

PISA 2025: National Report for Northern Ireland (Volume 1)

Research report September 2026

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Acknowledgements

This report represents a genuinely global team effort. We are especially grateful to the large number of participating pupils and teachers and for their time and effort in completing the assessments and questionnaires for PISA 2025, without whom this report would not have been possible.

We are grateful to all members of the PISA International Consortium, whose hard work and support contributed towards successful implementation of PISA 2025. We would also like to thank colleagues at the OECD for their expertise and support.

We also greatly appreciate the support and guidance we have received at all stages of the study from colleagues in the Department of Education, Northern Ireland especially Michael Woods, Jill McClelland and Trevor Campbell.

The team at Pearson managed the process of recruiting schools, and collecting, scoring and checking the data. We are therefore indebted to Dr Grace Grima, Dr Alistair Hooper, Lucian Lanteri, Kate Miller, Mish Mohan and Sarah Turner for guiding all these aspects of the work. Thanks to Carole Caple, Karen Gordon, Vasu Krishnaswamy, Liz Mangan, Steven Russell, Hugh Williams, Samantha Wilson and Christopher Wymbs, the team leaders for scoring, and all the hardworking scorers at Pearson.

At UCL Institute of Education (IOE) we would like to thank our colleagues for their expert input and feedback including, Professor Michael Reiss, Professor Eirini Geraniou, Dr Wilton Lodge and Dr Sinead Harmey. At the Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment (OUCEA) we are grateful to colleagues for their expert guidance, including Professor Jo-Anne Baird, Professor Sibel Erduran and Professor Rebecca Eynon.

Notes for readers

Readers who require a screen reader to read this report are advised to adjust settings to include reading aloud of punctuation marks as asterisks and subtraction signs are used throughout.

This report is based on the OECD International Database for PISA 2025 and is correct as of the 7th July 2026.

Citation

Richardson, M., Wilkinson, D., Maris, R., Barnes, I., Swensson, C., Ingram, J., Hillier, J. & Stiff, J. (2026) *PISA 2025: National Report for Northern Ireland* (September 2026). Bangor: Education, Government of Northern Ireland.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assesses the knowledge and skills in science, reading and mathematics of 15-year-old pupils¹ in countries around the world. PISA is run by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the assessment is typically carried out every 3 years allowing countries to chart how performance changes over time and across different countries. PISA 2022 was undertaken 4 years after the previous assessment in 2018 because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. PISA 2025 restores the 3-year cycle and involved 91 countries, including the United Kingdom – a full list of participants is in Chapter 1 ([Table 1.1](#)).

This report, Volume 1 of the National Report for Northern Ireland, analyses pupils' performance in the 3 subject domains of science, reading and mathematics. Volume 2² will analyse pupils' performance in computational problem solving, science subdomains, summarise responses to the PISA questionnaires, and explore further a selection of findings from Volume 1.

In Northern Ireland, 3,445 15-year-old pupils from 104 schools completed a 2-hour computer-based assessment and a pupil questionnaire. These were completed between September and October 2025 with pupils taking their GCSE exams in 2026.

When reading this report, it is important to keep in mind that Northern Ireland's sample of participating pupils may not be entirely representative of all 15-year-old pupils in Northern Ireland. This is, to some degree, always the case with international studies such as PISA.

For Northern Ireland, the Non-Response Bias Analysis (NRBA) showed that the sample in Northern Ireland represented schools and pupils well. There was a slight potential bias in the percentage of schools participating from the middle attainment band (band 3) which was reduced through the recruitment of replacement schools and non-response adjusted weighting applied in the analysis. The issues with non-response, both for Northern Ireland and for other participating countries, mean that cautious interpretation is particularly necessary when considering trends in performance over time and when making international comparisons. More confident conclusions can be drawn when making comparisons between groups of pupils within Northern Ireland, where we are not trying to generalise beyond our sample (such analysis takes place in Chapters 5 and 6). Overall, while cautious consideration of the results is encouraged, the analysis remains a valuable insight into the knowledge and skills of 15-year-old pupils in Northern Ireland in science, reading and mathematics, and how they compare to other 15-year-old pupils from around the world.

¹ Refer to Chapter 1 in this Volume for a more detailed description of the PISA age range.

² Due for publication in December 2026.

The term 'significant' is used throughout this report to refer to statistically significant differences between scores or values. In this report, we use a '95% confidence level' to define statistical significance, which means that there is less than a 1 in 20 chance that the finding is due to sampling or measurement error. Similarly, the term average, as in 'average score', is used to refer to the statistical mean for the relevant group, unless stated otherwise. The 35 OECD trend countries are those OECD countries in PISA 2025 that have participated in every cycle since PISA 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain. For Costa Rica and Spain, the data required for particular trend comparisons are not available across all cycles. For details about interpretation of PISA data, see Chapter 1, Section 1.4.

Performance in science

Pupils in Northern Ireland achieved an average score of 492 in science in PISA 2025, which was significantly above the OECD average of 482. The average science score for pupils in Northern Ireland was significantly above the majority of countries (66), was not significantly different from 11 countries, and was significantly below the average score in 13 countries.

Most of the top-performing countries were from East Asia: the Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang (B-S-J-Z) regions in China (597), Singapore (560), Macao (541), Taiwan (540), Japan (538) and South Korea (526). Pupils in B-S-J-Z (China) on average performed significantly above pupils in Singapore, who, on average, performed significantly above pupils in all other countries.

In addition to Northern Ireland, the European countries whose pupils had an average score significantly above the OECD average were Estonia (527), Finland (504), Switzerland (501), the Republic of Ireland (500), Austria (497), Poland (495), Czech Republic (490), Belgium (490), and Lithuania (488).

In Northern Ireland, pupils' average science score of 492 in PISA 2025 was not significantly different from the score of 488 in PISA 2022. This was also the case on average across OECD trend countries with average science scores of 484 and 487 respectively.

In Northern Ireland, pupils' average science score of 492 in PISA 2025 was also not significantly different from the average scores of 491 in PISA 2018 and 500 in PISA 2015. On average across OECD trend countries the average science score in 2025 (484), as in Northern Ireland, was not significantly different to the average in 2018 (489). However, unlike in Northern Ireland, on average across OECD trend countries the score in 2025 was significantly below the average score in 2015 (491).

PISA also describes performance in terms of proficiency, with higher proficiency levels representing better knowledge and skills in the subject domain. In Northern Ireland, 8% of

pupils performed at the highest science proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), which was not significantly different from the OECD average of 7%. Northern Ireland had 22% of pupils working at the lower proficiency levels (below Level 2) which was significantly smaller than the OECD average of 26%.

Performance in reading

Pupils in Northern Ireland achieved an average score of 482 in reading in PISA 2025, which was significantly above the OECD average score of 461. The average reading score for pupils in Northern Ireland was significantly above the majority of countries (75), was not significantly different from the average score in 3 countries and was significantly below the average score in 11 countries: Singapore (535), the B-S-J-Z regions in China (527), Taiwan (508), Japan (503), Macao (501), South Korea (501), the Republic of Ireland (500), Estonia (499), New Zealand (497), Australia (491), and Canada (490).

In Northern Ireland, pupils' average reading score of 482 in PISA 2025 was not significantly different from the average score of 485 in PISA 2022 but was significantly below pupils' average scores in PISA 2018 (501) and 2015 (497). On average across OECD trend countries the reading score of 463 in PISA 2025 was significantly below the scores in PISA 2022 (477), 2018 (488) and 2015 (490).

In terms of PISA's reading proficiency levels, in Northern Ireland, 6% of pupils performed at the highest reading proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), which was not significantly different from the OECD average of 6%. Northern Ireland had 23% of pupils working at the lower proficiency levels (below Level 2), which was significantly smaller than the OECD average of 31%.

Performance in mathematics

Pupils in Northern Ireland achieved an average mathematics score of 473 points in PISA 2025, which was significantly above the OECD average of 463 points. Pupils in the majority of countries (65) had average mathematics scores significantly below those of pupils in Northern Ireland. Pupils in 11 other countries had average mathematics scores that were not significantly different from the average score of pupils in Northern Ireland. Pupils in 13 countries (the B-S-J-Z regions in China (612), Singapore (563), Macao (549), Taiwan (546), Japan (525), South Korea (522), Hong Kong (522), Estonia (508), Switzerland (499), Canada (485), Poland (484), the Netherlands (483), and the Republic of Ireland (480)) had a mathematics average score significantly above the average score of pupils in Northern Ireland.

The average mathematics score achieved by pupils in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025 (473) was not significantly different from the average score that pupils in Northern Ireland achieved in PISA 2022 (475). However, the average mathematics score in PISA 2025 (473) was significantly below that achieved in PISA 2018 (492) and 2015 (493).

The average mathematics score across OECD trend countries in PISA 2025 was 465. This was significantly below the OECD trend averages in PISA 2022 (475), 2018 (490) and 2015 (487).

In terms of proficiency in mathematics, 9% of pupils in Northern Ireland performed at the highest proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), which was not significantly different from the OECD average of 8%. Northern Ireland had 30% of pupils working at the lower proficiency levels (below Level 2), which was significantly smaller than the OECD average of 35%.

Equity and Inclusion

Pupils' PISA scores in science, reading, and mathematics were analysed by gender, socioeconomic status and immigration status.

In PISA 2025, girls and boys in Northern Ireland achieved average science scores of 494 and 491, respectively, both not significantly different from the scores achieved in 2022. A similar pattern was observed in the OECD trend averages with no significant changes in girls' or boys' scores between 2022 and 2025.

Over the longer term, girls' and boys' science scores in Northern Ireland were stable between 2015 and 2025. The OECD trend average for girls was also stable between 2015 and 2025 while the OECD trend average science score for boys in 2025 was significantly below the equivalent score in 2015.

In Northern Ireland, girls achieved an average score in science which was not significantly different from the average score for boys. This continued the pattern observed in 2022 when girls' and boys' average scores were also not significantly different from one another. Over the same period, the OECD trend average showed a significant gender gap in science favouring girls in 2025 but no significant gender gap in 2022.

In reading for PISA 2025, girls and boys in Northern Ireland achieved average scores of 497 and 467, respectively. Both scores were not significantly different from the scores achieved in 2022, however the OECD trend average reading scores for girls and boys in 2025 were significantly below the equivalent scores in 2022.

Over the longer term, girls' reading scores in Northern Ireland were stable between 2015 and 2025 while boys recorded a significant decrease over the same period. The OECD trend averages for both girls and boys significantly decreased over the same period.

There was a significant gender gap in favour of girls in 2025 in Northern Ireland, as girls performed significantly above boys in terms of average reading scores. Between 2015 and 2025 there was a significant widening of the gender gap between Northern Ireland's girls and boys with the score point gap in 2025 (30 points in favour of girls) significantly wider than in 2015 (14 points). This pattern was also observed in the OECD trend average gap over this period.

In 2025, girls and boys in Northern Ireland achieved average scores of 469 and 478, respectively, in mathematics. For girls and boys, mathematics scores in 2025 were not significantly different from scores achieved in 2022. This contrasted with the OECD averages for girls and boys in 2025 which were both significantly below equivalent scores in 2022. Over the longer term in Northern Ireland, girls' and boys' mathematics scores in 2025 were both significantly below the scores in 2015. This was also the case for the OECD trend average.

There was no significant gap between the mathematics performance of girls and boys in Northern Ireland in 2025, mirroring the patterns observed in 2018 and 2015. However, there was a significant gap in 2022 when Northern Ireland's girls performed significantly below boys. By contrast, the OECD trend average showed girls performing significantly below boys in each cycle.

There was an 82 average score point difference in science between the average science score of the most disadvantaged quarter of pupils and the least disadvantaged quarter of pupils in Northern Ireland in 2025, not significantly different from the range on average across OECD countries (85 points). The same pattern was observed in reading, with the range in scores for Northern Ireland (66 points) not significantly different from the OECD average range (78 points) and in mathematics with the range in scores for Northern Ireland (90 points) not significantly different from the OECD average range (83 points).

On average, pupils in Northern Ireland who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieved average scores in science, reading and mathematics significantly below scores for pupils who were not eligible.

In science, reading and mathematics, the average scores for pupils in Northern Ireland in 2025 with a second-generation immigration background were significantly above the average score for first-generation immigrant pupils and not significantly different from the score for non-immigrant pupils.

PISA in the UK

In PISA 2025, the average scores for pupils in all three subjects in Northern Ireland were significantly above the corresponding scores in Wales but not significantly different from the scores in Scotland and significantly below the scores in England.

In 2025 the average science scores in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were not significantly different from the respective scores in 2022, whereas in England the average science score increased significantly. In all 4 countries of the UK the average reading score in 2022 was not significantly different from the score in 2025. In mathematics in Northern Ireland, England and Scotland there were no significant differences in average scores whereas in Wales the average score decreased significantly between 2022 and 2025.

Each UK country saw a stable trend over time in science with no significant difference in pupils' average score between PISA 2015 and 2025. However, in Northern Ireland and Wales there were significant downward trends in pupils' average reading scores between PISA 2015 and 2025. In England and Scotland, average reading scores remained stable over the same period with no significant score differences. In mathematics, there was a significant downward trend in pupils' average scores in Northern Ireland between PISA 2015 and 2025, and the same trend was observed in Scotland and Wales while the trend for pupils' scores in England was stable over the same period.

In science, there were no significant differences between the average scores for girls and boys in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales but there was a significant gender gap in favour of boys in England. Gender differences in PISA 2025 were consistent across the 4 countries for reading with girls achieving significantly higher average scores than boys. There were no significant differences between the average mathematics scores for girls and boys in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025 while in each of the other countries there was a significant gender gap favouring boys.

As in previous cycles, pupils from less disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds performed better than their peers from more disadvantaged backgrounds across all domains and all countries.

1 Introduction to PISA

1.1 What is PISA?

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a study of 15-year-old pupils around the world organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). PISA assesses the knowledge and skills that are considered necessary for participation in social and economic life, specifically in science, reading and mathematics. PISA also offers participation in optional innovative domain assessments. In 2025 this domain was Learning in the Digital World in which Northern Ireland participated. PISA is typically carried out every 3 years; however, PISA 2022 was undertaken 4 years after the previous assessment in 2018 because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. PISA 2025 restores the 3-year cycle.

Pearson delivered the PISA 2025 study on behalf of the Department of Education Northern Ireland. The UCL Institute of Education (IOE) and the Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment (OUCEA) led on the analysis and reporting for Northern Ireland.

The data for Northern Ireland was collected as part of a wider collaborative effort with the other nations of the United Kingdom (UK), and although this report focuses on Northern Ireland, the OECD reports on the UK as a whole.

To enable countries to identify and monitor trends in pupils' performance over time, each PISA subject score is presented on a scale that is comparable over PISA cycles. Each participating country receives detailed results, allowing them to understand how different groups of pupils performed (such as pupils from different socioeconomic backgrounds). PISA data also enables governments to benchmark education policy and performance, make evidence-based decisions and learn from policies and practices in other countries.

In this chapter, we present an overview of the PISA study. First, we provide information about other countries that participated in PISA and a description of Northern Ireland's past participation. We then provide a guide to interpreting the PISA results, including details of the study design, data collection and analysis. Finally, we conclude with an overview of the structure of this report.

1.2 Who participated in PISA?

The number of OECD countries, associate or partner countries and economies (education systems)³ participating in PISA, has increased from 43 in the initial cycle in 2000 to 91⁴ in

³ For the purpose of this report, the term country is used for each participant unless specific reference is made to an education system.

⁴ This included one country with performance estimates for pupils in science but not reading or mathematics.

the current PISA 2025 cycle (OECD, 2025)⁵, and more than 760,000 pupils participated worldwide. Of the 91, 38 were OECD members, including the UK. All participants are shown in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 OECD member countries, associate or partner countries and economies (education systems) participating in PISA 2025

Continents	OECD member countries	OECD associate or partner countries and economies (education systems)
Africa		Egypt, Kenya, Mauritius, Morocco, Rwanda, Zambia
Asia	Israel, Japan, South Korea, Türkiye*	Armenia, Azerbaijan*, Brunei, Cambodia, China**, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Kurdistan Region (Iraq), Jordan, Kazakhstan*, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Macao, Malaysia, Mongolia, Palestinian Authority, Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vietnam
Australasia	Australia, New Zealand	
Europe	Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom	Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia*, Kosovo, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine**
North America	Canada, Costa Rica, United States of America	Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala
South America	Chile, Colombia, Mexico	Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay

⁵ See [OECD \(2025\) Countries and economies that have participated in PISA to date](#)

Countries and education systems marked with an asterisk () are transcontinental, situated partly in Asia and partly in Europe.*

*This included one country with performance estimates for pupils in science but not reading or mathematics. Countries and education systems marked with an asterisk (**) include sub-regions only. For China, 4 regions took part in PISA 2025 (Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang, abbreviated as B-S-J-Z, (China)). For Ukraine, 17 out of 27 regions took part in PISA 2025.*

Source: OECD, PISA 2025

1.2.1 Northern Ireland's participation in PISA

In Northern Ireland, 3,445 15-year-old pupils⁶ from 104 schools completed a 2-hour onscreen assessment and a pupil questionnaire that took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Principals at participating schools were also asked to complete a questionnaire, asking about the context of their school, staff and pupils. The assessments and questionnaires were completed in September and October 2025, with pupils who took part due to complete their GCSE exams in 2026. Northern Ireland has participated in all cycles since the first PISA study in 2000.

1.3 What does PISA measure?

Although science, reading and mathematics are always assessed, each cycle of PISA focuses on one of these 3 areas in particular – this is referred to as the ‘major domain’. For PISA 2025, the major domain was science, as it was in 2015 and 2006, with reading and mathematics both minor subject domains. PISA 2025 also included an assessment of Learning in the Digital World. This measures pupils’ ‘capacity to engage in an iterative process of knowledge building and problem solving using computational tools’⁷.

1.3.1 The PISA 2025 assessment frameworks

Pupils’ performance was assessed using measures outlined in the science, reading and mathematics frameworks. The frameworks describe the competencies developed by science, reading and mathematics education and pupils’ knowledge required to exhibit these competencies. The competencies define what is considered important for young people to know, value, and be able to do in situations requiring the use of scientific and technological knowledge, reading knowledge and mathematical knowledge.

Science used an updated framework in 2025 while the reading and mathematics frameworks remained unchanged from the PISA 2022 cycle. Compared with 2015, when science was last the major domain, the science assessment framework has been broadened. The focus on the concept of ‘science literacy’ in 2015 has been replaced with a focus on the general outcomes of science, bringing it in line with the reading and

⁶ The OECD (2025) PISA 2025 Technical Standards state that the PISA Target Population comprises students aged between 15 years and 3 (completed) months and 16 years and 2 (completed) months at the beginning of the testing period.

⁷ See [Learning in the Digital World](#)

mathematics frameworks. The PISA 2025 science framework⁸ is available on the [OECD website](#), which includes examples of science assessments.

The science framework was last changed for PISA 2015 when it was the major domain. It was unchanged in PISA 2018 and 2022. Notable differences in 2025 in comparison with 2022 are:

- the changes to the competencies outlined below
- the introduction of a subset of environmental competencies
- a move from 'a focus on attitudes towards science to a focus on measuring a broader concept of 'science identity', which has been shown to be more comprehensive in describing students' engagement in science'⁹

The 2025 science framework describes the:

- 3 science competencies and a subset of 3 environmental science competencies that science education develops
- 3 types of knowledge required to develop these competencies
- 3 main contexts in which students will use the competencies
- aspects of science identity that are deemed important

Science competencies

The 3 science competencies¹⁰ are:

- **explain phenomena scientifically:** retained from PISA 2015, this requires pupils to recognise, produce, apply, and evaluate explanations and solutions for a range of natural and technological phenomena and problems
- **construct and evaluate designs for scientific enquiry and interpret scientific data and evidence critically:** a merger of 2 previous competencies in PISA 2015 ('Evaluate and design scientific enquiry' and 'Interpret data and evidence scientifically'), this requires pupils to construct, appraise, and evaluate scientific investigations
- **research, evaluate and use scientific information for decision making and action:** a new competency for 2025, this requires pupils to critically assess the credibility of scientific information, both genuine and claimed, in which there has been a surge

⁸ See [OECD \(2025\) PISA Framework for Science](#)

⁹ See [OECD \(2025\) PISA Framework for Science](#)

¹⁰ See [OECD \(2025\) PISA Framework for Science](#)

The new framework also emphasises pupils' environmental awareness and agency by introducing 3 environmental science competencies¹¹:

- explain the impact of human interactions with Earth's systems
- make informed decisions to act based on evaluation of diverse sources of evidence and application of creative and systems thinking to regenerate and sustain the environment
- demonstrate hope and respect for diverse perspectives in seeking solutions to socio-ecological crises

These competencies recognise the influence and substantial impact, both past and present, that humans have had on the Earth.

Science knowledge

In both PISA 2015 and 2025, pupils needed 3 types of knowledge to develop these science competencies¹², namely:

- **content:** knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas and theories, assessed through
- 3 major areas: physical systems, living systems and Earth and space systems
- 4 major fields: physics, chemistry, biology and Earth and space sciences¹³
- **procedural:** knowledge of the standard procedures and practices that scientists use to obtain reliable and valid data
- **epistemic:** knowledge of constructs and features that are essential to producing knowledge in science and justifying this, such as the importance of repeating measurements

Science contexts

Competencies and knowledge were assessed using a series of contexts seen as generally consistent with how scientific literacy was applied in the previous PISA frameworks¹⁴. The focus of assessment items related to situations in:

- the self, family, and peer groups (personal)
- the community (local and national)
- life across the world (global)

¹¹ See [OECD \(2025\) PISA Framework for Science](#)

¹² See [OECD \(2025\) PISA Framework for Science](#) for full definitions.

¹³ The framework uses the term "systems" instead of "sciences" in the content knowledge descriptors, as pupils must understand concepts from the physical and life sciences, Earth and space sciences, and their application. See [OECD \(2025\) PISA Framework for Science](#)

¹⁴ See [OECD \(2025\) PISA Framework for Science](#)

The application of science and technology in the 3 contexts above was primarily assessed using the topics below:

- health and disease
- natural resources
- environmental quality (including environmental impacts and climate change)
- hazards
- frontiers of science and technology (including contemporary advances and challenges)

The extent to which the competencies, knowledge and contexts represented in the PISA science framework reflect the curriculum for science in Northern Ireland is set out in Chapter 2 Section 2.3.

Other PISA assessments

Alongside assessments in science, pupils undertook assessments in:

- **reading:** the ‘capacity to understand, use and reflect on written texts to achieve personal goals, develop knowledge and potential, and participate in society’¹⁵
- **mathematics:** The ‘capacity to reason mathematically and to formulate, employ, and interpret mathematics to solve problems in a variety of real-world contexts. It includes concepts, procedures, facts, and tools to describe, explain, and predict phenomena. It helps individuals know the role that mathematics plays in the world and make the well-founded judgments and decisions needed by constructive, engaged and reflective 21st Century citizens’¹⁶
- **Learning in the Digital World:** the ‘capacity to engage in an iterative process of knowledge building and problem solving using computational tools...demonstrated by effective self-regulated learning while applying computational and scientific inquiry practices’¹⁷

1.3.2 The PISA questionnaires

Alongside the PISA assessments in science, reading, mathematics and Learning in the Digital World, participating schools and pupils were asked to complete questionnaires. The pupil questionnaire requested information about participating pupils’ background (including their parents’/carers’ occupation as part of the socioeconomic status measure); their attitudes (such as to learning); feelings towards school; educational experiences and future aspirations.

¹⁵ See OECD 2025 Reading Performance (PISA)

¹⁶ See [OECD PISA 2022 Assessment and Analytical Framework](#)

¹⁷ See [OECD PISA 2025 Learning in the Digital World](#)

As science was the major domain for PISA 2025, pupils were also asked to report on their experiences and attitudes to science in greater detail. In 2025, there was a change in emphasis on affective factors (such as attitudes and motivations) with the introduction of ‘science identity’. This centred on the importance of pupils’ ‘agency and active citizenship in a rapidly changing world’ alongside their development of competencies and knowledge¹⁸. These were assessed using a questionnaire.

The school questionnaire requested information from principals about the school climate, resources and perceived barriers to learning.

1.3.3 The PISA assessment

The OECD iteratively reviewed proposed test items (questions) using different local and international experts. The field trial process, which took place in March 2024 in the UK, ensured that the assessment items met PISA’s Technical Standards¹⁹ and were suitable for inclusion in the main data collection. This was repeated across all participating countries to ensure that the items met the standards and were comparable across education systems.

PISA takes a complex approach to the design and administration of assessment compared to more conventional assessments, such as GCSE examinations, where every pupil takes the same test with the same items, and the cohort’s average performance is an aggregation of these individual pupil performances. The PISA assessment itself was computer-based²⁰ and employed multi-stage adaptive testing (for science, reading and mathematics). An adaptive test automatically selects items based on a pupil’s performance on preceding question blocks. Consequently, not every pupil answered the same questions²¹.

1.3.4 PISA study design and sampling

It is impractical for the PISA assessment to be administered to every single pupil in each participating country. Participating countries therefore assess a sample of eligible pupils. The OECD employs a two-stage sampling method to ensure that the pupils chosen to take part in the study are representative of the national pupil population. The first stage is to sample schools in the country, the second to sample pupils within the selected schools. Countries that participated in PISA were required to adhere to strict international sampling procedures which facilitate sample comparability. Table 1.2 illustrates this process for Northern Ireland.

¹⁸ See [OECD \(2025\) PISA Framework for Science](#)

¹⁹ See [OECD \(2025\) PISA 2025 Technical Standards](#)

²⁰ Some countries used paper based tests: Cambodia, Kurdistan Region (Iraq), Mauritius, Rwanda, Tajikistan, and Zambia.

²¹ See [OECD \(2023\) PISA 2025 Integrated Design](#)

Table 1.2 PISA 2025 sampling procedure for Northern Ireland

Step	Process
Step 1	The sampling process for PISA 2025 required Northern Ireland to select a representative sample of 125 secondary schools
Step 2	Special schools and Alternative Provision were excluded
Step 3	The OECD selected 2 replacement schools, where possible, with similar characteristics to each sampled school. They were asked to take part if sampled schools opted out
Step 4	Within each selected school, a sample of 40 pupils, with an average age of 15, was chosen to take part
Step 5	In Northern Ireland, 3445 pupils from 104 schools took part in PISA 2025

40 pupils were selected from each school unless there were fewer than 40 eligible pupils in a school.

In line with this procedure, a sample of post primary schools was selected to take part in PISA 2025. Schools were selected to represent the different geographical regions within Northern Ireland, the different types of school that pupils attend (for example, grammar and non-grammar) and a range of academic attainment at the school level (based on the GCSE performance of previous pupil cohorts). In each participating school, a random sample of 40 eligible pupils²² was selected to take the assessment. All these pupils were in year 12²³. With any sample, some sub-populations may be under- or over-represented once the final data is obtained. It is important to note that the PISA design counteracts this, as far as is possible, through statistical methods (sample weighting)²⁴. The response rates for Northern Ireland in relation to these Technical Standards are discussed in Chapter 1 Section 1.4.7.

1.4 Interpreting data from PISA: a reader's guide

This section provides information and context for interpreting Northern Ireland's results in PISA 2025.

1.4.1 Sampling and measurement errors

The PISA 2025 data for Northern Ireland was based upon a sample of pupils rather than a census of all pupils. This means that there is a degree of uncertainty in the findings because, however carefully selected the sample, there is always at least some chance

²² 40 pupils were selected from each school unless there were fewer than 40 eligible pupils in a school.

²³ In England and Wales this is equivalent to year 11. In Northern Ireland, pupils aged 4 can leave pre-school and attend an optional reception class. This results in Northern Ireland's Primary 1 (ages 4-5) being equivalent to reception in England and Wales. Accordingly, subsequent years in Northern Ireland are numbered one higher than in England and Wales.

²⁴ See [OECD \(2025\) PISA 2025 Technical Standards](#)

that it does not fully represent the overall population of pupils. This uncertainty is described as ‘sampling error’. This does not mean a mistake has been made however, it is present in all research which relies on the analysis of data from a sample. Another source of uncertainty is ‘measurement error’, which relates to the extent to which an individual pupil’s performance on the PISA test reflects their true ability. Measurement error occurs because a pupil’s score may be influenced by factors that are unrelated to their ability, such as their interpretation of the items that they respond to or their level of motivation on the day of the test.

1.4.2 Statistical significance

To contextualise and account for this uncertainty, statistical analysis of the differences between countries and groups of pupils is undertaken in this report to determine whether they are ‘statistically significant’. Statistically significant differences are unlikely to be the result of either sampling or measurement error and are likely to reflect a true difference between the countries or groups being compared. In this report, we use a ‘95% confidence level’ to define statistical significance, which means that there is less than a 1 in 20 chance that the finding is due to sampling or measurement error. For clarity of writing, the term ‘significant’ is used throughout this report to refer to statistically significant differences between scores or values. Similarly, the term average, as in ‘average score’, is used to refer to the arithmetic mean for the relevant group, unless stated otherwise.

Due to rounding, the significance of data presented may be affected. For example, when comparing the difference between 2 percentages, in one case a reported percentage may be significantly different from another percentage, but in another case, it may not be significantly different even though the percentage is the same. Two countries with the same or similar score may have also different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

1.4.3 Rank order

Caution should be taken when considering the ‘rank order’ of countries who participated in PISA as this is not based on statistically significant differences. It can also be affected by variation in the number of countries participating in each cycle, for example, fewer countries participating in the latest cycle may cause a country’s rank order to be higher compared with a previous cycle. This report therefore focuses on statistically significant differences between countries and groups, providing greater confidence that findings are robust.

1.4.4 Comparing pupil groups

It is important to note that test items may not be equally difficult for pupils from different socio-cultural or language backgrounds, or across countries and translations. Previous research suggests that some test items may not have necessarily performed in a

comparable manner across different countries and languages, thus somewhat undermining the comparability of results²⁵. Although pupils taking part in PISA were the same age range, their educational experiences may have differed depending on what point in the academic year they took the tests. Across the UK (not including Scotland), there were different testing windows:

- Wales and Northern Ireland (September to October 2025)
- England (February to May 2025: approximately two-thirds of pupils who were in year 11 and one-third who were in year 10)

During PISA 2025's development, the OECD made every effort to ensure that comparisons between countries and translations can be validly made. However, the cross-country comparisons presented in this report should still be cautiously interpreted, especially when comparing countries with different languages or where participation rates for one or more cycles did not meet the PISA technical standard²⁶.

The methodology for calculating the Economic, Social, and Cultural Status index (ESCS) was revised for the 2025 cycle. Although the index retains the same name and continues to measure socioeconomic background, a different methodology was used to calculate the index. At the time of writing, the exact details of these methodology changes were not available, and it was therefore not possible to make statistical comparisons between the 2025 cycle and previous cycles within this report.

1.4.5 Statistical terms

The following measures are referred to in the report:

Interdecile ranges

The spread of performance in each country can be examined by looking at the distribution of scores with percentiles dividing data into 100 equal parts and deciles into 10 equal parts, as illustrated in Figure 1.2. The score at the 90th percentile is the score above which the highest-performing 10% of pupils attain (pupils in the highest-performing decile), while the 10th percentile is the score below which the lowest-performing 10% of pupils attain (pupils in the lowest-performing decile). The difference between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils at the 90th and 10th percentiles is described as the interdecile range (the difference between pupils in the highest-performing and lowest-performing deciles). This is a better measure of the spread of scores when comparing countries than using the

²⁵ Kreiner S and Christensen KB. (2014) 'Analyses of Model Fit and Robustness. A New Look at the PISA Scaling Model Underlying Ranking of Countries According to Reading Literacy.' *Psychometrika*, 79(2), pp.210-231. and Rutkowski, L. and Rutkowski, D. (2016) 'A Call for a More Measured Approach to Reporting and Interpreting PISA Results.' *Educational Researcher*, 45(4), pp.252-257.

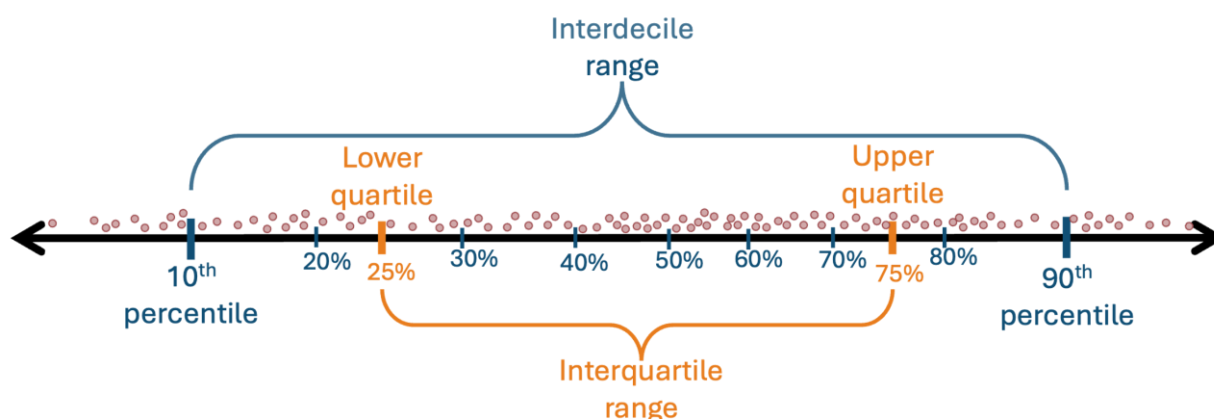
²⁶ For more information on how PISA measures pupils' success at school please see [What is PISA data and how does it measure students' success at school? – The Education Hub](#)

very highest- and very lowest-performing pupils, as the latter comparison may be affected by a small number of pupils with unusually high or low scores.

Interquartile ranges

In Chapter 6, the spread of pupils' performance is also measured using the OECD's economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) index. Pupils completed a questionnaire that asked them about their parents' education, occupation and home possessions. Using their responses, pupils were allocated to one of 4 ESCS Quartiles (with 25% of pupils in each). The most disadvantaged 25% of pupils were placed in Quartile 1 and the least disadvantaged 25% of pupils in Quartile 4. In this report, comparisons are made between the relative performance of pupils in Quartiles 1 and 4 using their average scores. The interquartile range is used to determine the spread of performance between the least (Quartile 4) and most (Quartile 1) disadvantaged pupils by subtracting the Quartile 1 average score from the Quartile 4 average score (Quartile 4 average score – Quartile 1 average score).

Figure 1.1 Calculating interdecile and interquartile ranges



Gender gap

In Chapter 5 the score difference between girls and boys is described as the gender gap. This was calculated by subtracting the average score for girls from the average score for boys. Although pupils were asked what their sex was in the pupil questionnaire, gender is referred to in this report to maintain consistency with the PISA 2025 national reports for Northern Ireland and Wales, and the OECD PISA Assessment and Analytical Framework.

Higher-performing countries

Where the report refers to higher-performing countries this refers to all participating countries with average scores over 440 in PISA 2025. The countries in this category will differ by subject.

Periods studied and trends over time

The report analyses findings from PISA 2025 and the changes over time since PISA 2015, the last PISA cycle in which science was the focus. Trends are reported as:

- A stable trend is reported where there was no significant difference in scores over time
- A downward trend refers to a significant decrease in PISA scores over a specified period
- An upward trend refers to a significant increase in PISA scores over a specified period

1.4.6 PISA and the COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic caused widespread disruption to schools, teaching and learning, which included significant periods of time (during 2020 and 2021) when school buildings were closed. Remote instruction or distance learning resources were made available in line with government guidance at the time. Schools also offered a range of programmes and types of support to pupils whose learning and wellbeing were affected. However, the impact of this disruption varied between regions of Northern Ireland, schools and individual pupils within those schools, as well as between different countries. Given this complexity, it is not possible to ascertain precisely how the COVID-19 pandemic affected performance in the PISA 2025 or 2022 assessments for those who participated, or how it may have affected their responses to the questionnaires.

Data collection for PISA 2022 (the administration of the assessment and the questionnaires) had originally been planned for 2021 but was delayed by 12 months because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although data collection was undertaken in November and December of 2022, the ongoing situation had an impact on recruitment, retention and pupil engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have also affected pupils tested in PISA 2025 as they would have been 10-11 years old and approaching the end of their primary education when it occurred.

This is important in the context of PISA 2025 as trend comparisons are made in this report between the performance of pupils tested for PISA 2022 and other PISA cycles.

1.4.7 PISA 2025 response rates for Northern Ireland

Exclusion rate

The overall exclusion rate for schools in the UK²⁷ was 7.6% above the 5% OECD target. This marks an upward trend (UK²⁸ exclusion rates were 4.9% in 2022, 5.4% in 2018), however, the OECD has confirmed that the PISA 2025 results can be fully included in reports and used for international and trend comparisons.

Participation rate

PISA requires a country's final weighted school response rate to be at least 85% of sampled eligible and non-excluded schools. For Northern Ireland, the final weighted response rate was 83% (up from 78% following the use of replacement schools), not meeting this threshold. Similarly, the final weighted pupil response rate should be at least 80% of all sampled pupils across responding schools. For Northern Ireland, the final weighted pupil response rate was 86%, meeting the target²⁹.

Response Bias

A Non-Response Bias Analysis (NRBA) at school and pupil levels was undertaken to understand among other things differences between responding and non-responding schools and between originally sampled schools and replacement schools. The overall purpose of this analysis was to establish the extent to which the final sample of 15 year old pupils was likely to represent the population of 15 year old pupils in Northern Ireland.

While Northern Ireland did not meet the Technical Standard for school level participation therefore requiring a NRBA the Technical Standard for pupil level participation was met and the NRBA was undertaken voluntarily to inform readers' inferences from the data. Other countries that also met this standard may not have carried out a NRBA. The key findings of the NRBA, and what they mean for interpreting Northern Ireland's PISA 2025 results are described briefly below, and a full report of the analysis can be found in Appendix A.

For Northern Ireland, the non-response analysis showed that the sample in Northern Ireland represented schools and pupils well. There was a slight potential bias in the percentage of schools participating from the middle attainment band (band 3) which was reduced through the recruitment of replacement schools and non-response adjusted weighting applied in the analysis. The issues with non-response, both for Northern Ireland and for other participating education systems, mean that cautious interpretation is particularly necessary when considering trends in performance over time and when making international comparisons. More confident conclusions can be drawn when making

²⁷ UK minus Scotland

²⁸ UK minus Scotland

²⁹ Due to the requirements to sample sufficient schools there were limited numbers of replacements, affecting the overall school participation rate.

comparisons between groups of pupils within Northern Ireland, where we are not trying to generalise beyond our sample (such analysis takes place in Chapters 5 and 6). Overall, while cautious consideration of the results is encouraged, the analysis remains a valuable insight into the knowledge and skills of 15-year-old pupils in Northern Ireland in science, reading and mathematics and how they compare to other 15-year-old pupils from around the world.

1.4.8 Selection of comparator countries

Given the large number of countries that participated in PISA 2025, it is necessary to be selective when making international comparisons. For this report, 4 countries have been selected for comparison to Northern Ireland, namely: Canada, Estonia, Finland and the Republic of Ireland. This is on the basis that they provide valid, meaningful and valuable comparisons, serving to contextualise the performance of pupils from Northern Ireland.

The report compares Northern Ireland's performance to the OECD average performance which has been selected for such comparisons, rather than the average for all countries that participated in PISA 2025. This is because the countries used to calculate the OECD average are more economically comparable to Northern Ireland.

The number of countries which are part of the OECD has increased over time affecting the calculation of averages. To ensure comparisons are consistent and not unduly distorted by countries which are included or excluded in a given comparison, the OECD has calculated different averages. These include different sets of countries, allowing for accurate comparisons of change over time to be made.

This report compares the performance of Northern Ireland's pupils to 2 OECD averages, depending on the most appropriate comparison. These are the:

- **OECD average** - the average of all 38 OECD countries (including the UK) which participated in the 2025 cycle
- **OECD trend average** - the average across the 35³⁰ OECD member countries which took part in 2015, 2018, 2022 and 2025 (including the UK) and have results included in the international reports for each cycle

1.5 Organisation of this report

The rest of this Volume 1 report is divided into 7 main chapters with the NRBA included as an appendix:

³⁰ Of the 38 OECD member countries participating in PISA in 2025, none participated for the first time. Of these 38, only Luxembourg did not participate in each of the PISA cycles as it was absent in 2022. It is therefore not included in the OECD trend average. Spain and Costa Rica are also excluded from the trend average as they did not meet the participation standards across every cycle.

- chapters 2 to 4 focus on Northern Ireland's performance in PISA science, reading and mathematics
- chapters 5 to 6 focus on the themes of Equity and Inclusion, presenting performance by pupil characteristics, such as gender and socioeconomic status
- chapter 7 focuses on similarities and differences in pupil assessment outcomes across the participating countries in the UK
- chapter 8 concludes Volume 1 and looks forward to Volume 2

Each chapter generally includes information on the distribution of pupils' test scores and an overview of how Northern Ireland's performance has changed over time in relation to other participating countries.

Volume 2 comprises chapters on Learning in the Digital World, selected science subdomains and questionnaire responses. Volume 2 will also present a conclusion to both volumes.

2 Performance in science

2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter reports the performance of pupils in Northern Ireland in the science domain in PISA 2025. It draws on findings outlined in the international report (OECD, 2026) and places outcomes for Northern Ireland's pupils in the context of those findings. This performance is considered alongside that of previous cycles: PISA 2022, 2018, and 2015. It outlines how the performance of pupils in Northern Ireland in 2025 compares with that of other participating countries, as well as how performance has changed over time. Science was assessed using the science framework developed specifically for PISA 2025 ([PISA 2025 Science Framework](#)).

2.2 Key findings

- Pupils in Northern Ireland achieved an average score of 492 in science in PISA 2025, which was significantly above the OECD average of 482.
- The average science score for pupils in Northern Ireland was significantly above the majority of countries (66), was not significantly different from 11 countries, and was significantly below the average score in 13 countries.
- Pupils in Northern Ireland's average science score of 492 in PISA 2025 was not significantly different from the score of 488 in PISA 2022. This was also the case on average across OECD trend countries³¹ with average science scores of 484 and 487 respectively.
- Pupils in Northern Ireland's average science score of 492 in PISA 2025 was also not significantly different from the average scores of 491 in PISA 2018 and 500 in PISA 2015. On average across OECD trend countries the average science score in 2025 (484), as in Northern Ireland, was not significantly different to the average in 2018 (489). However, unlike in Northern Ireland, on average across OECD trend countries the score in 2025 was significantly below the average score in 2015 (491).
- The range between Northern Ireland's highest- and lowest-performing pupils was 261 points and was not significantly different from the OECD average of 258 score points. This range was also not significantly different from the range in PISA 2022 of 262 points.
- In Northern Ireland, 8% of pupils performed at the highest science proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), which was not significantly different from the OECD average of 7%. Northern Ireland had 22% of pupils working at the lower proficiency levels (below Level 2) which was significantly smaller than the OECD average of 26%.

³¹ The 35 OECD trend countries are those OECD countries in PISA 2025 that have participated in every cycle since PISA 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

2.3 Introduction to PISA science

In Chapter 1, Section 1.3.1, an overview is given of the PISA 2025 science framework, including some of the changes to previous PISA science frameworks. Whilst no country has a science curriculum that is directly aligned to the PISA science framework, it is helpful to consider the extent to which the Northern Ireland Curriculum reflects the PISA science framework.

Despite differences in terminology and nuanced variations in focus, the competencies in the PISA science framework demonstrate strong alignment with Northern Ireland's Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities framework. These broader learning goals are an integral part of teaching in every subject across the Northern Ireland curriculum and, as such, are stipulated in the learning outcomes of each subject, including Science.

The competencies in the science framework are influenced by affective factors. Previously, these have focused on attitudes towards science. In PISA 2025, the focus is on measuring science identity, a broader concept that has been shown to be a better measure of pupils' engagement in science. Science Identity as a broader learning concept is reflected in the requirement to develop Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities in all subjects (including Science) in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. This places broader types of learning more explicitly into the curriculum so that they take their place as learning goals concurrently with other important learning goals. The explicit infusion of these skills and capabilities in subjects such as science places a focus on epistemic practices by developing thinking, dispositions and collaborative practices so that pupils see themselves as scientists and capable contributors to society, the economy and environment. This links to the new focus in PISA 2025 on education for sustainability and environmental education, under the concept of 'Agency in the Anthropocene'. In Northern Ireland, every subject, including science, consists of an integrated combination of statutory content comprised of knowledge, skills and capabilities and key elements. The key elements serve to guide contextual applications. Education for Sustainable Development is one of the statutory key elements.

2.4 The performance of pupils in Northern Ireland in science

Pupils in Northern Ireland who participated in PISA 2025 achieved an average score of 492 in science. This was significantly above the OECD average of 482.

The average science score for pupils in Northern Ireland was significantly above the majority of countries (66), was not significantly different from 11 other countries, and was significantly below the average score in 13 countries.

Among the other 37 OECD countries that participated in PISA 2025, pupils in 9 countries (Japan (538), Estonia (527), South Korea (526), Canada (510), New Zealand (509), Australia (509), Finland (504), Switzerland (501), and the Republic of Ireland (500)) had an

average science score significantly above that in Northern Ireland. Table 2.1 shows the science performance of all higher-performing countries in PISA 2025 relative to pupils in Northern Ireland.

Table 2.1 Science performance of higher-performing countries in PISA 2025 relative to Northern Ireland

Science performance relative to pupils in Northern Ireland	Country and average science score
Countries whose pupils had an average science score significantly above that in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025	The Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang regions in China (B-S-J-Z) (597), Singapore (560), Macao (541), Taiwan (540), Japan (538), Estonia (527), South Korea (526), Canada (510), New Zealand (509), Australia (509), Finland (504), Switzerland (501), and the Republic of Ireland (500)
Countries whose pupils had an average science score not significantly different from that in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025	United States (502), Austria (497), Hong Kong (496), Poland (495), Türkiye (494), Northern Ireland (492) , Czech Republic (490), Belgium (490), Lithuania (488), Germany (486), the Netherlands (485), and Sweden (485)
Countries whose pupils had an average science score significantly below that in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025	Slovenia (484), France (483), Italy (483), OECD average (482) , Portugal (482), Hungary (480), Denmark (478), Spain (477), Croatia (476), Slovak Republic (475), Luxembourg (474), Norway (470), Latvia (468), United Arab Emirates (458), Vietnam (457), Malta (453), Ukrainian regions (17 of 27) (448), Uruguay (445), Chile (442), Israel (442), and Iceland (441)

Base: All participating countries with average scores over 440 in science in PISA 2025.

Two countries with the same or similar score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

In 2025, among the 91 participating countries, pupils in 22 countries, including Northern Ireland, had an average score significantly above the OECD average, pupils in 9 countries had an average score that was not significantly different from the OECD average, and pupils in 60 countries had an average score significantly below the OECD average.

As in previous cycles, most of the top-performing countries were from East Asia; the B-S-J-Z regions in China (597), Singapore (560), Macao (541), Taiwan (540), Japan (538), South Korea (526), and Hong Kong (496). Pupils in the B-S-J-Z regions in China on

average performed significantly above pupils in Singapore, who, on average, performed significantly above pupils in all other countries.

The European countries whose pupils had an average score significantly above the OECD average were Estonia (527), Finland (504), Switzerland (501), the Republic of Ireland (500), Austria (497), Poland (495), Northern Ireland (492), Czech Republic (490), Belgium (490), and Lithuania (488). Pupils in the remaining comparator country, Canada (510), also had an average score in science significantly above the OECD average.

