

# Lifelong Learning among Adults in Ireland

## Quarter 4 2014

April 2015

### Introduction

One of the EU education and training benchmarks aims for **15% of 25-64 year-olds to participate in lifelong learning by 2020**. This paper is the first in a series which aims to monitor Ireland's progress towards this target by examining the number and share of persons aged 25-64 years who had engaged in lifelong learning activities.

The analysis is based on the latest available data from the CSO's National Quarterly Household Survey (QNHS) results. It covers the number of respondents who stated they had engaged in formal and/or non-formal learning activities, and by derivation, lifelong learning in the four weeks prior to the survey. Definitions of lifelong learning, formal learning and non-formal learning are included in the Notes and definitions section (page 6).

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### Overview

- In quarter 4 2014,
  - of the 2.48 million adults aged between 25 and 64 years in the population, almost **181,000 persons had engaged in lifelong learning activities** in the preceding four weeks
  - the **lifelong learning participation rate was 7.3%**
  - most lifelong learning participants had engaged in **formal learning activities** (almost 119,000); 64,800 had engaged in **non-formal learning\***
- Lifelong learning participation tends to decline with age
- The higher the education attainment level, the more likely adults are to participate in lifelong learning.

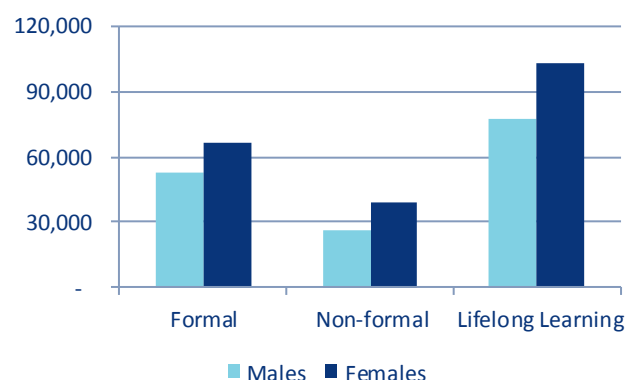
\*Some learners had engaged in both formal and non-formal learning; therefore the total number of lifelong learning participants is smaller than the sum of formal and non-formal learning participants.

# Profile of lifelong learning participants: who are they?

## Over a half are female

- **57% of all lifelong learning participants are female**, amounting to 103,300 persons in q4 2014
- This pattern holds for formal and non-formal learning, where females make up 66,200 (56%) and 38,700 (60%) of all participants respectively
- Most lifelong learning participants had undertaken formal learning activities (almost 119,000 persons).

Formal, non-formal & lifelong learning participants by gender, q4 2014

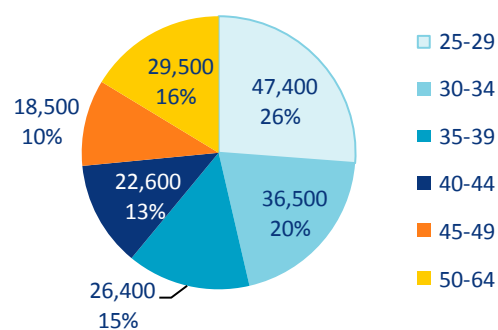


Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO QNHS data

## A quarter are aged under 30

- **26% are aged between 25 and 29 years**; however, the age profile is younger for formal learning participants: 35% of formal learners are aged under 30 years and a further 23% are aged between 30 and 39 years. In contrast, over one half of all non-formal learners are 40 years or older.

