

# National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill 2025

Dr Cliona Loughnane  
Senior Parliamentary Researcher (Social Science)

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## **Abstract**

The National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill 2025 proposes to amend the *National Training Fund Act 2000* to enable certain payments from the fund. This follows a Government commitment in Budget 2025 to an almost €1.5 billion funding package from the National Training Fund for the tertiary education sector. This Bill Digest presents the principal provisions of the National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill 2025 and provides an overview of the origins and purpose of the National Training Fund and of the tertiary education sector.



## Library & Research Service

Email: [library.and.research@oireachtas.ie](mailto:library.and.research@oireachtas.ie)

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### Contact

Houses of the Oireachtas  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2  
D02 XR20

Tel: +353 (0)1 6183000

Twitter/X: @OireachtasNews

[www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie)



## Executive Summary

- The **National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill 2025** ('the Bill') proposes to amend the *National Training Fund Act 2000, as amended* ('2000 Act') to enable certain payments from the National Training Fund.
- The National Training Fund (NTF) has a significant surplus (estimated to be approximately €1.8 billion at end-2024) and the specific areas/programmes which can avail of NTF funds are prescribed in the 2000 Act.
- The Bill proposes to enable the use of the NTF for items including the acquisition of lands, premises, furniture or equipment, and upgrading, construction or reconstruction of premises.
- These new areas of funding would still need to accord with the purposes outlined in the 2000 Act: (a) to raise the skills of those in employment, or (b) to provide training to those who wish to acquire skills for the purposes of taking up employment, or (c) to provide information in relation to existing, or likely future, requirements for skills in the economy.
- The **2025 Programme for Government** commits to close the tertiary education core funding gap through use of the NTF and to expand the skill categories that can access NTF funding.
- In Budget 2025, the government announced funding of €1.485 billion for the tertiary education sector over a six-year period from (2025 to 2030) to be drawn from the NTF. The Department states that fulfilling this funding package requires changes to the 2000 Act.
- In June 2025, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (FHERIS), James Lawless TD, published the **General Scheme of the National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill** and the accompanying **Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)**.
- The **National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill 2025** was published on 10 October 2025. The Bill comprises of two sections.
- In particular, the Bill will amend the *National Training Fund Act 2000, as amended* to enable the use of the NTF for additional items within the purpose of the 2000 Act.
- According to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) press release (8 October 2025) announcing Government approval of the Bill:

*"This legislation will unlock the nearly €1.5 billion funding package, announced in Budget 2025, for the tertiary education sector over a six-year period from 2025 to 2030."*
- The General Scheme of the National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill received a Pre-Legislative Scrutiny (PLS) waiver from the Joint Committee on Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in July 2025.

- In September 2025, the Library & Research Service (L&RS) published a **Policy and Legislative Briefing Paper** for the General Scheme of the National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill, which examines the origins and purpose of the NTF and provides an overview of Ireland’s tertiary education sector. The L&RS has also published a **Bill Resource Page** [internal access only].

### L&RS Resources

- **Policy and Legislative Briefing Paper** (September 2025) for the General Scheme of the National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill.
- **Bill Resource Page** (2025) providing resources related to this Bill, including select media, publications from Government, the Oireachtas, stakeholders, and specialist commentary.
- **Bill Digest** (January 2024) for the Research and Innovation Bill 2024, which includes analysis of Ireland’s research and innovation policy context.

[Some resources may only be accessible on the Oireachtas network.]

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## Glossary and abbreviations

Table 1 Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Meaning
C&AG	Comptroller and Auditor General
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
ETBs	Education and Training Boards
FE	Further Education
FET	Further Education and Training
FHERIS	Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
NTF	National Training Fund
RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
2000 Act	<i>National Training Fund Act 2000</i> , as amended

## Introduction

The **National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill 2025** ('the Bill') was approved by Cabinet and then published on the 10 October 2025. It is scheduled for Second Stage debate in Dáil Éireann on Thursday 16 October.