2.5 Science performance over time

Pupils in Northern Ireland achieved an average score of 492 in science in PISA 2025, which was not significantly different from the score of 488 in PISA 2022 and not significantly different from the average scores of 491 in PISA 2018 and 500 in PISA 2015.

The OECD trend average science score was 484 in PISA 2025, which was not significantly different from the OECD trend averages of 487 in PISA 2022 and 489 in PISA 2018. In PISA 2015, the average science score of 491 across OECD trend countries was significantly above the average in PISA 2025.

The average science score for pupils in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025 (492) and in PISA 2015 (500) was significantly above the respective OECD trend averages of 484 and 491 points. In PISA 2022 and 2018 there was no significant difference between the OECD trend average and the average score for pupils in Northern Ireland.

In total, among the 75 countries that participated in both PISA 2022 and 2025, pupils' average science score in PISA 2025 was significantly above the average score in PISA 2022 in 15 countries. Pupils in a further 12 countries had an average science score in PISA 2025 that was significantly below the average score in PISA 2022. In each of the remaining 48 countries, including Northern Ireland, there was no significant difference between the pupils' average score in PISA 2025 and in PISA 2022.

Table 2.2 shows the changes in the average science score of pupils in higher-performing countries, including Northern Ireland, and on average across OECD trend countries between PISA 2022 and PISA 2025.

Table 2.2 Changes in pupils' average science score between PISA 2022 and PISA 2025 for higher-performing countries

Trend in science performance	Country and change in average science score
Countries whose pupils had an average science score in PISA 2025 significantly above the average science score in PISA 2022	United Arab Emirates (+26), Türkiye (+18), Slovak Republic (+13), and Uruguay (+9)
Countries whose pupils had an average science score in PISA 2025 not significantly different from the average science score in PISA 2022	Austria (+6), Italy (+6), New Zealand (+5), Northern Ireland (+4) , Lithuania (+3), Taiwan (+2), United States (+2), Australia (+2), Estonia (+1), Belgium (–1), Chile (–1), Switzerland (–1), Singapore (–2), South Korea (–2), Macao (–2), Portugal (–3), OECD trend average (–3) , the Netherlands (–3), France (–4), Poland (–4), the Republic of Ireland (–4), Canada (–5), Iceland (–6), Hungary (–6), Croatia (–6), Finland (–7), Germany (–7), Spain (–7), Czech Republic (–7), Norway (–8), Sweden (–8), and Japan (–9)
Countries whose pupils had an average science score in PISA 2025 significantly below their average science score in PISA 2022	Malta (–13), Vietnam (–15), Slovenia (–16), Denmark (–16), Israel (–23), Hong Kong (–25), and Latvia (–25)

Base: All higher-performing countries in PISA 2025 that also participated in PISA 2022.

OECD trend averages were calculated using OECD countries that participated in all cycles since PISA 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Caution is required when interpreting estimated changes in score because one or more PISA sampling standards were not met in PISA 2022 in some of the included countries.

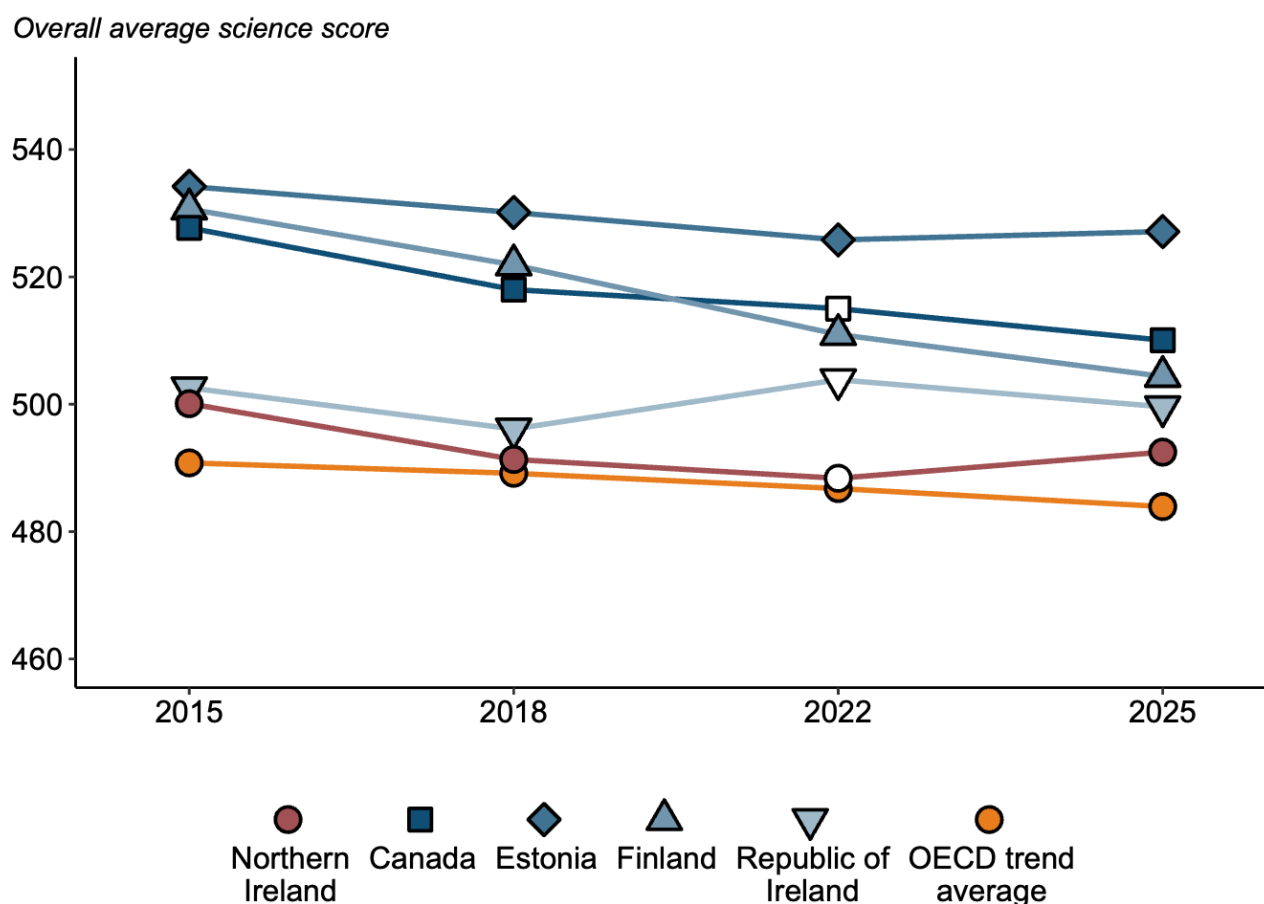
Two countries with a similar change in score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Changes in score may appear inconsistent with scores due to rounding

Source: OECD PISA 2025 and PISA 2022 databases

Figure 2.1 shows the trends over time in pupils' average science scores in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, and the Republic of Ireland, as well as the OECD trend average. Similar to Northern Ireland, there were no significant differences between pupils' average scores in PISA 2025 and PISA 2022, 2018 and 2015 in Estonia and the Republic of Ireland. In Canada, there were no significant differences between pupils' average scores in PISA 2025, 2022 and 2018 but the average score in PISA 2015 was significantly above the score in PISA 2025. In Finland, there were no significant differences between pupils' average scores in PISA 2025 and 2022 but the average score in 2018 and 2015 was significantly above that in 2025.

Figure 2.1 Trends in science performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and on average across the OECD trend countries



Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure. OECD trend averages were calculated using PISA 2025 data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

2.6 Differences between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in science

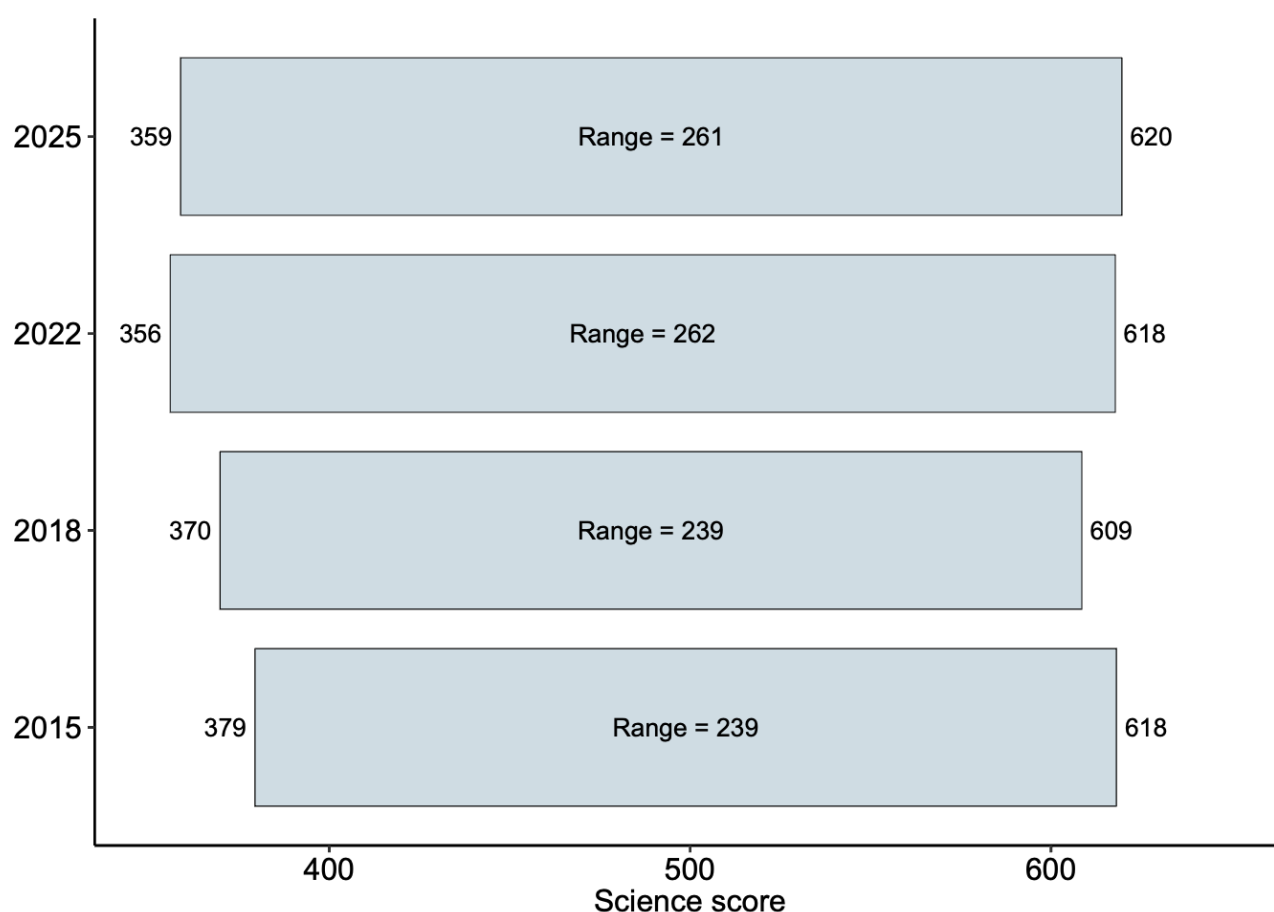
It is important to examine the difference in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in science. This is because even where pupils in 2 countries have similar average scores in science, there may be significant differences in how their pupils are performing across the attainment range. For example, a country with a wide spread of attainment may have a relatively high percentage of pupils who are performing at the lowest levels and a high percentage of pupils performing at the highest levels – they will have greater disparity across their population of pupils. On the other hand, a country with a lower spread of attainment may have fewer very high-performing pupils but may also have fewer lower-performing pupils – they will have less disparity across their pupils. Despite these differences, it would be possible for pupils in these 2 countries to attain the same average score, masking important differences between them.

The first way in which the spread of performance in each country can be examined is by looking at the distribution of scores. The 90th percentile is the score above which the highest-performing 10% of pupils attain, while the 10th percentile is the score below which the lowest-performing 10% of pupils attain. The difference between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils at the 90th and 10th percentiles, the interdecile range, is a better measure of the spread of scores for comparing countries than using the very highest- and lowest-performing pupils, as the latter comparison may be affected by a small number of pupils with unusually high or low scores.

In PISA 2025, the interdecile range between Northern Ireland's highest- and lowest-performing pupils in science was 261 points. This was not significantly different from the OECD average of 258 points.

Figure 2.2 shows the trend in the distribution of PISA science scores in Northern Ireland since PISA 2015. The interdecile range between Northern Ireland's highest- and lowest-performing pupils in PISA 2022 was 262 points, which was not significantly different from the OECD trend average of 256 points. The interdecile range in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025 (261) was not significantly different from the range in PISA 2022 (262) but was significantly larger than the range in PISA 2018 (239) and 2015 (239).

Figure 2.2 Trends in the range in science performance between the highest-and lowest-performing pupils in Northern Ireland



PISA cycle	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
2025	359	620	261
2022	356	618	262
2018	370	609	* 239
2015	* 379	618	* 239

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland.

Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the respective score for PISA 2025.*

Interdecile ranges were calculated as 90th percentile – 10th percentile.

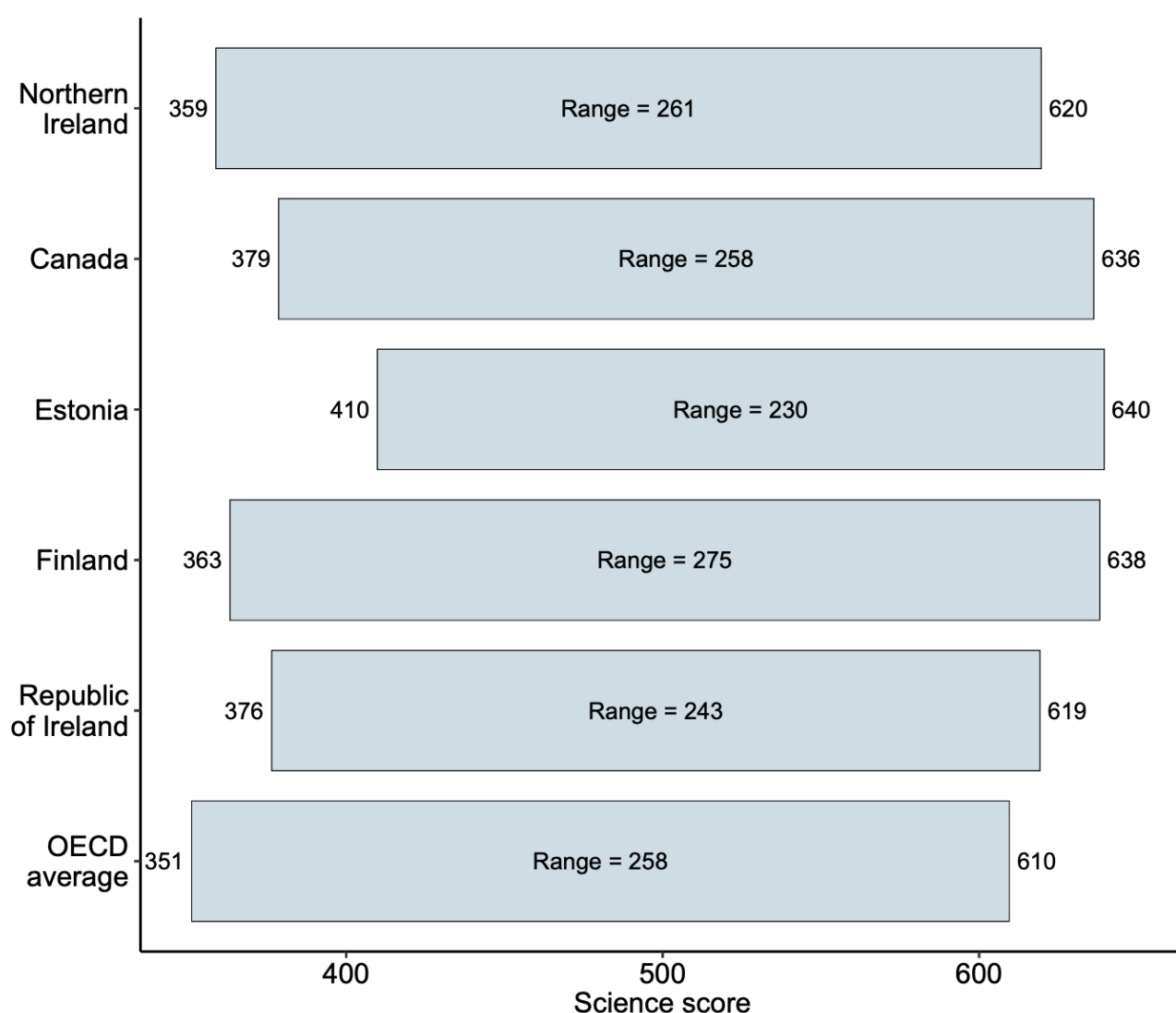
Ranges may appear inconsistent with percentile scores due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

In PISA 2025, the score at the 90th percentile in science in Northern Ireland was 620 points and the score at the 10th percentile was 359 points. On average across OECD countries the score at the 90th percentile in science was 610 points, which was significantly below the score in Northern Ireland. The average score across OECD countries at the 10th percentile was 351, which was not significantly different from the score in Northern Ireland.

To further consider these differences between the highest- and the lowest-performing pupils in science in Northern Ireland, scores at the 90th and 10th percentiles can be compared with those of other countries. The interdecile range in Finland (275) was significantly larger than the interdecile range in Northern Ireland (261), while the interdecile ranges in the Republic of Ireland (243) and Estonia (230) were significantly smaller than in Northern Ireland. There were no significant differences between the interdecile range in Northern Ireland and the interdecile range in Canada (258). Figure 2.3 shows the differences between the scores at the 90th and the 10th percentiles in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland and the Republic of Ireland as well as on average across OECD countries.

Figure 2.3 Ranges in science performance between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



Country	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
Northern Ireland	359	620	261
Canada	* 379	* 636	258
Estonia	* 410	* 640	* 230
Finland	363	* 638	* 275
Republic of Ireland	* 376	619	* 243
OECD average	351	* 610	258

Base: All participating pupils in the included countries.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the score in Northern Ireland.

Interdecile ranges were calculated as 90th percentile – 10th percentile.

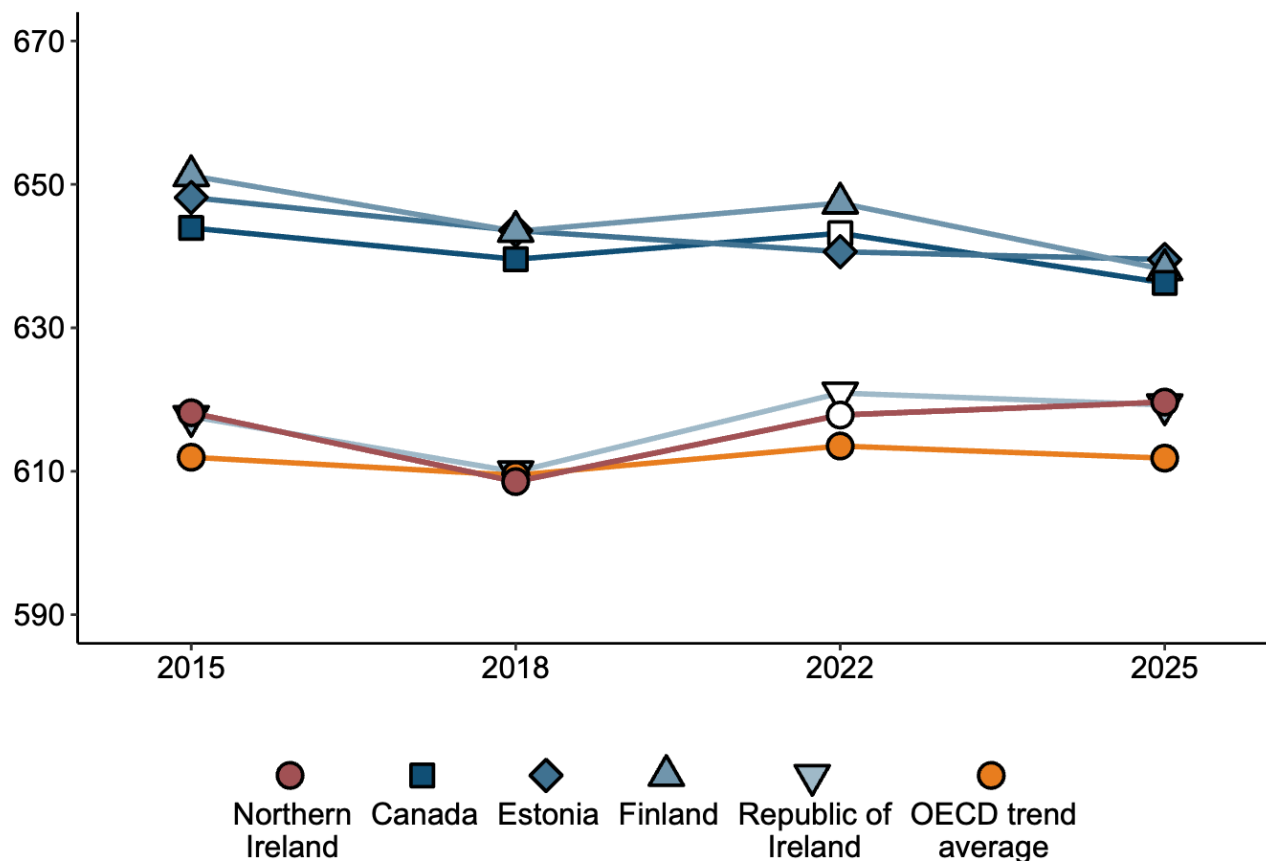
Ranges may appear inconsistent with percentile scores due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Figure 2.4 shows the trends in the performance at the 90th percentile across the 4 most recent cycles of PISA in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, and the Republic of Ireland and on average across OECD trend countries.

Figure 2.4 Trends in science performance at the 90th percentile in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and on average across the OECD trend countries

Science score (90th percentile)



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	618	609	618	620
Canada	644	640	643	636
Estonia	648	644	641	640
Finland	* 651	643	647	638
Republic of Ireland	618	610	621	619
OECD trend average	612	609	614	612

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the score in that country for PISA 2025.*

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure. OECD trend averages were calculated using PISA 2025 OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

There have been no significant differences in the scores at the 90th percentile in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, and the Republic of Ireland since PISA 2015. In Finland, there have also been no significant differences in the scores at the 90th percentile since PISA 2018, but the score at the 90th percentile in PISA 2015 was significantly above the score in PISA 2025.

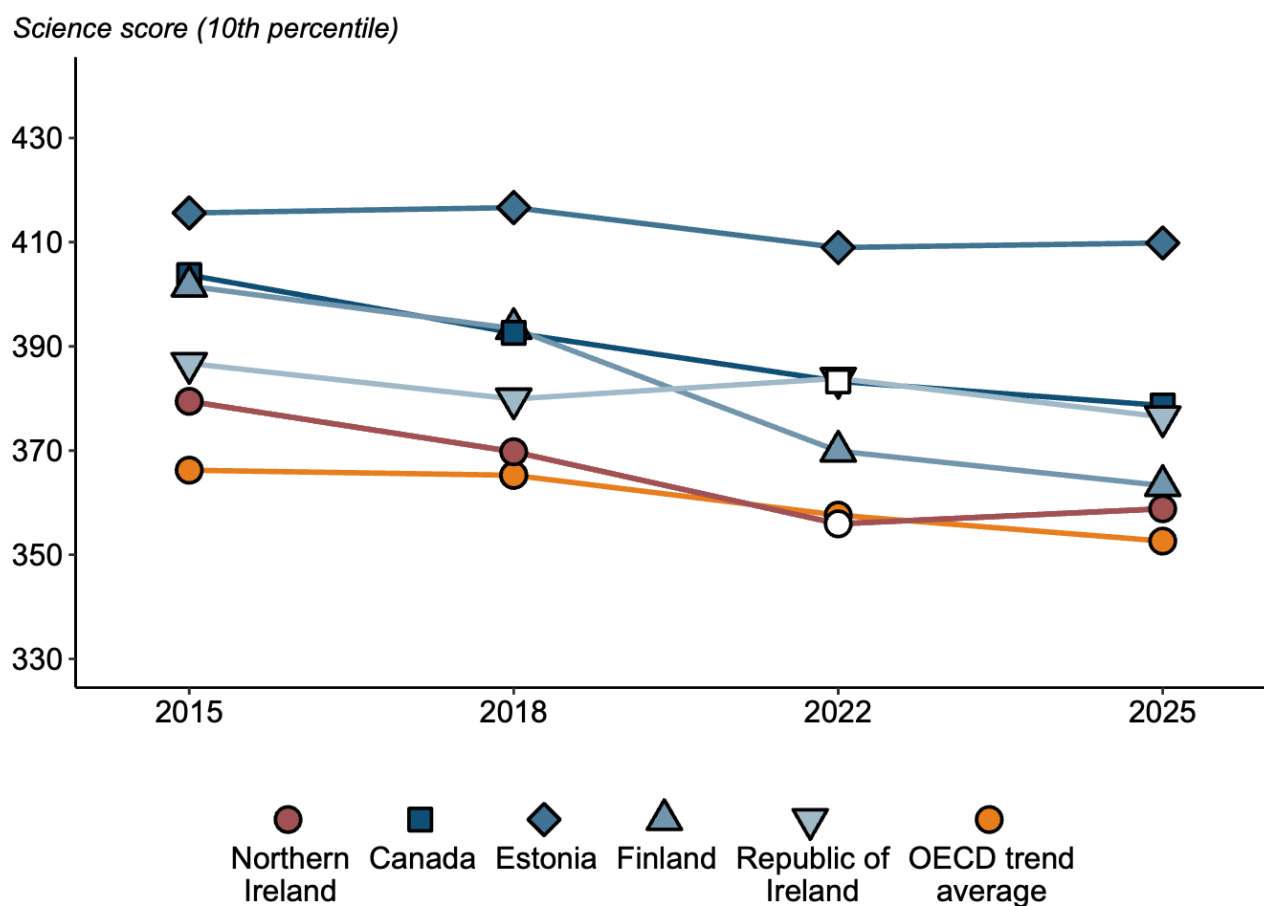
The score at the 10th percentile in Northern Ireland (359) was not significantly different from the corresponding percentile score in Finland (363) or on average across OECD trend countries (351). The score was significantly below the score at the 10th percentile in Canada (379), Estonia (410) and the Republic of Ireland (376).

Figure 2.5 shows the trends in the performance at the 10th percentile across the 4 most recent cycles of PISA in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, and the Republic of Ireland and on average across OECD trend countries.

In Northern Ireland the score at the 10th percentile in PISA 2025 (359) was not significantly different from the scores in science in PISA 2022 (356) and PISA 2018 (370) but was significantly below the score at the 10th percentile in PISA 2015 (379).

In Estonia and the Republic of Ireland there were no significant differences between the scores at the 10th percentile in PISA 2025 and the scores at the 10th percentile in PISA 2022, 2018 and 2015. In Canada, Finland and on average across OECD trend countries there were no significant differences between the scores at the 10th percentile in PISA 2025 and those in 2022, while the scores at the 10th percentile in PISA 2015 and 2018 were significantly above the corresponding scores in PISA 2025.

Figure 2.5 Trends in science performance at the 10th percentile in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and on average across the OECD trend countries



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	* 379	370	356	359
Canada	* 404	* 393	383	379
Estonia	416	417	409	410
Finland	* 402	* 393	370	363
Republic of Ireland	387	380	384	376
OECD trend average	* 366	* 365	358	353

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the score in that country for PISA 2025.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

OECD trend averages were calculated using OECD countries that have participated in all PISA cycles since 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

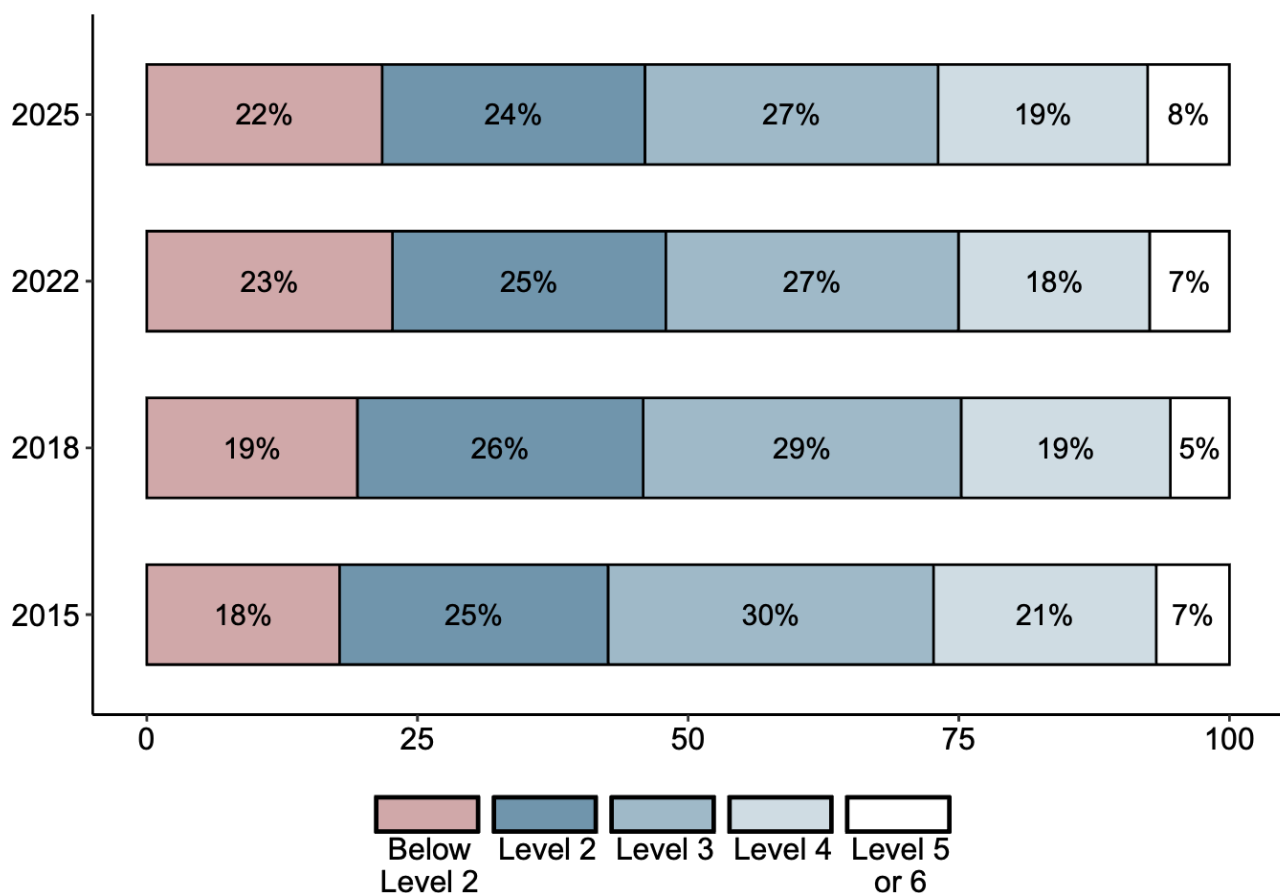
Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

2.7 Performance across science proficiency levels

Another way to examine the spread of performance is to look at pupils in Northern Ireland's performance at each of the PISA science proficiency levels. The PISA proficiency levels describe the tasks that pupils performing at each level can do. They are devised internationally and are illustrated in the International Report (OECD, 2026). Science performance in PISA is described in terms of 6 proficiency levels (Levels 1–6, with Level 1 subdivided into 1a and 1b). These proficiency levels are outlined in the PISA 2025 Assessment and Analytical Framework (OECD, 2026). Level 2 is considered the baseline level of proficiency in science where pupils can begin to use science in simple real-life situations, which is needed to participate fully in society.

In total, 8% of pupils in Northern Ireland performed at the highest proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6) which was not significantly different from the OECD average of 7%. Northern Ireland had 22% of pupils working at the lower proficiency levels (below Level 2) which was significantly smaller than the OECD average of 26%. Figure 2.6 shows the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland performing at each science proficiency level over the 4 most recent cycles of PISA.

Figure 2.6 Percentage of pupils performing at each science proficiency level in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015



PISA Cycle	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or Level 6
2025	22%	24%	27%	19%	8%
2022	23%	25%	27%	18%	7%
2018	19%	26%	29%	19%	5%
2015	18%	25%	30%	21%	7%

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland.

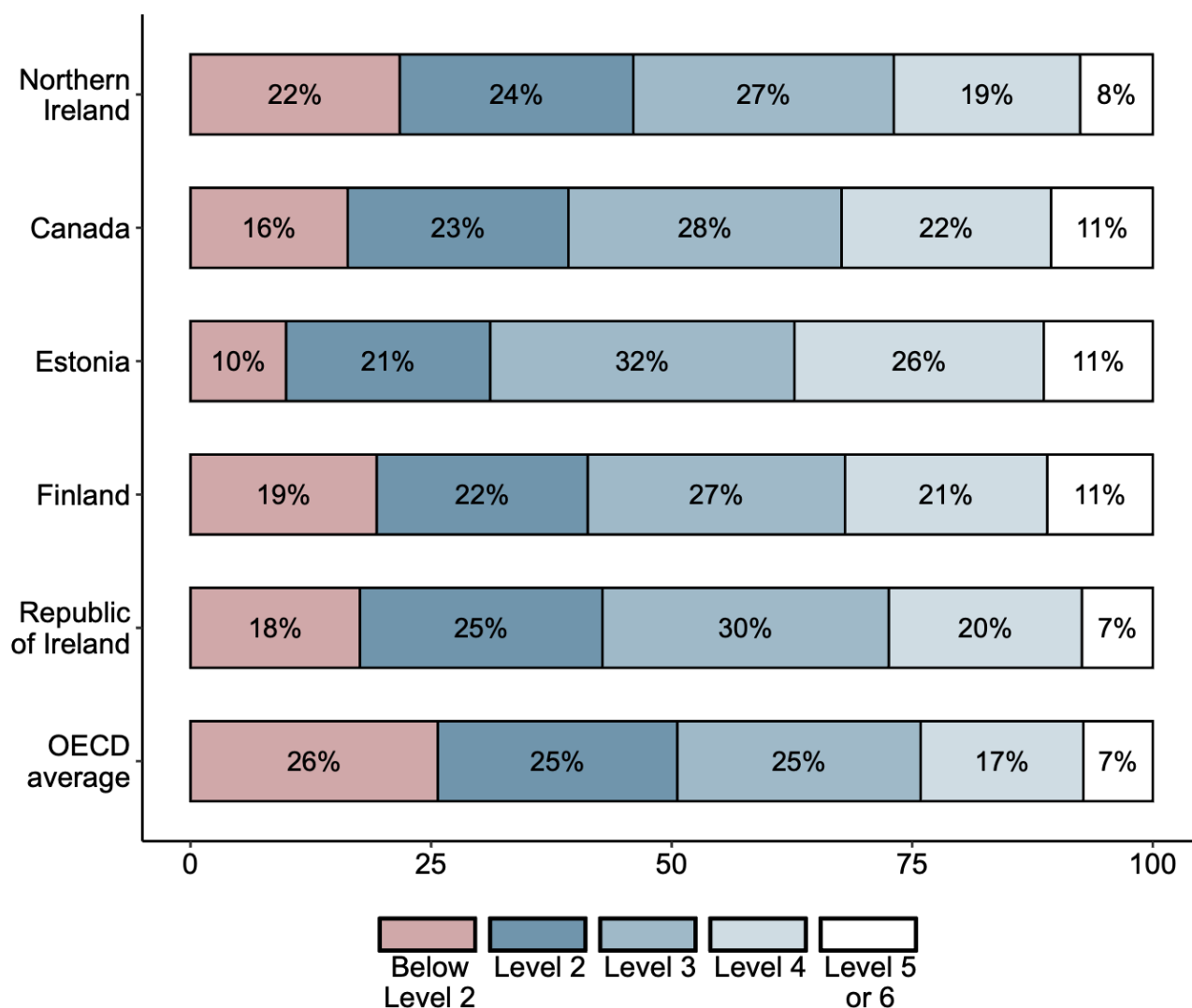
Individual percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

It was not possible at the point of writing to calculate whether there were significant differences between percentages across the PISA cycles

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

Figure 2.7 shows the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, and the Republic of Ireland and on average across OECD countries, achieving each of the science proficiency levels in PISA 2025.

Figure 2.7 Percentage of pupils performing at each science proficiency level in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and on average across OECD countries



Country	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	22%	24%	27%	19%	8%
Canada	* 16%	23%	28%	* 22%	* 11%
Estonia	* 10%	* 21%	* 32%	* 26%	* 11%
Finland	19%	* 22%	27%	21%	* 11%
Republic of Ireland	* 18%	25%	30%	20%	7%
OECD average	* 26%	25%	25%	* 17%	7%

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the respective score in Northern Ireland.*

Individual percentages for a country may not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

At the highest proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland (8%) was not significantly different from the percentage of pupils in the Republic of Ireland (7%) and on average across OECD countries (7%) but was significantly smaller than the percentage of pupils in Canada (11%), Estonia (11%), and Finland (11%).

At the lowest proficiency levels (below Level 2), the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland (22%) was not significantly different from the percentage of pupils in Finland (19%) but was significantly larger than the percentages of pupils in Canada (16%), Estonia (10%) and the Republic of Ireland (18%). This percentage was also significantly smaller than the OECD average (26%).

3 Performance in reading

3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter reports the performance of pupils in Northern Ireland in the reading domain in PISA 2025. It draws on findings outlined in the international report (OECD, 2026) and places outcomes for Northern Ireland's pupils in the context of those findings. This performance is considered alongside that of previous cycles: PISA 2022, 2018, and 2015. It outlines how the performance of pupils in Northern Ireland in 2025 compares with that of other participating countries, as well as how performance has changed over time. Reading was assessed using the [reading framework](#) developed for PISA 2018.

3.2 Key findings

- Pupils in Northern Ireland achieved an average score of 482 in reading in PISA 2025, which was significantly above the OECD average score of 461.
- The average reading score for pupils in Northern Ireland was significantly above the majority of countries (75), was not significantly different from the average score in 3 countries and was significantly below the average score in 11 countries³².
- Pupils in Northern Ireland's average reading score of 482 in PISA 2025 was not significantly different from the average score of 485 in PISA 2022 but was significantly below pupils' average score in PISA 2018 (501) and 2015 (497). On average across OECD trend countries³³ the reading score of 463 in PISA 2025 was significantly below the scores in PISA 2022 (477), 2018 (488) and 2015 (490).
- There was no significant difference in Northern Ireland's pupils' reading scores at either the 90th (605) or 10th (348) percentiles relative to PISA 2022 (612 and 353 respectively).
- The significant increase in the performance range (90th percentile score minus 10th percentile score) between PISA 2015 (220) and PISA 2025 (257) was driven by a significant decrease at the 10th percentile (37 points) and no significant difference at the 90th percentile (1 point).
- In Northern Ireland, 6% of pupils performed at the highest reading proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), which was not significantly different from the OECD average of 6%. Northern Ireland had 23% of pupils working at the lower proficiency levels (below Level 2), which was significantly smaller than the OECD average of 31%.

³² In PISA 2025 there was one country without performance estimates for reading.

³³ The 35 OECD trend countries are those OECD countries in PISA 2025 that have participated in every cycle since PISA 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

3.3 Introduction to reading in PISA

Reading literacy in PISA is defined as pupils' '...capacity to understand, use, evaluate, reflect on and engage with texts in order to achieve one's goals, develop one's knowledge and potential, and participate in society' (OECD, 2023). The framework for assessing pupils' reading literacy was most recently revised in PISA 2018, when reading was the major domain of assessment.

The PISA reading literacy framework identifies 4 reading skills that readers use and rely on when engaging with texts and provides brief descriptors of the types of tasks that pupils who participate in PISA may have to tackle that target those comprehension processes. These are:

- **locating information** – pupils are required to search for and select appropriate texts to help address questions, and/or identify relevant information within those texts
- **understanding** – pupils are required to identify both the explicit meanings of texts, as well as generate inferences - pupils will also need to integrate information within those texts
- **evaluating and reflecting** – pupils are required to assess the quality and credibility of text, reflect on the content and form of texts, and detect and resolve conflicts within and across texts
- **reading fluency** – how well pupils accurately and automatically process words and texts to comprehend explicit meaning - in PISA, this is measured by lower-level tasks on simpler texts

More information on the current PISA reading literacy framework and example reading test-items from previous PISA cycles can be found in the OECD's [PISA 2018 reading framework](#).

3.4 The performance of pupils in Northern Ireland in reading

Pupils in Northern Ireland who participated in PISA 2025 achieved an average score of 482 in reading. This was significantly above the OECD average score of 461.

The average reading score for pupils in Northern Ireland was significantly above the majority of countries (75), was not significantly different from the average score in 3 countries and was significantly below the average score in 11 countries. Table 3.1 shows the reading performance of all higher-performing countries in PISA 2025 relative to pupils in Northern Ireland.

Table 3.1 Average reading scores of pupils in higher-performing countries in PISA 2025 relative to the average score of pupils in Northern Ireland

Performance relative to Northern Ireland	Country and average reading score
Countries whose pupils had an average reading score significantly above that in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025	Singapore (535), the Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang regions in China (B-S-J-Z China) (527), Taiwan (508), Japan (503), Macao (501), South Korea (501), the Republic of Ireland (500), Estonia (499), New Zealand (497), Australia (491), and Canada (490)
Countries whose pupils had an average reading score not significantly different from that in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025	United States (490), Northern Ireland (482) , Poland (482), and Hong Kong (480)
Countries whose pupils had an average reading score significantly below that in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025	Finland (474), Italy (474), Türkiye (472), Switzerland (470), Czech Republic (468), Austria (467), Sweden (466), Belgium (466), Germany (465), Lithuania (464), Portugal (462), OECD average (461) , Denmark (460), France (456), Croatia (453), Norway (453), Hungary (452), Spain (451), Slovak Republic (448), Slovenia (445), Luxembourg (443), and the Netherlands (441)

Base: All participating countries with average scores over 440 in reading in PISA 2025.

Two countries with the same score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

In PISA 2025 there was one country without performance estimates for reading.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

The average reading score for pupils in Northern Ireland (482) was significantly above the average score for pupils in Finland (474) but was significantly below the average scores for pupils in Canada (490), Estonia (499) and the Republic of Ireland (500).

A total of 21 countries, including Northern Ireland, had average scores significantly above the OECD average. This includes all 4 comparator countries.

3.5 Reading performance over time

Pupils in Northern Ireland achieved an average reading score of 482 in PISA 2025, which was not significantly different from the score of 485 in PISA 2022. In contrast, pupils' average score in most higher-performing countries (33 out of 41) significantly declined in PISA 2025 relative to PISA 2022, with an average decline of 14 points across OECD trend

countries. Table 3.2 shows the changes in average reading scores of pupils in higher-performing countries between PISA 2022 and PISA 2025.

Table 3.2 Changes in pupils' average reading score between PISA 2022 and PISA 2025 for higher-performing countries

Trend in reading performance	Country and change in average reading score
Countries whose pupils had an average reading score significantly above the average reading scores in PISA 2022	Türkiye (+16)
Countries whose pupils had an average reading score in PISA 2025 not significantly different from the average reading score in PISA 2022	Slovak Republic (+1), Northern Ireland (-4) , New Zealand (-4), Poland (-7), Italy (-7), and Taiwan (-7)
Countries whose pupils had an average reading score in PISA 2025 significantly below the average reading score in PISA 2022	Australia (-7), Singapore (-8), Lithuania (-8), Macao (-9), Estonia (-12), Belgium (-13), Japan (-13), Austria (-13), Switzerland (-13), OECD trend average (-14) , United States (-14), Germany (-15), Portugal (-15), South Korea (-15), the Republic of Ireland (-16), Finland (-16), Canada (-17), France (-18), the Netherlands (-18), Hong Kong (-20), Czech Republic (-20), Sweden (-21), Hungary (-21), Croatia (-22), Spain (-23), Norway (-24), Slovenia (-24), and Denmark (-29)

Base: All higher-performing countries in PISA 2025 that also participated in PISA 2022.

OECD trend averages were calculated using OECD countries that participated in all cycles since PISA 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Caution is required when interpreting estimated changes in score because one or more PISA sampling standards were not met in PISA 2022 in some of the included countries.

Two countries with the same change in score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Changes in score may appear inconsistent with scores due to rounding

Source: OECD PISA 2025 and PISA 2022 databases

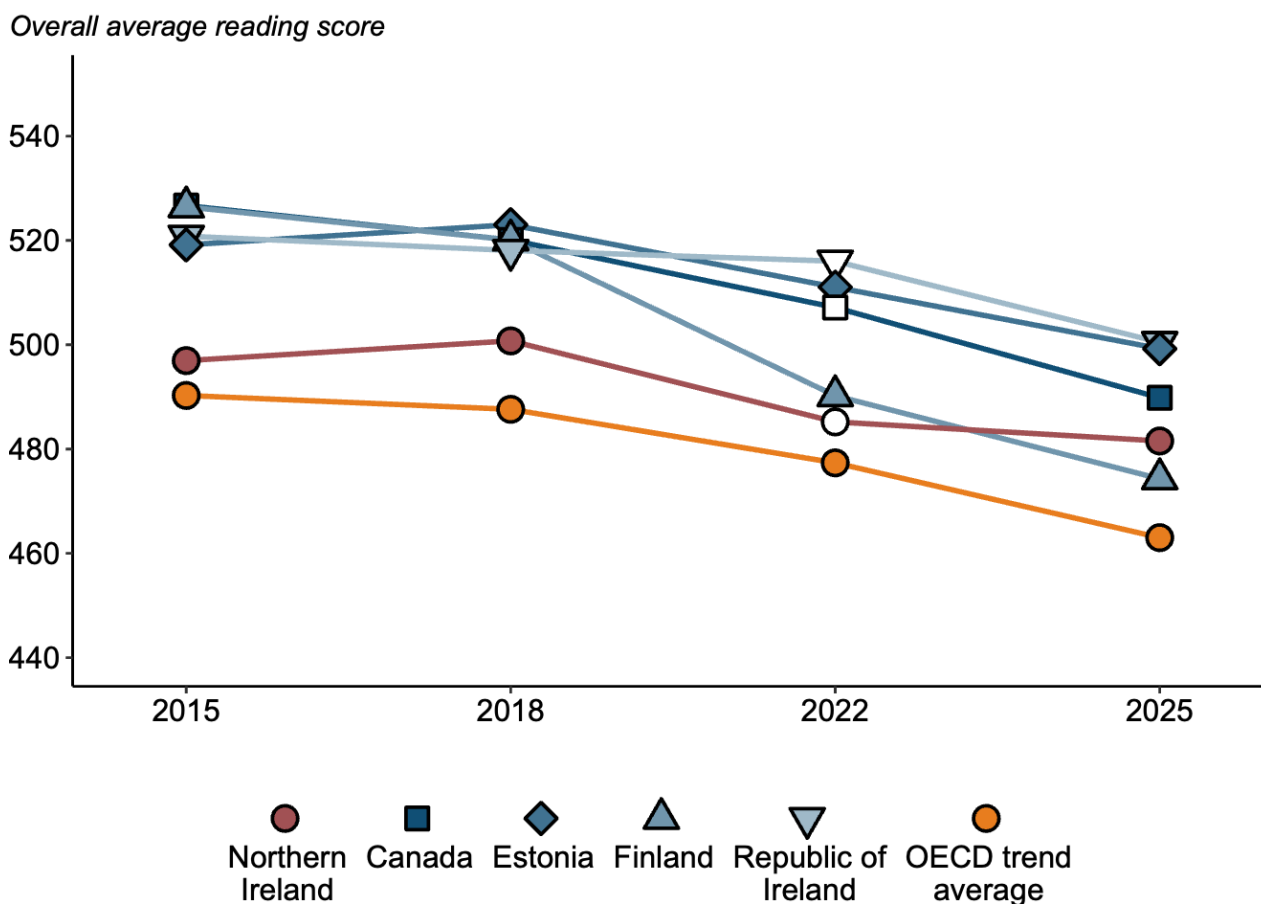
Türkiye was the only higher-performing country that experienced a significant improvement with an increase in its pupils' average reading scores of 16 points between PISA 2022 and 2025. There was no significant change in average reading scores in 6 higher-performing countries, including Northern Ireland. Every other higher-performing country participating in both PISA 2022 and PISA 2025 experienced a significant decline in their pupils' average reading scores. This included all 4 comparator countries.

