas. An implementation plan outlining a number of reforms, which were to have been executed to support two 0.1 per cent rises in the NTF levy that were part of Budget 2019, was developed and published by the Department of Education and Skills in 2019. Three of the reforms within this plan focused on improving monitoring and evaluation of the NTF. Specifically:

- The Department would organise and publish an NTF evaluation report on an annual basis, to include counterfactual modelling of the programmes’ impacts.
- Performance metrics should be expanded to support enhanced monitoring of outcomes of all NTF-funded programmes. Metrics should include measures that track progression outcomes; for example, to employment, educational progression (including certification achieved), employment placement and sustainment, and completion rates.
- Priority should be given to drive continued enhancement of data to inform evaluation of the NTF.

An examination of this implementation plan by the Comptroller and Auditor General in 2022 found that planned reforms had been implemented in three of the four key areas, but that identified reforms around ‘improvements in monitoring

¹⁸ See Houses of the Oireachtas (2025). ‘Education and training provision’, *Parliamentary Questions*, 34th Dáil, 22 January.

¹⁹ See DFHERIS (2025). ‘Minister Lawless obtains Government approval to amend National Training Fund Act, unlocking funding package of €1.5 billion’, press release, 29 April [accessed 15 September 2025].

²⁰ Given that NTF spending is governed by departmental spending rules, specifically falling within the expenditure ceiling of DFHERIS, this effects how much of the NTF surplus can be spent annually on initiatives that support the goals of the NTF. This has resulted in some organisations recommending the removal of NTF funding from state spending rules. For further information, see: *An overview of the National Training Fund (NTF) and 2025-09-23_general-scheme-briefing-paper-national-training-fund-amendment-bill_en.pdf* [accessed 16 October 2025].

²¹ At the time of writing, the employment permit system, and list of occupations it covers to address skill and labour gaps, is being reviewed; See DETE (2025). ‘Ministers Burke and Dillon initiate public consultation on review of employment permit occupations lists’, Department News, 23 July.

²² The other three areas were: i) reform of the future direction of the NTF; ii) utilising NTF to support investment in higher education; and iii) enhancing enterprise engagement and input to NTF priorities.

and evaluation of NTF²³ had not progressed in line with the timelines that had been set out in the implementation plan. **Given this, as part of the DFHERIS joint research programme with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), the Department asked the ESRI to develop a framework to monitor and assess the effectiveness of the various NTF-funded initiatives.** Following extensive engagement with all grantee organisations in receipt of NTF resources on their data infrastructure for their NTF funded initiatives, this report sets out the ESRI's proposed framework for evaluating the NTF.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THIS REPORT

The aim of this study is to assess the extent to which the various NTF-funded initiatives can be readily evaluated and, on the basis of this assessment, to develop a framework for DFHERIS to use to evaluate the NTF. This was undertaken by: assessing the nature and objectives of each NTF intervention; deriving relevant outcomes – key performance indicators (KPIs); and then identifying and examining the data that are currently held by the NTF grantee organisations and assessing whether they meet evaluation requirements. In particular, we concentrate on the feasibility of conducting counterfactual impact evaluations (CIEs) for the various NTF interventions.²³ Under this evaluation approach, those who engage in an NTF-funded initiative (i.e., the treatment group) would be compared with those individuals with similar characteristics that do not participate in the training programme (i.e., the control group) on a key objective/outcome of the programme. For example, the rate of employment of supported job seekers (the treatment group) might be compared with a comparison group not in receipt of such supports (the control group). Given this methodological approach, we categorise each NTF initiative as follows:

- suitable for evaluation;
- partially suitable for evaluation; or
- facing data gaps and challenges that would hamper evaluation.

Where CIE is not feasible, we examine whether the data infrastructure will allow for the use of monitoring tools to track the programme's effectiveness across a set of relevant KPIs.

In this study, the NTF-funded initiatives, which are discussed in detail in subsequent chapters and accompanying appendices, are grouped into the following three categories, based on our assessment of their core objectives:

²³

A CIE involves quasi-experimental methods, which are used to estimate the causal impact of a policy, programme or intervention; for example, the effectiveness of an unemployment training programme in terms of helping unemployment recipients to re-integrate into employment. Quasi-experimental methods include propensity score matching (PSM), difference-in-differences, regression discontinuity design and instrumental variables. For further information, see, for example, Imbens and Wooldridge (2009).

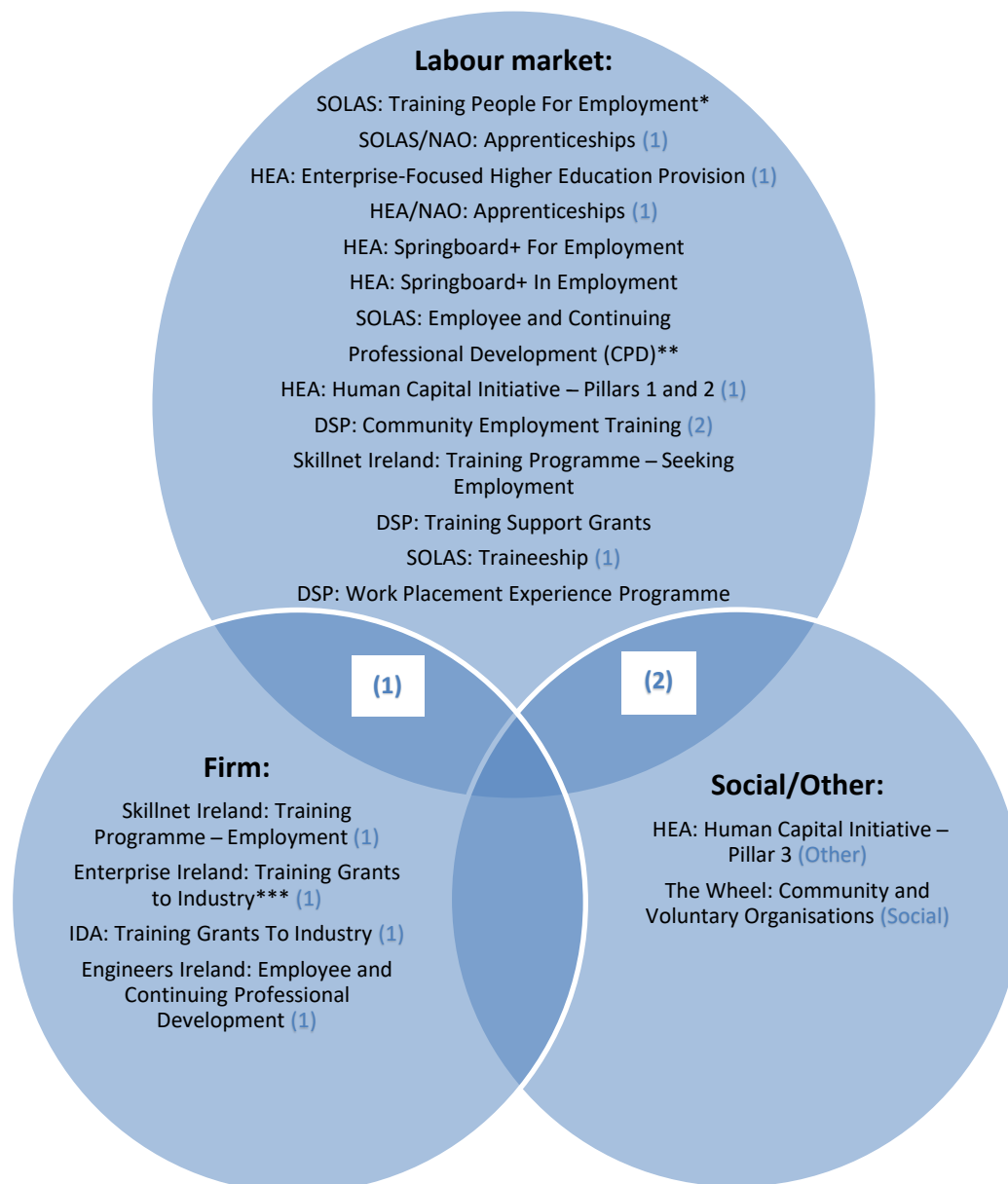
- Labour market;
- Firm level; and
- Social/Other.

A number of these initiatives are also cross-cutting, in that while their primary objective might be, for example, labour market focused, there are also spillover effects for one of the other two areas, such as secondary firm-level effects.

The various initiatives examined in this report, which are based on 2023 NTF expenditure, are set out in Figure 1.1.²⁴

²⁴

Some NTF funding is allocated to institutions that are in charge of providing information on skill requirements, such as the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit within SOLAS, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs within DETE and Regional Skills Fora and Regional Skills Innovation within the Skills Planning and Enterprise Engagement Unit. Our study does not include analysis of this type of NTF funding.

FIGURE 1.1 2023 NTF INITIATIVES

Source: Constructed by the authors using information from the Comptroller and Auditor General's 2022 report on the accounts of the public service.

Notes: (1) captures 'labour market/firm' cross-cutting initiatives, and (2) 'labour market/other/social' cross-cutting programmes.

* Consists of seven sub-programmes; ** consists of three sub-programmes; *** consists of two main programmes, one of which consists of nine sub-programmes.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

A combination of desk-based research, consultations and semi-structured interviews were employed to undertake this study. Specifically, we began by examining the international literature to identify how funds similar to the NTF have been evaluated in other countries, including, more broadly, studies that have evaluated labour market programmes and firm-related training initiatives similar to those funded under the NTF (see Chapter 3).

From this work, we developed a template that sets out a range of questions to capture information on the data infrastructure in place for each NTF-funded initiative (see Appendix I). This was administered to the grantee organisations in July 2024, for them to complete. Consultation meetings were also offered and arranged with a number of the grantee organisations at this time to:

- explain the research being undertaken;
- provide the rationale for the information in the template that we were requesting for them to complete; and
- address any questions and/or concerns that they had about the research.

The majority of the grantee organisations completed and returned their templates during August 2024; others returned theirs in September 2024 and January 2025. On reviewing the information provided in the templates, follow-up queries were sent to a number of grantee organisations at the end of October, with returns received by mid-November.

Semi-structured interviews took place online with a range of grantee organisations, between December 2024 and February 2025, in order to clarify some outstanding queries about their NTF initiative data infrastructures. Specifically, these meetings were held with the HEA, SOLAS, Skillnet Ireland and the National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) (see Table 4.1). We also met with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to discuss their administrative Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD), a database that we identified as having the potential to evaluate a number of the NTF-funded initiatives (also see Table 4.1 in Chapter 4).²⁵ Before completion of the report, grantee organisations were asked to review a final draft, to ensure that the information provided within the report on their initiative(s) was factually correct. At that time, final clarifying meetings were arranged with some of the grantee organisations; specifically, The Wheel, Enterprise Ireland and Engineers Ireland.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The remainder of this report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides additional information on the NTF-funded initiatives, specifically regarding spending on the various initiatives, from their inception up to 2023.²⁶ Chapter 3 provides a summary of the international and national literature on the evaluation of funds similar to the NTF in other countries, and also on the impact of general training programmes on labour market and firm-level outcomes. In Chapter 4, we outline evaluation possibilities for the NTF, while conclusions are outlined in Chapter 5.

²⁵ This link provides information on the CSO's role in delivering high quality data, such as the ELD, for research and policy making, and how it can facilitate access to these data:
<https://www.cso.ie/en/trusttransparency/ourroledeliveringbetterdata/>.

²⁶ 2023 is the most recent year for which we have finalised NTF spending data, provided by DFHERIS.

CHAPTER 2

Overview and context

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we set out the initiatives that were funded by the National Training Fund (NTF) in 2023. In particular, we analyse expenditure on these initiatives from 2015,²⁷ or from the year they began to receive NTF funding, up to 2023.²⁸

2.2 ANALYSIS OF NTF EXPENDITURE

In Tables 2.1 to 2.3, we set out the various initiatives that were being funded by the NTF in 2023, classified by which of these categories their core objectives fell into: labour market, firm-level and ‘social/other’ focused. Additional detail on each initiative is provided in Appendix II, relating to: the nature of the programme; its objectives (e.g., reskilling); targeted support group (e.g., unemployed); key outcomes (e.g., employment); data collected; data requirements for counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE); and assessment of its potential for a CIE.

2.2.1 Labour market initiatives

In 2023, 13 of the 18 initiatives funded (partially or fully) by the NTF had a labour market focus, either to upskill or reskill those in employment or move those in unemployment closer to the labour market or into employment. Five of these initiatives were under the remit of the Higher Education Authority (HEA), four were under SOLAS, three were under the Department of Social Protection (DSP), and one was under Skillnet Ireland. In 2023, these 13 initiatives accounted for 87.4 per cent of the NTF budget.

The three largest of these initiatives, based on spending from 2015 (or the programme’s inception year if that came after 2015) to 2023, were SOLAS’s Training People for Employment and Apprenticeship programmes, and the HEA’s Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision (Table 2.1). Between 2015 and 2023, almost €1.7 billion was spent on the Training People For Employment initiative, over €900 million on Craft Apprenticeships, and almost €790 million on Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision.

²⁷ The year 2015 is taken as the starting point, as the source of the NTF expenditure data outlined in this chapter is the Comptroller and Auditor General’s 2022 NTF review report, and 2015 is the first year for which NTF expenditure information is available in this report.

²⁸ Most recent NTF funding data, provided by DFHERIS.

Over the 2015 to 2023 period, just over €300 million was spent on the HEA/National Apprenticeship Office's (NAO) Consortia-Led Apprenticeships in Higher Education (€300,260,000), and almost the same amount on the HEA's two Springboard+ initiatives – Springboard+ For Employment (€175.751 million) and Springboard+ In Employment (€120.151 million). The HEA/NAO Consortium-Led Apprenticeships came into existence in 2016. Springboard+, originally known as Springboard, was established in 2011. Initially, the programme was only open to applicants that were unemployed. However, from 2018 onwards, those in employment have been eligible to apply for Springboard+ courses. This has resulted in the identification of two separate Springboard+ fundings streams under the NTF budget: Springboard+ For Employment and Springboard+ In Employment, with the latter established as a separate funding stream in 2019, when Springboard+ was opened up to those in employment. As of 2025, 80 per cent of Springboard+ participants are in employment and 20 per cent are seeking employment.²⁹

Another initiative with an expenditure in excess of €200 million since its inception in 2020 up to (and including) 2023 is the HEA's Human Capital Initiative. The focus of this programme has been to increase capacity in higher education to provide skills-focused programmes designed to meet priority skills needs. This is being undertaken through three pillars of activity. Pillars 1 and 2 (graduate conversion courses and additional places in undergraduate provision respectively) are classified as labour market focused (Table 2.1). Pillar 3 (Innovation and agility: Projects to enhance innovation and agility in response to future skills needs) is classified as a 'social/other' initiative (Table 2.3).³⁰

The labour market initiative with the lowest NTF budget is the DSP's Work Placement Experience Programme (€2.3 million approximately). This initiative was only established in 2021, and while it has grown annually since its inception, it was not funded by the NTF in 2024 or 2025.³¹

²⁹ Information provided by the HEA.

³⁰ According to NTF spending information provided by DFHERIS, this initiative ceased in 2024.

³¹ Information provided by DFHERIS.

TABLE 2.1 2023 NTF LABOUR MARKET INITIATIVES

Programme	Grantee organisation	2015*	2022	2023	Total (2015*–2023)
		(€000)	(€000)	(€000)	(€000)
Training people for employment ^{1a}	SOLAS	212,008	130,174	287,095	1,641,877
Apprenticeship ²	SOLAS/NAO***	42,600	150,191	195,936	937,771
Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision ²	HEA	5,598*	152,555	148,352	789,544
Apprenticeship ²	HEA/NAO***	435*	59,599	78,940**	300,260
Springboard+: For Employment	HEA	22,438	10,388	6,888	175,751
Springboard+: In Employment	HEA	6,888*	31,050	29,550	120,151
Employee and Continuing Professional Development ^{1b}	SOLAS	2,800	15,386	22,783	96,002
Human Capital Initiative (Pillars 1 and 2) ²	HEA	10,693*	11,274	6,988	41,615
Community Employment Training ³	DSP	4,200	3,684	4,023	35,190
Training Networks Programme – Seeking Employment	Skillnet Ireland	3,564	5,449	5,449	35,265
Training Support Grants	DSP	3,200	2,352	2,634	20,979
SOLAS Traineeship ²	SOLAS	1,500*	2,900	2,900	16,000
Work Placement Experience Programme	DSP	103*	819	835	1,757

Source: Constructed by the authors using data from the Comptroller and Auditor General's 2022 report on the accounts of the public service and 2023 NTF spending data provided by DFHERIS.

Note: * The following programmes were not in existence in 2015, so the information entered into this '2015' column relates to the year in which the programme was established: the HEA Apprenticeship scheme (2016); Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision (2017); SOLAS Traineeship (2018); Springboard+ In Employment (2019); the Human Capital Initiative (2020); the Work Placement Experience Programme (2021).

** The HEA also received temporary funding of approximately €4 million for its Apprenticeship programme in 2023.

*** The National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) was established in 2022 under the framework of the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021–2025. The NAO reports to a joint management board with the CEOs of SOLAS and the HEA. Since 2023, the NAO has been receiving a separate allocation under the NTF to assist both SOLAS and the HEA in the running of their apprenticeship initiatives. The NAO allocation for 2023 (€3.4 million) is combined with SOLAS's NTF apprenticeship allocation (€192.5 million), as their funding is distributed through SOLAS.³²

1a consists of seven sub-programmes; 1b consists of three sub-programmes; 2 concerns cross-cutting labour market/firm-level initiatives (i.e., initiatives that have firm-level spillover effects); 3 concerns cross-cutting labour market/social/other initiatives (i.e., initiatives that have social/other spillover effects).

2.2.2 Firm-level initiatives

Four of the eighteen NTF-funded initiatives in 2023 had a firm-level focus as their primary objective (Table 2.2); these accounted for 6.9 per cent of the 2023 NTF

budget. For example, objectives included: to advance competitiveness, productivity and innovation; to embrace new technologies; to attract external investment; to expand into export markets; and to develop the leadership and management capabilities of companies. However, each also had an employee development focus; for example, in relation to educational attainment, wage progression, occupational upgrading, improved management capabilities and upskilling. The grantee organisations in charge of each of the four initiatives were: Skillnet Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Engineers Ireland.

The largest of the firm-level initiatives is Skillnet Ireland’s Training Networks Programme For Those In Employment: with an expenditure of almost €260 million between 2015 and 2023 (Table 2.2). NTF funds have also been allocated to Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland’s Training Grants to Industry initiatives over this period (approximately €32 and €27 million respectively),³³ with Engineers Ireland receiving a smaller budget for its Employee And CPD Programme (€2 million).

TABLE 2.2 2023 NTF FIRM-LEVEL INITIATIVES

Programme	Grantee organisation	2015	2022	2023	Total (2015–2023):
		(€000)	(€000)	(€000)	(€000)
Training Networks Programme – Employment ¹	Skillnet Ireland	12,636	45,706	55,692	261,227
Training Grants to Industry ¹²	Enterprise Ireland	3,500	3,500	3,500	31,500
Training Grants to Industry ¹	IDA Ireland	3,000	3,000	3,000	27,000
Employee and CPD ¹	Engineers Ireland	75	400	400	2,000

Source: Constructed by the authors using data from the Comptroller and Auditor General’s 2022 report on the accounts of the public service and 2023 NTF spending data provided by DFHERIS.

Note: ¹ Cross-cutting firm-level/labour market initiatives (i.e., initiatives that have labour market spillover effects).

² NTF funding to Enterprise Ireland supports longer and shorter duration programmes. Longer duration ones concern leadership, management development and scaling supports – Leadership 4 Growth, Go Global 4 Growth, Enter the Eurozone programme and Founders Forum. Shorter duration programmes include the Business Navigator programme, Attracting & Retaining Talent workshops, Sustainability Kickstarter workshops, Spotlight on Skills workshops and the HR & OD Community of Practice. It also funds Enterprise Ireland’s Mentor Network.

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IDA Ireland also contributes a significant proportion of their own budget for training grant aid. While €3 million of NTF money was allocated to IDA Ireland’s ‘training grants to industry’ programme on an annual basis between 2015 and 2023, over a four-year period between 2021 and 2024, IDA Ireland approved over €100 million in training grant aid to client companies (information provided though correspondence with IDA Ireland, 9 April 2025). In relation to Enterprise Ireland, they also directly allocate budget on client skill development; for example, in 2024, this allocation was to the value of €12.5 million (information provided though correspondence with Enterprise Ireland, 2 April 2025). In their new strategy, Enterprise Ireland has outlined the KPIs they intend to measure going forward: for further information, see Enterprise Ireland Strategy 2025–2029 (p. 6).

