



Press release

Launch of *Digital Technologies in Education: Ireland in International Context (Trends and Implications from PISA 2012-2018)*

Jude Cosgrove, Emmet Feerick, Eva Moran, and Rachel Perkins
Educational Research Centre (29th September 2022).

The full report can be found at <https://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/DT-in-Ed-PISA-2012-to-2018-for-web.pdf>

Today, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) publishes a new report, *Digital Technologies in Education: Ireland in International Context*. The report draws on data collected in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which gathers information from 15-year-old students and school principals. The report examines trends in digital technologies in post-primary schools and students' school and home contexts in 2012, 2015 and 2018, and includes an in-depth analysis for 2018. Detailed comparisons are made between Ireland and EU and OECD countries and country averages in the report, which also includes an overview of European and national contexts.

The publication of the report occurs shortly after the publication by the Department of Education of the new national Digital Strategy for Schools (DSS), and prior to the publication of the first implementation plan (2022-2024) of the DSS. It is designed to address some of the data and evidence gaps in this area and to encourage reflection and debate about the implementation of the new DSS to 2027. It provides a set of policy implications, as well as implications for further research.

The authors emphasise that the data were collected in 2018, prior to the onset of the pandemic, but note nonetheless that several of the findings merit concern and ongoing monitoring. The lead author, Dr Jude Cosgrove (who has recently left the ERC to take up another position) commented: "Perhaps what is most striking from a review of digital technology in education policies and frameworks across Europe is the extent to which countries vary with respect to digital technology policy, curriculum and assessment in primary and post-primary schools. Ireland generally fares reasonably well in these international comparisons but lags behind in some areas. Some of the international comparative research has attributed this to a lack of a national overarching vision and longer-term plan for digital technologies in education."

She went on to note: "From the review of the implementation of the previous DSS 2015-2020, and the new DSS to 2027, it seems clear that the adoption of a national digital competence framework is an urgent policy issue. A competence framework has the potential to bring coherence and alignment to curriculum, teacher professional development, assessment and evaluation. Ideally, a digital competence framework should cut across primary, post-primary, further and higher education, and it should also include links to the employment and social inclusion sectors of our society and government. The EU DigComp framework has been well-researched and it could be adopted in Ireland, since countries have flexibility in terms of how they adopt and adapt this framework. If an international framework were to be adopted, this would facilitate international

comparisons and monitoring, which would be important to be able to do in the area of digital technologies.”

The analyses in the report found that, generally speaking, Ireland fares quite well on broad measures of school digital technology (DT) infrastructure, yet is significantly and substantially below the EU and OECD averages on measures of student DT usage inside and outside of school for learning. This is a consistent and stable finding across 2012, 2015 and 2018.

In 2018, the capacity of schools in Ireland to use DT to support teaching and learning goals was significantly lower than the OECD and EU averages. A more detailed examination of the items contributing to the overall school DT capacity measure showed that the perceived adequacy of technical support in Irish post-primary schools is particularly low. Just one in five students were in schools whose principals reported that the level of technical support was adequate.

In 2018, students in Ireland reported relatively high levels of perceived DT competence and autonomy. However, levels of perceived DT competence and autonomy were lower among girls compared to boys, and also lower among socio-economically disadvantaged students compared to their more advantaged peers.

Countries with generally strong track records on indicators of school DT infrastructure and usage, and of student educational usage (according to the PISA data), included Australia, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. The authors suggest that a comparative review of the digital technology-related policies and practices in a sub-set of these countries could be valuable in guiding aspects of the implementation of the new DSS to 2027. The report calls for a dedicated resource stream for the assessment, monitoring and evaluation of the new DSS to 2027. It notes that given the significant investment in DT in recent years and planned investment under the new DSS to 2027, ongoing evaluation should occur alongside implementation in order to provide evidence of impact and guidance on targeted allocation of resources and efforts where required. The authors make some suggestions as to how existing large-scale assessment studies could be used as a basis for some of these evaluation activities, and they advocate for international discussion on the measurement of digital technologies indicators in studies such as PISA to enable good alignment with national goals in future cycles of the studies.

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Additional Information

- The Department of Education published its Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 on April 13, 2022 (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/69fb88-digital-strategy-for-schools/>). In the Strategy it is stated that an implementation plan for 2022-2024 will be published in due course. The new strategy is preceded by the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f8990-digital-strategy-for-schools-2015-2020/>)
- More information on the PISA study can be found at <https://www.erc.ie/studies/pisa/what-is-pisa/> and <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/>
- The EU DigComp framework is available at https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcomp_en