

Knowledge and use of Irish in Northern Ireland

Biennial report



Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2013/14

DCAL Findings 14/2014-15

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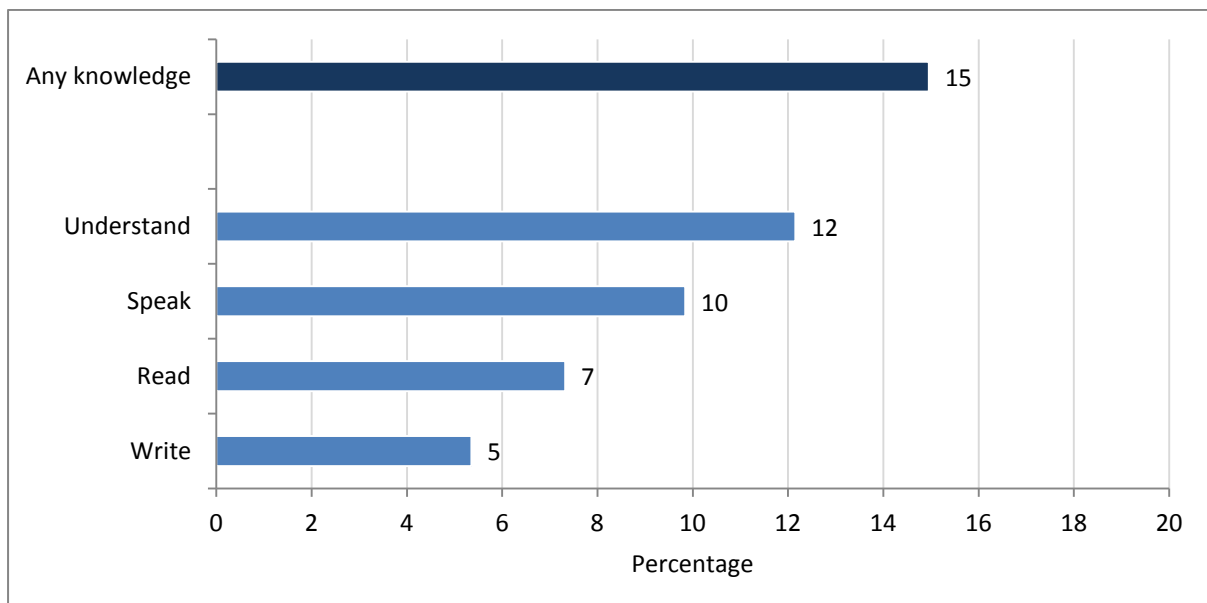
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Key findings

- In 2013/14, 15% of the population have some knowledge of Irish, i.e. can understand, speak, read or write Irish. This is an increase on the 13% of the population who had some knowledge of Irish in 2011/12.
- A higher proportion of Catholics (30%) have knowledge of Irish than both those with other or no religion (12%) and Protestants (3%).
- Adults living in the least deprived areas are less likely to have knowledge of Irish than those living in the most deprived areas (13% and 19% respectively).
- Four out of every hundred people (4%) use Irish at home, conversing with family or housemates, at least occasionally. A similar proportion (4%) use Irish socially, at least occasionally, conversing with friends or acquaintances
- Almost a half (49%) of adults agree that Irish is an important part of Northern Irish culture.

Knowledge of Irish



Introduction

Background

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement committed the Government to 'recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic minority communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.'

DCAL chairs the Interdepartmental Charter Implementation Group and through this group aims to promote the use of Irish and Ulster-Scots and encourage all departments and their agencies to meet their obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015 included a Strategy for the Irish Language and a Strategy for Ulster Scots as key building blocks under Priority 4 'Building a Strong and Shared Community'. This followed agreements between the British and Irish Governments at St Andrews in 2006, which led to the NI Act 1998 being amended, placing a duty on the Executive to develop such strategies. DCAL published the strategies in January 2015. The *Strategy to enhance and protect the development of the Irish Language 2015-2035* sets out a roadmap for the Irish language in areas such as education, public services, the community and media, taking account of the needs of the Irish language community and international best practice.

