



**Growing Up  
in Ireland**  
National Longitudinal  
Study of Children



# GROWING UP IN IRELAND

KEY FINDINGS: COHORT '98 AT 20 YEARS OLD IN 2018/19

**NO. 4**

**EDUCATION, TRAINING  
AND EMPLOYMENT**

## INTRODUCTION

This *Key Findings* report presents summary information on the lives and circumstances of the 20-year-olds from the fourth wave of interviews with **Growing Up in Ireland's** older **Cohort '98** between August 2018 and June 2019.

It focuses on young adults' achievements at the end of second-level education, the profile of those who left school before the Leaving Certificate and the reasons for their departure. The report looks at participation in post-school education and training, how students funded their education/training and the extent of direct and indirect support from their parents. Finally, it examines whether the jobs held by 20-year-olds are stop-gaps or a step on the career ladder, and the kinds of qualities they value in jobs.

The *Key Findings* reports draw mainly on information provided by the 5,191 young people themselves. The background characteristics of the young people and their families (such as family type, mother's education, social class, income category) were measured at the most recent prior wave (typically at age 17/18) and these are examined in relation to their experiences at age 20.

This is the first time that data from **Growing Up in Ireland** have been available on young people as they make the transition from their teen years into early adulthood. It allows an examination of the connections between their diverse experiences in childhood and adolescence and the important transition to adulthood. This information is relevant to policy in a broad range of areas, including further and higher education and training, labour market entry, new household formation and the physical and mental health status of young adults.

*Growing Up in Ireland* is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), with a contribution from The Atlantic Philanthropies in Phase 2; and managed and overseen by the DCYA in association with the Central Statistics Office.



## Educational attainment on leaving school

Second-level students may take one of three Leaving Certificate (LC) programmes, depending on the school they attend. The majority of young adults (67%) had taken the (*Established*) Leaving Certificate (LCE). Just under a quarter (24%) completed the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) (similar to the LCE but with two link modules on preparation for the world of work and enterprise education). Only 4% took the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme (which adopts a more hands-on approach to learning but does not allow for direct entry to higher education). The remaining 5% of 20-year-olds had left school without completing the Leaving Certificate.

Those who completed the Leaving Certificate received an average of 385 points in the college-entry (CAO) system out of a possible maximum of 625 (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> These points have significant consequences as they determine entry to higher education and influence access to other education, training and employment opportunities.

Young women achieved slightly higher points than young men (393 compared with 378). The differences by family background were much larger. There was a gap of 138 points between those from the professional and lowest-skilled social classes, on average.<sup>2</sup> Young adults from one-parent families tended to achieve lower points than those from two-parent families (338 compared with 397). This gap was only partly related to the more disadvantaged profile of one-parent families. For example, 20-year-olds from professional backgrounds achieved 467 points, on average, if they were in two-parent families compared to 413 points in one-parent families.

Figure 1: Average points achieved by 20-year-olds in the Leaving Certificate by gender, family type and social class



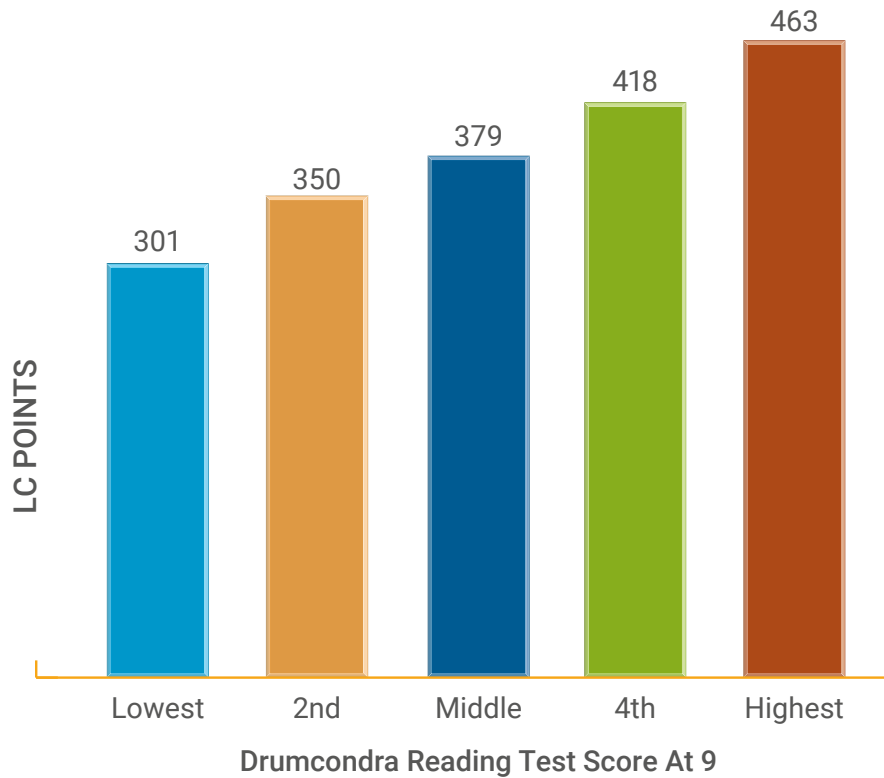
**There was a large achievement gap in Leaving Certificate points; 20-year-olds from more advantaged families obtained over 100 points more, on average, than those from less advantaged families.**

Figure 2 shows that Leaving Certificate performance at least partly reflected the skills acquired at primary school level. At the age of 9, the cohort had taken a standardised reading test related to school achievement, the Drumcondra Reading Test (DRT). There was a very large gap in points (162) between those in the lowest quintile on the DRT at the age of 9 and those in the highest quintile.

<sup>1</sup> The grades achieved in the LCE and LCVP programmes are awarded 'points' that are used to allocate third-level places. More popular courses and courses with fewer places generally require more points. The LCA programme is not recognised for direct access to higher education so is not awarded 'points' in the same way. 65% of the cohort had points awarded under the 'old', pre-2017 points system. Whether the old or new system was used does not change the gender and family background differences found.

