

Further Education and Training Insights

Post Leaving Certificate (PLC)

August 2026

Further
Education
& Training

SOLAS

An tSeirbhís Oideachais
Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
Further Education and
Training Authority



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag
an Aontas Eorpach

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Introduction

This SOLAS Further Education and Training Insights report provides key statistics on the economic outcomes of learners who have completed Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses within the Further Education and Training sector. PLC courses are recognised as the largest full-time, post-secondary non-tertiary option available in Ireland's further education system. These programmes are designed to deliver vocational education to a diverse group of learners, including school leavers who have completed their Leaving Certificate and adults returning to education.

PLC programmes play a pivotal role in preparing learners for employment. They not only train learners in technical skills relevant to various industries but also foster transversal skills that are valuable across different sectors. In addition, PLC courses offer robust progression opportunities, enabling learners to advance to higher education and further develop their career prospects.

The SOLAS Data Analytics Unit (DAU) has established a comprehensive graduate tracking system designed to support informed decision-making across all levels of Further Education and Training (FET). This system not only aids learners in making effective education and training choices but also assists policymakers and ensures that FET provision is closely aligned with the evolving skill requirements of the Irish economy. Since 2018, the employment and education outcomes of FET graduates have been incorporated as key targets in the Strategic Performance Agreements

between Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and SOLAS. Additionally, the objectives of the new FET Creating Futures Strategy 2026-2030, specifically 'Future Ready Knowledge and Skills' and 'Collaborating for Impact', emphasise the importance of learner outcomes as a primary source of information for evaluating the social and economic impact of FET on Ireland's economy, local communities, and individual learners.

With these objectives in mind, the DAU systematically monitors the labour market outcomes of FET learners, particularly those who were previously unemployed or economically inactive. The system tracks the transition of learners to sustainable employment after course completion, measures the quality of employment by reporting on earnings, and, for those already in employment, assesses improvements in their labour market outcomes. In addition to employment outcomes, the system also tracks the educational progression of FET graduates, examining their further education pathways both within the FET sector and into Higher Education.

This Insights report utilises data-driven analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of PLC courses, assessing whether they are successfully meeting labour market needs and functioning as a bridge between education and employment. The insights provided are invaluable for FET providers, offering feedback on the quality and alignment of PLC programmes with employer requirements, enhancing guidance services for learners, and ultimately prioritising the needs and outcomes of the learners themselves.

This series of outcome reports employs administrative data linking to assess the employment and education outcomes of PLC graduates. The analysis is conducted by a SOLAS-CSO Liaison Officer, operating under the formal partnership established by a statistical collaboration agreement between SOLAS and the Central Statistics Office (CSO). This work builds on previous research published by the SOLAS Data Analytics Unit and the CSO on PLC outcomes focusing on the outcomes of the 2021/2022 PLC graduate cohort. The first PLC Outcomes report published in 2019 found that 64% of 2014/2015 PLC graduates were in substantial employment by 2016. This report demonstrates further progress, revealing that 76% of 2021/2022 PLC graduates were in substantial employment by 2023, i.e. an improvement of 12 percentage points. Other findings from this research are consistent with the results of the 2019 report, and further details will be explored in subsequent sections of this report.

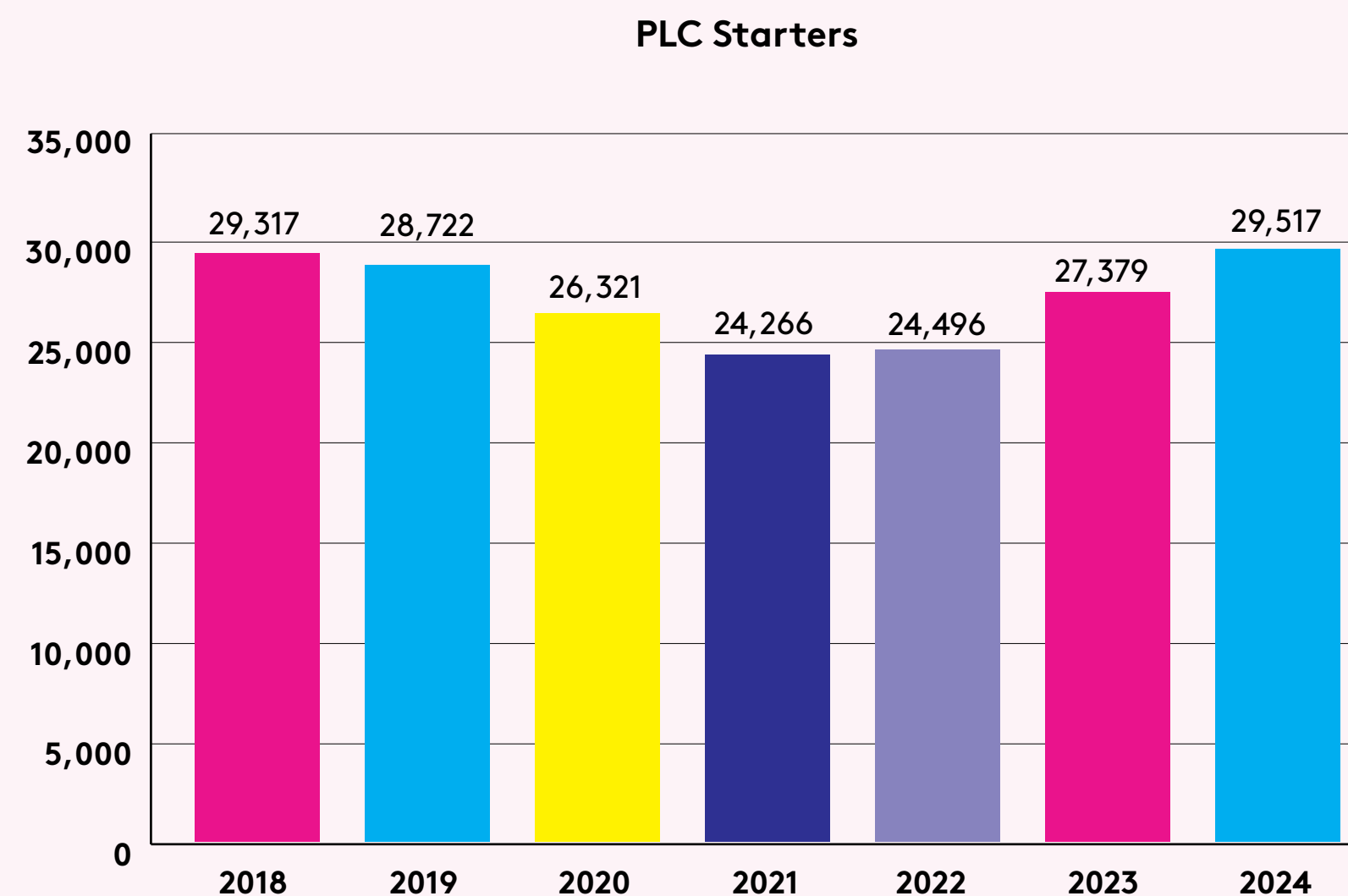


Background and Trends

In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the number of school leavers selecting Further Education and Training (FET) as their preferred pathway. Since 2019, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, alongside apprenticeships and newly introduced tertiary programmes, have emerged as significant alternatives to direct university entry. In 2024, PLC course enrolment reached a record high of 29,517 starters, surpassing the previous peak observed in 2018 prior to the pandemic. Of the 2024 cohort, 71% were under the age of 25, with over 22% opting for Health and Welfare courses, followed by 19% in

Arts and Humanities, 16% in Services, and 15% in Business, Administration, and Law disciplines.