Findings from the Continuous Household Survey

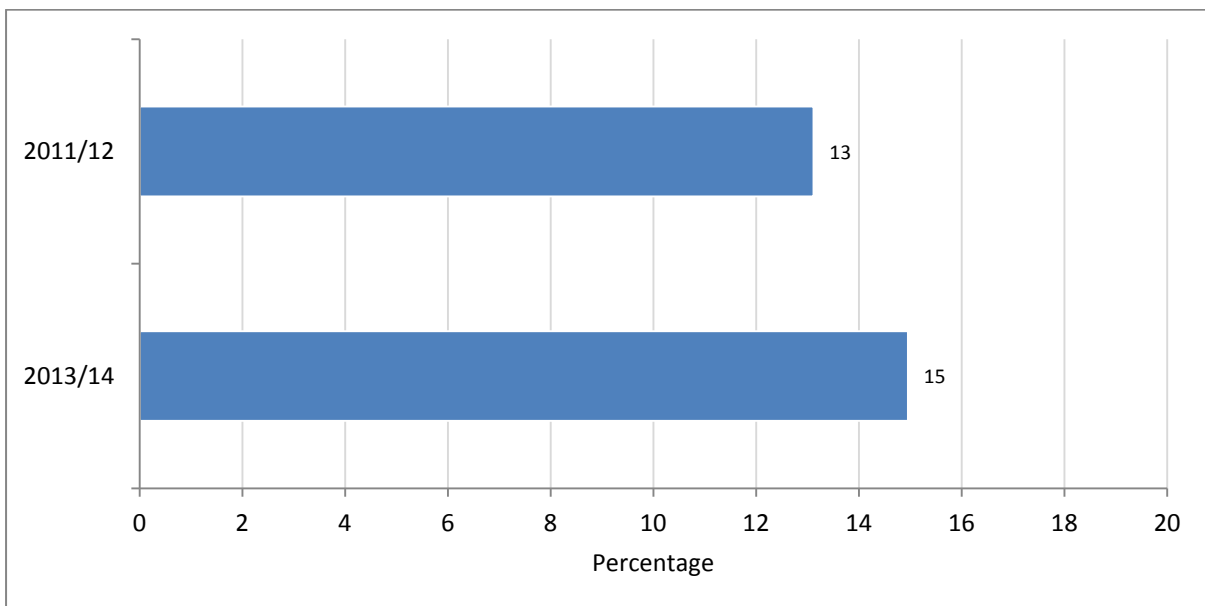
This report presents the findings from the 2013/14 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) in relation to the knowledge and use of Irish by the adult population in Northern Ireland. The information will be used to help inform policy making.

More information relating to the CHS, methodology and the interpretation of the figures can be found in the Technical notes in Appendix 1. The data tables are included in Appendix 2 and the Irish questions, which were asked in the 2013/14 CHS, are included in Appendix 3.

Knowledge of Irish

In 2013/14, 15% of the population have some knowledge of Irish, i.e. can understand, speak, read or write Irish. This is an increase on the 13% of the population who had some knowledge of Irish in 2011/12.

Figure 1 Knowledge of Irish



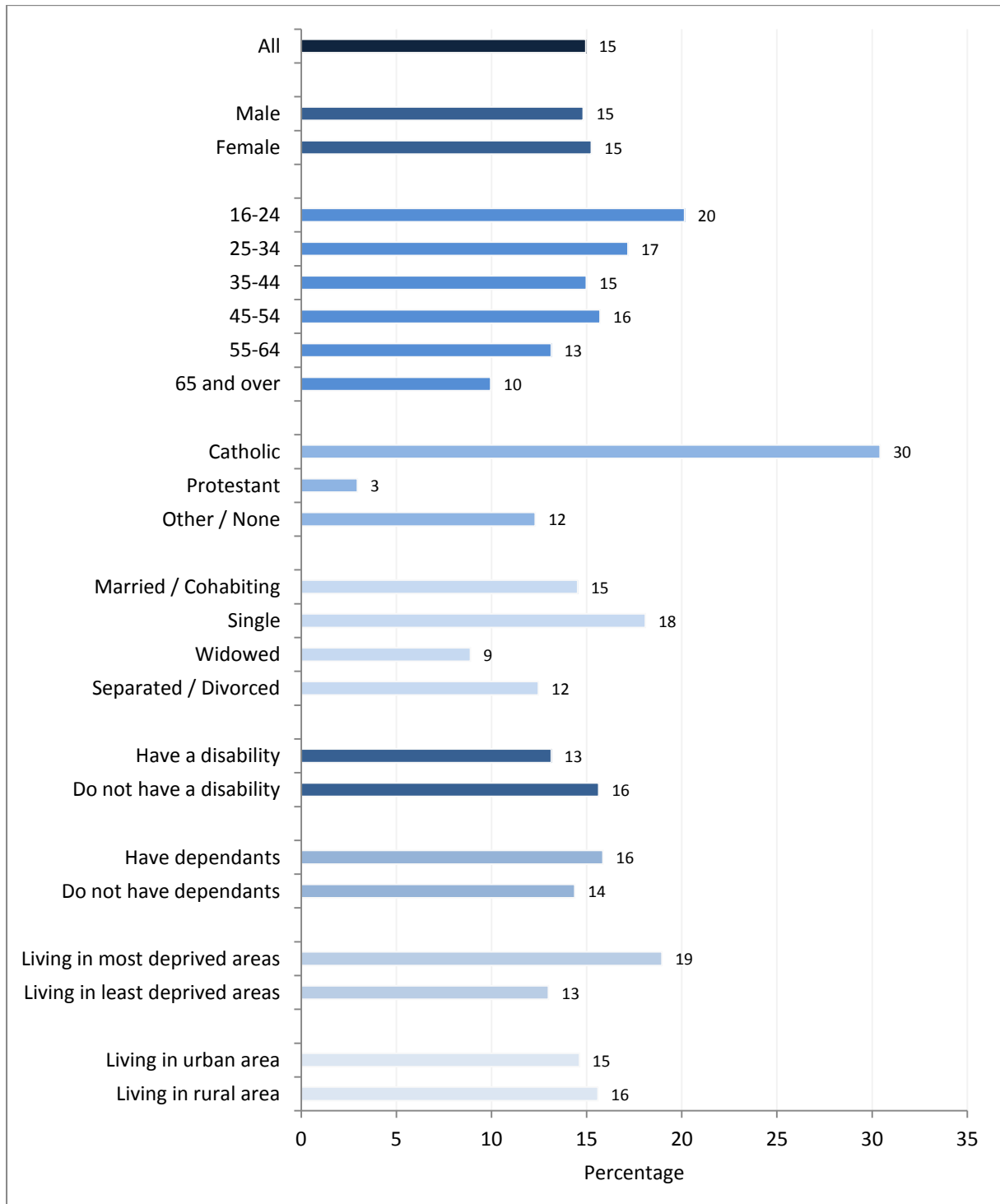
The proportion of those who live in the least deprived areas of Northern Ireland who have knowledge of Irish increased from 8% in 2011/12 to 13% in 2013/14. Similarly, for those living in urban areas, the proportion who had some knowledge of Irish increased from 11% in 2011/12 to 15% in 2013/14. All other groups and areas saw no change in the proportion who had some knowledge of Irish when 2011/12 and 2013/14 are compared.