<sup>2</sup> Social class is based on the occupation of the parents when the young person was 17/18 years of age. Here figures are shown for the professionals (including doctors, architects, teachers, nurses) and the lowest-skilled (including semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and those who never worked) social classes.

Figure 2: Average points achieved by 20-year-olds in the Leaving Certificate by their Drumcondra Reading Test scores at age 9 (quintiles)



## Early school-leavers

The vast majority of 20-year-olds across all social groups had completed senior-cycle education but 5% of young people left school without completing the Leaving Certificate. Early leaving was more common among less advantaged households (11% for the lowest-skilled social classes compared with 3% for the professionals and 11% where mothers had the lowest educational level compared to 2% where they had the highest).<sup>3</sup> Rates of early school-leaving were higher among one-parent than two-parent families (10% compared with 4%). Early leavers were mostly aged 16 or 17 on leaving school.

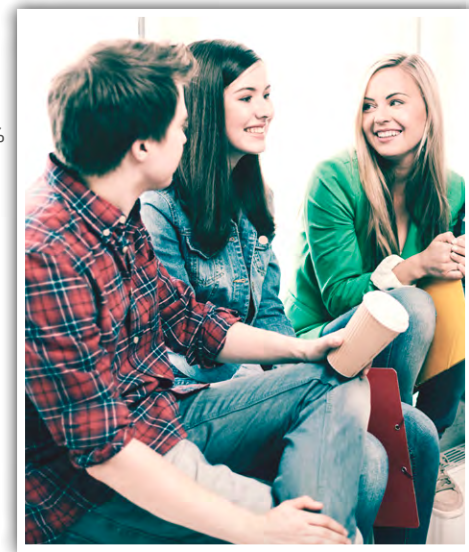
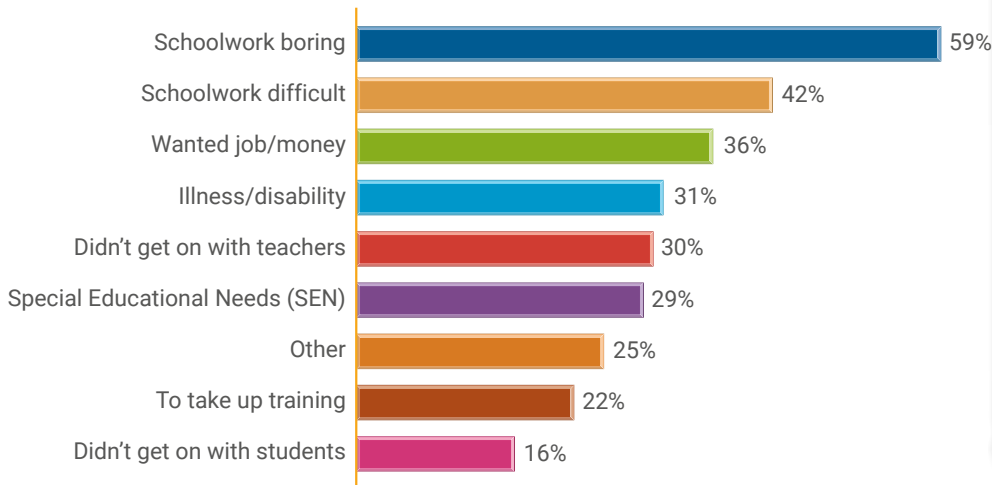
Many early leavers had friends or siblings who left school early; over half (57%) reported having friends who left school early and 34% had siblings who did so.

Early leavers were asked about the main reasons for leaving school and could indicate multiple reasons (Figure 3). Finding schoolwork 'boring' or 'difficult' or 'wanting a job/money' were the most frequently identified reasons (59%, 42% and 36% respectively), while 30% of the early leavers identified 'not getting on with teachers' as a factor in their decision.



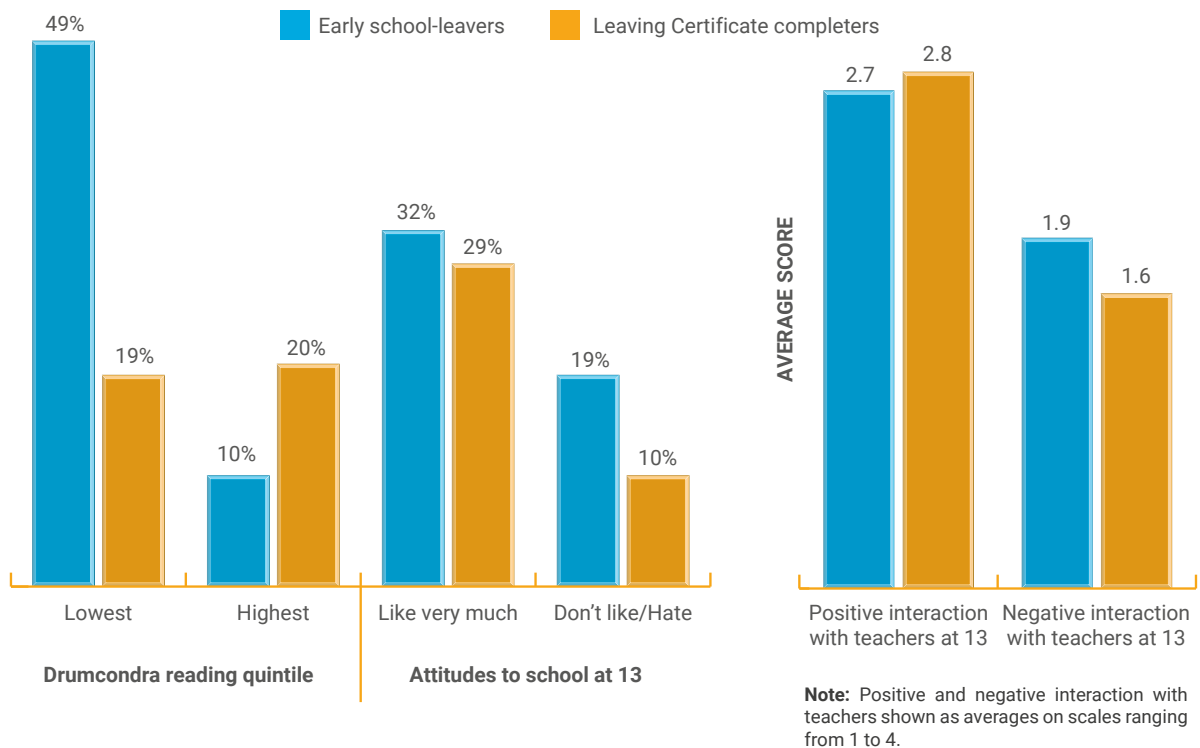
<sup>3</sup> 'Mother' refers to the parent/guardian who completed the 'Parent One' (at ages 17/18 and 20) or 'Primary Caregiver' (earlier waves) questionnaire – usually the mother. Mother's education is the highest level of education completed by Parent One when the young person was aged 17/18. 'Lower 2nd level' refers to the equivalent of Junior Certificate or less; 'Degree' refers to a bachelor's degree or higher level of education.

