



Lifelong Learning Participation Among Adults In Ireland

Introduction

This paper is the second in a series aimed at monitoring Ireland's progress in increasing lifelong learning participation rates amongst adults (*see page 6 for a definition of lifelong learning and its components, formal and non-formal learning*). The National Skills Strategy (published in January 2016) highlights the importance of lifelong learning and outlines a number of actions aimed at promoting and supporting participation, particularly amongst people in employment.

Ireland's lifelong learning rate, at 7.2% in quarter 4 2015, is less than half the benchmark set by the EU under its Education & Training framework (ET 2020), which aims to have 15% of adults aged 25-64 engaging in lifelong learning by 2020¹.

In this paper, two data sources are used. First, results from the CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) are used to estimate the extent of lifelong learning participation and to provide a profile of lifelong learning participants in Ireland. Secondly, data from the EU's statistical agency, Eurostat, is used to show how Ireland compares internationally in terms of lifelong learning participation rates. It is important to note that the two data sets are not directly comparable as the QNHS data is a quarterly figure based on quarter 4 2015, while the Eurostat figure is an annual average with the latest available at the time of writing being 2014.

Overview

- Of the almost 2.5 million adults aged 25-64 in Ireland in quarter 4 2015,
 - **177,300 were lifelong learning participants, giving a lifelong learning participation rate of 7.2 %**
 - there were 116,700 participants in formal learning activities, giving a formal learning participation rate of 4.7%
 - there were 64,900 persons in non-formal learning activities, giving a non-formal learning rate of 2.6%
(note: a small number of adults participated in both formal and non-formal learning and therefore the total number of lifelong learning participants is less than the sum of the number of formal and non-formal learning)
- Lifelong learning participation **rates tended to decline with age but increase with greater educational attainment**
- At 6.7% in 2014, Ireland ranked well below the EU average (10.7%) in terms of its share of adults engaging in lifelong learning activities. The gap is particularly large, with a difference of over five percentage points, for
 - non-formal learning (2.4% for Ireland compared to 8.1% for the EU 28 average)
 - the employed (5.5% for Ireland compared to 11.6% for the EU 28 average)
 - third level graduates (9.8% for Ireland compared to 18.8% for the EU 28 average)
 - the younger age cohorts (11.5% for Ireland compared to 17% for the EU 28 average)
- However, Ireland ranked above the EU 28 average in respect of participation
 - in formal learning activities (4.4% for Ireland compared to 3.2% for the EU 28 average)
 - by those who are economically inactive (10.1% for Ireland compared to 8% for the EU 28 average)
- While the EU 28, on average, is making progress in increasing LLL participation, if previous trends continue, this progress will be too slow to reach the 15% target by 2020
- Ireland's National Skills Strategy, if implemented, is expected to impact positively on lifelong learning participation. Therefore, while progress toward the EU target to date has been slow, interventions, such as those outlined in the National Skills Strategy, particularly in relation to work place training, will facilitate an increase in Ireland's lifelong learning rate.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm

² http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Lifelong_learning_statistics