2.2.3 Social/Other initiatives

Two of the NTF-funded initiatives in 2023 can be classified as having a ‘social/other’ focus (Table 2.3). The HEA’s Human Capital Initiative was already mentioned in Section 2.1.1; two of this initiative’s three pillars are labour market focused, while the third would be classified as ‘other’ as it supports higher education programmes in areas of identified skill needs for enterprises.

The Wheel is the grantee organisation in charge of the other initiative in this category. The Wheel supports community and voluntary organisations in Ireland, and the focus of its NTF-funded initiative – Community and Voluntary Organisations – is to support employees and employers operating in these sectors to acquire the skills and knowledge required to fulfil their roles and to improve management and leadership skills. Between 2015 and 2023, the total NTF funding allocation for The Wheel’s initiative was just under €6.5 million. Specifically in relation to 2023, this initiative accounted for 0.1 per cent of the NTF budget.

TABLE 2.3 2023 NTF SOCIAL/OTHER INITIATIVES

Programme	Grantee organisation	2015*	2022	2023	Total (2015*–2023):
		(€000)	(€000)	(€000)	(€000)
Human Capital Initiative (Pillar 3)	HEA	36,190	48,726	50,012	182,268
Community and Voluntary Organisations	The Wheel	375	1,140	1,140	6,420

Source: Constructed by the authors using data from the Comptroller and Auditor General’s 2022 report on the accounts of the public service and 2023 NTF spending data provided by DFHERIS.

Note: * The Human Capital Initiative (2020) was not in existence in 2015, so the information entered into this ‘2015’ column relates to the year in which the programme was established.

CHAPTER 3

Literature

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section, we will present some evidence on the existence and financing mechanisms (employer-based) of national training funds internationally, as well as evidence on the outcomes and impact of training funds. As general training programmes are one of the public measures of active labour market policy, we will present some studies that evaluate the impact of public training programmes, both from the international literature and from Irish-specific research. Training evaluation studies are categorised and presented, where possible, according to whether training programmes had any individual/labour market-level effect, firm-level effect or social outcome (as outlined in Chapter 2).

This chapter is organised as follows: Section 3.2 presents an international overview of national training funds and some evidence on their effectiveness. Section 3.3 shows findings from impact evaluations for general active labour market policy training programmes, from international studies (Section 3.3.1) and from Irish studies (Section 3.3.2). Finally, Section 3.3.3 presents findings from existing studies regarding evaluation of some initiatives currently funded in Ireland by the National Training Fund (NTF).

3.2 INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE ON NATIONAL TRAINING FUNDS

3.2.1 Introduction

As previously explained, the NTF was established in Ireland in 2000 as a dedicated fund to support employment-focused training. It is a mandatory levy on employers, collected through pay-related social insurance (PRSI). Such a fund plays an important role in the planning and implementing of an adult learning system for Ireland. Adult learning systems aim to improve the labour market prospects and employability of participants by allowing them to acquire skills that are in demand in the labour market, with reskilling and upskilling training opportunities that are expected to improve performance and productivity at work, but also to lead those who are unemployed and seeking employment to new employment opportunities, as well as reaching more disadvantaged and marginalised groups (OECD, 2019).

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), there is some evidence suggesting that governments' public financing of adult learning has been decreasing in some OECD countries over the last few years, following the Great Recession. Contextually, there has been a shift towards relying on external funding sources, alongside greater efforts to involve employers and individuals further in sharing the burden of adult learning financing. Governments

can set aside resources for training needs by imposing training levies on employers. The levy on employers' payroll varies across countries, and within countries it can vary by sector and company size.³⁴ According to the OECD (2019), levies on employers can be designed according to three different schemes:

- *Revenue-generating schemes*: Under this type of scheme, employers' contributions are allocated to fund general training programmes. Although this scheme does not encourage firms to invest in their workforce's training (as contributions cannot be reclaimed for this purpose), it serves to generate funds for publicly provided training.
- *Levy-grant schemes*: In this approach, funds are reimbursed to companies to enable them to finance workers' training. Firms contribute to adult learning and are also incentivised to train their employees, since the grants they receive can exceed the contributions made. Such schemes exist in France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Korea.
- *Levy-exemption schemes*: In a 'train-or-pay' scheme, firms that provide training incur no cost in doing so, or at most the cost is the same as they would have incurred in tax liability had they not provided training. Such schemes exist in Belgium, Greece, Spain and the UK.

Many countries have mixed systems, in which elements of different scheme types are combined. In Ireland, the NTF is an example of a levy-exemption and revenue-generating mixed scheme.

In 2022, UNESCO produced a global review of levy-financed funds. They found that 75 countries operate some such funding system: 18 countries in Europe; 1 in North America; 13 in Central and South America; 26 in sub-Saharan Africa; 3 in North Africa; 3 in Western Asia; 5 in eastern and southeast Asia; 3 in Oceania; and 3 in the Caribbean (UNESCO, 2022). There exist training funds operating at a national level and funds operating at a sectoral level. National-level training funds support training needs for all economy sectors, while sectoral level funds might support the needs of specific sectors.

3.2.2 Training fund effectiveness

According to UNESCO (2022), there is limited evidence on the outcomes and impact of training funds. Typically, any evaluation of training and other employment supports involves a *counterfactual impact evaluation* (CIE): comparing the rate of employment or any professional upgrading of supported trainees/job seekers (the *treatment* group) with a comparison group not in receipt of supports (the *control* group). A similar setting is necessary in evaluating any impact of training on relevant outcomes (i.e., firm performance) for companies

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According to OECD (2019), contributions range from 0.1 per cent of payroll in some sectors in Belgium and small firms in Korea, to 2.5 per cent in certain funds in the UK.

where employees received training, compared to similar firms whose employees did not attend any training.

UNESCO (2022) found that only a small number of CIEs have been carried out on training funds since 2010; these studies use quasi-experimental methods and data from the 2000s or earlier. Most of the literature highlights a generalised lack of robust, quantitative evidence on the causal impact of training funds: this scarcity is due to data collection costs, as well as methodological issues related to correctly identifying suitable control groups. Among national training funds, the Québec (Canada) Workforce Skills Development and Recognition Fund, funded by the university-level business school HEC Montréal, has undergone an impact evaluation. Impact evaluations also have been carried out on the following sector training funds: SENAI in Brazil, a study funded by the UK's Department for International Development; Fondirigenti in Italy; the Malaysian PSMB, funded by the World Bank; and sector training funds in the Netherlands.

Most training funds rely only on **output data**, or on 'success' stories. About one-quarter of national training funds and a few sectoral funds analysed by UNESCO (2019) implement **tracer studies** of graduates of training interventions. These studies follow trainees over time and report some labour market outcomes; however, the data cannot be analysed to evaluate any sort of causal impact of the training, as an adequate control group cannot be identified.

A small number of national training funds and some sectoral funds measure their outcomes through **perception studies**. These can be employer surveys, which ask respondents about their perception of the training programmes, or of the impact of the training on the workforce and company productivity. They can also be surveys of trainees/employees, who are asked about their perception of training programmes and the impact on their career. Through use of open-ended questions, surveys can be used to gather descriptive data that help provide a more qualitative insight into training outcomes, although not any evidence of causal relationship.

Research on the impact of training funds attempts to evaluate the extent to which training programmes had any *individual/labour market level effect* or *firm level effect*. Section 3.2.2.1 presents a small number of studies that analyse impacts at the individual/labour market level, while Section 3.2.2.2 presents some studies that analyse impacts at the firm level.

3.2.2.1 Labour market outcomes

At an individual level, the aim is to assess whether training funds improve individual employability, allow transition from unemployment to employment, and improve access to training for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Only the

sectoral training fund SENAI, in Brazil, has had a CIE. SENAI is the Brazilian system of vocational training in the industrial sector: it has a levy-based system, and all industrial companies pay a 1 per cent tax on all payrolls, which funds general training in training centres. SENAI also sells ad hoc training courses to specific companies. Using survey data from the 2007 PNAD Brazilian household survey, Barria and Klasen (2016) evaluate whether past participation to SENAI training had any significant impact on labour market outcomes (i.e., monthly earnings, monthly hours of work, hourly earnings and the probability of being employed in the formal sector) for those trained through SENAI relative to those trained in other training institutions. An inverse probability weighting model was implemented in order to estimate the average treatment effect on the relevant outcomes. The authors found that the average training premium in terms of monthly earnings for those aged 15–29 trained through SENAI was significantly higher compared to those trained in other training institutions (28 per cent versus 10 per cent wage premium). The effect was found to be stronger for males and individuals in rural areas, and it originated from increased hourly earnings rather than monthly working hours.

3.2.2.2 Firm-level outcomes

Few studies have evaluated the firm-level effects of training funds. Aspects to assess include whether training funds incentivise companies to raise the incidence of training and whether training improves workers' productivity within companies. There is no consensus on the impacts of such funds, as some studies found no impact while others registered a small but significant positive impact.

In 1995, a law was passed in Québec in Canada that obliged all companies to devote 1 per cent of their payroll towards training; in this 'train or pay scheme', firms spending less than 1 per cent had to remit the difference to the government. In 2004, a reform exempted medium-sized companies from the training requirement. Following this reform, Dostie (2012) employed a difference-in-difference strategy to compare changes in training and productivity in medium-sized firms (the *treatment* group) relative to the small and large firms (the *control* group). To do so, they accessed a longitudinal, linked employer–employee dataset with detailed information on the training policies of firms, in particular the number of workers undertaking classroom and on-the-job training in a given year. They found that the repeal of the obligation for training had no impact on firms' training levels, but rather caused firms to change their training 'allocation' decision, substituting other forms of training (on-the job training) for the specific type of training required by the law (classroom training). The study concludes that the levy exemption schemes did not successfully raise firms' training levels.

In the Netherlands, sectoral training funds are financed by a levy on the firms' total payroll costs. Firms can subsequently apply for subsidies for training costs. By employing different datasets on firms' characteristics, training investments,

workforce characteristics and economic sectors, Kamphuis et al. (2010) compared the level of training investments of firms in sectors with and without a training fund. The authors used a propensity score matching approach, where the treatment group was made up of companies in sectors with a fund, and the control group of those in sectors without a fund. Results showed that training levels were not higher in sectors with a fund than they were in sectors without a fund, so no evidence was found of a significant impact of the training fund on firms' level of training.

Feltrinelli et al. (2017) carried out an evaluation of Fondirigenti, one of Italy's inter-professional training funds that is concerned with the continuous training of middle managers. The evaluation was based on a panel dataset covering all sectors of the Italian economy over the period 2006–2011, and including information on the middle management training activity of Italian firms and general firm-level indicators. By employing an IV-GMM model, the authors found that training investment devoted to middle managers had a positive and significant effect on firm performance, measured in terms of total factor productivity.³⁵ Returns on training investments seem to be much higher for large and medium firms, and were found to be not significant for smaller firms.

In Malaysia, since 1993, firms in specific sectors have to pay a monthly levy of 0.5 to 1 per cent on the payroll to fund the Human Resource Development Training Fund. The World Bank (2017) found that registration on to this training fund increases a firm's likelihood of providing training by 24 percentage points and increases the share of workers trained by 19 percentage points. They also found that training an additional 1 percentage point of the workforce is associated with a nearly 1 per cent increase in productivity among all firms in Malaysia, but with a nearly 3 per cent increase in productivity among firms registered on this fund.

3.3 IMPACT EVALUATION FOR GENERAL ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET POLICY TRAINING PROGRAMMES

3.3.1 International literature

National training funds involve a levy being placed on private employers, which is used to fund training programmes and activities for those who are employed and unemployed, as well as for firms.

However, training programmes are one of the public measures of active labour market policy (ALMP). Active measures, which include job placement, assistance and employment services, training programmes, employment subsidies and direct

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An instrumental variables–Generalised method of moments model is used in econometrics to estimate relationships between variables when there might be some bias or endogeneity issue.

employment provision, are intended to assist unemployed people to return to work (Kelly et al., 2011). Training tends to account for the largest share of spending on active measures (Martin, 2000); training programmes aim at enhancing jobseekers' human capital and their employment perspectives. Within the literature, evidence from CIEs of the performance of public training programmes is mixed, even when long-run effects of training are analysed (McGuinness et al. 2011).

3.3.1.1 Labour market outcomes

Several studies have found positive effects of participation in training programmes at an individual level. Card et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 199 programme estimates for active labour market policy evaluation from 97 studies conducted between 1995 and 2007. The authors found that classroom and on-the-job training programmes often improved employment probabilities and earnings for participants in the medium term. The impact is found to be insignificant, and negative when significant, in the short run. The international evidence base pointed towards specific skills training as one of the most effective means of labour market activation.

Card et al. (2018) performed a second meta-analysis, and extended the number of studies used as sample in their earlier study (from 97 to 207, conducted before 2014). Again, the authors found that classroom and on-the-job training programmes had a positive impact on the probability of employment for participants in the medium term (1–2 years post programme), as well as longer term. Moreover, the average impacts of ALMPs were found to vary across socio-economic groups: specifically, several studies found that long-term unemployed participants benefit relatively more from training programmes than from other ALMPs.³⁶

Utilising administrative data from the Spanish Public Employment Service for 2018–2019, Arranz and García-Serrano (2024) investigated the impact of participation in job search assistance and training programmes on the probability, for unemployed jobseekers, of transition to employment, by using propensity score matching techniques. The study found that, compared to non-participants, participation in these programmes significantly increased the probability of transitioning from unemployment to employment, particularly into jobs of intermediate quality, and training programmes were identified as the primary driver of improved employment outcomes, with a persisting positive effectiveness over time.

³⁶

Other studies exist that provide an overview of European ALMP programmes (such as Kluve, 2010; Caliendo and Schmidl, 2016), and there are studies on the impact of vocational education and training programmes (e.g., Eichhorst et al., 2015).

Recently, the OECD (2025) published results from a wide, joint OECD–European Commission project, conducted between 2021 and 2025, on CIEs of some ALMPs across six European countries (Finland, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovenia). The ALMPs, among them training programmes, were evaluated using linked administrative and survey data and several CIE techniques. Training programmes in Finland, Greece and Lithuania were found to have positive effects on the employment probability of jobseekers in the long term, although negative effects were found in the short term, due to ‘lock-in’ effects. However, impacts were found to vary by socio-economic groups: for instance, the positive effects of training on employment were higher for women and jobseekers over 50 in Finland, and for young people in Greece.

In Denmark, a few studies have found insignificant or negative employment effects on participants in labour market training programmes. Rosholm and Skipper (2003), evaluating a specific programme for unskilled workers, found that it increased the subsequent unemployment rates of its participants. Jespersen et al. (2008) found no significant effect, in the short or long term, of classroom training on participants’ earnings or employment. In Sweden, Calmfors et al. (2001), summarising the results of various studies about the impact of public training programmes conducted between 1980 and 2000, found that outcomes varied by their time period. While evaluations of training acquired during the first half of the 1980s suggest positive effects on participants’ employment and/or income, evaluations of labour market training outcomes in the early 1990s found insignificant or significantly negative effects. In an evaluation of six Swedish active labour market programmes, Sianesi (2008) found that individuals joining labour market training displayed lower employment rates in both the short and long term. In Switzerland, Lalive et al. (2008) found that training programmes produced an increase in unemployment duration. Other negative effects were found in several studies in European countries (see Kluve, 2006, for a comprehensive meta-analysis). Insignificant or negative performance of training on individual level outcomes may be due to ‘lock-in’ effects: people who attend training courses have less time available to look for a job and put less effort into job searching, thereby becoming ‘trapped’ in the training programme (Conny, 2016). Alternatively, it may be due to selection bias problems: people who attend training programmes are already experiencing more disadvantaged conditions or greater marginalisation, and therefore experience difficulties in finding job opportunities or are not so active in job searching.

3.3.1.2 Firm-level outcomes

Firms invest in training their workers, in the expectation of it leading to enhanced productivity, competitiveness and profitability. However, measuring the return on this investment is challenging, and only a few studies have tried to do so. Problems relate to difficulties in obtaining data: firm-level datasets that have information on

productivity as well as workers' participation in training are rare (Fialho et al., 2019).

Martins (2021) is one of the first studies to provide evidence on the effects of employee training on firm performance. They describe their analysis as being based on almost potentially quasi-experimental variation. Using data from a training grants programme in Portugal, which was supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) of the EU, they compared firms in Portugal that received a grant with unsuccessful grant applicants. Following both the successful and unsuccessful grant applicants, the study boasts an extraordinarily rich matched employer–employee panel dataset. By using a difference-in-differences methodology, the author finds that the additional training driven by the programme led to economically and statistically significant improvements in several dimensions of firm performance. Sales, gross value added (defined as output minus intermediate consumption), employment, labour productivity (measured by the ratio of sales and the number of employees) and exports are all shown to increase among those firms that received the training grant (compared to the control group of unsuccessful applicants).

3.3.2 Irish context

3.3.2.1 Labour market outcomes

Compared to other OECD countries, there is a shortage of rigorous evidence on the impact of training in Ireland (McGuinness et al. 2014). Again, evidence from CIEs on the performance of training programmes is mixed. Several studies have found positive effects of training on labour market outcomes for unemployed individuals (McGuinness et al., 2011 & 2019) and for those returning to education (McGuinness et al., 2019). We summarise the main findings below.

McGuinness et al. (2011) provided a systematic evaluation of the impact of activation measures implemented under the Irish National Employment Action Plan. Under the plan, persons in receipt of Jobseeker's Benefit who reached three months duration on the Live Register of unemployment were referred to FÁS, the national training and employment authority, for an activation interview. At this, individuals could be provided with job search assistance, and some may be referred to employment or training opportunities. By using a PSM approach, the authors found that the job search assistance was totally ineffective; however, those who participated in training were less likely to be unemployed over a 21-month time horizon. Moreover, high-level specific skills training was found most likely to increase the probability of participants exiting from unemployment.

McGuinness et al. (2014) estimated the differential impact of different types of public training programmes. By employing a propensity score matching (PSM) estimation framework, they found that those who participated in training were less

likely to be unemployed at the end of the two-year study period, but the average effect of training varied by the type and duration of training received. Job search training and high-level specific skills training were most likely to increase the probability of participants exiting from unemployment, while a more modest positive effect was found for general vocational skills programmes, and weak effects were found with respect to low level skills training. Lower duration training programmes had a more positive impact, with the exception of high-level skills training programmes.

McGuinness et al. (2019) produced an evaluation of the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme, which is the most significant full-time further education and training programme (post-secondary non-tertiary) serving multiple purposes such as preparing for employment, bridging to higher education and offering second-chance education to adults. By using data from a specially designed learner survey and a PSM approach, the authors compared employment and educational outcomes of PLC participants against individuals who entered the labour market directly after completing their Leaving Certificate (upper secondary). The results showed that PLC education had a strong positive influence on future labour market outcomes: PLC participants were 16 percentage points more likely to be in employment relative to the control group. Moreover, PLC participants were found 27 percentage points more likely to transition to higher education studies.

Studies of other interventions found negative effects. Kelly et al. (2022) evaluated Ireland's second-chance education opportunity scheme, the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA), which was one of the main ALMPs for tackling unemployment. Individuals could participate in a course of education if unemployed while continuing to receive an income support payment. By using the Jobseekers Longitudinal Dataset, an administrative dataset compiled by the Department of Social Protection (DSP), alongside PLC survey data, and employing a PSM technique to compare outcomes of BTEA participants with an adequate control group, the authors found a negative employment impact of the education scheme: BTEA participants were substantially less likely to be in employment between four and six years following entry into their respective BTEA programmes, compared to the control group.

Research on the impacts of traineeships on labour market outcomes in Ireland is extremely limited.³⁷ JobBridge was a national internship scheme launched by the Government in 2011 and operated by the DSP. Indecon (2013) conducted a programme evaluation for individuals who completed the traineeship: they found that total employment rates for JobBridge participants (treatment group) were much higher compared to non-JobBridge participants who exited the Live Register

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Traineeships are generally considered as having a primary focus on individual-level outcomes, although they may have a secondary focus on firm-level objectives.

(control group) over the same period, with almost two-thirds of JobBridge participants employed within five months of completing the programme versus one-third; however, the educational levels of JobBridge candidates were also very high, making it difficult to separate out the impact of the training received under JobBridge on employment probabilities. In the study, there was a weak attempt to estimate a counterfactual for JobBridge, but this fell well below acceptable international standards. The control group was considered not adequate due to differences between the profile of Live Register participants and that of JobBridge participants.