Figure 3: Main reasons for leaving school among early school-leavers (20-year-olds)



Longitudinally, those who ultimately left school early had much lower reading scores at the age of 9; just under half (49%) had been in the lowest quintile compared with 19% of those who stayed in school (the left-hand part of Figure 4). Early leavers were also more likely to have said that they dislike or hate school at the age of 13 (19% of early leavers disliked/hated school compared with 10% of the Leaving Certificate group).

Figure 4: School experiences at ages 9 and 13 of 20-year-olds who were early school-leavers (ESL) compared to Leaving Certificate (LC) completers (reading test score at 9; attitudes to school at 13; interaction with teachers at 13)



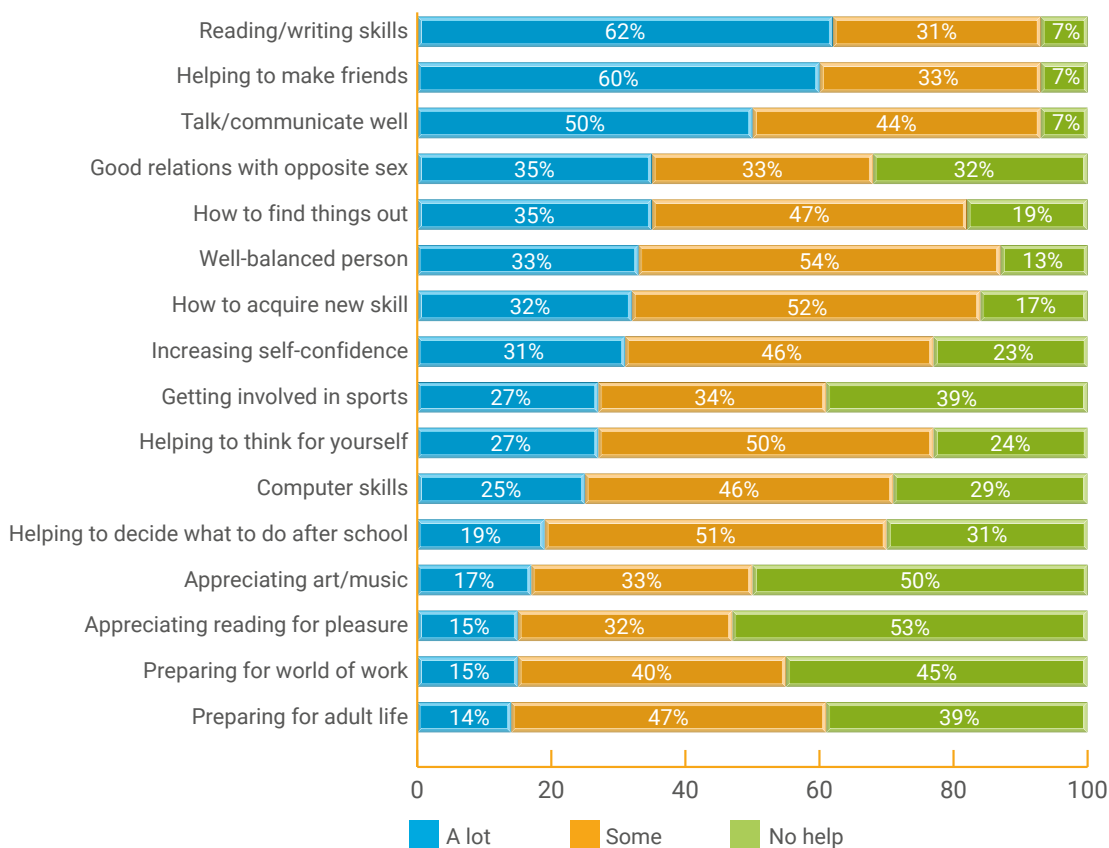
The right-hand panel of Figure 4 shows average scores on scales measuring positive interaction (e.g. praise or positive feedback) and negative interaction (e.g. reprimands, being given out to) with teachers at the age of 13. Early school-leavers reported more frequent negative interaction with teachers than those who stayed in school, but had similar levels of positive interaction.

**Early school-leavers had reported having difficulties with schoolwork and more negative relations with teachers, though almost a third of them had liked school very much, at age 13.**

## The benefits of second-level education

The 20-year-olds were asked whether and how their second-level education had benefited them, with respondents indicating it was a *lot* of benefit, *some* or *no help*. The majority said school had been a *lot* of benefit in terms of giving them 'reading/writing skills', 'helping to make new friends' and 'being able to talk or communicate well with others' (Figure 5). Second-level education was seen as being at least of some benefit in relation to personal and social development (such as 'increasing self-confidence') and learning to learn (such as knowing 'how to find things out' or 'acquire a new skill').

Figure 5: Perceptions of the benefits of second-level education among 20-year-olds



However, young adults highlighted two areas where they felt their second-level education had been of less help. First, around four in ten felt that school had been of *no help* in preparing them 'for adult life' or 'for the world of work'. Secondly, a large proportion felt it had been of *no help* in fostering an appreciation of 'reading for pleasure' (53%), 'appreciating art/music' (50%) or 'getting involved in sports' (39%). A significant minority reported that their schooling had been of *no help* in relation to their computer skills (29%) or helping them to 'decide what to do after leaving school' (31%).