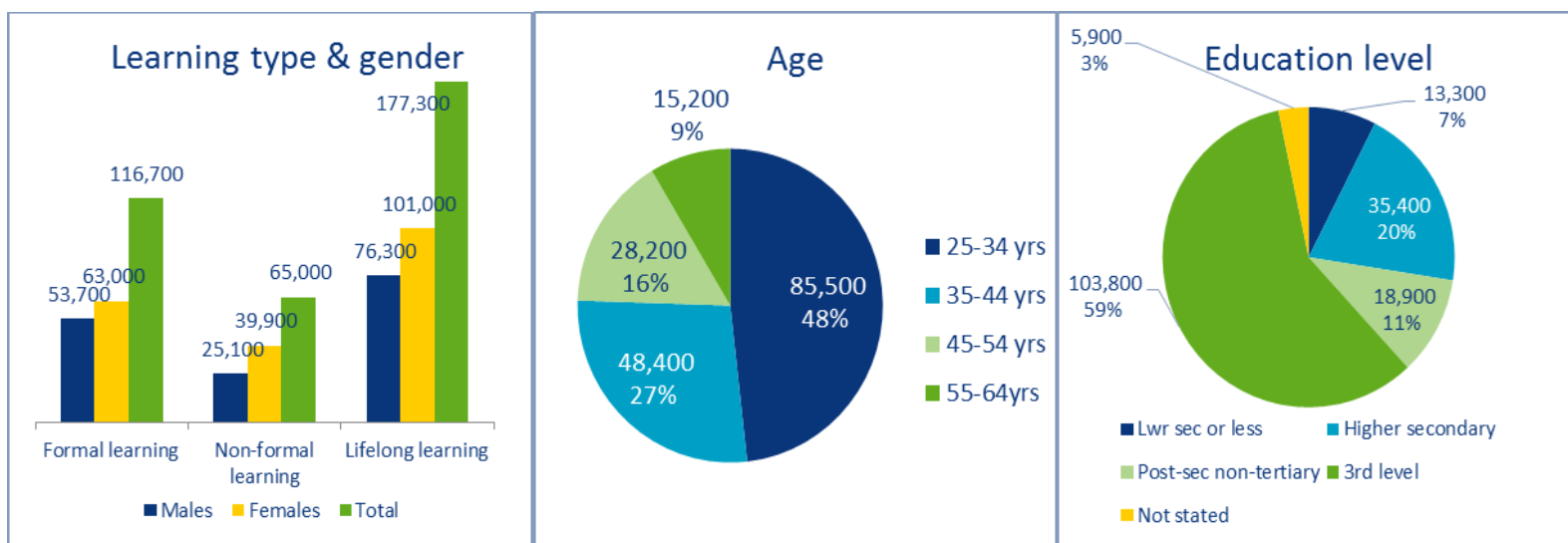


1.1 Lifelong learning in Ireland – how many participants? (quarter 4 2015)

Key facts and figures: lifelong learning participants in quarter 4 2015

- Type:** there were **177,300 lifelong learning (LLL) participants in quarter 2015**. Of these 116,700 had participated in formal learning activities and 64,900 in non-formal learning activities³. There were more female participants than males, due primarily to higher numbers of females participating in non-formal learning (males and females participated in formal learning in almost similar numbers)
- Age:** LLL participants were in the younger age cohorts with **almost one half being aged less than 35 years**
- Education:** most (59%) **were third level graduates**; undergraduates accounted for 48% of all LLLs; postgraduates for 11%

Figure 1. Number of lifelong learning (LLL) participants by type, gender, age, and education level, in quarter 4 2015



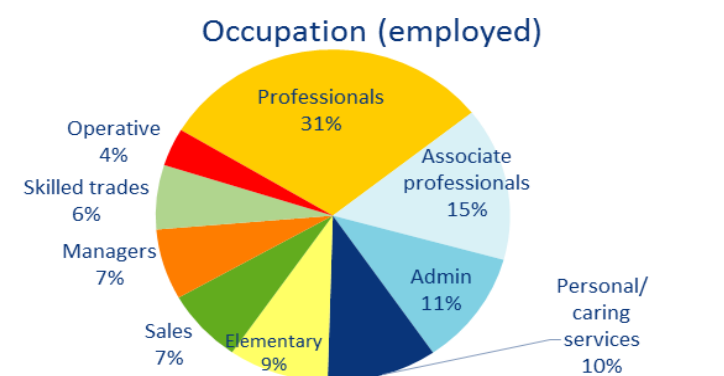
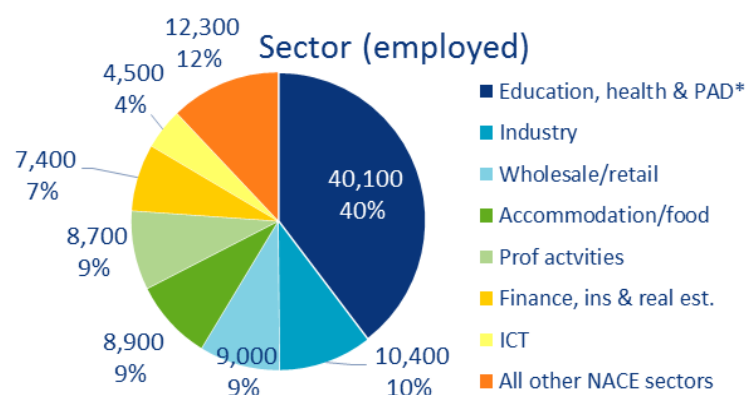
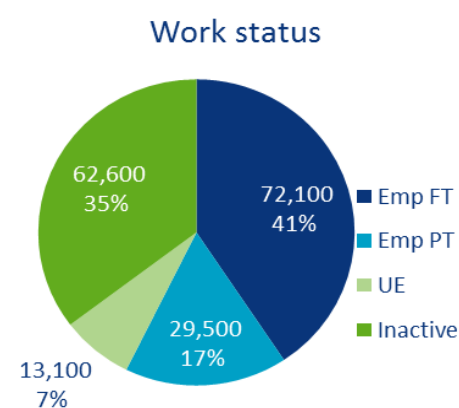
Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (QNHS) data

