

Report on a 2015 survey of the social context and basic skill attainments of learners in Youthreach Centres and CTCs

Background

This survey of centres delivering the Youthreach programme was carried out and analysed by NEPS. It was based on a similar survey carried out with primary and post-primary schools in 2014 by the Education Research Centre at the request of the Department of Education and Skills. The purpose of that exercise was to collect data that would assist the Department to develop an educational profile for each school. The Education Act (1998) recognises the need for policies and strategies to address educational disadvantage and allows for the payment of additional moneys for this purpose. To this end, the Department has been providing additional resources to schools identified as serving a particularly disadvantaged community under DEIS and previous social inclusion programmes. Under new proposals¹ from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), schools' educational profiles would also be used to determine provision for special educational needs. The relevant information for calculating schools' educational profiles is based on three broad areas:

- The number of students with very complex special educational needs
- The results of standardised tests
- The social context of each school.

The data collected in this survey relate primarily to the last two of these areas. Specifically, the questionnaire gathered information on: 1) the location of centres, 2) learners' families' socio-economic context, 3) learners' parents or guardians' engagement with their education and 4) learners' attainment in literacy and numeracy.

Response

The response rate to the survey from Youthreach Centres and CTCs is presented in the following table.

Table 1: Response rate

	No. of centres	%age of total	No. of learners
Youthreach Centres	54	50%	1683
CTCs	15	43%	760
Centres	69	48%	2443

The following sections provide combined results from Youthreach Centres and CTCs. The correlation between the responses from both types of centres was so high that it was decided not to treat them separately.

¹ NCSE (2014). *Delivery for children with special educational needs*. http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Allocating_resources_1_5_14_Web_accessible_version_FINAL.pdf

Question 1: What is the location of your centre?

NOTE: Location categories are based on those used by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). *Tick \surd one only*

Table 2: Responses to Question 1

(a) The city of Dublin or its suburbs, or the cities of Cork, Galway, Waterford or Limerick	26	38%
(b) A city or large town – apart from those specified above (population of 10,000 or more)	19	28%
(c) A town (population 5,000 to 9,999)	7	10%
(d) A town (population 1,500 to 4,999)	11	16%
(e) A village or rural community (population 1,000 to 1,499)	3	4%
(f) A village or rural community (population 500 to 999)	2	3%
(g) A village or rural community (population under 500)	1	1%

Question 2: What was the total enrolment of your centre on 31 October 2014?

Table 3: Responses to Question 2

Total number of learners across all responding centres	2443
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Question 3: In questions 3(a-i), your estimates of the socio-economic characteristics of the learners in your centre are sought. Please base your answers to the following questions on all learners enrolled in the centre at that time. For each characteristic, please indicate as accurately as possible the number of learners with the specified characteristic.

Table 4: Responses to Question 3

Of the total number of learners enrolled in your centre on 31 October 2014, how many	No. centres answering question	Mean %	SD
(a) live in a house in which the main breadwinner is unemployed? <i>(If none, enter '0')</i>	65	63.2	18.7
(b) live in a one-parent family? (This includes one parent, separated and widowed families.) <i>(If none, enter '0')</i>	66	49.0	16.8
(c) live in a family that has a full medical card? <i>(If none, enter '0')</i> Note: Count only those who have a full medical card and not those with a 'GP only' medical card	60	81.0	17.7
(d) live in local authority accommodation/housing? <i>(If none, enter '0')</i>	63	72.6	19.7
(e) are in a family with five or more children? <i>(If none, enter '0')</i>	57	26.4	19.6
(f) live in a family that is dependent mainly on social welfare payments? <i>(If none, enter '0')</i>	64	67.5	17.3
(g) live in a family with a low income <i>(If none, enter '0')</i> . Note: Please exclude those learners counted in (f)	59	48.9	34.8
(h) are members of the Travelling Community? <i>(If none, enter '0')</i>	67	18.2	18.8
(i) have English as an additional language (EAL)? <i>(If none, enter '0')</i>	54	6.8	9.2

Question 3 (g) was misunderstood by a number of respondents who clearly did not exclude learners counted in (f). For question 3 (a) – (i) [excluding 3(g)] the correlation between Youthreach Centres’ and CTCs’ mean scores was 0.99.