The religious background of the population in Northern Ireland relates to whether they have any knowledge of Irish. A higher proportion of Catholics (30%) have knowledge of Irish than both those with other or no religion (12%) and Protestants (3%) (Figure 2).

Age and level of deprivation of the area they live in are also related to the likelihood of having knowledge of Irish. People aged 45 years and over are less likely to have

knowledge of Irish than those aged 16-44 years (13% and 17% respectively). In addition, adults living in the least deprived areas are less likely to have knowledge of Irish than those living in the most deprived areas (13% and 19% respectively).

Figure 2 Knowledge of Irish

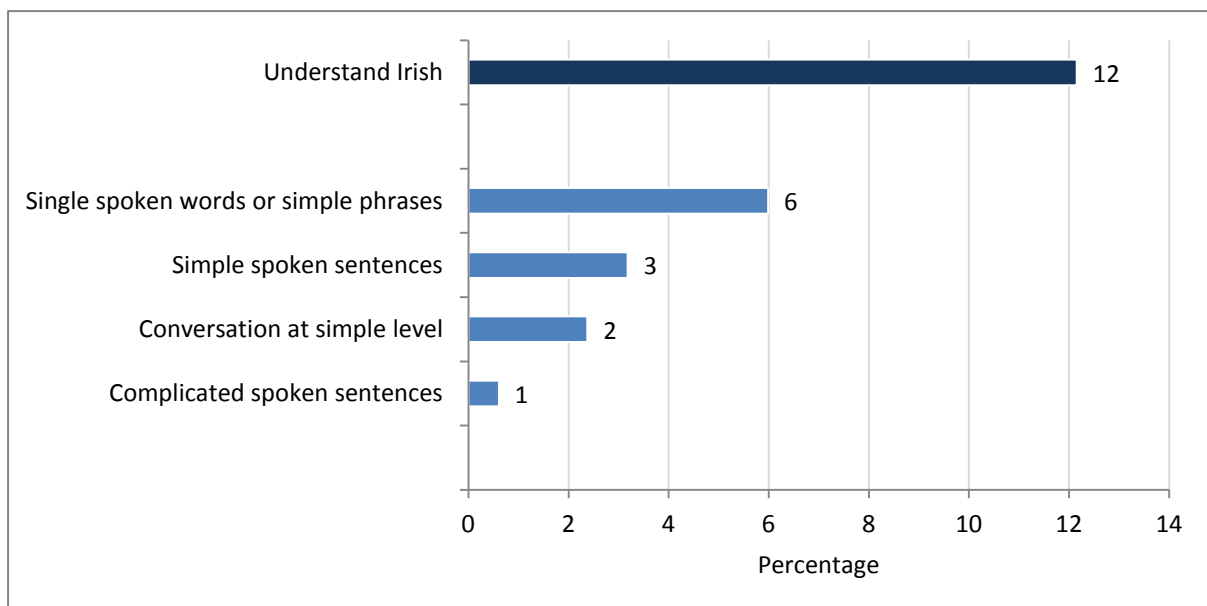


Understand Irish

More than one in every ten (12%) of the population can understand Irish (Figure 3).

One out of every hundred (1%) people in Northern Ireland can understand complicated spoken sentences, so could understand programmes in Irish on the radio or television. A further two out of every hundred (2%) people can understand a conversation in Irish conducted at a simple level so, for example, could understand directions given in the street. An additional three out of every hundred (3%) of the population can understand simple spoken sentences or passages, e.g. 'It's half past three', while a further 6% can understand single spoken words or simple phrases, e.g. 'Hello' or 'How are you?'.