Figure 3.1 shows the trends over time in pupils' average reading scores in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland and the Republic of Ireland, as well as the OECD trend average.

Pupils in Northern Ireland's average reading score of 482 in PISA 2025 was not significantly different from the average score that pupils in Northern Ireland achieved in PISA 2022 (485) but was significantly below the average scores achieved in 2018 (501) and 2015 (497). All 4 comparator countries saw their pupils' average scores decreased significantly to below the average scores for each of the 3 previous PISA cycles. This was consistent with the wider trend among OECD countries, as shown by the steady decline in the OECD trend average since 2015.

The OECD trend average decreased by 14 points between PISA 2022 and PISA 2025, from 477 to 463. All 4 comparator countries experienced significant declines in their pupils' average reading scores that were largely in line with the OECD trend average. Estonia saw its pupils' average reading score decline by 12 points since PISA 2022, while there was a 16-point decline in the Republic of Ireland and Finland, and a 17-point decline in Canada.

Figure 3.1 Trends in reading performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries, and on average across the OECD trend countries



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	* 497	* 501	485	482
Canada	* 527	* 520	* 507	490
Estonia	* 519	* 523	* 511	499
Finland	* 526	* 520	* 490	474
Republic of Ireland	* 521	* 518	* 516	500
OECD trend average	* 490	* 488	* 477	463

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure. OECD trend averages were calculated using PISA 2025 data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

3.6 Differences between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in reading

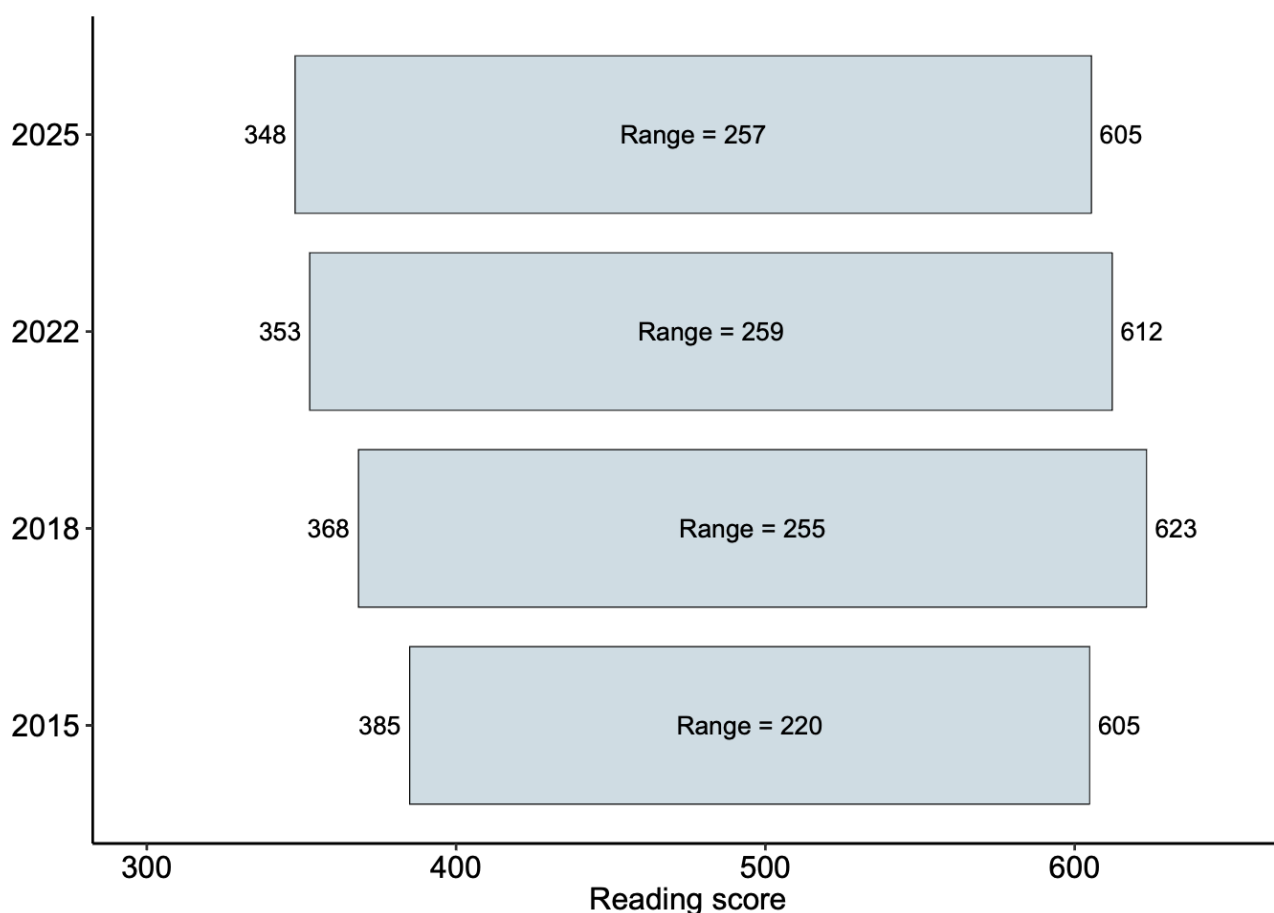
It is important to examine the difference in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in reading. This is because even where pupils in 2 countries have similar average scores in reading, there may be significant differences in how their pupils are performing across the attainment range. For example, a country with a wide spread of attainment may have a relatively high percentage of pupils who are performing at the lowest levels and a high percentage of pupils performing at the highest levels – they will have greater disparity across their population of pupils. On the other hand, a country with a lower spread of attainment may have fewer very high-performing pupils but may also have fewer lower-performing pupils – they will have less disparity across their pupils. Despite these differences, it would be possible for pupils in these 2 countries to attain the same average score, masking important differences between them.

The first way in which the spread of performance in each country can be examined is by looking at the distribution of scores. The 90th percentile is the score above which the highest-performing 10% of pupils attain, while the 10th percentile is the score below which the lowest-performing 10% of pupils attain. The difference between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils at the 90th and 10th percentiles, the interdecile range, is a better measure of the spread of scores for comparing countries than using the very highest- and lowest-performing pupils, as the latter comparison may be affected by a small number of pupils with unusually high or low scores.

In PISA 2025, the interdecile range between Northern Ireland's highest- and lowest-performing pupils in reading was 257 points. This was not significantly different from the OECD average interdecile range of 264 points.

Figure 3.2 shows the trend in the distribution of PISA reading scores in Northern Ireland since PISA 2015. The interdecile range in Northern Ireland in PISA 2022 was 259 points, which was also not significantly different from the OECD trend average interdecile range of 263 points. The interdecile range in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025 (257) was not significantly different from the ranges in PISA 2022 (259) and 2018 (255) but was significantly larger than the range in PISA 2015 (220).

Figure 3.2 Trends in the range in reading performance between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in Northern Ireland



PISA cycle	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
2025	348	605	257
2022	353	612	259
2018	* 368	* 623	255
2015	* 385	605	* 220

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland.

Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the respective score for PISA 2025.*

Interdecile ranges were calculated as 90th percentile – 10th percentile.

Ranges may appear inconsistent with percentile scores due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

Figure 3.3 shows the differences between the scores at the 90th and the 10th percentiles in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland and the Republic of Ireland, as well as on average across OECD countries.

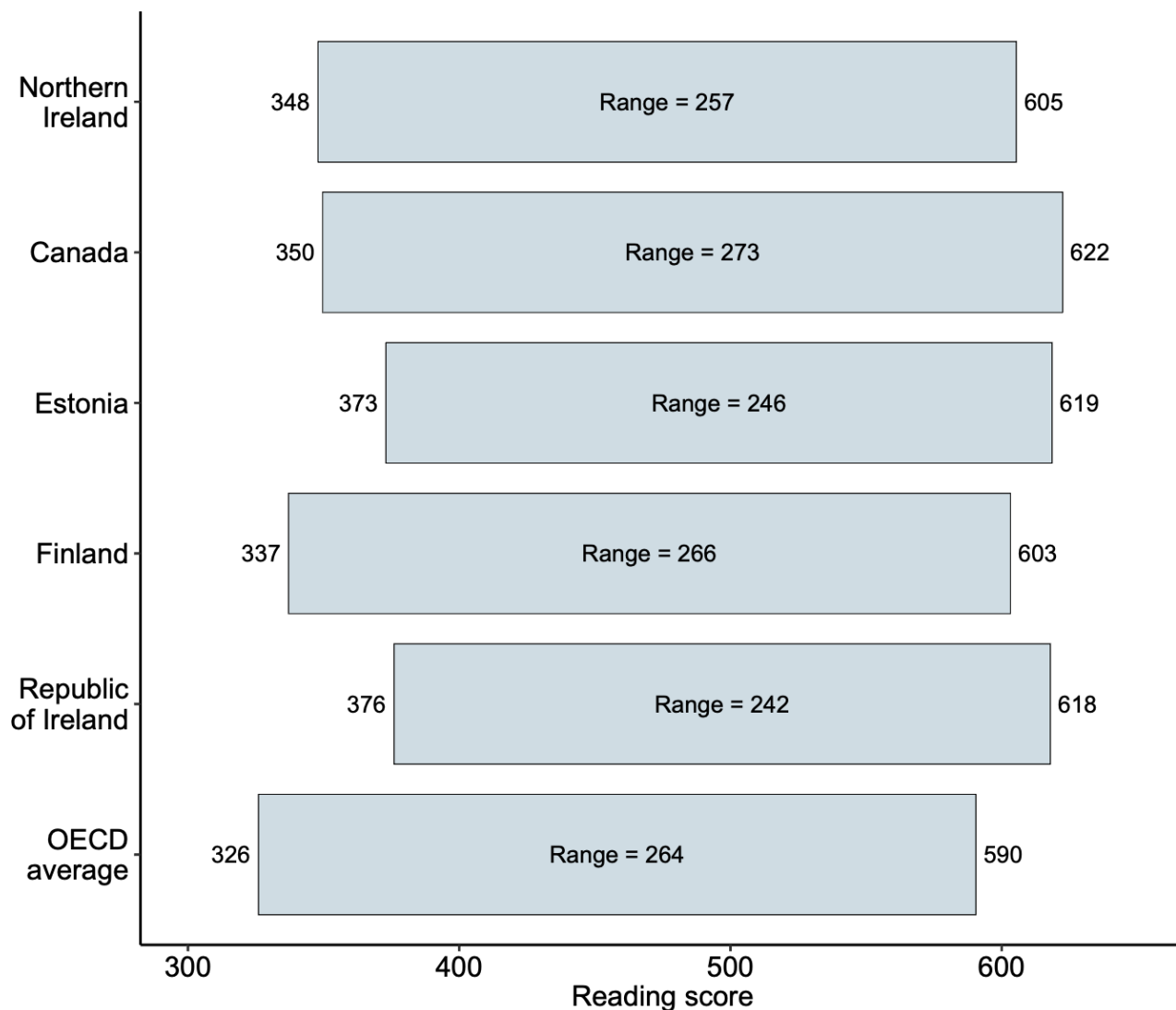
In PISA 2025 the score at the 90th percentile in reading in Northern Ireland was 605 points, and the score at the 10th percentile was 348 points. These scores were significantly above the corresponding average scores across OECD countries of 590 and 326.

To further consider these differences between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in reading in Northern Ireland, scores at the 90th and 10th percentiles can be compared with those of other countries. The interdecile range in Canada (273) was significantly larger than the interdecile range in Northern Ireland (257), while the interdecile range in the Republic of Ireland (242) was significantly smaller than that in Northern Ireland. There was no significant difference between the interdecile range in Northern Ireland (257) and that in Estonia (246) or Finland (266).

The score at the 90th percentile in Northern Ireland (605) was not significantly different from the score at the 90th percentile in Finland (603). It was significantly below the respective scores in Canada (622), Estonia (619) and the Republic of Ireland (618).

The score at the 10th percentile in Northern Ireland (348) was not significantly different from the score at the 10th percentile in Canada (350) and Finland (337). It was significantly below the respective scores in Estonia (373) and the Republic of Ireland (376), and significantly above the OECD average (326).

Figure 3.3 Range in reading performance between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and on average across OECD countries



Country	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
Northern Ireland	348	605	257
Canada	350	* 622	* 273
Estonia	* 373	* 619	246
Finland	337	603	266
Republic of Ireland	* 376	* 618	* 242
OECD average	* 326	* 590	264

Base: All participating pupils in the included countries.

Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the respective score in Northern Ireland.*

Interdecile ranges were calculated as 90th percentile – 10th percentile.

Ranges may appear inconsistent with percentile scores due to rounding.

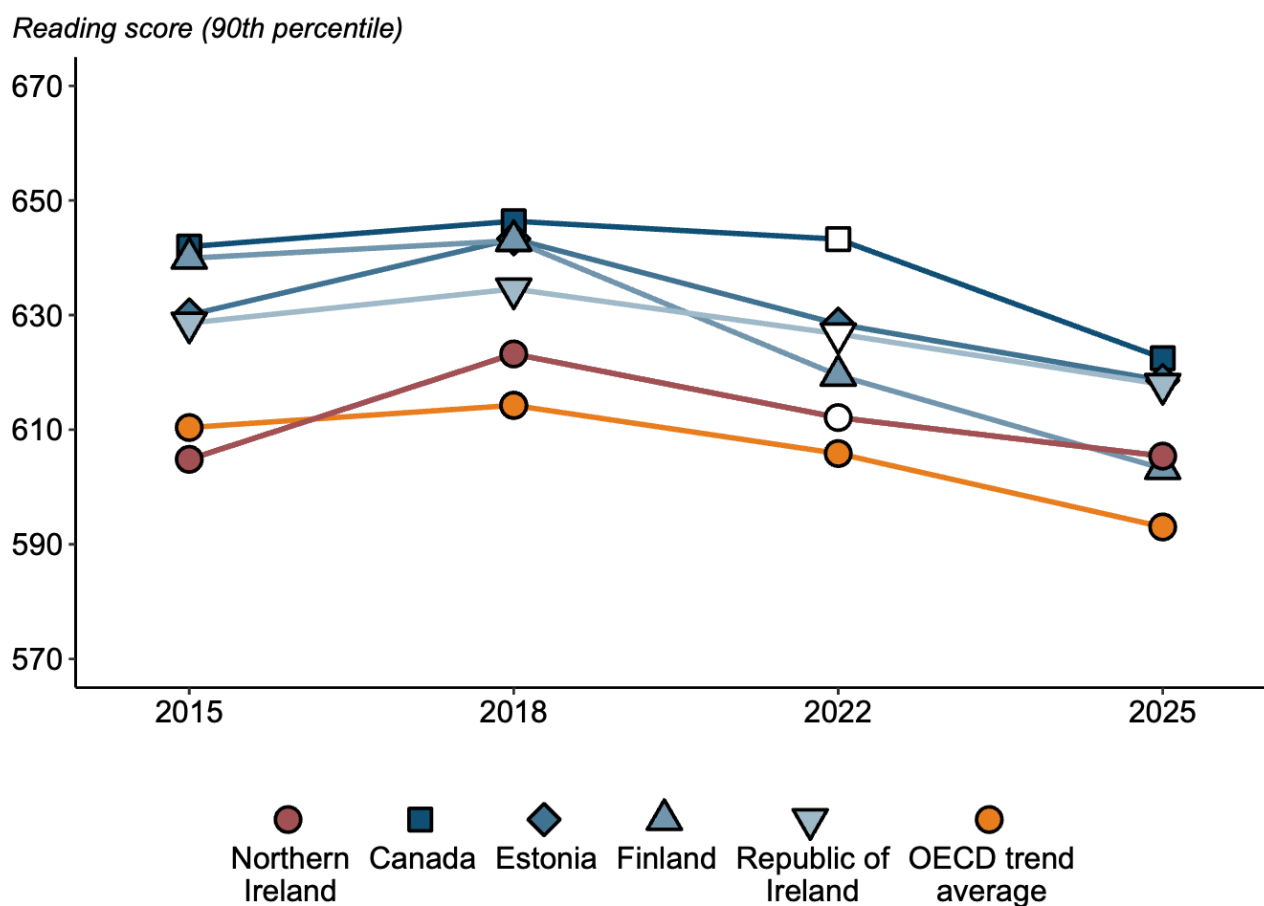
Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Figure 3.4 shows the trends in performance at the 90th percentile in reading since PISA 2015 in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, the Republic of Ireland, and on average across OECD trend countries. There was no significant difference in the score at the 90th percentile in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025 (605) compared to 2022 (612) and 2015 (605), though this score was significantly below the score in 2018 (623).

The scores at the 90th percentile in Canada, Estonia, Finland, the Republic of Ireland and on average across OECD trend countries were significantly below the respective scores in PISA 2022, 2018 and 2015.

In Northern Ireland, the score at the 10th percentile in PISA 2025 (348) was not significantly different from the respective score in 2022 (353) but was significantly below the scores at the 10th percentile in 2018 (368) and 2015 (385). On average across OECD trend countries and all the comparator countries, the score at the 10th percentile in PISA 2025 was significantly below the corresponding scores in 2022, 2018 and 2015.

Figure 3.4 Trends in reading performance at the 90th percentile in Northern Ireland, comparator countries, and on average across the OECD trend countries



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	605	* 623	612	605
Canada	* 642	* 646	* 643	622
Estonia	* 630	* 643	* 628	619
Finland	* 640	* 643	* 619	603
Republic of Ireland	* 629	* 635	* 627	618
OECD trend average	* 610	* 614	* 606	593

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate the score shown was significantly different to the score in that country in PISA 2025.

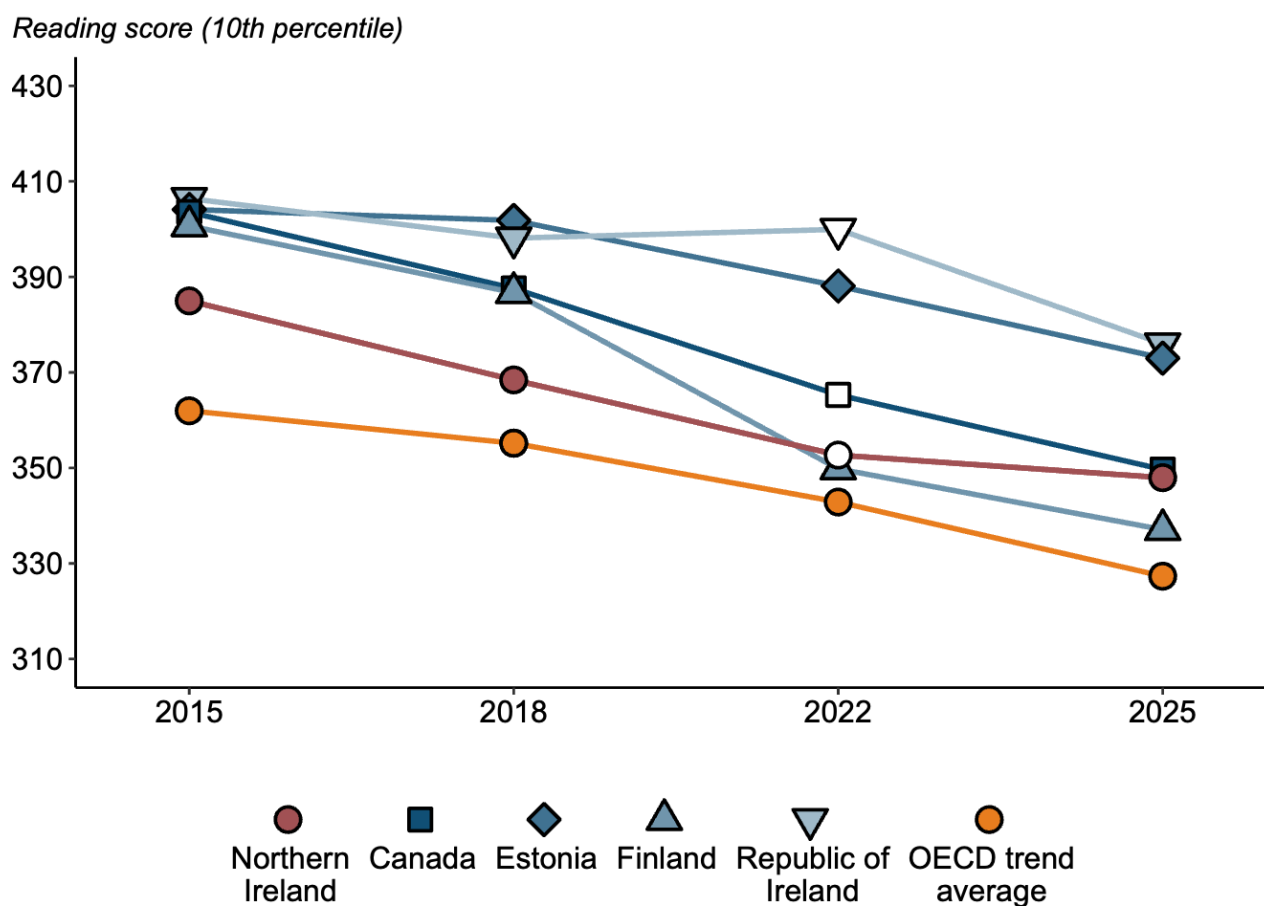
OECD trend averages were calculated using OECD countries that participated in all cycles since PISA 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

Figure 3.5 shows the trends in performance at the 10th percentile in reading since PISA 2015 in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, the Republic of Ireland, and on average across OECD trend countries.

Figure 3.5 Trends in reading performance at the 10th percentile in Northern Ireland, comparator countries, and on average across the OECD trend countries



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	* 385	* 368	353	348
Canada	* 404	* 388	* 365	350
Estonia	* 404	* 402	* 388	373
Finland	* 401	* 387	* 350	337
Republic of Ireland	* 406	* 398	* 400	376
OECD trend average	* 362	* 355	* 343	327

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate the score shown was significantly different to the score in that country in PISA 2025.

OECD trend averages were calculated using OECD countries that participated in all cycles since PISA 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

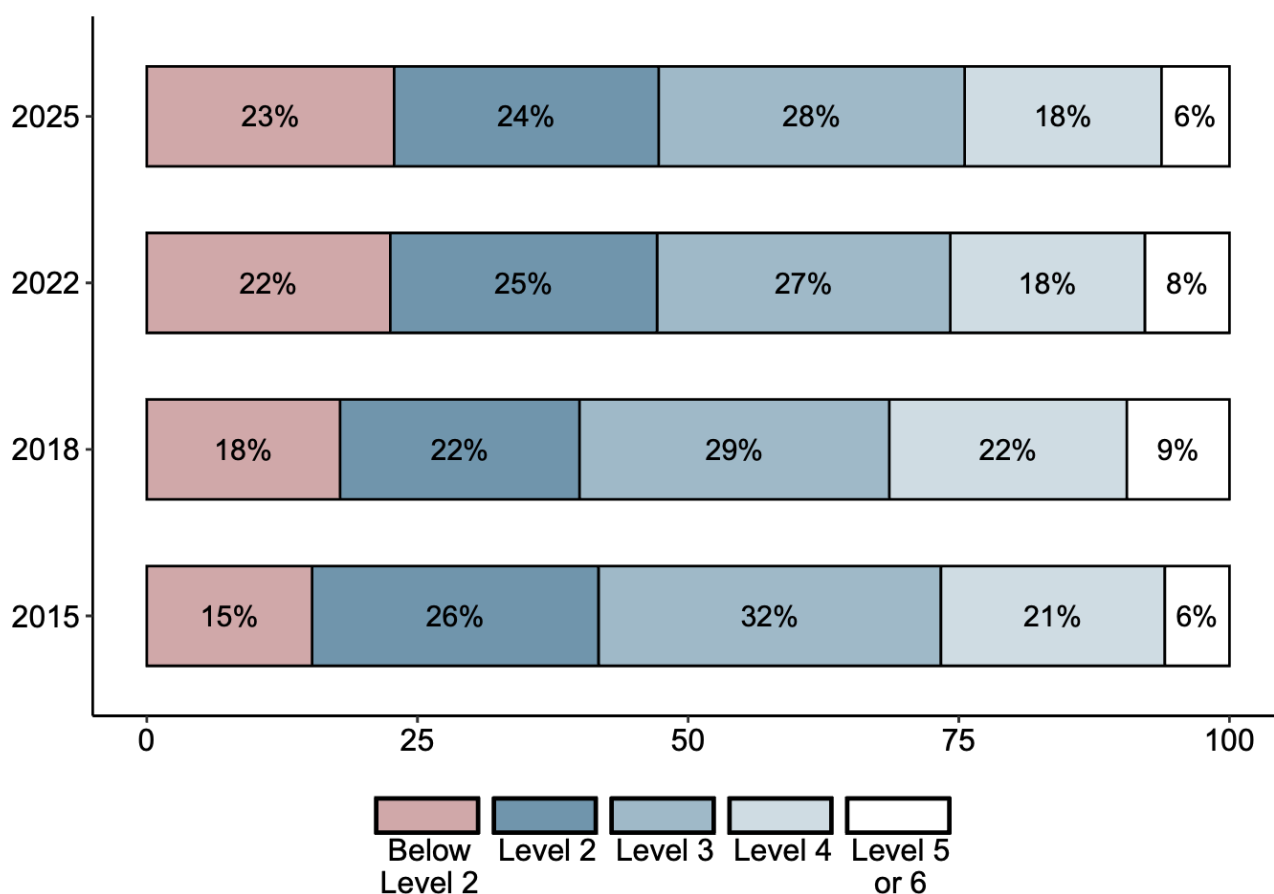
3.7 Performance across reading proficiency levels

Another way of examining the spread of performance is by looking at performance at each of the PISA proficiency levels. The PISA proficiency levels describe the tasks that pupils

performing at each level can do. They are devised internationally and are illustrated in the international report (OECD, 2026). Reading performance in PISA is described in terms of 6 proficiency levels (Levels 1-6, with Level 1 subdivided into 1a, 1b and 1c). These performance levels are outlined in the PISA 2022 Assessment and Analytical Framework (OECD, 2026). Level 2 is considered the baseline level of proficiency in reading, where pupils have sufficient skill in reading that they are able to participate fully in society.

In total, 6% of pupils in Northern Ireland performed at the highest reading proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), which was not significantly different from the OECD average of 6%. Northern Ireland had 23% of pupils working at the lower proficiency levels (below Level 2), which was significantly smaller than the OECD average of 31%. Figure 3.6 shows the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland performing at each reading proficiency level over the 4 most recent cycles of PISA.

Figure 3.6 Percentage of pupils performing at each reading proficiency level in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015



PISA Cycle	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
2025	23%	24%	28%	18%	6%
2022	22%	25%	27%	18%	8%
2018	18%	22%	29%	22%	9%
2015	15%	26%	32%	21%	6%

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland.

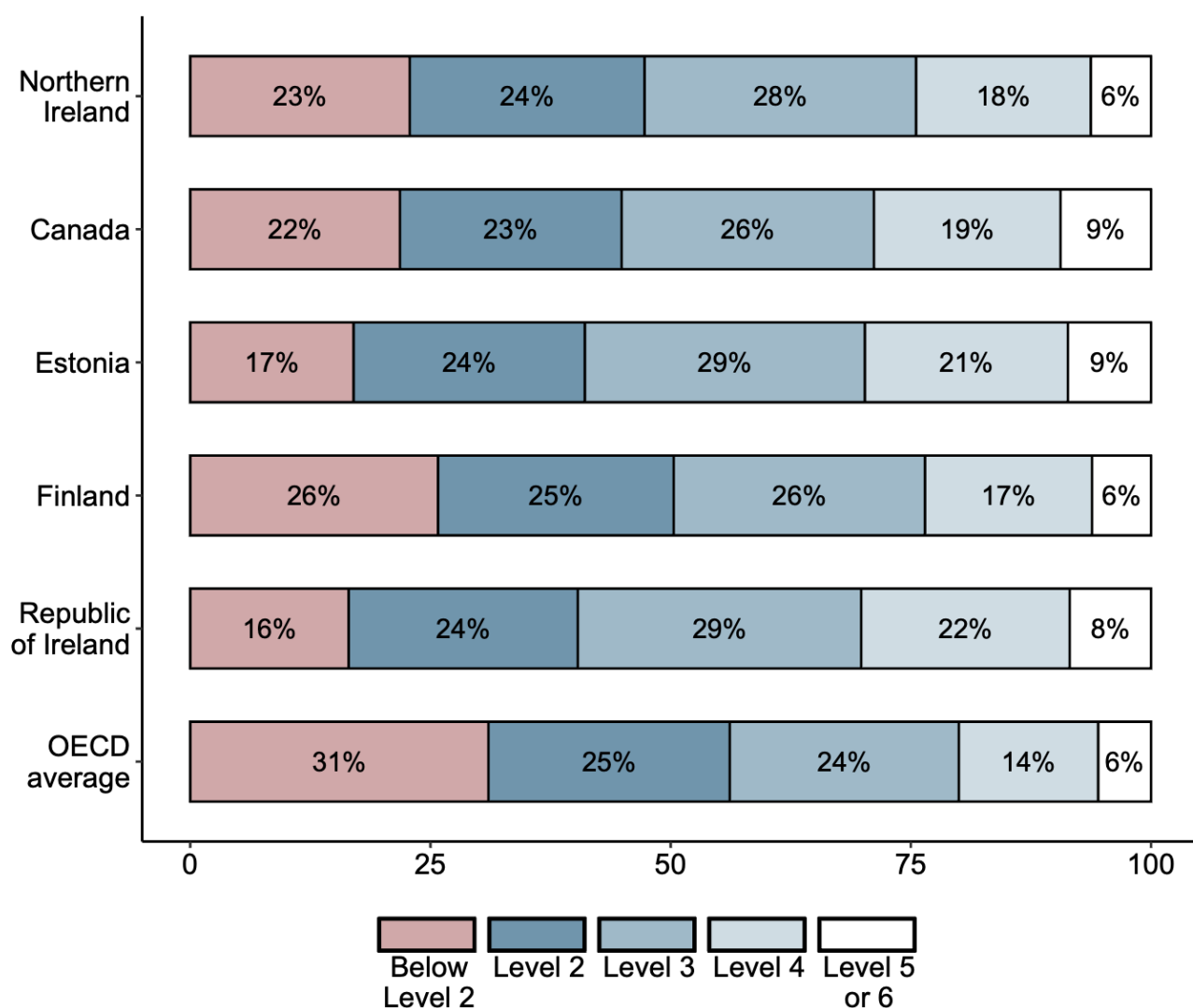
Individual percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

It was not possible at the point of writing to calculate whether there were significant differences between percentages across the PISA cycles.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

Figure 3.7 shows the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, the Republic of Ireland and on average across OECD countries, achieving each of the proficiency levels for reading in PISA 2025.

Figure 3.7 Percentage of pupils performing at each reading proficiency level in Northern Ireland, comparator countries, and on average across OECD countries



Country	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	23%	24%	28%	18%	6%
Canada	22%	23%	26%	19%	* 9%
Estonia	* 17%	24%	29%	* 21%	* 9%
Finland	* 26%	25%	26%	17%	6%
Republic of Ireland	* 16%	24%	29%	* 22%	* 8%
OECD average	* 31%	25%	* 24%	* 14%	6%

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Individual percentages for a country may not total 100% due to rounding.

Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the respective score in Northern Ireland.*

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

At the highest proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland (6%) was not significantly different from the percentage of pupils in Finland (also 6%) but was significantly smaller than the percentages of pupils in Canada (9%), Estonia (9%) and the Republic of Ireland (8%).

At the lowest proficiency levels (below Level 2), the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland (23%) was not significantly different from the percentage of pupils in Canada (22%). It was significantly smaller than the percentage of pupils in Finland (26%) but significantly larger than the percentages in Estonia (17%) and the Republic of Ireland (16%).

4 Performance in mathematics

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter reports the performance of pupils in Northern Ireland in the mathematics domain in PISA 2025. It draws on findings outlined in the international report (OECD, 2026) and places outcomes for Northern Ireland's pupils in the context of those findings. This performance is considered alongside that of previous cycles, PISA 2022, 2018, and 2015. It outlines how the performance of pupils in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025 compares to that of pupils in other participating countries, as well as how performance has changed over time. Mathematics was assessed using the [mathematics framework](#) developed for PISA 2022 when mathematics was most recently the major domain.

4.2 Key findings

- Pupils in Northern Ireland achieved an average mathematics score of 473 points in PISA 2025, which was significantly above the OECD average of 463 points.
- Pupils in the majority of countries (65) had average mathematics scores significantly below those of pupils in Northern Ireland. Pupils in 11 other countries had average mathematics scores that were not significantly different from the average score of pupils in Northern Ireland and pupils in 13 countries had average mathematics scores that were significantly above the average score in Northern Ireland³⁴.
- The average mathematics score achieved by pupils in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025 (473) was not significantly different from the average score that pupils in Northern Ireland achieved in PISA 2022 (475). However, the average mathematics score in PISA 2025 (473) was significantly below that achieved in PISA 2018 (492) and 2015 (493).
- The average mathematics score across OECD trend countries³⁵ in PISA 2025 was 465. This was significantly below the OECD trend averages in PISA 2022 (475), 2018 (490) and 2015 (487).
- The range between Northern Ireland's highest- and lowest-performing pupils in PISA 2025 was 258 score points. This was not significantly different from the range in PISA 2022 of 242 points but was significantly larger than the range of 223 points in 2018 and 204 points in 2015. The range in PISA 2025 (258) was significantly larger than the OECD average of 244 score points.

³⁴ In PISA 2025 there was one country without performance estimates for mathematics.

³⁵ The 35 OECD trend countries are those OECD countries in PISA 2025 that have participated in every cycle since PISA 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

- The increase in the range between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in Northern Ireland since 2015 was largely due to the score at the 10th percentile decreasing significantly from 388 points in PISA 2015 to 343 points in PISA 2025, while the score at the 90th percentile has remained relatively stable with no significant difference between the score in 2015 (592) and the score in 2025 (601).
- In Northern Ireland, 9% of pupils performed at the highest proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), which was not significantly different from the OECD average of 8%. Northern Ireland had 30% of pupils working at the lower proficiency levels (below Level 2), which was significantly smaller than the OECD average of 35%.

4.3 Introduction to mathematics in PISA

Mathematical literacy in PISA is a pupil's 'capacity to reason mathematically and to formulate, employ, and interpret mathematics to solve problems in a variety of real-world contexts' (OECD, 2023). The framework for assessing pupils' mathematical literacy was most recently revised in PISA 2022, when mathematics was the major domain of assessment.

The PISA mathematics framework relates mathematical reasoning and three process of the problem-solving (mathematical modelling) cycle: formulate, employ, and interpret and evaluate. It also describes how mathematical content knowledge is organised into four content subdomains: Quantity, Uncertainty and Data, Change and Relationships, Space and Shape.

More information on the current PISA mathematics framework and example mathematics test-items can be found in the OECD's [mathematics framework](#).

4.4 The performance of pupils in Northern Ireland in mathematics

Pupils in Northern Ireland who participated in PISA 2025 achieved an average score of 473 points in mathematics. This was significantly above the OECD average of 463 points.

Pupils in the majority of countries (65) had average mathematics scores significantly below those of pupils in Northern Ireland. Pupils in 11 other countries had average mathematics scores that were not significantly different from the average score of pupils in Northern Ireland and pupils in 13 countries had average mathematics scores that were significantly above the average score in Northern Ireland. Table 3.1 shows the average mathematics score for pupils in Northern Ireland relative to pupils in every other higher-performing country³⁶ and on average across OECD countries.

³⁶ Higher-performing countries in the mathematics domain are those countries whose pupils had an average score over 440 points.

Among the other 37 OECD countries that participated in 2025, pupils in 8 countries (Japan (525), South Korea (522), Estonia (508), Switzerland (499), Canada (485), Poland (484), the Netherlands (483), and the Republic of Ireland (480)) had a mathematics average score significantly above the average score of pupils in Northern Ireland.

Table 4.1 Average mathematics scores of pupils in higher-performing countries in PISA 2025 relative to pupils in Northern Ireland

Mathematics performance relative to pupils in Northern Ireland	Country and average mathematics score
Countries whose pupils had an average mathematics score significantly above that in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025	The Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang regions in China (B-S-J-Z China) (612), Singapore (563), Macao (549), Taiwan (546), Japan (525), South Korea (522), Hong Kong (522), Estonia (508), Switzerland (499), Canada (485), Poland (484), the Netherlands (483), and the Republic of Ireland (480)
Countries whose pupils had an average mathematics score not significantly different from that in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025	Belgium (480), New Zealand (480), Australia (478), Austria (477), Czech Republic (477), Northern Ireland (473) , Denmark (471), Lithuania (470), Slovak Republic (469), Finland (469), Italy (468), and United States (463)
Countries whose pupils had an average mathematics score significantly below that in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025	Sweden (464), Germany (464), OECD average (463) , Türkiye (462), Latvia (460), Portugal (460), Slovenia (460), Hungary (459), Luxembourg (458), France (458), Spain (457), Croatia (455), United Arab Emirates (453), Norway (452), Iceland (450), and Vietnam (443), and the remaining 50 countries whose pupils had average scores below 440 points.

Base: All higher-performing countries in PISA 2025 that also participated in PISA 2022.

In PISA 2025 there was one country without performance estimates for mathematics.

Two countries with the same score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

In PISA 2025, among the other 89 participating countries³⁷, pupils in 22 countries had an average mathematics score significantly above the OECD average, while pupils in 9 countries had an average score that was not significantly different from the OECD

³⁷ In PISA 2025 there was one country without performance estimates for mathematics.

average. Pupils in the remaining 58 countries had an average score significantly below the OECD average.

As in previous cycles, most of the top-performing countries in mathematics were from East Asia (B-S-J-Z China (612), Singapore (563), Macao (549), Taiwan (546), Japan (525), South Korea (522), and Hong Kong (522)). The average score of pupils in B-S-J-Z China was significantly above that of pupils in Singapore, with both countries having average scores significantly above the average of pupils in all other countries.

The European countries whose pupils had an average score significantly above the OECD average were Estonia (508), Switzerland (499), Poland (484), the Netherlands (483), the Republic of Ireland (480), Belgium (480), Austria (477), Czech Republic (477), Denmark (471), Lithuania (470), Slovak Republic (469), and Finland (469). Pupils in Canada (485), the remaining comparator country, also had an average score in mathematics significantly above the OECD average.

4.5 Mathematics performance over time

Pupils in Northern Ireland achieved an average score of 473 in mathematics in PISA 2025, which was not significantly different from the score of 475 in PISA 2022. The average score in PISA 2025 (473) was, however, significantly below the average scores of 492 in 2018 and 493 in 2015.

On average across the OECD trend countries the mathematics score in PISA 2025 was 465, which was significantly below the average mathematics score across OECD trend countries in PISA 2022 (475), PISA 2018 (490) and PISA 2015 (487).

In total, of the 75 countries, including Northern Ireland, that participated in both PISA 2022 and PISA 2025, 9 countries saw a significant increase in their pupils' average mathematics score in 2025 compared with 2022. A further 40 countries saw a significant decrease in their pupils' average mathematics score, and the remaining 26 countries saw no significant change in their pupils' average mathematics scores. Table 4.2 shows the changes in the average mathematics scores of pupils in higher-performing countries, including Northern Ireland, and the OECD trend average between PISA 2022 and PISA 2025.

Table 4.2 Changes in pupils' average mathematics score between PISA 2022 and PISA 2025 in higher-performing countries

Trend in mathematics performance	Country and change in pupils' average mathematics score
Countries whose pupils had an average mathematics score in PISA 2025 significantly above the average mathematics scores in PISA 2022	United Arab Emirates (+21) and Türkiye (+8)
Countries whose pupils had an average mathematics score in PISA 2025 not significantly different from the average mathematics scores in PISA 2022	Slovak Republic (+5), New Zealand (+1), Taiwan (–1), Northern Ireland (–2) , United States (–2), Estonia (–2), Macao (–3), Italy (–3), Lithuania (–5), Poland (–5), South Korea (–5), the Netherlands (–9), and Japan (–10)
Countries whose pupils had an average mathematics score in PISA 2025 significantly below the average mathematics scores in PISA 2022	Croatia (–8), Switzerland (–9), Iceland (–9), OECD trend average (–9) , Australia (–10), Belgium (–10), Czech Republic (–10), Austria (–10), Germany (–11), Canada (–12), Singapore (–12), the Republic of Ireland (–12), Portugal (–12), Hungary (–13), Finland (–15), Spain (–16), France (–16), Norway (–17), Sweden (–18), Hong Kong (–19), Denmark (–19), Latvia (–23), Slovenia (–25), and Vietnam (–26)

Base: All countries with average scores over 440 in mathematics in PISA 2025 that also participated in PISA 2022.

OECD trend averages were calculated using OECD countries that participated in all cycles since PISA 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Caution is required when interpreting estimated changes in score because one or more PISA sampling standards were not met in PISA 2022 in some of the included countries.

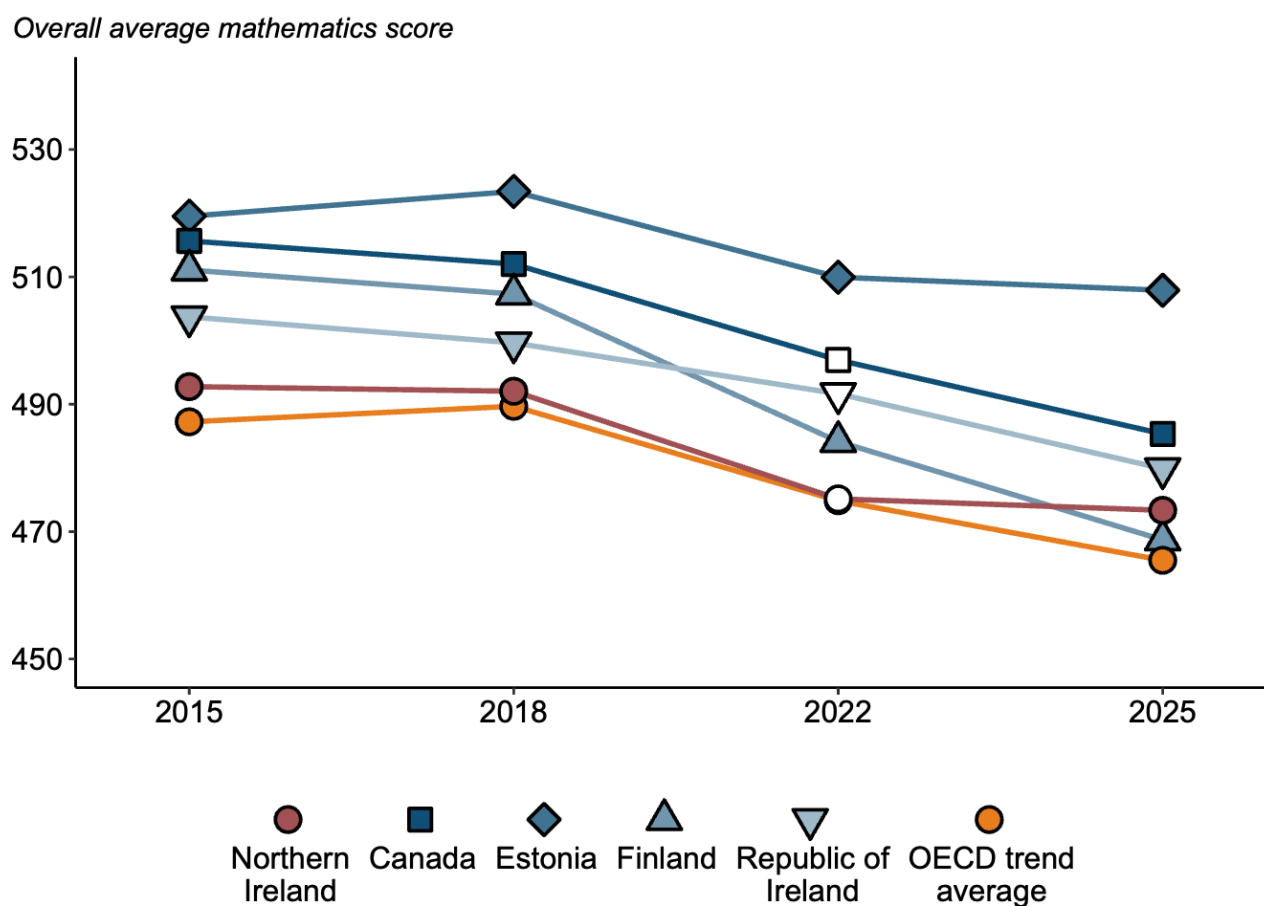
Two countries with a similar change in score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Changes in score may appear inconsistent with scores due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 and PISA 2022 databases

Figure 4.1 shows the trends over time in pupils' average mathematics scores in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, the Republic of Ireland, and on average across OECD trend countries. Similar to Northern Ireland, the average score for pupils in Estonia in PISA 2025 (508) was not significantly different from the average score in 2022 (510) but was significantly below the scores in 2018 (523) and 2015 (520). The average scores for pupils in Canada, Finland, the Republic of Ireland and on average across OECD trend countries in PISA 2025 were all significantly below the corresponding scores in 2022, 2018 and 2015.

Figure 4.1 Trends in mathematics performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and on average across the OECD trend countries



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	* 493	* 492	475	473
Canada	* 516	* 512	* 497	485
Estonia	* 520	* 523	510	508
Finland	* 511	* 507	* 484	469
Republic of Ireland	* 504	* 500	* 492	480
OECD trend average	* 487	* 490	* 475	465

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included. Base: All participating pupils in the countries included. Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure. OECD trend averages are calculated using PISA 2025 data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

4.6 Differences between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in mathematics

It is important to examine the difference in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in mathematics. This is because even where pupils in 2 countries have similar average scores in mathematics, there may be significant differences in how their pupils are performing across the attainment range. For example, a country with a wide spread of attainment may have a relatively high percentage of pupils who are performing at the lowest levels and a high percentage of pupils performing at the highest levels – they will have greater disparity across their population of pupils. On the other hand, a country with a lower spread of attainment may have fewer very high-performing pupils but may also have fewer lower-performing pupils – they will have less disparity across their pupils. Despite these differences, it would be possible for pupils in these 2 countries to attain the same average score, masking important differences between them.

