

Ready to Engage?

Results for Ireland on an
International Study of
Civics and Citizenship (ICCS)

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Educational Research Centre
www.erc.ie

About ICCS

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) was conducted in 38 countries including Ireland in 2008-2009 (Table 1). The study examined how well 14-year-olds (second years) are prepared for future civic and citizenship engagement and participation. About 3,400 students, 1,850 teachers and 140 school principals participated in the study in Ireland, where it was implemented by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

The ERC and DES extend their sincere thanks to all of the participating principals, teachers and students, without whose active co-operation this study would not have been possible.

Table 1. Countries participating in ICCS

Austria	England	Latvia	Poland
Belgium (Flemish region)	Estonia	Liechtenstein	Russian Federation
Bulgaria	Finland	Lithuania	Slovak Republic
Chile	Greece	Luxembourg	Slovenia
Chinese Taipei	Guatemala	Malta	Spain
Colombia	Hong Kong (SAR)	Mexico	Sweden
Cyprus	Indonesia	Netherlands	Switzerland
Czech Republic	Ireland	New Zealand	Thailand
Denmark	Italy	Norway	
Dominican Republic	Korea (Republic of)	Paraguay	

Countries marked in red are a subset of nine countries with which results for Ireland are compared in national reporting (we also compared the results for Ireland with the overall international average).

Countries in red were selected for a variety of reasons: high average performance (Finland, Denmark, Sweden), similar performance compared with Ireland (Poland, Switzerland and Sweden), similar cultural and linguistic characteristics (England, New Zealand), similar population sizes (New Zealand, Slovenia, Belgium (Fl.)), and/or recent educational reform (Poland).

Students' Civic Knowledge

Students in Ireland ranked seventh of 38 countries on a test of civic knowledge. The test involved a 45-minute assessment which examined knowledge of civic systems, civic principles, civic participation and civic identities. The average score in Ireland (534 points) was well above the ICCS average (500) and about the same as the average of the ten countries (536) shown in Figure 1¹ (i.e. Ireland plus the countries marked in red in Table 1). Finland and Denmark (both with an average score of 576 points) were among the highest-scoring countries. Ireland's average score was about the same as those of Poland, Switzerland and Sweden, and higher than those of England, New Zealand, Slovenia and Belgium (Fl.). In Ireland, **girls achieved an average civic knowledge score which was 22 points higher than that of boys.** This gender difference was about the same as that found on average across ICCS countries.

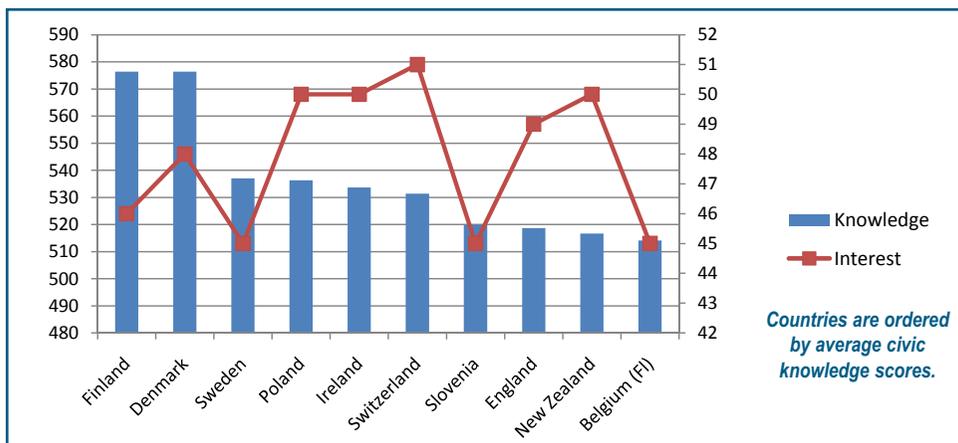
Students' Interest in Political and Social Issues

On average, students in Ireland had similar levels of interest in political and social issues as students internationally. Students were asked about their interest in the following areas: political issues at national and local levels, social issues at national level, politics in other countries, and international politics, and responses were combined to produce an overall measure of interest in political and social issues. Students in Ireland (49.5) scored about the same as the corresponding international average (50.0) on this measure (Figure 1)². Among the countries in Figure 1, only students in Switzerland had a higher average score than Ireland (50.8). Male students in Ireland reported a higher level of interest in these topics than females.

¹ The international standard deviation on this scale is 100, indicating that two-thirds of scores fall between 400 and 600.

² The international standard deviation on this scale is 10, indicating that two-thirds of scores fall between 40 and 60.

Figure 1. Country Average Scores on Civic Knowledge and Interest in Political and Social Issues – Ireland and Nine Comparison Countries



Characteristics Related to Civic Knowledge and Interest in Political and Social Issues

Some student characteristics associated with higher scores on the test of civic knowledge in Ireland were:

- higher socioeconomic status
- speaking English or Irish at home rather than another language
- discussing political or social issues regularly with one's parents
- believing in the value of participation in decision-making at school (e.g. believing that student participation can make schools better)
- perceiving classroom discussions to be open (e.g. believing that teachers encourage students to express their opinions)
- having more books at home
- engaging in leisure reading on a frequent basis.