*PAD = public admin/defence; see page 6 for further details on public sector category

Figure 2. Number of lifelong learning (LLL) participants by work status, sector and occupation in quarter 4 2015

Key facts and figures: participants by work status, sector and occupation in quarter 4 2015

- Work status:** most LLL participants were in either full- or part-time employment; full-time employed learners were made up of males and females in similar numbers; but almost two thirds of part-time employed learners were female.
- Of the 101,600 employed, over a third worked in the public sector (public admin/defence, education and health) and approximately a half were in high skilled occupations (i.e. managers, professionals or associate professionals).



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (QNHS) data

*PAD = public admin/defence; see page 6 for further details on public sector category

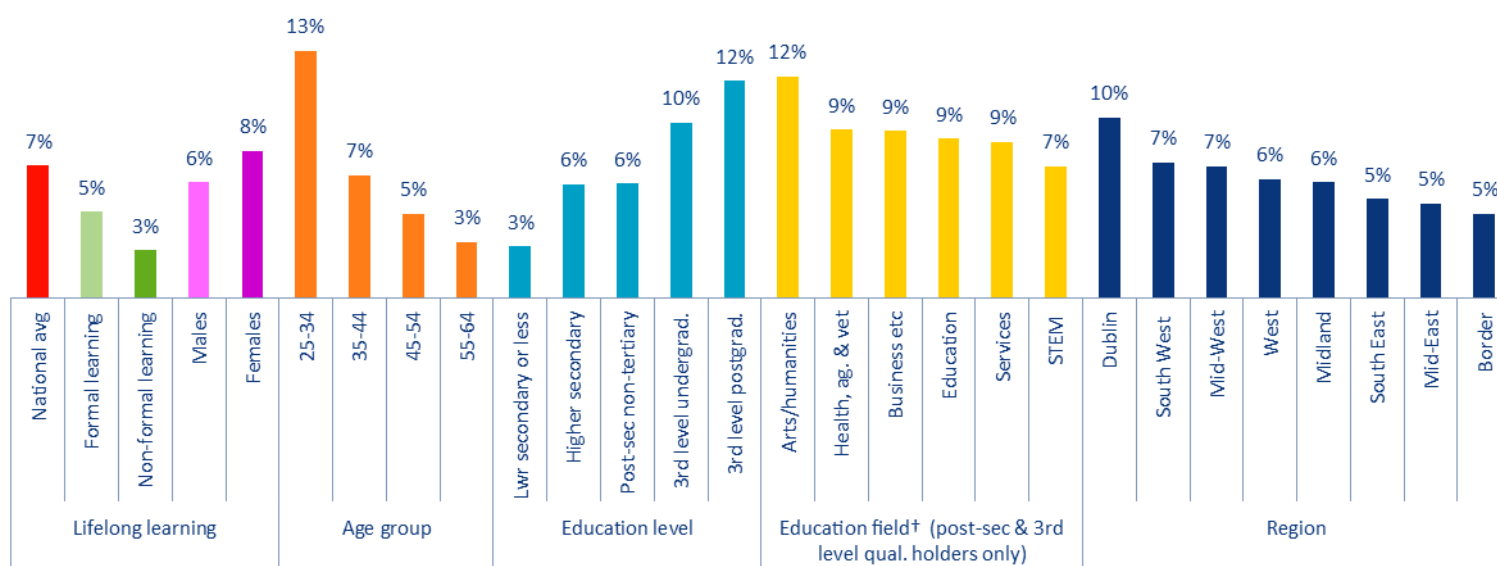


1.2 Who is most likely to participate in lifelong learning activities?

Key facts and figures: lifelong learning participation rates in quarter 4 2015

- In quarter 4 2015, Ireland's **lifelong learning participation rate was 7.2%**; the formal learning participation rate was 4.7%, compared to 2.6% for non-formal learning.
- Gender:**
 - With a participation rate of 8%, females were more likely than males (6.3%) to participate in lifelong learning;