The Bill comprises of two Sections and is accompanied by an **Explanatory Memorandum**.

Announcing Government approval of the Bill on the 8 October 2025, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (FHERIS), James Lawless TD stated<sup>1</sup>:

*"The National Training Fund is one of our most powerful tools to support people in gaining the skills they need whether they are retraining, entering the workforce, or progressing in their current role.*

*The Fund has played a vital role in helping Ireland weather past economic downturns. However, a considerable surplus has built up, which is why I am taking action now to ensure we invest this money where it is most needed.*

*The changes we are making to the legislation are targeted, practical and necessary, and have been agreed with all key stakeholders. They will allow us to make use of the €1.5 billion package announced in Budget 2025, without changing the purpose of the Fund, which remains focused on skills, training and helping people into work.*

*This package will help deliver the education, training and research needed to keep pace with a fast-changing world. It will support thousands of learners each year across further and higher education institutions, apprenticeships, and new upskilling pathways, producing skilled graduates who are ready to contribute to a dynamic and competitive economy. It will also support small and medium enterprises by providing upskilling opportunities for employees. Crucially, it will drive innovation and nurture the next generation of research talent, ensuring Ireland continues to grow a workforce that is ready for the future."*

The **Explanatory Memorandum** for the Bill notes:

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<sup>1</sup> DFHERIS (8 October 2025) **Minister Lawless receives Government Approval to bring forward Bill to amend the National Training Fund Act, Unlocking €1.5 Billion for Education and Research**, *Press Release*.

*“The purpose of the Bill is to amend the National Training Fund Act 2000 to make provision for the making of certain payments from the National Training Fund for the purposes of a scheme referred to in section 7 of the National Training Fund Act 2000.*

*The payments facilitated are the acquisition of lands, premises, furniture or equipment and the upgrading, construction or reconstruction, including repair and maintenance, of premises...”*

The Minister for FHERIS (‘the Minister’) sought a waiver from pre-legislative scrutiny (PLS), to facilitate early passing of the legislation to release the Budget 2025 NTF funding package. The Joint Committee on Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science granted a PLS waiver in July 2025.

This Digest firstly provides an overview of the policy and legislative context for the Bill. The Digest further examines the Regulatory Impact Analysis conducted by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), outlines some stakeholder perspectives for consideration, and describes the key provisions of the Bill.

In September 2025, the Library & Research Service (L&RS) published a **Policy and Legislative Briefing Paper** for the General Scheme of the National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill. It is recommended to read the **Policy and Legislative Briefing Paper** in conjunction with this Bill Digest where the reader is seeking more substantive policy and legislative context.

## Background

The National Training Fund (NTF) is an important funding source, focusing primarily on funding training for those seeking employment and upskilling for those already in work.

The NTF fund has had a **surplus** in income over expenditure in all but four years.<sup>2</sup> The surplus was €1.543bn at the end of 2023 and is estimated at €1.772bn at the end of 2024.<sup>3</sup> Recent increases in NTF income reflect current high employment levels, rises in incomes, and the recent increase in the NTF levy<sup>4</sup> to the current rate of 1%.

The **2025 Programme for Government** makes a number of commitments for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science which relate the aims of the Bill, including to “close the core funding gap by unlocking the National Training Fund” (p.71) and to “Expand the skills categories that can avail of the National Training Fund to include sectors such as healthcare and education” (p.73).

In **Budget 2025**, the government announced funding of **€1.485 billion for the tertiary education sector over a six-year period** from 2025 to 2030.<sup>5</sup> As outlined in the DFHERIS press release announcing Government approval of the Bill this includes:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> DFHERIS (17 June 2025) [Regulatory Impact Assessment \(RIA\) - National Training Fund \(Amendment\) Bill 2025](#).

<sup>3</sup> DFHERIS (17 June 2025) [RIA- National Training Fund \(Amendment\) Bill 2025](#), p.3.

<sup>4</sup> Following the 2016 [Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education](#) (Cassells' Review).

