



COUNTRY STUDY



IRELAND

Country Monitoring Report

Ireland is doing well in terms of early school-leaving and early childhood education and has a solid validation of non-formal and informal learning system in place. Nevertheless, the Irish government struggles with its VET system and the further education and training system has been ineffective in providing the type of skills that the rebalanced economy needs. Reforms have started only recently.

Recommendations

- 
- Deliver a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming a NEET.
 - Advance the ongoing reform of the further education and training (FET) system, employment support schemes and apprenticeship programmes.
 - Diversifying the VET sector and offer more workplace training.





Ireland is doing well in terms of early school-leaving and early childhood education and has a solid validation of non-formal and informal learning system in place. Nevertheless, the Irish government struggles with its VET system and the further education and training system has been ineffective in providing the type of skills that the rebalanced economy needs. Reforms have started only recently.

Recommendations

- Deliver a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming a NEET.
- Advance the ongoing reform of the further education and training (FET) system, employment support schemes and apprenticeship programmes.
- Diversifying the VET sector and offer more workplace training.

IRELAND

Country Monitoring Report

1. Promoting access and participation in LLL

Ireland continued its positive trend over the last years and had a participation rate in lifelong learning of 7.3 % in 2013, although it is still below the EU average of 10.5 %.

According to the Commission, further education, training and apprenticeship reforms are progressing in the right direction. In October 2013 the Further education and training authority, the SOLAS agency, was established in line with the 2013 Further Education and Training Act. One of its first major tasks was to develop a national five-year strategy for further education and training to ensure that programmes are efficient and relevant, link the provision of training

to labour market needs and facilitate the transition of the long-term unemployed back into work. The strategic goals will contribute to national economic development, and to supporting the active inclusion in society of people of all abilities in society with special reference to literacy and numeracy, and to providing high quality education and training programmes.

In May 2014, SOLAS published the first annual Further Education and Training Services plan, showing how each Education and Training Board will be delivering the overall budget to make provision for learners. The document clearly sets out data relating to the local demographics of each of the 16 Education and Training Boards and details the programmes and courses it will deliver, as well as target learner profiles and the National Framework of Qualifications levels that will be achieved. This annual service planning also involves consultation with employers and local Intreo offices¹².

2. Vocational Education and Training

Apprenticeships have been largely concentrated in the construction sector and, due to the economic crisis, have declined dramatically. The already below EU-average rate decreased from 37.5 % in 2010 to 32.2% in 2013 (EU-average is 50.4%). The Irish government therefore needs to increase the numbers and they have to be diversified. In addition, the opportunities and benefits of vocational education and training (VET) promoted with employers. In this regard, the Apprenticeship Council has been given the task of extending apprenticeship opportunities to new sectors of the economy. Ongoing reforms to the apprenticeship system will continue to be employer-led and should ensure the alignment of education and training provision with the needs of the labour

1 European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Ireland*.

2 European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report Ireland 2015 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances*.



market. Furthermore, carrying out a 'sustainability test' that takes into account the evidence of labour market needs and future strategic economic priorities, future demand for apprenticeships and the progression routes for apprentices, should help enhance the labour market relevance of proposals. The first results of this initiative will be seen at the end of 2015³⁴.

3. Validation of NFIL

In Ireland, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) incorporates prior formal, informal and non-formal learning which is validated within the context of a specified destination award from level one-ten on the National Framework of Qualifications. The recognition of non-formal learning has been facilitated systematically through the practice of the inclusion and alignment of awards of a range of awarding bodies, including professional awards and those developed and used internationally by different industrial sectors.

The Commission states that the economic situation in Ireland continues to place a growing emphasis on the importance of RPL and the need to up-skill and engage people in education and training, resulting in policy developments in different sectors. These sectors include further and higher education and the labour market where there is growing evidence that RPL is becoming a useful mechanism for labour market activation interventions by the government. Significantly, the Department of Education and Skills invited the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) as part of the National Skills Strategy Implementation Statement to investigate the potential of RPL in assisting in the up-skilling objectives of the National Skills Strategy, who subsequently established in their report the important role of RPL⁵.

3 European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Ireland*.

4 European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report Ireland 2015 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances*.

5 European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014).

4. Early-school Leaving

Ireland is doing well in terms of early school-leaving (ESL), as the early school leaving rate of 8.4% may prove in 2013 (EU average is 12%). It also confirms that Ireland is well on track to reach the 2020 national target of 8%. In addition, Ireland also excels at participation in early childhood education, which is almost universal (99.1% in 2012) and which can be helpful for the prevention of early school leaving.