 - the gender gap was narrower for formal learning participation where the difference between males and females was less than one percentage point (4.4% for males compared to 5% for females)
- Age and education:** lifelong learning participation rates tend to decline with age but rise with greater educational attainment levels; for those with qualifications at post Leaving Cert and third level (approx. 100,300 persons), arts/humanities graduates were most likely to participate in lifelong learning (refers to field of highest level of education attained).

Figure 3. Lifelong learning participation rates by gender, age, education level & field and region in quarter 4 2015



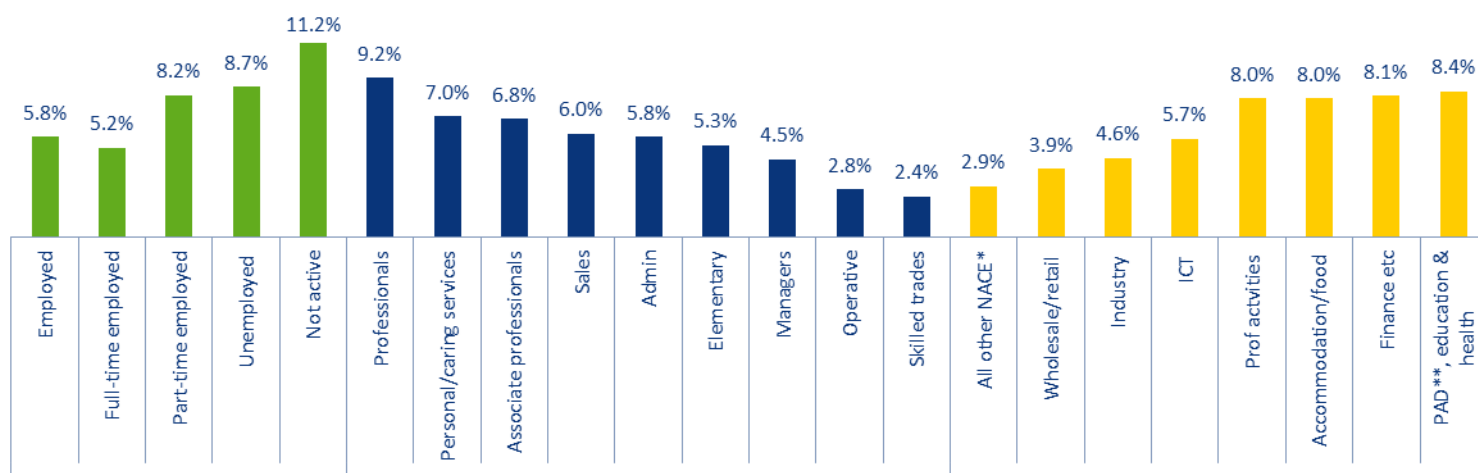
† Note field of learning refers to the field of a person's highest level of education

Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (QNHS data)

Key facts and figures: participation rates by work status, sector and occupation in quarter 4 2015

- Work status:** lifelong learning participation rates were above average for the economically inactive and the unemployed; while the rate was below average for the employed, this was due to a particularly low participation rate amongst the full-time employed of 5.2%.
- For those in employment,** those most likely to participate in lifelong learning were those working in professional and personal services occupations. In terms of sector, the highest rates were amongst the public sector (PAD, education and health), the financial sector, accommodation/food services, and professional activities.