Question 4: In questions 4(a-d), your estimates of the characteristics of learners and levels of parental involvement in your centre are sought. *Please base your answers to the following questions on all learners enrolled in the centre on 31 October 2014. For each characteristic, please indicate as accurately as possible the percentage of learners with the specified characteristic.*

Table 5: Responses to Question 4

Of the learners enrolled in your centre on 31 October 2014:	No. centres answering question	Mean %	SD
(a) What percentage of learners was unable to participate fully or effectively in the centre through a combination of any of the following factors: regularly came to the centre late, without adequate nutrition, without books/materials for class, too tired to take part in lessons? <i>(If none, enter '0')</i>	66	45.9	26.2
(b) For what percentage of learners did at least one parent or guardian take an active part in their child’s education by visiting the centre and/or attending parent-teacher meetings? <i>(If none, enter '0')</i>	66	47.9	29.6
(c) For what percentage of learners did at least one parent or guardian support the centre by, for example, volunteering to take part in after centre activities, volunteering to be involved in the work of the centre such as assisting in classrooms, helping with the library, trips or sports activities, or showing an active interest in the centre’s parent council and/or board of management? <i>(If none, enter '0')</i>	61	2.0	4.6
(d) For what percentage of learners did at least one parent or guardian show evidence of engaging in their child’s learning at home by supporting their child with homework and/or providing and encouraging learning-related activities? <i>(If none, enter '0')</i>	58	11.7	15.2

For question 4 (a) – (d) the correlation between Youthreach Centres’ and CTCs’ mean scores was 0.96.

Question 5: In questions 5(a-d), we are seeking attainment scores in relation to literacy and numeracy skills for those learners who were enrolled in your centre on 31 October 2014, if these are available. The scores must have been achieved at some point between 1 Apr 2014 and 31 Mar 2015. If a learner has been tested more than once during this time use their most recent score. The test(s) used must have been normed tests yielding standardised or percentile scores. *Please provide the answers to the following questions in respect only of learners enrolled in the centre at 31 Oct 2014. For each characteristic, please indicate as accurately as possible the percentage of learners achieving at the specified level.*

Most centres were not in a position to provide standardised scores in literacy and numeracy for their cohort of learners as they are not in the habit of using standardised tests. Some centres provided standardised scores in respect of a small number of their learners but as these learners could not be assumed to be typical of their total cohort – perhaps being assessed precisely because they had particular difficulties with learning – it was decided to examine the scores from centres where at least 40% had been tested. Twenty five centres (2 CTCs and 23 Youthreach Centres) fulfilled this criterion and the following results are based on an analysis of their scores.

5. (a) Word reading

Number tested between 1 Apr 2014 and 31 Mar 2015: 774

Table 6: Mean percentage of learners achieving word reading scores in each sten band

Sten score band	Mean %	SD
Standard score of 70 or lower	11.4	10.7
Standard score between 71 and 76	13.0	10.4
Standard score between 77 and 84	15.7	9.6
Standard score between 85 and 92	22.6	7.6
Standard score between 93 and 99	15.5	8.0
Standard score between 100 and 107	14.1	16.9
Standard score between 108 and 115	4.6	5.5
Standard score between 116 and 122	1.2	2.2
Standard score between 123 and 129	0.2	0.9
Standard score of 130 or above	0.8	2.2

5. (b) Sentence reading

Number tested between 1 Apr 2014 and 31 Mar 2015: 723

Table 7: Mean percentage of learners achieving sentence reading scores in each sten band

Sten score band	Mean %	SD
Standard score of 70 or lower	11.4	10.7
Standard score between 71 and 76	13.0	10.4
Standard score between 77 and 84	15.7	9.6
Standard score between 85 and 92	22.6	7.6
Standard score between 93 and 99	15.5	8.0
Standard score between 100 and 107	14.1	16.9
Standard score between 108 and 115	4.6	5.5
Standard score between 116 and 122	1.2	2.2
Standard score between 123 and 129	0.2	0.9
Standard score of 130 or above	0.8	2.2

5. (c) Spelling

Number tested between 1 Apr 2014 and 31 Mar 2015: 773

Table 8: Mean percentage of learners achieving spelling scores in each sten band

Sten score band	Mean %	SD
Standard score of 70 or lower	11.0	10.8
Standard score between 71 and 76	10.1	8.0
Standard score between 77 and 84	15.5	9.0
Standard score between 85 and 92	23.3	9.5
Standard score between 93 and 99	17.8	9.2
Standard score between 100 and 107	13.8	9.1
Standard score between 108 and 115	4.0	4.4
Standard score between 116 and 122	1.8	3.3
Standard score between 123 and 129	0.4	1.3
Standard score of 130 or above	0.8	2.0

5. (d) Maths computation

Number tested between 1 Apr 2014 and 31 Mar 2015: 697

Table 9: Mean percentage of learners achieving maths computation scores in each sten band