Figure 3 Understand Irish



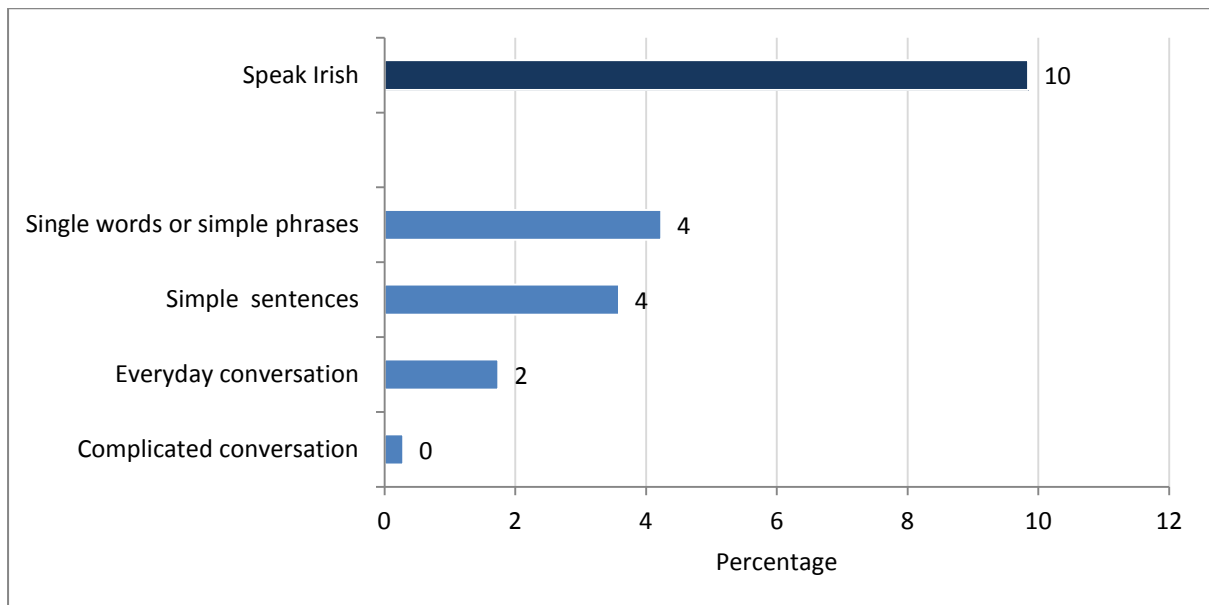
Of those who understand Irish, one in twenty (5%) can understand complicated spoken sentences, while one in five (20%) can understand a conversation at a simple level. Just over a quarter (26%) of those who have some understanding of Irish can understand simple spoken sentences, while just under a half (49%) can understand single spoken words or simple phrases.

Speak Irish

One in every ten (10%) of the population can speak Irish (Figure 4).

Two out of every hundred people (2%) can carry on a complicated conversation in Irish, e.g. talking about any subject, or carry on an everyday conversation, e.g. could describe their day. Four out of every hundred (4%) can use simple sentences in Irish, e.g. 'Can I have a cup of tea?', while a further 4% can use single words or simple phrases, e.g. 'Hello' or 'How are you?'.

Figure 4 Speak Irish



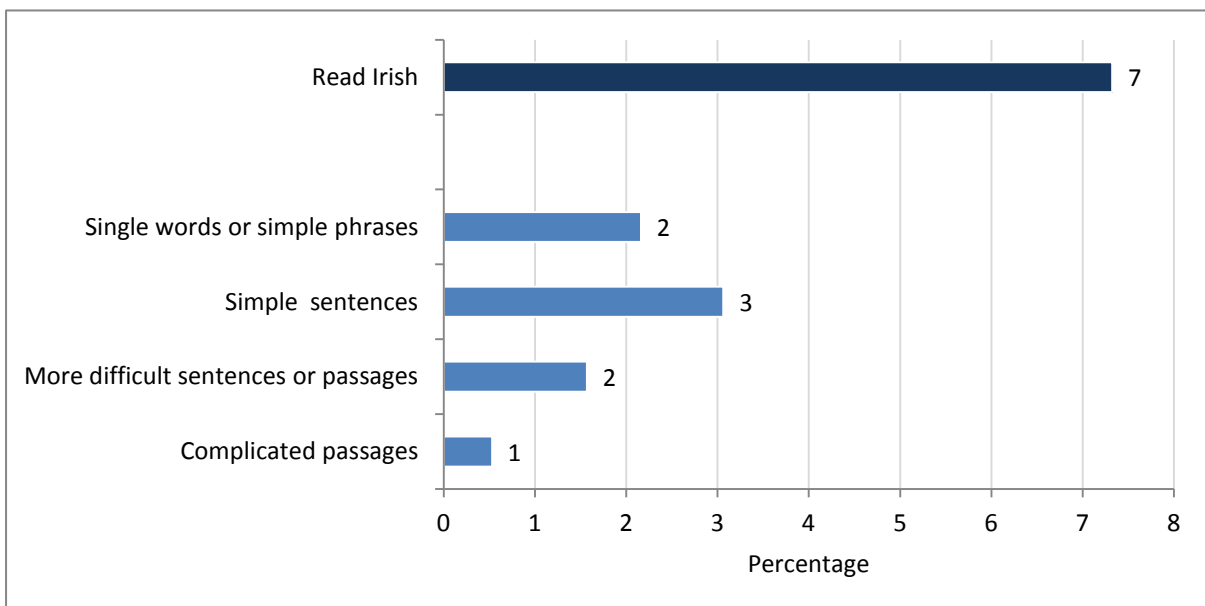
Of those who can speak Irish, 3% can carry on a complicated conversation, 18% can carry on an everyday conversation, 36% can use simple sentences, while the remaining 43% can use single words or simple phrases.

Read Irish

More than one out of every twenty adults (7%) can read Irish (Figure 5).

One out of every hundred people (1%) can read and understand complicated passages, so could read a book or newspaper written in Irish. A further two out of every hundred (2%) can read and understand difficult sentences and less complicated passages, so could read a letter or email written in Irish. An additional three out of every hundred (3%) of the population can read and understand simple sentences or passages, so could read a postcard written in Irish. A further 2% can read and understand single words or simple phrases, e.g. 'Entrance' or 'No smoking'.

