European Commission

Education and Training Monitor 2013

Ireland

Education and Training

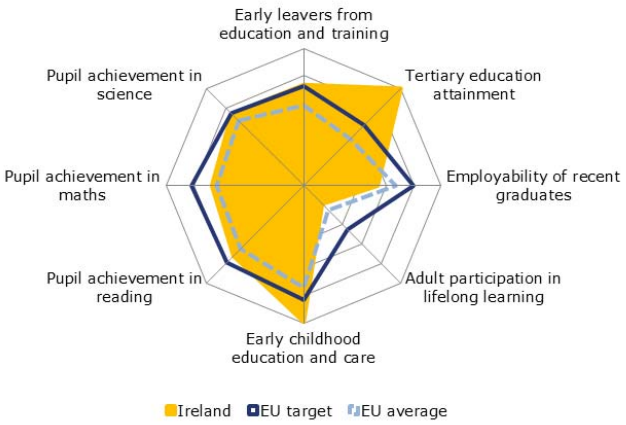
1. Key indicators and benchmarks

Europe 2020 headline targets			Ireland 2009	Ireland 2012	EU average 2009	EU average 2012	Europe 2020 target / Benchmark
1. Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)			11.6%	9.7%	14.2% EU28	12.7% EU28	**EU target: 10%** National target: 8%
2. Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)			48.9%	51.1%	32.1% EU28	35.7% EU28	**EU target: 40%** National target: 60%
ET 2020 Benchmarks							
3. Early childhood education and care (4 years old - year before start of compulsory primary)			72.8%	96.1% 11	91.7%	93.2% 11	**95%**
4. Basic skills Low achievers (15 year-olds; Level 1 or lower in PISA study)	Reading		17.2%	:	19.6%	:	**15%**
	Mathematics		20.8%	:	22.2%	:	**15%**
	Science		15.2%	:	17.7%	:	**15%**
5. Learning mobility	Initial vocational training (IVET)	**a.** Students participating in Leonardo da Vinci programs as a share of vocational students at ISCED 3	1.8%	0.5% 11	0.6%	0.7% 11	
	Higher Education	**b.** Erasmus inbound students as % of student population in host country		2.7% 11		1.1% 11	
		c. Inbound degree mobile students as % of student population in the host country		10.7% 11		7.0% 11	
6. Employment rate of graduates (age 20-34) having left education 1-3 years before reference year			75.5%	69.3%	78.3%	75.7%	**82%**
7. Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)			6.3%	7.1%	9.3%	9.0%	**15%**
Proposed ET 2020 benchmark							
8. Foreign languages skills	**a.** ISCED 2 students at proficiency level B1 or higher in first foreign language[1]		:	:	:	43.5% 11	
	b. ISCED 2 students learning two or more foreign languages		10.1%	10.2% 11	58.6%	60.8% 10	
Other ET 2020 Indicators							
9. Investment in education and training	**a.** General government expenditure on education (% of GDP)		5.9%	5.2% 11	5.5%	5.3% 11	
	b. Annual expenditure on public and private educational institutions per pupil/student in € PPS	ISCED 1-2	: 08	: 10	€ 5,732 08	€ 6,021 10	
		ISCED 3-4	: 08	: 10	€ 6,964 08	€ 7,123 10	
		ISCED 5-6	: 08	: 10	€ 9,309 08	€ 9,168 10	
10. Digital competences	**a.** Pupils in grade 4 (ISCED 1) using computers at school		:	69.8% 11	60.7% 07	64.7% 11	
	b. Individuals aged 16-74 with high computer skills[2]		22.0%	31.0%	25.0%	26.0%	
11. Entrepreneurial competences	Individuals aged 18-64 who believe to have the required skills and knowledge to start a business		:	45.0%	42.3% a	42.0% a	
12. Vocational education and training	Share of vocational students at ISCED 3		34.4%	34.0% 11	49.6%	50.3% 11	
13. Skills for future labour markets Projected change in employment 2010-2020 in %	High qualification		:	16.9%	:	19.1% EU28	
	Medium qualification		:	11.4%	:	4.6% EU28	
	Low qualification		:	-31.8%	:	-20.2% EU28	
14. Low-skilled adults	Literacy		:	17.4%	:	19.9% EU17	
	Numeracy		:	25.2%	:	23.6% EU17	
	Problem solving in technology rich environments[3]		:	27.3%	:	26.9% EU13	