<sup>5</sup> DFHERIS (29 April 2025) [Minister Lawless obtains Government approval to amend National Training Fund Act, unlocking funding package of €1.5 billion](#), *Press Release*.

<sup>6</sup> DFHERIS (8 October 2025) [Minister Lawless receives Government Approval to bring forward Bill to amend the National Training Fund Act, Unlocking €1.5 Billion for Education and Research](#), *Press Release*.

*“€650m funding package for Higher Education, increasing funding by a further €150m by 2030.*

*€600m capital uplift to enable skills development, including facilities in the areas of healthcare and veterinary skills and further education skills; supporting universal access to skill provision; and the research sector (including an increase in the PhD stipend).*

*€235m for the tertiary sector as one-off current funding including skills and apprenticeships.”*

This funding is to be drawn from the NTF, but to do so requires changes to the 2000 Act. The **Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)** accompanying the **General Scheme** stated:

*“A legislative amendment is required to the National Training Fund Act 2000 to extend the scope of the Act to facilitate expenditure from the NTF funding package of €1.485bn over the next 6 years as agreed in Budget 2025. This funding package includes capital funding which requires an amendment to the Act and core funding for higher education and research expenditure (including an increase in the PhD stipend) which may require amendments to the Act”.<sup>7</sup>*

Head 3 of **General Scheme** of the NTF (Amendment) Bill, published in June 2025, dealt with the insertion of a new Section to provide for payments from the fund to be made for:

- acquisition of lands, premises, furniture or equipment or the upgrading, construction or reconstruction of facilities or premises; and/or
- core funding for higher education institutions; and/or
- research and innovation.

The **National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill 2025** and an accompanying **Explanatory Memorandum** were published on 10 October 2025. The Bill seeks to provide for payments from the NTF to be made for:

- the acquisition of lands, premises, furniture or equipment;
- the upgrading, construction or reconstruction, including repair and maintenance, of premises.

These new areas of funding would still need to accord with the purposes outlined in the 2000 Act (Section 7) which are:

(a) to raise the skills of those in employment, or

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<sup>7</sup> DFHERIS (17 June 2025) **RIA - National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill 2025**, p.3-4.

(b) to provide training to those who wish to acquire skills for the purposes of taking up employment, or

(c) to provide information in relation to existing, or likely future, requirements for skills in the economy.

### Previous legislation related to the current Bill

- [\*National Training Fund Act 2000\*](#)
- [\*Research and Innovation Act 2024\*](#)
- [\*Higher Education Authority Act 2022\*](#)
- [\*Technological Universities Act 2018\*](#)<sup>8</sup>

### Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)

A [Regulatory Impact Assessment \(RIA\)](#) was published alongside the General Scheme in June 2025.<sup>9</sup> The RIA outlined that:

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<sup>8</sup> Note: Where available, the hyperlinks above provided direct to Revised Acts, which are administrative consolidations of the current law compiled by the Law Reform Commission.

<sup>9</sup> DFHERIS (17 June 2025) [RIA - National Training Fund \(Amendment\) Bill 2025](#).

*“The key objective of the amendment of the NTF Act is to ensure that the NTF funding package of €1.485bn which was announced in Budget 2025 for further and higher education and research can be allocated and spent as planned. It is critical that there is no legislative impediment to the provision of this funding.*

*An amendment is required to the NTF Act to permit capital expenditure from the Fund ...*

*An amendment may be required to the NTF Act to permit research and core funding expenditure from the Fund ...” (p.5)*

**Policy options considered in the RIA:**

- Option 1: No amendment to the legislation;
- Option 2: Limited amendment to the legislation but retaining the requirement for all expenditure to be in accordance with a scheme;
- Option 3: Wider amendment to the legislation removing the requirement for all expenditure to be in accordance with a scheme.

Source: DFHERIS (17 June 2025) [RIA - National Training Fund \(Amendment\) Bill 2025](#), p.6.

**Option 1** (no amendment to the legislation) was discounted as the status quo would not enable the expenditure announced in Budget 2025 to be made.