Lifelong learning participants by age, q4 2014

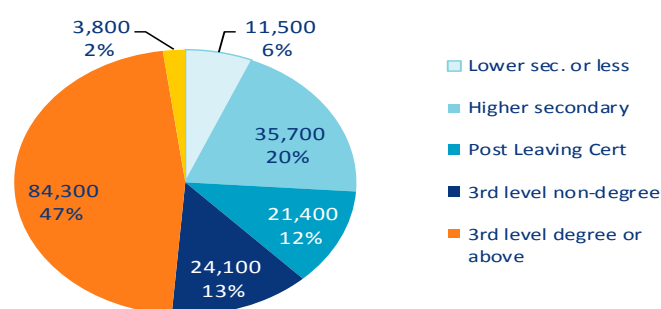


Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO QNHS data

## They are well educated

- **60% (108,400) are third level graduates**; of these, the vast majority (84,300) are degree holders (ord/hons degree or postgraduate qualifications); over 24,100 hold higher education qualifications at sub-degree level
- **12% (21,400) hold qualifications at post Leaving Cert level** (e.g. further education and training qualifications at levels NFQ 5-6).

Lifelong learning participants by highest education attained, q4 2014



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO QNHS data

## Over a half are working .....

- 57% (almost 103,700 persons) are in employment (mostly in full-time employment)
- 45% (49,200 persons) of employed lifelong learning participants **work in high skilled occupations** (professional/associate professional, especially in education, health and business occupations)
- Sector: the highest shares of employed lifelong learning participants **work in health/welfare** (21%) and **education** (15%) followed by industry (9%) and finance (7%)
- At almost 28,000 persons, the highest number of employed lifelong learning participants\* work in micro or small enterprises outside of the public sector (< 50 employees; see page 6 for further details), compared to 12,000 persons each in medium and large enterprises

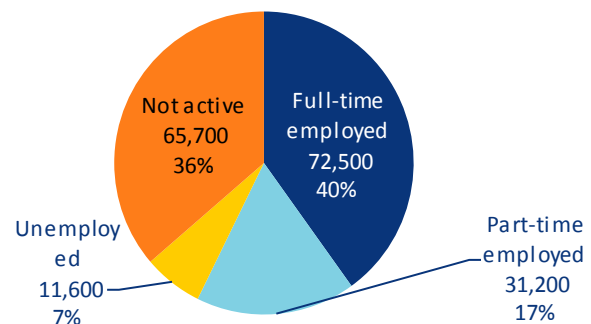
\* Excludes those who did not state a firm size, most of whom are self-employed without employees.

- At 7,600, the number of part-time employed males who are lifelong learning participants is less than a third that of part-time employed females (over 23,600 females).

## ... .. although many are not

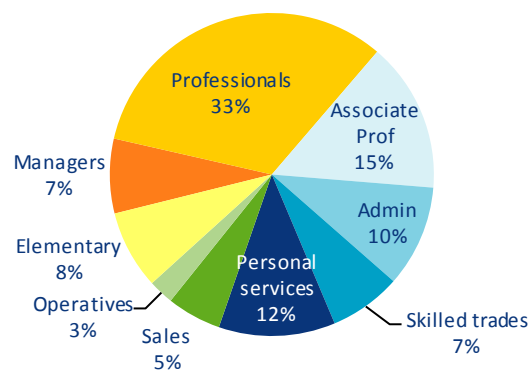
- Approximately 11,600 are unemployed, with almost similar numbers of males and females
- More than a third (65,700 persons) are **not economically active**; of these 70% were students
- 80% of male lifelong learning participants who were economically inactive were students, compared to 62% of females.

Lifelong learning participants by employment status, q4 2014



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO QNHS data

Employed participants by occupation, q4 2014



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO QNHS data

## They are in 3<sup>rd</sup> level or post-second level education

- Of those engaged in **formal learning activities**, the highest numbers are engaged in third level studies (81,500, or 69% of the formal learning total), with a further 21,900 at post Leaving Cert level (14%). Most of the remainder did not state a level.