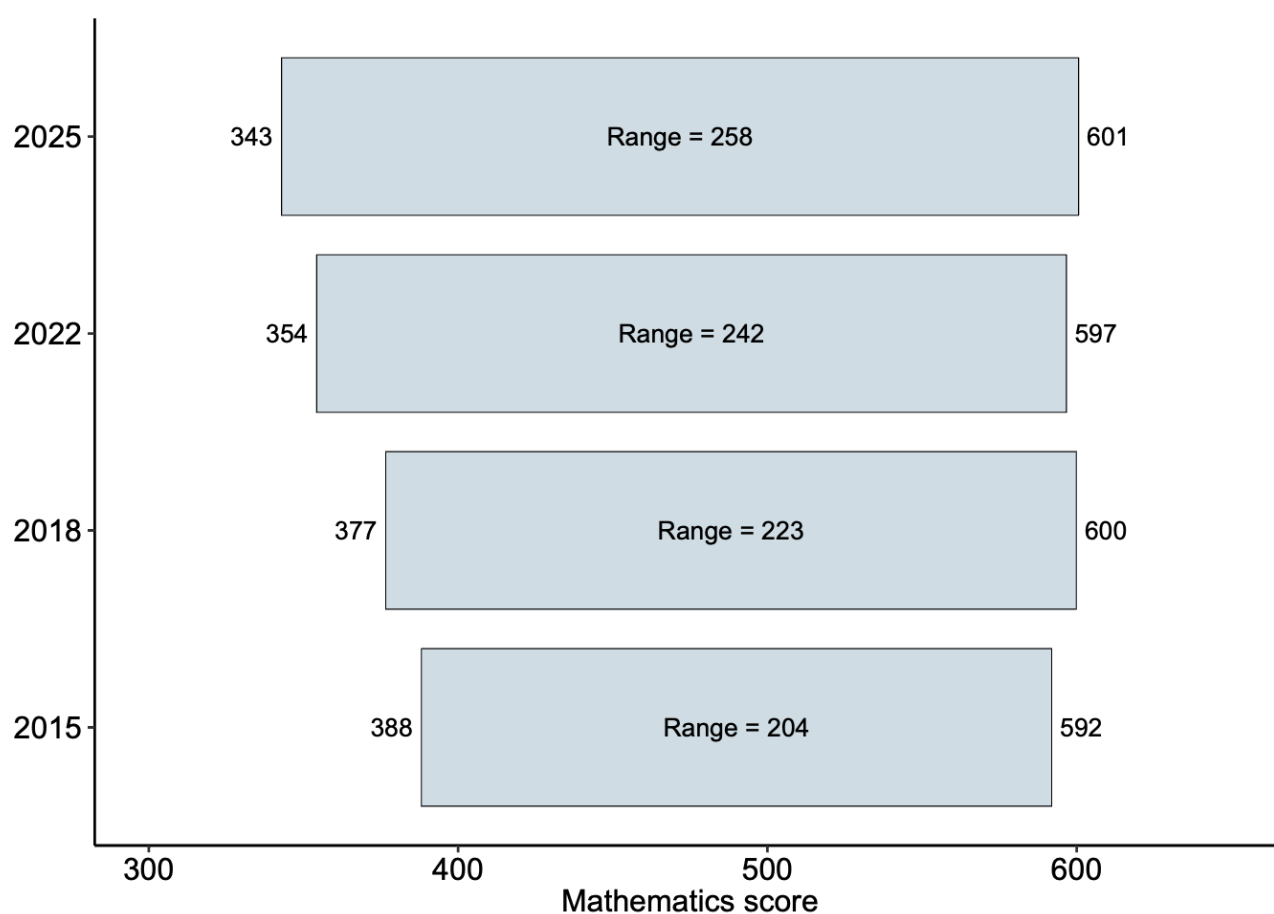
The first way in which the spread of performance in each country can be examined is by looking at the distribution of scores. The 90th percentile is the score above which the highest-performing 10% of pupils attain, while the 10th percentile is the score below which the lowest-performing 10% of pupils attain. The difference between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils at the 90th and 10th percentiles, the interdecile range, is a better measure of the spread of scores for comparing countries than using the very highest- and lowest-performing pupils, as the latter comparison may be affected by a small number of pupils with unusually high or low scores.

In PISA 2025, the interdecile range between Northern Ireland's highest- and lowest-performing pupils was 258 points. This was significantly larger than the OECD average interdecile range of 244 points. The interdecile range for Northern Ireland's pupils in PISA 2022 was 242 score points, which was not significantly different from the OECD trend average interdecile range of 237 points or from the interdecile range for Northern Ireland's pupils in 2025. The interdecile ranges in PISA 2015 (204) and 2018 (223) were both significantly smaller than the interdecile range in 2025.

Figure 4.2 shows the trend in the distribution of PISA mathematics scores in Northern Ireland since PISA 2015. The increase in the interdecile range in Northern Ireland was largely due to the significant decrease in the score at the 10th percentile since PISA 2015, while the score at the 90th percentile remained relatively stable.

In PISA 2025, the score at the 90th percentile in mathematics in Northern Ireland was 601 points. This was significantly above the OECD average score of 585 points. At the 10th percentile, the average score in Northern Ireland was 343 points which was not significantly different from the OECD average of 341 points.

Figure 4.2 Trends in the range in mathematics performance between the highest- and lowest-performing pupils in Northern Ireland



PISA cycle	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
2025	343	601	258
2022	354	597	242
2018	* 377	600	* 223
2015	* 388	592	* 204

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the respective score for PISA 2025.

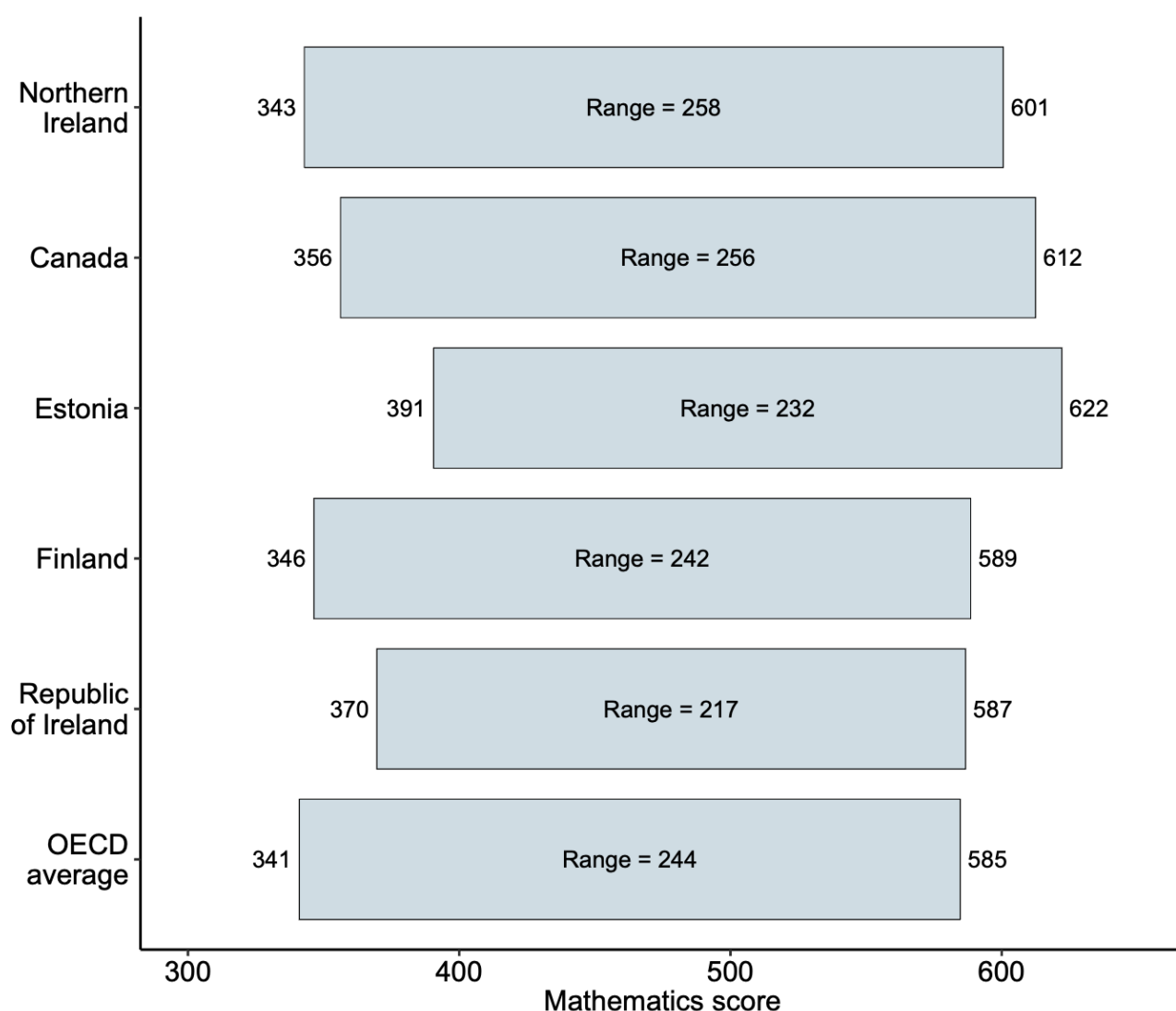
Interdecile ranges were calculated as 90th percentile – 10th percentile.

Interdecile ranges may appear inconsistent with percentile scores due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

The interdecile ranges in Finland (242), Estonia (232), and the Republic of Ireland (217) were significantly smaller than the range in Northern Ireland (258). There were no significant differences between the interdecile range in Northern Ireland and the interdecile range in Canada (256). Figure 4.3 shows the differences between the scores at the 90th and 10th percentiles in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, the Republic of Ireland and the OECD average.

Figure 4.3 Range of mathematics performance between the highest-and lowest-performing pupils in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



Country	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
Northern Ireland	343	601	258
Canada	* 356	* 612	256
Estonia	* 391	* 622	* 232
Finland	346	* 589	* 242
Republic of Ireland	* 370	* 587	* 217
OECD average	341	* 585	* 244

Base: All participating pupils in the included countries.

Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the respective score in Northern Ireland.*

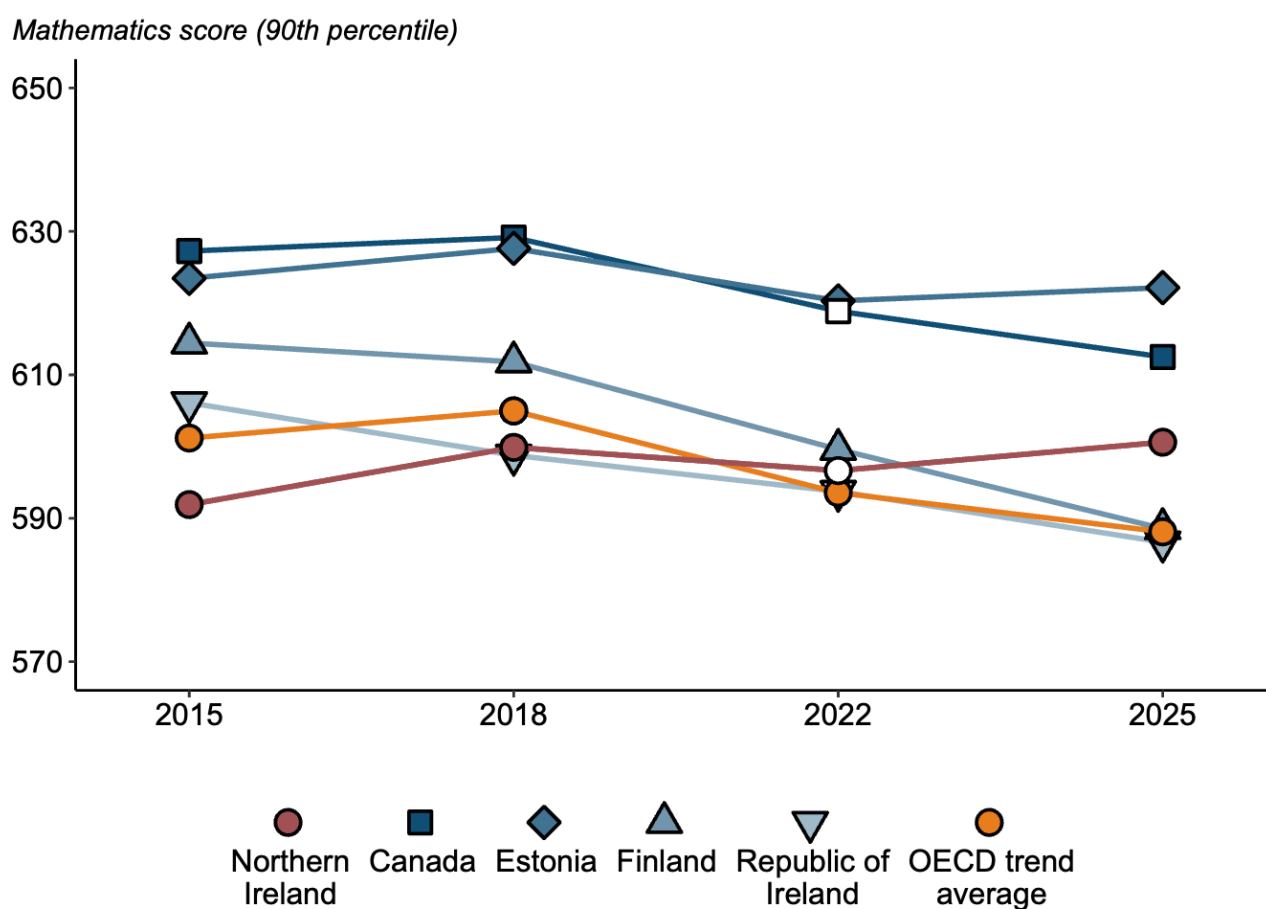
Interdecile ranges were calculated as 90th percentile – 10th percentile.

Ranges may appear inconsistent with percentile scores due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

To further consider these differences between the highest- and the lowest-performing pupils in mathematics in Northern Ireland, scores at the 90th and 10th percentiles can be compared with those of other countries. There have been no significant differences in the score at the 90th percentile in Northern Ireland since PISA 2015. Across the comparator countries there were no significant differences in the scores at the 90th percentile between PISA 2022 and PISA 2025, except in Finland and on average across OECD trend countries, where there was a decline in the scores. Figure 4.4 shows the trends in the performance at the 90th percentile across the 4 most recent cycles of PISA for Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, the Republic of Ireland, and on average across OECD trend countries.

Figure 4.4 Trends in mathematics performance at the 90th percentile in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and on average across OECD trend countries



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	592	600	597	601
Canada	* 627	* 629	619	612
Estonia	623	628	620	622
Finland	* 614	* 612	* 600	589
Republic of Ireland	* 606	* 599	594	587
OECD trend average	* 601	* 605	* 594	588

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

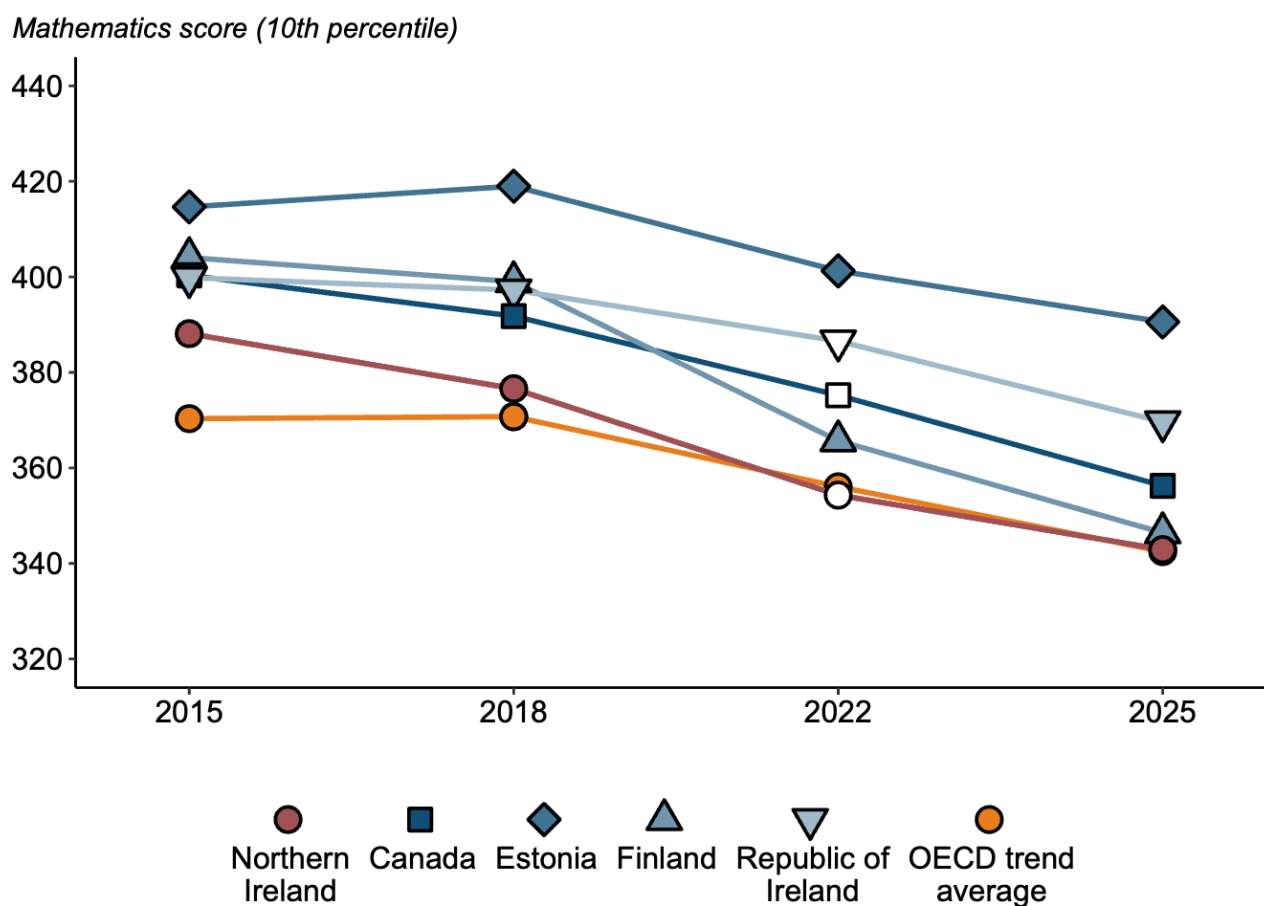
Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the score in that country for PISA 2025.*

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure. OECD trend averages were calculated using PISA 2025 OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

Since PISA 2015 there has been a significant decline in the score at the 10th percentile in the comparator countries, and on average across OECD trend countries. In Northern Ireland, the score at the 10th percentile in PISA 2025 (343) was not significantly different from the score in 2022 (354) but was significantly below the score in 2018 (377) and 2015 (388). Figure 4.5 shows these trends in the performance at the 10th percentile across the 4 most recent cycles of PISA for Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, the Republic of Ireland and on average across OECD trend countries.

Figure 4.5 Trends in mathematics performance at the 10th percentile in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and on average across OECD trend countries



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	* 388	* 377	354	343
Canada	* 400	* 392	* 375	356
Estonia	* 415	* 419	* 401	391
Finland	* 404	* 399	* 366	346
Republic of Ireland	* 400	* 397	* 387	370
OECD trend average	* 370	* 371	* 356	342

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the score in that country for PISA 2025.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

OECD trend averages were calculated using PISA 2025 OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

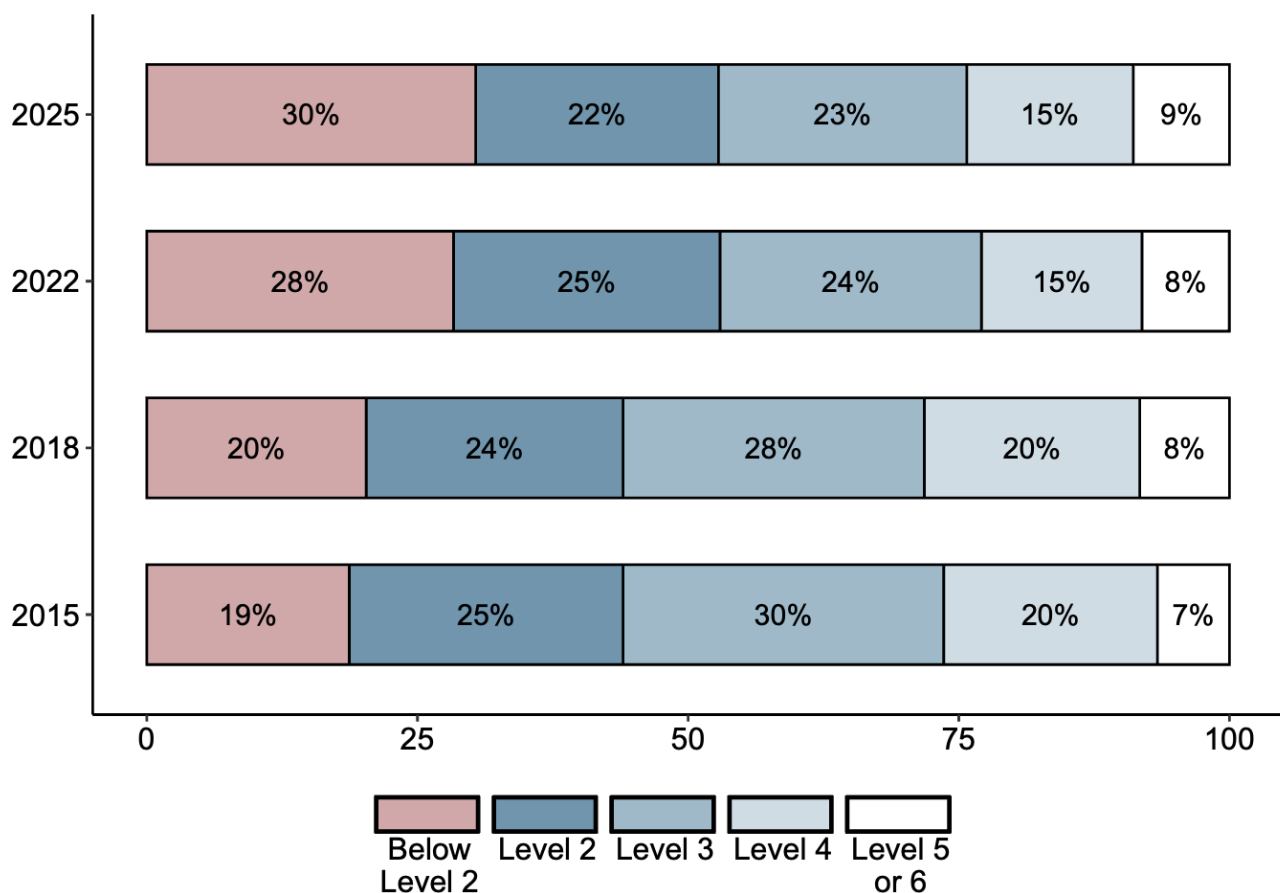
Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

4.7 Performance across mathematics proficiency levels

Another way to examine the spread of performance is to look at performance at each of the PISA mathematics proficiency levels. The PISA proficiency levels describe the tasks that pupils performing at each level can do. They are devised internationally and are illustrated in the International Report (OECD, 2026). Mathematics performance in PISA is described in terms of 6 proficiency levels (Levels 1–6, with Level 1 subdivided into 1a, 1b and 1c). These proficiency levels are outlined in the PISA 2025 Assessment and Analytical Framework (OECD, 2026). Level 2 is considered the baseline level of proficiency in mathematics, where pupils can begin to use mathematics in simple real-life situations, which is needed to participate fully in society.

In total, 9% of pupils in Northern Ireland performed at the highest proficiency levels in mathematics (Levels 5 or 6), which was not significantly different from the OECD average of 8%. Northern Ireland had 30% of pupils working at the lower proficiency levels (below Level 2), which was significantly smaller than the OECD average of 35%. Figure 4.6 shows the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland performing at each mathematics proficiency level over the 4 most recent cycles of PISA.

Figure 4.6 Percentage of pupils performing at each mathematics proficiency level in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015



PISA Cycle	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
2025	30%	22%	23%	15%	9%
2022	28%	25%	24%	15%	8%
2018	20%	24%	28%	20%	8%
2015	19%	25%	30%	20%	7%

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland.

Individual percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

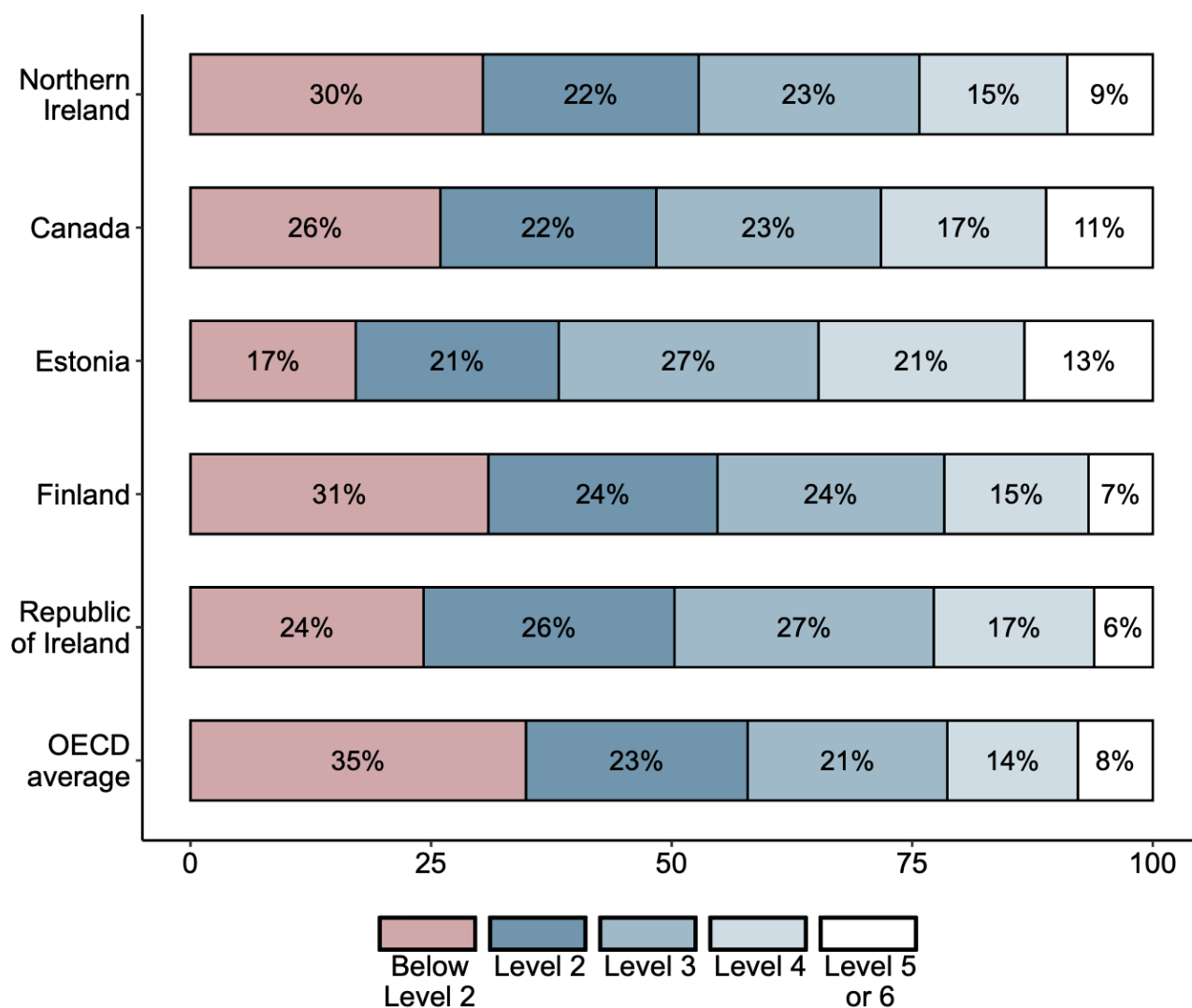
It was not possible at the point of writing to calculate whether there were significant differences between percentages across the PISA cycles.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

Figure 4.7 shows the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland, Canada, Estonia, Finland, and the Republic of Ireland and on average across OECD countries achieving each of the proficiency levels for mathematics in PISA 2025.

At the highest proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland (9%) was significantly larger than the percentages of pupils in Finland (7%) and the Republic of Ireland (6%), but significantly smaller than the percentages of pupils in Canada (11%) and Estonia (13%).

Figure 4.7 Percentage of pupils performing at each mathematics proficiency level in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and on average across OECD countries



Country	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	30%	22%	23%	15%	9%
Canada	* 26%	22%	23%	* 17%	* 11%
Estonia	* 17%	21%	* 27%	* 21%	* 13%
Finland	31%	24%	24%	15%	* 7%
Republic of Ireland	* 24%	* 26%	* 27%	17%	* 6%
OECD average	* 35%	23%	* 21%	* 14%	8%

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the respective score in Northern Ireland.

Individual percentages for a country may not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

At the lowest proficiency levels (below Level 2), the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland (30%) was significantly larger than the percentages of pupils in Canada (26%), Estonia (17%), and the Republic of Ireland (24%), but was not significantly different from the percentage of pupils in Finland (31%).

5 Equity and Inclusion - Gender

5.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter we explore differences in pupils' PISA scores in science, reading and mathematics according to gender. As described in Chapter 1, the OECD average is the average for all the 38 OECD countries participating in 2025. The OECD trend average is the average for the 35 countries that participated in each of the latest 4 PISA cycles (2015, 2018, 2022 and 2025)³⁸.

5.2 Key findings

Science

- In PISA 2025, girls and boys in Northern Ireland achieved average science scores of 494 and 491, respectively. Both scores were not significantly different from the scores achieved in 2022. A similar pattern was observed in the OECD trend average with no significant changes in girls' or boys' scores between 2022 and 2025.
- Over the longer term, girls' and boys' science scores in Northern Ireland were stable between 2015 and 2025. The OECD trend average for girls was also stable between 2015 and 2025 while the OECD trend average science score for boys in PISA 2025 was significantly below the equivalent score in 2015.
- In Northern Ireland in 2025, there was no significant gender gap in science³⁹, continuing the pattern observed in 2022. Over the same period, the OECD trend average showed a significant gender gap in science favouring girls in 2025 but no significant gender gap in 2022.
- There was also no gender gap in Northern Ireland in 2025 at either the 10th percentile or 90th percentile of science scores.
- In Northern Ireland, there was no significant difference between the percentages of girls (7%) and boys (8%) who achieved the highest science proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6) in 2025. There was also no significant difference in the percentages of girls (21%) and boys (23%) performing below the baseline science proficiency level (Level 2).

³⁸ The 35 OECD trend countries are those OECD countries in PISA 2025 that have participated in every cycle since PISA 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain. See Chapter 1 Section 1.4.8 for further details.

³⁹ Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores. A negative number indicates the average score for girls is below the average score for boys.

Reading

- In PISA 2025, girls and boys in Northern Ireland achieved average reading scores of 497 and 467, respectively. Both scores were not significantly different from the scores achieved in 2022. By contrast, the OECD trend average reading scores for girls and boys in 2025 were significantly below the equivalent scores in 2022.
- Over the longer term, girls' reading scores in Northern Ireland were stable between 2015 and 2025 while boys recorded a significant decrease in reading scores over the same period. The OECD trend averages for both girls and boys decreased significantly over the same period.
- In 2025 in Northern Ireland, girls performed significantly above boys in terms of average reading scores with the gender gap significantly widening from 14 points in 2015 to 30 points in 2025. Over the same period, there were also significant gender gaps in favour of girls in the OECD trend averages with the gap significantly widening from 27 points in 2015 to 30 points in 2025.
- The gender gap in average reading scores in favour of girls in Northern Ireland in 2025 was mirrored at both the 10th percentile and 90th percentile of reading scores.
- In Northern Ireland, a significantly larger percentage of girls than boys (7% compared with 5%) achieved the highest reading proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6), while a significantly smaller percentage of girls than boys performed below the baseline science proficiency level (18% compared with 28%).

Mathematics

- In 2025, girls and boys in Northern Ireland achieved average scores of 469 and 478, respectively, in mathematics. For girls and boys, mathematics scores in 2025 were not significantly different from scores achieved in 2022. This contrasted with the OECD trend averages for girls and boys in 2025 which were both significantly below equivalent scores in 2022.
- Over the longer term in Northern Ireland, girls' and boys' mathematics scores in 2025 were both significantly below the scores in 2015. This was also the case for the OECD trend average.
- In 2025, there was no significant difference between girls and boys in terms of average mathematics scores, mirroring the patterns observed in the PISA 2018 and 2015 cycles. This contrasted with 2022 when there was a significant gender gap in favour of boys (–12). In each of the latest 4 PISA cycles, there was a significant gender gap in favour of boys in the OECD trend averages.
- At the 10th percentile of mathematics scores there was no significant difference between girls' and boys' scores in Northern Ireland in 2025 while at the 90th percentile boys significantly outperformed girls.

- There were no significant differences recorded between the percentages of girls and boys who performed below the baseline mathematics proficiency level (31% compared with 29% below Level 2). The percentage of girls who achieved the highest mathematics proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6) was significantly below the percentage of boys (8% compared with 10%).

5.3 Did science performance differ by gender?

Table 5.1 shows the gender gaps in the average science scores for girls and boys in higher-performing participating countries (where pupils achieved an average score above 440 in PISA 2025). In 6 countries (including the comparator countries Canada and the Republic of Ireland), the average score for girls was significantly below the score for boys. In 28 countries (including Northern Ireland and the comparator country Estonia), there was no significant difference between girls' and boys' average scores. In 11 countries (including the comparator country Finland and the OECD), the average score for girls was significantly above the score for boys.

Table 5.1 Gender gaps in science performance for higher-performing countries

Gender gaps in science performance	Country and gender gap in the average score in science between girls and boys
Countries where the average score in science for girls was significantly below that for boys	Hong Kong (–16), the Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang regions in China (–14), Republic of Ireland (–7), Japan (–10), Chile (–9) and Canada (–5),
Countries where there was no significant difference between the average scores in science for girls and boys	Hungary (–8), United States (–8), Türkiye (–4), Austria (–3), Germany (–3), Italy (–3), Uruguay (–2), Australia (–1), Denmark (–1), Luxembourg (–1), Macao (–1), Singapore (0), Spain (0), Estonia (+1), Poland (+1), Vietnam (+1), Belgium (+2), Iceland (+2), New Zealand (+2), Northern Ireland (+2) , South Korea (+2), Czech Republic (+3), Portugal (+4), Ukrainian regions (17 of 27) (+4), Netherlands (+5), Slovak Republic (+5), Switzerland (+5), and France (+6)
Countries where the average score in science for girls was significantly above that for boys	OECD average (+1) , Lithuania (+10), Norway (+10), Taiwan (+11), United Arab Emirates (+11), Latvia (+12), Sweden (+12), Israel (+13), Malta (+19), Croatia (+20), Slovenia (+21), and Finland (+22)

Base: All participating countries with average scores over 440 in science in PISA 2025.

Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores. A negative number indicates the average score for girls is below the average score for boys.

Two countries with the same or similar gap may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

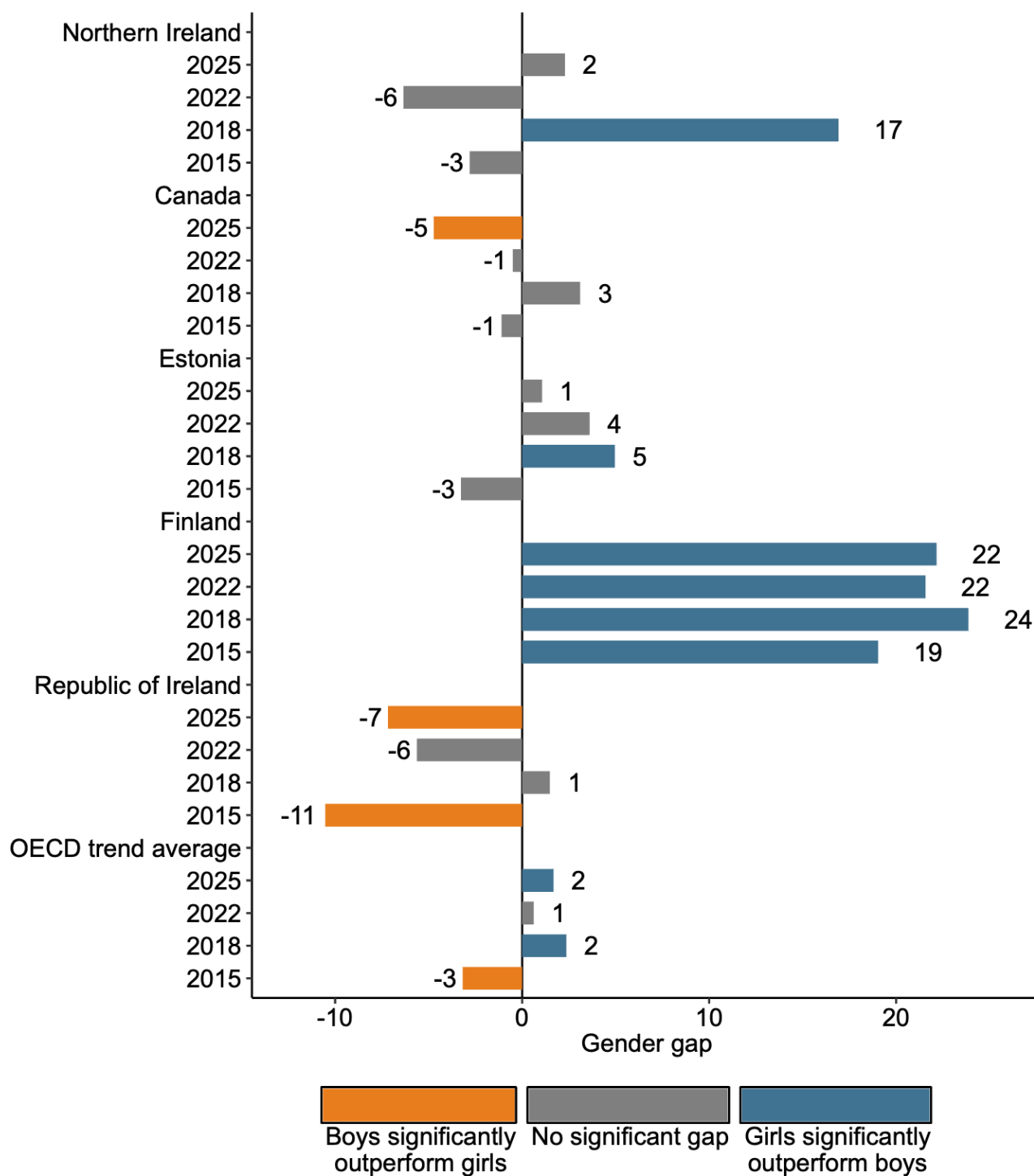
5.3.1 How have gender gaps in science performance changed over time?

Figure 5.1 shows that in 2025, girls in Northern Ireland achieved an average score in science which was not significantly different from the average score for boys indicating gender parity in science attainment in Northern Ireland. This was also the case in Estonia. For both countries, this mirrored the finding from PISA 2022.

By contrast, in 2025, the average scores for girls in Canada and the Republic of Ireland were significantly below the scores for boys, while the reverse was the case in Finland and the OECD trend average with scores for girls significantly above the scores for boys.

Similar to Northern Ireland, girls significantly outperformed boys in 2018 in Estonia, Finland and the OECD trend average. Girls in Finland have consistently and significantly outperformed boys in science by at least 19 score points in the latest 4 PISA cycles. In 2015, girls in the Republic of Ireland achieved an average score significantly below the score for boys, as was the case for the OECD trend average.

Figure 5.1 Gender gaps in pupils' science performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD trend average



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	–3	* 17	–6	2
Canada	–1	3	–1	* –5
Estonia	–3	* 5	4	1
Finland	* 19	* 24	* 22	* 22
Republic of Ireland	* –11	1	–6	* –7
OECD trend average	* –3	* 2	1	* 2

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores. A negative number indicates the average score for girls is below the average score for boys.

The length of each bar represents the gap before rounding but the figure reported is the gap after rounding. Two countries with the same or similar gap may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Asterisks () indicate that girls' average scores are significantly different from boys' average scores within individual PISA cycles.*

PISA sampling standards were not all met in PISA 2022.

OECD trend averages are calculated using PISA data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

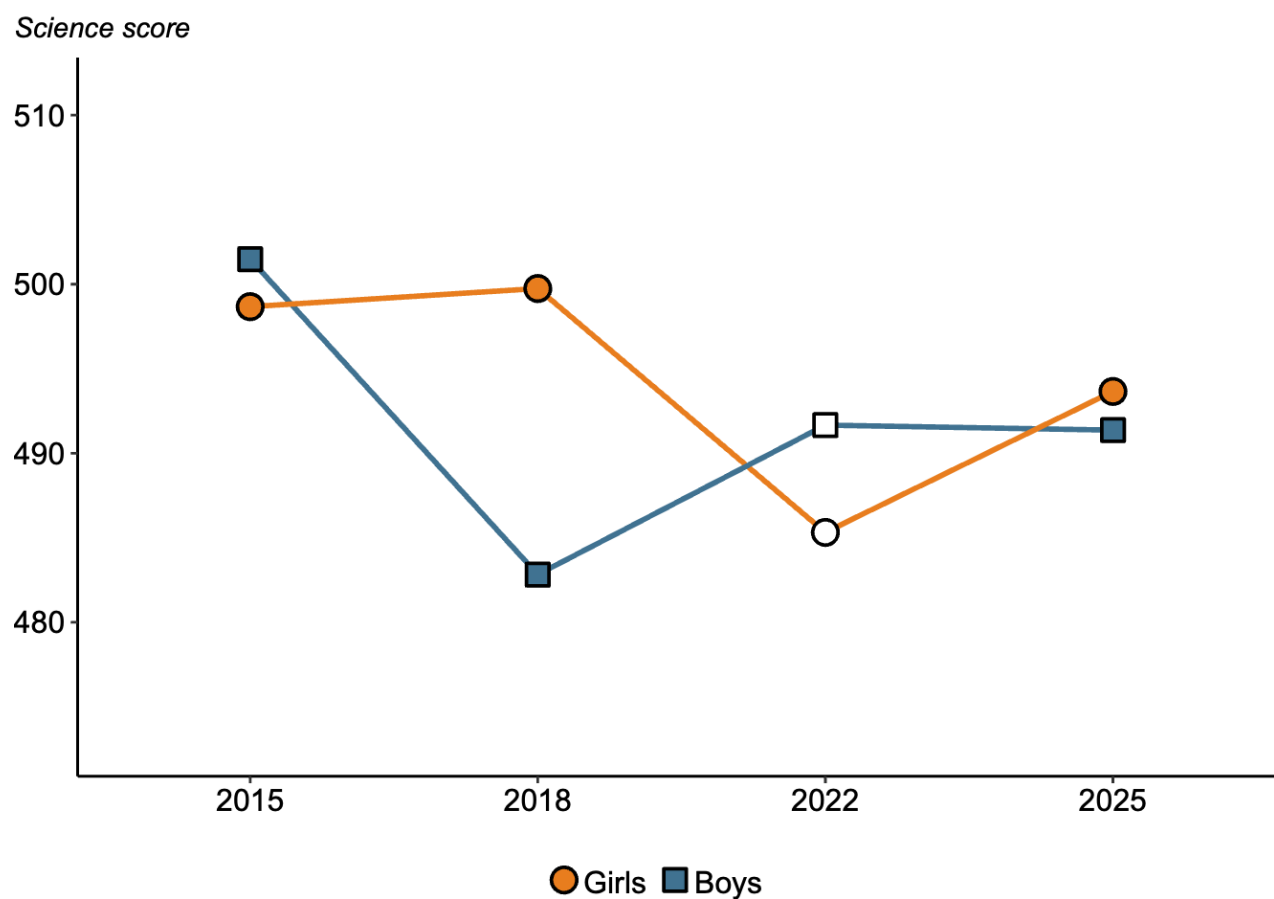
Between 2015 and 2025 the trend for Northern Ireland was stable with the change in gender score differences not significant.

Similar to Northern Ireland, in each of the comparator countries, the trend between 2015 and 2025 was stable. The OECD trend average in the same period showed a significant shift over time from boys significantly outperforming girls in 2015 (by 3 points) to girls significantly outperforming boys in 2025 (by 2 points).

5.3.2 How did girls and boys in Northern Ireland perform in science?

Figure 5.2 shows that in PISA 2025, the average science scores for girls and boys in Northern Ireland (494 and 491 respectively) were not significantly different from the average scores in each of the 3 previous PISA cycles.

Figure 5.2 Trends in girls' and boys' science performance in Northern Ireland



Gender	2015	2018	2022	2025
Girls	499	500	485	494
Boys	501	483	492	491

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

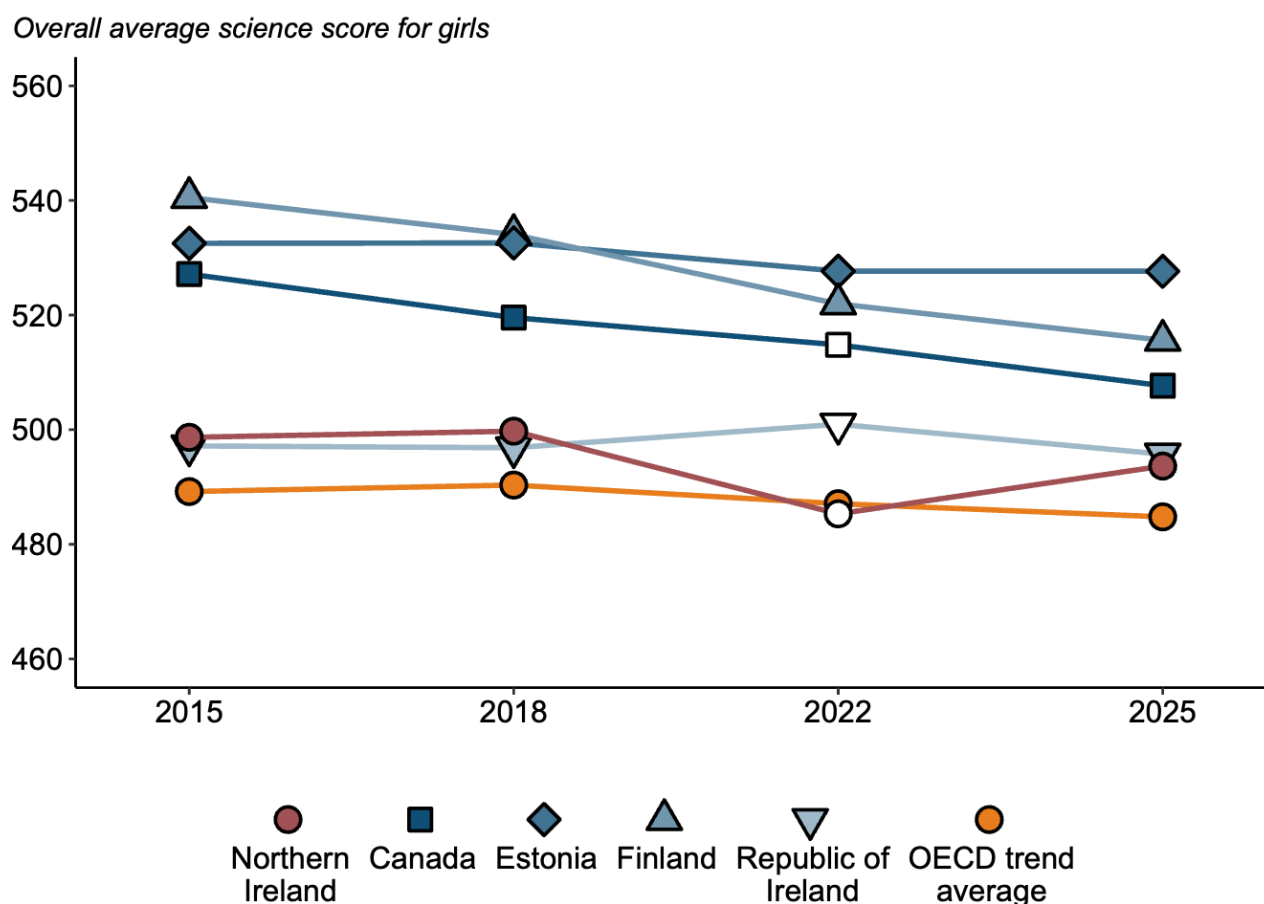
Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

5.3.3 What does PISA tell us about girls' performance in science?

Figure 5.3 shows there was a stable trend for girls' science performance in Northern Ireland with the average score in 2025 (494) not significantly different from the score in 2015 (499). This was also the case when comparing the average score for girls in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025 with the scores in the 2022 (485) and 2018 (500) cycles.