**Option 3** (wider amendment) was not preferred as wider amendment may require the amendment of the long title of the NTF legislation and development of a new Act. Further, employers’ group were not in favour of amending the legislation to provide for a wider purpose for the provision of funding from the NTF.

**Option 2** (limited amendment to the legislation) was selected as the preferred option based on maintaining the integrity of the NTF, wherein NTF expenditure provided for in the amendment could only be used for the purposes outlined in the 2000 Act.

The RIA anticipates there will be no cost to the Exchequer, as funding will be provided from the NTF, which has an estimated surplus of €1.772bn at the end of 2024.

## Policy and legislative context

This section provides an overview of the policy and legislative context for the Bill. The L&RS published a [Policy and Legislative Briefing Paper](#) for the General Scheme of the National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill in September 2025. The [Policy and Legislative Briefing Paper](#) explores the origins and purpose of the NTF and the policy context of the tertiary education sector in which the legislative proposal is made. It is recommended to read that Briefing Paper in conjunction with this Bill Digest where the reader is seeking more substantive policy and legislative context.

## The National Training Fund

A number of EU countries operate a training fund model to fund education and training.<sup>10</sup> [Cedefop](#), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, documents a range of ways that Member States organise cost-sharing for training, including national training funds such as the NTF, grants to businesses/individuals, loan/saving schemes for individuals to meet training costs, and training leave for employees.<sup>11</sup>

The [National Training Fund Act 2000](#) established Ireland's NTF. As described by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), the NTF is a 'dedicated fund to support employment-focused training'.<sup>12</sup> In essence, the NTF has two broad priorities – training for those seeking employment and upskilling for those already in work. Income to the fund, predominantly via levies from employers, has increased significantly in line with Ireland's recent economic growth. In 2025, the C&AG published an examination of the process by which PRSI is collected and allocated to the Social Insurance Fund and the NTF.<sup>13</sup>

### Box 1: An overview of the National Training Fund.

The National Training Fund (NTF) was established by the [National Training Fund Act 2000](#) as a **dedicated fund for schemes** which:

- raise the skills of those in employment, or
- provide training to those who wish to acquire skills to take up employment, or

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<sup>10</sup> Indecon (2018) [Review of National Training Fund](#).

<sup>11</sup> For more detail see: Indecon (2018) [Review of National Training Fund](#) (p.18-19) and [Financing adult learning database | CEDEFOP, Webpage](#).

<sup>12</sup> C&AG (2023) Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2022, [Chapter 19 National Training Fund](#), p.281.

<sup>13</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) (2025) Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2024 – Chapter [24. The collection and allocation of PRSI receipts](#).

- provide information in relation to existing, or likely future, requirements for skills in the economy.

As such, the NTF is a dedicated fund to support the training of those in employment and those seeking employment.

The fund is generated through a **levy on employers**. Currently, a levy of 1% is applied to reckonable earnings paid in respect of employees in Class A and Class H PRSI employments (circa 75% of all insured employees).

The **accumulated surplus** in the Fund at the end of 2024 is estimated to be approximately €1.8 billion.

NTF funding is **allocated by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science** with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. The financial allocation for each scheme is determined as part of the annual Estimates process. While the NTF **does not form part of the Vote of the Department**, NTF expenditure increases general government expenditure and can only be accommodated within the Government's fiscal strategy.

**Monitoring of NTF funding compliance** includes individual Service-Level Agreements, Performance Delivery Agreements, and mid-term reports. Outcomes against agreed targets are reported in end-of-year reports. The DFHERIS develops an annual expenditure report setting out the expenditure allocations, targets and indicators for each NTF-funded programme.

Sources: DFHERIS (8 October 2025) [Minister Lawless receives Government Approval to bring forward Bill to amend the National Training Fund Act, Unlocking €1.5 Billion for Education and Research](#), *Press Release*; DFHERIS (17 June 2025) [RIA - National Training Fund \(Amendment\) Bill 2025](#); DFHERIS (29 April 2025) [Minister Lawless obtains Government approval to amend National Training Fund Act, unlocking funding package of €1.5 billion](#), *Press Release*.