Figure 4. Lifelong learning participation rates by work status, sector and occupation (for the employed) in quarter 4 2015



*The 'All other NACE' category includes agriculture, construction, admin & support, and transport; **PAD – public administration & defence

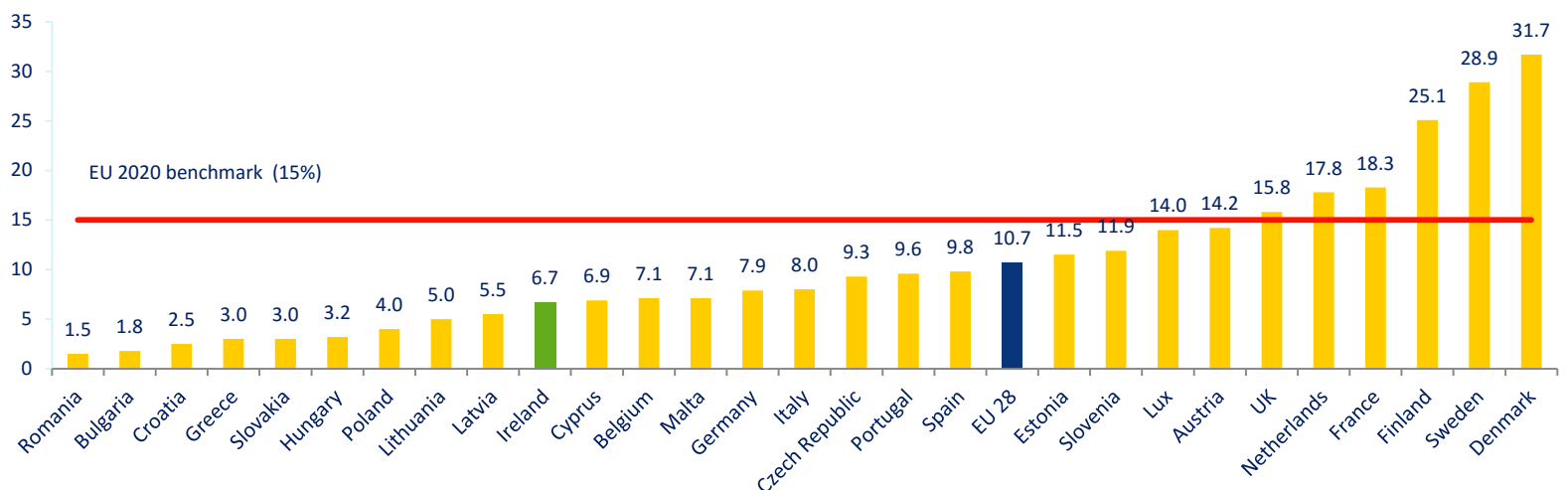
Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (QNHS data)