This stable pattern across the latest 4 PISA cycles was also observed in Estonia, the Republic of Ireland and in the OECD trend average. By contrast, the average scores for girls in 2025 in Canada (508) and Finland (516), were significantly below the corresponding scores in 2015 (527 and 541 respectively) reflecting downward trends over this period. The scores for Canada and Finland in 2025 (508 and 516) were also significantly below the corresponding scores for 2018 (520 and 534).

Figure 5.3 Trends in girls' science performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD trend average



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	499	500	485	494
Canada	* 527	* 520	515	508
Estonia	533	533	528	528
Finland	* 541	* 534	522	516
Republic of Ireland	497	497	501	496
OECD trend average	489	490	487	485

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.

Two countries with the same or similar score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

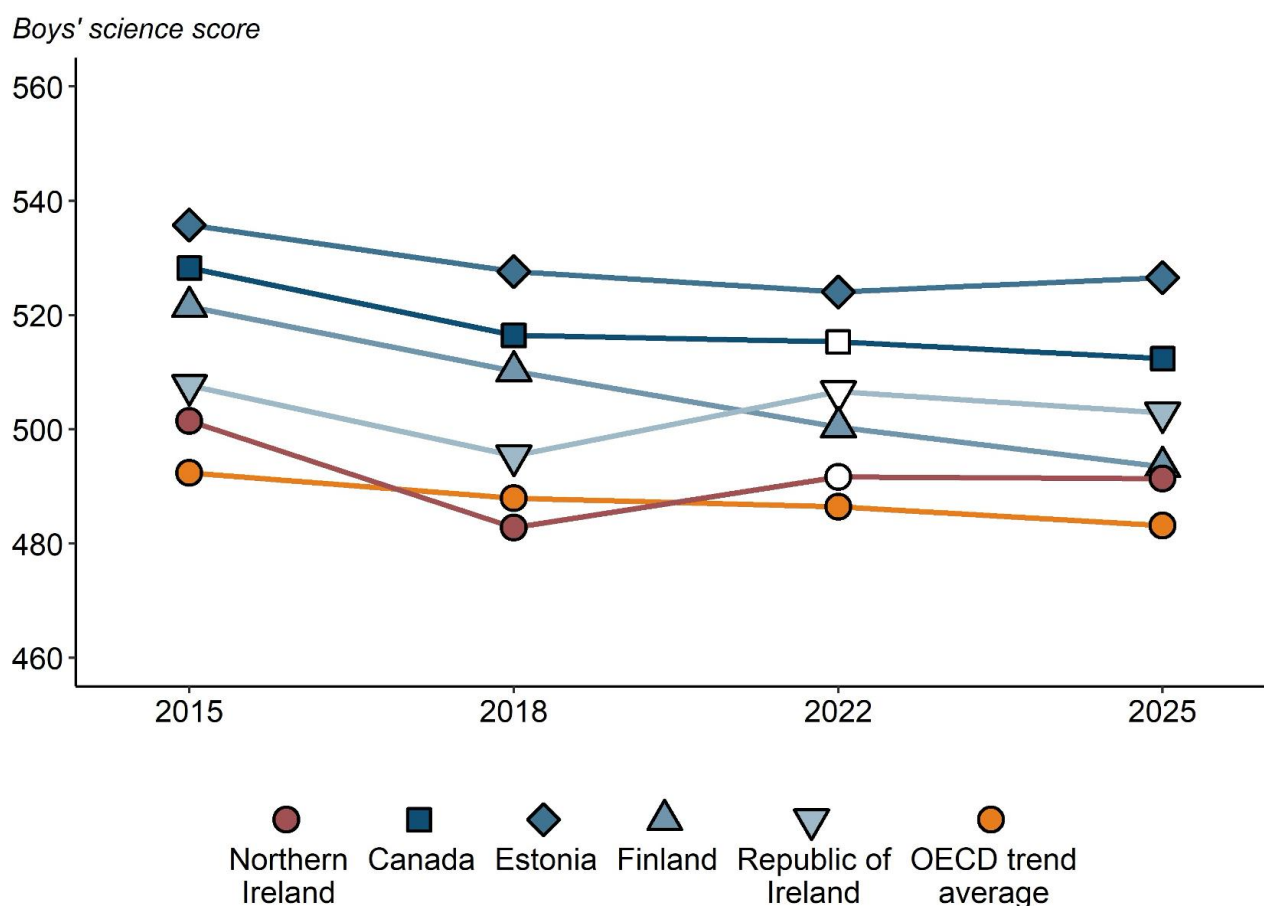
PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure. OECD trend averages are calculated using PISA data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

5.3.4 What does PISA tell us about boys' performance in science?

Between 2015 and 2025 in Northern Ireland, Estonia and the Republic of Ireland the trend in the science scores for boys was of stability with average scores in 2025 not significantly different from scores in 2015. By contrast, there were significant downward trends in Canada, Finland and in the OECD trend average over the same period (see Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4 Trends in boys' science performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD trend average



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	501	483	492	491
Canada	* 528	516	515	512
Estonia	536	528	524	527
Finland	* 521	* 510	500	493
Republic of Ireland	508	495	507	503
OECD trend average	* 492	488	486	483

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.

Two countries with the same or similar score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure. OECD trend averages are calculated using PISA data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

5.3.5 How did girls and boys in Northern Ireland perform at the 10th and 90th percentiles in science?

This section compares the performance of the highest- and lowest-achieving girls and boys using the 10th (lowest) and 90th (highest) percentile scores for science and provides the difference (the interdecile range, shortened to range) between these two scores.

Figure 5.5 shows the average scores at the 10th and 90th percentiles and interdecile ranges for pupils in Northern Ireland, its comparator countries and the OECD average while Table 5.2 shows the significance of differences between girls' and boys' average scores and gender gaps.

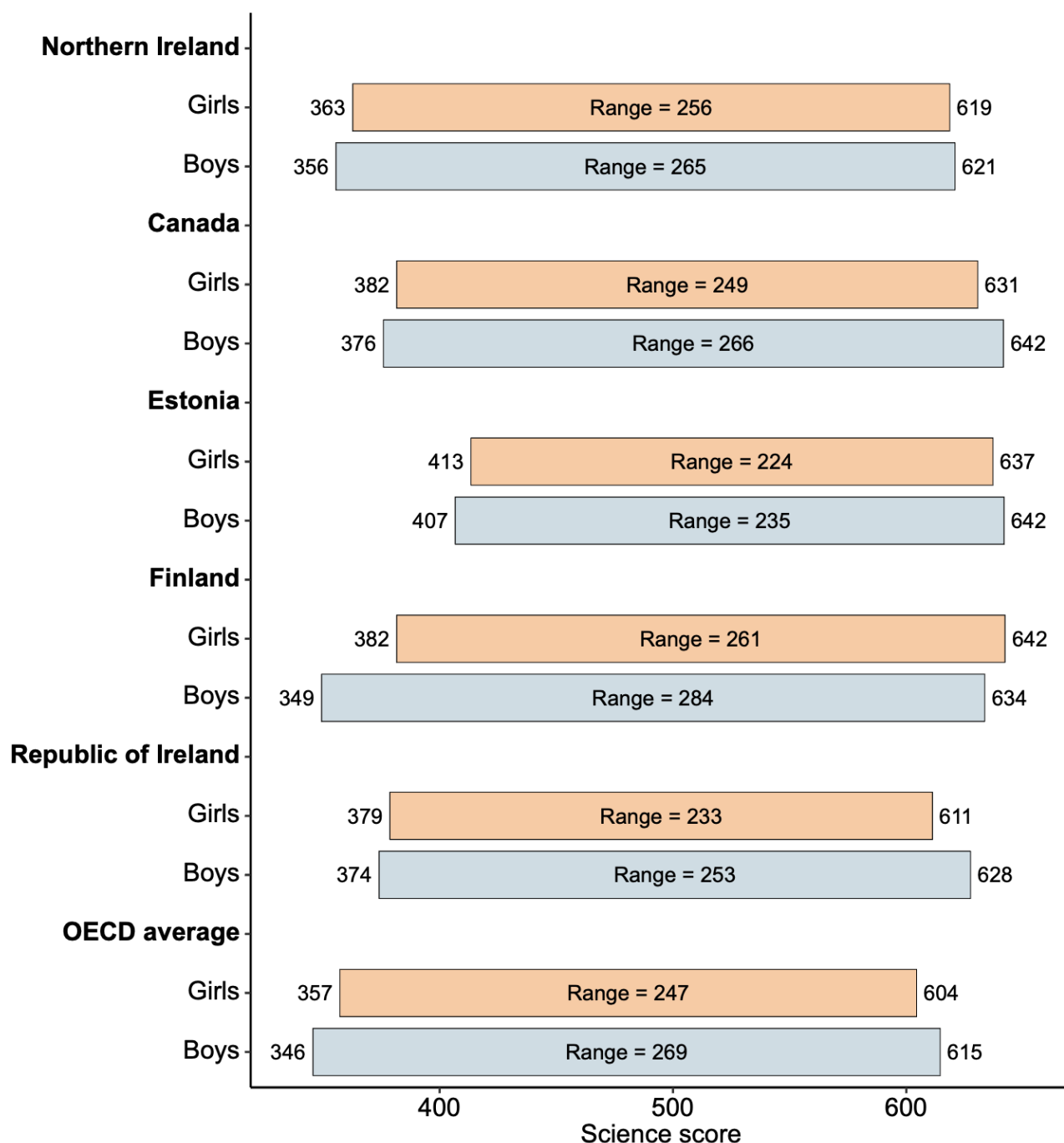
In PISA 2025, the average science score at the 10th percentile for girls in Northern Ireland (363) was not significantly different from the score for boys (356). Similarly, the average score at the 90th percentile for girls (619) was not significantly different from the average score for boys (621).

In Northern Ireland, the range in girls' science scores (256) was not significantly different from the range of boys' scores (265), a pattern also observed in Estonia. By contrast, the ranges of scores for girls in Canada, Finland and the Republic of Ireland, as well the OECD average range, were significantly narrower than the corresponding range for boys.

In Canada and the Republic of Ireland these narrower ranges were driven by the significantly stronger performance of boys at the 90th percentile, while in Finland it was driven by the significantly stronger performance of girls at the 10th percentile.

For the OECD average, the significantly narrower range in science scores for girls was driven by both the significantly stronger performance of girls at the 10th percentile and by girls performing significantly below boys at the 90th percentile.

Figure 5.5 Performance of girls and boys at the 10th and 90th percentiles in science in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



Country	Gender group	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
Northern Ireland	Girls	363	619	256
Northern Ireland	Boys	356	621	265
Canada	Girls	382	631	249
Canada	Boys	376	642	266
Estonia	Girls	413	637	224
Estonia	Boys	407	642	235
Finland	Girls	382	642	261
Finland	Boys	349	634	284
Republic of Ireland	Girls	379	611	233
Republic of Ireland	Boys	374	628	254
OECD average	Girls	357	604	247
OECD average	Boys	346	615	269

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Interdecile ranges were calculated as 90th percentile – 10th percentile.

Interdecile ranges may appear inconsistent due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Table 5.2 Gender gaps at the 10th and 90th percentiles in science in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average

Country	Gender gap at the 10th percentile	Gender gap at the 90th percentile	Gender gap in the interdecile range
Northern Ireland	7	–2	–9
Canada	6	* –11	* –17
Estonia	7	–5	–11
Finland	* 32	9	* –23
Republic of Ireland	5	* –16	* –21
OECD average	* 12	* –10	* –22

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores and range of girls' scores – range of boys' scores.

Asterisks (*) indicate a significant gender gap (significant difference between girls' and boys' scores and significant difference in ranges of scores).

Two countries with the same or similar gap may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

5.3.6 To what extent did girls and boys in Northern Ireland reach the highest and lowest PISA proficiency levels in science?

This section compares girls' and boys' performance in terms of the percentages attaining each of the PISA proficiency levels for science (levels range between 1 and 6). In this section the proportion of higher-performing girls and boys (those attaining Level 5 or Level 6) and lower-performing girls and boys (those attaining below Level 2) are compared⁴⁰.

Figure 5.6 shows the percentages of girls and boys achieving each science proficiency level in Northern Ireland, its comparator countries and the OECD average while Table 5.3 shows the significance of differences between girls' and boys' achievement at these levels.

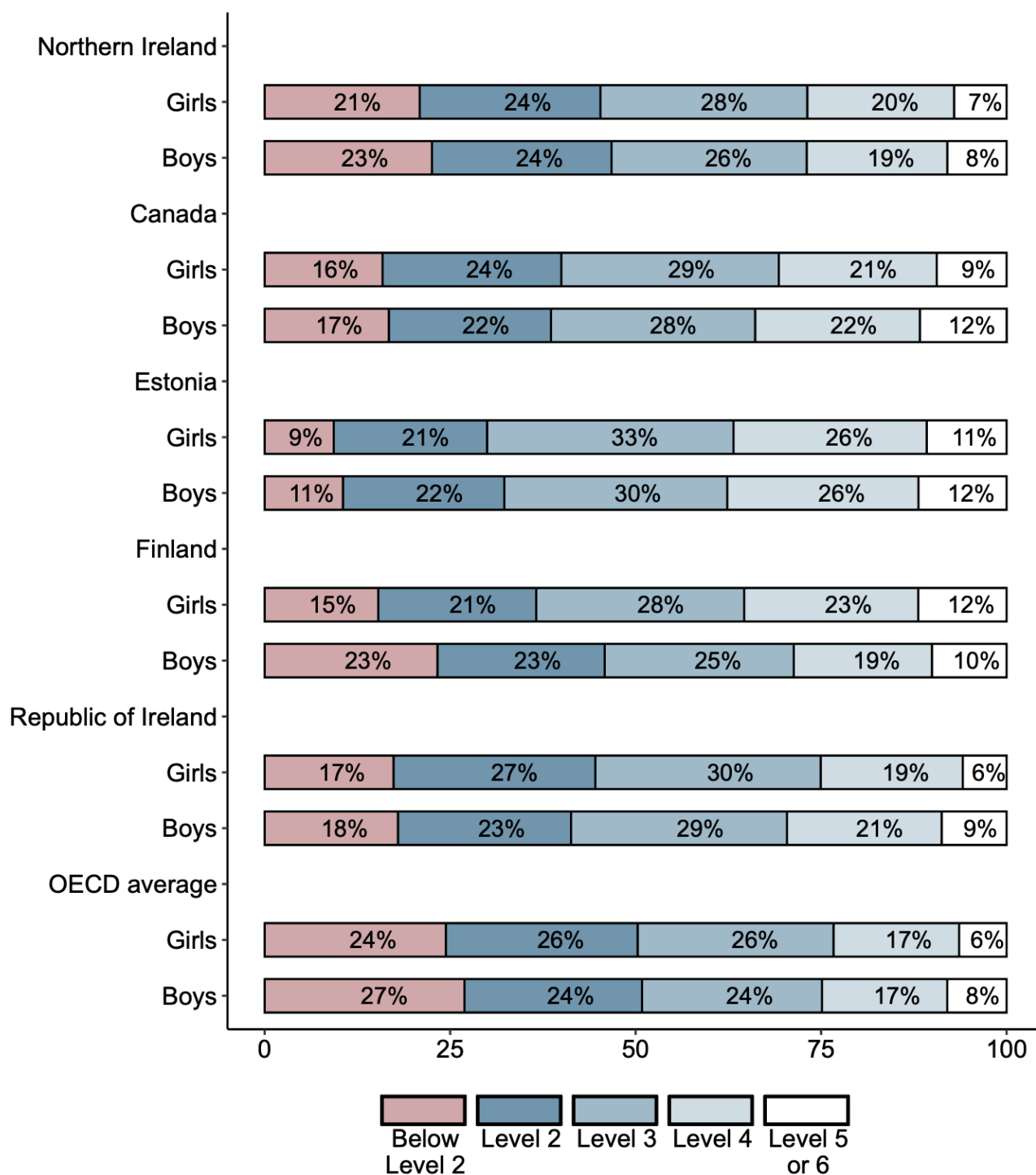
In PISA 2025, there was no significant difference between the percentages of girls in Northern Ireland (7%) and boys (8%) performing at Levels 5 or 6 in science or the corresponding percentages performing below Level 2 (21% and 23% respectively).

As in Northern Ireland, there were no significant differences between the percentages of girls (11%) and boys (12%) in Estonia performing at Levels 5 or 6 in 2025. By contrast, girls in Canada (9%) and the Republic of Ireland (6%) performed significantly below boys (12% and 9% respectively) while girls in Finland performed significantly above boys (12% compared with 10%). Of the comparator countries, only in Finland were the percentages of girls and boys performing below Level 2 significantly different (15% and 23% respectively).

Across the OECD countries, on average, a significantly larger percentage of boys (8%) than girls (6%) achieved Level 5 or Level 6 in science while a significantly larger percentage of boys (27%) did not achieve Level 2 in science compared with girls (24%).

⁴⁰ This section's analysis focuses on below Level 2 and Levels 5 or 6 only. The chart and table present data for all levels.

Figure 5.6 Percentage of pupils performing at each science proficiency level in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



Country	Group	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	Girls	21%	24%	28%	20%	7%
Northern Ireland	Boys	23%	24%	26%	19%	8%
Canada	Girls	16%	24%	29%	21%	9%
Canada	Boys	17%	22%	28%	22%	12%
Estonia	Girls	9%	21%	33%	26%	11%
Estonia	Boys	11%	22%	30%	26%	12%
Finland	Girls	15%	21%	28%	23%	12%
Finland	Boys	23%	23%	25%	19%	10%
Republic of Ireland	Girls	17%	27%	30%	19%	6%
Republic of Ireland	Boys	18%	23%	29%	21%	9%
OECD average	Girls	24%	26%	27%	17%	6%
OECD average	Boys	27%	24%	24%	17%	8%

*Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.
Individual percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.*

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Table 5.3 Gender gaps in the percentage of pupils at each proficiency level in science in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average

Country	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	–2%	0%	2%	1%	–1%
Canada	–1%	* 2%	* 2%	–1%	* –2%
Estonia	–1%	–1%	3%	0%	–1%
Finland	* –8%	–1%	3%	* 5%	* 2%
Republic of Ireland	–1%	* 4%	1%	–2%	* –3%
OECD average	* –2%	* 2%	* 2%	0%	* –2%

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores.

Asterisks () indicate significant gender gaps.*

Two countries with the same or similar percentages may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

5.4 Did reading performance differ by gender?

5.4.1 The gender gap in reading

Table 5.4 shows the gender gaps in the average reading scores for girls and boys in higher-performing participating countries (where pupils achieved an average score above 440)⁴¹. In each of the 36 countries (including Northern Ireland), the average score for girls was significantly above the score for boys.

Table 5.4 Gender gaps in reading performance for higher-performing countries

Gender gaps in reading performance	Country and gender gap in the average score in reading between girls and boys
Countries where the average score in reading for girls was significantly above that for boys	Slovenia (+52), Croatia (+47), Finland (+46), Lithuania (+44), Sweden (+41), Taiwan (+39), Norway (+39), Slovak Republic (+37), Poland (+37), Netherlands (+35), Portugal (+33), Belgium (+33), New Zealand (+33), France (+32), Australia (+31), Czech Republic (+31), Switzerland (+31), Denmark (+31), Northern Ireland (+30) , Luxembourg (+30), OECD average (+30) , South Korea (+28), Italy (+28), Singapore (+26), Spain (+26), Austria (+26), Germany (+25), Estonia (+25), United States (+24), Macao (+22), Canada (+22), Türkiye (+22), Hungary (+20), Republic of Ireland (+19), Japan (+14), Hong Kong (+12), and the Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang regions in China (+7).

Base: All participating countries with average scores over 440 in reading in PISA 2025.

Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores. A positive number indicates the average score for girls is above the average score for boys.

Two countries with the same or similar gap may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

In no country was the gap significantly in favour of boys or not significantly different between girls and boys.

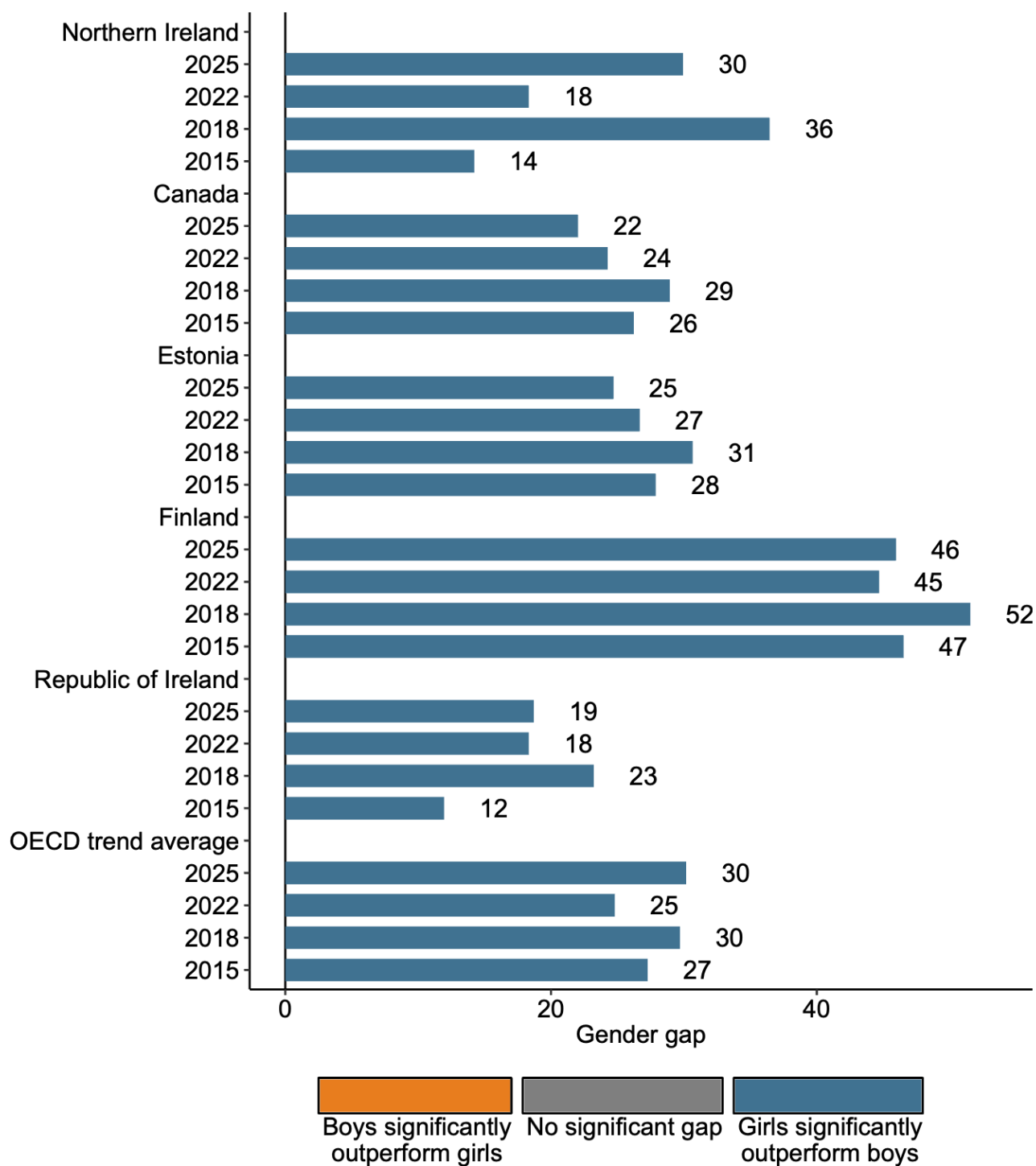
Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

5.4.2 How have gender gaps in reading performance changed over time?

Girls in Northern Ireland performed significantly above boys in 2025 and in each of the previous 3 PISA cycles, as was the case in each of the comparator countries and shown in the corresponding OECD trend averages (see Figure 5.7).

⁴¹ Gaps are calculated as the average score for girls – the average score for boys. A negative number indicates the average score for girls is below the score for boys.

Figure 5.7 Gender gaps in pupils' reading performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD trend average



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	* 14	* 36	* 18	* 30
Canada	* 26	* 29	* 24	* 22
Estonia	* 28	* 31	* 27	* 25
Finland	* 47	* 52	* 45	* 46
Republic of Ireland	* 12	* 23	* 18	* 19
OECD trend average	* 27	* 30	* 25	* 30

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores. The length of each bar represents the gap before rounding but the figure reported is the gap after rounding.

Two countries with the same or similar gap may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Asterisks () indicate that girls' average scores are significantly different from boys' average scores within individual PISA cycles.*

PISA sampling standards were not all met in PISA 2022.

OECD trend averages are calculated using PISA data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

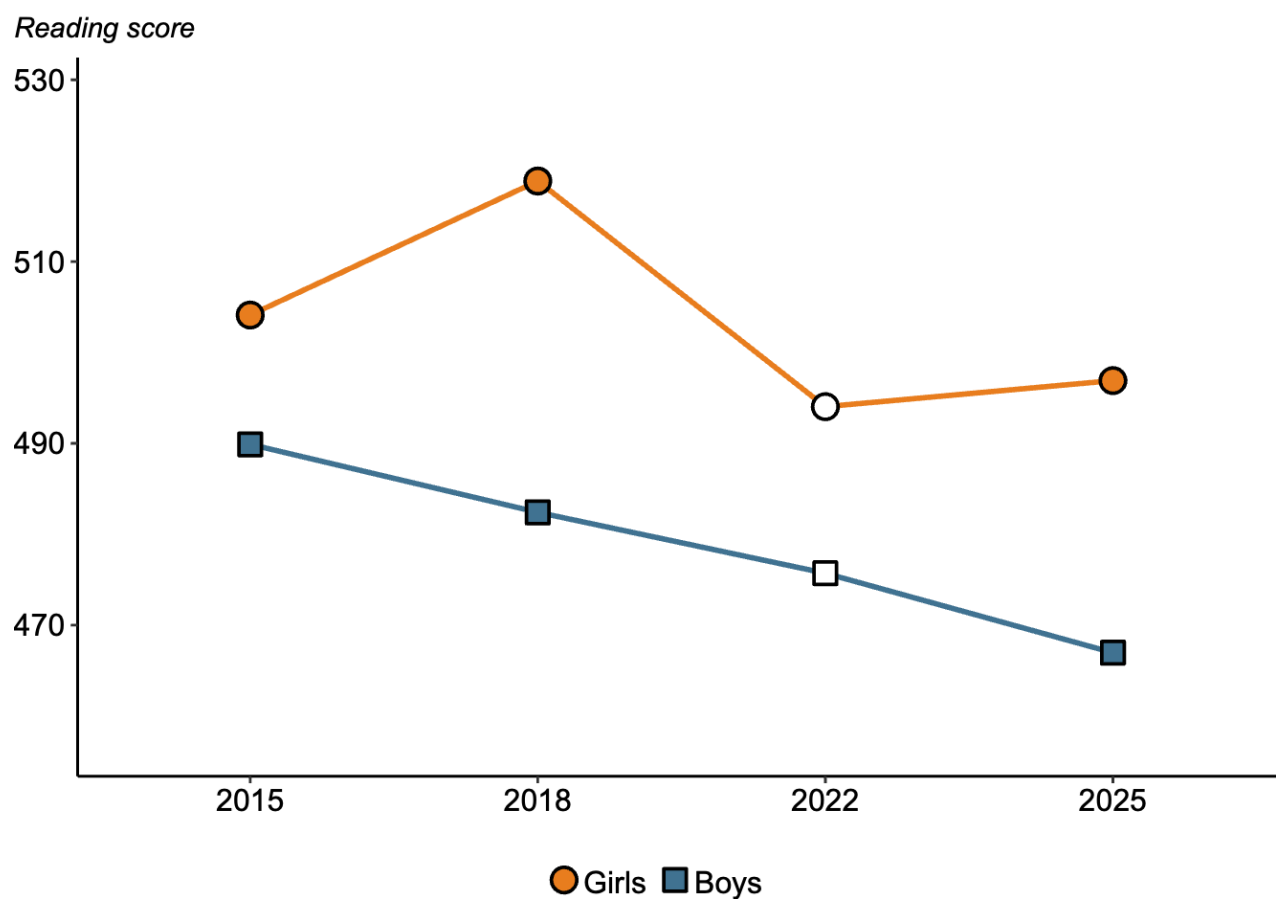
Between 2015 and 2025 the trend has seen a widening of the gender gap between Northern Ireland's girls and boys with the score point gap in 2025 (30 points in favour of girls) significantly wider than in 2015 (14 points). This pattern was also observed in the OECD trend average gap over this period with the reading gender gap significantly widening by 3 points from 27 points to 30 points. By contrast, in each of the comparator countries gender gaps were stable when comparing 2025 and 2015 score point differences.

5.4.3 How did girls and boys in Northern Ireland perform in reading?

In PISA 2025, in Northern Ireland, the average reading score for girls (497) was not significantly different from the corresponding scores in 2022 (494) and 2015 (504) (see Figure 5.8). However, it was significantly below the average score in 2018 (519).

The average score for boys in 2025 (467) was not significantly different to the corresponding score in 2022 (476). However, it was significantly below the average scores in both 2018 (482) and 2015 (490).

Figure 5.8 Trends in girls' and boys' reading performance in Northern Ireland



Gender	2015	2018	2022	2025
Girls	504	* 519	494	497
Boys	* 490	* 482	476	467

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland.

Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in Northern Ireland for PISA 2025.*

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

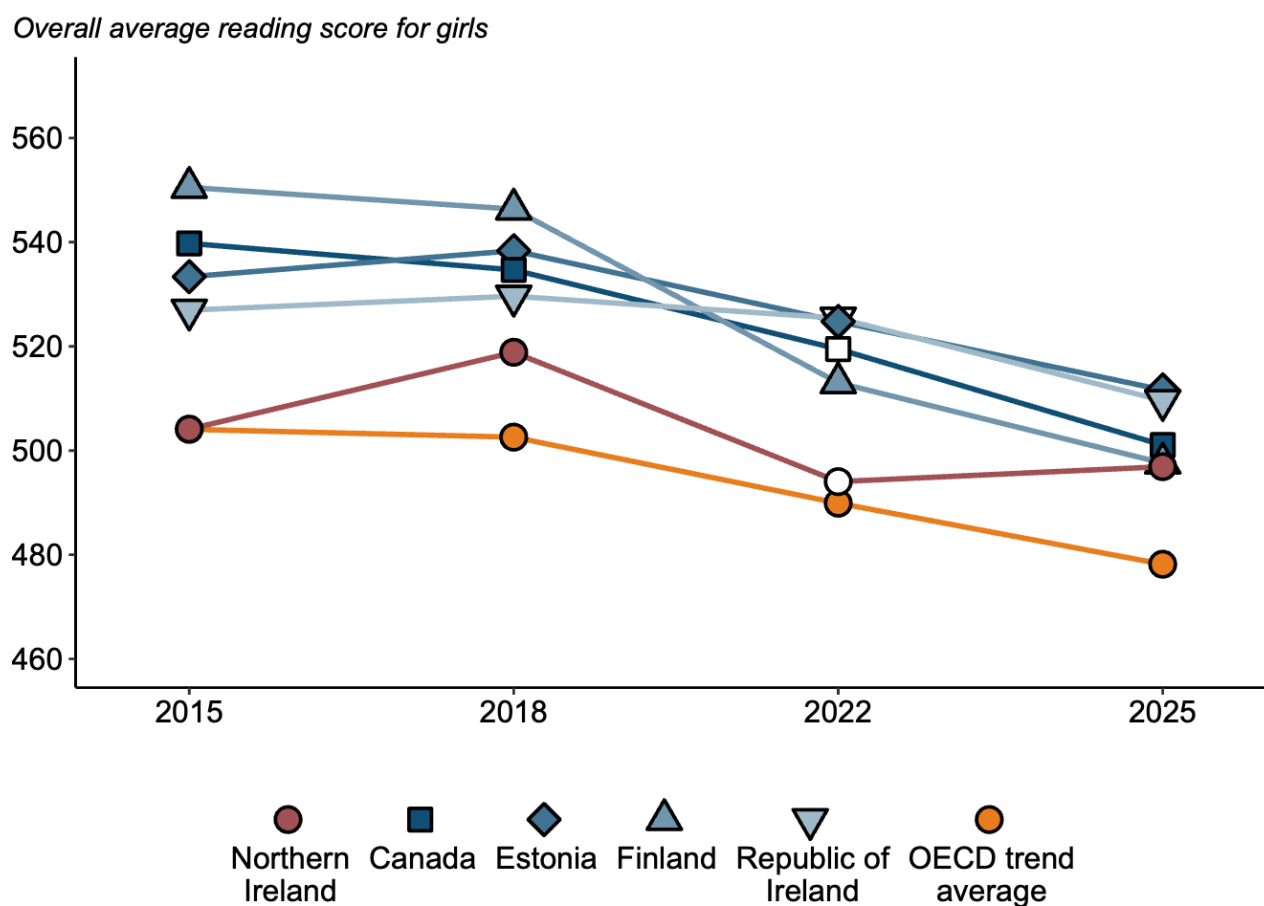
Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

5.4.4 What does PISA tell us about girls' performance in reading?

Figure 5.9 shows a stable trend for the average reading scores for girls in Northern Ireland between 2015 and 2025 with no significant difference between the respective scores (504 and 497). However, the 2025 score for reading was significantly below the corresponding score in 2018 (519).

By contrast, in each comparator country and for the OECD trend average, the average reading score for girls in 2025 was significantly below the score in 2015 reflecting a downward trend over this period. The scores for 2025 in each case were also significantly below the scores for the 2018 and 2022 cycles.

Figure 5.9 Trends in girls' reading performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD trend average



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	504	* 519	494	497
Canada	* 540	* 535	* 519	501
Estonia	* 533	* 538	* 525	512
Finland	* 551	* 546	* 513	498
Republic of Ireland	* 527	* 530	* 525	510
OECD trend average	* 504	* 503	* 490	478

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.

Two countries with the same or similar score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

OECD trend averages were calculated using PISA 2025 data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

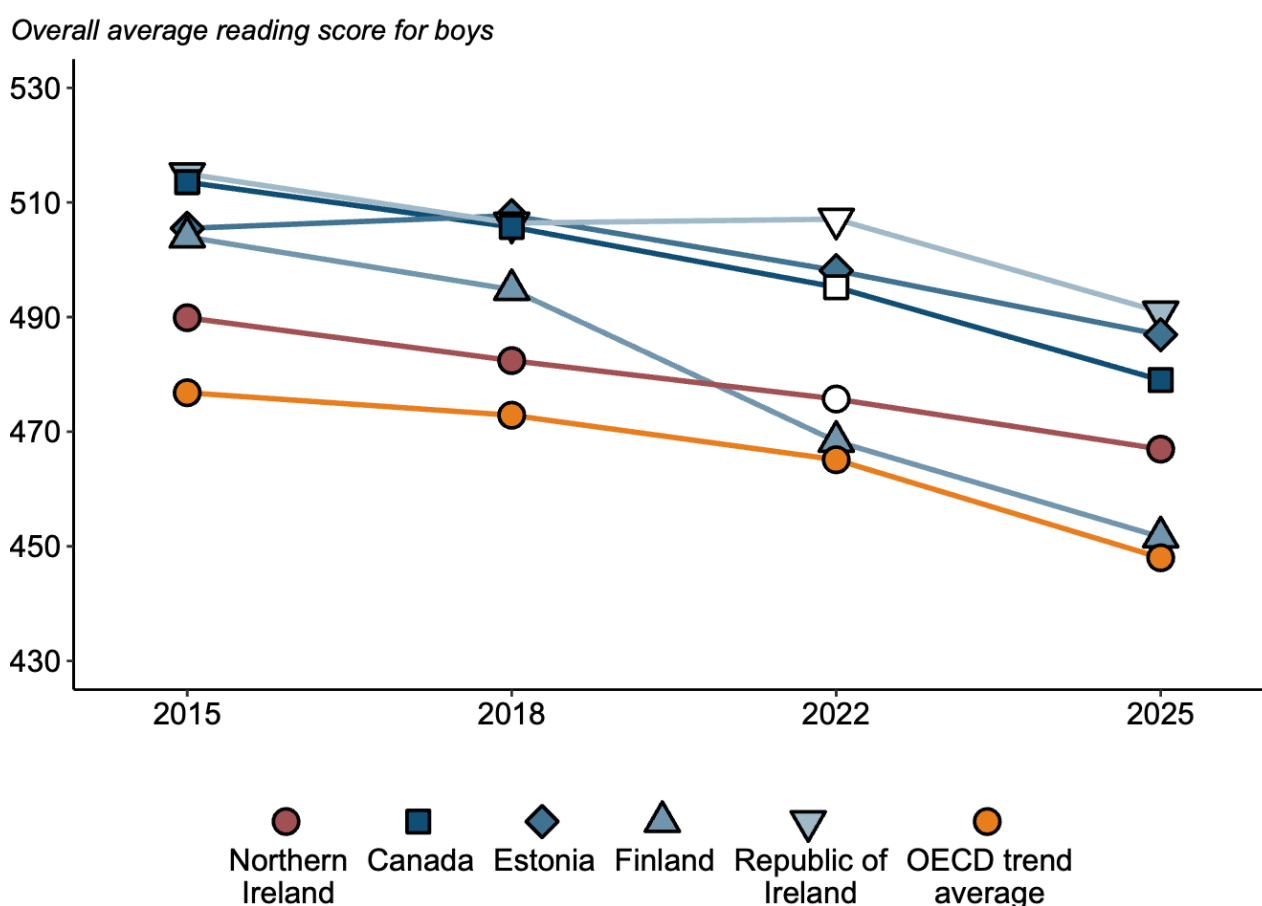
Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

5.4.5 What does PISA tell us about boys' performance in reading?

In Northern Ireland, the difference between the average reading score for boys in 2025 (467) compared with 2022 (476) was not significant. This contrasts with boys' performance in each of the comparator countries and the OECD trend average where scores for 2025 were significantly below those for each of the previous 3 cycles (see Figure 5.10).

The average score for boys in Northern Ireland in 2025 (467) was significantly below the score for 2015 (490) reflecting a downward trend over this period and was also significantly below the score in 2018 (482). Similar trends were observed in each of the comparator countries and in the OECD trend average.

Figure 5.10 Trends in boys' reading performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD trend average



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	* 490	* 482	476	467
Canada	* 514	* 506	* 495	479
Estonia	* 505	* 508	* 498	487
Finland	* 504	* 495	* 468	452
Republic of Ireland	* 515	* 506	* 507	491
OECD trend average	* 477	* 473	* 465	448

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.*

Two countries with the same or similar score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

OECD trend averages were calculated using PISA 2025 data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

5.4.6 How did girls and boys in Northern Ireland perform at the 10th and 90th percentiles in reading?

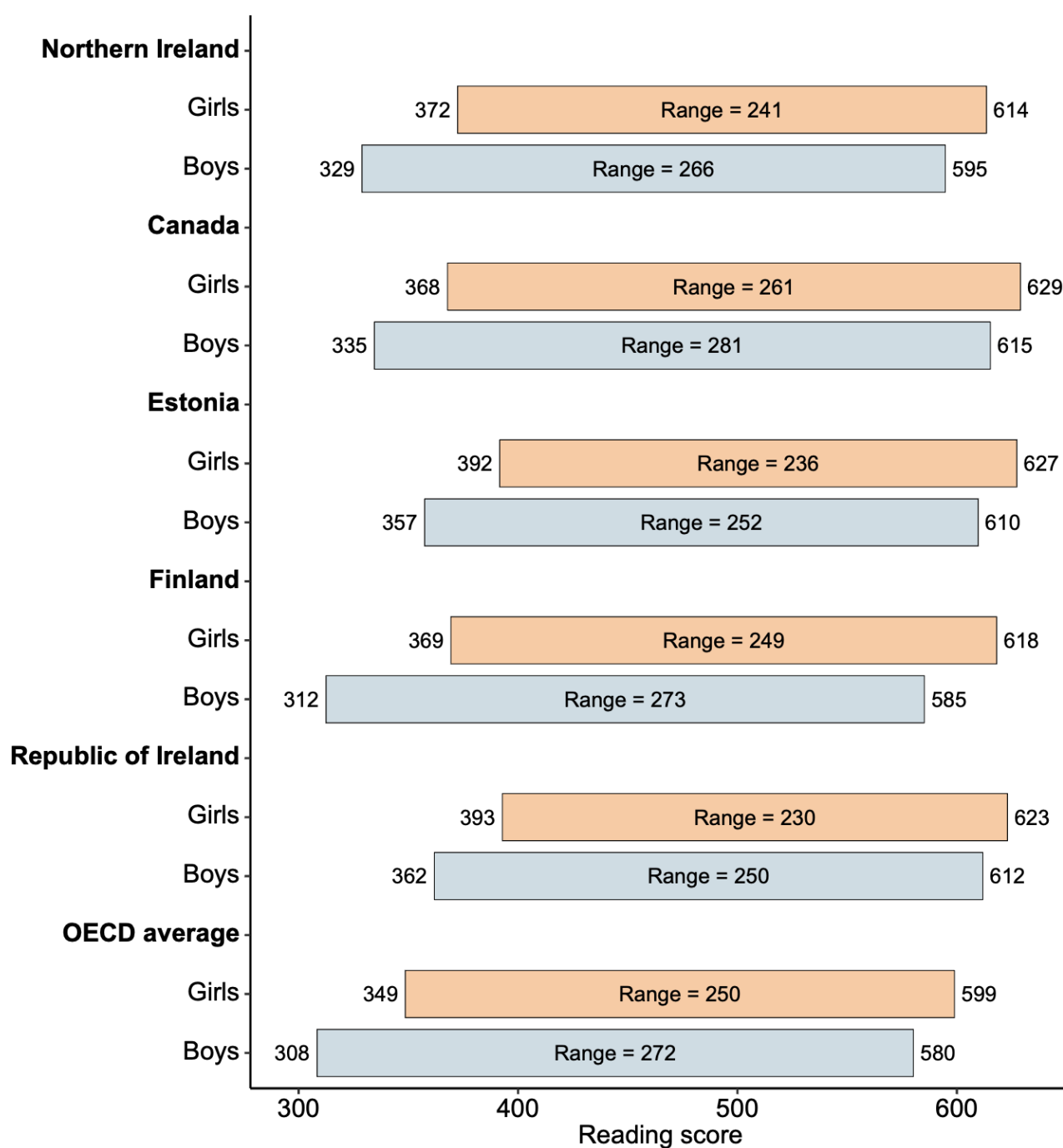
This section compares the performance of the highest- and lowest-achieving girls and boys using the 10th (lowest) and 90th (highest) percentile scores for reading and provides the difference (the interdecile range, shortened to range) between these two scores.

Figure 5.11 shows the average scores at the 10th and 90th percentiles and interdecile ranges for pupils in Northern Ireland, its comparator countries and the OECD average while Table 5.5 shows the significance of differences between girls' and boys' average scores and gender gaps.

In PISA 2025, the average reading score at the 10th percentile for girls in Northern Ireland (372) was significantly above the corresponding score for boys (329), a difference of 44 points after rounding. Similarly, the average score at the 90th percentile for girls (614) was significantly above the corresponding score for boys (595), a gap of 19 points.

The range in girls' reading scores in Northern Ireland (241) was significantly narrower than the range of boys' scores (266), a difference of 25 points. This pattern was also observed in each of the comparator countries and the OECD average. In Northern Ireland the narrower range was mostly driven by the stronger performance of girls at the 10th percentile. This was similarly the case in each comparator country and the OECD average.

Figure 5.11 Performance of girls and boys at the 10th and 90th percentiles in reading in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



Country	Gender group	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
Northern Ireland	Girls	372	614	241
Northern Ireland	Boys	329	595	266
Canada	Girls	368	629	261
Canada	Boys	335	615	281
Estonia	Girls	392	627	236
Estonia	Boys	357	610	252
Finland	Girls	369	618	249
Finland	Boys	312	585	273
Republic of Ireland	Girls	393	623	230
Republic of Ireland	Boys	362	612	250
OECD average	Girls	349	599	250
OECD average	Boys	308	580	272

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Interdecile ranges were calculated as 90th percentile – 10th percentile.

Interdecile ranges may appear inconsistent due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Table 5.5 Gender gaps at the 10th and 90th percentiles in reading in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average

Country	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
Northern Ireland	* 44	* 19	* –25
Canada	* 33	* 14	* –20
Estonia	* 34	* 18	* –17
Finland	* 57	* 33	* –24
Republic of Ireland	* 31	* 11	* –20
OECD average	* 40	* 19	* –22

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Interdecile ranges were calculated as 90th percentile – 10th percentile.

Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores and range of girls' scores – range of boys' scores.

Asterisks () indicate a significant gender gap (significant difference between girls' and boys' average score and significant difference in ranges of scores).*

Two countries with the same or similar score or gap may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

5.4.7 To what extent did girls and boys in Northern Ireland reach the highest and lowest PISA proficiency levels in reading?

This section compares girls' and boys' performance in terms of the percentages attaining each of the PISA proficiency levels for reading (levels range between 1 and 6). In this section the proportion of higher-performing girls and boys (those attaining Level 5 or 6) and lower-performing girls and boys (those attaining below Level 2) are compared.