## .... .. and study social science business & law

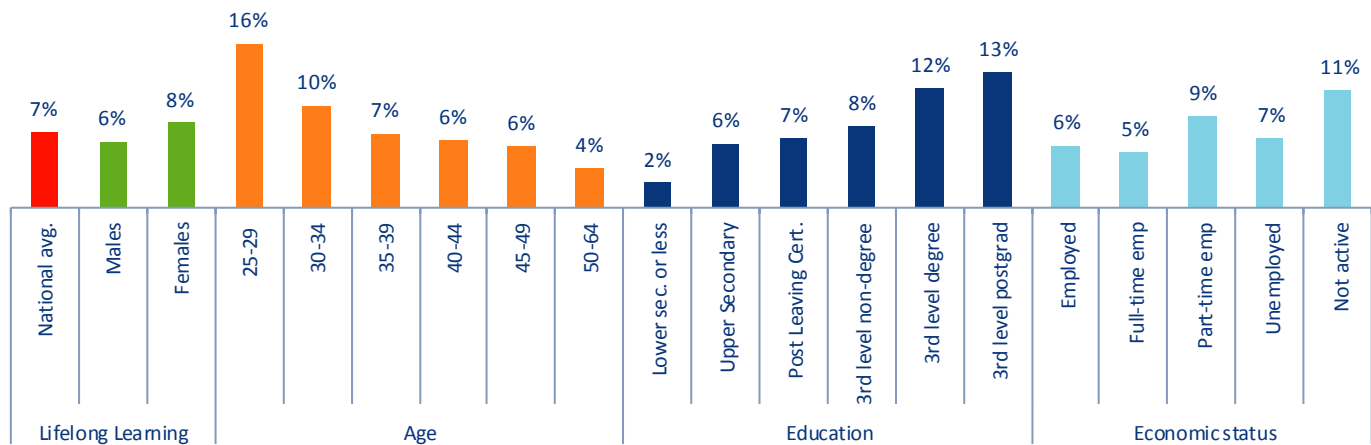
- Of the almost 101,000 participants who stated a field of learning, **30,500 study social science business and law**, over **20,000 study STEM\*** subjects and a further **20,000 study health/welfare** (applies to post Leaving Cert level and above only); combined these three broad subject areas make up over 70% of the total.

# Who is most likely to participate in lifelong learning?

*Participation rates were highest for 25-29 years-olds, 3<sup>rd</sup> level graduates or the economically inactive*

- Participation **decreases with age** but **increases with higher educational attainment** levels
- Lifelong learning participation rates were higher for the part-time employed compared to the full-time employed; however, the highest rate was observed for those not economically active (11%) which was due partly to strong participation (16%) by economically inactive males.

Lifelong learning participation rates by gender, age, education level and employment status, q4 2014

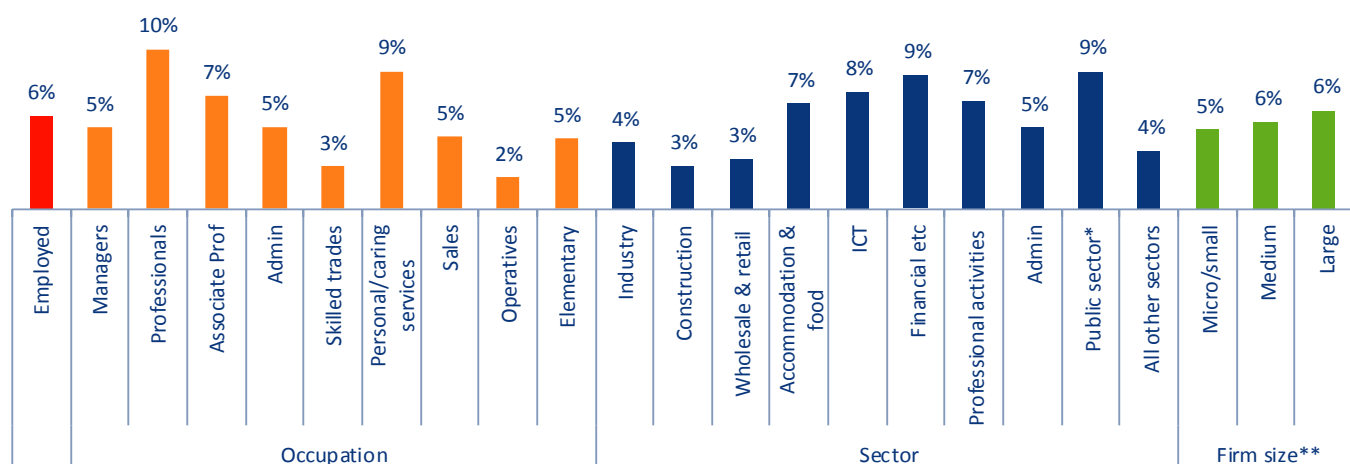


Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO QNHS data

*For those in employment, lifelong learning participation rates were highest for those in*