2.1 Lifelong learning participation in the EU and Ireland, 2014

Key points

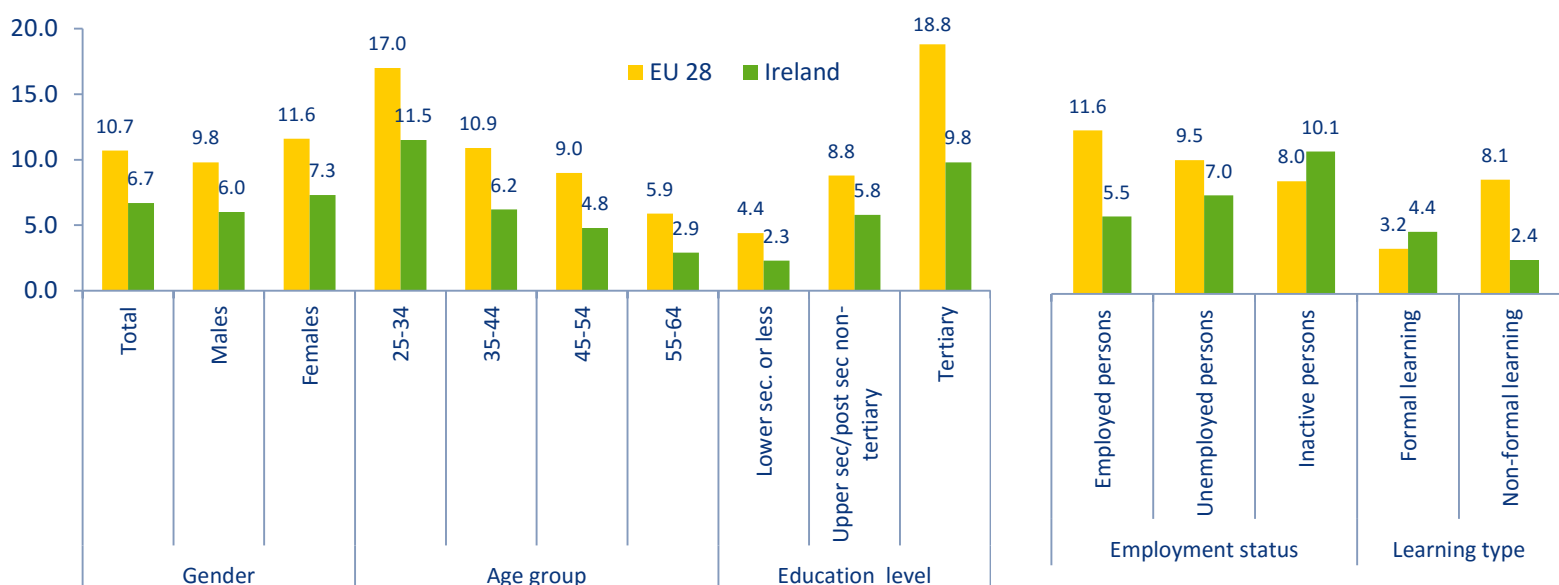
- Eurostat data shows that in 2014, six countries had already reached the EU 2020 benchmark of 15% (Figure 5)
- Across the EU 28 countries, on average, factors including age, education level and, to a lesser extent, gender, affected lifelong learning participation rates (Figure 6); this pattern was also observed across most individual member states
- With a rate of 6.7% in 2014, Ireland lagged considerably behind the EU 28 average of 10.7% (Figure 5), regardless of gender, age and education level (Figure 6)
- Participation rates in Ireland were above the EU 28 average for
 - **the economically inactive:** in Ireland, the economically inactive were most likely to participate in lifelong learning activities (10.1% for Ireland compared to 8% for the EU 28); in contrast, across the EU 28, the highest participation rates was observed for the employed. Ireland ranked 6th highest in the EU for lifelong learning amongst the economically inactive
 - **formal learning activities:** the likelihood of participating in formal learning activities in Ireland was above the EU 28 average (4.4% for Ireland compared to 3.2% for the EU 28). In contrast, however, Ireland's participation rate in non-formal learning was considerably lower than the EU average; Ireland was one of only four EU 28 countries where the participation rate for non-formal learning was lower than that of formal learning. Some countries (France, Finland, Denmark and Sweden) reached or exceeded 15% through participation in non-formal learning activities alone.

Figure 5. LLL participation rates for selected EU countries (adults aged 25-64 years), 2014



Source: Eurostat (January 2016)

Figure 6. LLL participation rates for Ireland and EU 28 average by gender, age, education level, employment status and learning type, 2014



Source: Eurostat (January 2016)