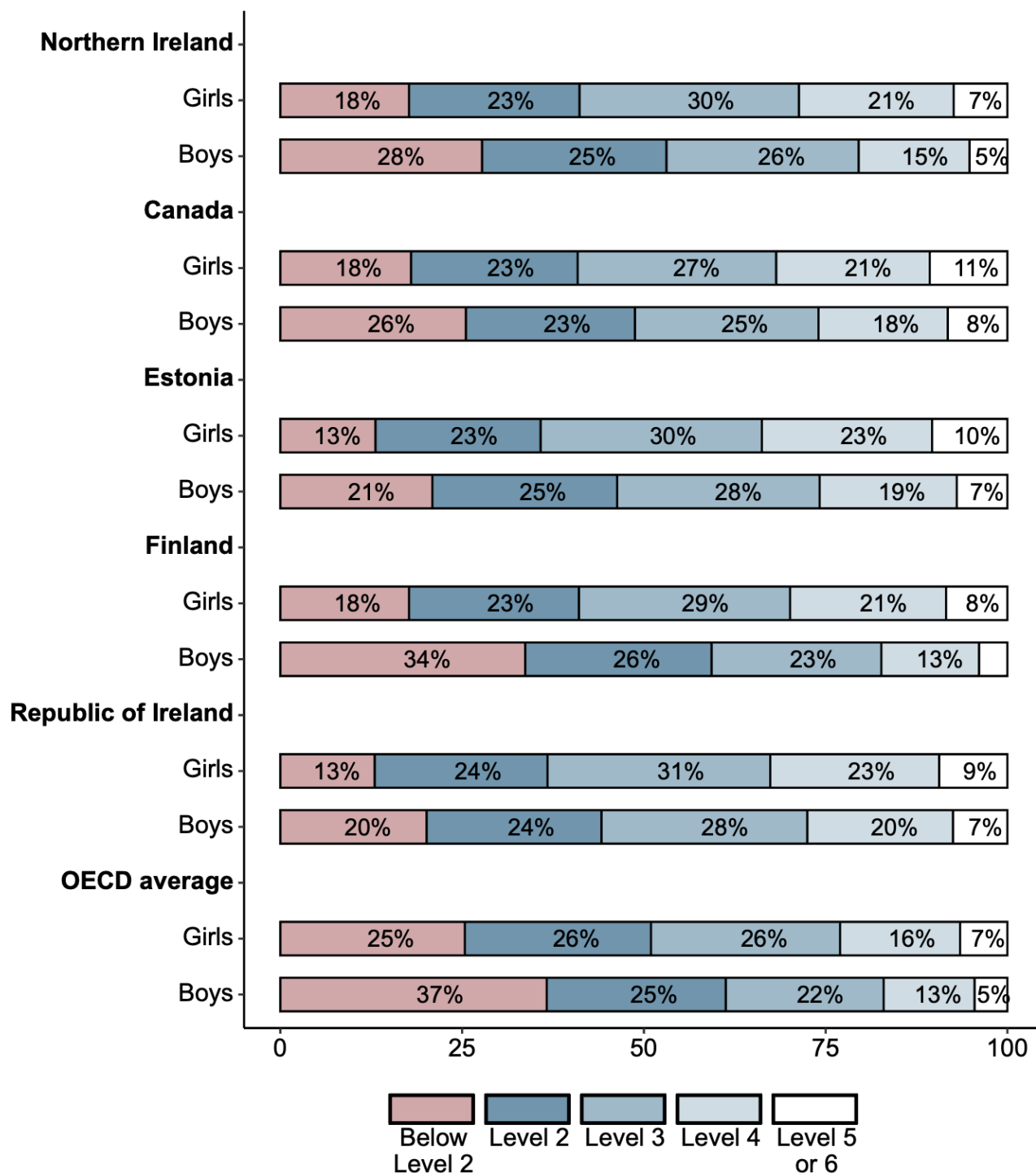
Figure 5.12 shows the percentages of girls and boys achieving each science proficiency level in Northern Ireland, its comparator countries and the OECD average while Table 5.6 shows the significance of differences between girls' and boys' achievement at these levels.

In PISA 2025 a significantly larger percentage of Northern Ireland's girls (7%) performed at Levels 5 or 6 compared with boys (5%). Correspondingly, a significantly smaller percentage of girls performed below Level 2 compared with boys (18% and 28% respectively).

In each comparator country, as in Northern Ireland, the percentage of girls performing at Levels 5 or 6 was significantly above the percentage of boys. Correspondingly, the percentage of girls performing below Level 2 in each comparator country was significantly

below the percentage of boys, as in Northern Ireland. This pattern was also evident in the corresponding OECD averages.

Figure 5.12 Percentage of pupils performing at each reading proficiency level in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and on average across the OECD countries



Country	Group	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	Girls	18%	23%	30%	21%	7%
Northern Ireland	Boys	28%	25%	26%	15%	5%
Canada	Girls	18%	23%	27%	21%	11%
Canada	Boys	26%	23%	25%	18%	8%
Estonia	Girls	13%	23%	30%	23%	10%
Estonia	Boys	21%	25%	28%	19%	7%
Finland	Girls	18%	23%	29%	21%	8%
Finland	Boys	34%	26%	23%	13%	4%
Republic of Ireland	Girls	13%	24%	31%	23%	9%
Republic of Ireland	Boys	20%	24%	28%	20%	7%
OECD average	Girls	25%	26%	26%	16%	7%
OECD average	Boys	37%	25%	22%	13%	5%

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Individual percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Percentages below 4.5% are not displayed on the chart for visual clarity.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Table 5.6 Gender gaps in the percentage of pupils at each proficiency level in reading in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average

Country	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	* -10%	-2%	4%	* 6%	* 2%
Canada	* -8%	0%	* 2%	* 3%	* 2%
Estonia	* -8%	-3%	3%	* 5%	* 3%
Finland	* -16%	-2%	* 6%	* 8%	* 5%
Republic of Ireland	* -7%	0%	2%	* 3%	* 2%
OECD average	* -11%	* 1%	* 4%	* 4%	* 2%

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Gaps were calculated as percentage of girls – percentage of boys.

Asterisks (*) indicate significant gender gaps.

Two countries with the same or similar percentage may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

5.5 Did mathematics performance differ by gender?

5.5.1 The gender gap in mathematics

Table 5.7 shows the gender gaps in the average mathematics scores for girls and boys in higher-performing participating countries (where pupils achieved an average score above 440)⁴². In 34 countries, the average score for girls was significantly below the score for boys. In 6 countries (including Northern Ireland), there was no significant difference between girls' and boys' average scores.

Table 5.7 Gender gaps in mathematics performance for higher-performing countries

Gender gaps in mathematics performance	Country and gender gap in the average score in mathematics between girls and boys
Countries where the average score in mathematics for girls was significantly below that for boys	United Arab Emirates (–4), Norway (–6), Vietnam (–6), Latvia (–7), Lithuania (–9), Netherlands (–9), Singapore (–10), Portugal (–11), South Korea (–11), Germany (–11), Slovak Republic (–11), Czech Republic (–12), New Zealand (–12), Iceland (–12), Poland (–13), France (–13), Estonia (–13), Switzerland (–13), OECD average (–13) , Spain (–14), Denmark (–14), Belgium (–16), Japan (–16), Australia (–16), Republic of Ireland (–17), Italy (–17), Hong Kong (–17), Türkiye (–18), Macao (–19), Luxembourg (–19), Hungary (–19), Canada (–20), the Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang regions in China (–21), Austria (–23), United States (–24)
Countries where there was no significant difference between the average scores in mathematics for girls and boys	Slovenia (+3), Taiwan (–1), Croatia (–1), Sweden (–2), Finland (–2), and Northern Ireland (–9)

Base: All participating countries with average scores over 440 in science in PISA 2025.

Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores. A negative number indicates the average score for girls is below the average score for boys.

Two countries with the same or similar gap may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

In no country was the gap significantly in favour of girls.

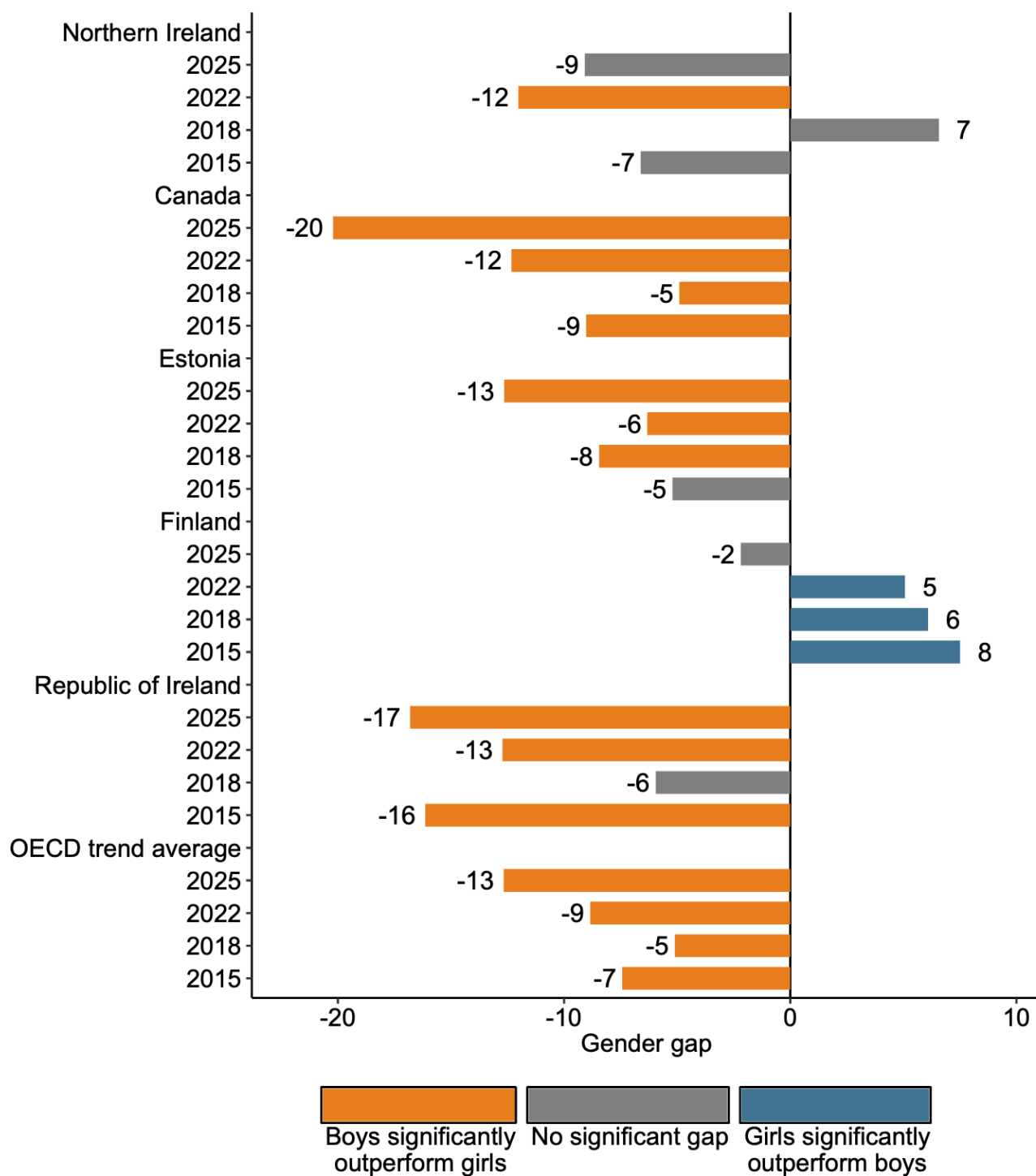
Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

⁴² Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores. A negative number indicates the average score for girls was below the average score for boys.

5.5.2 How have gender gaps in mathematics performance changed over time?

Figure 5.13 shows that there was no significant gap between the mathematics performance of girls and boys in Northern Ireland in 2025, mirroring the patterns observed in 2018 and 2015. However, there was a significant gap in 2022 when Northern Ireland's girls performed significantly below boys (–12 points). By contrast, girls in Canada, Estonia and the Republic of Ireland performed significantly below boys in each cycle (in the case of Canada) or 3 of the 4 cycles (Estonia and the Republic of Ireland). In Finland, girls performed significantly above boys in mathematics in each cycle apart from in 2025 when there was no significant difference between scores. The OECD trend average shows girls performing significantly below boys in each cycle.

Figure 5.13 Gender gaps in pupils' mathematics performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD trend average



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	–7	7	* –12	–9
Canada	* –9	* –5	* –12	* –20
Estonia	–5	* –8	* –6	* –13
Finland	* 8	* 6	* 5	–2
Republic of Ireland	* –16	–6	* –13	* –17
OECD Trend Average	* –7	* –5	* –9	* –13

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores. A negative number indicates the average score for girls is below the average score for boys.

The length of each bar represents the gap before rounding but the figure reported is the gap after rounding. Two countries with the same or similar gap may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Asterisks () indicate that girls' average scores are significantly different from boys' average scores within individual PISA cycles.*

PISA sampling standards were not all met in PISA 2022.

OECD trend averages are calculated using PISA data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

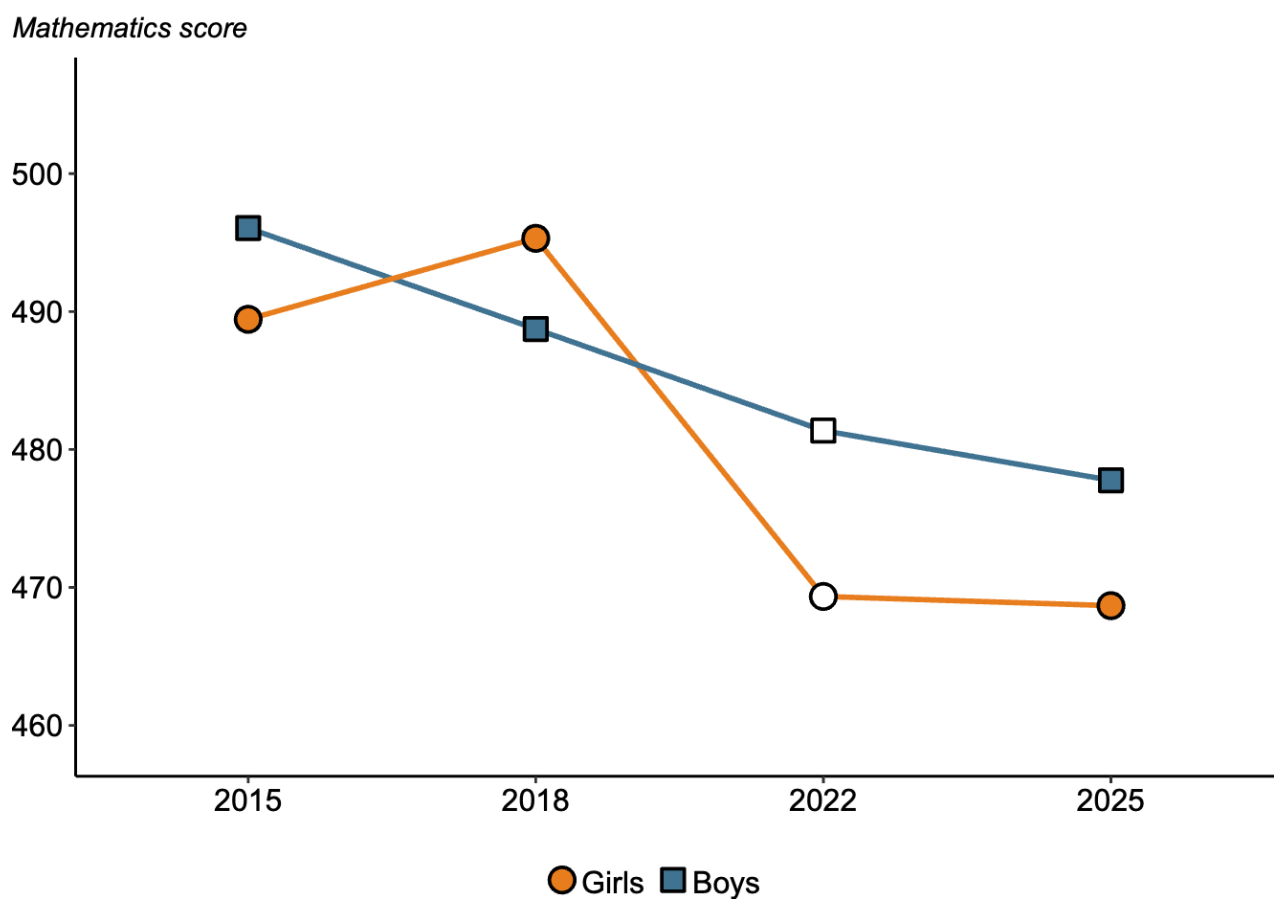
Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

Between 2015 and 2025 the trend for Northern Ireland was stable with the change in the gender gap not significant. This pattern was also observed in Estonia and, apart from in 2018, the Republic of Ireland. By contrast, in Canada and the OECD average, the gaps in 2025 were significantly wider than in each of the previous 3 cycles. In Finland there was no significant gap between girls and boys in 2025, a significant difference from each of the previous cycles in which girls outperformed boys.

5.5.3 How did girls and boys in Northern Ireland perform in mathematics?

Figure 5.14 shows that in Northern Ireland, the average mathematics score for girls in 2025 (469) was the same as in 2022 but was significantly below the corresponding scores in 2018 (495) and 2015 (489). The average score for boys in 2025 (478) was not significantly different from the average scores in 2022 (481) and 2018 (489) but was significantly below the corresponding score in 2015 (496).

Figure 5.14 Trends in girls' and boys' mathematics performance in Northern Ireland



Gender	2015	2018	2022	2025
Girls	489*	495*	469	469
Boys	496*	489	481	478

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in Northern Ireland for PISA 2025.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

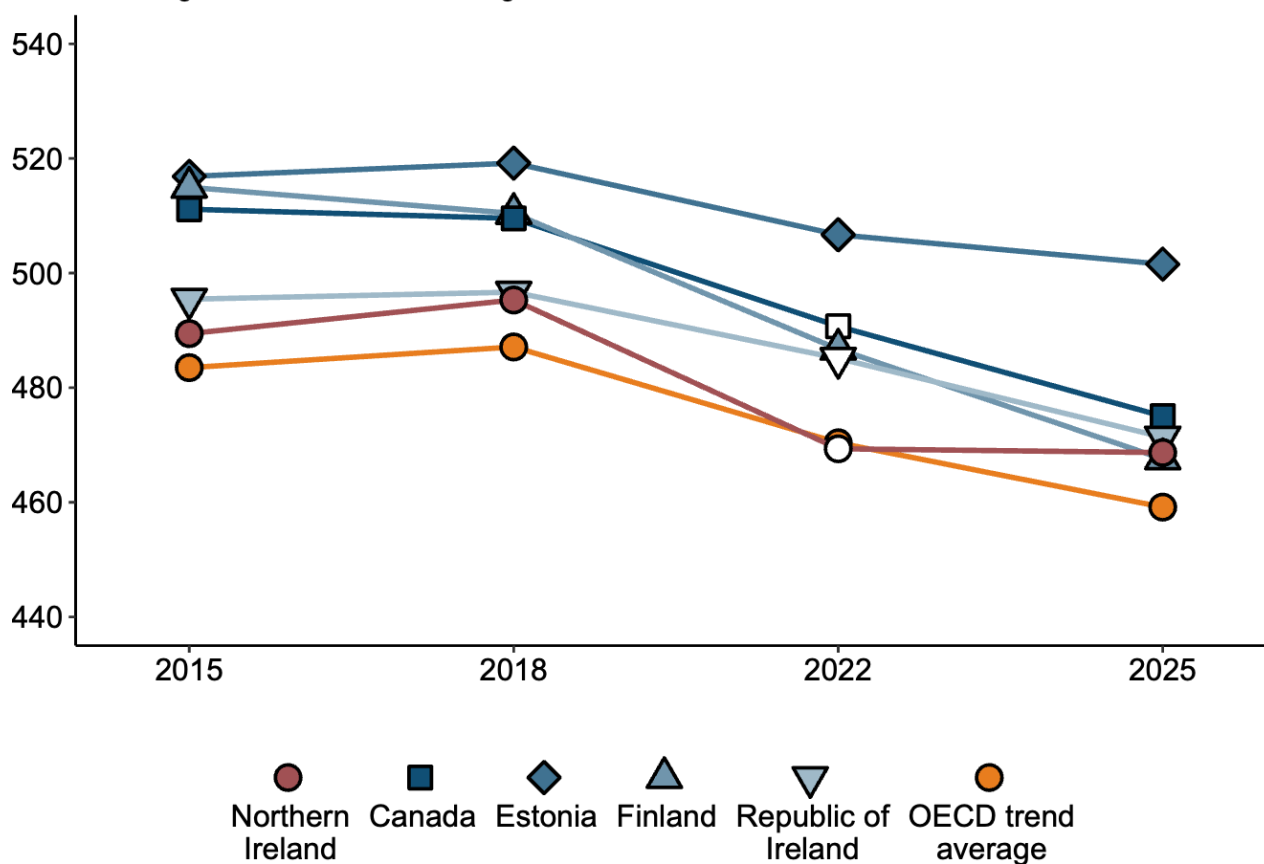
Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

5.5.4 What does PISA tell us about girls' performance in mathematics?

In 2025, the average mathematics score for girls in Northern Ireland (469) was significantly below the score in 2015 (489) reflecting a downward trend over this period (see Figure 5.15). The same pattern was found in each of the comparator countries and in the OECD trend average. In Northern Ireland, each comparator country and the OECD trend average, the mathematics scores in 2025 were also significantly below the scores in 2018. This was also the case when comparing the scores for 2025 and 2022, except in Northern Ireland and Estonia where there were no significant differences.

Figure 5.15 Trends in girls' mathematics performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD trend average

Overall average mathematics score for girls



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	* 489	* 495	469	469
Canada	* 511	* 510	* 491	475
Estonia	* 517	* 519	507	502
Finland	* 515	* 510	* 487	468
Republic of Ireland	* 495	* 497	* 485	471
OECD trend average	* 484	* 487	* 470	459

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.

Two countries with the same or similar score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure. OECD trend averages were calculated using PISA 2025 data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

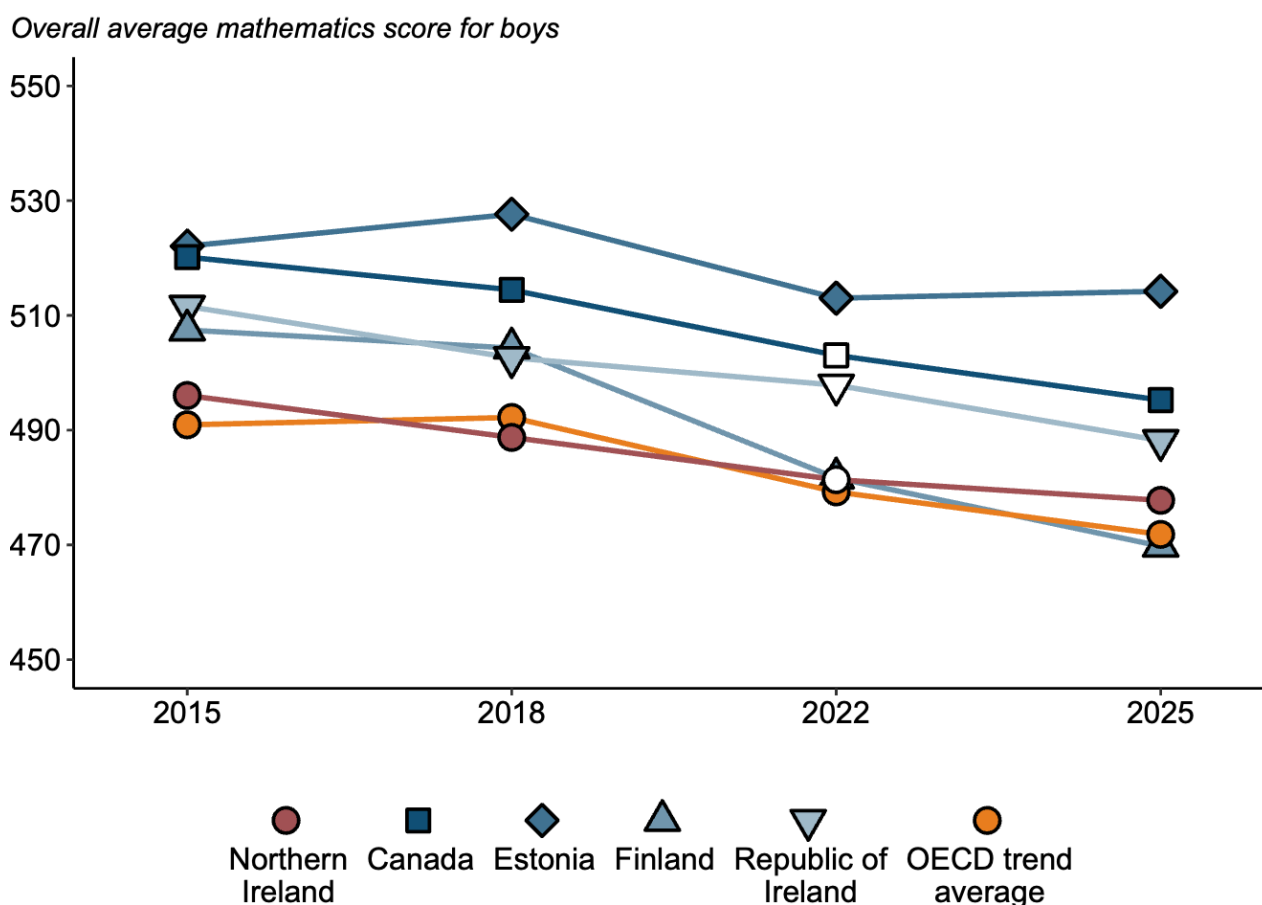
Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

5.5.5 What does PISA tell us about boys' performance in mathematics?

Figure 5.16 shows that in Northern Ireland there were no significant differences between the average score for boys in PISA 2025 (478) and the scores in 2022 (481) and 2018 (489). This contrasted with each of the comparator countries (except Estonia in 2022 where there was no significant difference) and the OECD trend average where average mathematics scores in 2025 were significantly below scores in 2018 and 2022.

The average mathematics score for boys in Northern Ireland in 2025 (478) was significantly below the average score in 2015 (496) reflecting a downward trend over this period. The same pattern was observed in each of the comparator countries (except Estonia) and the OECD trend average. The trend in Estonia was stable between 2015 and 2025 with no significant difference between the scores (522 and 514 respectively).

Figure 5.16 Trends in boys' mathematics performance in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD trend average



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	* 496	489	481	478
Canada	* 520	* 514	* 503	495
Estonia	522	* 528	513	514
Finland	* 507	* 504	* 482	470
Republic of Ireland	* 512	* 503	* 498	488
OECD trend average	* 491	* 492	* 479	472

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.*

Two countries with the same or similar score may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

OECD trend averages were calculated using PISA 2025 data for OECD countries that participated in all cycles, excluding Costa Rica and Spain.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

5.5.6 How did girls and boys in Northern Ireland perform at the 10th and 90th percentiles in mathematics?

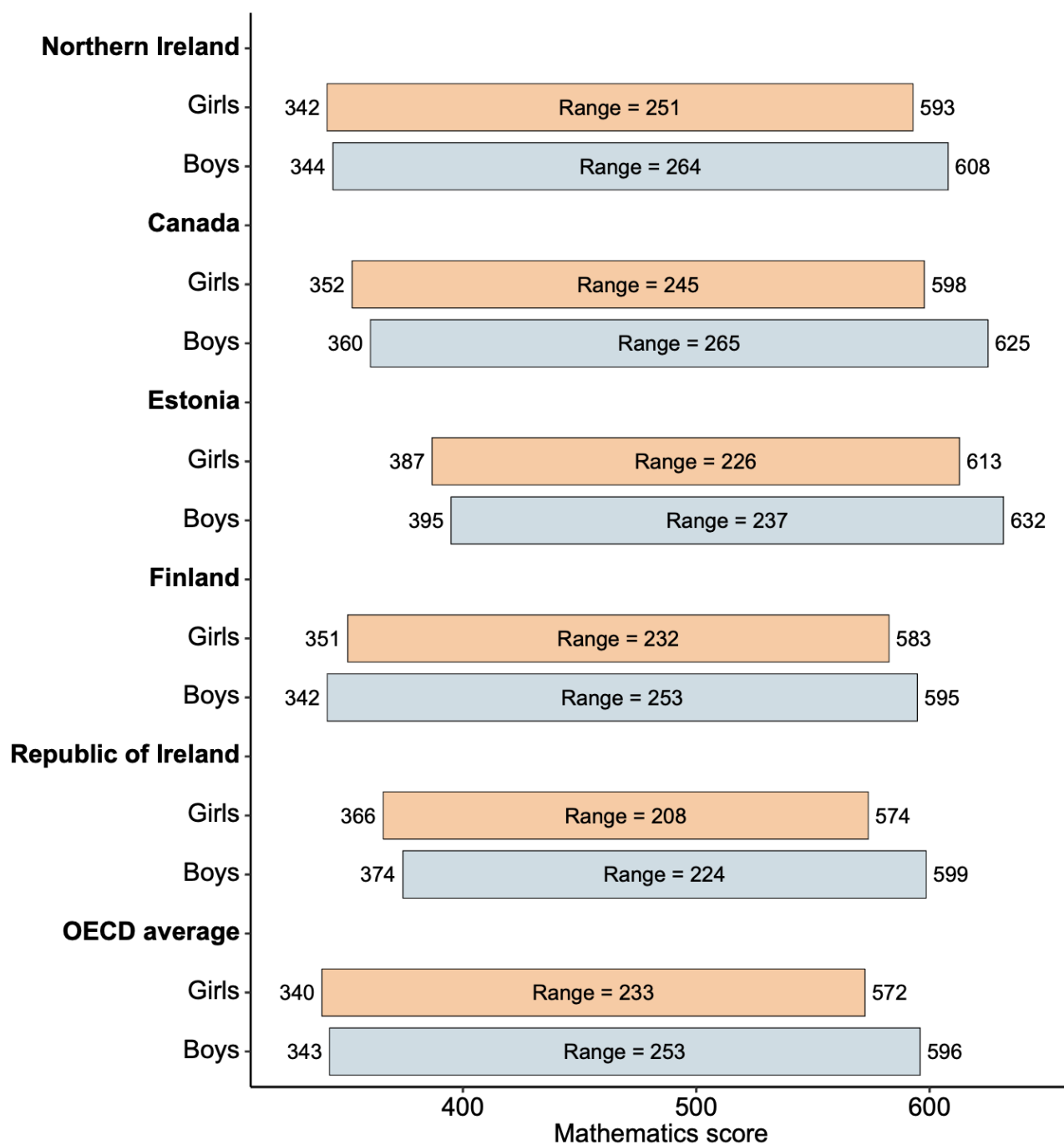
This section compares the performance of the highest- and lowest-achieving girls and boys using the 10th (lowest) and 90th (highest) percentile scores for mathematics and provides the difference (the interdecile range, shortened to range) between these two scores.

Figure 5.17 shows the average scores at the 10th and 90th percentiles and interdecile ranges for pupils in Northern Ireland, its comparator countries and the OECD average while Table 5.8 shows the significance of differences between girls' and boys' average scores and gender gaps.

In Northern Ireland, the average mathematics score at the 10th percentile for girls (342) was not significantly different from the corresponding score for boys (344). However, the average score at the 90th percentile for girls (593) was significantly below the corresponding score for boys (608), a difference of 15 points.

In Northern Ireland, the range in girls' mathematics scores (251) was not significantly different from the range in boys' scores (264), a pattern also observed in Estonia. By contrast, in each of the remaining comparator countries and the OECD average, ranges in girls' mathematics scores were significantly narrower than the ranges in boys' scores. In each case this was mostly driven by boys' stronger performance at the 90th percentile.

Figure 5.17 Performance of girls and boys at the 10th and 90th percentiles in mathematics in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



Country	Gender group	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
Northern Ireland	Girls	342	593	251
Northern Ireland	Boys	344	608	264
Canada	Girls	352	598	245
Canada	Boys	360	625	265
Estonia	Girls	387	613	226
Estonia	Boys	395	632	237
Finland	Girls	351	583	232
Finland	Boys	342	595	253
Republic of Ireland	Girls	366	574	208
Republic of Ireland	Boys	374	599	224
OECD average	Girls	340	572	233
OECD average	Boys	343	596	253

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Interdecile ranges were calculated as 90th percentile – 10th percentile.

Interdecile ranges may appear inconsistent due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 202

Table 5.8: Gender gaps at the 10th and 90th percentiles in mathematics in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average

Country	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
Northern Ireland	–3	* –15	–13
Canada	* –8	* –27	* –19
Estonia	–8	* –19	–11
Finland	* 9	* –12	* –21
Republic of Ireland	–8	* –25	* –16
OECD average	* –3	* –24	* –20

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Interdecile ranges were calculated as 90th percentile – 10th percentile.

Gaps were calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores and range of girls' scores – range of boys' scores.

Asterisks (*) indicate a significant gender gap (significant difference between girls' and boys' average score and significant difference in ranges of scores).

Two countries with the same or similar gap may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

5.5.7 To what extent did girls and boys in Northern Ireland reach the highest and lowest PISA proficiency levels in mathematics?

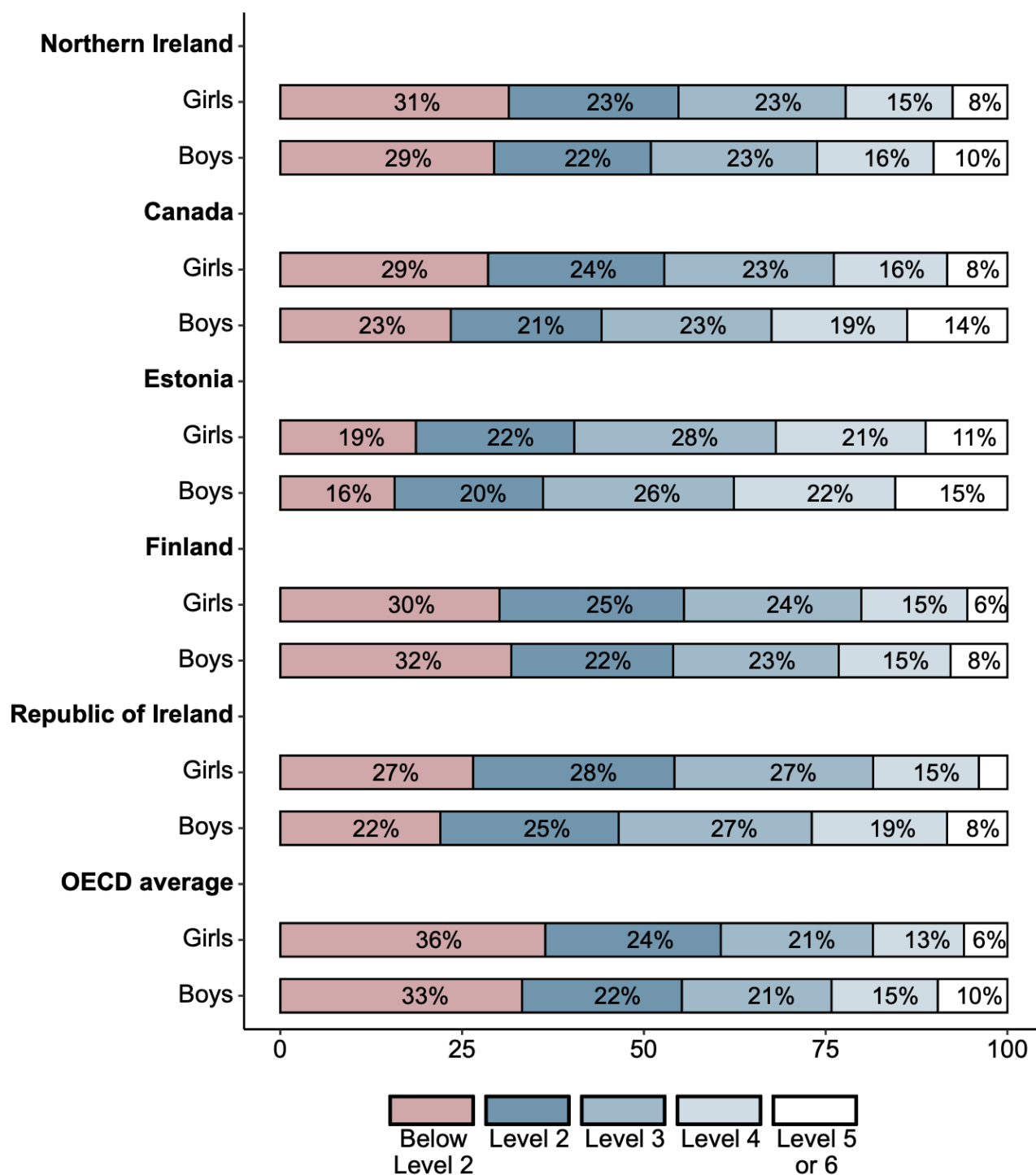
This section compares girls' and boys' performance in terms of the percentages attaining each of the PISA proficiency levels for mathematics (levels range between 1 and 6). In this section the proportion of higher-performing girls and boys (those attaining Level 5 or 6) and lower-performing girls and boys (those attaining below Level 2) are compared.

Figure 5.18 shows the percentages of girls and boys achieving each mathematics proficiency level in Northern Ireland, its comparator countries and the OECD average while Table 5.9 shows the significance of differences between girls' and boys' achievement at these levels.

In PISA 2025, a significantly smaller percentage of girls in Northern Ireland (8%) performed at Levels 5 or 6 in mathematics compared with boys (10%). The percentages of girls and boys in Northern Ireland performing below Level 2 were not significantly different (31% compared with 29% respectively).

In each comparator country, as in Northern Ireland and the OECD average, the percentages of girls performing at Levels 5 or 6 in mathematics were significantly below the percentages of boys. In Finland, as in Northern Ireland, there was no significant difference between the percentage of girls and boys performing below Level 2 in mathematics. By contrast, the percentages of girls performing below Level 2 in Canada, Estonia and the Republic of Ireland were significantly above the percentages of boys. This was also the case for the OECD average.

Figure 5.18 Percentage of pupils performing at each mathematics proficiency level in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



Country	Group	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	Girls	31%	23%	23%	15%	8%
Northern Ireland	Boys	29%	22%	23%	16%	10%
Canada	Girls	29%	24%	23%	16%	8%
Canada	Boys	23%	21%	23%	19%	14%
Estonia	Girls	19%	22%	28%	21%	11%
Estonia	Boys	16%	20%	26%	22%	15%
Finland	Girls	30%	25%	24%	15%	6%
Finland	Boys	32%	22%	23%	15%	8%
Republic of Ireland	Girls	27%	28%	27%	15%	4%
Republic of Ireland	Boys	22%	25%	27%	19%	8%
OECD Average	Girls	36%	24%	21%	13%	6%
OECD Average	Boys	33%	22%	21%	15%	10%

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Individual percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Percentages below 4.5% are not displayed on the chart for visual clarity.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Table 5.9 Gender gaps in the percentage of pupils at each proficiency level in mathematics in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average

Country	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	2%	2%	0%	–1%	* –3%
Canada	* 5%	* 3%	0%	* –3%	* –6%
Estonia	* 3%	1%	1%	–2%	* –4%
Finland	–2%	* 3%	2%	–1%	* –2%
Republic of Ireland	* 5%	* 3%	1%	* –4%	* –4%
OECD average	* 3%	* 2%	0%	* –2%	* –4%

Base: All participating pupils in the countries included.

Gaps were calculated as percentage of girls – percentage of boys.

Asterisks (*) indicate significant gender gaps.

Two countries with the same or similar percentage may have different outcomes from significance testing due to the different sample sizes and rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

6 Equity and Inclusion – Socioeconomic status and immigration status

6.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter we explore differences in pupils' PISA scores in science, reading and mathematics according to socioeconomic status and immigration status. As described in Chapter 1, the OECD average is the average for all the 38 OECD countries participating in 2025. The OECD trend average is the average for the 35 countries that participated in each of the latest 4 PISA cycles (2015, 2018, 2022 and 2025)⁴³.

6.2 Key findings

- In PISA 2025, the average score on the economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) Index for Northern Ireland's pupils was +0.15 indicating that, on average, pupils' socioeconomic status was higher than the average across OECD countries (0).
- There was an 82 score point difference in the average science score of the most disadvantaged quarter of pupils and the least disadvantaged quarter of pupils in Northern Ireland in 2025, not significantly different from the OECD average range (85 points).
- The same pattern was observed in reading, with the range in scores for Northern Ireland (66 points) not significantly different from the OECD average range (78 points) and in mathematics with the range in scores for Northern Ireland (90 points) not significantly different from the OECD average range (83 points).
- Pupils in Northern Ireland who were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieved average scores in science (450), reading (448) and mathematics (427) significantly below scores for pupils who were not eligible (504, 491, 486 respectively).
- The difference in science performance associated with a one-unit increase in the ESCS index⁴⁴ in Northern Ireland (31 score points) was not significantly different from the average across OECD countries (36 score points).
- In PISA 2025, the difference in reading performance associated with a one-unit increase in the ESCS index in 2025 was significantly smaller in Northern Ireland (24 score points) than on average across OECD countries (32 score points).

⁴³ The 35 OECD trend countries are those OECD countries in PISA 2025 that have participated in every cycle since PISA 2015, excluding Costa Rica and Spain. See Chapter 1 for further details.

⁴⁴ Low values indicate that socioeconomic status had less impact on pupil attainment; high values indicate that socioeconomic background had more impact on pupil attainment.

- The difference in mathematics performance associated with a one-unit increase in the ESCS index in Northern Ireland (34 score points) was not significantly different from the average across OECD countries (35 score points).
- In PISA 2025, the percentage of the variance⁴⁵ in pupils' science performance in Northern Ireland that could be explained by socioeconomic status was 10%, while in reading it was 6% and in mathematics it was 12%. On average across OECD countries 12% of the variance in science performance, 9% of the variance in reading performance and 12% of the variance in mathematics performance could be explained by socioeconomic status.
- In Northern Ireland 15% of pupils were academically resilient⁴⁶ in science, 17% were academically resilient in reading and 13% were academically resilient in mathematics in PISA 2025. On average across OECD countries 12% of pupils were academically resilient in science and mathematics while 13% were academically resilient in reading.
- In 2025, the average scores for pupils in Northern Ireland with a first-generation immigrant background in science, reading and mathematics were significantly below the scores for non-immigrant pupils.
- In science, reading and mathematics, the average scores for pupils in Northern Ireland in 2025 with a second-generation immigration background were significantly above the average scores for first-generation immigrant pupils and not significantly different from the scores for non-immigrant pupils.

6.3 Measures of socioeconomic status in Northern Ireland

6.3.1 The ESCS Index

The ESCS index is based on pupils' responses to questions about their parents' occupational status, education, and possessions in their homes⁴⁷.

The index is standardised across OECD countries with an average of 0 (representing the average socioeconomic status of a 15-year-old pupil across all participating OECD countries) and standard deviation of 1. This means almost all pupils will fall between -3 and +3 on the index. If a country's ESCS index is above 0, on average, pupils' socioeconomic status is above the average across all OECD countries. If a country's

⁴⁵ The average percentage of PISA score variation explained by socioeconomic status.

⁴⁶ A pupil is classified as being academically resilient if they are relatively disadvantaged in terms of their socioeconomic background (they are in the lowest quartile of the ESCS Index) but perform in the top quarter of pupils in that country.

⁴⁷ ESCS is based on 3 questionnaire variables related to family background (parents' highest level of education, parents' highest occupational status and home possessions). If two or more variables are missing, a pupil is assigned a missing value for ESCS.

ESCS index is below 0, on average pupils' socioeconomic status is below the average across all OECD countries.

The methodology for calculating the Economic, Social, and Cultural Status index (ESCS) was revised for the 2025 cycle. Although the index retains the same name and continues to measure socioeconomic background, a different methodology was used to calculate the index. At the time of writing, the exact details of these methodology changes were not available, and it was therefore not possible to make statistical comparisons between the 2025 cycle and previous cycles within this report.

Northern Ireland's mean score on the ESCS Index was +0.15 indicating that, on average, pupils' socioeconomic status in Northern Ireland was higher than the average across all OECD countries. In each comparator country, the mean score on the ESCS index was also above 0: Canada (+0.43), Estonia (+0.14), Finland (+0.17) and the Republic of Ireland (+0.33).

Relative to the OECD average, there was a similar percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland with missing or otherwise unavailable ESCS estimates (10% compared to 8% respectively)⁴⁸. This percentage of missing data should be considered when assessing the national representativeness of Northern Ireland's ESCS data.

6.3.2 Free school meals

In Northern Ireland, eligibility for free school meals (FSM) is used as a proxy measure for socioeconomic disadvantage. Table 6.1 shows the percentages of pupils eligible or not for FSM in Northern Ireland using 2 measures. The first of these is eligibility for FSM in the year of PISA assessments using the 2025/2026 academic year Northern Ireland School Census data. The second uses the School Census data to determine the percentage of pupils who have been recorded as eligible for FSM at any point in the past 6 years so that socioeconomic disadvantage is understood to be not just pertaining to a single point in time. For pupils in ESCS Quartile 1⁴⁹, 44% were eligible for FSM in 2025 and 69% were eligible for FSM at any point in the last six years.

⁴⁸ For the comparator countries, the percentages of pupils with missing or otherwise unavailable ESCS estimates were Canada (10%), Estonia (2%), Finland (5%) and the Republic of Ireland (3%)

⁴⁹ See section 6.4 for an explanation of ESCS Quartiles.

Table 6.1 FSM eligibility by ESCS deprivation quartile

ESCS Quartile	Pupils eligible for FSM (2025)	Pupils not eligible for FSM (2025)	Pupils eligible for FSM at any point in the last 6 years	Pupils not eligible for FSM at any point in the last 6 years	Missing FSM data
ESCS Quartile 1	44%	56%	69%	31%	0.3%
ESCS Quartile 2	22%	78%	44%	56%	0.2%
ESCS Quartile 3	12%	88%	28%	72%	0.8%
ESCS Quartile 4	3%	97%	10%	90%	0%
Missing ESCS	32%	68%	51%	49%	0%
All pupils	21%	79%	39%	61%	0.3%

Base: All participating pupils with ESCS data in Northern Ireland.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database, Northern Ireland School Census 2025

6.4 Analysis of the relationship between socioeconomic status and performance

There are 5 different ways to think about the relationship between socioeconomic status and attainment in PISA. Each of these is applied in the following sections for science (6.5), reading (6.6) and mathematics (6.7).

1. Measuring the difference in attainment, on average, between pupils with high socioeconomic status and those with low socioeconomic status using FSM data

By dividing pupils into groups of those who were eligible or not for FSM in 2025 or at any point in the past 6 years, comparisons can be made between their average scores.

2. Measuring the difference in attainment, on average, between pupils with high socioeconomic status and those with low socioeconomic status using the ESCS Index

By dividing pupils into 4 equal groups (quartiles)⁵⁰ according to their ESCS score a comparison can be made between their average scores. This includes calculating the interquartile range (shortened to range) of average scores between pupils who were most disadvantaged (Quartile 1) and those who were least disadvantaged (Quartile 4)⁵¹.

⁵⁰ See Chapter 1 (section 1.4.5) for definitions of quartiles and interquartile range.

⁵¹ In this report the focus is on the average score for Quartiles 1 and 4 and the interquartile range.

3. Measuring the extent to which pupils' subject scores correspond with their ESCS index score (the gradient of the slope)

The OECD plotted individual pupils' subject scores against their ESCS scores and calculated the average difference in performance associated with each unit on the ESCS index. This is known as the gradient or steepness of the slope where the steeper the slope, the larger the impact that disadvantage had on performance. Low values indicate that socioeconomic status had less impact on pupil attainment; high values indicate that socioeconomic background had more impact on pupil attainment. A slope of 30 would mean a one-unit increase in the ESCS index (which is quite a large change) is associated with 30 more points scored.

4. Measuring the variation between pupils with similar socioeconomic status

As many factors influence an individual pupil's score other than their socioeconomic status, a range of PISA scores at each point on the index would be expected. The OECD plotted pupils' average subject scores against each point on the ESCS index to calculate the average percentage of score variation explained by socioeconomic status. This is referred to as the strength of the socioeconomic effect. A strong effect will show less variability in the attainment of pupils with the same socioeconomic status, which implies that socioeconomic status is a dominant factor in determining outcomes. A weak effect will show more variability in the attainment of pupils with the same socioeconomic status, which implies that socioeconomic status was not a dominant factor in determining outcomes.