- professional or caring/personal service occupations
- the finance/real estate and public sectors \*
- larger firms\*\*, although the differences are small.

Lifelong learning participation rates for the employed by occupation, sector and firm size, q4 2014



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO QNHS data

\*Public sector includes public admin & defence, education & health

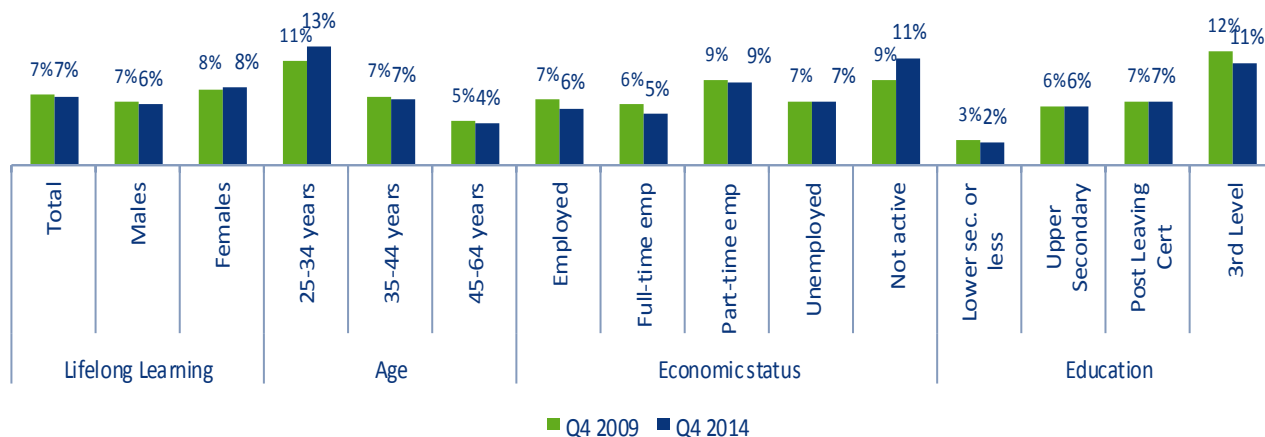
\*\* Excludes public sector; includes only those who stated firm size

## What has changed since quarter 4 2009?

### Participation rates in lifelong learning activities are unchanged

- However, they increased slightly (by 1.6 percentage points) for 25-34 year-olds and the economically inactive (by 2.4 percentage points)
- For most groups, rates either remained the same or declined only very marginally (by half a percentage point or less)
- The most notable declines were for third level graduates (-1.3 percentage points) and those employed full-time (-1.1 percentage points); the decline for graduates is related to an increased share of older graduates in the population and the fact that participation rates decline with older age cohorts; the decline for full-time employed relates to decreased participation in non-formal learning for this group.

Participation rates in lifelong learning by gender, age and employment status, q4 2009 & q4 2014



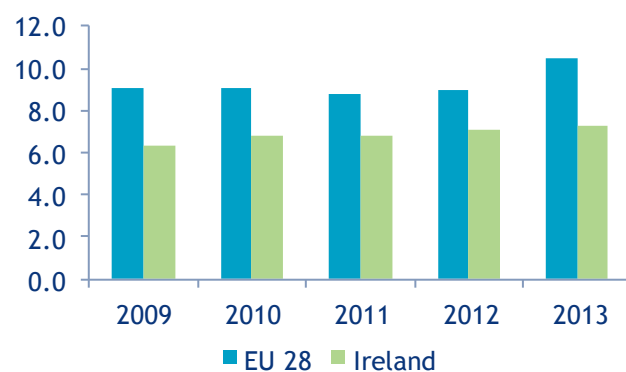
Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO QNHS data