### 20-year-olds were broadly positive about their second-level education but felt it had been of less benefit in preparing them for the world of work and for adult life.

There were differences in ratings depending on whether the young adults had remained in school or which Leaving Certificate programme they had taken. Early school-leavers were less positive in general about the benefits of second-level education. For example, 16% of early leavers felt their schooling had been a *lot* of help in knowing how to acquire a new skill compared with 32% of those who completed the Leaving Certificate.

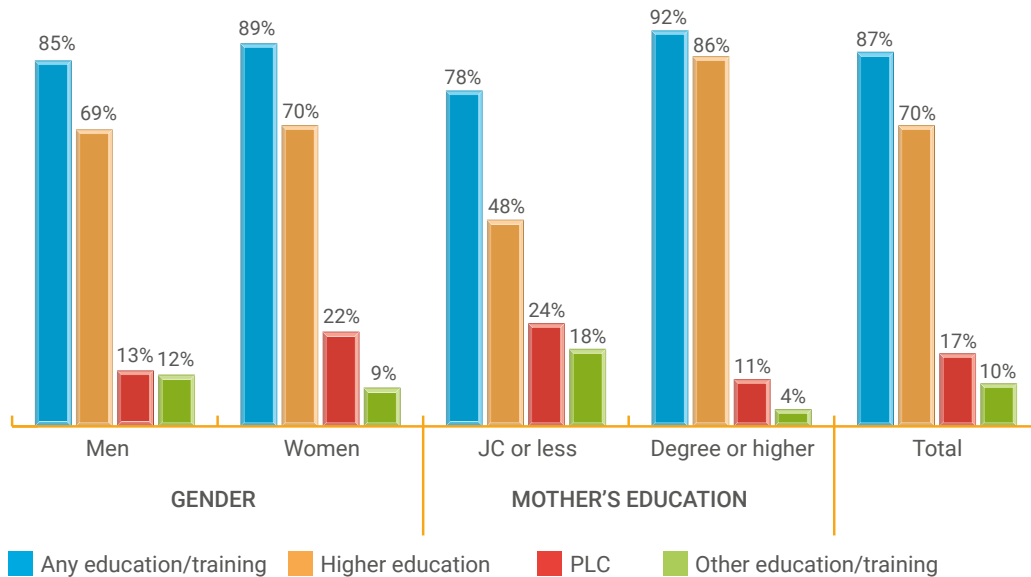
Those who had taken the Leaving Certificate Applied were more likely to rate the benefits of their schooling positively in relation to 'preparation for the world of work' (54% seeing it as a *lot* of benefit compared with 12% of LCE), 'preparation for adult life' (48% a *lot* compared with 11% of LCE) and 'computer skills' (66% a *lot* compared with 19% of LCE).

## Participation in post-school education and training

*Key Findings 1* looked at the 20-year-olds' main activity at the time of the survey. Over two-thirds (68%) were in education/training, 27% were employed and 5% were not in education, employment or training (NEET). Those in education/training included those in higher (third-level) education (57%), on Post-Leaving Certificate courses (6%) and those on other education/training (including apprenticeships and Youthreach, 5%).<sup>4</sup>

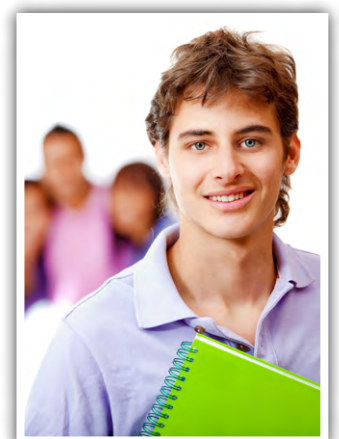
As well as being asked about their main activity, all 20-year-olds were asked about the extent to which they had participated in different kinds of education and training since leaving school. The vast majority (87%) had taken part in at least one education/training course. Engaging in any education/training course was more common among those whose mothers had higher levels of education, and somewhat more prevalent among young women than young men (Figure 6). Figure 6 further distinguishes between those who had any experience of higher education, Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses and/or other education/training.<sup>5</sup> The biggest group (70%) had taken or were taking a higher-education course, 17% a PLC course and 10% another form of education and training.

**Figure 6: Participation in education and training since leaving school by gender and mother's education**



Note: more than one type of education or training course is possible.

Participation in higher education did not differ by gender but young women were more likely than young men to take part in a PLC course (22% compared with 13%), while young men were somewhat more likely than young women to take part in other education/training courses (12% compared with 9%; Figure 6). Rates of participation in higher education were relatively high across all social groups, although variation by family background was apparent. There were particularly high levels of higher-education participation among those whose mothers had higher levels of education (86%) compared with those whose mothers had the lowest educational level (48%). In contrast, participation in PLC or other education/training courses was more common among those whose mothers had lower levels of educational attainment. Young people whose mother had the lowest level of educational attainment were more than twice as likely as those whose mother had the highest qualifications to take a PLC course, and more than four times as likely to take another form of education/training. In addition, separate analyses (not shown here) showed that young adults from one-parent families had lower rates of higher-education entry than those from two-parent families (52% compared to 75%).