Figure 5 **Read Irish**



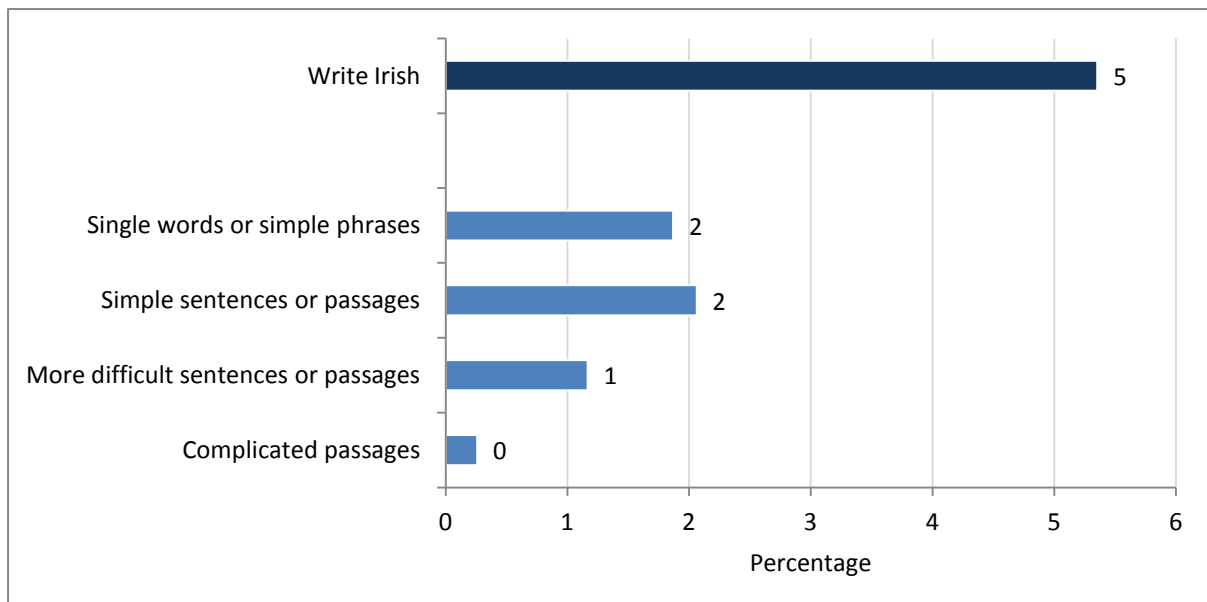
Of those who can read Irish, 7% can read and understand complicated passages, 21% can read moderately difficult sentences or passages, 42% can read and understand simple sentences, while the remaining 30% can read and understand single words or simple phrases.

Write Irish

One in every twenty adults (5%) can write Irish (Figure 6).

One out of every hundred people (1%) can write complicated passages, e.g. could translate part of a book or report into Irish, or write difficult sentences and moderately difficult passages, e.g. could write a letter or email in Irish. An additional two out of every hundred (2%) of the population can write simple sentences or passages, so could write a postcard in Irish, while a further 2% can write single words or phrases, e.g. 'Hello' or 'How are you?'.

Figure 6 Write Irish

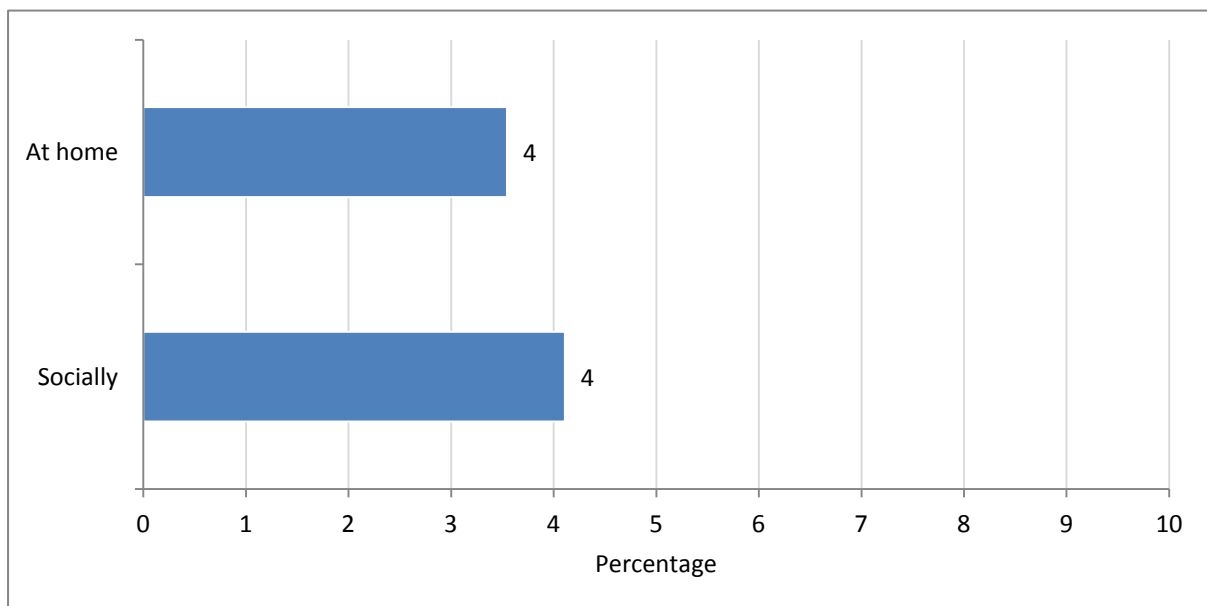


Of those who can write Irish, 5% can write complicated passages, 22% can write moderately difficult sentences or passages, 39% can write simple sentences or passages, while the remaining 35% can write single words or simple phrases.