Initially, the NTF was developed to support FÁS/ SOLAS training, but its use has broadened to supporting Higher Education (HE) and wider Further Education and Training (FET) and some programmes providing enterprise and employment supports.<sup>14</sup> The C&AG reports that in recent years, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and SOLAS have been main recipients of NTF funding, which includes the cost of providing apprenticeships/training courses, training allowances paid to apprentices (and other NTF funded programmes within SOLAS), enterprise-

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<sup>14</sup> PBO (2018) [The National Training Fund](#). PBO Note 22 of 2018.

focused HE provision and the **Human Capital Initiative**.<sup>15</sup> Table 2 details the **NTF's funding allocation** in 2023.

Table 2: NTF funding allocation 2023

Programme	2023 Allocation (m)	Percentage
Skills acquisition for purpose of taking up employment	526.77	58.5%
Programmes for those in employment	370.53	42.1%
Provision of information on skills requirement	3.43	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>902.74</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: PBO (2023) *An Overview of the National Training Fund (NTF)* from Dept. of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2023*. Note: Rounding affects totals.

In 2022, the NTF had an **income** of €951 million (and a surplus for the year of €269 million), more than double 2017 income (€436 million).<sup>16</sup> The **accumulated surplus** in the NTF at the end of 2024 is estimated to be approximately €1.8 billion.<sup>17</sup> C&AG analysis of the NTF found that the year-end accumulated surplus in the fund in 2022 (€1.37 billion) was over seven times that recorded in 2015 (€184 million).<sup>18</sup> The C&AG identified that in 2021 and 2022 income exceeded forecasts, while expenditure was lower than planned.

### NTF funding commitments in Budget 2025

The funding architecture of Ireland's tertiary education system is complex, drawing from a range of sources, including the state, individual students/learners, international bodies, and commercial sources. The sector continues to experience the impact of funding cuts imposed during and after the financial crisis and is also faced with an increased population demand for education and training, and the ongoing need to adapt to the changing skills needs of the

<sup>15</sup> C&AG (2023) Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2022, **Chapter 19 National Training Fund**, p.283.

<sup>16</sup> C&AG (2023) Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2022, **Chapter 19 National Training Fund**, p.281.

<sup>17</sup> DFHERIS (17 June 2025) **RIA - National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill 2025**.

<sup>18</sup> C&AG (2023) Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2022, **Chapter 19 National Training Fund**, p.285.

labour force.<sup>19</sup> Inflationary pressures and rising cost of pay, capital projects and energy are also impacting the education sector. Concerns about the sustainability of Ireland's tertiary system, particularly HE, has led to a number of reviews of the current and possible future financial model.<sup>20</sup>

In Budget 2025, the government announced funding of €1.485 billion for the tertiary education sector over a six-year period from 2025 to 2030 (see Box 2).<sup>21</sup> This funding is to be drawn from the NTF, but to do so requires changes to the 2000 Act.<sup>22</sup> In order to proceed with this funding DFHERIS aims to enact the current Bill by the end of the year.<sup>23</sup>

### Box 2 NTF funding package for the tertiary education sector 2025 to 2030 announced in Budget 2025.

“In Budget 2025, a total NTF funding package of **€1.485bn** was agreed over a 6 year period (**2025-2030**) for the **tertiary sector**. This will include:

- €650m funding package for **Higher Education**, addressing Funding the Future commitments by increasing **core funding** by €150m per annum by 2030;
- €150m **capital funding** to provide key **training facilities** in the areas of Veterinary, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy and Dentistry and to provide for universal access;