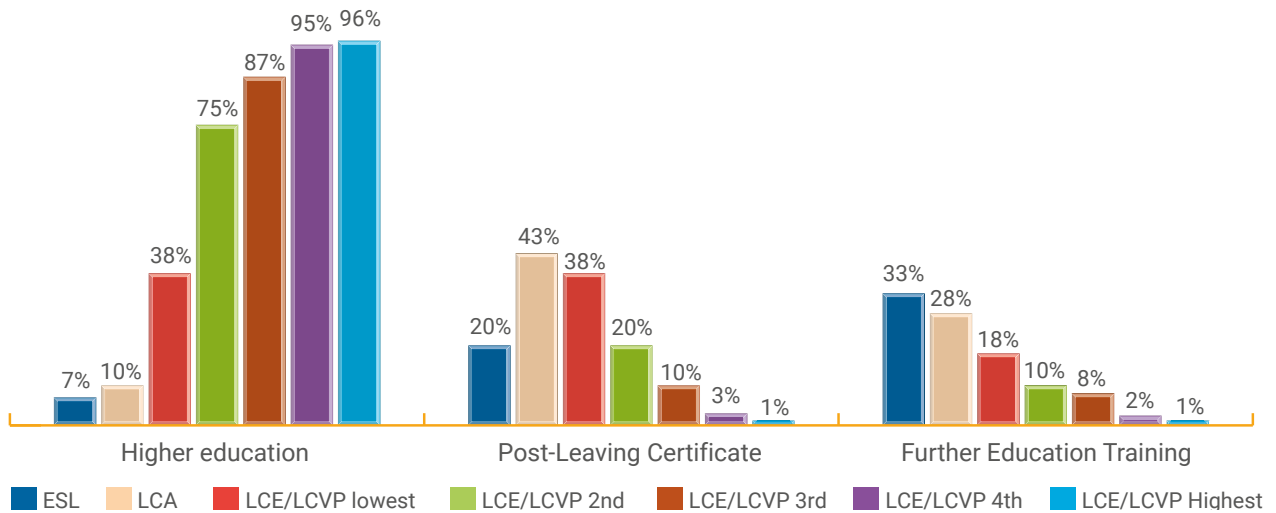


<sup>4</sup> Youthreach provides second-chance education to young people who leave school before Leaving Certificate level.

<sup>5</sup> This includes those who had completed the course, left the course before completion or were still on the course at the time of the survey. As many 20-year-olds were still in education/training, this Key Finding does not look at course non-completion as this would give a partial picture.

Figure 7 compares participation in different types of education and training among early school-leavers (ESL), those who took Leaving Certificate Applied and those with different levels of Leaving Certificate points (grouped into quintiles). Not surprisingly, given the nature of the points system, nearly all of those who got the best grades (and hence the highest points) in the Leaving Certificate went on to higher education. Participation in higher education was very low among early and Leaving Certificate Applied leavers, though it appears that a small number accessed higher education through an indirect route.

**Figure 7: Participation in post-school education and training by stage of leaving school, senior cycle programme and Leaving Certificate points (in quintiles)**

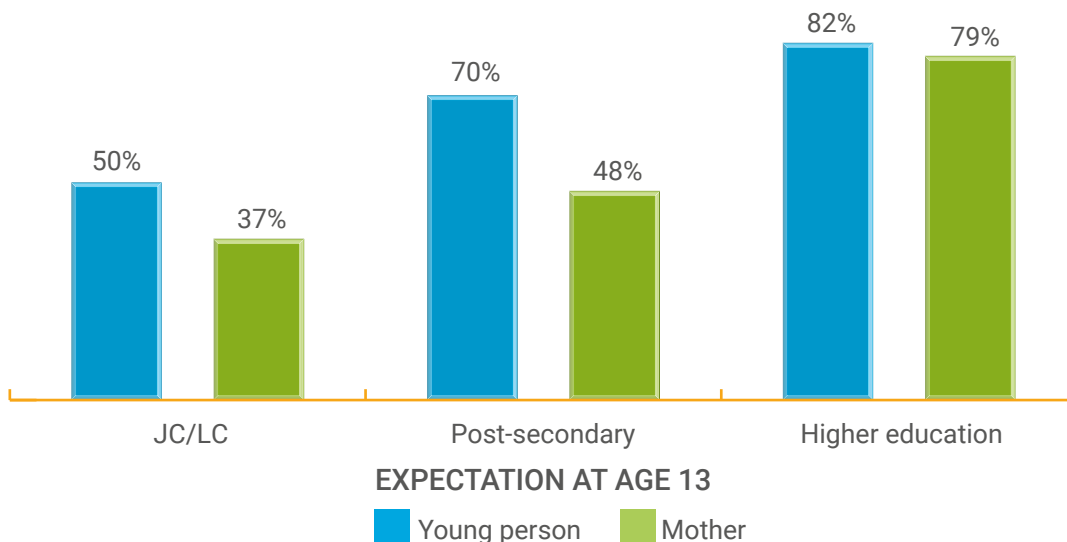


PLC courses were more common among those who did the Leaving Certificate Applied programme or got lower points (43% and 38% respectively). Early school-leavers were more likely to have taken part in other further education and training options (33% did so).

**Among 20-year-olds, entry to higher education was the most prevalent pathway but was less common for those from less advantaged families, those who had taken the LCA programme and those with lower points.**

The pathway taken after leaving school was significantly related to the educational expectations held by young people and their parents seven years previously. Where higher education had been the expected pathway at 13, around four-fifths took that route after leaving school (Figure 8). However, a significant proportion of young people who had not initially expected to go on to higher education actually did so. For instance, among those who expected at age 13 to finish their education at Junior or Leaving Certificate level, one-half participated in higher education.