Source: Cedefop: 13 / EAC: 10a,b / European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC): 8a / Eurostat (Government finance statistics): 9a / Eurostat (LFS): 1, 2, 6, 7 / Eurostat (ISS): 10b / Eurostat (UOE): 3, 8b, 9b, 10c, 12 / IEA TIMSS: 10a / Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: 11 / OECD (PIAAC): 14 / OECD (PISA): 4

Notes: 07 =2007, 08 =2008, 09 =2009, 10 =2010, 11 =2011, e= estimate, a= unweighted average b= break, p= provisional
Number of countries included in EU average: PISA=25, Entrepreneurship=18, Language skills=13, ICT/Computers at school=13, others: EU27
[1]= average of skills tested in reading, listening, writing, [2]= having carried out 5-6 specific computer related activities, [3]= Results cover people with scores below level 1 as well as people who have no computer experience or failed the ICT test

Figure 1. Position in relation to highest (outer ring) and lowest performers (centre)



Source: DG EAC calculations on the basis of data from Eurostat (LFS 2012 and UOE 2011) and OECD (PISA 2009). *Note:* all scores are set between a maximum (the highest performers visualised by the outer ring) and a minimum (the lowest performers visualised by the centre of the chart).

2. Main challenges

Ireland faces a relatively high level of unemployment, particularly among 15-24 year olds with an education level corresponding to the end of the primary cycle (lower secondary). The recent economic crisis has had a strong negative impact on the employment rate of those graduating at all levels.

While participation rates are showing modest all-round increases, school outcomes and educational achievements have deteriorated, particularly in reading and mathematics. With a rate of around 20% of low achievers in mathematics in Ireland, the education system is apparently having difficulty in equipping all young people with the skills they need to succeed in the labour market.

Ireland will experience in the future a significant need for both learning provision and educational infrastructure, due to the increasing demographic trends, as enrolment figures are expected to continue to rise over the medium term at all levels of education. Finally, the impact of the current economic down-turn and the savings made in the education sector will have to be further monitored.

3. Investing in skills and qualifications

Investing in education and training in a context of economic crisis

General government expenditure on education as a share of GDP in Ireland is in line with the EU average (5.2% vs. 5.3% in 2011), but it has significantly decreased from 5.9% in 2009. This decrease also needs to be seen in the context of the severe recession since 2008 which in Ireland led to shrinking GDP growth rates up till 2010.[1]

Skills

Given the deterioration of the performance of Ireland in the area of educational achievement (PISA 2006 and 2009), the Irish government has adopted in July 2011 the 'Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life Strategy' (2011-20). Its aim is to ensure that every child leaving school masters the necessary reading and mathematical skills. It also sets out a programme of reforms in initial teacher education and professional development. It is estimated that the cost of implementation of the actions of this strategy will be €6 million in 2012, rising to €19 million per annum by 2017. In addition a new mathematics curriculum at second level was adopted following extensive research and consultation and was fully rolled out to schools in September 2012. It was supported by a multi-million euro investment in professional development for all mathematics teachers.

In practical terms Ireland tackles the issue of educational inclusion primarily through a targeted approach called the 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS). This national action plan launched in 2005 fosters educational inclusion at both primary and secondary school levels, especially in disadvantaged communities. The plan comprises a standardised system for identifying and regularly reviewing the levels of disadvantage. It includes a general 'School Support Programme' for priority intervention in difficult geographical areas, as well as a number of thematic sub-programmes, such as 'Ready, Set, Go – Maths', 'Reading Recovery' and 'Maths Recovery' actions. There are currently 670 primary schools and 195 post-primary schools in Ireland receiving

[1] Expenditure on education (public and private combined) in 2010 was 6.4% of GDP (up from 6.3% in 2009 and 5.6 % in 2008).

assistance under the School Support Plan within the context of the DEIS programme, which has an overall budget of €158 million in 2012.