## How does Ireland compare internationally?

### Ireland ranked below average

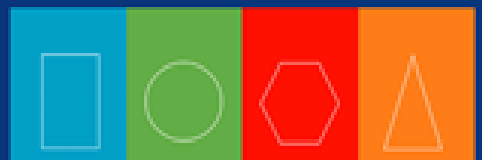
- At 7.3% on average for 2013, Ireland was below the EU average of 10.5% ; the gap was widest for **employed** persons, with Ireland's rate being 5.2 percentage points lower than the EU average (6.2% compared to 11.4%); in contrast, at 10.7%, it was above the EU average (7.7%) for the economically inactive
- Ireland also lagged significantly behind the top performing countries such as Denmark (31.4%), Sweden (28.1%) and Finland (24.9%)
- In addition, the gap between Ireland and the EU average has widened to 3.2 percentage points in 2013, up from 2.8 percentage points in 2009.

Participation rate in lifelong learning for EU 28 and Ireland,



Source: Eurostat Lifelong Learning Statistics

Note: Eurostat data refers to the annual average, not quarterly data as used elsewhere in this report; see page 6



# Notes & definitions

## Definitions

**Formal Education** covers the regular education and training system where courses are

- of a predetermined purpose and format
- provided in the system of schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions
- normally constitute a continuous ladder of education
- structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time and learning support
- normally intended to lead to a qualification recognised by national authorities qualifying for a specific education/programme).

**Non-formal Education** refers to all organised learning activities outside regular or formal education. The learner normally has to register for each learning activity. Non-formal education includes

- participating in a course or a seminar to acquire/improve skills, knowledge and competence; courses can be aimed at improving job-related knowledge or enhancing skills for social and personal purposes
- both courses leading to certificates and courses not leading to certificates
- grinds, piano lessons, night classes, art courses, letter writing, using the internet, courses in Tai Chi, driving lessons, etc.

**Informal Learning** includes learning that is not organised or structured in terms of purpose, time or instruction (e.g. language skills acquired during a stay abroad, IT skills acquired at work, skills acquired through sports, reading a professional magazine etc.)

**Lifelong learning** as defined by Eurostat includes 'all purposeful learning activity, whether formal, non-formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence'. However, statistics on informal learning are not always available and the CSO (QNHS) and international data on lifelong learning encompasses formal and non-formal learning only. In this paper, the term **lifelong learning** refers to the percentage of persons aged 25-64 who received formal and/or non-formal education and

training in the 4 weeks prior to the survey.

## Data coverage

In the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), the Central Statistics Office gathers data on those who have (a) been a student or apprentice in regular education in the preceding four weeks (formal education) and (b) those who have attended taught learning activities (non-formal education) in the preceding four weeks. The data here is based on the number formal education participants, non-formal education participants and, by derivation, lifelong learning participants in Ireland's adult (aged 25-64 years) population.

The measure of lifelong learning in this paper differs from that used by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in its 2010 publication on lifelong learning. This is due to the fact that the CSO publication was based on a special module included in the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) in which participants were asked about formal and non-formal learning activities **in the preceding year**. The questions on lifelong learning in the QNHS quarters examined in this paper refer to **the preceding four-week period** only. In addition, the data covered informal learning activities, which was not included in subsequent surveys.

Furthermore lifelong learning rates, as published by Eurostat, are based on the Labour Force Survey and supplemented by data from the Adult Education Survey (AES). The reference period for the Eurostat data is the calendar year and as such is not directly comparable with the CSO data, for which the reference period is the calendar quarter.

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

**Firm size:** categories are as follows

- Micro— 1-10 persons
- Small—11-49 persons
- Medium—50-249 persons
- Large—250 persons or more.

## Further Information

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