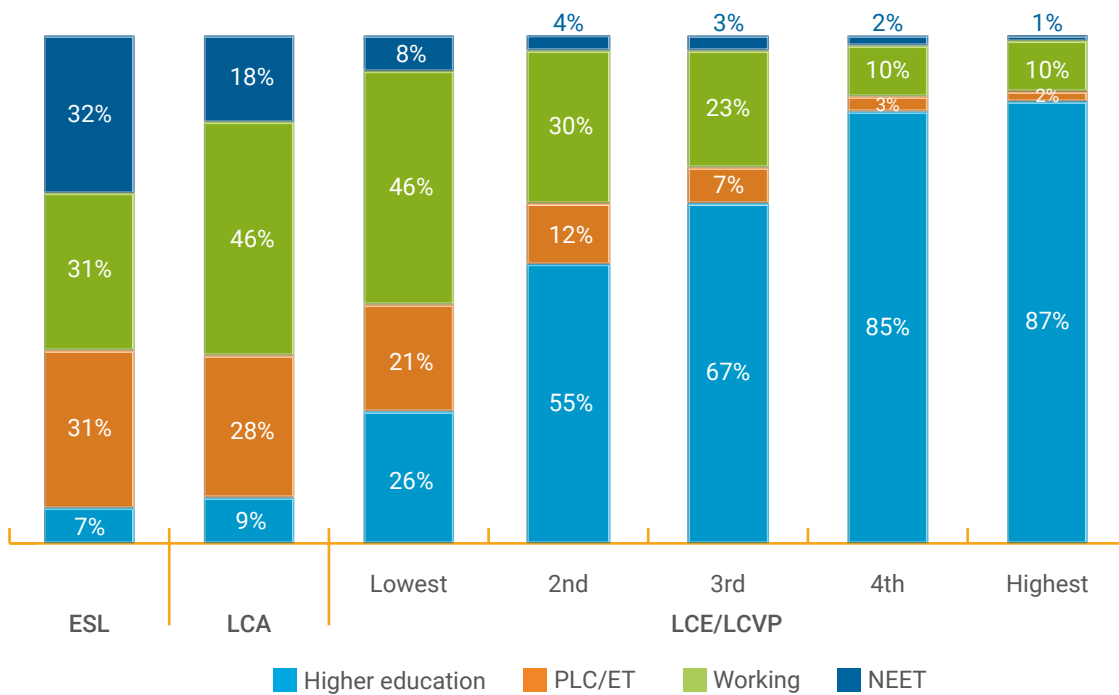
**Figure 8: Participation in higher education by educational expectations of the young person and their mother at age 13**



## Main activity and second-level attainment

This section looks at whether educational attainment made a difference to the main activity of 20-year-olds at the time of the survey (*Key Findings 1* looks at differences in main activity by gender and family background). Figure 9 shows the importance of second-level attainment to the main activity at the age of 20. Most of those who had left school early, taken the Leaving Certificate Applied or had low points left full-time education or training by 20. In contrast, most of those who had received at least moderate points were still in education, mainly higher education.

Figure 9: Main activity at 20 years of age by stage of leaving school, senior cycle programme and Leaving Certificate points (in quintiles)



Early school-leavers (ESL) were at much greater risk of being *not in education, employment or training* (NEET, 32%). NEET rates were also higher among those who had taken the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA, 18%), a level more than double that found among the lowest-performing LCE/LCVP leavers (8%).

**Early school-leavers and those who had taken the Leaving Certificate Applied programme were more likely not to be in education, training or employment (NEET).**

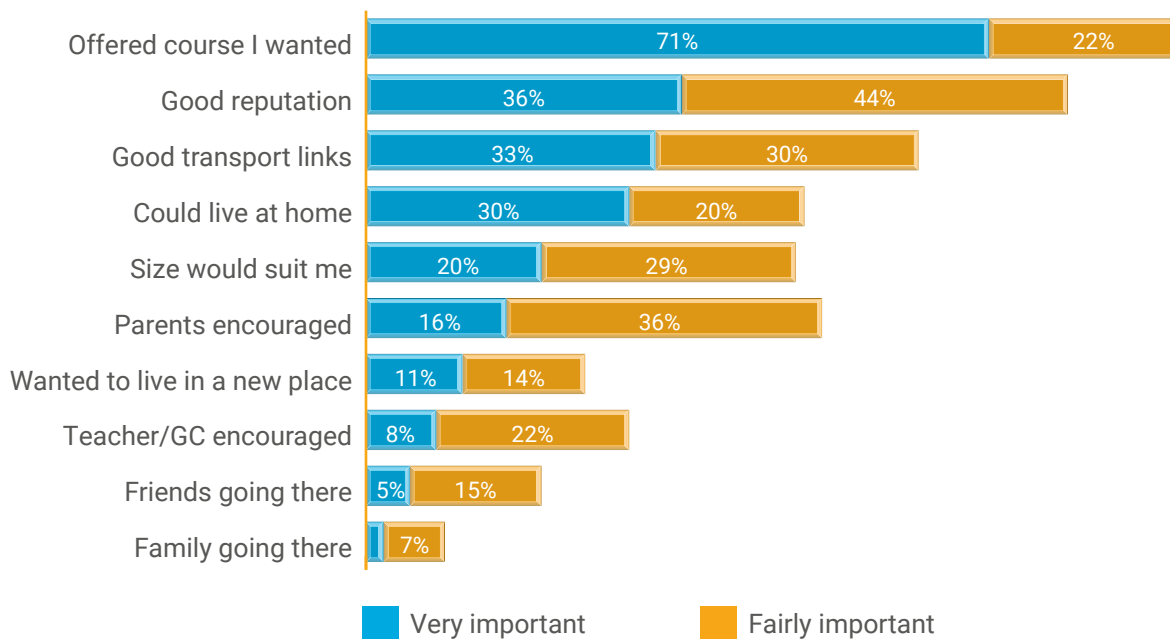
## Choosing a further or higher-education institution

Twenty-year-olds who had attended or were attending a further or higher-education course were asked about their reasons for selecting that specific institution. Almost all (93%) rated the 'subject/course they wanted' being on offer as *very* or *fairly* important in choosing a place to study, while the institution having 'a good reputation' also played a strong role (80%) (Figure 10). Geographical access emerged as an important consideration; 63% rated 'good transport links' as important, and half felt it important that it 'would allow them to live at home'. 'Parental encouragement' was rated as more important to choice of institution than 'recommendation by a teacher/guidance counsellor' (52% versus 30%).





Figure 10: Reasons for the choice of higher/further education institution given by 20-year-olds (% 'very' or 'fairly important')



Reasons for choice differed according to 20-year-olds' academic achievement and family background. For example, those who had scored high points in the Leaving Certificate emphasised that the institution 'offered the course/subject I wanted' (83% of the top quintile considered it *very important* compared with 64% of the lowest quintile) and the institution having 'a good reputation' (51% and 25% respectively). Young adults whose mothers had lower levels of education placed a stronger emphasis on being able 'to live at home' (44% *very important* compared with 24% where the mother had a degree) as well as on 'good transport links'.