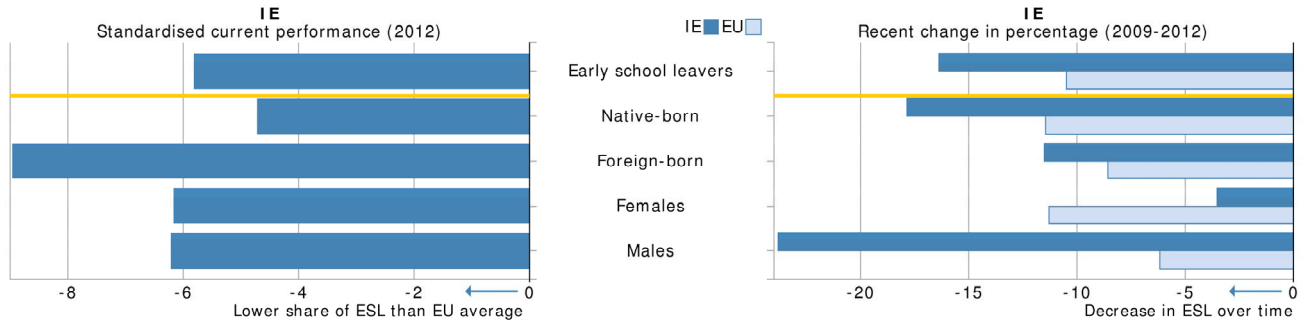
At 31% in 2012, Ireland has an above-average share of individuals aged 16-74 with high computer skills which is consistent with the advanced rate of access to ICT. The process of high speed broadband roll out is ongoing with a further 234 schools expected to be connected by 2014. All second-level schools will receive high-speed broadband at no cost to themselves by September 2014. Ireland is also above the EU average as regards entrepreneurship competences. The average level of foreign languages learnt per pupil at ISCED level 2 in Ireland is the lowest in the EU, but most students to take Irish at primary and secondary level.

Ireland has implemented a comprehensive and learning outcomes based framework of qualifications (NFQ). The 10 levels of the framework capture all learning, from initial stages to the most advanced. The majority of current and legacy national awards are now included in the NFQ, including those made by the State Examinations Commission, Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), Higher Education and Training Award Council (HETAC), the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

4. Tackling early school leaving and raising the bar in school education

The early school leaving rate dropped to 9.7% in 2012 from 11.6% in 2009. Ireland performs better than the EU average on the early school leaving rate (9.7% vs. 12.7% in 2012) and is quite close to its 2020 national target (8%).

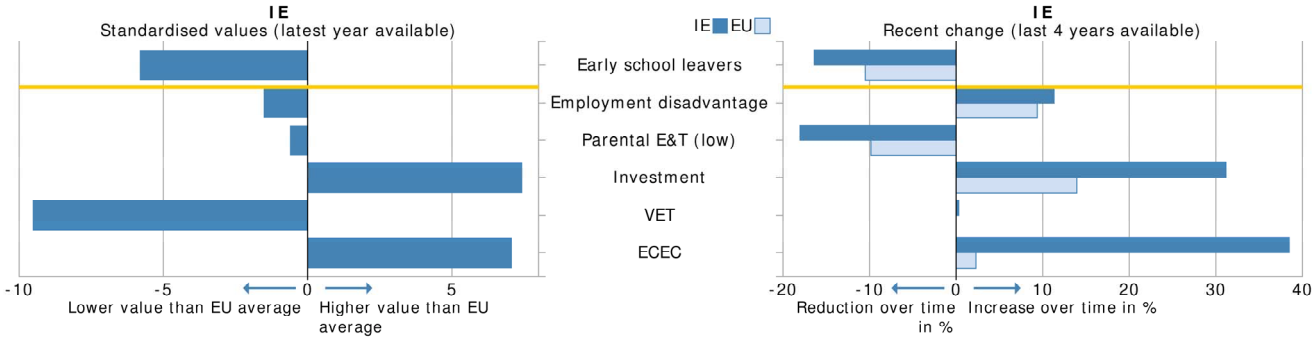
Figure 2. Early leavers from education and training: sub-groups



Source: JRC-CRELL. *Note:* ESL = early school leaving. See Annex 2 for further information.

The sub-indicators confirm the good performance on early school leavers despite the small (but increasing) employment disadvantage. The level of investment is strong and increasing as well as early childhood education and care. Options on vocational education and training are very limited and not changing.