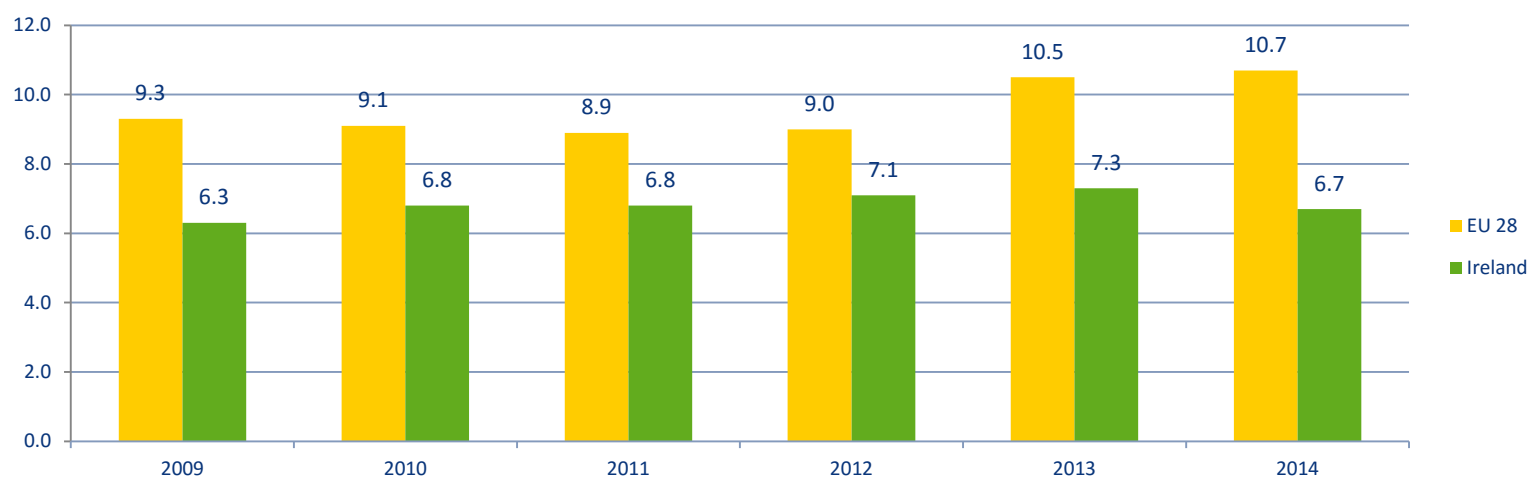


2.2 Lifelong learning participation in 2009 and 2014

Key points: participation rates, 2009 and 2014

- While the EU 28 lifelong learning participation rates increased, in the main, between 2009 and 2014, the participation rate for Ireland remained almost unchanged, with the 2014 rate being less than half a percentage point higher than that of 2009
- Furthermore, the gap between the EU 28 average and Ireland widened over the period 2009-2014, with a three percentage point gap in 2009 growing to a four percentage point gap in 2014, despite fluctuations in the intervening years.

Figure 7. LLL participation rates for the EU 28 average (adults aged 25-64 years), 2014

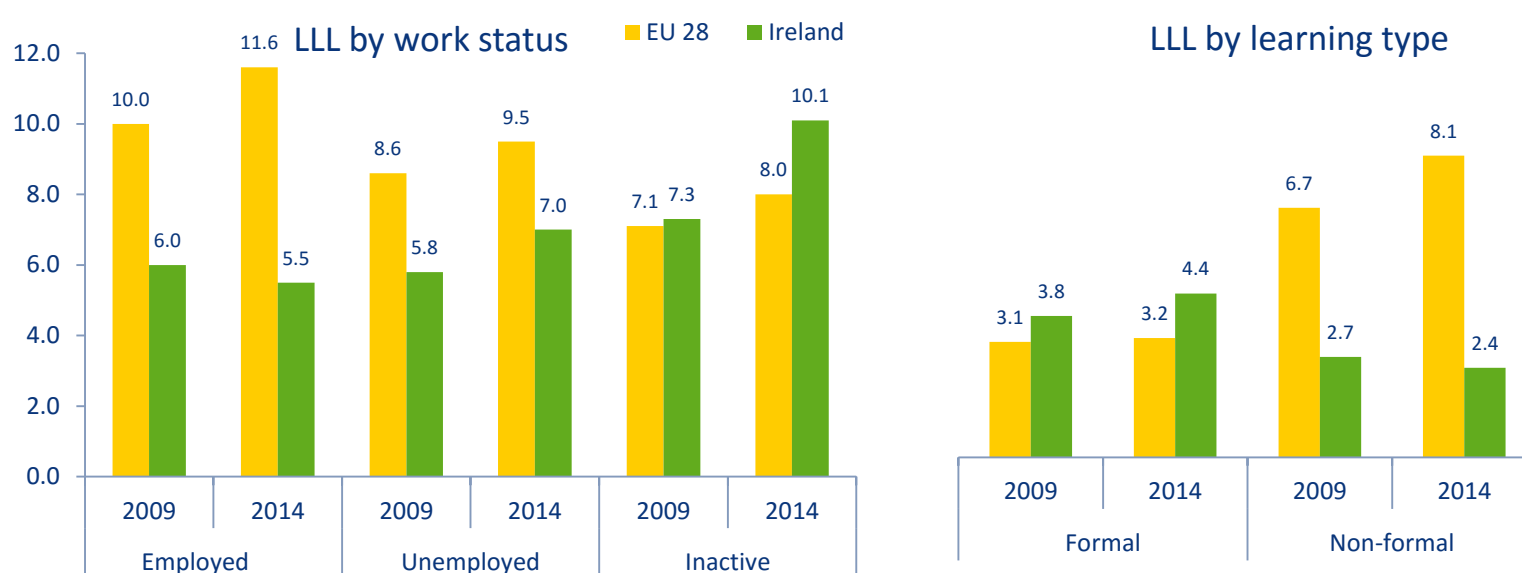


Source: Eurostat (January 2016)