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<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the impact of the 2008 financial crisis on funding for Ireland's HE sector see: OECD (2022) [Resourcing higher education in Ireland – Funding higher education institutions](#), OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 51. For a discussion of funding developments from 2016 see: DFHERIS (May 2022) [Funding the Future - Investing in knowledge and skills: Ireland's competitive advantage - A Funding and Reform Framework for Higher Education](#). See also: AARC, in association with Indecon and LE Europe (October 2020) [Increasing the sustainability of Higher and Further Education provision in Ireland Economic review of funding options - Deliverable 1.1 and 1.2: Adapting Higher Education and Further Education & Training Provision to Meet the Skill Requirements of Ireland's Labour Market](#). For a discussion of the impact of artificial intelligence and automation on Ireland's future skills needs see: Bukartaite, R. and Hooper, D. (2023) [Automation, artificial intelligence and future skills needs: an Irish perspective](#), *European Journal of Training and Development*, 47(10): 163-185.

<sup>20</sup> Reviews include: Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education (the Cassells Review) (2016) [Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education](#) and Government of Ireland (18 November 2019) [Ministers announce awarding of EU contract for review regarding increasing the sustainability of higher and further education provision in Ireland](#), *Press Release*.

<sup>21</sup> DFHERIS (29 April 2025) [Minister Lawless obtains Government approval to amend National Training Fund Act, unlocking funding package of €1.5 billion](#), *Press Release*.

<sup>22</sup> DFHERIS (17 June 2025) [RIA - National Training Fund \(Amendment\) Bill 2025](#), p.3-4.

<sup>23</sup> DFHERIS (8 October 2025) [Minister Lawless receives Government Approval to bring forward Bill to amend the National Training Fund Act, Unlocking €1.5 Billion for Education and Research](#), *Press Release*.

- €150m for the **upgrading of the tertiary estate**;
- €150m **capital funding** for the **Further Education and Training Sector**;
- €150m for the **research sector** including research infrastructure and an increase in the PhD stipend;
- €235m for the **tertiary sector** as **one-off current funding** including skills and apprenticeships.”

Source: DFHERIS (17 June 2025) [Regulatory Impact Assessment - National Training Fund \(Amendment\) Bill 2025](#), p. 3-4. [Emphasis added.]

See DRHERIS [Press Release](#) for an overview of Budget 2026 measures announced in October 2025.<sup>24</sup>

### Ireland’s tertiary education sector

Reflecting the tertiary education focus of the Budget 2025 NTF package to which the current legislative proposal responds, this section provides an introduction to elements of Ireland’s tertiary education sector (including education, training, and research).<sup>25</sup>

Box 3 provides an overview of some of the span and scale of Ireland’s tertiary sector from apprenticeships to third level institutions.

#### Box 3: Overview of the span of Ireland’s tertiary sector.

- **Full-time HE enrolments, postgraduate research enrolments, FET learners and apprenticeship registrations** have **all increased** since 2021 (with some dips during the COVID-19 pandemic).
- The number of people registered on **apprenticeships** has increased by over 50% from almost 18,000 in 2018 to 27,470 in 2023. The total apprenticeship certifications exceeded 4,500 in 2023.
- The most recent **Adult Education Survey** (2022) reported that 48.3% of adults had engaged in **formal or non-formal learning** in the previous 12 months, up 2.3% since the previous 2017 survey.
- SOLAS reports that over 400,000 **FET places** (229,000 unique learners) were taken up in 2024.
- Registrations on courses for **Near-Zero Energy Building/Retrofit skills** increased almost ten-fold from 455 in 2019 to almost 4,500 in 2023.

<sup>24</sup> DFHERIS (8 October 2025) [Minister Lawless announces first-ever permanent cut to student contribution fee, major increase in SUSI grants and the income threshold, and record investment in apprenticeships](#), *Press Release*.

<sup>25</sup> DFHERIS (17 June 2025) [Minister Lawless obtains Government approval to draft legislation to amend National Training Fund Act, unlocking funding package of €1.5 billion](#), *Press Release*.

- In 2023, there were six **Third level** Institutes of Technology and colleges and 13 Third level universities and technological universities funded by the HEA.
- In 2023, there were approximately 181,000 full-time **undergraduates in higher education** (HE), and this is anticipated to increase to 240,000 full-time undergraduates by 2031.
- There were more than 8,900 full-time **PhD** enrolments in 2023, and almost 1,800 part-time PhD enrolments.