Figure 3. Early leavers from education and training: sub-indicators



Source: JRC-CRELL. *Note:* see Annex 2 for an explanation of the sub-indicators.

Ireland's 'Back to Education Initiative' (BTEI) for those wishing to re-enter the education system, has proven to be a useful national programme and received co-funding from the ESF. Ireland has also decided to invest early on in education to prevent early school leaving at a later stage, notably through the Universal Free Preschool Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme. The Scheme was introduced in 2010 and is being administered by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Under the scheme, all children aged between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 7 months in September of the relevant year are entitled to a free pre-school year of appropriate programme-based activities in the year prior to starting primary school.

While participation is voluntary, 96.1% of eligible children were enrolled in pre-school services for the 2011/12 school year which is a considerable increase from 72.8% in 2009 which was before the scheme was introduced. In 2012 this initiative had an annual budget of €175 million. The support is provided through capitation

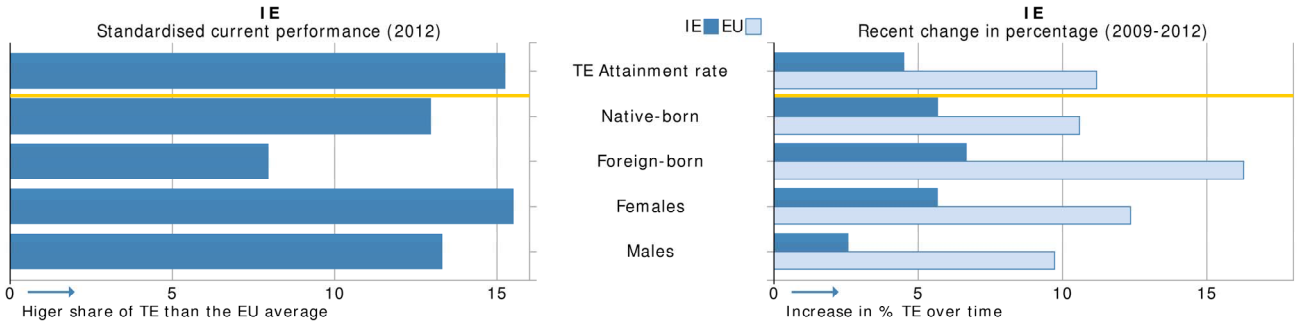
payments paid to services in advance of each school term. The Early Start Programme is a pre-primary initiative in designated areas of disadvantage. The programme aims to provide children who are most at risk of educational exclusion with an educational programme that will enhance their personal development and prevent failure at school.

Ireland will experience in the future a significant need for both learning provision and educational infrastructure; since with the strongly increasing demographics, enrolment figures are expected to continue to rise over the medium term at all levels of education. The School Building programme for 2013 will see work begin on 50 projects for new schools and major extensions. This will bring the number of planned major school projects on site in 2013 to 113 as part of an overall capital expenditure on schools of almost €370 million.

5. Encouraging participation in tertiary education and modernising higher education

The tertiary attainment rate increased to 51.1% in 2012 from 49.7% a year earlier. Ireland set an ambitious national target for 2020 (60%) and currently has the highest tertiary attainment rate in the whole of the EU. Improving access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds can contribute to further increasing the tertiary participation rate.

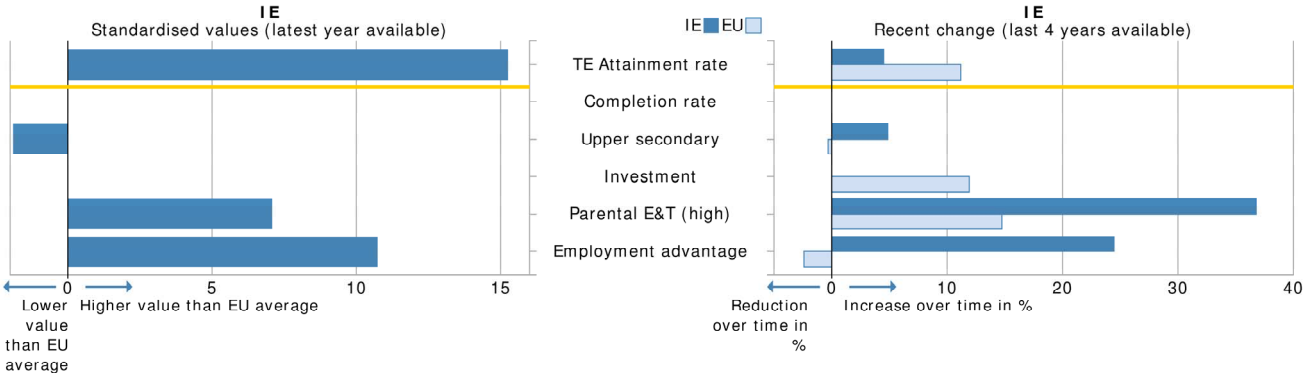
Figure 4. Tertiary education attainment: sub-groups