3.3.2.2 Labour market and social outcomes

For some programmes designed to assist unemployed persons back into employment, a purely empirical approach centred on estimating a counterfactual is not sufficient. This is particularly the case for employment supports implemented within the realm of community development, as these supports target individuals facing more substantial barriers to employment (such as physical or mental health problems, language difficulties, etc.). Such supports, which typically target individuals who are deemed to be further (or furthest) away from the labour market relative to typical claimants, are termed pre-employment programmes. Relative to more mainstream labour market activation programmes, the evaluation of pre-employment supports is a more complex exercise, for a number of reasons.

Whelan et al. (2019) looked at the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in Ireland and examined how programme impacts could be effectively measured. SICAP represents a major component of Ireland's community development strategy, led by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht. The vision of SICAP is to improve the opportunities and life chances of those who are marginalised in society, experiencing unemployment or living in poverty through community development approaches, targeted supports and interagency collaboration. After evaluating the international literature, the authors found that difficulties in untangling causal relationships made it virtually impossible to generate robust counterfactual estimates of programme impacts.

Recently, the OECD, the DSP, Ireland and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (2024) published a study on two large public works programmes in Ireland, the Community Employment (CE) scheme and Tús, in which the authors evaluated labour market and non-labour market outcomes of participants of these programmes. These programmes provide job placements in local communities to long-term jobseekers and disadvantaged groups; the work is designed to help the community, and it involves community and voluntary organisations. The programmes are administered by the DSP. In particular, CE was designed as an integrated training and employment programme, so primarily as a labour market

scheme and only secondarily as a community development scheme. The training element of the CE is funded by the NTF.

The OECD et al. (2024) built a rich dataset by linking the DSP's data on unemployment, welfare benefit receipt and detailed participation data on Tús and CE to administrative data from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners (Revenue) on earnings and weeks of employment. The dataset contains background information on jobseekers, details on their participation in CE, and individual outcomes after participation.

To assess the impact of CE on labour market and non-labour market outcomes of programme's participants (treatment group), a suitable control group was built of non-participants to CE who were eligible for the scheme and very similar in their observable characteristics to actual CE participants. PSM techniques were used to address selection bias issues. The impact of CE participation on employment and earnings follows a U-shaped pattern, with short negative effect directly after participation ('lock in' effects) and positive outcomes in the medium and long-term (after two/three years). When evaluating non-labour-market outcomes, it was found that participation in CE reduces the probability of claiming disability benefits in comparison to the control group.³⁸ However, the study cannot fully assess the many outcomes CE might offer in terms of 'social inclusion' because data on these outcomes are not available. The impact of CE on labour market and social inclusion outcomes is not the same for all types of CE participants, but varies markedly across subgroups of jobseekers (OECD et al., 2024). The report authors highlighted many challenges and difficulties related to the dataset construction process for the study and recommended improving the current situation of data infrastructure in Ireland:

Information was frequently available on the same benefit or scheme participation in more than one data source. [...] Piecing together these different sources of information was never easy, as very rarely the two sources were providing coherent information. The working solution to this issue was to identify what could be considered the 'main' source of information on each scheme or benefit, in terms of coverage and likely reliability of data. This leaves however an open question on comparability between different datasets, reliability of the information provided, and in general, an impression that availability of more comprehensive meta-data would help interpreting the information found when exploring the data sources. As the source datasets are built for operational purposes, developing comprehensive

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CE participation was also found to enhance take-up of education subsidies, such as the BTEA, in the medium-long term (after three years). While it is positive to see community employment participants choosing to engage in education, the previously outlined findings with regards to the effectiveness of the BTEA scheme need to be borne in mind.

meta-data documentation will assist in re-using them for analytical purposes. Furthermore, the development of a longitudinal database that can consider a variety of data points and use them to come to some determination of labour market status, would alleviate many of the data construction challenges. (OECD et al., p. 132)

3.3.2.3 Firm-level outcomes

Very few evaluations have been carried out on the impact of training programmes on firms in Ireland. The few studies that do exist focus on measuring the differential impacts of different forms of training grant assistance on the performance of assisted firms. Roper and Hewitt-Dundas (2001) analysed data on small manufacturing companies in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland from 1991 to 1994; their sample included companies that did not receive any type of grant and companies in receipt of either a workforce training grant or other type of grant, such as for marketing or capital costs. Results showed that firms in assisted clusters had positive results in terms of employment growth over a three-years horizon, compared to non-assisted firms, but no effect was found regarding profitability or turnover growth. With a similar dataset, McGuinness and Hart (2004) examined the impact of different forms (in nature and timing) of grant assistance to firms in Northern Ireland from 1994 to 1997. They found that grant assistance generally boosts employment growth, especially in smaller firms, while the effects on turnover and productivity vary by type of grant, with marketing grants benefiting larger firms in the medium term.

3.3.3 Summary of NTF-funded initiative evaluations

In Table 3.1 below, we summarise recent findings from existing studies regarding evaluation of NTF-funded initiatives. Please note that the table aims to provide a fairly comprehensive overview of these studies but cannot be considered exhaustive. The studies employ various methodologies, which are outlined in Section 3.1.2.

TABLE 3.1 NTF-FUNDED INITIATIVE EVALUATIONS SUMMARY

NTF-funded initiative	Study	Year	Authors	Methods	Main findings
Apprenticeships	<i>Further education outcomes – Graduation years 2020</i>	2025	CSO	Tracer study, using the Educational Longitudinal Database	92% of the apprentices who qualified in 2020 were in employment two years after qualification, a 40% increase compared with those who qualified in 2010. About 15% of the qualified apprentices in 2020 were enrolled in education two years after their apprenticeship completion.
Apprenticeships	<i>Further education outcomes – Graduation years 2010–2016</i>	2019	CSO	Tracer study, using the Educational Longitudinal Database	Two years following qualification, 52.9% of apprentices qualified in 2010 were in employment and 17.8% were enrolled in education. Over the following years, the proportion in employment increased from 52.9% for apprentices qualified in 2010 to 79.5% for apprentices qualified in 2014.
Community Employment (DSP)	<i>Impact evaluation of Ireland’s active labour market policies</i>	2024	OECD, the DSP, European Commission’s Joint Research Centre	CIE evaluation, using DSP Live Register data and administrative data from Revenue	Short negative effect directly after programme participation on participants’ employment and earnings (‘lock in’ effects); positive outcomes in the medium and long term (after two/three years).
Skillnet Ireland: Training programmes	<i>Evaluation of Skillnet Ireland in 2019–2020</i>	2022	Indecon	Survey of employers	Positive perceptions on the impact of Skillnet Ireland training reported across firms of different size. Participation in training was found to be associated with enhancing the business’s product/service quality, improving productivity, and enhancing long-term business performance.
Springboard (HEA)	<i>Evaluation of Springboard</i>	2013	HEA	Analysis on a combination of data: Participant surveys; online data returns from colleges; Live Register data	2,400 people completed a Springboard course in 2012 with a 63% rate of successful course completion. Within 6 weeks of courses completing, 30% were back in work; within 6 months average 40% were back in work.
SOLAS’ Evening Training Courses	<i>2016 follow up survey of further education and training programme participants</i>	2017	Perceptive Insight	Survey of former FET participants who exited training in the period January 2016 to March 2016	In terms of programme provision, just over one-third (36%) of further education and training participants were involved in evening courses. 36% of participants on evening courses were found to be in employment after course completion, compared with 13% pre-course.
Post-Leaving Certificate (SOLAS)	<i>Evaluation of PLC programme provision</i>	2018	ESRI	CIE evaluation	PLC participants were 16 percentage points more likely to be in employment relative to the control group. PLC participants were found 27 percentage points more likely to transition to higher education studies.
Specific Skills Training (SOLAS)	<i>Evaluation of specific skills training</i>	2020	Indecon	CIE evaluation, using DSP’s Live Register data	Positive impact of SST on the prospect of being in employment 12 months following course completion, with an increase in probability of employment range from 3.5% to 5.6%.

TABLE 3.1 (CONTD.) NTF-FUNDED INITIATIVE EVALUATIONS SUMMARY

NTF-funded initiative	Study	Year	Authors	Methods	Main findings
VTOS (SOLAS)	<i>Evaluation of Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)</i>	2020	Indecon	CIE evaluation, using DSP's Live Register data	Participation in VTOS did not have a statistically significant impact on the likelihood of finding employment.
Enterprise Ireland³⁹	<i>Enter the Eurozone – Market entry plan</i>	NA	Frontline Consultants	Survey of employers	Nearly two-thirds of participants successfully executed their market entry plan after completing the programme. Participants felt they would not have been able to achieve increased export sales without this plan. Value received from the Enterprise Ireland market advisor evaluated as excellent/good.
Enterprise Ireland	<i>Evaluation of Go Global 4 Growth</i>	NA	Frontline Consultants	Participants' surveys; companies' survey; secondary data; stakeholders' interviews	Participants had a high level of satisfaction with all aspects of GG4G. Stakeholders agreed that GG4G played an important role in supporting Enterprise Ireland's aim of increasing international reach, growth and export sales revenue (particularly important for small and medium enterprises).
Enterprise Ireland	<i>Evaluation of the Mentor Network (2017 to 2020)</i>	2021	Frontline Consultants	Mentees and mentors' surveys; secondary data; stakeholders' interviews	Mentees reported their expectations to be met or exceeded as a result of their experience with their mentor, and the positive impact on daily duties/work. Most mentors felt that the matching process with mentees worked well and that support activities were very useful. Stakeholders agreed on the positive important contribution the Mentor Network makes to Enterprise Ireland's objectives (valuable as a support resource to pre investment indigenous companies in areas of reaching scale, creating jobs and in exporting; building on internal support capacity through the provision of a wider range of sectoral knowledge and experience).

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Note that three evaluation studies on Enterprise Ireland's programmes were provided to the authors of this study; however, other evaluation studies from Enterprise Ireland do exist, as part of their comprehensive evaluation framework using the Kirkpatrick Model. This model is a framework used for evaluating the effectiveness of training programmes, which breaks down training evaluation into four levels (Level 1–4), each assessing a different aspect of the learning experience and its impact. In Enterprise Ireland's case, feedback from clients is collected: (i) at the end of each short programme and/or module of longer programme to ascertain participant reaction (Level 1); (ii) after completion of several modules to ascertain learning and behaviour change (Levels 2 and 3); and (i) via independent evaluation to ascertain business impact (Level 4).

TABLE 3.1 (CONTD.) NTF-FUNDED INITIATIVE EVALUATIONS SUMMARY

NTF-funded initiative	Study	Year	Authors	Methods	Main findings
HCI – Pillar 3 (HEA)	<i>HCI Pillar 3 – Mid term evaluation report</i>	2023	Indecon	Output data; surveys	Pillar 3 has resulted in a number of key outputs, including in terms of additional places being provided. This shows that the funding has had a significant impact already in expanding training to meet priority skill needs. Positive responses were reported by the 400+ enterprise partners, with whom intensive collaboration has seen over 33,000 engagements, leading to innovation in terms of new technologies, learning methods and curriculum design.

CHAPTER 4

Evaluation possibilities for the National Training Fund

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The overall goal of the majority of National Training Fund (NTF) funded initiatives is the provision of targeted supports, to either upskill those in employment or provide training to those seeking employment.⁴⁰ In this report, NTF programmes (outlined in more detail in Appendix II) are categorised into three main areas of activity in order to provide the necessary focus to discuss evaluation possibilities and approaches, as used internationally. The three main areas of activity identified to review and examine the NTF programmes are: (i) labour market initiatives, (ii) firm-level initiatives, and (iii) other/social initiatives.⁴¹

A strong evaluation culture is needed to support evidence-based policy making, underpinned by well-resourced evaluation structures and a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to skills policy evaluation (OECD, 2023). Evaluating training programmes that support jobseekers, upskilling and lifelong learning is a crucial part of this. Effective evaluation ensures that projects or programmes provide participants with relevant skills, enhancing employability and career progression. Evaluation helps identify strengths, areas for improvement and alignment with labour market needs, ensuring public funds are well spent. By measuring outcomes such as job placement rates, skill acquisition and long-term career impacts, evaluations contribute to continuous improvement, fostering a more skilled workforce and a stronger economy. Furthermore, it is also critical that programmes align NTF funding objectives with labour market needs, foster active employer participation, maintain strong governance frameworks, manage finances prudently and ensure that programmes are available to individuals that would benefit most from them.

In general, the aim is to measure counterfactual impacts. However, not all NTF initiatives meet the criteria for applying this methodological framework, and/or the necessary data may not be readily available currently. Employment and firm

⁴⁰ Budget 2025 delivered a total NTF funding package of €1.485 billion over a six-year period (2025–2030) for the tertiary sector. To facilitate aspects of this NTF funding package, an amendment needed to be made to the National Training Fund Act, which established the NTF. Following consideration of a number of policy options, it was concluded that the optimal option was to make a limited amendment to the NTF Act to provide for certain funding but not to amend the current purposes of the Act. Thus, the goal of the NTF continues to be the provision of targeted supports to either upskill those in employment or to provide training to those seeking employment. For further information, see: Regulatory Impact Assessment - National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill 2025.

⁴¹ The majority of NTF expenditure is targeted towards programmes with labour market objectives. For example, labour market programmes, focusing on employment and upskilling, accounted for approximately 87.3 per cent of all NTF funding in 2023. Therefore, in this report most emphasis is placed on assessing monitoring and evaluation in this area. Some of these programmes are also cross-cutting initiatives, as outlined in Chapter 1 and Figure 1.1.

initiatives generally have a clear method for analysis; by contrast, it tends to be more challenging to capture any causal impacts of social initiatives. Therefore, a range of classifications are outlined: first, the optimal situation where the data infrastructure is suitable for counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE); second, where the data infrastructure is partially suitable for evaluation; third, where there are significant gaps and challenges to evaluation; and, fourth, where a monitoring approach may be more appropriate. Therefore, various methodological approaches are considered, including, in addition to CIE, mixed-method approaches and monitoring tools.

The monitoring and evaluation of NTF programmes can be further enhanced with improvements in the type and consistency of data collected over time. Continued data improvement expands the opportunities to evaluate robust counterfactual impacts more formally in future, particularly in terms of firm initiatives. Our overall findings and next steps are discussed below for each of the three main areas of NTF activities.

4.2 LABOUR MARKET INITIATIVES

Labour market initiatives include:

- Training People for Employment – SOLAS;
- Apprenticeships – SOLAS/National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) and Higher Education Authority (HEA)/NAO;
- Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision – HEA;
- The Human Capital Initiative, Pillars I & II – HEA;
- Springboard+ HEA;
- Employee and Continuing Professional Development – SOLAS;
- Community Employment Training – Department of Social Protection (DSP);
- The Training Networks Programme – Skillnet Ireland;
- Training Support Grants – DSP;
- Traineeships – SOLAS; and
- The Work Placement Experience Programme – DSP.⁴²

Such programmes can aim to either provide training to those seeking employment or upskill those in employment. In the first instance – providing training to those seeking employment – the outcomes of interest are related to exiting unemployment and entering either employment or further training and education. Other outcomes of interest include job quality (whether it is full-time/part-time or permanent/temporary/contract-based), earnings, job retention and skills acquisition (certifications/competencies). In terms of upskilling those in employment, the goals relate more closely to individual occupation upgrading and wage progression.

International approaches to measuring the impact of employment supports typically involve the use of identifying ‘treatment’ and ‘control’ groups – i.e., CIE. This might be done to compare the employment rates of supported jobseekers with those of a comparison group not in receipt of supports.⁴³ There have been numerous examples of this approach in Ireland over recent years; examples include Kelly et al. (2019), McGuinness et al. (2014) and Indecon (2012). The evaluation of employment programmes has become much less complicated in Ireland over recent years, with the development of the Work and Welfare Longitudinal Database (WWLD) and statistical profiling (O’Connell et al., 2009; 2013), which has led to a more accurate control and treatment group identification.

However, it must be noted that many employment supports within the realm of community development target individuals facing more substantial barriers to employment (such as homelessness, physical or mental health problems, addiction issues, language difficulties, etc.). Such supports are termed pre-employment programmes and they typically target individuals who are deemed to be further (or furthest) away from the labour market, relative to usual claimants. Relative to more mainstream labour market activation programmes, the evaluation of pre-employment supports is a more complex exercise for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is very difficult to get data on a comparable control group to allow for the estimation of a counterfactual. Secondly, even when an appropriate control group is available, programme participants often face unobserved or unmeasured challenges that place them further from the labour market. This means that immediate employment is rarely a realistic prospect, and short-term outcome measures may underestimate programme effects. Consequently, it is unlikely that a quantitative approach alone will be sufficient to capture the effects of such programmes. For this reason, researchers typically adopt a mixed-method approach, combining analyses of existing administrative data with in-depth surveys of staff and participants in a range of settings, as well as the use of distance travelled tools.

A publication by the Institute of Employment Studies (Dewson et al., 2000), *A guide to measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled*, emphasises the importance of assessing soft outcomes in evaluations that focus on individuals facing particular barriers:

⁴³

It is important to note that employment supports within the realm of social inclusion and community development target individuals facing more substantial barriers to employment, e.g., physical or mental health issues, language difficulties, homelessness or addiction issues. Such supports are more difficult to formally evaluate due to challenges related to identifying an appropriate control group. Mixed-method approaches, including qualitative and quantitative approaches, are necessary to examine the impacts of these supports more fully. See Whelan et al. (2020) for a more complete review.

Hard outcomes such as jobs obtained, numbers of qualifications, and numbers progressing onto further education and training (though useful in some cases), do not show the success of the project as a whole. They are an insufficient indicator of a beneficiary's increased employability. Target groups that are facing multiple barriers to employment may be a long way from being able to acquire a qualification or employment. Consideration of soft outcomes for such groups is a crucial indicator of success. Measuring soft outcomes can also help with the national level evaluation to provide a fuller picture of the impact of the programme as a whole. (Dewson et al., 2000, p. 4).

Such outcomes of interest can be categorised under four headings: key work skills (e.g., teamwork, communication, literacy, timekeeping), attitudinal skills (e.g., motivation, confidence, responsibility, self-esteem), personal skills (e.g., appearance, attendance, timekeeping) and practical skills (e.g., ability to complete forms, manage money, complete a CV). As outlined above, focusing on employment outcomes alone for such a marginalised group may give a misleading picture of programme impact. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) has recently completed a mixed-methods study of pre-employment supports delivered under Pobal's Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) (Whelan et al., 2020).⁴⁴ The research combines a counterfactual estimate of immediate employment impacts with case study and survey evidence aimed at identifying the softer impacts of the programme.

In the sub-sections below, we discuss: existing datasets that would facilitate CIE evaluation of NTF labour market initiatives; and datasets that present significant data gaps and challenges to CIE evaluation.

4.2.1 Datasets that facilitate CIE evaluation of NTF-funded initiatives

As part of the study methodology, we investigated multiple data sources to assess their suitability for evaluating NTF-supported programmes. In this process, we identified several key datasets that can provide valuable insights into learner outcomes, employment transitions and progression. This section discusses these datasets, their potential for CIE, and the key challenges associated with their use. Once NTF-funded programmes are systematically identified, it will be possible to compare NTF beneficiaries and non-NTF beneficiaries using robust econometric methods to assess training impacts on employment, earnings and job quality.

Table 4.1 compares six key datasets that have the potential to be used for evaluating NTF labour market initiatives. Each dataset is comprehensive in

capturing core variables such as programme participation, unique identifiers and demographic details (age, gender, education and employment history). Outcome variables are more uneven: while most cover labour market status, only some include earnings, completion or certification information. Programme-level variables, such as type, duration, delivery mode and intensity, are generally well represented in the datasets, though with gaps across each. Additional explanatory variables, including social welfare payments, health, migration status and location, are available in some but not all six key datasets. Overall, the table highlights that while there is a strong foundation for evaluation, no single dataset is comprehensive, making linkage or mixed-use necessary to fully capture programme impacts.

4.2.1.1 The Educational Longitudinal Database

The Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD) is, potentially, one of the most valuable resources for evaluating the impact of NTF labour market initiatives, given that it tracks learner outcomes over time, and for a given cohort provides access to a comparable control group. Established by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), since approximately 2010 it has served as a statistical framework for the compilation and analysis of learner outcomes. It provides the basis for a series of projects that the CSO has established in collaboration with Irish public sector bodies to examine learner outcomes across a range of educational levels and programmes, the most recent of which is its Apprenticeships project.⁴⁵ By linking data on individuals who have completed training programmes with employment, welfare and further education records, the ELD can potentially enable a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of NTF-supported initiatives.

