

National Social Monitor 2016

Education

Chart 1: Lifelong Learning Participation Rates EU28 - 2015

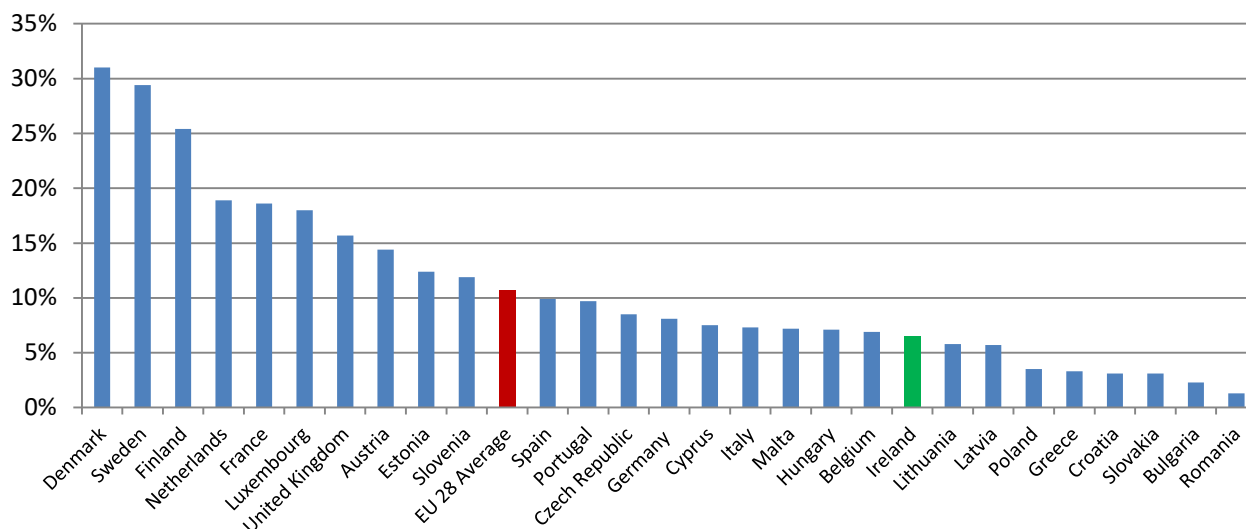


Chart 2: Lifelong Learning Participation Rates 2006 - 2015

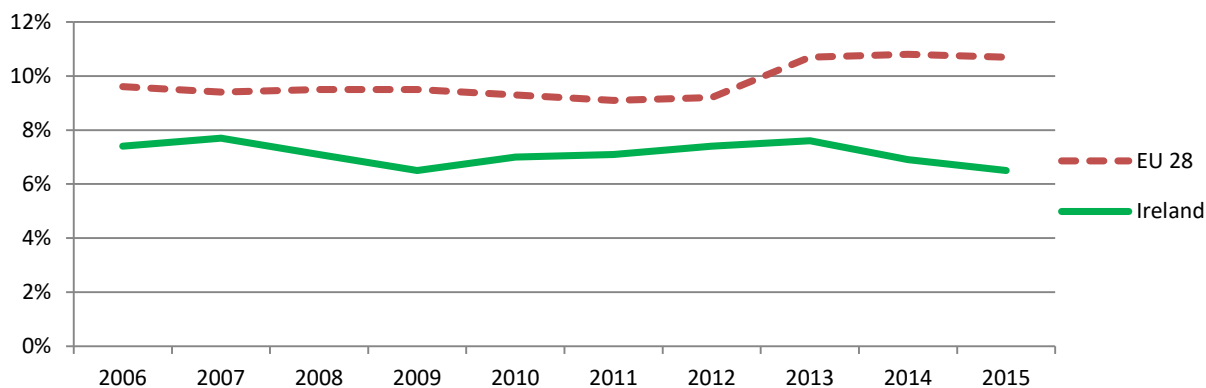
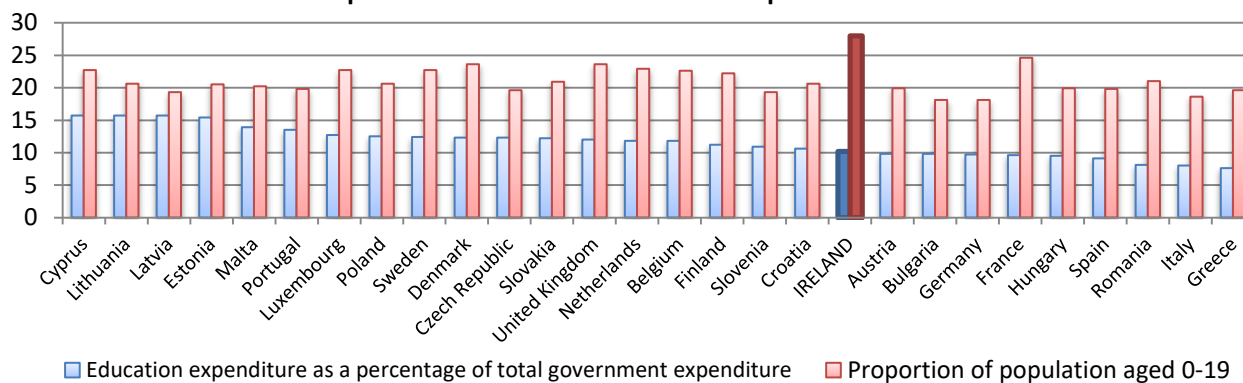