**Higher-education choices reflected the courses provided and the reputation of the institution but being able to live at home was also important, especially for 20-year-olds from less advantaged families.**

## Funding education and training

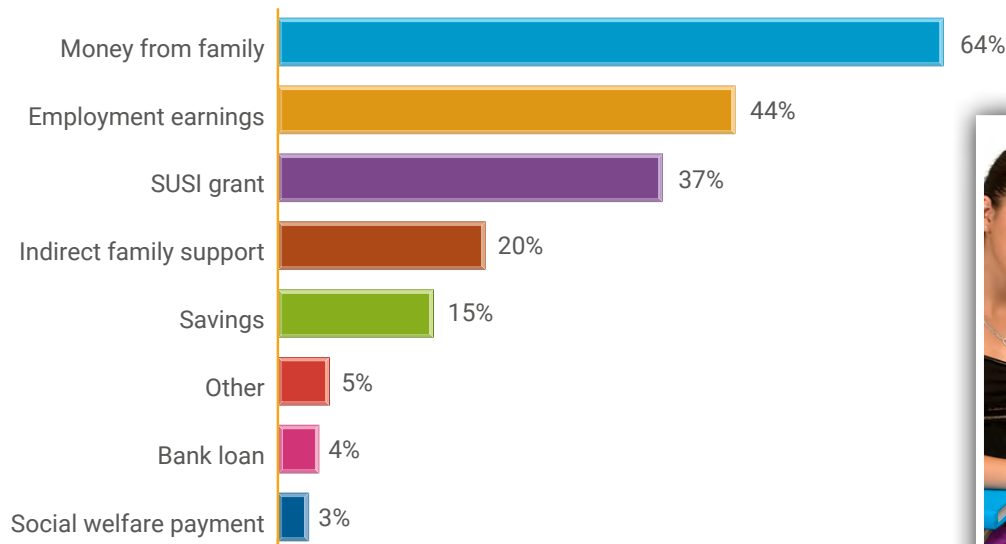
How educational participation is funded has been the subject of much debate in Ireland and internationally. Most of the 20-year-olds in Cohort '98 drew on multiple forms of funding for their studies/training (Figure 11, over). Almost two-thirds (64%) received money from their family while 20% reported indirect family support (in the form of food or accommodation).

Just over four in ten (44%) were using earnings from employment while a slightly smaller proportion (37%) were in receipt of the SUSI (State Universal Support Ireland) maintenance grant. Not surprisingly, given that the grant is means-tested, receipt was higher among those from lower-income families (58% of the bottom income quintile<sup>6</sup> compared with 11% of the highest income quintile). Receipt of money from their family was less common in lower-income families; 89% of those from the highest income quintile received such support compared with 40% of those from the lowest quintile.



<sup>6</sup> Income refers to the total disposable income of the household when the young person was aged 17/18, adjusted for household size and composition, divided into quintiles (fifths) ranging from the lowest to the highest.

Figure 11: Sources of funding while studying/in training



## Employment and what young people looked for in a job

Just over a quarter of 20-year-olds reported their main activity at the time of the survey as *working*; this includes a very small number who were on unpaid internships. Of those *working*, the majority (79%) were working full-time. On a 10-point scale where higher scores were more positive, 20-year-olds rated 'liking their job' at 7.4 and the 'security of their job' at 7.7. There was little variation by gender, family background or qualification level but those not working full-time hours considered their job less secure (7.1 compared with 7.9).

Despite this fairly positive view of their job, a majority (63%) felt the job was a 'stop-gap' rather than the 'start to a long-term career'. There was no marked variation in this viewpoint by gender, family background or qualification level. Those who viewed their job as a stop-gap were more negative about the job (6.6 compared with 8.8) and saw it as less secure (7.0 compared with 8.7).

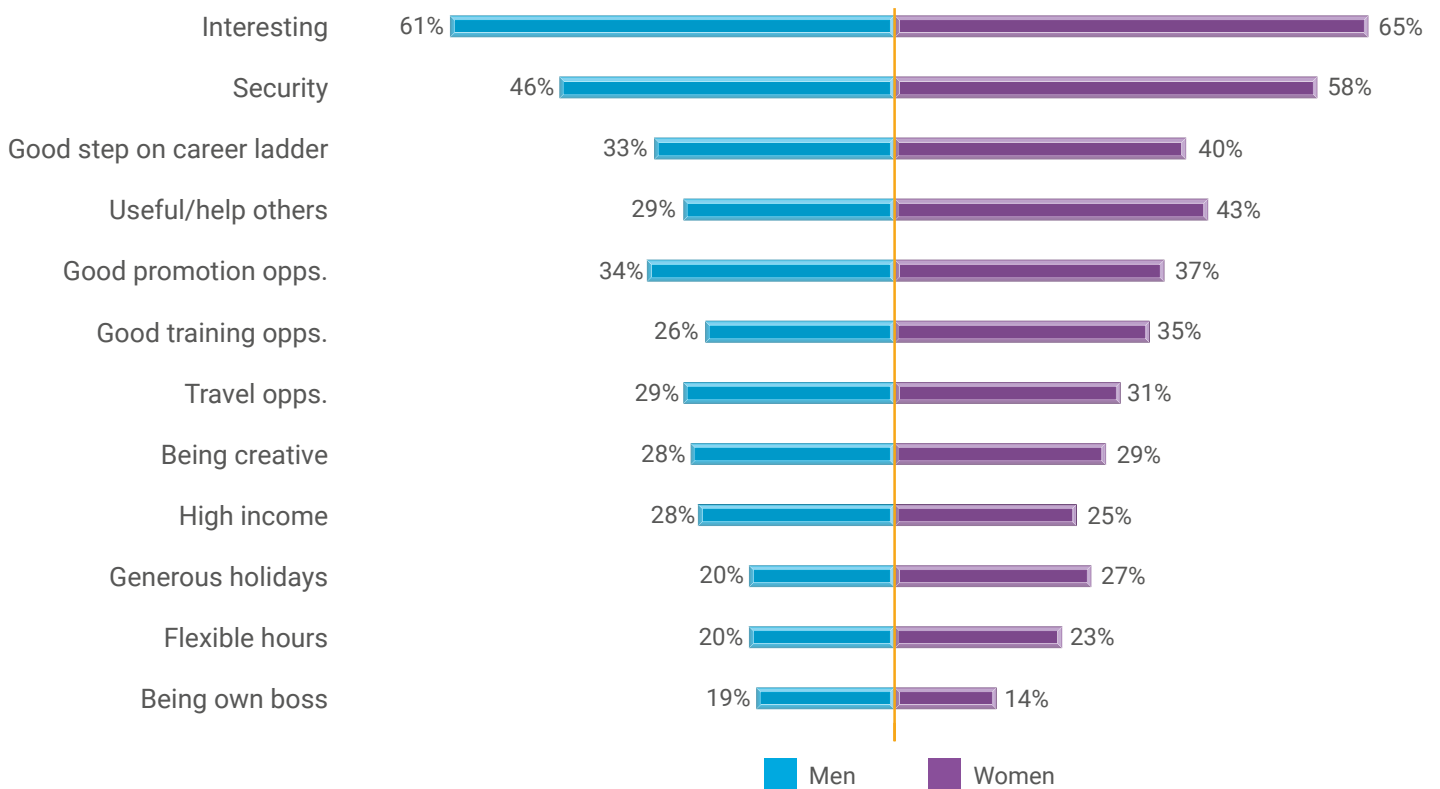
All of the 20-year-olds, including those not in employment, were asked about the importance of different factors (rating them from 0 to 10) in choosing a job. Figure 12 shows the proportion giving a factor very high ratings (9 or 10 out of a maximum of 10) by gender. The job 'being interesting' and 'job security' were given the highest ratings while the lowest rating was given to the opportunity to be 'your own boss'. Young women gave higher ratings to a number of job features; particularly related to 'job security' and the job 'being useful or helping others'. In contrast, young men were somewhat more likely to rate 'being your own boss' highly.