Source: JRC-CRELL. *Note:* TE = tertiary education. See Annex 2 for further information.

Sub-indicators show a very solid performance with pronounced (and strongly increasing) employment advantage.

Figure 5. Tertiary education attainment: sub-indicators



Source: JRC-CRELL. *Note:* see Annex 2 for an explanation of the sub-indicators.

Ireland's higher education sector is currently undergoing reforms in line with the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030. The aims of the reforms are to have a more flexible system with a greater choice of provision and modes of learning for an increasingly diverse cohort of students. Improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and the relevance of learning outcomes as well as ensuring that higher education connects more effectively with wider social, economic and enterprise needs are also sought.

6. Facilitating the transition from education to work and reshaping vocational training

Ireland has a high unemployment rate of 15-24 year olds with an education level corresponding to the end of the primary cycle (lower secondary) with almost 50% in 2011. Worryingly the employment rate of graduates decreased by almost 20 percentage points since 2006 and is below the EU average (69.3% vs. 75.7% in 2011).

Ireland is pursuing the implementation of the 'Youthreach' initiative. It targets young people aged 15-20 who have dropped out of school without any qualifications or vocational training. It integrates elements of education, training and work experience. In 2010, 2.385 'Youthreach' learners achieved certification and of those completing, 15% progressed to employment, while 52% progressed to further education and training. This initiative is significantly co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), i.e. it has received in 2012 an additional financing of €25 million from the ESF within the context of the Youth Opportunities Initiative.

The VET system is set in the context of the Government's National Development Plan (NDP) for 2007-2013, which emphasizes the needs for consistency with the European VET and social policy. Reforms to the vocational education and training system are on-going, including the creation of Education and Training Boards. There is a need to increase and diversify apprenticeships which were largely concentrated in the construction sector and due to the economic crisis have declined dramatically. A wide-ranging review of apprenticeships in Ireland has been announced with the objective to align apprenticeship training in Ireland with a greater focus on work-based learning and the current needs of the Irish labour market.

7. Upgrading skills through lifelong learning

The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC[2]) shows that adults (aged 16-65) in Ireland perform around the EU average in literacy, but score below the EU average in numeracy. The share of the population with low skills (at most level 1) in numeracy is 23%, slightly above the EU average of 20%. This holds also true for young people (aged 16-24): 22% of them have low numeracy skills, compared to an EU average of 19%. Young adults (16-24) with at most lower or upper secondary education also have lower scores than the EU average.

Despite gradual improvement, participation of adults in lifelong learning remains lower than the EU average (7.1% vs. 9.0% in 2012)[3]. The development of new training opportunities, in particular the up-skilling of the work force and of the unemployed as well as re-entry into education, is essential to ensure that long-term-unemployed jobseekers do not become permanently excluded from work.

The new further education and training authority *Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanunaigh agus Scileanna* (SOLAS) has been set up with the mandate to ensure the provision of high-quality further education and training programmes to jobseekers and other learners.

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that two thirds of enterprises offer continuing vocational training courses, which is in line with the EU average (67 vs. 66%), and the participation of employees in these activities is higher than the EU average (60% vs. 48%)[4].

[2] Volume I of the Education and Training Monitor (chapter 6) provides an overview of the results of the survey. Skills levels are presented either in terms of average score points or proportion of adults at a given proficiency level in literacy or numeracy (level 1 to 5) or problem solving in technology-rich (ICT) environments (level 1 to 3 or no ICT experience).

[3] Eurostat, LFS 2012

[4] Eurostat, CVTS 2010