School socioeconomic composition was the only school characteristic related to civic knowledge, though we know that school socioeconomic composition is associated with other school characteristics such as school sector and gender composition.

In Ireland, **gender differences in civic knowledge were related to differences in the time spent reading for fun between boys and girls**, where girls read more frequently than boys. This is likely to be related to differences in reading literacy levels between boys and girls.

School characteristics were not related to interest in political and social issues. Student characteristics associated with higher interest in politics and social issues included: regularly discussing political and social issues with parents, engaging in civic activities in school, perceiving classroom discussions at school to be open, and perceiving that students can influence decision-making at school.

Students' Civic and Citizenship Attitudes and Beliefs

Civic and citizenship attitudes of students in Ireland were generally similar to those found in other countries. For example, students in Ireland had similar scores to students internationally on measures of support for equal rights for immigrants and for democratic values, trust in civic institutions, political self-efficacy (confidence), student-teacher relations, and expected future participation in political and protest activities. However, students in Ireland showed **greater support for gender equality** than students on average internationally. Students in Ireland perceived that they had **less influence on decision-making processes in school**.

A large majority (95%) of Irish students indicated that they identified with a religion, which is higher than the international average of 81%. Three-quarters of students in Ireland agreed that religious beliefs are an important influence in their lives.

Students' Knowledge of and Attitudes towards Europe

Students in Ireland and on average across 23 European countries demonstrated a **high degree of familiarity with basic facts about the European Union**. For example, 99% of students in Ireland were aware that Ireland is a member of the EU and 87% could identify the EU flag. However, **knowledge of EU laws and policies varied**. Just 21% of students in Ireland and 30% internationally were aware that all EU citizens can study in any European country without a permit. In contrast, almost all students knew that the EU aims to promote peace, prosperity and freedom within its borders. About **half of students in Ireland knew that the euro is not the official currency of all EU countries**.

Compared to students in other European countries, students in Ireland had **more positive attitudes towards a common European currency, less positive attitudes to European unification, and less favourable attitudes to European language learning**. However, the high status of English in some non-English speaking countries should be taken into account in interpreting the latter finding.

Views of School Principals and Teachers

- According to teachers in Ireland, **the key aims of civic and citizenship education (CCE) are:**
 - promoting knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities
 - promoting knowledge of social, political and civic institutions
 - developing the ability of students to engage in critical and independent thinking
 - developing respect for the environment.
- CSPE (Civic, Social and Political Education) teachers in Ireland reported having **high levels of confidence in teaching Civic and Citizenship Education topics**.
- Almost **half of CSPE teachers in Ireland reported using project work to assess** their second-year students. Other **interactive assessment methods**, such as student self-assessment and peer assessment, **were less widely used**.
- In general, teachers in Ireland reported that **classroom climate is good**. When asked about student behaviour, teachers in Ireland gave similar responses to teachers on average across ICCS countries.
- Teachers in Ireland reported markedly **lower levels of participation by their second years in community activities and in participatory class activities**. They also noted higher levels of social problems at school (e.g. truancy, vandalism) than on average internationally.
- School principals in Ireland held **positive perceptions about teachers' and students' sense of belonging at school**, and of the levels of **resources in the local community** (e.g., libraries, parks). However, they also reported **low levels of parental participation in school**.

ICCS and National Curriculum and Assessment

The content of the CSPE (Civic, Social and Political Education) **Junior Certificate examination papers was compared to the ICCS assessment**. Results show that similar percentages of CSPE and ICCS questions – about two-fifths – covered content relating to civic society and systems; more questions in CSPE (34%) than in ICCS (23%) concerned civic participation; and fewer questions in CSPE (16%) than in ICCS (31%) examined civic principles. Very few questions in either assessment (only 5% or so) assessed civic identities.

An analysis of students' CSPE action projects (Wilson, 2008)³ showed that the **most popular content areas related to rights and responsibilities, stewardship, democracy, and law**, and that **more 'passive' forms of action were preferred** over 'active' forms. Almost all action projects were undertaken on a whole-class basis rather than on a small-group or individual basis.

More Information

The results of ICCS are available in summary form at www.erc.ie and are reported in full in: *International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS): Report for Ireland* (Cosgrove, Gilleece & Shiel, 2011). Download or purchase the report at www.erc.ie. Alternatively, telephone the ERC on 01 8373789 or email iccs@erc.ie. International reports can be obtained at www.iea.nl.

³ Wilson, M. (2008). The action project as a teaching/learning tool. In G. Jeffers & Úna O'Connor (Eds.), *Education for citizenship and diversity in Irish contexts*, pp. 178-186. Dublin: IPA.