Sources: Government of Ireland (July 2025) [Education Indicators for Ireland](#); DFHERIS (10 July 2025) [Ministers McEntee, Lawless and Foley announce publication of Education Indicators for Ireland 2024, Press Release](#); DFHERIS (February 2025) [Briefing for Minister](#); DFHERIS (14 February 2025) [Minister Lawless announces increased levels of research and innovation activity in Higher Education institutions, Press Release](#). Reporting from the Higher Education Research and Development Survey 2022-23; SOLAS (13 January 2025) [SOLAS Reports Record Numbers of Further Education and Training Places Taken up in 2024, Press Release](#).

Note: Not all programmes listed above may be in receipt of NTF funding.

The Irish tertiary education sector has incorporated a range of significant developments in recent years, including:

- Responding to growth in student/learner demand (reflecting that a majority of adults in Ireland participate in advanced studies at some level);
- Changes in governance structures and controls between the state and third level institutions (e.g., [Higher Education Authority Act 2022](#));
- Changes in the research funding and governance landscape (e.g., [Research and Innovation Act 2024](#));
- A drive for commercially-orientated research following the financial crisis;
- The establishment of the new Department (DFHERIS) in 2020 with policy responsibility across further and higher education, skills training and research; and
- A range of new policy frameworks (including: [Funding the Future](#), the policy framework for HE; [Impact 2030](#), Ireland's national research and innovation strategy, and; the [Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021–2025](#)).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Loughnane, Caroline (2024) [Irish university governance in transition](#), *Administration*, 72(4): 123-146; McTaggart, B. (2024) [Fifty years on – limitations and opportunities within Ireland's higher education system and structures](#), *Policy Futures in Education*, 22(8), 1771-1793; Hazelkorn, E. and Boland, T. (2023) [Ireland: Toward a Unified Tertiary Education System](#), *International Higher Education*, 114: 5-7; Hazelkorn, E., Harkin, S. and Gibson, A. (2015) [From Massification to Globalisation: Reflections on the Transformation of Irish Higher Education](#) in Rafter, K. and O'Brien, M. (eds.) *The State in Transition*, Dublin: New Island.

## Legislative proposal

This section examines the provisions of the Bill.

### Principal provisions of the Bill

The Bill itself contains two sections.

#### Section 1 Amendment of section 7 of National Training Fund Act 2000

Section 1 provides for amendment of Section 7 of the 2000 Act<sup>27</sup> through the insertion of subsection 2B to make payments from the fund for:

- (a) the acquisition of lands, premises, furniture or equipment;
- (b) the upgrading, construction or reconstruction, including repair and maintenance, of premises.

These new areas of funding would still need to accord with the purposes outlined in the 2000 Act: (a) to raise the skills of those in employment, or (b) to provide training to those who wish to acquire skills for the purposes of taking up employment, or (c) to provide information in relation to existing, or likely future, requirements for skills in the economy.<sup>28</sup>

#### Section 2 Short title and commencement

Provides for the short title of the Act and commencement information (by the the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science).

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<sup>27</sup> *National Training Fund Act 2000, as amended*, Section 7.

<sup>28</sup> *National Training Fund Act 2000, as amended*, Section 7.

## Stakeholder perspectives

In the [Policy and Legislative Briefing Paper](#) (September 2025) for the General Scheme of the National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill, a number of issues were discussed relating to the implications of the legislative proposal, which are equally applicable to the Bill. These include:

- Origins and purpose of the NTF
- Perspectives/commentary on the NTF
- Developments in the funding of the tertiary education sector

It is not intended to repeat these issues in the Bill Digest, but further detail on each issue can be found in the [Policy and Legislative Briefing Paper](#) itself.