Use of Irish

Four out of every hundred people (4%) use Irish at home, conversing with family or housemates, either on a daily basis or occasionally. A similar proportion (4%) use Irish socially, either on a daily basis or occasionally, conversing with friends or acquaintances (Figure 7).

Figure 8 Use Irish



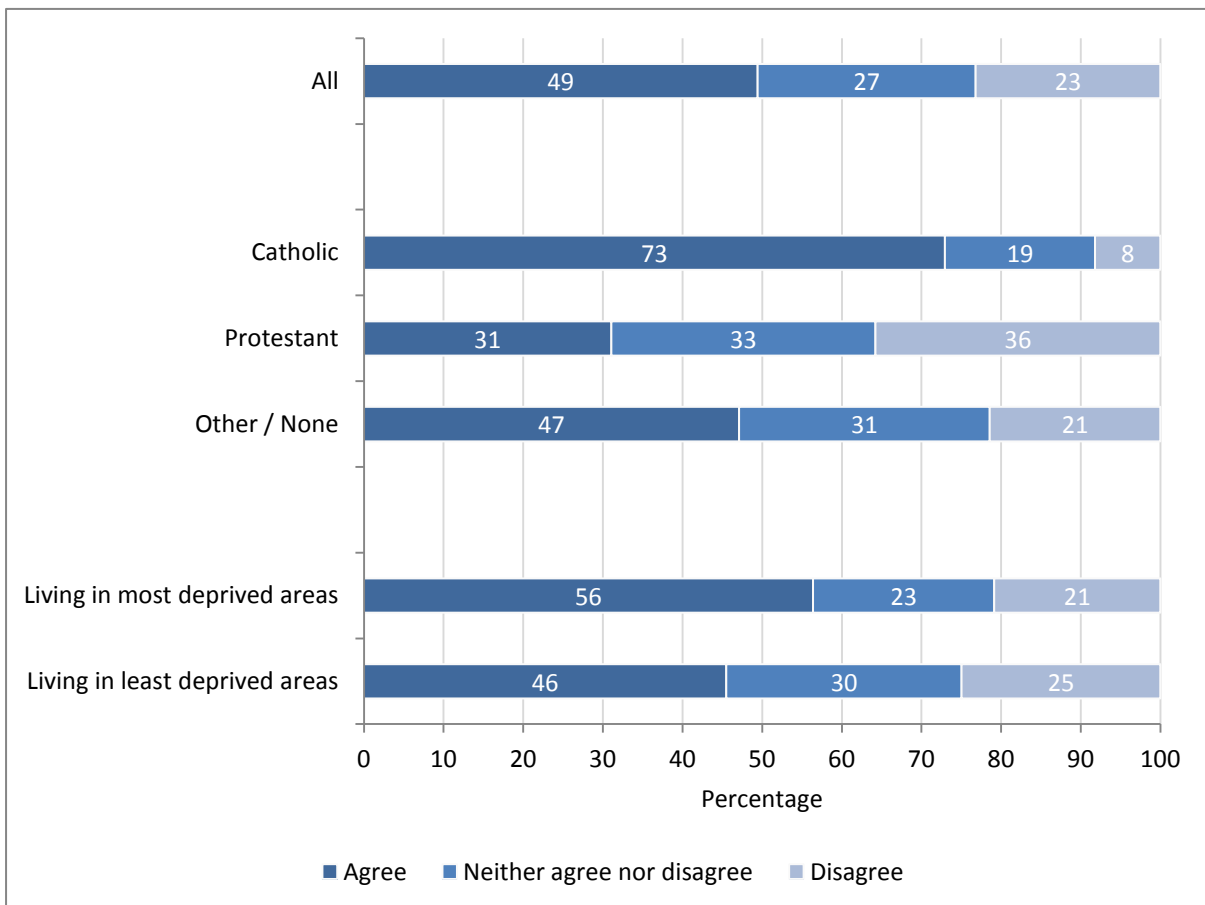
Of those with some knowledge of Irish, almost a quarter (24%) use Irish at home at least occasionally, while more than a quarter (27%) use Irish socially.

Importance of Irish to Northern Irish culture

Almost a half (49%) of adults agree that Irish is an important part of Northern Irish culture (Figure 8).

A higher proportion of Catholics (73%) agree that Irish is an important part of Northern Irish culture than both Protestants (31%) and those with other or no religion (47%). Similarly, adults living in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland are more likely to agree that Irish is an important part of Northern Irish culture than those living in the least deprived areas (56% and 46% respectively).

Figure 8 Irish is an important part of Northern Irish culture



Appendix 1 Technical Notes

Continuous Household Survey

The Continuous Household Survey (CHS) is a Northern Ireland wide household survey administered by Central Survey Unit, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The 2013/14 survey was based on a random sample of 4,500 domestic addresses drawn from the Land and Property Services list of addresses and interviews were sought with all adults aged 16 and over in these households.

DCAL places questions related to the knowledge and use of Irish biennially in the CHS. The data derived from the CHS is used for various purposes: to help inform policy making, for equality monitoring and contributing to Northern Ireland wide strategies.

The findings reported in this bulletin are based on 3,751 respondents who answered the Irish module of the survey. The questions relating to this module are included in Appendix 3.