5. Calculating the percentage of pupils who were 'academically resilient'

Academically resilient pupils are those who succeed academically despite their comparatively low socioeconomic status. A pupil is classed as resilient in PISA if they are in the bottom quartile of the ESCS index in their country (Quartile 1) but perform in the top quartile of pupils in that country (Quartile 4).

6.5 What is the relationship between socioeconomic status and science performance in PISA in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average?

6.5.1 Science performance according to FSM eligibility

Table 6.2 shows that pupils who were eligible for FSM in 2025 achieved an average score of 450, significantly below pupils who were not eligible (504), a gap of 46 score points. Similarly, pupils who were eligible for FSM in the past 6 years in 2025 achieved an average score of 459 significantly below pupils who were not eligible (514), a gap of 55 score points.

Table 6.2 Pupils' science performance in Northern Ireland by FSM status

FSM eligibility	Percentage of pupils	Average score
Not eligible for FSM in 2025	79%	504
Eligible for FSM in 2025	21%	* 450
Not eligible for FSM at any point in the past 6 years	61%	514
Eligible for FSM at any point in the past 6 years	39%	* 459

Base: All participating pupils with FSM data in Northern Ireland.

Asterisks () indicate average scores for pupils eligible for FSM that are significantly different from the equivalent scores for pupils not eligible for FSM.*

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database and Northern Ireland School Census 2025

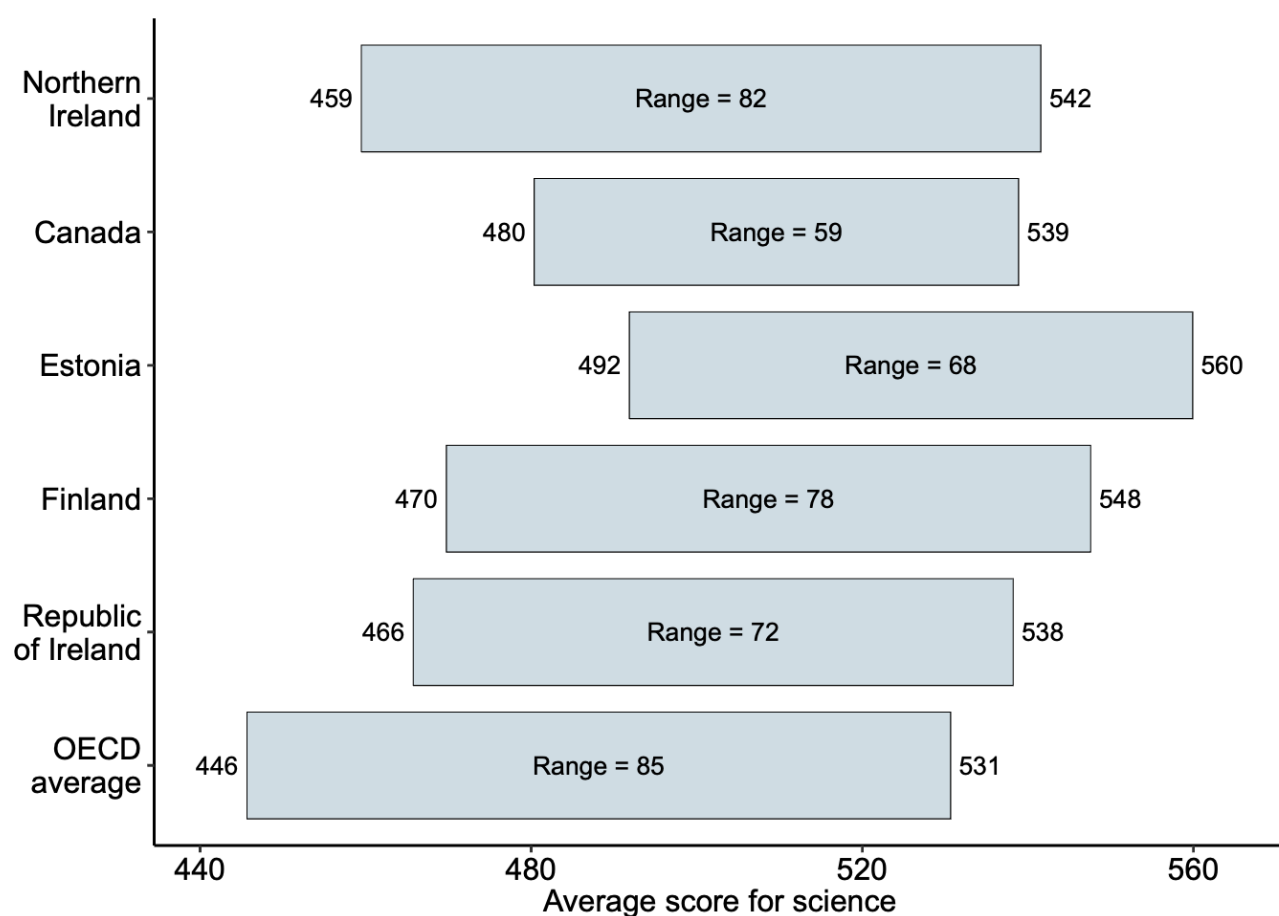
6.5.2 Range in science performance between ESCS Quartile 1 and Quartile 4

Figure 6.1 shows that the interquartile range (shortened to range)⁵² of average science scores in Northern Ireland between pupils in the most disadvantaged quartile (Quartile 1: 459) and those in the least disadvantaged quartile (Quartile 4: 542) was (82 points). This range was not significantly different from the OECD average range (85 points) or the ranges in each of the comparator countries, except in Canada.

In Canada there was a significantly narrower range of science scores compared with Northern Ireland (59 points compared with 82 points respectively). This difference was driven by pupils in Quartile 1 in Canada (480) scoring on average significantly above pupils in Quartile 1 in Northern Ireland (459) while there was no significant difference between the average science score for pupils in Quartile 4 in Canada (539) and Northern Ireland (542).

⁵² See Chapter 1 (section 1.4.5) for definitions of percentiles and interdecile range.

Figure 6.1 Range in science scores between PISA ESCS Quartiles 1 and 4 in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



Country	ESCS Quartile 1	ESCS Quartile 4	ESCS interquartile range
Northern Ireland	459	542	82
Canada	* 480	539	* 59
Estonia	* 492	* 560	68
Finland	* 470	548	78
Republic of Ireland	466	538	72
OECD average	* 446	* 531	85

Base: All participating pupils with ESCS data in the countries included.

Asterisks () indicate average scores and ranges that are significantly different from those for Northern Ireland.*

The range is calculated as the average score for Quartile 4 – the average score for Quartile 1.

Ranges may appear inconsistent with quartile scores due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

6.5.3 The strength of the relationship between ESCS and PISA science scores (gradient of the slope)

In Northern Ireland there was a 31-point difference in science performance associated with a one-unit increase in ESCS, compared with a 36-point difference on average across the OECD countries. The point difference in science performance in Northern Ireland was not significantly different from the average across the OECD countries, or from the differences in Canada (29 points), Estonia (34 points) or the Republic of Ireland (32 points). By contrast, there was a significantly stronger relationship between ESCS and PISA science scores in Finland (38 points) compared with Northern Ireland (31 points).

6.5.4 Variation between pupils with similar backgrounds

The percentage of the variation in science performance explained by socioeconomic status in Northern Ireland was 10%, compared with 12% on average across the OECD countries. In Estonia and the Republic of Ireland 10% of the variance in science performance was explained by the ESCS index while in Canada it was 6% and in Finland, 9%.

6.5.5 Percentage of pupils who were ‘academically resilient’

In Northern Ireland, 15% of pupils were academically resilient in the context of science performance, not significantly different from the OECD average (12%). Compared with Northern Ireland, the academically resilient rates in the comparator countries were also not significantly different: Canada (15%), Estonia (12%), Finland (14%) and the Republic of Ireland (14%).

6.5.6 To what extent did pupils in Northern Ireland reach the highest and lowest PISA proficiency levels in science by ESCS quartile?

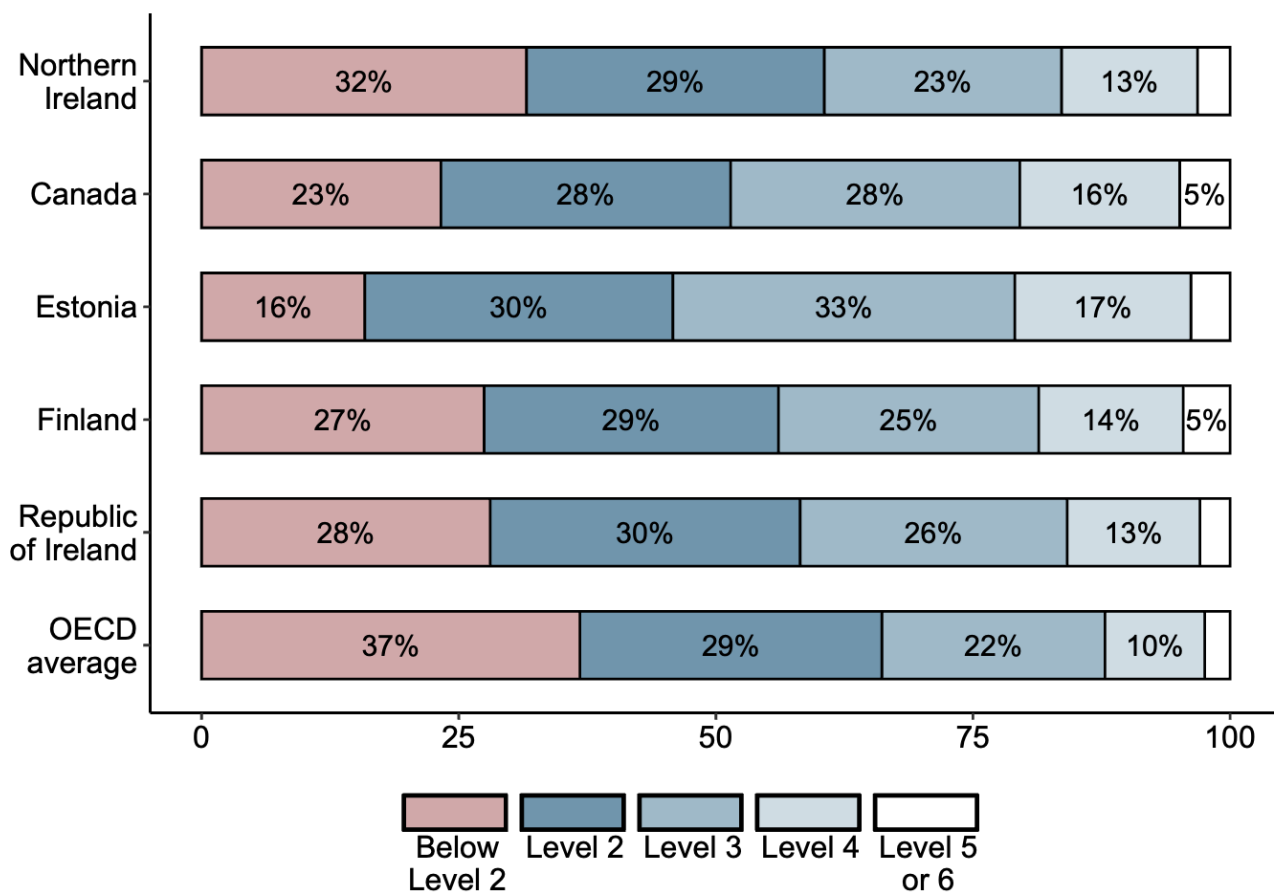
Quartile 1 (most disadvantaged pupils)

Figure 6.2 shows that the percentage of Northern Ireland’s pupils in Quartile 1 performing at the highest proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6) in science (3%) was not significantly different from the OECD average (2%) or the percentages of pupils in Estonia (4%), Finland (5%) and the Republic of Ireland (3%). By contrast, the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland was significantly smaller than the corresponding percentage in Canada (5%).

The percentage of Northern Ireland’s pupils in Quartile 1 performing below the baseline proficiency level (below Level 2) in science (32%) was significantly larger than the corresponding percentages in Canada (23%) and Estonia (16%). By contrast, the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland performing below Level 2 in science (32%) was significantly smaller than the OECD average (37%). There were no significant differences

between the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland (32%) and their peers in Finland (27%) and the Republic of Ireland (28%)

Figure 6.2 Percentage of pupils performing at each science proficiency level by ESCS Quartile 1 in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



Country	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	32%	29%	23%	13%	3%
Canada	* 23%	28%	* 28%	16%	* 5%
Estonia	* 16%	30%	* 33%	* 17%	4%
Finland	27%	29%	25%	14%	5%
Republic of Ireland	28%	30%	26%	13%	3%
OECD Average	* 37%	29%	22%	* 10%	2%

Base: All participating pupils with ESCS data in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate significant differences between the percentage of pupils in comparator countries or the OECD average compared with the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland.

Individual percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Percentages below 4.5% are not displayed on the chart for visual clarity.

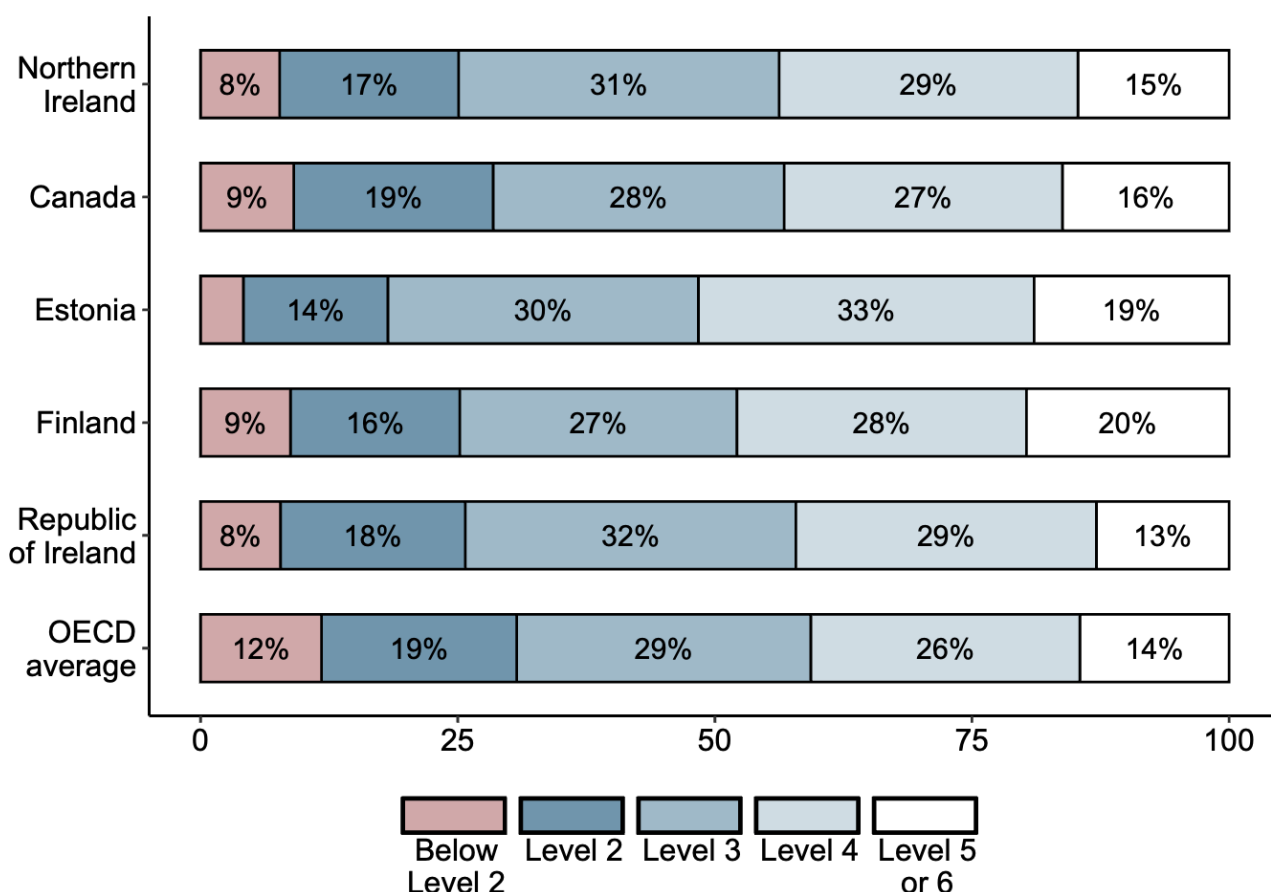
Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Quartile 4 (least disadvantaged pupils)

Figure 6.3 shows that the percentage of Northern Ireland's pupils in Quartile 4 performing at the highest proficiency levels (Levels 5 or 6) in science (15%) was significantly smaller than the corresponding percentages of pupils in Estonia (19%) and Finland (20%). By contrast, the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland performing at Levels 5 or 6 in science was not significantly different from the percentages in Canada (16%), the Republic of Ireland (13%) and the OECD average (14%).

The percentage of Northern Ireland's pupils in Quartile 4 performing below the baseline proficiency level (below Level 2) in science (8%) was significantly larger than the corresponding percentage in Estonia (4%) and significantly smaller than the OECD average (12%). Compared with Northern Ireland's pupils (8%), the percentages of pupils performing below the baseline in the remaining comparator countries were not significantly different (Canada (9%), Finland (9%) and the Republic of Ireland (8%)).

Figure 6.3 Percentage of pupils performing at each science proficiency level in ESCS Quartile 4 in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



Country	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	8%	17%	31%	29%	15%
Canada	9%	19%	28%	27%	16%
Estonia	* 4%	14%	30%	33%	* 19%
Finland	9%	16%	27%	28%	* 20%
Republic of Ireland	8%	18%	32%	29%	13%
OECD Average	* 12%	19%	29%	26%	14%

Base: All participating pupils with ESCS data in the countries included.

Asterisks (*) indicate significant differences between the percentage of pupils in comparator countries or the OECD average compared with the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland.

Individual percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Percentages below 4.5% are not displayed on the chart for visual clarity.

Source: OECD PISA database 2025

6.6 What is the relationship between socioeconomic status and reading performance in PISA in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average?

6.6.1 Reading performance according to FSM eligibility

As shown in Table 6.3 below, pupils who were eligible for FSM in 2025 achieved an average reading score of 448, significantly below pupils who were not eligible (491), a gap of 43 score points. Similarly, pupils who were eligible for FSM in the past 6 years in 2025 achieved an average score of 453 significantly below pupils who were not eligible (500), a gap of 47 score points.

Table 6.3 Pupils' reading performance in Northern Ireland by FSM status

FSM eligibility	Percentage of pupils	Average score
Not eligible for FSM in 2025	79%	491
Eligible for FSM in 2025	21%	* 448
Not eligible for FSM at any point in the last 6 years	61%	500
Eligible for FSM at any point in the last 6 years	39%	* 453

Base: All participating pupils with FSM data in Northern Ireland.

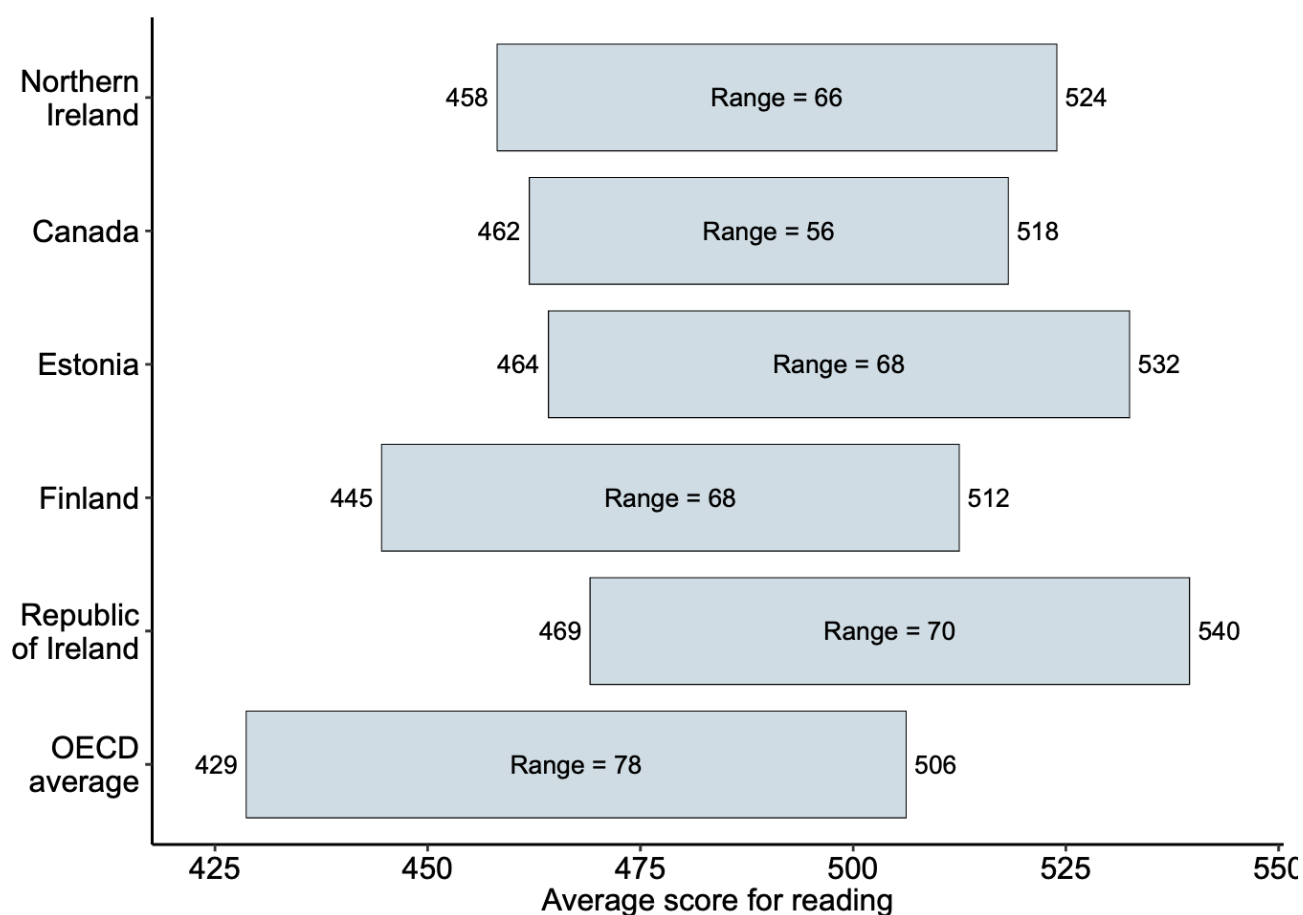
Asterisks (*) indicate average scores for pupils eligible for FSM that are significantly different from the equivalent scores for pupils not eligible for FSM.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database and Northern Ireland School Census 2025

6.6.2 Range in reading performance between ESCS Quartile 1 and Quartile 4

Figure 6.4 shows that the interquartile range (shortened to range)⁵³ of average reading scores in Northern Ireland between pupils in the most disadvantaged quartile (Quartile 1: 458) and those in the least disadvantaged quartile (Quartile 4: 524) was 66 points. This was not significantly different from the interquartile ranges in Canada (56 points), Estonia (68 points), Finland (68 points), the Republic of Ireland (70 points) or the OECD average (78 points).

Figure 6.4 Range in reading performance between ESCS Index Quartiles 1 and 4 in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



⁵³ See Chapter 1 (section 1.4.5) for definitions of percentiles and interdecile range.

Country	ESCS Quartile 1	ESCS Quartile 4	ESCS interquartile range
Northern Ireland	458	524	66
Canada	462	518	56
Estonia	464	532	68
Finland	*445	* 512	68
Republic of Ireland	* 469	* 540	70
OECD average	* 429	* 506	78

Base: All participating pupils with ESCS data in the countries included.

Asterisks () indicate average scores and ranges that are significantly different from those for Northern Ireland.*

The range is calculated as the average score for Quartile 4 – the average score for Quartile 1.

Ranges may appear inconsistent with quartile scores due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

6.6.3 The strength of the relationship between ESCS and PISA reading scores (gradient of the slope)

In Northern Ireland there was a 24-point difference in reading performance associated with a one-unit increase in ESCS, significantly below the OECD average (32 points). This means there was a significantly stronger relationship between socioeconomic status and reading scores across the OECD countries on average. This was also the case in Estonia (33 points), Finland (33 points) and the Republic of Ireland (30 points) compared with Northern Ireland (24 points). By contrast, the point difference in reading performance in Northern Ireland was not significantly different from the difference in Canada (27 points).

6.6.4 Variation between pupils with similar backgrounds

The percentage of the variation in reading performance explained by socioeconomic status in Northern Ireland was 6%, compared with 9% on average across the OECD countries. In Estonia 8% of the variance in reading performance was explained by the ESCS index while in Canada it was 5%, in Finland, 7% and in the Republic of Ireland, 9%.

6.6.5 Percentage of pupils who were ‘academically resilient’

In Northern Ireland, 17% of pupils were academically resilient in the context of reading performance, significantly above the OECD average (13%). Compared with Northern Ireland, the academically resilient rates in the comparator countries were not significantly different: Canada (15%), Finland (14%) and the Republic of Ireland (14%). By contrast, the rate in Northern Ireland (17%) was significantly above the rate in Estonia (12%).

6.7 What is the relationship between socioeconomic status and mathematics performance in PISA in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average?

6.7.1 Mathematics performance according to FSM eligibility

Table 6.4 shows that pupils who were eligible for FSM in 2025 achieved an average mathematics score of 427, significantly below pupils who were not eligible (486), a gap of 59 score points. Similarly, pupils who were eligible for FSM in the past 6 years in 2025 achieved an average score of 437 significantly below pupils who were not eligible (497), a gap of 60 score points.

Table 6.4 Pupils' mathematics performance in Northern Ireland by FSM status

FSM eligibility	Percentage of pupils	Average score
Not eligible for FSM in 2025	79%	486
Eligible for FSM in 2025	21%	* 427
Not eligible for FSM at any point in the last 6 years	61%	497
Eligible for FSM at any point in the last 6 years	39%	* 437

Base: All participating pupils with FSM data in Northern Ireland.

Asterisks () indicate average scores for pupils eligible for FSM that are significantly different from the equivalent scores for pupils not eligible for FSM.*

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database and Northern Ireland School Census 2025

6.7.2 Range in mathematics performance between ESCS Quartile 1 and Quartile 4

Figure 6.5 shows that the interquartile range (shortened to range)⁵⁴ of average mathematics scores in Northern Ireland between pupils in the most disadvantaged quartile (Quartile 1: 437) and those in the least disadvantaged quartile (Quartile 4: 527) was 90 points. This range was not significantly different from the OECD average range (83 points).

However, the range in mathematics scores in Northern Ireland (90 points) was significantly wider than in Canada (63 points), Estonia (76 points), Finland (71 points), and the Republic of Ireland (72 points).

In Canada the narrower range was driven by two factors. Pupils in Quartile 1 achieved an average score of 453, significantly above the corresponding score in Northern Ireland

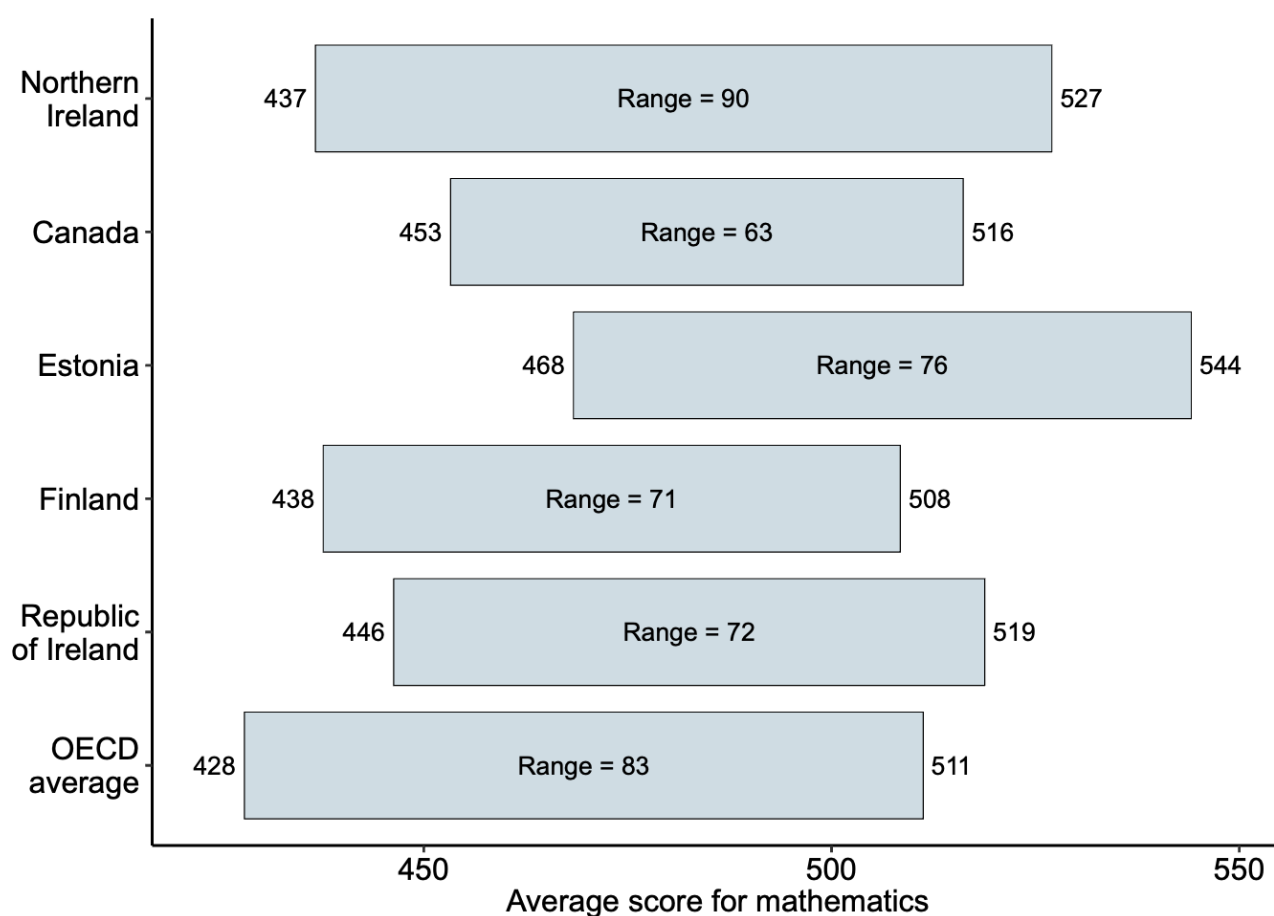
⁵⁴ See Chapter 1 (section 1.4.5) for definitions of percentiles and interdecile range.

(437) while pupils in Quartile 4 achieved an average score of 516 significantly below the score in Northern Ireland (527).

In Finland, the narrower range in mathematics scores was driven by its pupils in Quartile 4 achieving an average score (508) significantly below the corresponding score in Northern Ireland (527).

In Estonia and the Republic of Ireland, the narrower ranges in mathematics scores were driven by pupils in Quartile 1 achieving average scores (468 and 446 respectively) significantly above the corresponding score in Northern Ireland (437).

Figure 6.5 Range in mathematics performance between ESCS Index Quartiles 1 and 4 in Northern Ireland, comparator countries and the OECD average



Country	ESCS Quartile 1	ESCS Quartile 4	ESCS interquartile range
Northern Ireland	437	527	90
Canada	* 453	* 516	* 63
Estonia	* 468	* 544	* 76
Finland	438	* 508	* 71
Republic of Ireland	* 446	519	* 72
OECD Average	* 428	* 511	83

Base: All participating pupils with ESCS data in the countries included.

Asterisks () indicate average scores and ranges that are significantly different from those for Northern Ireland.*

The range is calculated as the average score for Quartile 4 – the average score for Quartile 1.

Ranges may appear inconsistent with quartile scores due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

6.7.3 The strength of the relationship between ESCS and PISA mathematics scores (the gradient of the slope)

In Northern Ireland there was a 34-point difference in mathematics performance associated with a one-unit increase in ESCS. The point difference in mathematics performance in Northern Ireland was not significantly different from those recorded in Canada (31 points), Estonia (37 points), Finland (34 points), the Republic of Ireland (31 points) or the OECD average (35 points).

6.7.4 Variation between pupils with similar backgrounds

The percentage of the variation in mathematics performance explained by socioeconomic status in both Northern Ireland and on average across the OECD countries was 12%. In Estonia the equivalent figure was also 11% while in Canada it was 7%, in Finland, 9% and in the Republic of Ireland, 11%.

6.7.5 Percentage of pupils who were ‘academically resilient’

In Northern Ireland, 13% of pupils were academically resilient in the context of mathematics performance, not significantly different from the OECD average (12%). Compared with Northern Ireland, the academically resilient rates in the comparator countries were also not significantly different: Canada (14%), Estonia (11%), Finland (13%) and the Republic of Ireland (13%).

6.8 Does performance differ by immigration status?

The pupil questionnaire in PISA 2025 collected information which identifies whether pupils are first- or second-generation immigrants. PISA defines immigrant pupils as those whose mother and father were both born in a country/economy other than that where the pupil took the PISA test. The 3 categories of immigrant background used were:

- non-immigrant pupils - those whose parent/carer (or both) was/were born in the country where the pupil sat the PISA test, regardless of whether the pupil him/herself was born in that country
- first-generation immigrant pupils – those who were born in another country and whose parents/carers were also born in another country
- second-generation immigrant pupils – those born in the country of assessment but whose parents/carers were both born in another country

The percentage of pupils across the OECD countries with an immigrant background was 15% in 2025. In Northern Ireland the percentage of pupils with an immigrant background was 12%, though data were not available for the immigration status of 10% in the OECD and 7% of pupils in Northern Ireland.

Science

Table 6.5 shows that, in Northern Ireland the average science score for pupils with a first-generation immigrant background (454) was significantly below the score for non-immigrant pupils (501) and pupils with a second-generation immigrant background (502). The average score of non-immigrant pupils (501) was not significantly different from the average score for pupils with a second-generation immigrant background (502).

On average across OECD countries, the average science scores for pupils with either a first-generation (437) or second-generation (460) immigrant background were significantly below the average score for non-immigrant pupils (495).

Table 6.5 Immigration background and average science scores in Northern Ireland and the OECD average

Pupil group	Northern Ireland	OECD average
Non-immigrant pupils	501	495
First-generation pupils	454	437
Second-generation pupils	502	460
Difference between non-immigrant pupils and second-generation pupils	–1	* 35
Difference between first-generation pupils and non-immigrant pupils	* –46	* –58
Difference between first-generation pupils and second-generation pupils	* –48	* –23

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland and the OECD with data on immigration status.

The difference between the performance of non-immigrant pupils and second-generation pupils is calculated as the average score for non-immigrant pupils – the average score for second-generation pupils.

The difference between the performance of first-generation and non-immigrant pupils is calculated as the average score for first-generation pupils – the average score for non-immigrant pupils.

The difference between the performance of first-generation pupils and second-generation pupils is calculated as the average score for first-generation pupils – the average score for second-generation pupils.

Some results may appear inconsistent due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

Reading

Table 6.6 shows that in Northern Ireland the average reading score of pupils with a first-generation immigrant background (438) was significantly below the score of non-immigrant pupils (491) and pupils with a second-generation immigrant background (493). The average score of non-immigrant pupils (491) was not significantly different from the average score of pupils with a second-generation immigrant background (493).

On average across OECD countries, the average reading scores of pupils with either a first-generation (414) or second-generation (442) immigrant background were significantly below the average score for non-immigrant pupils (474).

Table 6.6 Immigration background and average reading scores in Northern Ireland and the OECD average

Pupil group	Northern Ireland	OECD average
Non-immigrant pupils	491	474
First-generation pupils	438	414
Second-generation pupils	493	442
Difference between non-immigrant pupils and second-generation pupils	–2	* 32
Difference between first-generation pupils and non-immigrant pupils	* –53	* –60
Difference between first-generation pupils and second-generation pupils	* –55	* –27

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland and the OECD with data on immigration status.

The difference between the performance of non-immigrant pupils and second-generation pupils is calculated as the average score for non-immigrant pupils – the average score for second-generation pupils.

The difference between the performance of first-generation and non-immigrant pupils is calculated as the average score for first-generation pupils – the average score for non-immigrant pupils.

The difference between the performance of first-generation pupils and second-generation pupils is calculated as the average score for first-generation pupils – the average score for second-generation pupils.

Some results may appear inconsistent due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

Mathematics

Table 6.7 shows that in Northern Ireland the average mathematics score of pupils with a first-generation immigrant background (427) was significantly below the score of pupils with a non-immigrant background (482) and pupils with a second-generation immigrant background (491). By contrast, the average score of pupils with a non-immigrant background (482) was not significantly different from the average scores of second-generation immigrant pupils (491).

On average across OECD countries, the average mathematics scores of pupils with either a first-generation (433) or second-generation (447) immigrant background were significantly below the average score for non-immigrant pupils (474).

Table 6.7 Immigration background and average mathematics scores in Northern Ireland and the OECD average

Pupil group	Northern Ireland	OECD average
Non-immigrant pupils	482	474
First-generation pupils	427	433
Second-generation pupils	491	447
Difference between non-immigrant pupils and second-generation pupils	–9	* 28
Difference between first-generation pupils and non-immigrant pupils	* –55	* –41
Difference between first-generation pupils and second-generation pupils	* –64	* –14

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland and the OECD with data on immigration status.

The difference between the performance of non-immigrant pupils and second-generation pupils is calculated as the average score for non-immigrant pupils – the average score for second-generation pupils.

The difference between the performance of first-generation and non-immigrant pupils is calculated as the average score for first-generation pupils – the average score for non-immigrant pupils.

The difference between the performance of first-generation pupils and second-generation pupils is calculated as the average score for first-generation pupils – the average score for second-generation pupils.

Some results may appear inconsistent due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

7 PISA across the United Kingdom

7.1 Chapter overview

This chapter describes the average PISA scores for science, reading and mathematics for pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. This chapter also describes the relative performance of the highest- and lowest-achieving pupils in each UK country, the relative gender differences, and the relative differences between the most and least disadvantaged socioeconomic groups.

7.2 Key findings

- In PISA 2025, the average score for pupils in science in Northern Ireland was 492, significantly above the corresponding score in Wales (476), not significantly different from the score in Scotland (491) and significantly below the score in England (516).
- Pupils' average score for reading in Northern Ireland was 482, significantly above the corresponding score in Wales (459), not significantly different from the score in Scotland (488) and significantly below the score in England (497).
- Pupils' average score for mathematics in Northern Ireland was 473 significantly above the corresponding score in Wales (456), not significantly different from the score in Scotland (467) and significantly below the score in England (492).
- Each UK country saw a stable trend over time in science with no significant difference in pupils' average score between PISA 2015 and 2025.
- In Northern Ireland and Wales there were significant downward trends in pupils' average reading scores between PISA 2015 (497 and 477 respectively) and 2025 (482 and 459 respectively). In England and Scotland, average reading scores remained stable over the same period with no significant score differences.
- In mathematics, pupils' average score in Northern Ireland in 2025 (473) was not significantly different from pupils' scores in 2022 (475). By contrast, there was a significant downward trend in pupils' average scores in Northern Ireland between PISA 2015 (493) and 2025 (473). The same trend was observed in Scotland and Wales while the trend for pupils' scores in England was stable over the same period.
- In PISA 2025, there were no significant differences between the average science scores for girls and boys in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. By contrast, there was a significant gender gap in favour of boys in England.
- Gender differences in PISA 2025 were consistent across the 4 countries for reading with girls achieving significantly higher average scores than boys.

- There were no significant differences between the average mathematics scores for girls and boys in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025 while in each of the other countries there was a significant gender gap favouring boys.
- As in previous cycles, pupils from less disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds performed better than their peers from more disadvantaged backgrounds across all domains and all countries.

7.3 Introduction

Though there are many similarities between Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, and Wales there are also substantive differences in terms of their education systems, culture, and demographic composition. The purpose of this chapter is not to explore possible explanations for the differing scores between the UK countries rather it summarises and compares their scores within the 3 PISA subject domains of science, reading and mathematics.

7.4 How did pupils perform in each domain?

Figure 7.1 shows the average PISA scores for each country in each of the 3 domains. Not all differences between countries were significant meaning their rank order should be interpreted with caution. This section focuses on significant differences between the average scores in Northern Ireland and the other UK countries.

Science

Pupils' average score for science in Northern Ireland was 492, significantly above the corresponding score in Wales (476) and not significantly different from the score in Scotland (491). By contrast, the score in Northern Ireland was significantly below that for pupils in England (516).

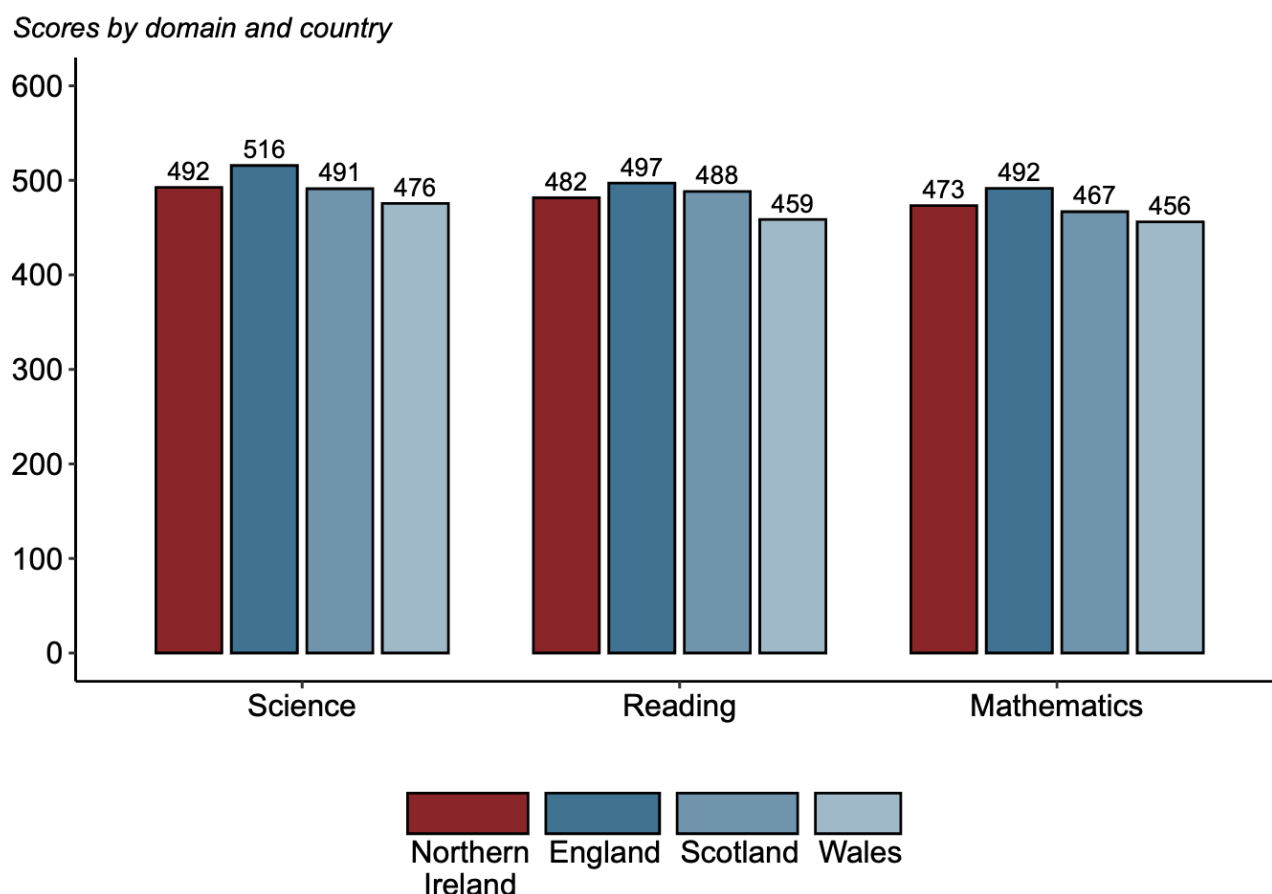
Reading

Pupils' average score for reading in Northern Ireland was 482, significantly above the corresponding score in Wales (459) and not significantly different from the score in Scotland (488). By contrast, the score in Northern Ireland was significantly below the score for pupils in England (497).

Mathematics

Pupils' average score for mathematics in Northern Ireland was 473, significantly above the corresponding score in Wales (456) and not significantly different from the score in Scotland (467). The score in Northern Ireland was significantly below the score for pupils in England (492).

Figure 7.1 Pupils' average PISA domain scores by country



Country	Science	Reading	Mathematics
Northern Ireland	492	482	473
England	* 516	* 497	* 492
Scotland	491	488	467
Wales	* 476	* 459	* 456

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Asterisks (*) indicate average scores that are significantly different from the average score for pupils in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

7.5 How did pupils perform across the PISA proficiency levels?

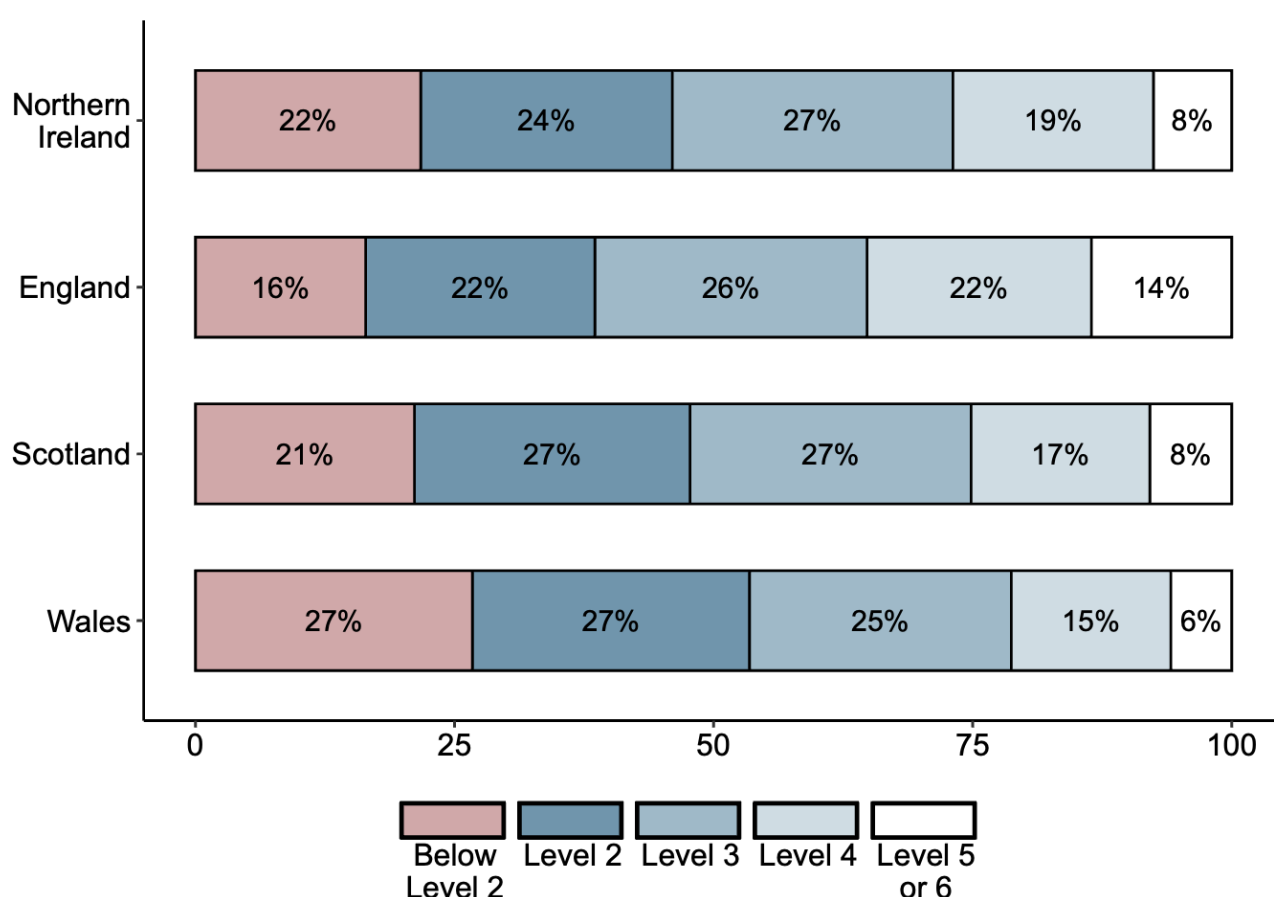
The UK countries may also be compared in terms of the percentages of pupils attaining each of the PISA proficiency levels for science, reading and mathematics (levels range between 1 and 6). In the following sections the proportion of higher-performing pupils (those attaining Level 5 or Level 6) and lower-performing pupils (those attaining below Level 2) are compared across the UK countries.