A contributing factor is the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme, announced in 2010, which provides a free pre-school year of 15 hours a week of childcare for 38 weeks a year. So far, there is no progress in extending the daily coverage of this provision and no further steps have been taken to introduce a second free year which the authorities have committed to introducing by 2020.

With the national action plan 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS), Ireland has a comprehensive early school leaving strategy. It focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education. Some 860 primary and second level schools are participating in DEIS. All of these schools are eligible for a range of additional supports to help them to improve attendance, retention and educational outcomes for their students⁶⁷.

5. NEETs

Ireland has managed to slightly decrease its NEETs rate (not in employment, education or training) to 16.1% in 2013 after having reached its peak of 19.2% in 2010. The Irish government presented a comprehensive Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan to the

European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Ireland.

6 European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Ireland*.

7 European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report Ireland 2015 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances*.



Commission in 2014, identifying measures to build on services and initiatives already in place and to increase their impact by tailoring them to address the particular challenges of youth unemployment. Nonetheless, more measures need to be implemented, within the Youth Guarantee, to improve the situation of young people.

As a matter of fact, the country faces several challenges in terms of the Youth Guarantee. Not only do young people who have been assessed to have a medium or high probability of exiting unemployment have to wait nine months, but Ireland lacks also a more comprehensive outreach strategy and needs to better address the issue of the quality of offers⁸⁹.

6. Citizenship education

The Republic of Ireland has had a long involvement in the development of civic education. A pilot project between 1993 and 1996 led to the introduction of a new curriculum programme in Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) in all secondary level schools from September 1997. CSPE is a course in citizenship based on human rights and social responsibilities. It aims to develop active citizens who have a sense of belonging to the local, national, European and global communities. The course incorporates seven key concepts (democracy, rights and responsibilities, human dignity, interdependence, development, law and stewardship) and is taught through four units of study (The Individual and Citizenship; The Community; The State; Ireland and the World)¹⁰.

7. Council recommendations

The Council recommendation 2015 highlights that, in the past, the further education and training system has been ineffective in providing the type of skills that the rebalanced economy needs, and reforms have started

only recently. With regards on establishing the Youth Guarantee, the Council recommended in 2014 that young people should receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education to avoid scarring effects. Additionally, it recommended to advance the ongoing reform of the further education and training (FET) system, employment support schemes and apprenticeship programmes. In response to addressing the skills mismatch, it recommended to offer more workplace training as well as to improve and ensure the relevance of FET courses and apprenticeships with respect to labour market needs¹¹.

8 European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Ireland*.

9 European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report Ireland 2015 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances*.

10 Ulster University (2011). *Citizenship Education in England, Ireland and Northern Ireland*. Retrieved from <http://uir.ulster.ac.uk/11464/>.

11 European Council (2014). *Council Recommendation of 8 July 2014 on the 2014 National Reform Programme of Ireland and delivering a Council opinion on the 2014 Convergence Programme of Ireland*.

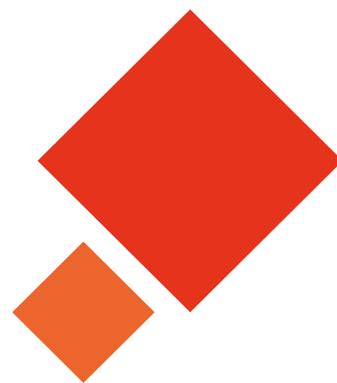
European Council (2015). *Council Recommendation of 14 July 2015 on the 2015 National Reform Programme of Ireland and delivering a Council opinion on the 2015 Convergence Programme of Ireland*.





Rue du Commerce | Handelsstraat 22
1000 Brussels
Belgium
T +32 2 500 10 20
F +32 2 500 10 30

Twitter: @SOLIDAR_EU
Facebook: SOLIDAR
www.solidar.org
solidar@solidar.org



Authors in alphabetical order: Fionnuala Richardson – People's College, Julie Roden – SOLIDAR Foundation

SOLIDAR, together with our national members and partners, has developed 15 case studies in 2014, presenting innovative, effective, sustainable and tailor made models to promote social inclusion, the social economy and quality job creation by adapting a social investment approach. In their daily work, SOLIDAR members and partners anticipate new or unmet needs of socio-economically vulnerable people and empower them to actively participate in society and to access the labour market.

These case studies gather strong evidence of the social impact of the activities undertaken by our members and partners to help Member States making progress towards the achievement of the social and employment objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the implementation of the Social Investment Package.

SOLIDAR Foundation in cooperation with national members and partners has gathered an examples of national programmes and initiatives that present the innovative and successful approaches that contribute to the process of building inclusive learning societies. The case studies are centred on themes of lifelong learning, civic and citizenship education, the validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and NEETs (young people Not in Employment, Education or Training).



This publication reflects the views of the author(s) only, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.