Sten score band	Mean %	SD
Standard score of 70 or lower	17.6	12.1
Standard score between 71 and 76	15.3	8.3
Standard score between 77 and 84	27.5	11.0
Standard score between 85 and 92	18.7	8.5
Standard score between 93 and 99	10.3	8.2
Standard score between 100 and 107	6.9	11.4
Standard score between 108 and 115	2.1	4.3
Standard score between 116 and 122	0.3	0.8
Standard score between 123 and 129	0.1	0.6
Standard score of 130 or above	0.0	0.0

Discussion

Compared to the response of primary (96%) and post-primary (85%) schools to the ERC survey, the response from centres at 48% was disappointing. Some coordinators and managers expressed a reluctance to provide personal information on families served by their centre, possibly because of concerns about data protection issues or because they simply did not have the information.

The location of centres is 92% urban and 8% rural (compared to a geographical urban / rural split in the population of 62% / 38%²). The majority of centres (65%) are located in cities and large towns with just under a quarter in small towns and rural communities.

The responses to Question 3 on key socioeconomic characteristics showed very high levels of economic disadvantage in the families of learners. In line with the ERC's findings in primary and post-primary schools, there was a substantial and statistically significant correlation between the various socioeconomic variables used in the survey. The figures for centres are significantly higher than for post-primary schools across all of these variables, including for schools that are designated disadvantaged (i.e. in the DEIS scheme). This indicates that centres cater for a community of students that have a particularly high level of social exclusion.

² CSO (2012). *Profile 1 Town and Country*.

http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011vol1andprofile1/Profile1_Town_and_Country_Entire_doc.pdf

Table 10: Mean incidences of socioeconomic characteristics across schools and centres nationally

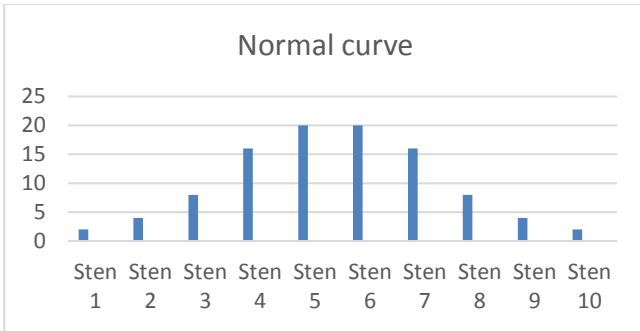
Key socioeconomic characteristics	Total post-primary schools		Post-primary schools in DEIS ³		Centres	
	<i>Mean %</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>Mean%</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>Mean%</i>	<i>(SD)</i>
Unemployed	27.3%	21.1	46.7%	19.9	63.2%	18.7
Holds a medical card	43.8%	36.1	66.6%	48.0	81.0%	17.7
Lives in Local Authority accommodation	29.0%	25.5	52.5%	28.0	72.6%	19.7
Lives in a lone-parent Family	21.9%	15.4	33.2%	17.4	49.0%	16.8
In a family with 5 or more children	10.5%	10.4	16.1%	11.8	26.4%	19.6
Children from Irish Traveller Community	2.1%	5.0	4.7%	7.7	18.2%	18.8

The fourth question sought information about the level of family support for the education being provided. The age of learners in the Youthreach context makes the relevance of this question more doubtful that it might be for children in primary schools or the earlier part of post-primary. The reliability of the responses was also an issue with coordinators/managers tending to give extreme values (e.g. '100%' or '0%') or putting 'n/a'.

It is notable that the majority of centres were not in a position to give standardised information on the literacy and numeracy attainments of their learners. Most centres do not use normed attainment tests and those that do do not necessarily test all their learners in a systematic way. Just over a third of the centres provided a sufficient number of scores across their learner cohort (the criterion was 40%) to allow for an analysis of the literacy and numeracy levels of their learners.

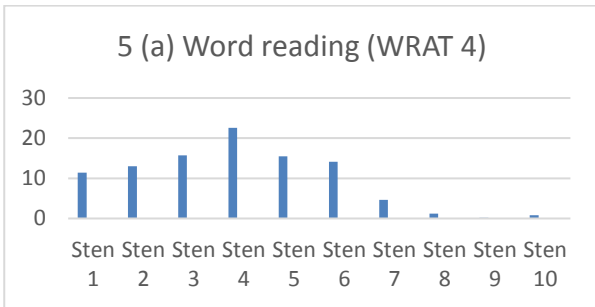
The analysis shows that the scores are skewed to the left side of each graph, indicating that significantly high numbers are scoring below the level that would be expected for their age group in the population at large. This can be seen by comparing each of the bar graphs and percentage tables below with those at the top of the page illustrating what would be the normally expected distribution across the population as a whole.