The ELD is produced by matching datasets on learners who have completed courses or programmes to other datasets that describe their outcomes in subsequent years. The data sources used to describe learner outcomes include employment and self-employment datasets from Revenue, benefits data from the DSP, and data on educational participation from the Department of Education and several state agencies, including the HEA, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), and SOLAS.⁴⁶

This database allows for the assessment of key employment outcomes, such as job placement rates, earnings growth and job retention, using employment and self-employment records from Revenue. It also helps measure the extent to which training reduces reliance on social benefits by integrating data from the DSP. Additionally, the ELD facilitates an understanding of lifelong learning pathways by

⁴⁵ CSO (2021). 'Key Findings apprenticeship outcomes – Qualification year 2020'.

⁴⁶ For more information, please see: <https://www.cso.ie/en/methods/education/educationallongitudinaldatabase/educationallongitudinaldatabaseeld/>.

incorporating information from the Department of Education, the HEA, QQI and SOLAS.

By applying CIE techniques, the ELD could be used to determine whether training programmes funded by the NTF lead to better labour market outcomes, when those of participants are compared to similar individuals who did not participate. Most importantly, a control group can be defined within the ELD dataset, by identifying individuals within the chosen cohort who did not participate in the NTF-funded initiative of interest. This evidence can support data-driven decisions to improve training fund allocation and programme design.

4.2.1.2 Jobseekers Longitudinal Dataset and Work and Welfare Longitudinal Database

In evaluating the effectiveness of active labour market policies (ALMPs) in assisting people into employment in Ireland, two significant datasets are utilised: the Jobseekers Longitudinal Dataset and, in more recent times, the Work and Welfare Longitudinal Database (WWLD). The Jobseekers Longitudinal Dataset, which has been replaced by the WWLD, was developed and maintained by the DSP to track social welfare claims, employment, training and activation programme interventions of all individuals who have made a jobseeker or one-parent family payment claim since 2004. This is a comprehensive dataset that has enabled researchers to analyse the trajectories of jobseekers over time, providing valuable insights into the impact of labour market initiatives on individual's transitions from unemployment to employment.

The more recent WWLD has replaced the Jobseekers Longitudinal Dataset, and offers a broader perspective on individuals' interactions with the welfare system and the labour market. By linking data from various administrative sources, the WWLD facilitates a more detailed analysis of employment patterns and the effectiveness of different ALMP interventions. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) (2024) technical report on the impact evaluation of Ireland's ALMPs, both these longitudinal datasets are instrumental in assessing programme outcomes and informing policy decisions. However, it should be noted that Ireland's most recent seasonally adjusted unemployment rate (April 2025) stood at 4.1 per cent, down from a rate of 4.4 per cent in April 2024. This low rate and its steady decline over time indicate that the labour market is approaching full employment. Therefore, in such a context, the relevance of ALMPs may be perceived as diminished, given the reduced pool of unemployed individuals. However, even in a tight labour market, ALMPs play a crucial role in addressing structural unemployment, supporting vulnerable groups and enhancing workforce adaptability to economic shifts. It is also possible, given the open nature of the Irish economy and its susceptibility to external shocks, that unemployment will begin to rise again at some point in the future. Therefore, continuous evaluation using datasets such as the WWLD remains essential to

ensure labour market policies funded by the NTF effectively meet the evolving needs of the labour market.

4.2.1.3 Facilitating a CIE approach: ELD and WWLD

Drawing from our data reviews and interviews with relevant stakeholders, we conclude that the ELD and the WWLD together represent a strong foundation for applying a CIE approach to assess the impact of NTF labour market initiatives in Ireland. However, since the ELD is maintained by the CSO and the WWLD by the DSP, it is essential for these bodies to collaborate with DFHERIS to secure access to anonymised data or relevant data samples necessary for effective programme evaluation. By linking data on learners who have completed training programmes with post-training employment and social welfare records, the ELD can potentially enable a robust analysis of labour market outcomes. As mentioned already, once NTF-funded programmes are systematically identified, either from existing records or through improved tracking mechanisms, the ELD and WWLD can facilitate comparisons between training participants and non-participants, thus allowing for the application of robust econometric techniques, such as difference-in-differences and propensity score matching (PSM). Such methodologies will help establish the causal impact of training interventions on employment, earnings, job quality and occupation related outcomes.

4.2.2 Datasets with significant gaps and challenges to evaluation

Several other existing datasets, shown in Table 4.1, contain high-quality data, and contain high coverage of personal public service number data (PPSN), which allows for longitudinal tracking. These include the HEA's Application Management System (AMS), SOLAS's Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) and the NAO's Apprenticeship Client Services System (ACSS). In fact, some of these high-quality datasets (AMS and PLSS, shown in Table 4.1) serve as foundational sources for the construction of the ELD database. However, used in isolation, there are critical gaps in control group data and in regard to the systematic collection of outcome variables at appropriate time intervals. In order to strengthen CIEs, it is essential to collect information on individuals who apply but do not enrol in training programmes, as these individuals can serve as a natural comparison group. Even in the case where treatment and control firms differ in terms of observable and unobservable characteristics, difference-in-differences and PSM are econometric techniques that can be employed to ensure that any counterfactual estimates of the impact are robust. In the absence of an effective control group, at a minimum, the impact of different forms of grants within assisted firms should be assessed (see McGuinness and Hart, 2004).

There is a need for structured follow-up surveys to systematically capture key outcome variables, qualitative insight, and self-reported employment or skills outcomes that administrative data alone may not reveal. Such enhancements

would improve capacity to assess the impact of NTF-funded programmes over time. Programmes in receipt of European Social Fund (ESF) funding survey participants at three key timepoints: at the start, on completion (after four weeks), and after six months. For unemployed individuals, transitions into employment represents the primary measure, while for those already employed the focus is on self-assessed improvements in labour market status, such as wage increases or promotions. Thus, the evaluation of NTF programmes in Ireland can also be informed by established ESF methodologies and evaluations. The European Commission provides detailed guidance on evaluation design and implementation, including the European Social Fund+ Evaluations resource, which sets out standards for evaluation practice, and the data and evaluation guidelines, which cover outsourcing arrangements, practical challenges involved in assessing programme impacts and the use of administrative data for monitoring and assessment purposes (European Commission, 2021; 2020; 2019). ESF evaluators have highlighted issues with outcome data collected after six months, where self-reported surveys achieve very low response rates and relative sample sizes.⁴⁷ This limits reliability and risk bias in the estimation of impacts, even with representative sampling.⁴⁸ By contrast, administrative data offer fuller coverage, avoid recall issues and enable more robust long-term tracking.

The development of the Government's Virtual Data Rooms service, which is under the remit of the CSO, may facilitate increased government department and state agency data sharing, linking and availability. The purpose of this service is to allow public sector organisations to match their own data with additional pseudonymised data provided by other public sector organisations, with the intention of supporting evidence-based policy making, and policy evaluation and formation. Thus, this service could enhance future evaluations of the NTF by providing more streamlined access to verified personal/firm-level information.⁴⁹ However, at present the planned rollout of this service has only begun (Quarter 2 of 2025). Thus, it remains unclear how this service will function in practice, particularly in relation to administrative datasets and research access. While the CSO have robust data governance arrangements in place, and apply strict terms and conditions for accessing data, due to the CSO being governed by the 1993 Statistics Act, the potential application of this service for evaluation and policy

⁴⁷ These issues might necessitate adjustments in the survey methodology, including enhanced engagement strategies, improved tracking systems or alternative data collection methods to ensure that sufficient and reliable follow-up information is gathered.

⁴⁸ Examples of effective data collection, sharing and evaluation practices have been demonstrated for the ESF in Germany, Holland and Sweden (information provided by DFHERIS during meeting on 10 February 2025, and subsequent email follow-up on 20 May 2025).

⁴⁹ The establishment of this service formed part of the Government's 2019–2023 Public Service Data Strategy: [public-service-data-strategy-2019-2023-ae1c4cdf-b7e4-4e0c-bca7-b84b962a8ad3.pdf](#). The service's pilot was completed in quarter one of 2025. For more information on this service, please see: [VDR_Update_27_June_2024_for_ESLG.pptx](#).

analysis will depend on how interoperability and data-sharing frameworks are implemented.

The School Leavers Survey was a long-running study that examined young people's experiences in school and their transition to the labour market, further education or economic inactivity.⁵⁰ The Irish Social Science Data Archive holds data for this survey from 1980 to 2007, after which the survey was discontinued. If reinstated, this survey could provide critical control group data, allowing for more accurate CIEs of training programmes. By capturing information on individuals who do not engage in NTF-funded training programmes, having access to such a dataset could enhance the ability to compare outcomes between participants and non-participants, strengthening the overall accuracy of NTF evaluations. Failing these additions, there remains the possibility to comparing the outcomes across various NTF-funded training programmes relative to one another, where the necessary data exists, and there is no access to a comparable control group. (See McGuinness and Harte (2004) for an example of an approach that compares the impacts of interventions across treatment groups.)

As a recent example of data gaps, McGuinness et al. (2018), in their evaluation of the Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme for SOLAS, identified significant data limitations, particularly in relation to the absence of a control group, which hinders the establishment of a counterfactual scenario. This limitation restricted capacity to assess the direct impact of PLC programmes on participants' outcomes. In order to address this challenge, the ESRI, in conjunction with SOLAS, employed a survey-based methodology. Surveys were designed and administered, targeting both PLC graduates and a comparison group of Leaving Certificate graduates who did not enrol in PLC courses. This approach facilitated the collection of data on both educational and employment trajectories, enabling a comparative analysis between the two groups. By analysing the responses, McGuinness et al. (2018) estimated the counterfactual – i.e., what the outcomes for PLC participants might have been had they not enrolled in the programme. This allowed for an assessment of the PLC programmes' effectiveness in enhancing educational and employment outcomes. Participation in PLC programmes was found to have positive impacts on both educational progression and employment outcomes. Specifically, PLC graduates were more likely to continue to higher education compared to similar Leaving Certificate graduates, and they also were found to experience improved employment prospects.

It is important to note that this **survey-based approach with primary data collection, while useful in the absence of a control group, is often more expensive and time-consuming than using linked administrative data.** Administrative data, if available, allows for more cost-effective and comprehensive analysis by

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The School Leavers Survey was conducted by the ESRI and funded by the Department of Education.

leveraging existing records on employment, education and welfare interactions. It also reduces complexities such as survey non-response and recall bias, thereby improving the reliability of impact evaluations. As such, the re-establishment of some form of school leavers survey would enhance capacity to evaluate NTF-funded labour market initiatives, including any current or future NTF initiatives targeted at younger cohorts.

Another key consideration to be aware of is that **the timing of evaluations is a crucial factor in measuring short- to long-term impacts**. A phased approach to evaluation should be considered; one might take place, for example, 6–12 months post-training to assess immediate employment outcomes, job retention and initial earnings changes. After two to three years post-training, it could evaluate medium-term effects, such as career and earnings progression. Some consideration of the overall macroeconomic climate or other events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, are necessary to ensure that NTF-funded programme participants have had the necessary time to embed the skills developed into their careers. Longer term labour market impacts, such as wage growth and career stability, can be analysed 5–10 years post-training.

Lock-in effects occur when participants in education or ALMPs temporarily reduce their job search efforts during programme participation, leading to short-term decreases in employment rates. Such lock-in effects need to be taken into consideration when deciding on the timing of evaluations. Additionally, for certain highly specialised or upskilling programmes, longitudinal tracking over a decade may be necessary to fully understand their impact on career trajectories and earnings mobility. For instance, only short-term post-training information is collected in the case of Springboard+ (HEA dataset). Furthermore, in an evaluation, outcomes might also relate to the potential differential effects of mode of delivery; i.e., online, in-person or blended teaching and learning. These can vary by, for example, intensity or duration of courses.

Another important issue to mention is that **available datasets through Revenue capture total weekly or monthly pay, but lack data on the number of hours worked**. This gap creates problematic measurement errors, particularly when evaluating the earnings impact of training programmes, as an increase in total earnings could reflect more hours worked rather than higher wages. To enhance wage-related analysis, it is essential to incorporate hourly wage estimates, either by encouraging the collection of standardised work-hour information within administrative datasets or through self-reported survey data. This would allow for more precise assessments of whether training improves wage rates, not just other employment conditions (for example, a move from part-time to full-time or increased hours worked). In this regard, towards the end of 2024, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) submitted a business case to Revenue for the collection of hours worked data through its PAYE Modernisation (PMOD)

system.⁵¹ The business case was led by DETE, in collaboration with the CSO and other interested policy bodies supporting the proposal.⁵² The DETE proposal also has strong support from the National Statistics Board (NSB) (NSB, 2024).

Effective evaluation requires technical expertise in econometrics, statistical analysis and labour economics. It is necessary for evaluators to have proficiency in advanced quantitative methods and econometrics, including the ability to construct counterfactual groups, assess selection bias and interpret causal effects. To ensure objectivity, it is also crucial that evaluations are conducted independently, whether through external research institutions/bodies, universities or dedicated evaluation units within government agencies. Independence facilitates the prevention of any conflicts of interest and ensures increased credibility in the findings for policymaking.

Mixed-methods approaches to evaluation integrate both quantitative and qualitative research methods, offering a comprehensive understanding of complex programmes or interventions. By combining statistical data with detailed personal insights, these approaches provide a more nuanced analysis than singular methods. For instance, as mentioned above, Whelan (2020) evaluates pre-employment supports under Pobal’s SICAP programme, employing a mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were used to assess employment outcomes and qualitative interviews were conducted with participants and staff to improve understanding of personal experiences and challenges. This combination allows for a more holistic approach to evaluation, capturing both measurable impacts and the contextual factors influencing those outcomes. Such approaches are particularly beneficial when exploring more complex social programmes where statistical data alone may not capture the full scope of participant experiences or programme effectiveness. By integrating diverse data sources, mixed-methods evaluations can validate findings across methodologies, enhance the reliability of results and provide actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners. Mixed-methods evaluations are markedly more expensive than purely quantitative approaches due to the additional costs of conducting qualitative research, such as interviews, focus groups and necessary fieldwork. These methods require more time, researchers with these specific skills and resources for data collection and analysis, making them more resource-intensive compared to relying solely on existing administrative or survey data as suggested above. Nevertheless, mixed-method approaches are key when it comes to the evaluation of complex labour market, or any other, initiatives.

⁵¹ PMOD, introduced by Revenue in 2019, is a system that requires employers to report employee pay in real time for each payroll cycle. It replaced the practice of submitting an annual P35 form.

⁵² DSP, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Low Pay Commission.

TABLE 4.1 LABOUR MARKET INITIATIVES – DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

	Application Management System (AMS) – HEA	Apprenticeship Client Services System (ACSS) – NAO	Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD) – CSO	Programme and Learner Support Systems (PLSS) – SOLAS	Skillnet Ireland data	Work and Welfare Longitudinal Dataset (WWLD) – previously Jobseeker Longitudinal Dataset – DSP
Core variables for evaluation						
- NTF programme participation indicator ⁽¹⁾	✓ ⁽⁸⁾	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Unique identifier/ PPS number	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
- Company registration number			✓ ⁽⁹⁾			
Outcome variables (before and after)						
<i>Individual-level:</i>						
- Completion		✓	✓	✓	✓ ⁽¹¹⁾	
- Labour market status (e.g., employment, unemployment, additional education/training)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Earnings/wages			✓			✓
- Career progression (e.g., occupation upgrading, hours worked, moving from part-time to full-time)						
- Certification		✓		✓		
Programme information:						
- Type of programme		✓	✓	✓	✓	
- Duration of training (hours/days/months/years)		✓	✓ ⁽²⁾	✓	✓	

TABLE 4.1 (CONTD.) LABOUR MARKET INITIATIVES – DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

	Application Management System (AMS) – HEA	Apprenticeship Client Services System (ACSS) – NAO	Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD) – CSO	Programme and Learner Support Systems (PLSS) – SOLAS	Skillnet Ireland data	Work and Welfare Longitudinal Dataset (WWLD) – previously Jobseeker Longitudinal Dataset – DSP
- Mode of delivery (in-person, online, blended)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Intensity (i.e., full-time/part-time)	✓		✓	✓	✓	
- Start date		✓	(2)	✓	✓	✓
- Finish date		✓	(2)	✓	✓	✓
Explanatory variables						
<i>Individual-level:</i>						
<i>Core variables</i>						
- Educational attainment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Age	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Gender	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Employment history (e.g., employed in last month, in last year) *	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Migrant/non-Irish	✓		(12)	✓		✓
<i>Secondary variables</i>						
- Social welfare payment (Jobseeker’s Allowance)	✓		✓	✓		✓
- Own transport (e.g., car)						✓
- Long-term unemployment (12 months or more)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
- Health			(3)			✓
- Public sector employment scheme (Community employment scheme)						✓

TABLE 4.1 (CONTD.) LABOUR MARKET INITIATIVES – DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

	Application Management System (AMS) – HEA	Apprenticeship Client Services System (ACSS) – NAO	Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD) – CSO	Programme and Learner Support Systems (PLSS) – SOLAS	Skillnet Ireland data	Work and Welfare Longitudinal Dataset (WWLD) – previously Jobseeker Longitudinal Dataset – DSP
- Geographic location type (e.g., geocode, county, rural/urban)	✓	✓	(4)	✓	✓	✓
- Number of children (0, 1, 2, etc.)			(5)			✓
- Additional professional/Vocational training or skills			(6)			
- Occupation				✓	✓	✓
- Industry/sector	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
- Disability		✓	(7)	✓		✓
- Employment contract type (e.g., fixed-term, temporary)		(10)		✓		
- Full-time/Part-time employment				✓		
Source of information	<i>Notes from meeting with grantee organisation and application form/codebook</i>	<i>Waiting for information from grantee</i>	<i>Obtained from ELD homepage on CSO website/CSO contact</i>	<i>From PLSS codebook</i>	<i>Info obtained from grantee organisation</i>	<i>From OECD (2024) report that used this data set and colleagues within DSP</i>

Notes: (1) No specific NTF identifier but NTF-funded places could be identified from programme type, course name, provider information. (2) Start and finish date on SOLAS (PLSS) enrolments. QQI awards and HEA graduations are in the calendar year. (3) Self-reported health in Census 2022 for cohort that can be matched to Census. (4) Address for student identifiable with Administrative Census (IPEADS publication). (5) Child Benefit recipients identifiable (usually mother), number of children could be inferred from the annual payment divided by the number of weeks and the payment rate. (6) If awarded by QQI, since 2010. (7) Self-reported disability status in Census 2022 for cohort that can be matched to Census. (8) In the case of Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision, the necessary information is not currently available, NTF-funded participants are not identifiable. For HCI (Pillars I and II), the NTF courses are identified as those in particular ISCED categories at Levels 7 and upwards. It is also important to note that information is accessible only for HEA providers and not at the same level for private education providers. (9) The NAO collects company registration numbers; however, it is a new field within the dataset and is not fully populated. The NAO collects the tax employer number, which could be used for linking to other administrative datasets. (10) The apprenticeship employment contract falls under a specific employment contract category that is regulated by the 1967 Industrial Training Act. (11) Skillnet Ireland collects completion data for a proportion of learners only (funded through ESF+). (12) PPSN coverage within the ELD for 'Migrant/non-Irish' individuals is very low.

4.3 FIRM-LEVEL INITIATIVES

Evaluation of enterprise supports focuses on the outcome variables of interest to firm-level performance; for example, employment growth, employment sustainability, business turnover and/or profitability. In order to evaluate the impacts of NTF-supported firm-level initiatives it is, in general, necessary to identify a 'control group' of non-supported firms in order to be able to benchmark the performance of supported firms ('treatment group'). Evaluations can also focus on measuring the differential impacts of different forms of grant assistance on the performance of assisted firms; for example, the relative impact of employment grants on assisted firm performance (McGuinness and Hart, 2004; Roper and Hewitt-Dundas, 2001).

In Ireland, there has been a lack of CIEs in the area of enterprise supports to date (Whelan et al., 2021). This is due, in part, to the lack of administrative and survey data necessary to conduct such analysis. International best practise in evaluating enterprise supports is clearly laid out in the well cited publications by Storey (1998, 2000, 2003) in which he identifies six key stages in evaluating the impact of supports to small businesses. These are also discussed in an Irish evaluation context in Lenihan et al. (2005). Of the six stages, the first three relate to effective monitoring, with the final three stages focusing on evaluation. The six key stages to enterprise support evaluation are summarised as follows.