The enrolments for PLC courses, as with other FET programmes, were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, dropping to 24,266 in 2021, i.e. a 17% reduction from the 2018 peak. Full recovery and further growth followed this decline. The resurgence in enrolment is attributed to coordinated efforts and targeted communication campaigns, which increased awareness and promoted Level 5/6 qualifications as accessible options for skilling, upskilling, reskilling, and as clear pathways into further education, higher education, and employment.



2021/2022 PLC Course Delivery and Popular Programmes

During the 2021/2022 academic year, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses were provided by sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs) as well as VSCSS, reaching a total of 92 different locations across Ireland. The ETBs offered over 1,500 PLC courses, covering every field of education and training. The majority of these courses fell within the areas of Arts and Humanities, Health and Welfare, Services, Business and Administration and Law, and Education.

The most popular PLC courses in 2021/2022 academic year were in Nursing Studies and midwifery, Audio-visual technics and media production, Hair and Beauty Services, Business and Administration, Welfare, Training for pre-school teachers, Veterinary, Social work and counselling, Sports, and Fine Arts. Majority of the courses delivered in 2021/2022 were at level 5 (83%) and level 6 (16%).

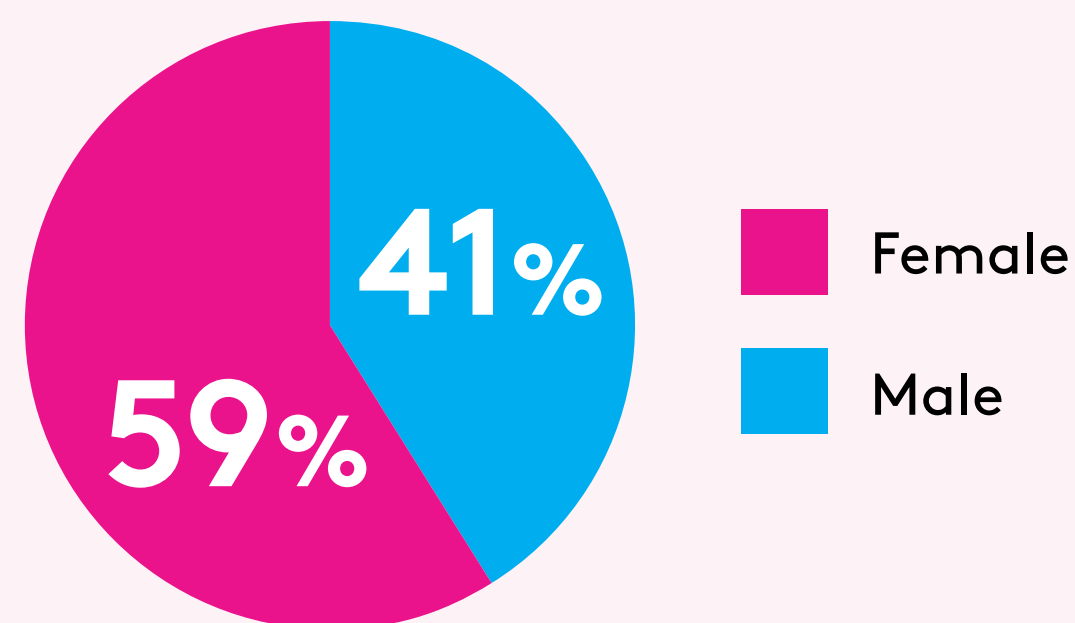
	Number of courses	Percent share (%)
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	59	4%
Arts and humanities	306	21%
Business and administration and law	246	17%
Education	112	8%
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	83	6%
Generic programmes and qualifications	39	3%
Health and welfare	278	19%
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	83	6%
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	39	3%
Services	264	18%
Social sciences, journalism and information	17	1%

Table 1: PLC courses by ISCED, 2021/2022

Learner Profile

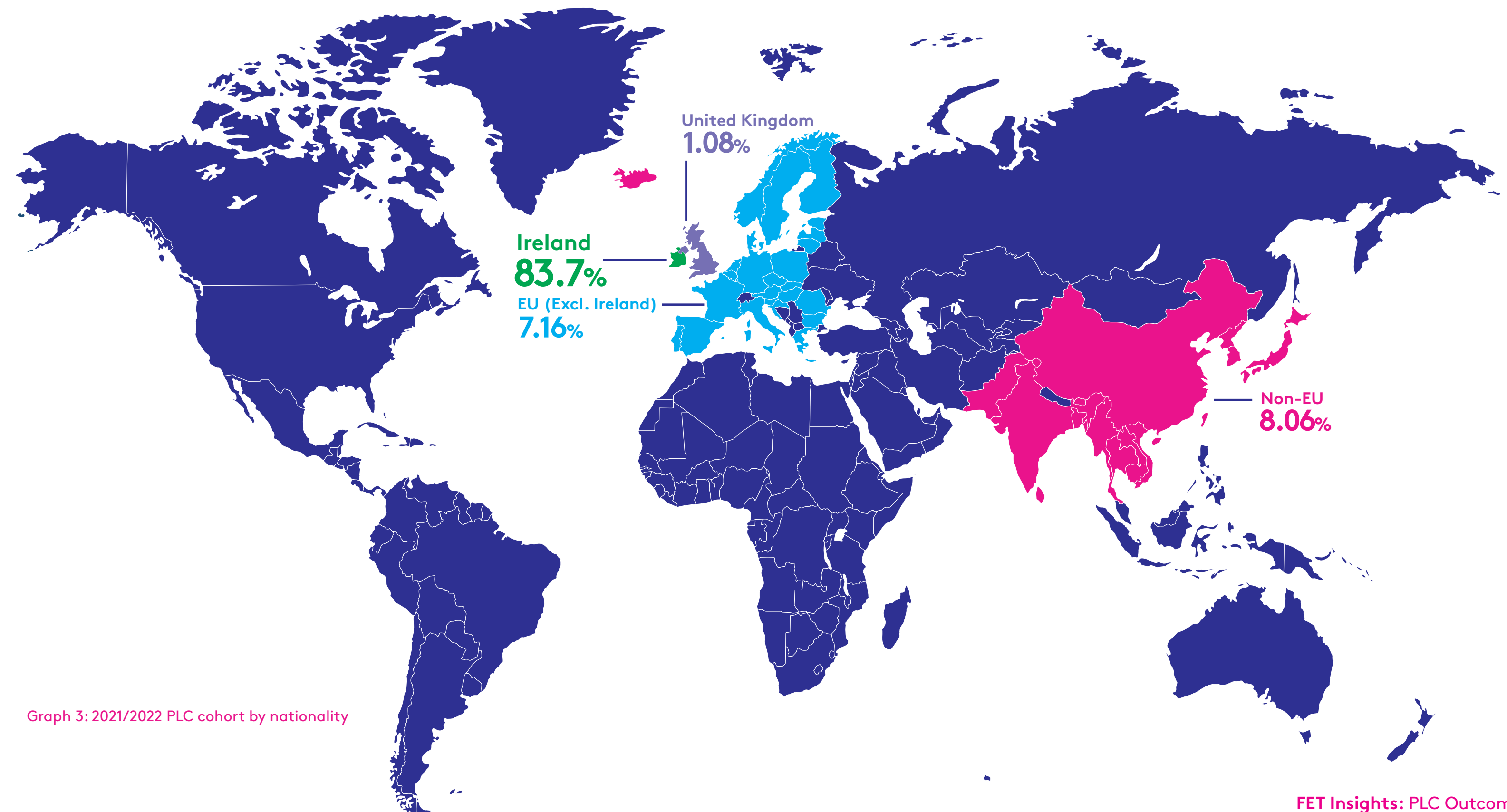
This report examines the educational and employment outcomes of learners who completed a PLC course in 2022. The analysis is limited to learners aged 25 years or younger at the commencement of their course; in 2022, this group comprised of 15,122 PLC graduates. The cohort's gender distribution aligns closely with national trends among learners, as females accounted for 59% and males represented 41%. The majority of learners commencing a PLC course were between 17 and 20 years old, with the age distribution exhibiting right skewness. The mean and median starting age was 19, and ages ranged from 16 to 24.