Weighting the DCAL module of the Continuous Household Survey (CHS)

Analysis of the DCAL module of the CHS has been weighted for non-response. A chi square goodness-of-fit test showed that the CHS sample was not representative of the population by age and sex when compared with the Population and Migration Estimates Northern Ireland 2013¹ (NISRA). As a result, three separate weights were produced for age, sex and age and sex combined.

Non-response weighting sometimes increases standard errors and sometimes decreases them, although the impact tends to be fairly small, i.e. the adjustment may be less or greater than 1, but will generally be reasonably close to 1. In the case of the DCAL module of CHS, the values of the adjustment for all three weighting systems are so close to one, it is not necessary to take account of this in the calculation of standard error and confidence intervals.

¹ [Population and Migration Estimates Northern Ireland 2013](#)

While weighting for non-response (also called post-stratification) should reduce bias, it must be acknowledged that it will not eliminate bias. The reasons individuals choose to take part in surveys are complex and depend on lots of factors specific to the individual. As a result, the non-response biases in surveys are likely to be complex. Post-stratification works on the assumption that, by aligning the survey to the population along a small number of dimensions such as age and gender, many of these complex biases will reduce. However, it would be misleading to suggest that they will be eliminated.

Definitions

Knowledge of Irish – Can understand, speak, read or write Irish or any combination of these skills.

Disability – In 2013/14, the questions used to ascertain whether or not a person has a disability are harmonised with the definition of disability in the Equality Act 2010. This states that a disabled population is classified on the basis of having a long-lasting physical or mental health condition or illness which restricts day-to-day activities. The disabled population in this report are those who have answered yes to both the questions below:

- Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?
- Does your condition or illness / do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day to day activities?

In 2011/12, the disabled population was classified as those answering yes to the questions below:

- Do you have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity? By long-standing I mean anything that has troubled you over a period of time or that is likely to affect you over a period of time.
- Does this illness or disability limit your activities in any way?

Although there are subtle differences between the two sets of questions, comparative analysis between years can be made.

Dependants – A person is defined as having dependants if they have responsibility for either the care of a child(ren), a person with a disability or an elderly person.

Deprivation – The data have been analysed by whether respondents are living in the 20% most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) or in the 20% least deprived SOAs. This is estimated using the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010² which is a weighted combination of seven domains of deprivation. Rank 1 indicates the most deprived SOA, while rank 890 denotes the least deprived SOA.

Urban/ rural – The data have also been analysed by whether respondents are living in SOAs that have been categorised as either urban or rural as set out in the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements report (2005)³. This report classified each settlement in Northern Ireland into one of eight bands (A-H) and recommended that Government and other users should consider defining "urban" and "rural" areas in ways which are appropriate for different programmes and projects. In the absence of a programme-specific definition, Bands A-E can be defined as urban and Bands F-H as rural. This definition was applied in the analysis in this bulletin.

Comparisons with other countries

It is not possible to compare the knowledge and use of Irish in Northern Ireland with other parts of the United Kingdom or with the Republic of Ireland because comparable data is not available.

Statistical significance in this report

Any statements in this report regarding differences between groups such as males and females, different age groups, religion, etc., are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% confident that the differences between groups are actual differences and have not just arisen by chance. Both the base numbers and the sizes of the percentages have an effect on statistical significance. Therefore on occasion, a difference between two groups may be statistically significant while the same difference in percentage points between two

² [Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Report 2010](#)

³ [Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements 2005 Report](#)

other groups may not be statistically significant. The reason for this is because the larger the base numbers or the closer the percentages are to 0 or 100, the smaller the standard errors. This leads to increased precision of the estimates which increases the likelihood that the difference between the proportions is actually significant and did not just arise by chance.

Other notes

The following should be noted when interpreting figures and tables:

- Percentages less than 0.5% are denoted by '0' and where there are no responses, they are denoted by '-'.
- Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.
- Percentages may not add to 100% for questions where multiple responses are allowed.
- Detailed tabulations are not provided where the number of respondents is too small to allow meaningful analysis.
- The base number of responses to each question, which is shown in each table, is the unweighted count. The base may vary due to some respondents not answering certain questions.

Appendix 2 Data tables

Table 1 Knowledge of Irish, 2011/12 and 2013/14

Profile of respondent	2013/14		2011/12		Significant difference?
	%	Base	%	Base	
All	15	3,750	13	3,686	Significant
Gender					
Male	15	1,600	13	1,608	Not significant
Female	15	2,150	13	2,078	Not significant
Age bands					
16-24	20	335	15	323	Not significant
25-34	17	533	17	614	Not significant
35-44	15	672	16	695	Not significant
45-54	16	714	13	679	Not significant
55-64	13	566	10	588	Not significant
65 and over	10	930	8	787	Not significant
Religious background					
Catholic	30	1,494	29	1,461	Not significant
Protestant	3	1,916	2	1,908	Not significant
Other / None	12	319	8	282	Not significant
Marital status					
Married / Cohabiting	15	2,231	13	2,188	Not significant
Single	18	835	16	828	Not significant
Widowed	9	319	8	320	Not significant
Separated / Divorced	12	365	13	350	Not significant
Disability					
Have a disability	13	1,110	10	1,004	Not significant
Do not have a disability	16	2,637	14	2,681	Not significant
Dependants					
Have dependants	16	1,515	14	1,440	Not significant
Do not have dependants	14	2,231	12	2,244	Not significant
Level of deprivation					
Living in most deprived areas	19	660	15	709	Not significant
Living in least deprived areas	13	719	8	698	Significant
Urban or rural					
Living in urban area	15	2,430	11	2,336	Significant
Living in rural area	16	1,320	16	1,339	Not significant