1. **Take up of schemes:** This relates to quantifying and profiling the take-up of schemes, and might involve examining the distribution of firms taking advantage of supports in terms of their size, sector, ownership type, location, etc. This step fulfils an accounting and legal function but has no economic role; its purpose is to ensure that the programme expenditures are consistent with stated programme objectives.
2. **Recipient's opinions:** In this stage, participating firms are asked their opinions regarding the value of the supports received under the particular assistance programme; for instance, firms in receipt of training supports would be asked if they thought that there was any value in the training that had been delivered. Firms are also asked about the effectiveness of the application process for receiving programme supports. Stage 2 can deliver some important insights into the nature of programme access and policy delivery; however, this step will not demonstrate programme effectiveness in terms of achieving set programme objectives related, for example, to aspects of firm performance.
3. **Recipient view(s) on the difference made by the assistance:** In this stage, recipients are asked if the assistance made any difference to the firm's performance and are, usually, required to quantify the impact in terms of metrics that are relevant to programme goals (employment, turnover, profitability, etc).

The problem with this aspect of monitoring is that it is difficult to validate firms' responses; moreover, the responses may be biased upward.

4. Comparison of the performance of assisted firms with typical firms: In this stage, the performance of assisted firms is compared with that of non-assisted firms, with the clear inference being that any difference in the outcomes of the two groups can be attributed to the policy intervention. For example, this stage might involve comparing rates of employment growth among assisted firms with those of 'typical firms' within the economy. The main drawback with this approach is that assisted firms may not be 'typical' themselves; therefore, the control group of 'typical firms' may not be an appropriate benchmark against which to measure programme impacts.

5. Matching: In this stage, researchers will typically seek out a control group that more readily compares with assisted firms. This matching approach will generally be driven by the objectives of the policy. For instance, if the programme aimed at stimulating growth among new firms, then the matching process would seek to draw a sample of newly registered business that, while meeting the criteria for support, did not receive assistance under the programme.

6. Take account of selection bias: In this stage, the researcher applies formal statistical tools such as PSM to try and eliminate any remaining differences in observable characteristics between the control and treatment firms. Any differences observed in the performance of both sets of firms, post selection bias controls, can more confidently be attributed to the influence of the programme.

In many instances, researchers will not typically follow all of the stages; for instance, Stage 4 might be omitted in favour of proceeding directly to matching and the implementation of selection controls. However, where possible, the suggested monitoring evaluation stages (Stages 1, 2 and 3) should be pursued prior to the formal evaluation exercises (Stages 4, 5 and 6), as they can provide valuable additional insights into programme strengths and weaknesses. In the sub-section below, we discuss the NTF firm-level initiatives for which there are significant gaps and challenges to evaluation.

4.3.1 Significant gaps and challenges to evaluation

Significant limitations in evaluating firm-level training initiatives arise from the absence of systematic collection of company registration numbers and, in certain instances, from insufficient clarity regarding the proportion of total funding contributed by the NTF relative to that provided by the grantee organisation or its parent department.⁵³ These issues apply to initiatives such as the Training

Networks Programme – Employment (Skillnet Ireland), Training Grants at Industry Level (Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland), and CPD Supports for Employees (Engineers Ireland). Without a standardised method to link training participation to specific firms, it is challenging to assess the impact of training on, for example, firm performance, productivity or workforce development. Implementing a consistent company identification system within datasets and linking further with administrative datasets would enable better tracking of firm participation and facilitate more robust firm-level impact evaluations. In the case of Engineers Ireland, it appears that the courses are fully funded by NTF.⁵⁴ For Skillnet Ireland, the proportion of total funding stemming from the NTF is approximately 60 per cent, while the NTF part funds the initiatives of Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland to a lower extent.⁵⁵ The proportion of funding allocated from the NTF to these firm-level initiatives is something that should be examined and taken into consideration when deciding on the evaluation strategy (e.g., the methodology to be employed) and, in general, prioritising the evaluation of individual NTF initiatives.

Several of the existing datasets shown in Table 4.2, from Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Engineers Ireland and Skillnet Ireland, contain **data that require significant enhancement** before they can be effectively used for CIE, along with the systematic collection of company registration numbers. Additionally, there are **critical gaps in control group data and the systematic collection of outcome variables at appropriate time intervals**. In order to strengthen CIEs, where feasible, it is essential to collect information on similar firms who do not enrol in training programmes, as these firms can serve as a natural comparison group. Even if the case where treatment and control firms differ in terms of observable and unobservable characteristics, difference-in-differences and PSM are econometric techniques that can be employed to ensure that any counterfactual estimates of the impact are robust. In the absence of an effective control group, at a minimum, the impact of different forms of grants within assisted firms should be assessed (see McGuinness and Hart, 2004). In addition, when it is not feasible to collect information on similar firms who do not enrol in training programmes, another alternative that should be undertaken is to explore the linking of the NTF-supported firms data with external firm-level data. The establishment of the

⁵⁴ Engineers Ireland provide learning and development to those employees working in the professional engineering sector in Ireland. The training and education courses that they provide continuously evolve to meet current needs within the sector. For example, providing training that will facilitate professional engineering companies to meet targets set by Government in relation to climate change, digitalisation, etc.

⁵⁵ For IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, additional funding comes from DETE. Please see further information on funding for IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland NTF-funded initiatives in Chapter 2.

Government's new Virtual Data Rooms service, discussed in Section 4.2.2, may, going forward, assist with this data linking work.⁵⁶

Linking NTF-funded participation data to other key firm-level datasets, such as the Census of Industrial Production (CIP) and Annual Services Inquiry (ASI) datasets, held by the CSO, may improve capacity to measure firm-level outcomes more effectively. However, it is crucial that compliance with data protection regulations is ensured, even if this will sometimes be a complex task; for Enterprise Ireland, the relevant regulation is the disclosure information clause within the Act governing its establishment (Industrial Development (Enterprise Ireland) Act, 1998) and for the CSO it is The Statistics Act 1993. This will require robust governance structures and secure data-sharing agreements, and/or the use of the CSO's Virtual Data Rooms service, to balance the analytical needs with privacy considerations. For Enterprise Ireland, it seems that the current legal framework (i.e., the disclosure information clause within the Industrial Development (Enterprise Ireland) Act, 1998) precludes the possibility of using their clients data for any impact evaluations, particularly CIE, to assess the effectiveness of the firm-level initiatives being supported by the NTF.⁵⁷

In recent years, data protection issues have been more easily addressed through the use of memorandums of understanding (MoUs) establishing clear legal and operational frameworks for data sharing between organisations. MoUs can outline the specific purposes for data linkage, the responsibilities of each party, and the safeguards in place to ensure compliance with data protection regulations. **MoUs can therefore streamline the data-sharing process by establishing predefined agreements, reducing the need for repeated permissions at each stage, and thereby simplifying data protection compliance while ensuring data protection requirements and standards are met.**⁵⁸ Additionally, the MoUs specify the legal basis for data sharing, such as legitimate interest or public interest, and incorporate anonymisation or pseudonymisation measures to further protect privacy. These issues could also potentially be addressed through the CSO's Virtual Data Rooms service.

⁵⁶ For Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Engineers Ireland supported firms, it could be potentially difficult to identify a comparable control group given there is a degree of self-selection in the firms supported. Nevertheless, this issue can potentially be addressed via access to administrative data containing the full population of firms in the country (e.g., Companies Registration Office firm-level data), or nationally representative firm-level survey data (discussed next), along with the econometric techniques used for CIEs.

⁵⁷ Please see Appendix Tables 2.24 and 2.25 for additional information on the concerns held by Enterprise Ireland with regards to their ability to share their client data outside of Enterprise Ireland and their parent department, DETE.

⁵⁸ By detailing how data will be processed, stored, and accessed securely, MoUs have been used to provide transparency and accountability, and to reduce the risk of non-compliance in a more streamlined way.

The European Commission, in conjunction with Hassan et al. (2023), has assessed the legal and practical challenges in accessing and re-using administrative data for the purposes of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of ESF and ESF+ initiatives. In doing so, the study aims to provide guidance to managing authorities on how to process personal data, including administrative data, while complying with data protection rules. This research could potentially assist grantee organisations address any data access, data protection and/or GDPR issues that might arise when collecting and storing the personal/firm-level data needed to assist the Department in evaluating the effectiveness of NTF-funded initiatives.

Firm-level training evaluations require clearly defined outcome variables, based on the goals of the funding initiative, to assess the effectiveness of interventions. While traditional metrics like employment rates and wages are useful at an individual level, firm-level evaluations require additional indicators such as productivity growth, employee retention, workforce upskilling, innovation capacity and firm survival rates. **A more structured approach to defining and collecting these outcome variables would enhance the robustness of firm-level training evaluations. As an interim solution, grantee organisations should, at a minimum, gather outcome data on firms to allow for the comparison of the effectiveness of different types of grant assistance** (e.g., employment, capital, R&D). This approach would align with McGuinness and Hart (2004) and supports the evaluation of treatment impacts.

Evaluating the impact of very short duration training courses, such as half-day or full-day sessions, is particularly challenging. Standard employment and earnings outcome variables may not capture their effects, as such courses are often designed to improve specific competencies rather than lead to major career changes. Alternative approaches, such as pre- and post-training self-assessments, employer feedback surveys, thematic reviews and skill application case studies, could provide more meaningful insights into their effectiveness.⁵⁹ Additionally, tracking participation in further upskilling activities or job performance improvements could help to estimate their longer-term value.

⁵⁹

For example, Enterprise Ireland have shared that, in line with the Kirkpatrick Model, they capture feedback from clients at the end of each short programme and/or module of longer programme to ascertain participant reaction (Level 1), after completion of several modules to ascertain learning and behaviour change (Levels 2 and 3), and via independent evaluation to ascertain business impact (Level 4).

TABLE 4.2 FIRM-LEVEL INITIATIVES – DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

Variables	IDA data	Engineers Ireland data	Skillnet Ireland data	Training Grant to Industry – Enterprise Ireland
Core variables for evaluation				
- NTF programme participation indicator	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Unique identifier/ PPS number				
- Company registration number	✓			
Outcome variables (before and after)				
<i>Firm-level:</i>				
- Firm turnover				✓
- Employment numbers	✓ (only before)	✓	✓ (only before)	✓
- Labour productivity				
- Sales volume	✓ (only before)			✓
Programme information				
- Type of programme			✓	✓
- Duration of training				
- Mode of delivery (in-person, online, blended)			✓	✓
- Intensity (i.e., full-time/part-time)	✓		✓	✓
- Start date	✓		✓	✓
- Finish date	✓		✓	✓
Explanatory variables				

TABLE 4.2 (CONTD.) FIRM-LEVEL INITIATIVES – DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

	IDA data	Engineers Ireland data	Skillnet Ireland data	Training Grant to Industry – Enterprise Ireland
- Employment history (e.g., employed in last month, in last year, etc.)		✓	✓	
- Educational attainment		✓	✓	
- Age		✓	✓	
- Gender		✓	✓	✓
- Migrant/non-Irish				
- Additional professional/vocational training or skills				
- Occupation			✓	✓
- Industry/sector			✓	✓
Firm-level:				
- Firm size (number of employees)	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Ownership type (e.g., multinational)	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Sector/industry	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Geographic location type (e.g., geocode, county, rural/urban)	✓	✓	✓	✓
- Company age				

Note: Individual-level outcome variables could also be collected (i.e., training completion, labour market status, earnings/wages, career progression, certification). Some secondary individual-level dependent variables could be collected (as per labour market initiatives), but this was not strictly necessary.

Source: Information obtained from grantee organisations.

4.4 SOCIAL AND OTHER INITIATIVES

Within the academic and policy literature, there exists a number of theoretical frameworks that could potentially be used for measuring social and community level initiatives. Examples include: the Logic model (Milstein and Chapel, 2011); the four pillars approach (Pritchard and Kazimirski, 2014); the ABCD framework (Barr and Hashagen, 2000); and the LEAP model (Barr and Dailly, 2007). All of these provide suggestions of how progress at the community level can be measured. While it is not clear that any particular one of these conceptual frameworks should guide the measurement of NTF programmes with a social or other focus, each of these theories generally involves a clear statement on programme objectives, which are linked explicitly to inputs, processes and outcome variables that the policy should be influencing.

As discussed above, counterfactual analysis allows the outcomes of the intervention to be compared with the outcomes that would have been achieved in the absence of the intervention. International best practice for evaluating community and social level programmes was extensively assessed in Whelan et al. (2019). This study specifically looked at SICAP in Ireland and examined how programme impacts could be effectively measured. After evaluating the international literature, a principal conclusion of the study was that difficulties in untangling causal relationships made it, in this instance, virtually impossible to generate robust counterfactual estimates of programme impacts. The analysis pointed out that it was impossible to identify causal links between community level expenditure and general levels of community wellbeing metrics, such as those included in the Community Tool Box developed by the University of Kansas Work Group for Community Health and Development.⁶⁰

Proposed metrics suggested in the Community Tool Box attempt to measure community-level well-being using very broad aggregates that are not linked to any particular policy intervention (Milstein and Chapel, 2011). Examples of such metrics include measures of: income, poverty, deprivation, educational attainment, unemployment rates, workforce entry, social welfare payment discontinuation, community participation, membership in clubs and community associations, number of community activists, citizen advocacy groups and organisations, political participation (percentage of individuals voting), diversity of population, average price of a single family house, average rental rates, average commuting times, number of (current and new) local businesses, local revenue from taxes and fees, number of service firms, number of new commercial buildings being constructed and occupancy rates.

60

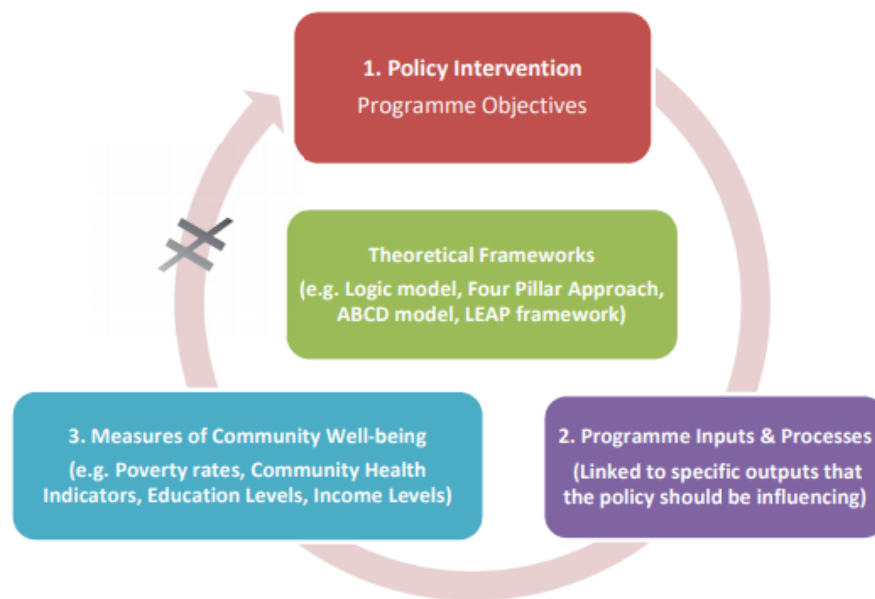
For more information, please see <https://ctb.ku.edu/en>.

Across the literature, we have found no evidence of any systematic attempts to practically measure a counterfactual estimate of community level outcomes. Our previous research has highlighted many reasons why this might be the case. Specifically, Whelan et al. (2019) point out that many factors will simultaneously affect these outcomes, and that attempting to disentangle and isolate the impacts of any individual policy intervention is extremely difficult. In these situations, Whelan et al. (2019) propose the adoption of a monitoring framework that focuses on metrics specific to the objectives of the programme. However, even when programme-specific metrics are established, causal relationships are extremely difficult to extract given the structure of funding to bodies implementing community level programmes.⁶¹

Other barriers to measuring counterfactual impacts at a community or social level include the difficulty involved in identifying: control groups where no community or social assistance took place; appropriate common outcome metrics given the diverse objectives of community and social groups; and the appropriate timeframe over which impacts should be measured. The principal barriers to identifying causal outcomes for community level expenditure are summarised in Figure 4.1. The key challenge is that existing data may not allow a clear demonstration of a causal link between a policy intervention and changes in broad measures of community well-being, shown by the break in the circular overview (Figure 4.1) between points (1) and (3).

⁶¹

For example, in 2016, the average SICAP funding was found to account for an average of approximately 16 per cent of the total budgets to programme implementers (Darmody and Smyth, 2018).

FIGURE 4.1 CIRCULAR OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY LEVEL POLICY IMPACT EVALUATION

Source: Whelan et al. (2019).

Whelan et al. (2019) identify the following confounding factors contributing to the difficulties involved in trying to estimate the causal impact of policies targeting community well-being:

- Numerous national agencies simultaneously implement policies that will affect such broad outcomes, making it difficult to isolate the impacts of one particular policy.
- Local organisations targeting specific communities often receive funding from multiple sources, making it impossible to measure the impact of a particular funding stream, even in instances where the community level outcome measures are narrowly defined and identifiable.
- It may be more feasible to focus on more narrow outcomes for the purpose of evaluating the impact of funding to community level organisations. However, local community organisations tend to be highly heterogeneous in nature with differing objectives, making it extremely difficult to identify a set of specific community level outcome measures relevant to the activities of all funded groups.
- It is extremely difficult to identify control groups at a community level who have not been subject to any policy interventions against which to measure the counterfactual impact of an intervention.

Therefore, the expectation of measuring any causal influence of SICAP on broad community level outcomes, such as poverty rates or levels of educational attainment, was not felt to be practical in Whelan et al. (2019). This was due to the

existence of various streams of funding targeting such outcomes and the overall complexity of the system.

Nevertheless, community and social development initiatives, as with all government-funded activities, require monitoring and measurement. Whelan et al. (2019) suggest that the most appropriate framework for assessing the impact of community level expenditure involves approaches such as a logic model framework linked specifically to programme objectives, which would allow for the monitoring of key outcome variables over time. A number of other similar monitoring frameworks could be considered, including the four pillar approach, the ABCD model and the LEAP framework. Further recommendations include the adoption of a community level ‘distance travelled tool’ and/or the commissioning of thematic qualitative studies that periodically collect evidence of themes related to programme goals. In the sub-section below, Section 4.4.1, we discuss the NTF-funded ‘social and other’ initiatives where the data available are more suited to monitoring than a CIE approach.

4.4.1 Suitable for monitoring

Social and community level initiatives that are funded by the NTF are not suitable for standard CIE approaches. The Wheel, a national association of charities, community groups and social enterprises, receives funding from the NTF alongside other sources. Through its NTF-funded initiative, it is providing leadership, upskilling, reskilling and other education opportunities to people working or volunteering in the charity and community sectors in Ireland. Thus, the initiative’s focus is on workforce development, and it seeks to support individuals concerned in their community development, social and charity-related work. As a result, it is more appropriate to evaluate this and similar programmes, as outlined above, through systematic monitoring, qualitative case studies and thematic reviews, rather than using CIE methods. Developing performance indicators tailored to these interventions, such as skill acquisition in informal settings, can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the programme.

4.5 NTF EVALUATION FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS

In this section, we aim to provide a structured overview of the evaluation possibilities for the NTF. Table 4.3 categorises each NTF-funded initiative with the associated grantee organisation and allocated funding (for 2023) under the type of programme concerned – labour market initiative, firm-level initiative, social/other initiative or cross-cutting initiative. Furthermore, it classifies each area of funding according to the following categories:

- complete CIE (fully);
- partial evaluation that can identify differential impacts (partially);
- only minor adjustments are needed to enable evaluation (easily resolved);
- monitoring is the most appropriate approach (monitor);
- no evaluation is possible currently (not possible).

As can be seen from Table 4.3, and in line with our discussions in the sections above, currently labour market initiatives (as opposed to firm-level ones) are best positioned for robust CIE. This is due to the greater availability of relevant datasets and established outcome variables for these initiatives. In contrast, firm-level initiatives currently face more significant challenges that impede effective CIEs. These initiatives require considerable changes in their data collection (e.g., comprehensive collection of company registration numbers) and measurement of outcomes to facilitate more accurate and comprehensive assessments. Addressing these issues is critical for ensuring that firm-level initiatives can be evaluated similarly to their labour market counterparts in the future.

Overall, approximately 71 per cent of NTF funding is allocated to programmes that appear to support a complete CIE; approximately 1 per cent corresponds to initiatives suitable for partial evaluation to identify differential impacts. A further 6.7 per cent of NTF funding is associated with initiatives requiring changes that should be easily resolved to enable evaluation. Monitoring is found to be the most appropriate approach for initiatives claiming approximately 6 per cent of NTF funding. Finally, 16 per cent is associated with programmes for which no evaluation is currently possible.