2021/22 Cohort by Gender



Graph 2: PLC cohort by gender

This cohort of learners represented nearly 100 nationalities, demonstrating significant diversity. Irish nationals comprised 83.7% of the group, followed by individuals from non-EU countries at 8.1%, EU nationals at 7.2%, and UK learners at 1.1%. Among the learners who were non-Irish, learners from Poland, UK, Lithuania, Latvia and Romania accounted for 50% of this cohort.



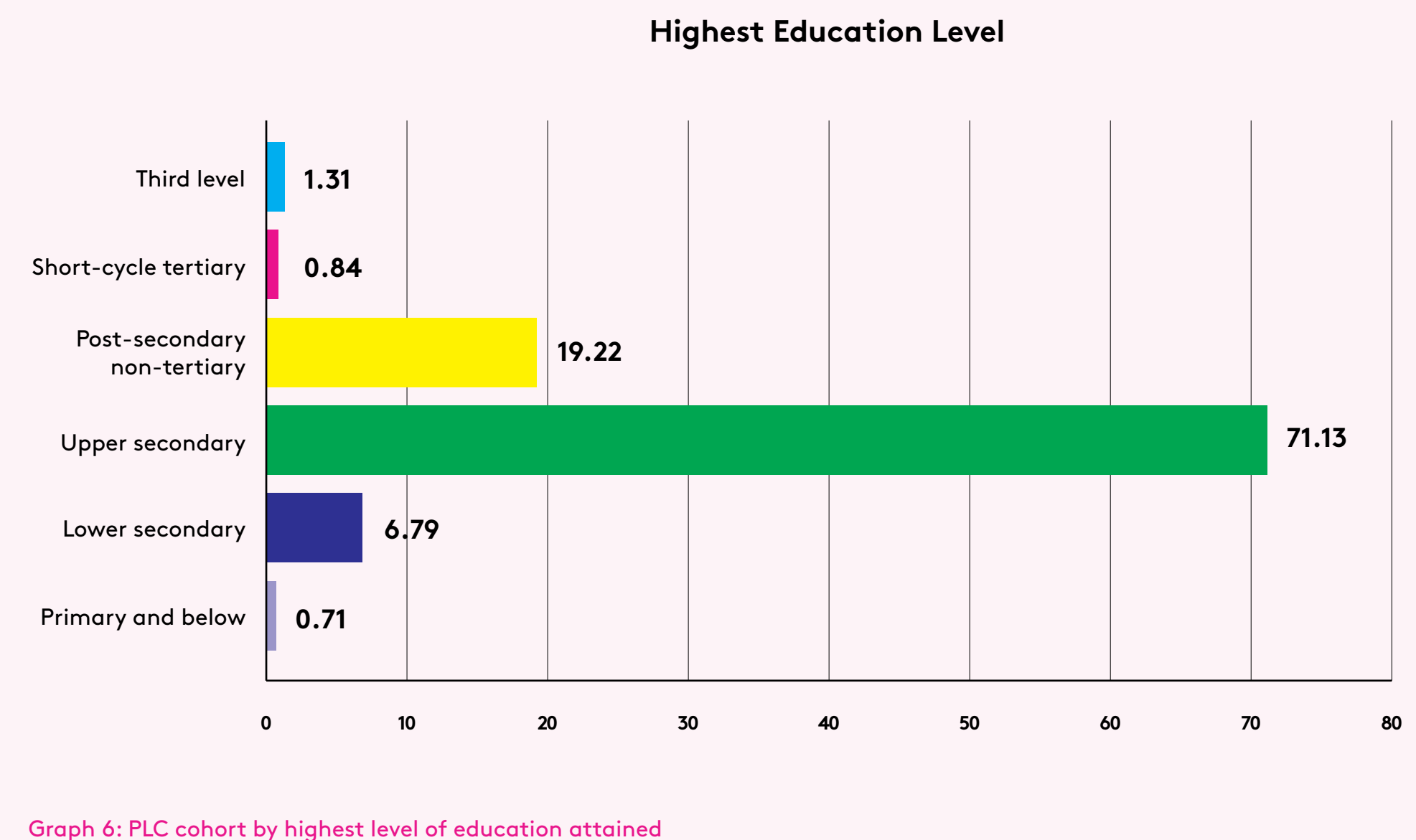
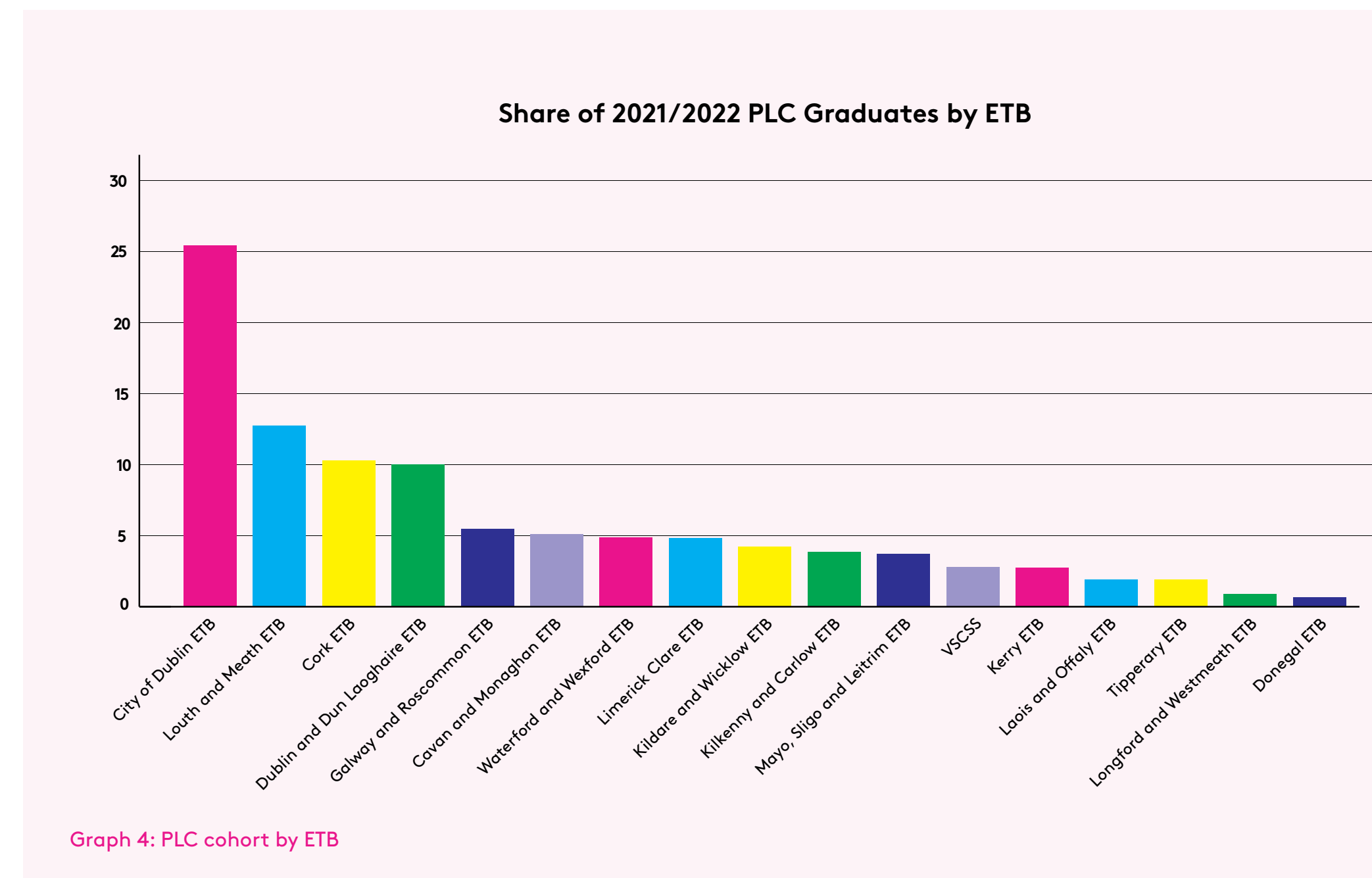
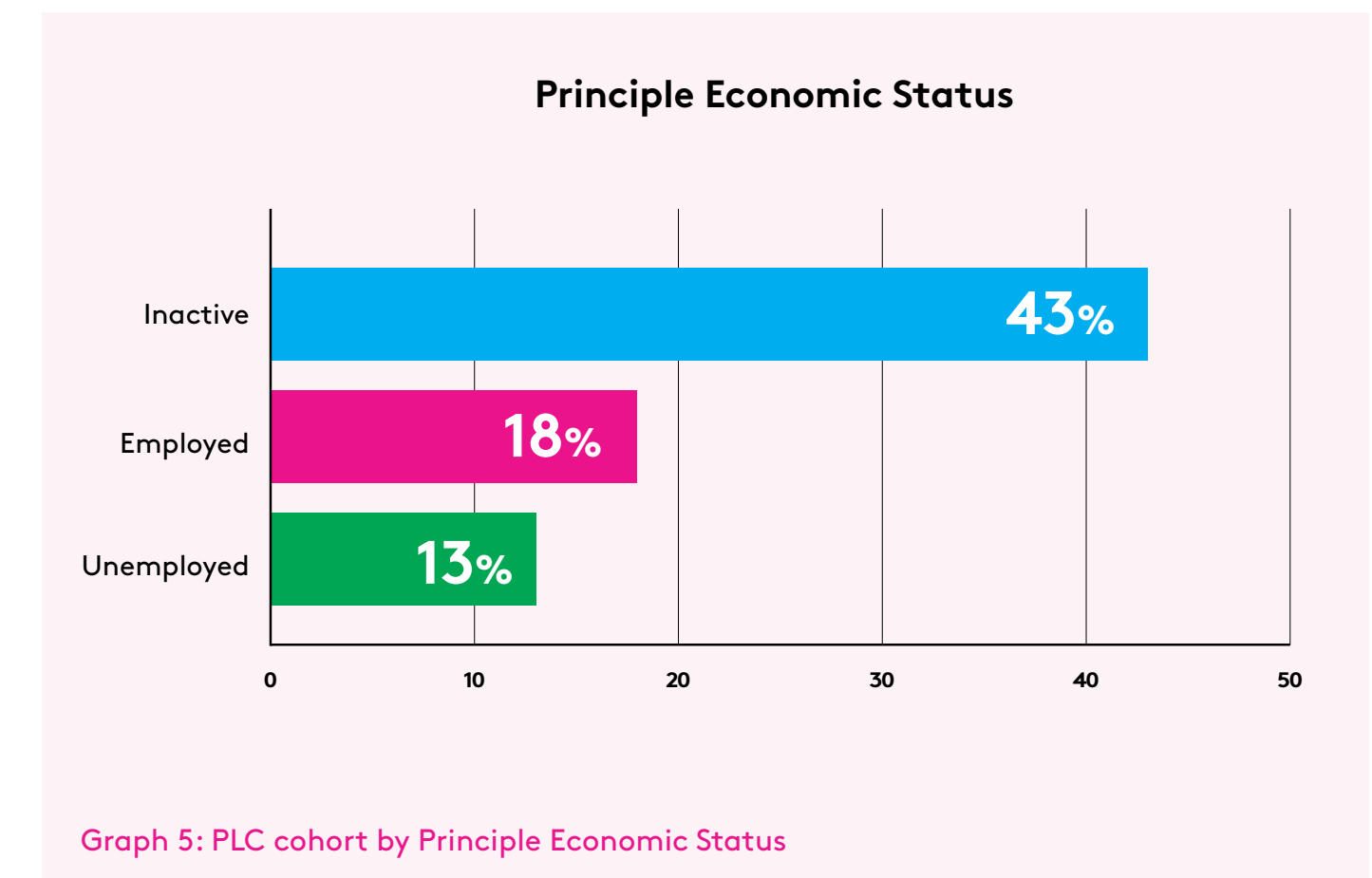
Graph 3: 2021/2022 PLC cohort by nationality