Key points: work status and learning type 2009 and 2014

- Work status:** the EU 28 average participation rate increased across all work status categories between 2009-2014; however, in Ireland while the participation rate increased for the unemployed and the economically inactive, the participation rate amongst the employed actually declined
- Formal learning:** over the period 2009-2014, participation in formal learning activities in Ireland increased but remained static for the EU 28 average; in contrast, the non-formal learning participation rate declined slightly in Ireland but increased across the EU 28 average.

Figure 8. LLL participation rates for Ireland and EU 28 average by work status and learning type, 2014



Source: Eurostat (January 2016)

3. Conclusion

- While there has been some growth in Ireland's lifelong learning rate since 2009, the gains, when they occurred, have been small, with the gap between Ireland and the EU 28 average actually widening between 2009 and 2014. If past trends continue, and assuming no policy intervention in the intervening years, **it is unlikely that Ireland and the EU 28 countries on average will meet the EU benchmark** for lifelong learning participation of 15% by 2020
- Challenges, which are not unique to Ireland, include improving participation rates among those with lower education attainment and older age groups. Specific challenges for Ireland include the fact that
 - **Ireland's workforce lags behind that of most EU countries in the extent to which it engages in lifelong learning activities**, ranking 20th out of 28 countries for participation by the employed. In most other EU countries, lifelong learning participation rates are higher for the employed than for the population overall, indicating that participation amongst the employed (especially in non-formal learning) is often a key driver of lifelong learning participation.

Therefore learning opportunities for those in the workplace need to be expanded and to occur on a more frequent basis throughout workers' careers. This is particularly relevant within the framework of Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 (published January 2016) where one of the key actions (Action 4.1) aims is to promote the benefits of lifelong learning among individuals, the self-employed and employers. The Strategy recognises the role of increasing participation in lifelong learning in ensuring Ireland has a flexible, skilled workforce, where individuals (including low-skilled and older workers) can gain the skills to move between jobs and careers throughout their working lives.

- **Ireland's participation rate in non-formal learning is particularly low**, while its rate of formal learning is the sixth highest in the EU. However, in most other EU countries, lifelong learning rates are driven by participation in non-formal learning activities. It is worth noting that even short courses (e.g. seminar participation, courses not leading to certification, and classes in letter writing or driving) are classified as non-formal learning. Therefore, while Ireland has an above average participation rate for formal learning, which possibly requires a greater investment in terms of money and time, **the greatest progress towards improving the lifelong learning rate could be expected to come from expanding opportunities for non-formal learning, especially in the workplace**. This is also important in the context of the EU's Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, which recognises, *inter alia*, the need for individuals to acquire and update workplace skills and for economies to be able to match skills supply and demand as they evolve.

Definitions

Throughout this paper, the terms lifelong learning, formal learning, non-formal learning are used according to Eurostat (and Labour Force Survey) definitions²:

- Lifelong learning: comprises formal, non-formal and informal education and training; however, statistics presented in the QNHS and Eurostat data do not cover informal learning and the data in this paper refers to the individuals aged 25-64 years who had engaged in formal and non-formal learning activities only.
- Formal education corresponds to education and training in the regular system of schools, universities, colleges and other formal educational institutions that normally constitute a continuous 'ladder' of full-time education for children and young people.
- Non-formal education and training is defined as any organised and sustained educational activities that do not correspond to the definition of formal education. It may or may not take place in educational institutions and cater to persons of all ages. It may cover educational programmes to impart adult literacy, basic education for out-of-school children, life skills, work skills, and general culture. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Lifelong_learning_statistics

The data from the QNHS and Eurostat, while both are derived from the same survey data, are not entirely comparable as the QNHS is a quarterly figure whereas the Eurostat figure is an annual average.

In this paper, **the public sector** comprises public administration and defence (PAD), education and health/welfare; while there are some non-publicly funded segments in the education and health sectors, they remain relatively small and have been therefore included in the data.

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