Chart 3: Education Expenditure as % total Government Expenditure EU 28 2013



Introduction

Education is widely recognised as crucial to the achievement of our national objectives of economic competitiveness, social inclusion and active citizenship. However, the overall levels of public funding for education in Ireland are out of step with these aspirations. This under-funding is most apparent in the areas of early childhood education and in lifelong learning and second chance education – the very areas that are most vital in terms of the promotion of greater equity and fairness.

Planning for demographic pressures

Despite Ireland having the youngest population in Europe with 28% of the population aged 0-19, Ireland spends relatively limited amounts on education. Government expenditure on education as a proportion of total government expenditure is the ninth lowest in Europe (chart 3) despite the significant demographic pressures at all levels of the education system. Investment is required at all levels of our education system. In reality this will mean increased expenditure, both current and capital, at all levels and over a period of time.

Life Long Learning

Skills are the currency of the modern global knowledge-based economy. Educational success is now about creative and critical approaches to problem solving and decision making. Access in adult life to desirable employment and choices is closely linked to one's level of educational attainment.

Ireland is significantly behind in lifelong learning participation rates compared to other European countries, a trend which remains little changed over time (see charts 1 & 2). The National Skills Strategy 2025 commits to promoting and supporting lifelong learning, particularly in the workplace. A focus on lifelong learning and the promotion of skills is a very welcome development when people now 'work for life' rather than have a

'job for life'. Participating in lifelong learning has also been shown to be of benefit to people's personal development, mental health and resilience.

Skills Ireland¹ recently reported that people who already have a 3rd level qualification are four times more likely to be engaged in upskilling than those with lower secondary or less. In addition, three times as many people in professional occupations engage in lifelong learning compared to operatives or elementary grades. These are the people who are most likely to be in vulnerable precarious employment and need to reskill / upskill.

One of the barriers to lifelong learning is the lack of any grant aid for part time learners. There is a need to put suitably means tested supports in place to encourage people on low incomes to improve their skills.

It is essential that sufficient resources are allocated to the National Skills Strategy on a multiannual basis. An adequately resourced lifelong learning and adult skills strategy is an opportunity to provide people with opportunities to upskill throughout their working life and contribute to a strategy to combat labour market polarisation. It is important to equip people with the skills they need to adapt to changing economic and social conditions throughout their lifetime

Policy Priorities

- Commit to reach the lifelong learning target set out in the National Skills Strategy and ensure sufficient resourcing of the strategy.
- Develop a long-term sustainable funding strategy for education at all levels.

¹ <http://www.skillsireland.ie/Publications/2016/Lifelong-Learning-Report-2016-Web-Final.pdf>