Inclusion is at the heart of any FET provision, as evidenced by the diverse backgrounds of PLC learners. During the 2021/2022 academic year, over 1,000 learners self-identified as having a long-term condition, 28 were from the Irish Traveller and Roma communities, and 34 were asylum seekers or refugees.

City of Dublin ETB accounted for 25% of the PLC graduate cohort in 2021/2022, followed by Louth and Meath ETB with 13%. Cork ETB and Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETBs each represented 10%, while Galway and Roscommon ETB and Cavan and Monaghan ETBs comprised 5% respectively.

The majority of the PLC learners in this cohorts were inactive (43%) before they started their course, meaning they were unemployed and were not actively seeking employment. Given the young age of this cohort, majority of the learners whose self-declared economic status was inactive (36% of the overall cohort) were in education and training prior to starting their PLC course, and the rest were inactive for other reasons. This was followed by learners who were employed making up 18% of the cohort and 13% were unemployed.¹

Prior to commencing their PLC course, the majority of learners in this cohort had attained upper secondary education (71.1%), while 19.2% held post-secondary non-tertiary qualifications and 2.1% possessed short-cycle tertiary or third-level education. A minority of learners had achieved education levels below upper secondary.



¹ Some of the PLC learners did not declare their economic status representing 26% of the overall cohort.

Methodology

Outcomes analysis in this report is performed within the CSO environment, utilising the Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD). The ELD is a statistical framework for the compilation and analysis of learner outcomes over several years. The ELD provides the basis for a series of projects that the CSO has established in collaboration with Irish public sector bodies to examine learner outcomes across a range of educational levels and programmes. The ELD is produced by matching pseudonymised data on learners that have completed courses or programmes to other pseudonymised data that describe their outcomes in subsequent years.

The data sources used to describe learner outcomes include:

- Data on educational participation from the Department of Education and several state agencies, including the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the State Examinations Commission (SEC), SOLAS and the National Apprenticeship Office (NAO),
- Employment and self-employment data from Revenue,
- Benefits data from the Department of Social Protection.