³ These figures were provided by Dr Susan Weir of the ERC in a personal communication on 4 Aug 2016.



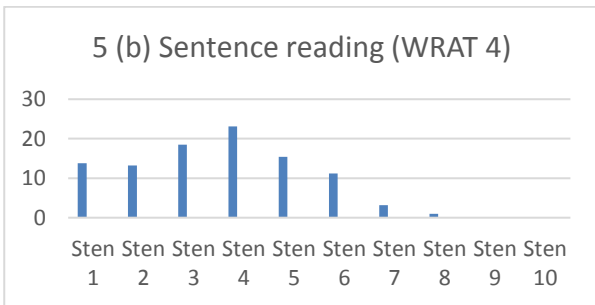
Expected %ages for each sten score:

Sten 1	2%	Sten 6	19%
Sten 2	4%	Sten 7	15%
Sten 3	9%	Sten 8	9%
Sten 4	15%	Sten 9	4%
Sten 5	19%	Sten 10	2%



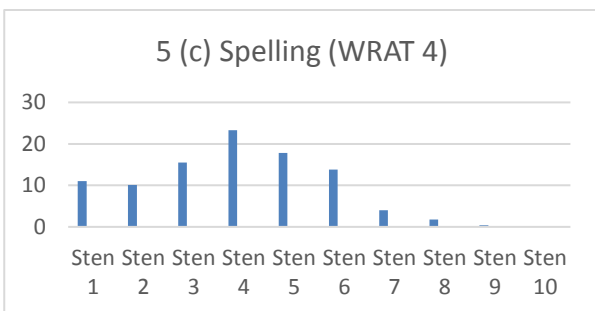
%ages achieving each sten score:

Sten 1	11%	Sten 6	14%
Sten 2	13%	Sten 7	5%
Sten 3	16%	Sten 8	1%
Sten 4	23%	Sten 9	<1%
Sten 5	16%	Sten 10	1%



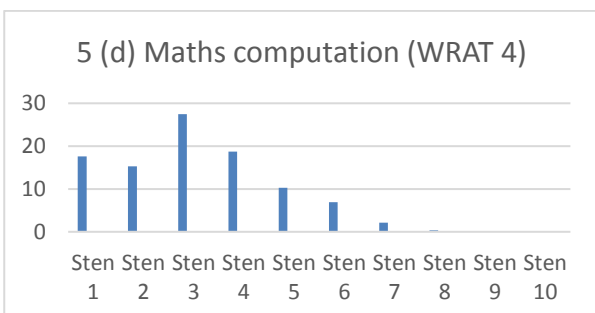
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Sten 3	16%	Sten 8	2%
Sten 4	23%	Sten 9	<1%
Sten 5	18%	Sten 10	1%



%ages achieving each sten score:

Sten 1	18%	Sten 6	7%
Sten 2	15%	Sten 7	2%
Sten 3	28%	Sten 8	<1%
Sten 4	19%	Sten 9	<1%
Sten 5	10%	Sten 10	0%

It is apparent that many of the learners are achieving quite low scores in each of the basic skill areas that are measured by the WRAT. Using a cut-off value of one standard deviation below the mean, (represented by sten scores of 3 or less and normally comprising 15% of a population), we find 40% of the learners in word reading, 46% in sentence reading, 37% in spelling and 61% in maths computation are at this level. The particularly weak performance in maths computation is striking (but not inconsistent with national and international research findings in relation to mathematical performance in Ireland⁴). In the literacy subtests, however, the majority (58% in word reading, 52% in sentence reading and 59% in spelling) scored within the broad average range (defined as within a standard deviation of the mean). A very small minority – less than 4% – performed above this level.

In their analysis of the data from the post-primary schools the ERC looked at the relationship between the socioeconomic variables and educational outcomes in third year students. They found a clear association between home backgrounds and achievement, with all of the socioeconomic variables correlating negatively and significantly with performance in the Junior Cert, both overall and in terms of the individual subject areas of English and mathematics⁵.

If attainment outcomes are to be improved in centres providing the Youthreach programme, the very high levels of educational disadvantage among learners needs to be addressed and adequate resources provided for this purpose.

⁴ DES (2016). *Review of national and international reports on literacy and numeracy*.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Literacy-and-Numeracy/Review-of-National-and-International-Reports-on-Literacy-and-Numeracy.pdf>

⁵ Weir & Denner (2016) *A survey of the socioeconomic profile of all post-primary schools in 2014 in the context of developing a new resource allocation model: Report to the Department of Education and Skills / National Council for Special Education*. http://www.erc.ie/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/NCSE_survey_Post-Primary_schools_2014.pdf