Overall, there appears to be general support amongst stakeholders for more effective use of the NTF and for the leveraging of the fund's surplus. However, there are differences in emphasis between education, enterprise, and other stakeholders on where those funds should be directed, such as for in-work/for-work skills development and training, or for wider tertiary education activities and core funding.<sup>29</sup>

The General Scheme of the National Training Fund (Amendment) Bill was not subject to Pre-Legislative Scrutiny (PLS). The Minister for FHERIS sought a waiver from PLS from the Joint Committee on Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to facilitate early passing of the legislation to release the Budget 2025 NTF funding package. The Committee received an informal briefing by Departmental officials in July 2025 and subsequently granted a PLS waiver.<sup>30</sup>

Notwithstanding the waiver of pre-legislative scrutiny by the relevant Committee, stakeholders' views were received as part of the DFHERIS' [Regulatory Impact Assessment \(RIA\)](#). The RIA, published by the DFHERIS in June 2025, detailed the Department's engagement with and/or submissions received from stakeholders, such as the National Skills

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<sup>29</sup> See a sample of commentary on the use of the NTF from a range of stakeholders: Ian Talbot, Chief Executive, Chambers Ireland (1 October 2025) [Opening Statement to the Oireachtas Committee on FHERIS](#); Meadhbh Costello, Senior Executive for Skills, Education and Innovation Policy, Ibec (1 October 2025) [Opening Statement to the Oireachtas Committee on FHERIS](#); Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association (ISME) (27 August 2025) [ISME - A big mistake to plunder the National Training Fund surplus to fund universities](#), *Press Release*; Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB) (28 February 2025) [Education & Training Boards call for accelerated release of National Training Fund to future-proof Ireland's workforce](#), *Press Release*; Irish Universities Association (IUA) (31 October 2024) [IUA calls for investment in future talent and innovation to be prioritised by political parties | Irish Universities Association](#), *Press Release*.

<sup>30</sup> Email communication to the L&RS from a member of the Committee secretariat, 21 July 2025.

Council, Chambers Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the HEA, and the Irish Universities Association (IUA).<sup>31</sup> Issues raised by various stakeholders during this consultation process included:<sup>32</sup>

- Support for additional NTF funding to bolster skills base and boost national competitiveness.
- Concerns about the potential significant draw on the NTF for upgrading and decarbonising works.
- The need for NTF-funded schemes to align with the Fund's core objectives. For the fund to prioritise training programmes that directly respond to labour market demands, such as digital skills, green skills, management skills, and employability skills.
- Need for investment in a broad range of training infrastructure (not just universities).
- Need for full transparency of NTF funding and for funding to university sector to be ring-fenced for enterprise upskilling.
- Increased tracking and reporting of the NTF's impact on raising the skills of those in employment and those taking up employment.
- Greater coordination with other skills and enterprise systems to avoid duplication and boost impact.
- Explore how NTF funding can be channelled through the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment and/or its agencies to support skills/talent development, and Research and Innovation supports.
- Potential to remove NTF expenditure from the 'Government expenditure' ceiling which would allow expenditure from NTF surpluses to be additional to existing expenditure ceilings.

The Department's **RIA** projects a number of likely benefits of enabling new forms of NTF funding, including provision of sustainable funding of the HE sector, expanding healthcare training capacity, ensuring universal access to tertiary education, and improving research infrastructure. More widely, the RIA anticipates NTF funding will provide for a highly skilled and adaptable workforce and more competitive economy, ameliorate barriers to attendance at tertiary level for socially excluded groups, and that upgrades to the tertiary estate will contribute to decarbonisation.

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<sup>31</sup> For details of all stakeholders see p.15 of the **Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)**.

<sup>32</sup> For list of issues documented by the DFHERIS see p.15-17 of the **RIA**.

## Conclusion

The National Training Fund is a significant funding mechanism focusing primarily on funding training for those seeking employment and upskilling for those already in work. In any expansion of the NTF there is a need to consider how the fund can best be used to meet the skills and education needs of the state, employers, employees, and citizens, and to ensure the fund is flexible and responsive to ever-changing labour market trends and economic conditions.