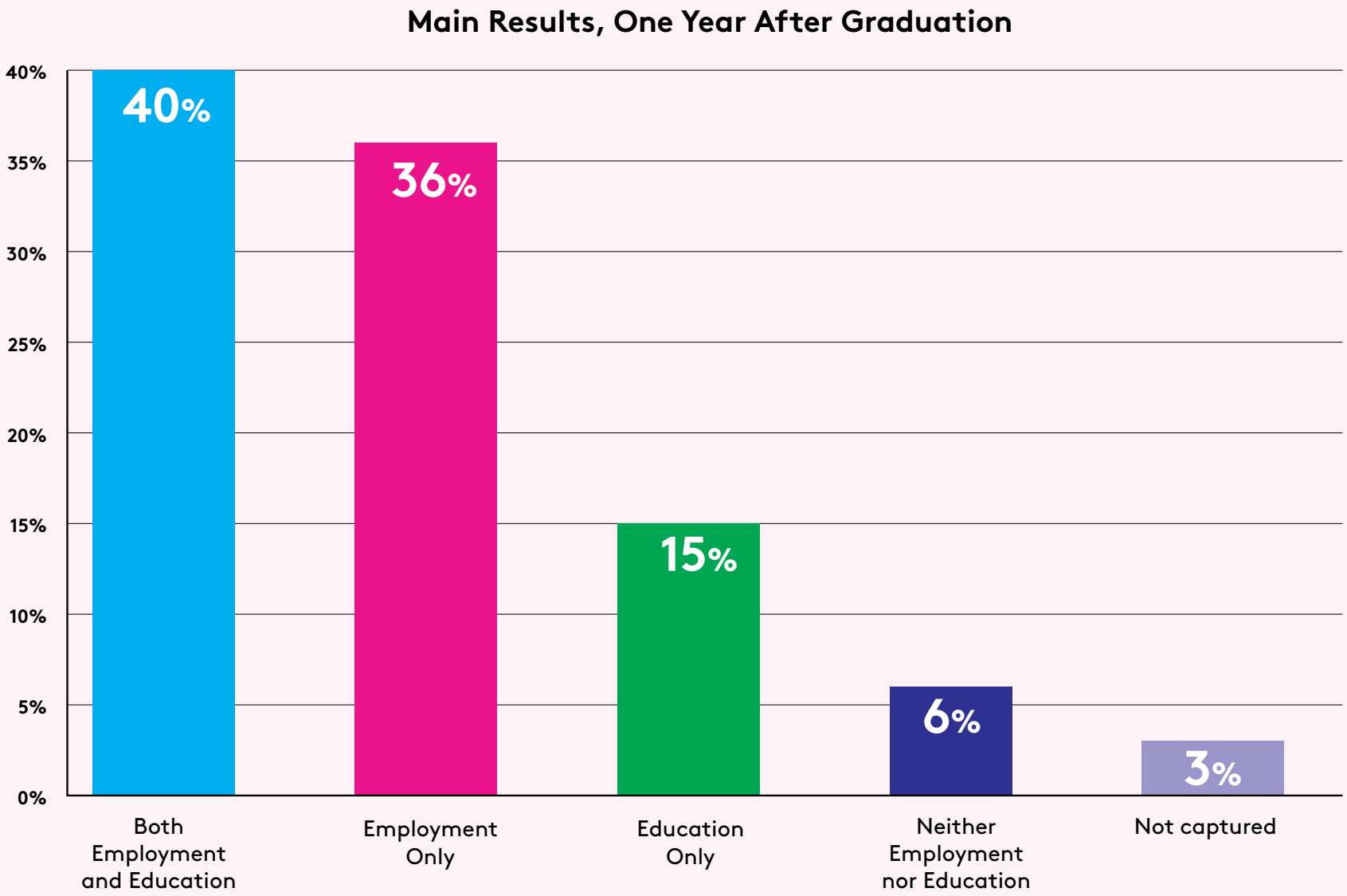
All linkage is carried out by using a Protected Identifier Key (PIK) assigned on each contributing data source. The PIK is then used to link the pseudonymised data sources together to create the ELD. The PIK protects a person’s identity but also enables linking across data sources and over time. The PIK enables high quality deterministic matching thus significantly reducing/eliminating linkage error.

All results have been estimated in collaboration with the CSO, linking our learner database (PLSS) with the CSO Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD).

The results shared below are based on the 2021/2022 PLC cohort who finished their course in May/June 2022 and represent their 12-month post-course progression outcomes. Majority of this PLC cohort were both in employment and education (40%) and an additional 36% were in substantial **employment only** resulting in 76% of this PLC cohort progressing into employment. There were also some learners who were in **education only** (15%), and together with those in **employment and education** (40%) 55% continued further into education, with only 6% on benefits and 3% had no recorded outcomes.

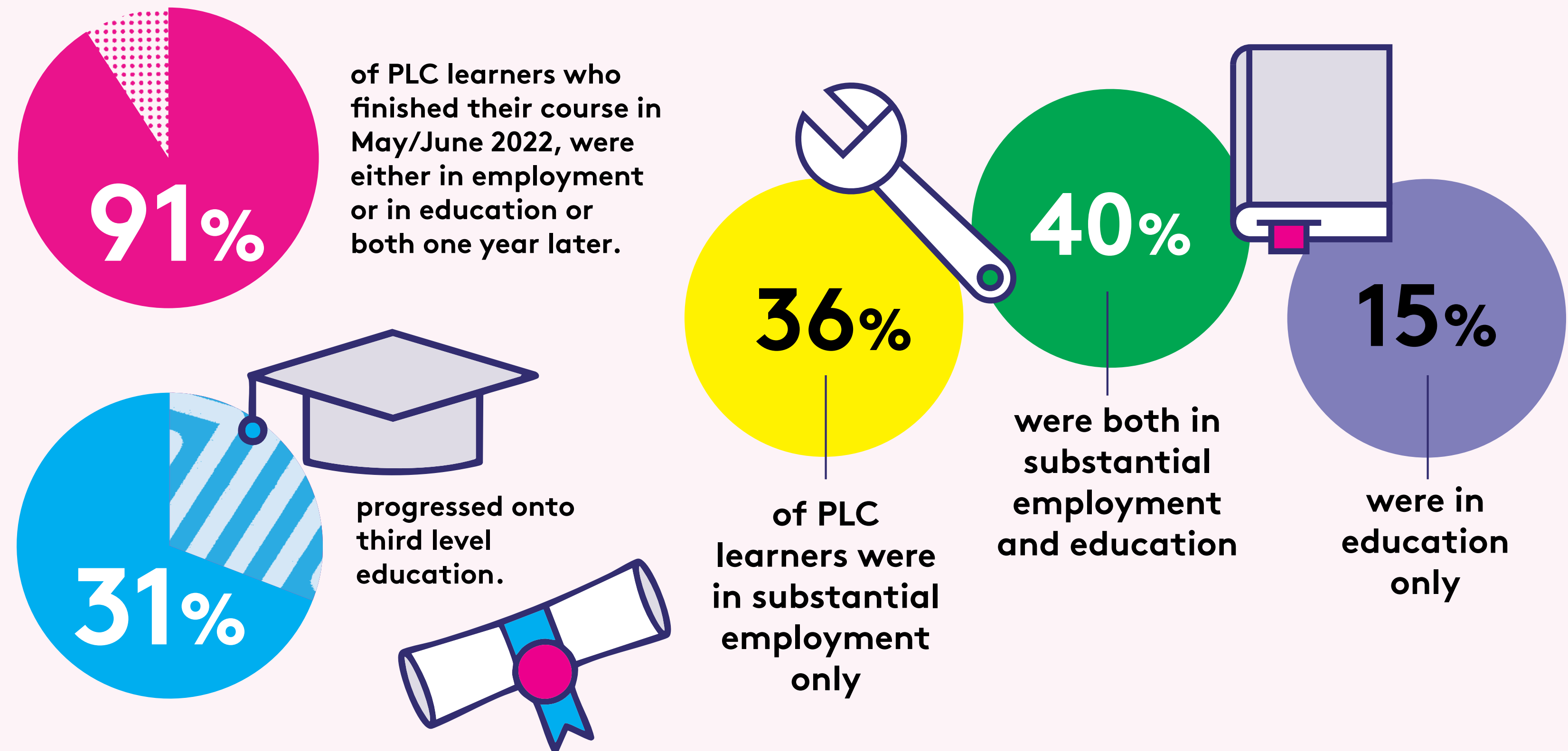
Outcome number	Outcome	Definition
1	Employment only	Worked at least 12 weeks in the year (P35 employment) earning at least €100 a week on average from their main employer. Must have no record of enrolment in any educational databases in the year in question.
2	Employment and Education	Must meet the above conditions of employment but also have a record of enrolment in any education database.
3	Education only	Must have a record of enrolment in any education database in the year in question, but not meet the definition of employment.
4	Neither employment nor education	Does not meet the definition of employment nor do they have an enrolment record in any educational database, but they do have some record of employment or benefits in the ELD for the year in question.
5	Not captured	No record of either employment, benefits or educational enrolment in the ELD for the year in question

Table 2: ELD Outcomes



Graph 7: Main Results

These outcomes represent significant improvement in post-course completion compared to the economic status of learners before their course starts. The increase in the rate of employment is particularly notable. Our results also indicate to strong pathways between PLCs and third level education with 31% of this PLC cohort progressing onto a higher education course one year after graduation.