TABLE 4.3 NTF EVALUATION POSSIBILITIES (PRELIMINARY FINDINGS)









Programme	Type	Grantee organisation	Fully	Partially	Easily resolved	Monitor	Not possible	Funding 2023	Share of total NTF funding in 2023
			✓	✓			✗	(€000)	(%)
	LM/ F/O/CC		Counter-factual	Differential impacts	Changes required	Monitoring more suitable	No evaluation possible at present		
Training People for Employment	LM	SOLAS	✓					287,095	31.6
Apprenticeship ^{1**}	LM/CC	SOLAS/NAO	✓					195,936	21.6
Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision ¹	LM/CC	HEA					✗	148,352	16.3
Apprenticeship ^{1***}	LM/CC	HEA/NAO	✓					78,940	8.7
Human Capital Initiative (Pillars I & II) ¹	LM/CC	HEA	✓					6,988	0.8
Springboard+: In Employment	LM	HEA	✓					29,550	3.3
Springboard+: For Employment	LM	HEA	✓					6,888	0.8
Employee and Continuing Professional Development	LM	SOLAS	✓					22,783	2.5
Community Employment Training ²	LM/CC	DSP	✓					4,023	0.4
Training Networks Programme – Seeking Employment	LM	Skillnet Ireland						5,449	0.6
Training Support Grants	LM	DSP	✓					2,634	0.3
SOLAS Traineeship ¹	LM/CC	SOLAS	✓					2,900	0.3
Work Placement Experience Programme	LM	DSP	✓					835	0.1

TABLE 4.3 (CONTD.) NTF EVALUATION POSSIBILITIES (PRELIMINARY FINDINGS)

Programme	Type	Grantee organisation	Fully	Partially	Easily resolved	Monitor	Not possible	Funding 2023	Share of total NTF funding in 2023
			✓	✓			✗	(€000)	(%)
	LM/ F/O/CC		Counter-factual	Differential impacts	Changes required	Monitoring more suitable	No evaluation possible at present		
Training Networks Programme – Employment ¹	F/CC	Skillnet Ireland						55,692	6.1
Training Grants to Industry ^{1,3}	F/CC	Enterprise Ireland		✓				3,500	0.4
Training Grants to Industry ¹	F/CC	IDA Ireland		✓				3,000	0.3
Employee and CPD ¹	F/CC	Engineers Ireland					✗	400	0.04
	S	HEA						50,012	5.5
Community and Voluntary Organisations	S	The Wheel						1,140	0.1
TOTAL NTF FUNDING (€000) AND SHARE (%) 2023			638,572 (70.5)	6,500 (0.7)	61,141 (6.7)	51,152 (5.6)	148,752 (16.4)	906,117	100.0

Source: Constructed by the authors using data from the Comptroller and Auditor General's 2022 report on the accounts of the public service and 2023 NTF spending data provided by DFHERIS.

Notes: LM – Labour market initiative; F – Firm-level initiative; S – Social/Other initiative; CC – Cross-cutting initiative.

¹ Cross-cutting labour market/firm-level initiatives (i.e., initiatives that have firm-level spillover effects); and ² cross-cutting labour market/social/other initiatives (i.e., initiatives that have social/other spillover effects).

³ Enterprise Ireland's 'training grants to industry' consist of two main programme categories: 'Leadership, management development & scaling supports' (which consists of nine individual long and short duration programmes) and 'Mentor network'. Presently, both programme categories would appear to be evaluable using a differential impacts methodology.

⁴ The total NTF budget allocation for 2023 was €909.437 million, with the remaining €3.320 million of the budget mainly allocated to programmes that research skill requirements for the economy (e.g., the Skills and Labour Market Unit (SOLAS), the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (DETE), and Regional Skills Fora (SPEE)).

* SOLAS's apprenticeship funding for 2023 includes the NAO's allocation: since 2023, the NAO has been receiving a separate allocation under the NTF to assist both SOLAS and the HEA in the running of their apprenticeship initiatives, and its allocation for 2023 (€3.400 million) is combined with SOLAS's apprenticeship allocation (€192.536 million) as NAO's funding is distributed through SOLAS.⁶²

** The HEA also received temporary funding of approximately €4 million for its apprenticeship programme in 2023.

4.6 SUMMARY

In summary, evaluation of NTF-funded initiatives requires a combination of robust data sources, steadfast data confidentiality and data-sharing agreements, well-designed counterfactual approaches, strategic prioritisation of evaluation efforts, and good collaboration between the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), the NTF grantee organisations and any external agencies that hold data required to evaluate the NTF (e.g., the CSO). In addition, to allow DFHERIS, and other relevant stakeholders, to make data-driven decisions to optimise the effectiveness of NTF investments in employee and workforce development, it will be important that evaluations of the initiatives are timely, independent and methodologically sound.

The ELD and WWLD, supplemented with additional survey data and enhanced administrative data tracking, make for a strong foundation for impact evaluation of NTF-funded labour market initiatives. Since the ELD is maintained by the CSO and the WWLD by the DSP, it is essential for these agencies to collaborate with DFHERIS to enable that Department to secure access to anonymised data, or relevant data samples, necessary for effective programme evaluation, while, at all times, adhering to any data protection legislation (e.g., GDPR and The Statistics Act, 1993).

Subsequently, addressing key gaps, such as the comprehensive collection of company registration numbers and control group data, systematic measurement of relevant outcome variables and improved wage data are essential to strengthening the accuracy of CIEs of the NTF funded firm-level initiatives.

Given the diverse range of training programmes funded by the NTF, prioritisation will be necessary to determine which programmes should and could be evaluated most readily. The selection process will need to consider factors such as programme cost, scale, alignment with labour market needs and policy relevance. Programmes with a clear skills development component and a direct link to employment outcomes should be prioritised for rigorous CIE. Currently, as mentioned already, the labour market initiatives are best positioned for robust CIE due to the greater availability of relevant datasets and established outcome variables. In contrast, at present, the firm-level initiatives face more significant challenges that impede effective evaluation. As outlined above, these programmes require considerable changes in their data collection and measurement of outcomes to facilitate more accurate and comprehensive assessments.

Overall, when we examined current feasibility for evaluation more closely, we found a wide range, with approximately 71 per cent of funding being allocated to programmes that appear to support a complete CIE. In contrast, 16 per cent corresponds to instances where no CIE is possible at present. The remaining 13 per

cent fall somewhere in between. For those initiatives where CIE is not feasible at present, systematic monitoring, qualitative case studies and thematic reviews are all options to consider; these approaches can provide valuable insights on how well these initiatives are doing in meeting their core objectives.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and conclusions

This report reviews the range of initiatives funded under the National Training Fund (NTF) to assess the extent to which the initiatives have been subject to evaluations in the past and, more so, whether the existing data infrastructures are sufficient to ensure that robust evaluation of these NTF-funded initiatives can take place going forward. The NTF is a major source of funding for Ireland's human capital development, amounting to €909 million in 2023. While NTF funding is relatively diverse and allocated to a number of bodies, the four largest initiatives, which are all labour market focused, accounted for over 78 per cent of total NTF funding in 2023. These are: Training People For Employment – SOLAS; Traditional Apprenticeships – SOLAS/National Apprenticeship Office (NAO); Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision – Higher Education Authority (HEA); and Consortium-Led Apprenticeships – HEA/NAO.

While some individual initiatives of the NTF have been reviewed on an ad hoc basis over time, this is the first systematic overview that has been undertaken to assess the extent to which all initiatives funded under the NTF can be evaluated using counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE) or, where CIE is not feasible then the most suitable methodologies based on project structure and objectives. It is a matter of national importance to ensure that evaluations of publicly funded training initiatives are undertaken, and that they are done so in a timely, independent and methodologically sound manner, in order to allow policymakers to make data-driven decisions to optimise the effectiveness of NTF investments in employee and workforce development. Ideally, the evaluation of publicly funded initiatives, like those supported by the NTF, should be considered at their design stage, so that they can be developed in a way that will facilitate CIE, including identification and collection of the required data needed for CIE. In reality, however, many public policies and initiatives are evaluated ex-post.

Our research indicates that CIE is the most suitable approach to assess the majority of NTF interventions. There has been little evidence for CIE of NTF interventions over time; this is unsurprising given the historic lack of sufficient data infrastructures for such an evaluation approach in Ireland. It is also important to note that Ireland is far from unique in this respect, as data constraints have led to a lack of robust, quantitative evidence on the outcomes and causal impact of similar training funds in many other countries.

We conclude that CIE is the most suitable methodology to assess the effectiveness of the majority of the NTF-funded initiatives. This is based on the fact that there have been major advancements on the data front in Ireland in recent years. One

especially important example of this has been the creation of the CSO's Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD), which through personal public service numbers (PPSN) matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes; e.g., matching SOLAS's Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) to other datasets that describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue's PMOD system). Another important development in recent times has been the creation of the Department of Social Protection's (DSP) Work and Welfare Longitudinal Dataset (WWLD), which, like the ELD, matches the DSP's jobseeker database to administrative datasets that measure relevant labour market outcomes. Going forward, the new Virtual Data Rooms service that is currently being rolled out by the CSO may also prove to be a useful data infrastructure for evaluating NTF-funded initiatives.

Our findings suggest that programmes representing over two-thirds of NTF funding, all focused on the labour market (with some being cross-cutting initiatives), could potentially be assessed using CIE approaches. However, effective measurement of these NTF initiatives is hugely dependant on the future utilisation of the ELD and WWLD data infrastructures, and these data being made available to researchers with the competencies required to conduct evaluations to the required standard.

Our research indicates that considerable work needs to be undertaken with firm-related data infrastructures, both grantee organisations and survey/administrative data sources, to enable these data to be fully utilised for CIE of NTF-funded firm-level initiatives. Currently, some of these initiatives are suitable for partial evaluation to identify differential impacts (e.g., Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland's 'training grants to industry' initiatives). However, full CIE is potentially feasible if, for example, there was complete collection of company registration numbers from those firms in receipt of NTF funding to facilitate data linking with relevant administrative (e.g., Companies Registration Office data) and/or survey (e.g., Census of Industrial Production (CIP)) data, or if outcomes data were comprehensively captured by the grantee organisations. Such measures, including addressing any data confidentiality/privacy concerns and current legal framework issues (e.g., the disclosure information clause within the Industrial Development (Enterprise Ireland) Act, 1998), would significantly enhance firm-level data infrastructures and would facilitate more accurate and comprehensive assessments of these NTF-funded initiatives. Addressing these, and any other data-related issues, is critical to ensure that the NTF-funded firm-level initiatives can be evaluated in the same manner as their labour market counterparts in the future.

We find that the impacts of one major NTF-funded initiative, Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision, which accounted for 16.3 per cent of NTF funding in 2023, cannot be readily evaluated, as it is not possible to identify individuals attending courses in receipt of NTF funding under this programme. Going forward, an extremely convincing rationale would be required to justify the use of NTF funding on any initiative where the funding recipients (individual or firm) cannot be identified, and, therefore, the initiative's effectiveness assessed.

We also established that a number of major funding interventions, while not amenable to CIE, are suitable for a monitoring approach to assessing project impacts. However, ideally for any policy where monitoring is to be adopted, the programme rationales and objectives should be clearly set out and relevant key performance indicators (KPIs) identified prior to any funding being released. Furthermore, baseline measures of key KPIs should be collected at the outset of the initiative. It is not clear the extent to which any of these processes were followed with regards to the two NTF-funded initiatives identified here as being only evaluable through monitoring. Furthermore, it would be extremely difficult to implement a monitoring approach ex post. Given this, it is likely that the impacts of these NTF interventions, which account for 5.6 per cent of NTF funding, cannot be easily assessed at present either.

It is a priority for Government to begin the process of evaluating NTF interventions, where it has been assessed that the data infrastructures are fit for purpose. Given the diverse range of initiatives funded by the NTF, prioritisation is necessary to determine which programmes should and could be evaluated most readily. The selection process will need to consider factors such as programme cost, scale, alignment with labour market needs and policy relevance. Programmes with a clear skills development component and a direct link to employment outcomes should be prioritised for rigorous CIE. Currently, as mentioned, the labour market initiatives are best positioned for robust CIE, due to the greater availability of relevant datasets and established outcome variables. In contrast, as also outlined, the NTF-funded firm-level initiatives face more significant challenges at present, which impede effective CIE. These programmes require considerable changes in their data collection and measurement of outcomes to facilitate more accurate and comprehensive assessments of their effectiveness.

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APPENDIX I

Information gathering template issued to NTF grantee organisations

List of questions:

1. What year was the programme established?
2. Please list the groups targeted by the programme. (E.g., employees, unemployed, young people, NEETS, individuals with disabilities, other disadvantaged/marginalised groups, older people, etc.)
3. Is the programme NTF funded only, or part-funded by other agencies/departments?
4. If part-funded, please provide details. (E.g., other agencies/departments involved, the proportion of the programme that is funded by NTF and the proportion funded by other agencies/departments, etc.)
5. Who provides the training/education element of the programme?
6. What body (bodies) has (have) overall responsibility for managing the programme?
7. What is the usual duration of the programme (or the courses covered by the programme)?
8. Describe the nature of the programme. (E.g., pre-employment training, continuing training, in-firm training, business development services to enterprises, etc.)
9. Does the programme target any economic sectors identified as national priorities by the Government, and if so what are the sectors?
10. What are the key objectives of the programme for learners? (E.g., employment, progression to further learning, addressing basic competency gaps, etc.)
11. What are the key objectives of the programme for the firms receiving the training? (E.g., address skill needs/gaps, increasing skill levels of its workforce, increasing workers' productivity, etc.)
12. Are there any wider objectives of the programme? (E.g., reduction in unemployment, supporting national skills objectives, meeting national skills shortages, increasing productivity, tackling social exclusion etc.) If so, please list.

13. How is the programme (or the courses covered by the programme) delivered? (E.g., classroom, online, work placement, etc.) If the programme is (or the programme courses are) delivered across a range of modes, please provide approximate percentage breakdowns for each mode of delivery.
14. Is the programme (or the courses covered by the programme) certified? If yes, please provide details of the accreditation level and awarding body.
15. Since its establishment, how many people (learners) have commenced the programme (the programme's courses) on an annual basis?
16. Of those that commenced the programme (the programme's courses) on an annual basis, what number/percentage completed the programme (their course)?
17. Since its establishment, how many firms have commenced the programme (the programme's courses) on an annual basis?
18. Of those firms that commenced the programme (the programme's courses) on an annual basis, what number/percentage completed the programme (the course)?
19. What background data are captured on the programme (course) participants? (E.g., gender, age, educational attainment, previous employment/unemployment history, etc.)
20. At what stage of the programme (course) is this background information captured on participants? (E.g., before commencing the programme/course, weekly, monthly, annually, at programme completion, etc.)
21. What information is captured on those firms that participate in the programme? (E.g., economic sector, number of employees, turnover, multinational or indigenous company, geographic location, etc.)
22. At what stage of the programme (course) is this background information captured on firms? (E.g., before commencing the programme/course, weekly, monthly, annually, at programme completion, etc.)
23. What post-course completion information is captured on programme (course) participants? (E.g., employment, unemployment, further training, emigrated, sector of employment, earnings, etc.)
24. What post-course completion information is captured on firms participating in the programme (course)? (E.g., number of employees, turnover, etc.)

25. Is the information that is captured on programme (course) participants linked to any other administrative datasets? (E.g., Revenue data, Department of Social Protection data, etc.)
26. Is the information that is captured on programme (course) learners and firms linked to any other administrative datasets? (E.g., Revenue data, Department of Social Protection data, etc.)
27. Is the programme/course participant PPS number captured?
28. Is the central business register (CBR) number of those firms participating in the training programme captured?
29. How frequently is the post-course completion information on participants captured? (E.g., at the course completion time point, 3 months after, 6 months after, 12 months after, 24 months after, etc.)
30. How frequently is the post-course completion information on firms participating in the programme/course captured? (E.g., at the course completion time point, 3 months after, 6 months after, 12 months after, 24 months after, etc.)
31. Are data captured on those that applied for the programme (course) but were not successful in their application?
32. If yes, please provide details on the information captured on non-participants (background, economic status), along with the frequency at which such information is captured.
33. Are data captured on those firms that applied for the programme (course) but were not successful in their application?
34. If yes, please provide details on the information captured on non-participating firms (economic sector, number of employees, etc.), along with the frequency at which such information is captured.
35. What are the existing key performance indicators (KPIs) for the programme (the programme's courses)?
36. Please provide frequency of collection of KPI data.
37. Has the effectiveness of the programme ever been formally evaluated by an external agency?

38. If yes, please provide details on the evaluation (e.g., methodology employed, data used, who conducted the evaluation, etc.), including a link to/copy of the study.
39. Are programme (course) participants issued with a satisfaction survey on completion of the programme (their course)? If yes, please provide details.
40. Are employers/firms issued with a satisfaction survey on completion of the training programme (course)? If yes, please provide details.
41. Is there ever any qualitative information collected from programme (course) participants, such as through focus groups, workshops, etc.? If yes, please provide details.
42. Is there ever any qualitative information collected from employers/firms, such as through focus groups, workshops, etc.? If yes, please provide details.
43. Please provide links (or references) to any documentation detailing the programme.
44. Please provide links (or references) to any known assessments or evaluations of the programme (publicly available or not).
45. Please provide any other information that you think is relevant for the study for which the information in this template is being sought.

APPENDIX II

Overview of NTF-funded initiatives

LABOUR MARKET INITIATIVES

APPENDIX TABLE 2.1 APPRENTICESHIPS (NAO/SOLAS AND NAO/HEA)

Nature of the programme	The National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) was established in 2022 from the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021–2025 to coordinate and drive apprenticeship expansion in Ireland. The NAO reports to a joint management board with the CEOs of SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Apprenticeship is a work-based learning programme where an apprentice is directly employed by an approved employer in their field of training and education. Currently, 77 apprenticeships are offered under two models: craft (25) and consortia-led (52) apprenticeships. SOLAS is the coordinating provider for all 25 craft apprenticeships. The coordinating providers for the current 52 consortia-led apprenticeship programmes consist of education and training boards, higher education institutions and designated agencies (e.g., Retail Ireland Skillnet, Accounting Technicians Ireland, FasttrackintoIT).
Objectives	Employment, education progression, skills enhancing across the various sectors where there are apprenticeships.
Target group	Unemployed, employed, individuals from socio-economically challenging backgrounds (carers, travelers, etc.).
Key outcomes/KPIs	Individual: Progression to employment, educational attainment; earning/occupational upgrading (primary); Firm: productivity, revenue, no. of employees (secondary).
Data collected to date	The NAO's ACSS dataset contains information on gender, age, level of education, apprentice employer details, personal public service number (PPSN), apprenticeship type. The ACSS data can be linked to the CSO's Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD), which through PPSNs matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets that describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue). Data are also captured on those who register but do not continue, but as apprentice applications are made via the employer, data on socio-economic factors are not directly collected. A national survey of apprentices is due for administration.
Data requirements	Markers needed in Live Register (for unemployment) and learner (for employee) databases, and these data linked to Revenue.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE), with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison.
NTF budget	SOLAS apprenticeships: €150.191 million (2022); €195.936 million (2023). HEA apprenticeships: €59.599 million (2022); €78.940 million (2023). Fully funded by NTF.
Relevant links	Programme: https://www.apprenticeship.ie/ . CSO. 'Further education outcomes – Graduation year 2020', https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-aoqy/apprenticeshipoutcomesqualificationyear2020/ . CSO. 'Further education outcomes – Graduation years 2010–2016': https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-feo/furthereducationoutcomes-graduationyears2010-2016/apprenticeships/ .

Source: Grantee organisation.