Table 2 Understand Irish

Type of activity	All
	%
Understand Irish	12
Level of understanding	
Single spoken words or simple phrases	6
Simple spoken sentences	3
Conversation at simple level	2
Complicated spoken sentences	1
Unable to understand any spoken Irish	88
Base	3,750

Table 3 Speak Irish

Type of activity	All
	%
Speak Irish	10
Level of speaking	
Single words or simple phrases	4
Simple sentences	4
Everyday conversation	2
Complicated conversation	0
Unable to speak any Irish at all	90
Base	3,750

Percentages less than 0.5% are represented by '0' and where there are no responses this is represented by '-'.

Table 4 Read Irish

Type of activity	All
	%
Read Irish	7
Level of reading	
Single words or simple phrases	2
Simple sentences	3
More difficult sentences or passages	2
Complicated passages	1
Unable to read any Irish at all	93
Base	3,750

Table 5 Write Irish

Type of activity	All
	%
Write Irish	5
Level of writing	
Single words or simple phrases	2
Simple sentences or passages	2
More difficult sentences or passages	1
Complicated passages	0
Unable to write any Irish at all	95
Base	3,750

Percentages less than 0.5% are represented by '0' and where there are no responses this is represented by '-'.

Table 6 Using Irish at home and socially

Type of activity	At home	Socially
	%	%
Daily	0	0
Occasionally	3	4
Never	96	96
Base	3,751	3,751

Percentages less than 0.5% are represented by '0' and where there are no responses this is represented by '-'.

Table 7 Irish is an important part of Northern Irish culture

Profile of respondent	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Base
	%	%	%	
All	49	27	23	3,709
Gender				
Male	50	26	24	1,585
Female	49	29	22	2,124
Age bands				
16-24	50	29	22	327
25-34	50	29	21	523
35-44	48	28	25	663
45-54	52	27	21	708
55-64	50	25	26	563
65 and over	47	27	26	925
Religious background				
Catholic	73	19	8	1,478
Protestant	31	33	36	1,902
Other / None	47	31	21	310
Marital status				
Married / Cohabiting	49	27	24	2,217
Single	50	28	22	818
Widowed	45	33	22	319
Separated / Divorced	53	24	23	355
Disability				
Have a disability	49	27	24	1,103
Do not have a disability	50	28	23	2,603
Dependants				
Have dependants	50	28	22	1,499
Do not have dependants	49	27	24	2,207
Level of deprivation				
Living in most deprived areas	56	23	21	647
Living in least deprived areas	46	30	25	717
Urban or rural				
Living in urban area	49	27	24	2,399
Living in rural area	50	28	22	1,310

Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Appendix 3 Irish questions

[IRIS1] SHOWCARD

Firstly some questions about the Irish language...

Can you understand, speak, read or write Irish?

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

1. Understand spoken Irish
2. Speak Irish
3. Read Irish
4. Write Irish
5. None of the above

If IRIS1 = 1

[IRIS2] SHOWCARD

Which statement best describes your current ability to understand spoken Irish?

1. Able to understand single spoken words or simple spoken phrases e.g. 'hello', 'how are you?'
2. Able to understand simple spoken sentences e.g. 'it's half past three'
3. Able to understand a conversation conducted at a simple level e.g. simple directions given in the street, household conversation about meals, tasks, etc.
4. Able to understand complicated spoken sentences e.g. radio or TV broadcast

If IRIS1 = 2

[IRIS3] SHOWCARD

Which statement best describes your current ability to speak Irish?

1. Able to speak single words or simple phrases e.g. 'hello', 'how are you?'
2. Able to speak simple sentences e.g. 'can I have a cup of tea?'
3. Able to carry on an everyday conversation e.g. describing your day
4. Able to carry on a complicated conversation e.g. this conversation

If IRIS1 = 3

[IRIS4] SHOWCARD 32

Which statement best describes your current ability to read Irish?

1. Able to read and understand single words or simple phrases e.g. 'entrance', 'no smoking'
2. Able to read and understand simple sentences or passages e.g. postcard
3. Able to read and understand more difficult sentences or passages e.g. a letter or email
4. Able to read and understand complicated passages e.g. read a book or newspaper

If IRIS1 = 4

[IRIS5] SHOWCARD 33

Which statement best describes your current ability to write Irish?

1. Able to write single words or simple phrases e.g. 'hello', 'goodbye', 'how are you?'
2. Able to write simple sentences or passages e.g. postcard
3. Able to write more difficult sentences or passages e.g. letter or e-mail
4. Able to write complicated passages e.g. translate part of a book into the language or write a report

If IRIS1 ≠ 5

[IRIS6]

Do you use Irish at home at all, i.e. in conversing with family or housemates?

1. Never
2. Occasionally
3. Daily

If IRIS1 ≠ 5

[IRIS7]

Do you use Irish socially at all, i.e. in conversing with friends or acquaintances?

1. Never
2. Occasionally
3. Daily

Ask all

[IRIS9]

Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with following statement:

Irish is an important part of Northern Irish culture.

1. Agree strongly
2. Agree slightly
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree slightly
5. Disagree strongly