Graph 8: PLC Learner Progression

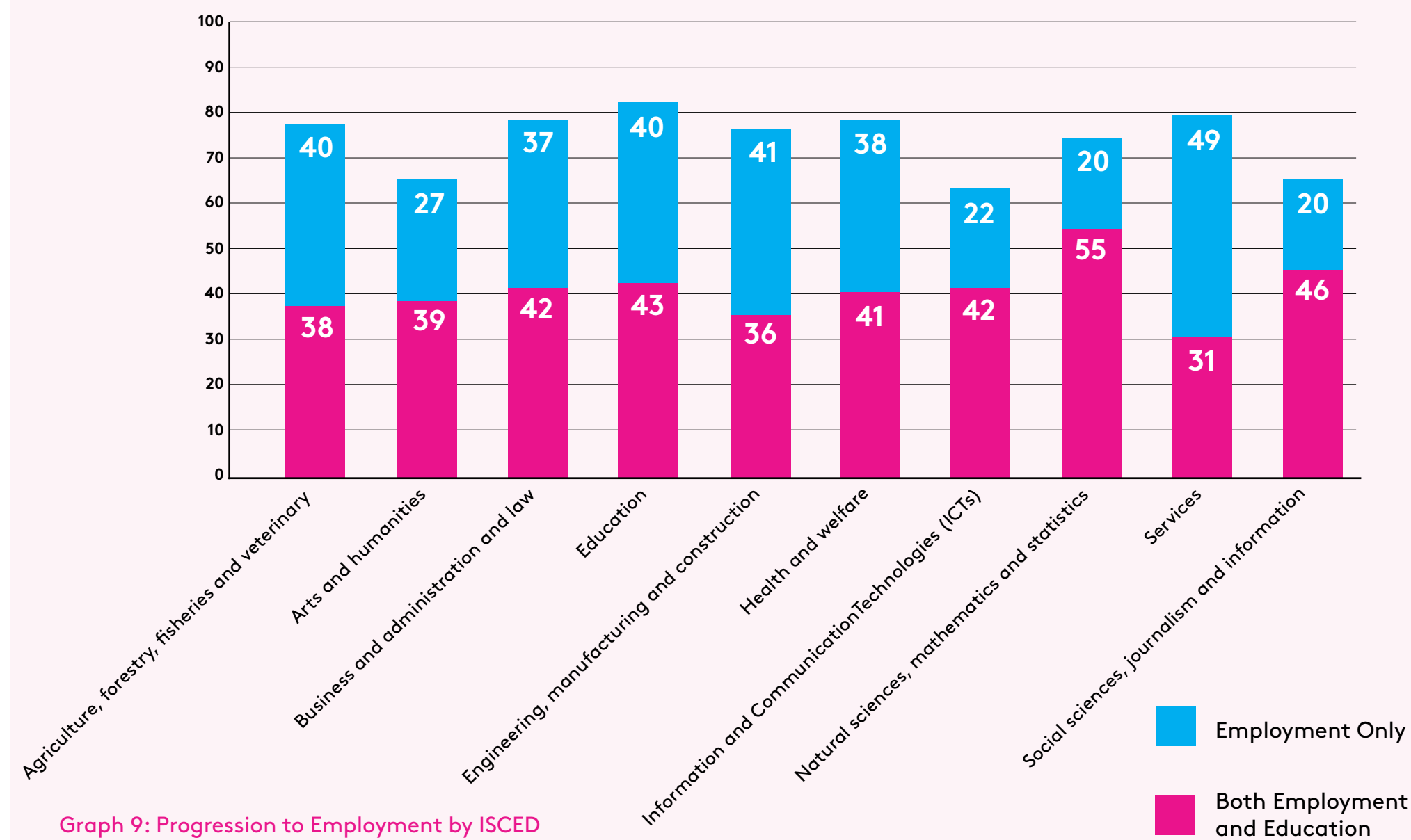
The analysis of outcomes based on the ISCED field of education and training provides valuable insights for ETBs, learners, and their families. Learners who completed courses in Education achieved the highest employment progression rate at 83%, followed by those in Services (80%), Business Administration and Law, Health and Welfare (79%), and Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary (78%).

PLC graduates from STEM fields demonstrated slightly lower employment rates, with 75% in Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, 66% in Information and Communication Technologies, and 71% in Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction.

Progression onto further education was highest among PLC graduates completing a course in Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics by 75%, followed by 72% in Social Sciences, journalism and information, and 69% in Information and Communication Technologies. This finding explains lower employment progression rates for graduates completing a PLC course in ICT and in Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics as they stay longer in education.

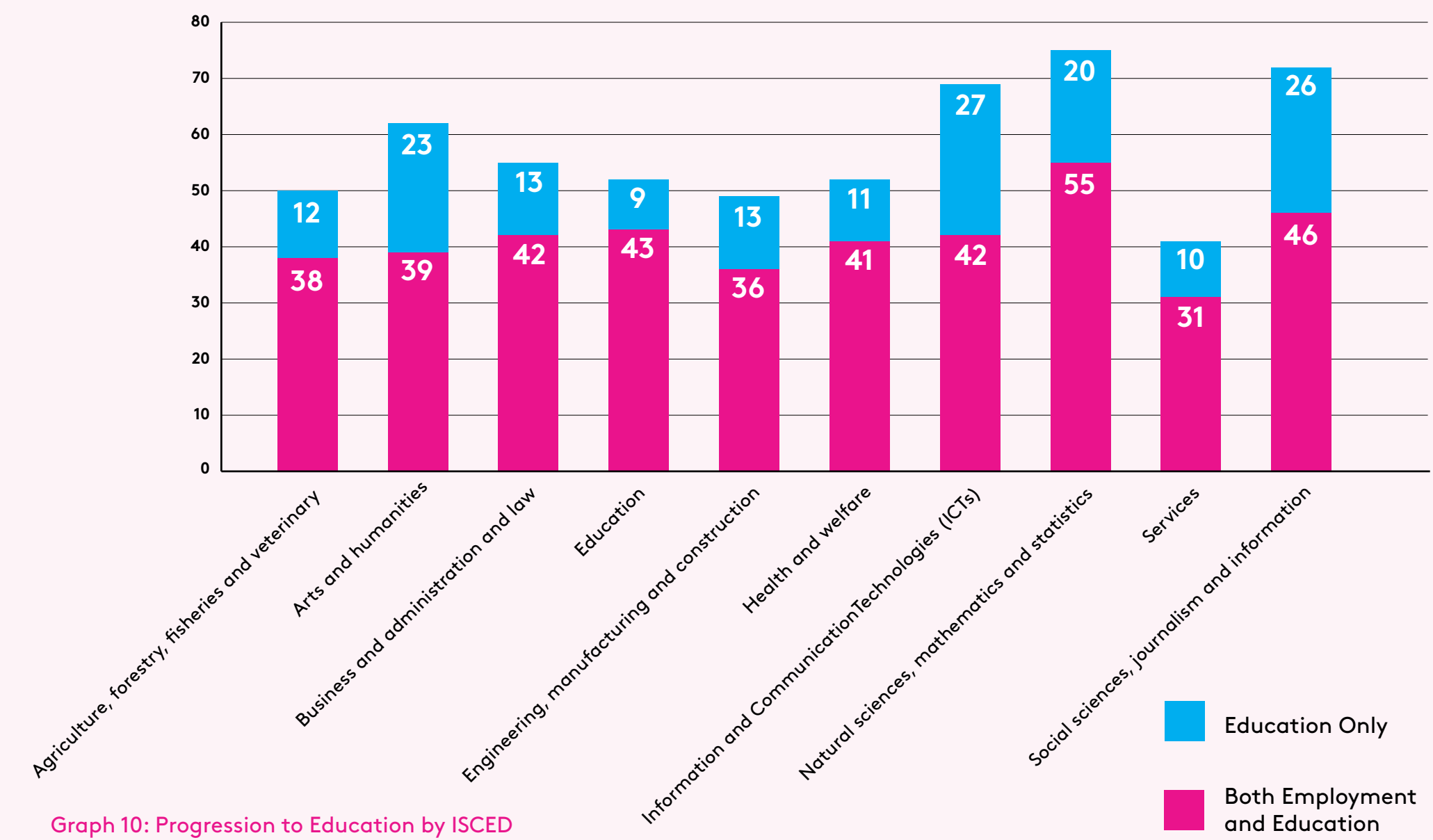
Progression rates were lowest in among those learners completing a course in Services (41%), in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (49%) and in Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary (50%).