Those from the lowest-skilled social classes were more likely to emphasise 'high income'; 29% did so compared to 20% of those from the professional social class. Twenty-year-olds who had not gone on to higher education were more likely to emphasise 'training opportunities' (41% compared with 26%) or 'good promotion opportunities' (41% compared with 33%).



**20-year-olds wanted interesting and secure jobs, with fewer focusing on securing a high income.**

Figure 12: Factors rated as very important (9-10 out of 10) in choosing a job among 20-year-olds by gender



## SUMMARY POINTS

- Most 20-year-olds were positive about their second-level education but many highlighted a lack of preparation for the world of work and adult life.
- There was a significant achievement gap in Leaving Certificate performance by family background (mother's education, social class and income).
- The Leaving Certificate programme taken and the grades received were strongly associated with post-school educational participation. They were also strongly related to the chances of obtaining a job among those who entered the labour market, with early school-leavers more likely to be not in education, training or employment (NEET).
- Higher education was the most common pathway among 20-year-olds but entry rates were lower among those from less advantaged backgrounds, those who had taken the Leaving Certificate Applied and those with lower grades.

# BACKGROUND

**Growing Up in Ireland** is the national longitudinal study of children and young people. The study is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), with a contribution from The Atlantic Philanthropies. It is managed by the DCYA in association with the Central Statistics Office. It is carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). The study is designed to inform policy affecting children and young people in Ireland.

The study tracks the development of two nationally representative cohorts of children and young people over time. **Cohort '98 (Child Cohort)** members were selected through primary schools and interviewed at 9 years, at 13 years, at 17/18 years and at 20 years old. These *Key Findings* are based on the 5,191 interviews with **Cohort '98** at age 20.

The second cohort is around ten years younger: **Cohort '08 (Infant Cohort)** members were first interviewed when the Study Child was 9 months old. The cohort members were re-interviewed at ages 3, 5 and 9 years, and a postal survey was completed by the parents at age 7/8. The experience of this cohort is described in a separate series of reports.

## Methodology

The table below shows the details of each round of data collection with Cohort '98.

Age	When	Completed	Response rate*
9 years	2007/08	8,568	89%
13 years	2011/12	7,525	89%
17/18 years	2015/16	6,216	76%
20 years	2018/19	5,191	66%

\* The response rate is the number of completions as a % of the total issued to interviewers in each wave (eligible cohort members where the address was known, apart from definitive refusals).

In any study that follows people over time, some will not respond in the first wave (non-response) or drop out between waves (attrition). Every effort has been made to adjust for any differences between those who respond and those who do not, though it is never possible to guarantee that this has been completely successful. Adjustments for non-response in Wave 1



were based on characteristics of the schools the 9-year-olds attended and data from the 2006 Census (see [www.growingup.ie/pubs/Sample-Design-and-Response\\_9YearCohort.pdf](http://www.growingup.ie/pubs/Sample-Design-and-Response_9YearCohort.pdf)). Adjustments for attrition between waves were based on characteristics measured at the last interview (or the first wave), including the young person's gender, family type, mother's education, family income, family social class; and the young person's score on a reading test at age 9. All figures presented in this *Key Findings* report are based on the statistically adjusted data.

The figures presented here are purely descriptive and do not control for potential interactions or confounding effects. All figures are preliminary and may be subject to change.

**Access to Growing Up in Ireland data:** Anonymised versions of all data collected in **Growing Up in Ireland** are available for research. Information on how to apply for access to the data, and copies of the questionnaires, are available at [www.growingup.ie/information-for-researchers](http://www.growingup.ie/information-for-researchers).

## Thank you to all participants

The success of **Growing Up in Ireland** is the result of contributions from a large number of individuals, schools, organisations and groups, many of whom helped to recruit the sample and collect the data. The Study Team is particularly grateful to the thousands of families and young people from every part of the country who have given so generously of their time on numerous occasions to make this study possible. A very big 'thank you' to all the children, young people and their families.

For further information about **Growing Up in Ireland**, visit [www.growingup.ie](http://www.growingup.ie), email [growingup@esri.ie](mailto:growingup@esri.ie) or Freephone 1800 200 434.