Note: *The HEA also received temporary funding of approximately €4 million for its apprenticeship programme in 2023.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.2 COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT TRAINING (DSP)

Nature of the programme	Community employment (CE) is an employment intervention with a training element, and it also benefits the community. All CE participants are engaged in some element of service support and delivery. The training element is NTF funded, with training mainly provided by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) (childcare and health and social care sectors).
Objectives	To enhance the employability and mobility of disadvantaged and unemployed persons by providing work experience and training opportunities for them within their communities.
Target group	Unemployed, long-term unemployed, clients on some types of allowance/benefit, people with disabilities, marginalised groups.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Employment, movement on to previous or new Department of Social Protection (DSP) payment; educational attainment (QQI framework); 'distance-travelled tool'.
Data collected to date	PPSN, date of birth, gender, age, completed years of participation, previous social welfare claim details, additional allowance details, highest educational attainment, individual learner plan. Data collected up to four months after exit from the CE programme. Training completion points are captured on the individual learner plan. Individuals can still be participating on the CE scheme after completion of a training course.
Data requirements	The data from CE is within the main DSP database that records jobseeker claims and payments. PPSN is collected, so linking to Revenue data for earnings, occupation, etc. data should be feasible and is needed for a counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE) – already done by the OECD 2024 study.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for a CIE evaluation.
NTF budget	€3.684 million (2022); €4.023 million (2023). The training element is NTF funded, most of the funding is from DSP.
Relevant links	Programme: https://www.gov.ie/en/service/412714-community-employment-programme/ . OECD impact evaluation: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2024/03/impact-evaluation-of-ireland-s-active-labour-market-policies_9548c157.html .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.3 EMPLOYEE AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – NEARLY ZERO ENERGY BUILDING-NZEB (SOLAS)

Nature of the programme	Pre-employment and continuing training for individuals post-apprenticeship and for those who are already working in the construction sector; generally, two weeks duration; provided by six ETBs. 64% of NZEB courses are non-NFQ aligned further education and training. The remaining distribution of award levels is: advanced certificate 12%, Level 5 certificate 12%, Level 3 certificate 7%, uncertified 4%. Less than 1% of courses are at Level 4.
Objectives	Upskilling; learn how to construct buildings to meet new NZEB requirements and learn skills to build homes that are more energy efficient, environmentally friendly and cheaper to heat.
Target group	Workers in construction
Key outcomes/KPIs	Certification/educational attainment.
Data collected to date	Age, gender, PPSN, educational attainment, principal economic status, economic sector, outcome status, early finish reason (if applicable), outcome certification (if available).
Data requirements	NZEB data are collected within SOLAS' database, Programme and Learner Support Systems (PLSS). The data collected by SOLAS are very comprehensive (see Chapter 4). Moreover, SOLAS' data are linked to the CSO's ELD, which through PPSN matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets which describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue).
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison.
NTF budget	€5,175,000 (2023)
Relevant link	Programme website: https://www.thisisfet.ie/nzeb/ .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.4 EMPLOYEE AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – SKILLS FOR WORK (SOLAS)

Nature of the programme	Part-time education and training initiative, provided by ETBs and sometimes in the workplace, designed in a flexible way to meet the needs of employer and employees. Courses with literacy and numeracy elements, communications, computing, interpersonal skills, problem-solving and report writing.
Objectives	Providing educational training opportunities to help employees in the workplace; raising the competency levels of those with low levels of educational qualifications, enhancing their communication and basic IT skills, and enabling them to cope with frequent and ongoing changes in work practices.
Target group	Employees in full- or part-time work, with low/outdated/no educational qualifications.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Course completion; educational attainment (Levels 2 and 3), but only 25% of courses are certified by QQI-FE.
Data collected to date	Age, gender, PPSN, educational attainment, PES, economic sector, outcome status, early finish reason (if applicable), outcome certification (if available)
Data requirements	Skills for Work data are collected within SOLAS' database, PLSS. The data collected by SOLAS are very comprehensive (see Chapter 4). Moreover, SOLAS' data are linked to the CSO's ELD, which through PPSN matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets, which describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue).
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison.
NTF budget	Total spend TBC Fully funded by NTF.
Relevant link	https://www.fetchcourses.ie/courses/parttime

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.5 EMPLOYEE AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – SKILLS TO ADVANCE (SOLAS)

Nature of the programme	Upskilling and reskilling training programmes for employees, provided by ETBs, across all sectors but a recent focus on emerging sectors/priority skills areas, informed by national skills objectives.
Objectives	Upskilling and reskilling for employees.
Target group	Employees with low skills or those seeking to develop skills in emerging skill areas.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Educational attainment (Levels 5 and 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications by QQI); earning/occupational upgrading.
Data collected to date	Age, gender, educational attainment, PES, economic sector, outcome status, early finish reason (if applicable), outcome certification.
Data requirements	Skills to Advance data are collected within SOLAS' database, PLSS. The data collected by SOLAS are very comprehensive (see Chapter 4). Moreover, SOLAS' data are linked to the CSO's ELD, which through PPSN matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets, which describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue).
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison.
NTF budget	€12.446 million (2022); €13.785 million (2023) Fully funded by NTF.
Relevant links	Programme: https://www.solas.ie/programmes/skills-to-advance/ .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.6 ENTERPRISE-FOCUSED HIGHER EDUCATION PROVISION (HEA)

Nature of the programme	Undergraduate degrees; funding allocated to run the courses. Funding is also provided for postgraduate programmes.
Objectives	Programmes in the skills areas identified by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science under the NTF-funded Enterprise-Focused Higher Education Provision. The purpose of this provision is to provide skills-related recurrent funding in support of higher education programmes that are particularly orientated towards meeting labour market needs; they can change annually.
Target group	Registered students of higher education institutions undertaking programmes in identified skills areas.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Educational attainment (relevant NFQ level); subsequent labour outcomes.
Data collected to date	Graduate outcome survey published annually by the HEA (data collected nine months after graduation).
Data requirements	There needs to be a marker for these programmes in the HEA data that can be subsequently linked to Revenue, and possibly to the ELD.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Significant gaps and challenges exist for CIE evaluation. Currently ISCED codes and thus programmes/courses under these codes can be identified in the modelling for this funding. However, the share of NTF funding for these courses and then individual recipients of NTF funding cannot be identified. In order to evaluate the impact of this funding, students need to be marked in the ELD/HEA database, which will allow for subsequent tracking of qualifications, earnings, occupation through Revenue.
NTF budget	€152.555 million (2022); €148.352 million (2023). Additional funding from the Exchequer.

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.7 HUMAN CAPITAL INITIATIVE (HEA) – PILLAR 1

Nature of the programme	Upskilling and reskilling training (1–2 years). Economic sectors with identified skill needs and higher education provision related to specific ISCEDs (environmental sciences, biochemistry, chemistry, engineering and manufacturing, construction). Training provided by public and private higher education institutions.
Objectives	<p>Employment, upskilling, reskilling and becoming work ready for economic sectors with high skill needs. Wider Human Capital Initiative objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase provision in areas of identified skills need for enterprise • Future proof graduates with industry relevant skills for emerging technologies • Ensure that there is a greater focus across the whole spectrum of higher education course provision on promoting and embedding transversal skills • Incentivise continued reform and innovation in higher education provision building on best practice available nationally and internationally. <p>The key areas of focus for actions under the initiative are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority skills needs for society and the economy, particularly in high productivity sectors • Mitigating Brexit risks • Promoting regional development and National Development Plan/Project Ireland 2040 objectives • Innovation and reform in programme provision • Responding to digitalisation and the future world of work • Strengthening relationships with enterprise and addressing identified future skills needs • Provision of upskilling and reskilling through lifelong learning.
Target group	Unemployed, employed, returners, self-employed, formerly self-employed.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Educational attainment (Levels 8 and 9 on the NFQ by QQI); earning/occupational upgrading.
Data collected to date	Age, gender, nationality, employment status, address, PPSN, qualification level, social welfare status, reasons for taking course. From 2024, graduate post-course completion information will be captured six months after course completion. Only for public higher education institutions. HEA collects data on the application management system.
Data requirements	(Same) data are captured on those who applied but were not successful in the application, but it appears that follow up information is not captured. Pre-course background information is needed on participants and non-participants, along with longitudinal data on outcomes for durations greater than six months. PPSN collected so linkage to Revenue data potentially feasible.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	<p>Data infrastructure appears suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison.</p> <p>The HEA data look sufficient to track participants' qualification attainment, subsequent wages and occupation. However, within HEA data, it does not seem to be feasible to draw a reliable control group with similar background characteristics (previous labour market status, CAO points, socio-economic background).</p>
NTF budget	€8.155 million (2022); €5.011 million (2023). Fully funded by NTF.
Relevant links	Programme: https://hea.ie/skills-engagement/human-capital-initiative-pillars-1-2-and-3/ .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.8 HUMAN CAPITAL INITIATIVE (HEA) – PILLAR 2

Nature of the programme	Levels 7 and 8 full-time undergraduate courses in economic sectors with identified skill needs (environmental sciences, ICT technologies, engineering, manufacturing, construction); funding allocated to run the courses (1–4 years). Training provided by public and private HEIs.
Objectives	<p>Employment, upskilling, reskilling and becoming work ready for economic sectors with high skill needs. Wider HCI objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase provision in areas of identified skills need for enterprise • Future proof graduates with industry relevant skills for emerging technologies • Ensure that there is a greater focus across the whole spectrum of higher education course provision on promoting and embedding transversal skills • Incentivise continued reform and innovation in higher education provision building on best practice available nationally and internationally. <p>The key areas of focus for actions under the initiative are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority skills needs for society and the economy, particularly in high productivity sectors • Mitigating Brexit risks • Promoting regional development and National Development Plan/Project Ireland 2040 objectives • Innovation and reform in programme provision • Responding to digitalisation and the future world of work • Strengthening relationships with enterprise and addressing identified future skills needs • Provision of upskilling and reskilling through lifelong learning.
Target group	Undergraduate students of higher education institutions undertaking programmes in identified skills areas.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Educational attainment (Levels 7 and 8 on the NFQ by QQI); subsequent labour market outcomes.
Data collected to date	None on learners' personal background (single HEIs collect this data). Pillar 2 captures additionality only. Further course specific information can be captured on HEA student record system. Single HEIs collect data on post course completion. HEA produces annual graduate outcome survey.
Data requirements	There needs to be a marker for these programmes in the HEA data that can be subsequently linked to Revenue.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure appears suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison. The HEA data look sufficient to track participants' qualification attainment, subsequent wages and occupation. However, within HEA data, it does not seem to be feasible to draw a reliable control group with similar background characteristics (previous labour market status, CAO points, socioeconomic background).
NTF budget	€3.118 million (2022); €1.976 million (2023).
Relevant links	Programme: https://hea.ie/skills-engagement/human-capital-initiative-pillars-1-2-and-3/ .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.9 SKILLNET IRELAND: TRAINING PROGRAMME – SEEKING EMPLOYMENT

Nature of the programme	Skills Connect is a training and work experience programme: the training can be short to longer-term education programmes, typically including a short work placement. Training is procured by a Skillnet Ireland Business Network (cluster of private sector businesses that collaborate based on their sector or region to address skills needs).
Objectives	Upskilling and reskilling, based on industry needs.
Target group	Unemployed; economically inactive individuals.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Progression to employment, career mobility, educational attainment (half courses certified).
Data collected to date	Gender, age, occupation, current economic status, existing education attainment. Some post-training information is collected (e.g., satisfaction with training).
Data requirements	Need a marker in DSP's activation data to be able to identify Skills Connect participants. Need PPSN to be captured in order to link data to Revenue and other administrative data sources that contain follow-up information (earnings, occupation, etc.).
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Significant gaps and challenges exist for CIE evaluation. Skillnet Ireland have their own evaluation system in place that uses a mixed-methods approach.
NTF budget	€5.449 million (2022 and 2023). ¹ Fully funded by NTF.
Relevant links	Programme: https://www.skillnetireland.ie/uploads/attachments/Skillnet-Ireland_Talent-Its-A-Game-Changer.pdf . Evaluation Report from Indecon: https://www.skillnetireland.ie/corporate-publications/evaluation-of-skillnet-ireland-programmes-2019-2020 .

Source: Grantee organisation.

Note: ¹Specifically, €5.345 million was spent on this programme in 2022, €5.435 million in 2023, and the remainder covered programme management costs.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.10 SPRINGBOARD+ FOR EMPLOYMENT/ SPRINGBOARD+ IN EMPLOYMENT (HEA)

Nature of the programme	The programmes provide upskilling and reskilling opportunities; part time courses are up to 12 months in duration; ICT courses are 1 year full time or 2 year part time.
Objectives	Provide upskilling and reskilling for employed/ unemployed in key growth sectors of the economy.
Target group	Unemployed, employed, returners, self-employed, formerly self-employed, recent graduates.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Educational attainment (Levels 6–9 on the NFQ); earning/occupational upgrading; progression to employment.
Data collected to date	Age, gender, nationality, employment status, PPSN, qualification level, social welfare status. From 2024, post course completion information will be captured one and six months post course completion.
Data requirements	(Same) data are captured on those who applied but were not successful in the application, but it appears that follow up information is not captured. Participants are tagged as Springboard+ on the HEA student records system (only public providers). HEA collects data on the AMS. PPSN collected so linkage to Revenue data potentially feasible. Pre-course background information is needed on participants and non-participants, along with longitudinal data on outcomes for durations greater than six months.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison. The HEA data look sufficient to track participants' qualification attainment, subsequent wages and occupation. However, within HEA data, it does not seem to be feasible to draw a reliable control group with similar background characteristics (previous LM status, CAO points, socioeconomic background).
NTF budget	Springboard+ for employment: €10.388 million (2022); €6,888 million (2023). Springboard+ in employment: €31,050 million (2022); €29,550 million (2023). The programme is co-funded by NTF and European Social Fund (ESF)+.
Relevant links	Programme: https://springboardcourses.ie/ . Graduate Outcome Survey: https://hea.ie/skills-engagement/graduate-outcomes/graduate-outcomes-survey-information-for-graduates/ .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.11 TRAINEESHIPS (SOLAS)

Nature of the programme	SOLAS' traineeships are developed and delivered by the ETBs working in partnership with industry representatives and employers. They combine classroom and online training, along with experience in the workplace. They are provided across many areas, such as business, care, construction, engineering, ICT, hospitality, retail, etc.
Objectives	Pre-employment training; continuing training.
Target group	Unemployed, employed.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Progression to employment; Educational attainment; Progression to further learning
Data collected to date	PPSN, date of birth, gender, address, nationality are captured for all applicants at application stage (FETCH). Once an application is successful other data fields are collected (gender, date of birth, nationality, education level and economic status before course start, welfare status, residency status ...). Traineeship data are on the PLSS database from SOLAS.
Data requirements	PLSS data are linked to the CSO's ELD, which through PPSN matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets, which describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue).
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, within the ELD.
NTF budget	€2.900 million (2022 and 2023). Fully funded by NTF.
Relevant link	Programme: https://www.solas.ie/programmes/traineeship/ .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.12 TRAINING PEOPLE FOR EMPLOYMENT – BLENDED TRAINING (SOLAS)

Nature of the programme	Blended training courses involves pre-employment training (although learners may require some previous experience/qualifications), with traditional face-to-face instruction and web-based online learning, provided by ETBs.
Objectives	Employment; further education and training.
Target group	Apprentices.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Employment; educational attainment (NFQ Levels 3 to 5).
Data collected to date	Age, gender, PPSN, educational attainment, PES, economic sector, outcome status, early finish reason (if applicable), outcome certification (if available).
Data requirements	Blended training data are collected within SOLAS' database, PLSS. The data collected by SOLAS are very comprehensive (see Chapter 4). Moreover, SOLAS' data are linked to the CSO's ELD, which through PPSN matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets, which describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue).
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison.
NTF budget	€1.882 million (2022); €1.065 million (2023)
Relevant link	NA

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.13 TRAINING PEOPLE FOR EMPLOYMENT – BRIDGING/FOUNDATION (SOLAS)

Nature of the programme	Training programmes provided by ETBs. The duration is determined by the requirements of each set of skills to be acquired for the occupation (usually less than six months). Work experience at the end of the training.
Objectives	Training programmes are intended to bridge the gap in a person's educational development, bringing them from a low level to a higher level. They are designed to build bridges to further training/education or employment and in the process considerably strengthen links with employers.
Target group	Unemployed; long term unemployed; socially disadvantaged individuals; early school leavers.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Educational attainment (NFQ Levels 4–6)
Data collected to date	Age, gender, PPSN, educational attainment, PES, economic sector, outcome status, early finish reason (if applicable), outcome certification (if available).
Data requirements	<p>Bridging data are collected within SOLAS' database, PLSS. The data collected by SOLAS are very comprehensive (see Chapter 4). Moreover, SOLAS' data are linked to the CSO's ELD, which through PPSN matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets, which describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue).</p> <p>Moreover, data for the unemployed could be mapped to the DSP's Live Register in order to draw an adequate control group.</p>
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison. Alternatively, use of the WWLD by DSP.
NTF budget	€ 836,000 (2022); € 1.479 million (2023)
Relevant link	Programme: https://www.fetchcourses.ie/courses/fulltime .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.14 TRAINING PEOPLE FOR EMPLOYMENT – EVENING TRAINING (SOLAS)

Nature of the programme	Pre-employment and continuing training provided by ETBs. Median course duration 8 weeks (minimum 1 day, maximum 55 weeks), two evening a week.
Objectives	To provide learners with a range of employability-related skills and qualifications to facilitate those entering the labour market for the first time. Reskilling/upskilling for those who are interested in updating or adding to their skills in their spare time.
Target group	Employed; unemployed (in receipt of any payment from DSP).
Key outcomes/KPIs	Employment; educational attainment (mainly NFQ Levels 5–6, but also Levels 1–4); progression to other further education and training.
Data collected to date	Age, gender, PPSN, educational attainment, PES, economic sector, outcome status, early finish reason (if applicable), outcome certification (if available).
Data requirements	Evening training data are collected within SOLAS' database, PLSS. The data collected by SOLAS are very comprehensive (see Chapter 4). Moreover, SOLAS' data are linked to the CSO's ELD, which through PPSN matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets, which describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue). Moreover, data for the unemployed could be mapped to the DSP's Live Register in order to draw an adequate control group.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison. Alternatively, use of the WWLD by DSP for unemployed.
NTF budget	€ 4.025 million (2022); € 5.361 million (2023)
Relevant link	2016 follow-up survey of FET programme participants: https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/60018bac47/followupsurveyfetprogrammeparticipants2016_final_report.pdf

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.15 TRAINING PEOPLE FOR EMPLOYMENT – POST LEAVING CERTIFICATE (SOLAS)

Nature of the programme	The PLC programme is a full-time training programme for young people who have completed their Leaving Certificate and adults returning to education; it is provided by ETBs.
Objectives	Employment progression and progression to higher education.
Target group	16+ who have completed the senior cycle; adults returning to education; unemployed wanting to upskill.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Educational attainment (Levels 5–6 on the NFQ by QQI); employment; progression to higher education.
Data collected to date	Age, gender, PPSN, educational attainment, PES, economic sector, outcome status, early finish reason (if applicable), outcome certification (if available).
Data requirements	PLC data are collected within SOLAS' database, PLSS. The data collected by SOLAS are very comprehensive (see Chapter 4). Moreover, SOLAS' data are linked to the CSO's ELD, which through PPSN matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets, which describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue).
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison.
NTF budget	€153.342 million (2023). NTF funding for PLC only since 2023.
Relevant link	Programme: https://www.plccourses.ie/ . Previous evaluation: https://www.esri.ie/publications/evaluation-of-plc-programme-provision .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.16 TRAINING PEOPLE FOR EMPLOYMENT – RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (SOLAS)

Nature of the programme	Training courses provided by ETBs, with median duration of 33 weeks (minimum 2 weeks, maximum 139 weeks). Individuals are assigned a RPL mentor, who guides them through the process of creating a RPL portfolio (i.e., evidence of past learning), that will be evaluated by a RPL assessor.
Objectives	RPL helps the learner get his/her prior learning formally recognised by matching their knowledge and skills to a QQI award.
Target group	NA
Key outcomes/KPIs	Educational attainment (NFQ Levels 4–6).
Data collected to date	Age, gender, PPSN, educational attainment, PES, economic sector, outcome status, early finish reason (if applicable), outcome certification (if available).
Data requirements	RPL data are collected within SOLAS' database, PLSS. The data collected by SOLAS are very comprehensive (see Chapter 4). Moreover, SOLAS' data are linked to the CSO's ELD, which through PPSN matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets, which describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue).
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison.
NTF budget	€113,000 (2022); €343,000 (2023)
Relevant link	Programme website: https://collegeoffet.ie/rpl/#~:text=RPL%20helps%20you%20get%20your,and%20in%20your%20social%20life.