Progression to Employment (%)



Graph 9: Progression to Employment by ISCED

Progression to Education (%)



Graph 10: Progression to Education by ISCED

Earnings

In this section, we present the median weekly earnings of the 2021/2022 PLC cohort one year after graduation. The table below shows the median weekly earnings for those learners in substantial employment. Overall, the median earnings for this cohort was €375 euro per week, with those in both **education and employment** earning €315 and those in substantial **employment only** earning up to €435. In addition, the top 25% of PLC graduates were earning more than €475 per week increasing above €520 per week for those in **employment only**. As can be seen, the earnings of those learners who were both in **education and employment** were substantially lower compared to those in **employment only**.

	25th Percentile	Median	75th Percentile
Both Employment and Education	235	315	415
Employment only	345	435	520
Overall	270	375	475

Table 3: Earning by the 25th, 50th and 75th percentile

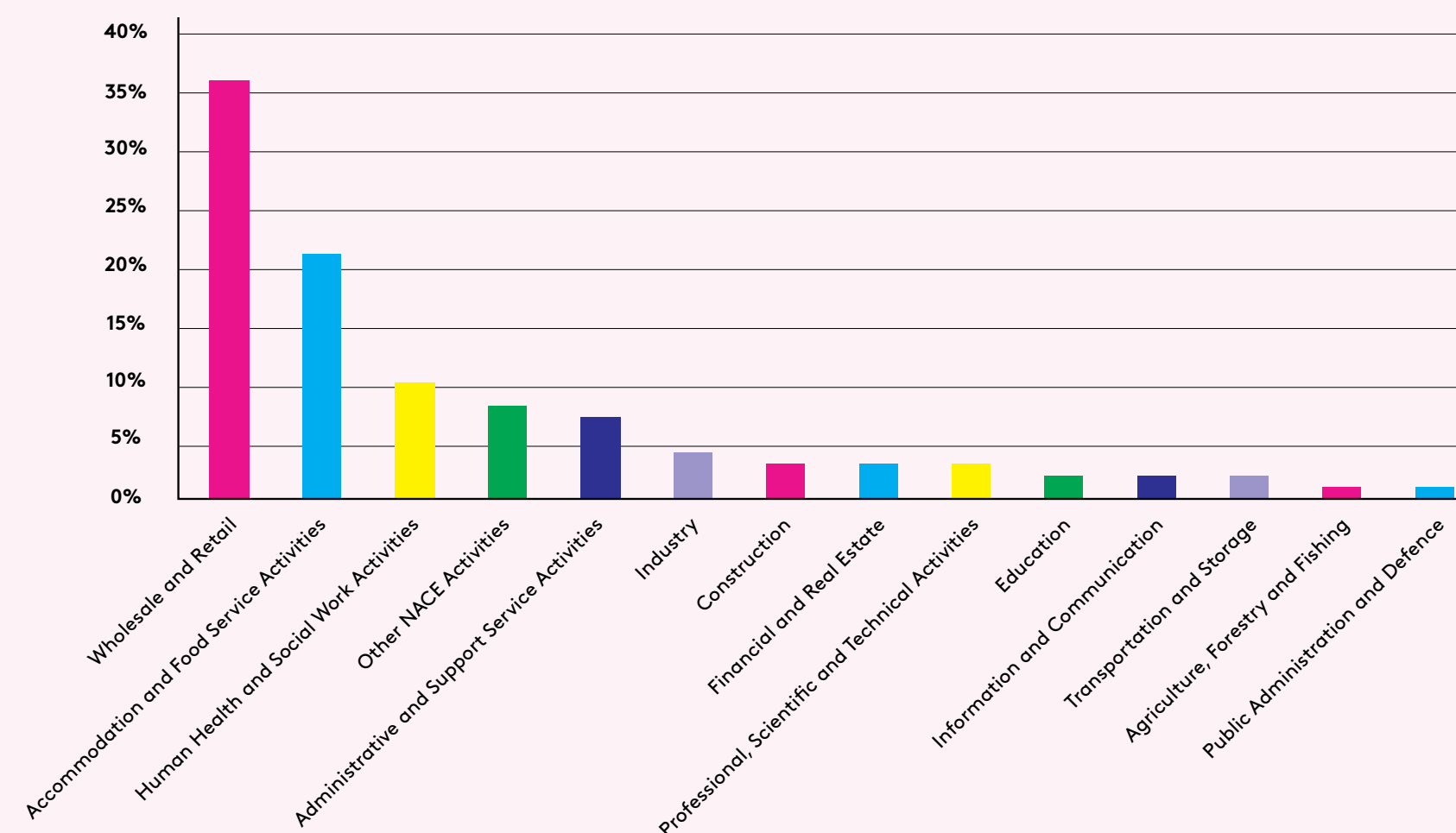
The overall weekly median earnings for individuals engaged in substantial **employment only** ranged from €415 in the field of Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction to €470 for graduates of Business Administration and Law. Education graduates earned a median weekly income of €450, while those in Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Statistics received €445 per week. Graduates from Health and Welfare studies reported median weekly earnings of €440.

ISCED	Sample Course titles	Median weekly gross pay
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	Animal Care	€435
	Animal Science	
Arts and humanities	Art	€425
	Creative Media	
	Film & TV Production	
	Media Production	
	Sound Production	
	Graphic Design	
	Music Performance	
Business and administration and law	Interior Design	€470
	Business Studies	
	Business Administration	
	Legal Studies	
Education	Office Administration	€450
	Early Learning and Care	
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	Engineering Technology	€415
	Construction	
	Motor Technology	
	Furniture Design and Making	
Health and welfare	Nursing Studies	€440
	Community Health Services	
	Healthcare Support	
	Applied Social Studies	
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	Software Development	€435
	Computer Systems and Networks	
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	Laboratory Techniques	€445
Services	Sports, Recreation and Exercise	€420
	Beauty Therapy	
	Hairdressing	
Social sciences, journalism and information	Cultural and Heritage Studies	€420
	Information, Advice and Advocacy	
	Journalism	