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.17 TRAINING PEOPLE FOR EMPLOYMENT – SPECIFIC SKILLS TRAINING (SOLAS)

Nature of the programme	Pre-employment training provided by ETBs, targeting all sectors. Short courses (4–10 weeks), which usually lead to minor awards, or long courses of 6 months or more. Broad range of courses available covering hard and soft skills. Courses at different levels (NFQ Levels 3-6) QQI certified, with some uncertified or non-NFQ aligned.
Objectives	Upskilling and reskilling.
Target group	Unemployed; employed; those in some form of further education and training.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Employment; educational attainment (NFQ Levels 3–6).
Data collected to date	Age, gender, PPSN, educational attainment, PES, economic sector, outcome status, early finish reason (if applicable), outcome certification (if available).
Data requirements	Specific Skills Training data are collected within SOLAS' database, PLSS. The data collected by SOLAS are very comprehensive (see Chapter 4). Moreover, SOLAS' data are linked to the CSO's ELD, which through PPSN matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets, which describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue). Moreover, data for the unemployed can be mapped to the DSP's Live Register, as done by Indecon (2020) in the CIE analysis of Specific Skills Training, in order to draw an adequate control group.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison. Alternatively, use of the WWLD by DSP.
NTF budget	€25.712 million (2022); €38.384 million (2023)
Relevant link	Indecon's counterfactual impact evaluation report: https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/9aa70231b7/sst-independent-evaluation-_2020_indecon.pdf .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.18 TRAINING PEOPLE FOR EMPLOYMENT – VOCATIONAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES SCHEME – VTOS (SOLAS)

Nature of the programme	In-person training courses provide by ETBs, from basic education and training to advanced vocational training, with a wide choice of subjects.
Objectives	Upskilling/reskilling/meet the education and training needs of unemployed people (originally tailored for people who left school without achieving an upper secondary qualification).
Target group	Unemployed, at least 21 years of age and in receipt, for at least 6 months (156 days), of payment of some social welfare allowances.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Employment; educational attainment (NFQ Level 3–6); higher level VTOS schemes; other FET provision.
Data collected to date	Age, gender, PPSN, educational attainment, PES, economic sector, outcome status, early finish reason (if applicable), outcome certification (if available).
Data requirements	VTOS data are collected within SOLAS' database, PLSS. The data collected by SOLAS are very comprehensive (see Chapter 4). Moreover, SOLAS' data are linked to the CSO's ELD, which through PPSN matches datasets on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other datasets, which describe their outcomes in subsequent years (e.g., Revenue). Moreover, data can be mapped to the DSP's Live Register, as done by Indecon (2020) in the CIE analysis of VTOS, in order to draw an adequate control group.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation, with use of ELD database permitted by the CSO to construct a control group for comparison. Alternatively, use of the WWLD by DSP.
NTF budget	€ 50.333 million (2022); € 52.478 million (2023)
Relevant link	Indecon's counterfactual impact evaluation report: https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/91bd5a18cc/independent-indecon-vtos-report-to-solas.pdf .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.19 TRAINING SUPPORT GRANTS (DSP)

Nature of the programme	Once-off grant to meet a short-term skills gap or training need that cannot be provided by a state provider within a reasonable time. It is not intended to substitute for training and activation measures that are funded under other programmes and agencies.
Objectives	Skills provision; progression to employment.
Target group	Unemployed, other benefit recipients, people with disabilities, marginalised groups (demand-led scheme determined on a one-to-one basis by case officers).
Key outcomes/KPIs	Employment; educational attainment (Level 6 on the NFQ by QQI).
Data collected to date	Personal information of customers is captured as part of their engagement with employment services staff. Main data are captured prior to referral to training support grants but information on the customer's journey is captured throughout the training.
Data requirements	The data from TSG are linked to the main DSP database that records jobseeker claims and payments. PPSN is collected , so linking to Revenue data for earnings, occupation, etc. data should be feasible and is needed for a CIE.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation.
NTF budget	€2.352 million (2022); €2.634 million (2023). Fully funded by NTF.
Relevant links	Programme: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0a962-operational-guidelines-training-support-grant/#the-training-support-grant-scheme .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.20 WORK PLACEMENT EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME (DSP)

Nature of the programme	26 weeks programme, to include 30 hours work experience per week and 60 hours of training over the 26 weeks period.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep jobseekers close to the labour market; - Provide those who never had a job opportunity to gain work experience and training to assist in gaining employment; - Provide those who wish to change careers an opportunity to gain work experience.
Target group	Unemployed, other benefit recipients, people with disabilities, marginalised groups.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Employment, movement on to previous or new DSP payment.
Data collected to date	Gender, age, educational attainment, previous employment and unemployment history, job seeking and training progress, programme participation including sector of employment, prior payment, details of host, training hours, exit reasons and outcomes.
Data requirements	The data from the programme are linked to the main DSP database that records jobseeker claims and payments. PPSN is collected , so linking to Revenue data for earnings, occupation, etc. data should be feasible and is needed for a CIE.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for CIE evaluation.
NTF budget	€819,000 (2022); €835,000 (2023). The training element of the Work Placement Experience Programme is NTF funded (~30 per cent of the full programme), then DSP funding.
Relevant links	Programme: https://www.gov.ie/en/service/95fe1-work-placement-experience-programme/ .

Source: Grantee organisation.

FIRM-LEVEL INITIATIVES

APPENDIX TABLE 2.21 IDA IRELAND – TRAINING GRANTS TO INDUSTRY

Nature of the programme	IDA Ireland manages training grants to industry for its portfolio of c. 1,800 multinational client companies. Training plan proposals, covering three years, are submitted for grant aid.
Objectives	For employees, training aims to improve their skills, increase productivity, provide life-long learning opportunities; and increase opportunities for career progression. For firms, training aims to support the delivery of strategic initiatives; drive productivity, embrace new technologies; and secure the future viability of multinational companies in Ireland.
Target group	Employees and firms in the IDA Ireland portfolio of multinational client companies.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Outcomes/KPIs are company specific (e.g., increase revenue, employee retainment, increase automation across the business). Employees level: increase in skills and competencies; enhanced career progression.
Data collected to date	None on learners: No template exists for data collection among the learners. For all assisted firms, IDA Ireland captures information on finance (e.g., total revenues, gross profit, R&D spend) and employment (e.g., no. of employees, temporary employment, no. of apprentices) in Irish operation, training plan with the expected impact/outcome, plan of expected expenditures, business outcomes to achieve and how. External evaluators collect ‘post-training’ data to establish if the milestones in the training plan submitted were addressed, before grant can be drawn down. Application and validation data are captured in a same system (confidential data). Company registration numbers are collected.
Data requirements	Ideally, need data on participating and non-participating firms, including employees, that contain important control (e.g., firm size and sector information for firms; gender, education attainment, etc.) and follow-up information (e.g., Revenue).
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Significant gaps and challenges exist for CIE evaluation. However, it may be possible to use IDA Ireland data to look at impact of these grants compared to other types of grants on outcomes (employment, productivity), i.e., differential impact analysis. IDA Ireland only captures information on assisted firms. Using company registration number markers to link to Census of Industrial Production and Annual Services Inquiry to construct a control group for CIE (may be possible to measure CIE if non assisted firms are in the IDA Ireland data). Significant data protection issues would need to be solved before attempting the two strategies.
NTF budget	€3 million (2022 and 2023). Additional funding from DETE.
Relevant link	Programme: https://www.idaireland.com/training-grants .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.22 ENGINEERS IRELAND: EMPLOYEE AND CPD

Nature of the programme	CPD accredited employer standard, awarded by Engineers Ireland, (2–3 years) and training (1–2 days), and webinars in strategic emerging areas.
Objectives	Upskilling and cross-skilling in strategically vital emerging technical areas; Supporting national skills objectives.
Target group	Employers, employees (engineers only).
Key outcomes/KPIs	Upskilling and cross-skilling of professional engineers; earnings/occupational progression.
Data collected to date	For the CPD: sector, multinational or indigenous, no. of employees. For trainees, some background data (gender, age, educational attainment), but for members only.
Data requirements	For members, pre-training background info is required along with outcome information over time. To derive a control group, employee and firm level data are required on non-members, and also on non-participating members.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Significant gaps and challenges exist for CIE evaluation.
NTF budget	€400,000 (2022 and 2023). Fully funded by NTF.
Relevant links	Programme: https://www.engineersireland.ie/Professionals/CPD-Careers/CPD-training-offerings-and-services and https://www.engineersireland.ie/Businesses/Training-development/CPD-accredited-employer-standard .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.23 SKILLNET IRELAND – TRAINING NETWORK PROGRAMME – EMPLOYMENT

Nature of the programme	Upskilling, cross-skilling and reskilling training programmes delivered through 70 Skillnet Ireland Business Networks. Training is demand-led by companies, from intensive one day CPD training to advanced degrees; also coaching and mentoring.																								
Objectives	For employees, upskilling, cross-skilling and reskilling; For firms, to advance competitiveness, productivity and innovation. Strategic priorities include: digital acceleration/transformation, climate action and business sustainability, SME leadership development, and strengthening Ireland’s foreign direct investment talent base.																								
Target group	Employees of private sector enterprises (businesses of all sizes and sectors).																								
Key outcomes/KPIs	Upskilling, strengthening employability and career mobility, educational attainment (including progression to further learning), improving productivity.																								
Data collected to date	For employees: gender, age, occupation, current economic status, existing education attainment. Some post-training information is collected (e.g., satisfaction with training). For firms: no. employees, sector, sole trader status. Networks might follow-up with businesses to seek information on the impact on training.																								
Data requirements	Company registration numbers can be collected but it is not mandatory. Need employee and firm-level data that captures both programme participating and non-participating firms/employees with background information on all groups, including post-course completion information. Also, collection PPSN in order to link to administrative data sources (e.g., Revenue, DSP).																								
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Significant gaps and challenges exist for CIE evaluation. Skillnet Ireland have their own evaluation system in place that uses a mixed-methods approach. The only possible way to evaluate is to collect the company registration number and link to CIP, ASI. In addition to data protection and technical constraints related to linking data, the fact that the company registration number collection is not mandatory, is a barrier to current CIE evaluation. Also need collection of PPSN for employee-level assessment.																								
NTF budget	€45.706 million (2022); €55.692 million (2023) – including management costs. The core programme is funded on a 60:40 basis, with 60 per cent derived from the NTF and 40 per cent from the private sector. The programme includes several different initiatives, we show the breakdown of spending in the table below:																								
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Training Networks Programme – In employment</th> <th>2022</th> <th>2023</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Training Networks Programme Main – 70 networks</td> <td>28,260,000</td> <td>33,350,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Future Dynamics Programme</td> <td>5,600,000</td> <td>6,760,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Industry Insights</td> <td>530,000</td> <td>461,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>MentorsWork</td> <td>1,050,000</td> <td>1,574,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Skillnet Climate Ready Academy</td> <td>1,750,000</td> <td>2,565,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Skillnet Innovation Exchange</td> <td>715,000</td> <td>1,050,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>37,905,000</td> <td>45,760,000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Training Networks Programme – In employment	2022	2023	Training Networks Programme Main – 70 networks	28,260,000	33,350,000	Future Dynamics Programme	5,600,000	6,760,000	Industry Insights	530,000	461,000	MentorsWork	1,050,000	1,574,000	Skillnet Climate Ready Academy	1,750,000	2,565,000	Skillnet Innovation Exchange	715,000	1,050,000	Total	37,905,000	45,760,000
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Source: Grantee organisation.

Notes: Relevant links – Programme: https://www.skillnetireland.ie/uploads/attachments/Skillnet-Ireland_Talent-Its-A-Game-Changer.pdf. Evaluation report from Indecon: <https://www.skillnetireland.ie/corporate-publications/evaluation-of-skillnet-ireland->

APPENDIX TABLE 2.24 TRAINING GRANTS TO INDUSTRY – LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND SCALING SUPPORTS (ENTERPRISE IRELAND)

Nature of the programme	(1) Leadership, management development and scaling supports. It comprises a range of long duration programmes (Leadership 4 Growth, Go Global 4 Growth, Enter the Eurozone Programme and Founders Forum) and shorter duration programmes (Business Navigator programme, Attracting & Retaining Talent programme, Sustainability Kickstarter workshops, Spotlight on Skills workshops and HR & OD Community of Practice). The long duration programmes can be anything from six to nine months, and the short duration programmes can comprise of half/one-day in-person workshops and webinars.
Objectives	Develop the leadership and management capability of Enterprise Ireland client companies to increase exports and grow jobs.
Target group	CEOs and senior managers in Enterprise Ireland client companies (export-oriented companies in manufacturing of internationally traded services sectors)
Key outcomes/KPIs	Firms: increase in exports, turnover and no. of employees (primary KPIs). Trainees: educational attainment (although programmes not certified by QQI); increased ambition, confidence and capability (secondary KPIs).
Data collected to date	Trainees: only gender; percentage of those who completed programme is tracked. Enterprise Ireland collects Level 1 to 3 on the Kirkpatrick methodology post-training information – satisfaction, learning and behaviour change. Level 4 of Kirkpatrick business impact is measured by independent evaluation for longer programmes capturing quantitative and qualitative data. Return on investment is also measured using the Philips return on investment evaluation model. Firms: sector, turnover, no. of employees, location; post completion, additional data on company sales turnover, and export sales.
Data requirements	Company registration number is collected but it is not fully populated. Enterprise Ireland collect their own company identification number for tracking their clients . Need employee/firm-level data that captures both Enterprise Ireland and non-Enterprise Ireland participating employees/firms with background information on all groups, including post-course completion information. However, in correspondence with Enterprise Ireland, they have expressed confidentiality concerns around the sharing of firm-level data outside Enterprise Ireland/DETE, due to risk of identity disclosure.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Significant gaps and challenges exist for CIE evaluation. However, it may be possible to measure the differential impacts of these grants compared to other Enterprise Ireland client-grants on productivity, employment, exports. Currently CIE is not possible because company registration number is not fully populated. In addition there are confidentiality concerns around the sharing of Enterprise Ireland client data outside the organisation/DETE. Compliance may also be required with information disclosure clauses within the Act governing the establishment of Enterprise Ireland (Industrial Development (Enterprise Ireland) Act, 1998). If these challenges can be addressed, then, in addition to the possibility of measuring differential impacts, it may be feasible to link Enterprise Ireland data to CIP, ASI for a full CIE. To note, Enterprise Ireland have their own evaluation system in place that uses a mixed-methods approach (Kirkpatrick methodology).
NTF budget	€3.500 million for both leadership, management development and scaling supports and Mentor Network (2022 and 2023). Additional funding from DETE. DETE/Enterprise Ireland provide substantially more funding for the programmes compared to the NTF allocation (see Chapter 2).
Relevant link	Programme: https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/supports/capability-development#:~:text=Leadership%20and%20Development,sustain%20and%20accelerate%20business%20growth.

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.25 TRAINING GRANTS TO INDUSTRY – MENTOR NETWORK (ENTERPRISE IRELAND)

Nature of the programme	(2) Mentor Network programme. It is mentorship advisory support, where new/experienced business owners among Enterprise Ireland client companies are matched with experienced business mentors (entrepreneurs and senior executives). One-to-one mentor support and/or multiskilled panel sessions.
Objectives	Advice/guidance on business plan, improve production/logistics, attract external investment, target their sales and marketing activity, commercialise new products or services, expansion into new export markets, improved R & D, production.
Target group	CEOs/MDs of Enterprise Ireland client companies, start-ups, Local Enterprise Office client companies.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Firms: sales growth, expansion into new export markets, opening up new channels to market (primary) Trainees: improved management capability (secondary).
Data collected to date	Trainees: name of CEO/MD (or individual being mentored); % of who completed the programme is tracked. 'Action plan' data collected from mentors. Firms: sector, turnover, number of employees, location; post completion, additional data on company sales, turnover, n. of employees and export sales.
Data requirements	Company registration number is collected but it is not fully populated. Enterprise Ireland collect their own company identification number for tracking their clients. Need employee/firm-level data that captures both Enterprise Ireland and non- Enterprise Ireland participating employees/firms with background information on all groups, including post-course completion information. However, in correspondence with Enterprise Ireland, they have expressed confidentiality concerns around the sharing of firm-level data outside Enterprise Ireland/DETE, due to risk of identity disclosure.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Significant gaps and challenges exist for CIE evaluation. However, it may be possible to measure the differential impacts of these grants compared to other Enterprise Ireland client-grants on productivity, employment, exports. Currently CIE is not possible because company registration number is not fully populated. In addition, there are confidentiality concerns around the sharing of Enterprise Ireland client data outside the organisation/DETE. Compliance may also be required with information disclosure clauses within the Act governing the establishment of Enterprise Ireland (Industrial Development (Enterprise Ireland) Act, 1998). If these challenges can be addressed, then, in addition to the possibility of measuring differential impacts, it may be feasible to link Enterprise Ireland data to CIP, ASI for a full CIE. To note, Enterprise Ireland have their own evaluation system in place that uses a mixed-methods approach (Kirkpatrick methodology).
NTF budget	€3,500 million for both leadership, management development and scaling supports and Mentor Network (2022 and 2023). Additional funding from DETE. DETE/ Enterprise Ireland provide substantially more funding for the programmes for the programmes compared to the NTF allocation (see Chapter 2).
Relevant link	Programme: https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/supports/capability-development#:~:text=Leadership%20and%20Development,sustain%20and%20accelerate%20business%20growth .

Source: Grantee organisation.

SOCIAL/OTHER INITIATIVES

APPENDIX TABLE 2.26 HUMAN CAPITAL INITIATIVE (HEA) – PILLAR 3

Nature of the programme	Funding allocated to 461 courses and over 700 micro-credential courses are receiving the learner fee subsidy. Many ISCED categories. Pillar 3 Innovation and Agility is project based (5 years long) and aims to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support innovative and agile proposals from institutions or groups of institutions with potential application and impact across the higher education system; and • Align innovation and agility with national strategic objectives, key system objectives for the higher education system, and future skills needs for society and the economy.
Objectives	The innovation in delivery stream aimed to promote innovative methods of teaching and delivery, so that learners will benefit from improved quality and more engaging ways of learning on enterprise-focused courses. Each project set its own KPIs and objectives in line with the programme objectives; projects report on these every six months. Wider HCI objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase provision in areas of identified skills need for enterprise • Future proof graduates with industry relevant skills for emerging technologies • Ensure that there is a greater focus across the whole spectrum of higher education course provision on promoting and embedding transversal skills • Incentivise continued reform and innovation in higher education provision building on best practice available nationally and internationally. The key areas of focus for actions under the initiative are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority skills needs for society and the economy, particularly in high productivity sectors • Mitigating Brexit risks • Promoting regional development and National Development Plan7/Project Ireland 2040 objectives • Innovation and reform in programme provision • Responding to digitalisation and the future world of work • Strengthening relationships with enterprise and addressing identified future skills needs • Provision of upskilling and reskilling through lifelong learning.
Target group	Higher education institutions or groups of institutions with potential application and impact across the higher education system and Enterprise partners.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Educational attainment; subsequent labour market outcomes; measurements for innovation in teaching.
Data collected to date	None at HEA level, only course additionality. Single HEIs collect data on post course completion of learners. HEA produces annual graduate outcome survey.
Data requirements	There needs to be a marker for these programmes in the HEA data, that can be subsequently linked to Revenue.
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Significant gaps and challenges exist for a CIE. Data infrastructure suitable for monitoring.
NTF budget	€48.726 million (2022); €50.012 million(2023).
Relevant Links:	Programme: https://hea.ie/skills-engagement/human-capital-initiative-pillars-1-2-and-3/ . Indecon report: https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2023/06/HCI-Pillar-3-Midterm-Evaluation-Report.pdf .

Source: Grantee organisation.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.27 THE WHEEL: COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Nature of the programme	Training to community, voluntary and social enterprise employees. Four initiatives: i) learning networks, ii) learning and innovation, iii) leadership and management, iv) research and engagement.
Objectives	Employees to acquire the skills and knowledge required to fulfil the roles in their sector; improve management and leadership skills.
Target group	Community, voluntary and social enterprise employees.
Key outcomes/KPIs	Improve skills and knowledge, including management and leadership skills.
Data collected to date	No. of trainees; activity carried out, financial summary; anonymised summary of the profile of each trainee involved in the programme; anonymous satisfaction rates. For a small proportion of learners, more detailed, anonymised, profile information.
Data requirements	–
Preliminary evaluation assessment	Data infrastructure suitable for monitoring. A qualitative approach seems most appropriate for evaluating the effectiveness of this initiative
budget	€1.140 million (2022 and 2023). Fully funded by NTF.
Relevant links	Programme: https://www.wheel.ie/ . Indecon report: https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2020-12/Investment%20Appraisal%20of%20Upskilling%20-%20Indecon.pdf .

Source: Grantee organisation.



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