Table 4: Median weekly earnings by ISCED

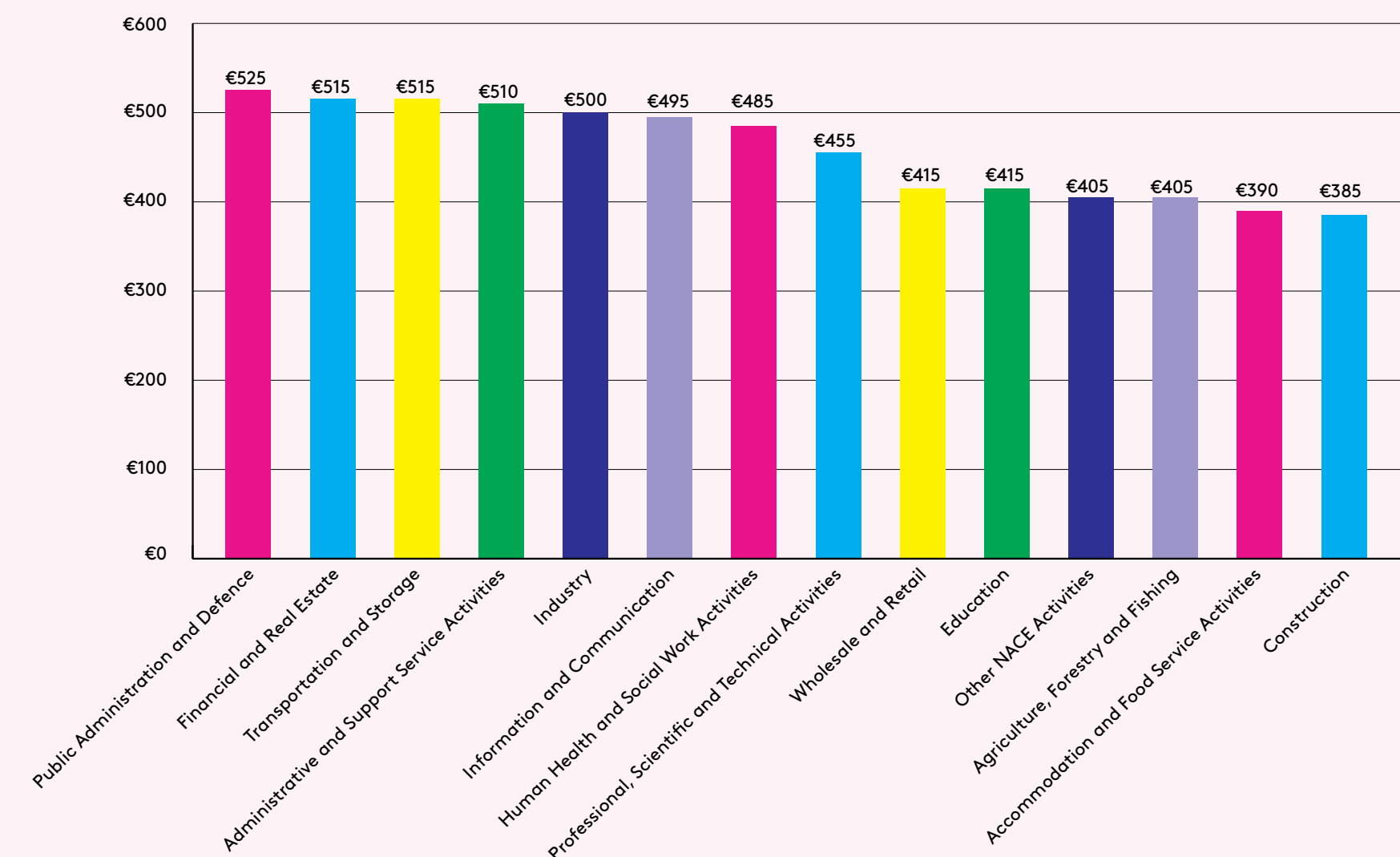
In terms of sectors of employment, 33% of PLC graduates were employed primarily in wholesale and retail trade, 21% in Accommodation and food service activities and 10% in Human health and social work activities. The weekly median earnings in the construction sector was €385 and €390 in the accommodation and food services activities, among the lowest. The highest paying sectors were Public Administration (€525), Financial and Real Estate (€515) and Transportation & Storage (€515). These earnings compare favourably to the national median weekly earnings in these sectors.²

Employment by Sector (%)



Graph 11: Progression to Employment by Sector

Weekly Earnings (Employment Only)



Graph 12: Median weekly earnings by Sector

² The median weekly earning in Transport and Storage sector in Ireland was €716, in Public Administration it was €962 and in Financial and Real Estate sector it was €977, for all ages and qualifications and years of experience.

Conclusion

Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses are an alternative education pathway for students who have completed their Leaving Certificate but are unsure about their next steps or not ready for university or employment. These courses, run by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) across Ireland, combine classroom learning with practical experience in various fields such as ICT, health and welfare and business administration and law.

In this research we find that over 91% of the 2021/2022 PLC graduate cohort were either in employment or education or both one year after course completion. This finding confirms that PLC courses offer viable pathways into employment and further education for learners. The PLC graduates were employed in various sectors with top 25 percent earning in excess of €520 per week.³

In greater detail, 76% of the cohort were in substantial employment (36% employment only, 40% employment and education), 15% in education only, with 91% engaged in employment and/or education; resulting in decreased unemployment and benefit receipts.

Employment progression was highest in Education (83%) and Services (80%), while STEM fields showed slightly lower rates as learners preferred to stay longer in education. Educational progression was strongest in Natural Sciences and Social Sciences, with lower rates in Services and Agriculture.

Median weekly earnings for employed graduates were €375 overall, higher for graduates in **employment only** (€435) than those also in education (€315). Earnings varied by field and sector, with highest median pay in Public Administration and Financial sectors.

PLC courses are known for providing learners a stepping stone to explore interests and gain confidence before making their long-term career decisions in a supportive environment. Our results confirm that PLC courses are successfully meeting labour market needs and functioning as a bridge between education and employment as majority of graduates are in substantial employment one year after completion. There are also well-established pathways into higher education with reserved places in some higher education institutions for PLC graduates, allowing entry to degree programs without relying solely on Leaving Certificate points. This is also reflected in 31% progression rate into higher education.

Finally, the PLC courses help secure a balance in skills and allows for a responsive and diversified supply of skills in Ireland as an increasing number of school leavers chose PLC courses as their first choice and many graduates continue their education in higher education. We find supporting evidence that PLCs serve not only to build a well-balanced tertiary system but also help it become more unified as recommended by the OECD Skills Strategy Ireland report (2023).



³ See Table 3.

Legal Framework underpinning research

The CSO provides researchers with access to relevant data holdings, subject to stringent confidentiality criteria, within the framework of the Statistics Act, 1993. Legal Framework underpinning research The CSO provides researchers with access to relevant data holdings, subject to stringent confidentiality criteria, within the framework of the Statistics Act, 1993.

The examination of learners outcomes provided in this report was produced by SOLAS under Section 11 of the Statistics Act 1993 using the Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD) data source which was created in compliance with all relevant data protection legislation. The ELD data source brings together data from the Department of Education and a number of state agencies, including the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and SOLAS, with employment, benefits and earnings data from the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social Protection.

Access to this data source is strictly limited to Officers of Statistics. The ELD provides the basis for a series of projects that the CSO facilitates in strict compliance with the Statistics Act, which allows researchers to further analyse and examine learner outcomes. The CSO's role is limited to the development of the ELD data source and it is important to note that any analysis, conclusions or recommendations made in this report are SOLAS's alone. Full details relating to the framework for this research work can be accessed through the following links:

https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/aboutus/documents/memorandumofunderstanding/CSO_SOLAS_Section_11_Agreement_2019.pdf

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1993/act/21/enacted/en/html>

<https://www.cso.ie/en/methods/education/educationallongitudinaldatabase/>

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