Science

Figure 7.2 shows that in Northern Ireland, the percentage of pupils performing at Levels 5 or 6 in science was 8%. This percentage was significantly larger than the corresponding percentage in Wales (6%) and the same as the percentage in Scotland (8%). By contrast, the percentage in Northern Ireland (8%) was significantly smaller than the percentage of pupils in England (14%).

The percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland performing below Level 2 in science was 22%. This percentage was significantly smaller than the corresponding percentage in Wales (27%) and not significantly different from the percentage in Scotland (21%). By contrast, the percentage of pupils achieving below Level 2 in science in Northern Ireland (22%) was significantly larger than the percentage of pupils in England (16%).

Figure 7.2: Percentage of pupils achieving each science proficiency level by country



Country	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	22%	24%	27%	19%	8%
England	* 16%	22%	26%	22%	* 14%
Scotland	21%	27%	27%	17%	8%
Wales	* 27%	27%	25%	* 15%	* 6%

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Asterisks () indicate percentages that are significantly different from the percentages for pupils in Northern Ireland.*

Individual percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

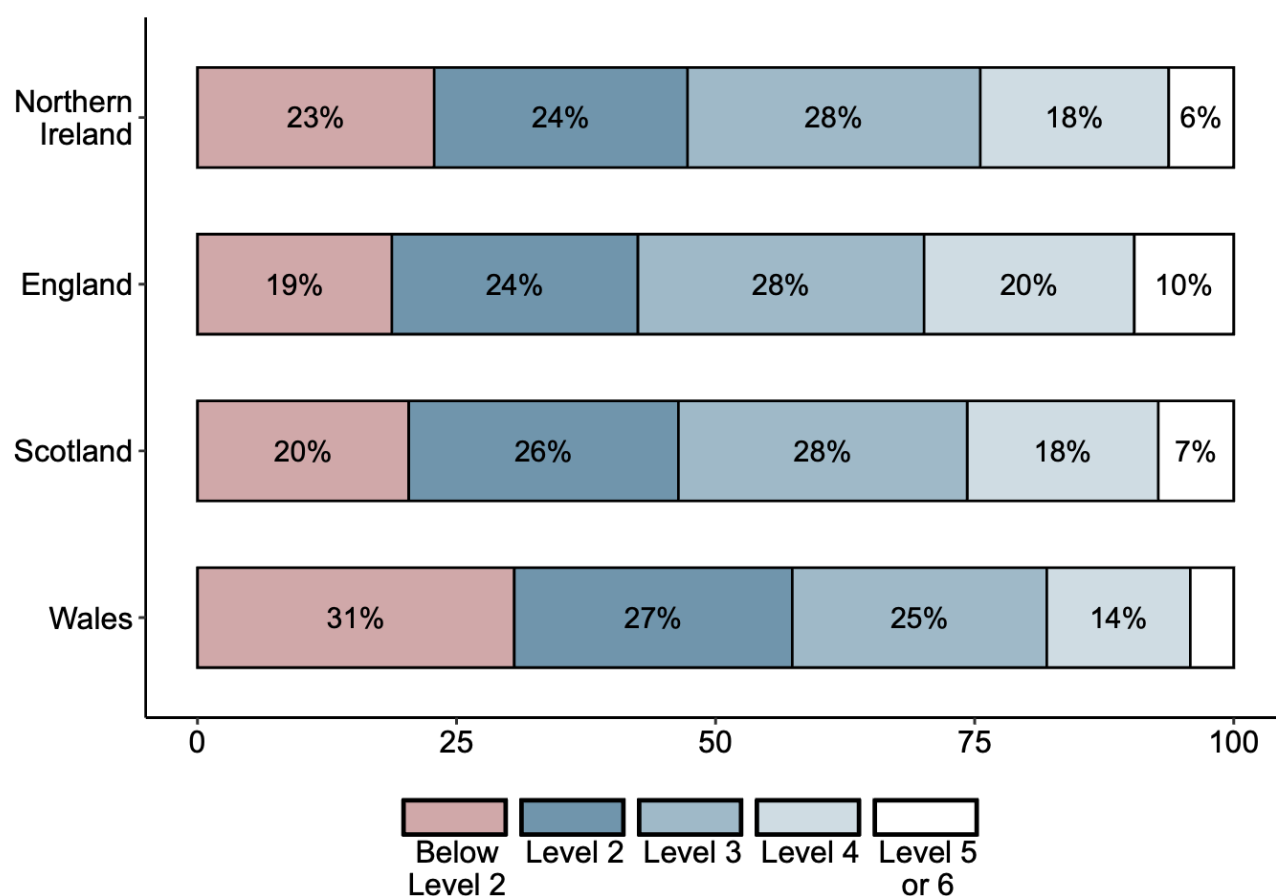
Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Reading

Figure 7.3 shows that in Northern Ireland, the percentage of pupils performing at Level 5 or 6 in reading was 6%. This percentage was significantly larger than the corresponding percentage in Wales (4%) and not significantly different from the percentage in Scotland (7%). By contrast, the percentage in Northern Ireland (6%) was significantly smaller than the percentage of pupils in England (10%).

The percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland performing below Level 2 in reading was 23%. This percentage was significantly smaller than the corresponding percentage in Wales (31%) and not significantly different from the percentage in Scotland (20%). By contrast, the percentage of pupils achieving below Level 2 in reading in Northern Ireland (23%) was significantly larger than the percentage of pupils in England (19%).

Figure 7.3: Percentage of pupils achieving each reading proficiency level by country



Country	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	23%	24%	28%	18%	6%
England	* 19%	24%	28%	20%	* 10%
Scotland	20%	26%	28%	18%	7%
Wales	* 31%	27%	* 25%	* 14%	* 4%

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Asterisks (*) indicate percentages that are significantly different from the percentages for pupils in Northern Ireland.

Individual percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Percentages below 4.5% are not displayed on the chart for visual clarity.

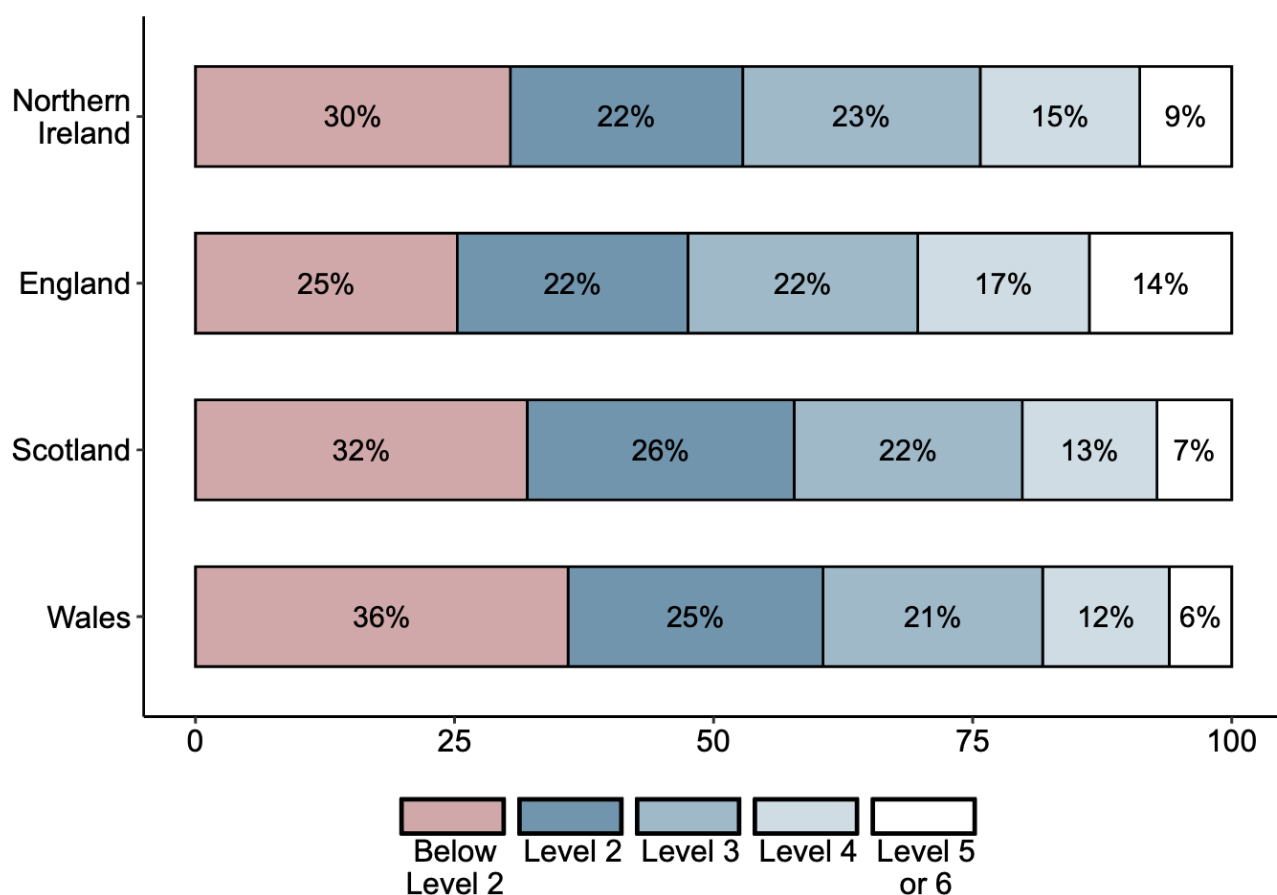
Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Mathematics

Figure 7.4 shows that in Northern Ireland, the percentage of pupils performing at Levels 5 or 6 in mathematics was 9%. This percentage was significantly larger than the corresponding percentage in Wales (6%) and not significantly different from the percentage in Scotland (7%). By contrast, the percentage in Northern Ireland (9%) was significantly smaller than the percentage of pupils in England (14%).

The percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland performing below Level 2 in mathematics was 30%. This percentage was significantly smaller than the corresponding percentage in Wales (36%) and not significantly different from the percentage in Scotland (32%). However, the percentage of pupils achieving below Level 2 in mathematics in Northern Ireland (30%) was significantly larger than the percentage of pupils in England (25%).

Figure 7.4 Percentage of pupils achieving each mathematics proficiency level by country



Country	Below Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5 or 6
Northern Ireland	30%	22%	23%	15%	9%
England	* 25%	22%	22%	17%	* 14%
Scotland	32%	* 26%	22%	* 13%	7%
Wales	* 36%	25%	21%	* 12%	* 6%

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Asterisks (*) indicate percentages that are significantly different from the percentages for pupils in Northern Ireland.

Individual percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

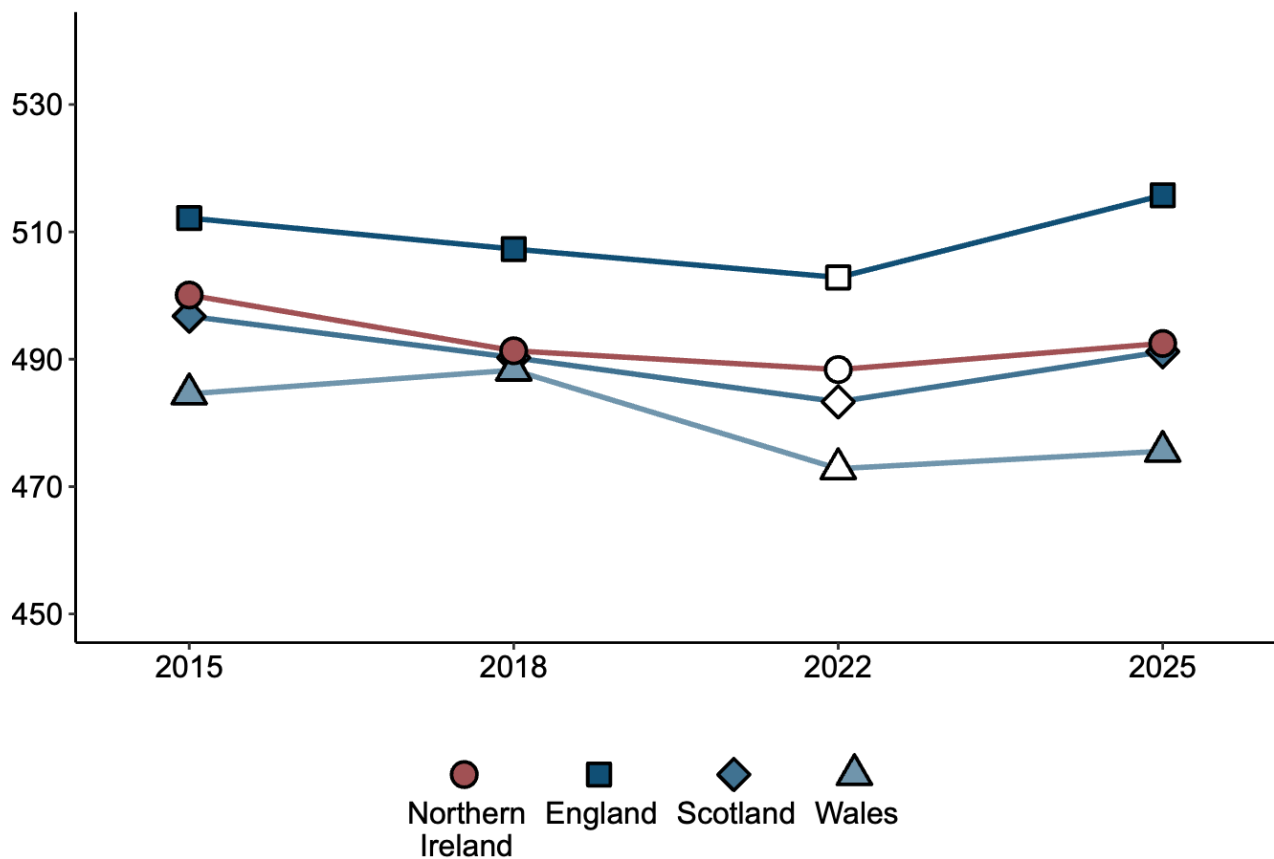
7.6 How did pupils perform over time?

Science

Figure 7.5 shows that the average science score for pupils in Northern Ireland in PISA 2025 (492) was not significantly different from the scores for the previous 3 cycles (2022: 488, 2018: 491, 2015: 500) reflecting a stable trend. The same stability was observed in Scotland, while the same was true for England and Wales over the longer term, between 2015 and 2025. By contrast, the average science score for pupils in England in 2025 (516) was significantly above the score in 2022 (503) and in Wales the average science score for pupils in 2025 (476) was significantly below the score in 2018 (488).

Figure 7.5 Trend in pupils' average science score by country

Overall average science score



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	500	491	488	492
England	512	507	* 503	516
Scotland	497	490	483	491
Wales	485	* 488	473	476

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Asterisks () indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.*

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

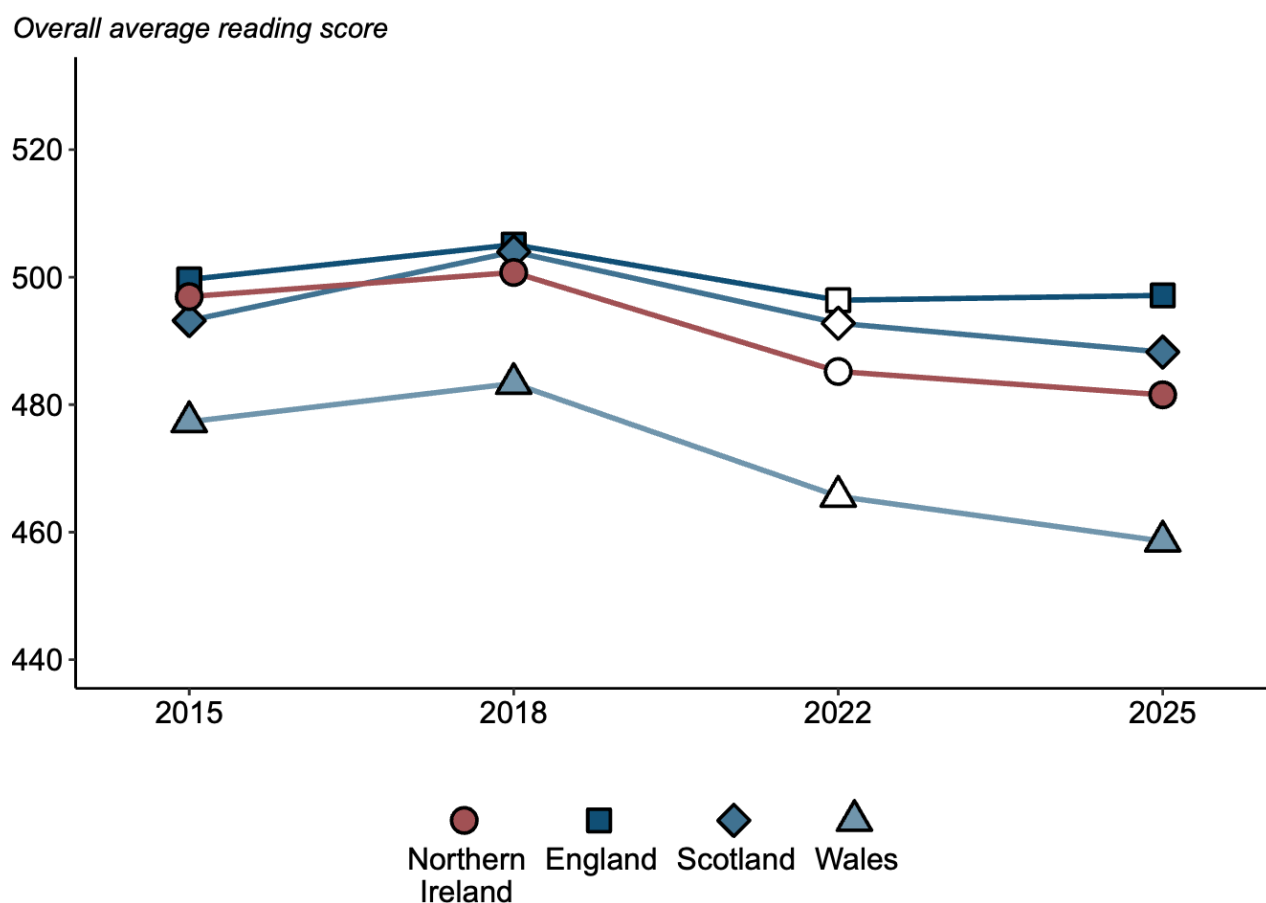
Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

Reading

Figure 7.6 shows that in Northern Ireland, the average reading score in 2025 (482) was not significantly different from the score in 2022 (485), a pattern observed in each of the other countries. By contrast, there was a significant downward trend in the average reading score for pupils in Northern Ireland between 2015 (497) and 2025 (482) while pupils' average score in 2025 (482) was similarly significantly below the average score for 2018 (501). The same trends were observed in Wales.

In England, the trend in pupils' average reading scores was stable with no significant differences recorded between the reading score in 2025 (497) and those recorded in the previous 3 cycles (2022: 496, 2018: 505, 2015: 500). In Scotland, the longer-term trend between 2015 and 2025 was stable with no significant difference between pupils' reading scores (493 in 2015 compared with 488 in 2025). However, the reading score in 2025 (488) was significantly below the score in 2018 (504).

Figure 7.6 Trend in pupils' average reading score by country



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	* 497	* 501	485	482
England	500	505	496	497
Scotland	493	* 504	493	488
Wales	* 477	* 483	466	459

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

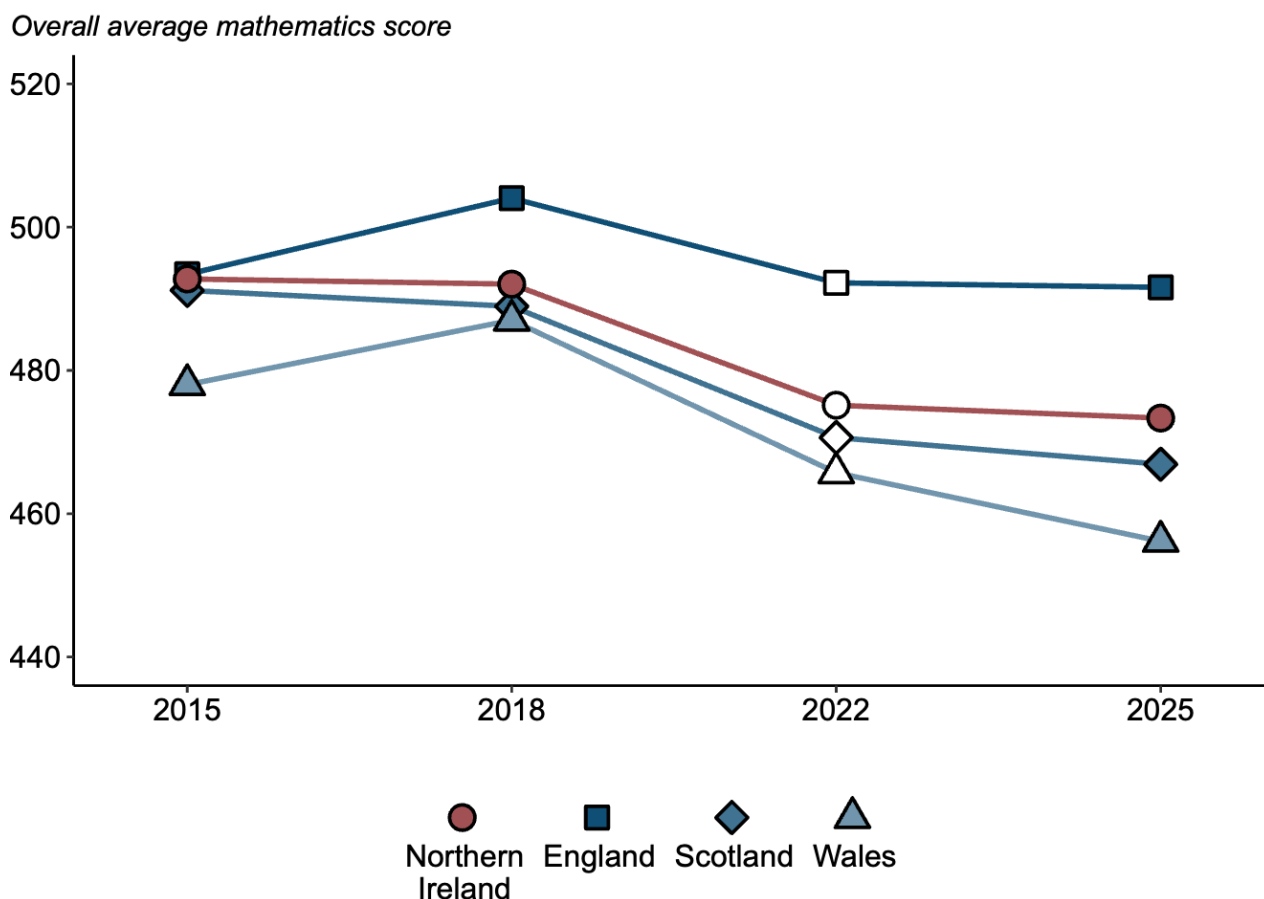
Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

Mathematics

Figure 7.7 shows that in Northern Ireland, there was no significant difference between pupils' average mathematics scores in 2025 (473) and the score in 2022 (475), a pattern observed in each of the other countries, except Wales where the 2025 mathematics score (456) was significantly below the score in 2022 (466). There was a significant downward trend in pupils' average reading scores in Northern Ireland between 2015 (493) and 2025 (473). This pattern was also observed in Scotland (2015: 491, 2025: 467) and Wales (2015: 478, 2025: 456). In Northern Ireland, pupils' average mathematics score in 2025

(473) was also significantly below the score in 2018 (492), a pattern also observed in England (2018: 504, 2025: 492), Scotland (2018: 489, 2025: 467) and Wales (2018: 487, 2025: 456).

Figure 7.7 Trend in pupils' average mathematics score by country



Country	2015	2018	2022	2025
Northern Ireland	* 493	* 492	475	473
England	493	* 504	492	492
Scotland	* 491	* 489	471	467
Wales	* 478	* 487	* 466	456

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the score shown was significantly different from the average score in that country for PISA 2025.

PISA cycles in which PISA sampling standards were not all met are indicated by a white point in the figure.

Source: OECD PISA databases for 2025, 2022, 2018 and 2015

7.7 How did the highest- and lowest-performing pupils achieve?

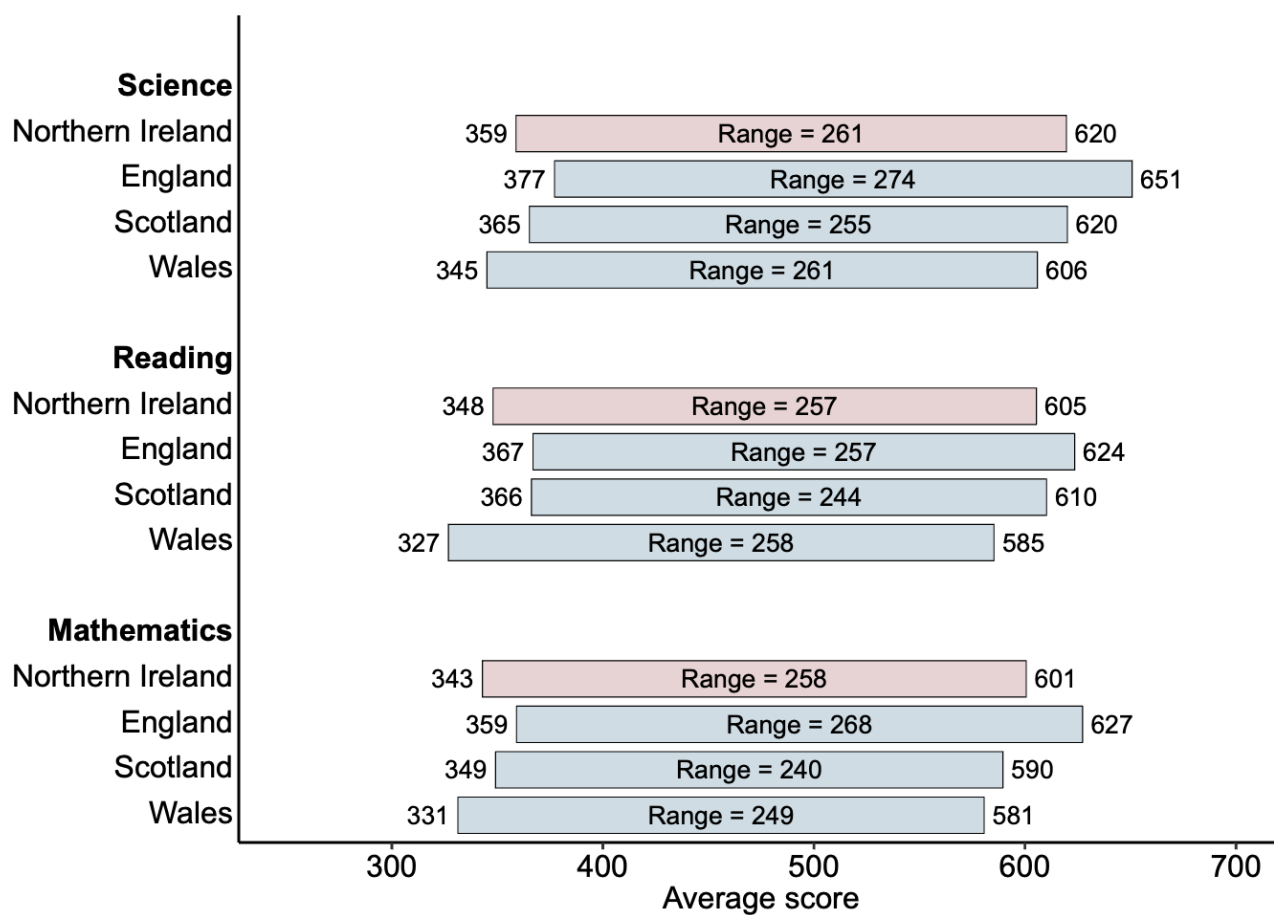
This section compares the performance of the highest- and lowest-achieving groups in each UK country. Figure 7.8 shows the 10th and 90th percentile scores for science, reading and mathematics for each UK country and provides the difference (the interdecile range, shortened to range) between these two scores.

In science, there were no significant differences between the range of scores for pupils in Northern Ireland (261) and the ranges for pupils in England (274), Scotland (255) and Wales (261).

In reading, there were no significant differences between the range of scores for pupils in Northern Ireland (257) and the ranges for England (257), Scotland (244) and Wales (258).

In mathematics, there were no significant differences between the range of scores for pupils in Northern Ireland (258) and the ranges for pupils in England (268) and Wales (249). By contrast, the range of scores for pupils in Northern Ireland (258) was significantly wider than the corresponding range in Scotland (240). This difference was mostly driven by Northern Ireland's pupils achieving an average score at the 90th percentile (601) that was 11 score points higher than the corresponding scores for Scotland's pupils (590).

Figure 7.8 Range between pupils' 10th and 90th percentile scores in science, reading and mathematics by country



Country and domain	Score at the 10th percentile	Score at the 90th percentile	Interdecile range
Science Northern Ireland	359	620	261
Science England	* 377	* 651	274
Science Scotland	365	620	255
Science Wales	* 345	* 606	261
Reading Northern Ireland	348	605	257
Reading England	* 367	* 624	257
Reading Scotland	* 366	610	244
Reading Wales	* 327	* 585	258
Mathematics Northern Ireland	343	601	258
Mathematics England	* 359	* 627	268
Mathematics Scotland	349	590	* 240
Mathematics Wales	331	* 581	249

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Interdecile ranges calculated as score at the 90th percentile – score at the 10th percentile.

Asterisks (*) indicate a score or range that is significantly different from the equivalent for pupils in Northern Ireland.

Ranges may appear inconsistent due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

7.8 How did girls and boys perform in PISA 2025?

This section provides the average PISA scores for girls and boys in each subject domain in each UK country. In the following tables, the gap between these scores was determined by subtracting the girls' average score from the boys' average score. A positive difference represents a gender gap favouring girls and a negative difference represents a gender gap favouring boys.

Science

Table 7.1 shows the average PISA science scores by gender for each country. The average score for girls in Northern Ireland (494) was not significantly different from the score for boys (491). The gender gaps in Scotland and Wales were also not significant. By contrast, in England, a significant gender gap of –13 points was observed in favour of boys⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ These significance tests (to ascertain whether there are significant differences between the science gender gap in Northern Ireland and the equivalent gaps in other countries) are not represented in Table 7.1. Asterisks (*) in Table 7.1 indicate a significant gender gap within a country.

Table 7.1 PISA average science score gender difference by country

Country	Girls	Boys	Gender gap
Northern Ireland	494	491	2
England	509	522	* –13
Scotland	490	493	–3
Wales	476	475	2

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Gaps calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores. A negative number indicates that, on average, the score for girls was below the score for boys.

Some results may appear inconsistent due to rounding.

Asterisks () indicate that girls' average scores are significantly different from boys' average scores within individual PISA cycles.*

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Reading

Table 7.2 shows the average PISA reading scores by gender for each country. For reading, there was a significant gap between girls and boys in Northern Ireland (30 points). This significant gender gap favouring girls was also observed in each of the other UK countries.

The gap for pupils in Northern Ireland (30 points) was not significantly different from the corresponding gaps in Scotland (30 points) and Wales (26 points). By contrast it was significantly wider than the gap in England (11 points)⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ These significance tests (to ascertain whether there are significant differences between the reading gender gap in Northern Ireland and the equivalent gaps in other countries) are not represented in Table 7.2. Asterisks (*) in Table 7.2 indicate a significant gender gap within a country.

Table 7.2 PISA reading score gender difference by country

Country	Girls	Boys	Gender gap
Northern Ireland	497	467	* 30
England	503	492	* 11
Scotland	503	473	* 30
Wales	472	446	* 26

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Gaps calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores. A negative number indicates that, on average, the score for girls was below the score for boys.

Some results may appear inconsistent due to rounding.

Asterisks (*) indicate that girls' average scores are significantly different from boys' average scores within individual PISA cycles.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

Mathematics

Table 7.3 shows that in Northern Ireland, the average mathematics score for girls (469) was not significantly different from the score for boys (478). By contrast, the gender gaps in England (–26 points), Scotland (–16 points) and Wales (–12 points) were all significant in favour of boys.

Table 7.3 PISA average mathematics score gender difference by country

Country	Girls	Boys	Gender gap
Northern Ireland	469	478	–9
England	478	504	* –26
Scotland	459	475	* –16
Wales	450	462	* –12

Base: All participating pupils in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Gaps calculated as girls' scores – boys' scores. A negative number indicates that, on average, the score for girls was below the score for boys.

Some results may appear inconsistent due to rounding.

Asterisks (*) indicate that girls' average scores are significantly different from boys' average scores within individual PISA cycles.

Source: OECD PISA database for 2025

7.9 What was the relationship between socioeconomic status and pupils' performance?

This section explores how different socioeconomic groups perform relative to each other across the UK countries. As in previous chapters, pupils are divided into quartiles based

on their score on the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). Quartile 1 represents the most disadvantaged pupils and Quartile 4 the least disadvantaged pupils. Interquartile ranges (shortened to ranges) have been calculated by subtracting the Quartile 1 average score from the Quartile 4 average score to show the spread of pupils' attainment by socioeconomic status. Figure 7.9 shows the average domain scores for pupils in Quartile 1 and Quartile 4 in addition to the range in scores between these quartiles for each of the UK countries.

Science

The range of average science scores in Northern Ireland (82 points) between pupils in Quartile 1 (459) and Quartile 4 (542) was not significantly different from the corresponding ranges England (81 points) Scotland (72 points) and Wales (65 points).

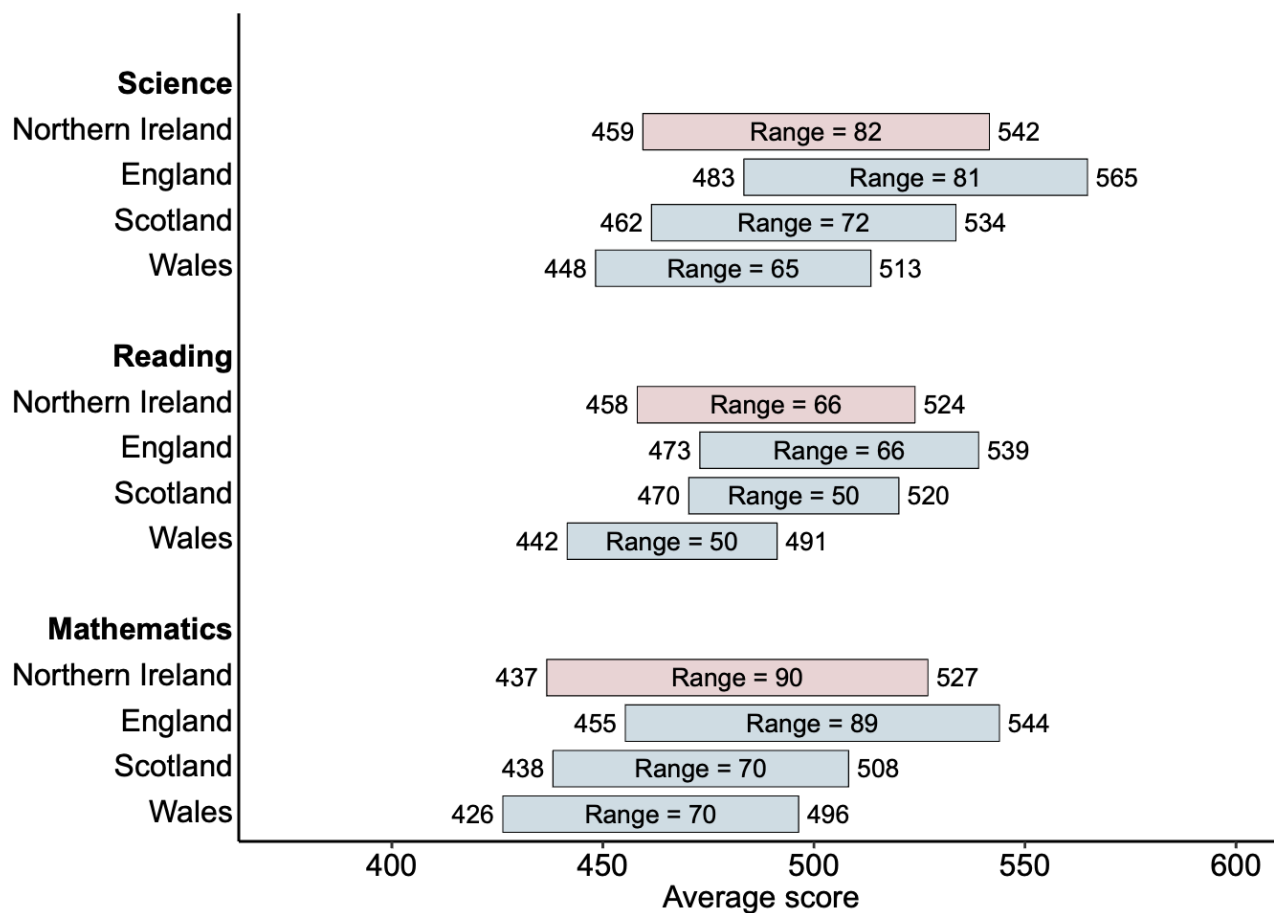
Reading

The range of average reading scores in Northern Ireland (66 points) between pupils in Quartile 1 (458) and Quartile 4 (524) was not significantly different from the corresponding ranges in England (66 points), Scotland (50 points) and Wales (50 points).

Mathematics

The range of average mathematics scores in Northern Ireland (90 points) between pupils in Quartile 1 (437) and Quartile 4 (527) was not significantly different from the corresponding range in England (89 points). By contrast, the range for pupils in Northern Ireland (90 points) was significantly wider than the corresponding ranges in Scotland and Wales (both 70 points).

Figure 7.9 Average score range between PISA ESCS Quartiles 1 and 4 by country



Country and domain	ESCS Quartile 1	ESCS Quartile 4	Interquartile range
Science Northern Ireland	459	542	82
Science England	* 483	* 565	81
Science Scotland	462	534	72
Science Wales	* 448	* 513	65
Reading Northern Ireland	458	524	66
Reading England	* 473	* 539	66
Reading Scotland	* 470	520	50
Reading Wales	* 442	* 491	50
Mathematics Northern Ireland	437	527	90
Mathematics England	* 455	* 544	89
Mathematics Scotland	438	* 508	* 70
Mathematics Wales	426	* 496	* 70

Base: All participating pupils with ESCS data in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

Asterisks () indicate average scores and ranges that are significantly different from those for Northern Ireland's pupils.*

The interquartile range is calculated as ESCS Quartile 4 average score – ESCS Quartile 1 average score.

Ranges may appear inconsistent with quartile scores due to rounding.

Source: OECD PISA 2025 database

8 Conclusion

Volume 1 of the PISA 2025 National Report for Northern Ireland has presented an overview of the achievement of pupils in science, reading and mathematics using the PISA frameworks for science, reading and mathematics. Pupils in Northern Ireland achieved an average score of 492 in science, significantly above the OECD average of 482. In reading, they scored an average reading score of 482, which was significantly above the OECD average of 461, and in mathematics, pupils had an average score of 473, which was significantly above the OECD average of 463. Chapters 2-4 have reported in detail on the comparisons of these scores and the differences between highest and lowest scoring pupils with other countries, commenting on trends over time, and testing for significance where possible. Chapters 5 and 6 have described the achievements of different groups of pupils.

In PISA 2025, there was no significant gender gap between girls' and boys' average scores in science, continuing the pattern observed in 2022. Over the same period, the OECD trend average showed a significant gender gap in science favouring boys in 2025 but no significant gender gap in 2022. In PISA 2025, there was no significant difference between girls and boys in terms of average mathematics scores in Northern Ireland, contrasting with 2022 when there was a significant gender gap in favour of boys (–12). In each of the latest 4 PISA cycles, there was a significant gender gap in favour of boys in the OECD trend averages for mathematics. The gender gap in Northern Ireland was reversed in reading, with girls achieving an average score of significantly above boys and the gap significantly widening from 14 points in 2015 to 30 points in 2025. Over the same period, there were also a gender gap in favour of girls in the OECD trend averages with the gap significantly widening from 27 points in 2015 to 30 points in 2025.

On the ESCS Index, Northern Ireland's average score was +0.15, indicating that pupils' socioeconomic status in Northern Ireland, on average, was above the OECD average. The difference between the most and least disadvantaged groups was 82 points in science, 66 points in reading and 90 points in mathematics in Northern Ireland. These ranges were not significantly different from the average ranges across the OECD countries.

In Northern Ireland, pupils' average scores in science, reading and mathematics were significantly above the corresponding scores in Wales, not significantly different from the scores in Scotland and significantly below the scores in England.

Volume 2 of the PISA 2025 National Report for Northern Ireland comprises chapters on Learning in the Digital World, selected science subdomains and questionnaire responses. Volume 2 will also present a conclusion to both volumes.

Appendix A Northern Ireland non-response bias analysis

A.1 Introduction

A.1.1 What is a non-response bias analysis?

International assessments such as PISA are designed to draw conclusions about national pupil populations. Achieving this relies on obtaining samples of pupils in each participating country that accurately represent their national pupil populations.

The sampling approaches used in PISA are designed to ensure that the participating schools, and the participating pupils within those schools, adequately reflect the target population. However, schools and pupils in Northern Ireland may choose not to participate in the study. This non-response may occur at random, but it is also possible that non-respondents share characteristics that make the achieved sample less representative of the target population.

A non-response bias analysis investigates whether non-response has affected the representativeness of the achieved sample and, consequently, the validity of the reported results. In this analysis of PISA data, we examined whether responding and non-responding schools and pupils in Northern Ireland national sample differed in terms of their characteristics. If non-response is systematically associated with characteristics that are also related to PISA outcomes, the reported results may be biased. For example, if schools with higher levels of pupil eligibility for free school meals were underrepresented in the final sample, the achieved sample may no longer accurately reflect the national pupil population, potentially affecting the validity of the reported findings.

A.1.2 How were schools and pupils selected to participate in PISA?

To select the national samples of each participating country, PISA adopts a stratified sampling design consisting of two stages. The first stage focuses on the selection of schools. The second stage focuses on the selection of pupils within the schools that agreed to participate in the study.

In each country, the probability of an individual school being selected is based on the estimated number of age-eligible pupils within the school, as well as country-specific factors that reflect the national structure of schools. In Northern Ireland, two additional factors were selected as explicit sampling strata that contributed to the probability of school selection; the region within Northern Ireland (Belfast, North Eastern, South Eastern, Southern and Western), and the school-type (grammar or non grammar). For most education systems for each school that is chosen in the initial sample, two replacement schools were also identified with similar characteristics to the originally sampled school. In Northern Ireland, this was not possible as there were not enough schools within each of the explicit strata.

The second stage randomly selects up to 40 eligible pupils⁵⁷ within each sampled school. The OECD require that each participating pupil is aged between 15 years 3 months and 16 years 2 months at the onset of data collection. All age-eligible pupils in a school have an equal probability of being selected to participate in the study. Pupils may be excluded from the study if they have Special Educational Needs (SEN) or if they have insufficient English language experience that would impact their ability to take the assessments⁵⁸. Selected pupils may also choose not to participate in the assessment. The Northern Ireland PISA sample consisted of 125 eligible schools having at least one pupil in this age range.

Of these original 125 schools, 97 agreed to participation. An additional 7 replacement schools agreed to participation, leading to a final participating sample of 104 schools. Performance data was collected for 3,455 of the 4,160 sampled pupils in participating schools. Non-participating pupils in participating schools are not replaced.

A.1.3 Key questions about the Northern Ireland national sample

This non-response bias analysis looked to address the following questions about the Northern Ireland national sample:

- Were there any specific characteristics common among the original sample schools that chose not to participate, and were these sufficiently accounted for by the introduction of participating replacement schools?
- Were there any specific characteristics common among the selected pupils that chose not to participate, and how well do the participating pupils reflect the national population of pupils that would have been eligible to participate in the study?

The answers to these questions help us to understand how representative the final set of participating pupils were of the total population of PISA-eligible pupils in Northern Ireland and therefore, how representative the national findings from PISA 2025 are.

⁵⁷ 40 pupils were selected from each school unless there were fewer than 40 eligible pupils in a school.

⁵⁸ The PISA 2025 Technical Standards specified that pupils be excluded if:

1. They are functionally disabled in such a way that they cannot take the PISA test. Functionally disabled students are those with a moderate to severe permanent physical disability.
2. They have a cognitive, behavioural or emotional disability confirmed by qualified staff, meaning they cannot take the PISA test. These are students who are cognitively, behaviourally, or emotionally unable to follow even the general instructions of the assessment.
3. They have insufficient assessment language experience to take the core PISA test. Students who have insufficient assessment language experience are those who meet all the following three criteria:
 - a. they are not native speakers of the assessment language,
 - b. they have limited proficiency in the assessment language, and
 - c. they have received less than one year of instruction in the assessment language

Source: [PISA 2025 Technical Standards](#)

A.2 Methodology

A.2.1 School-level analyses

The school-level analyses consisted of two stages:

- Analysis of the original sample of schools (before replacements)
- We compared the characteristics of the participating schools in the original sample ($n = 97$) to the whole set of original sample schools ($n = 125$). This analysis was conducted using the school base weights.
- Analysis of the final sample of participating schools (with replacements)
- We compared the characteristics of the final set of all participating schools ($n = 104$), to the whole set of schools in the original sample ($n = 125$). This analysis used the school non-response adjusted weights.

The first stage of analysis investigated potential bias arising from school non-response (non-participation). The second stage of analysis investigated how any potential bias identified in the first stage was mitigated by (or potentially, introduced) by the inclusion of replacement schools and the introduction of non-response adjustments to school weights.

Each school-level analysis was conducted twice; once using the school base weights or non-response adjusted weights, and a second time using the selected weight multiplied by the school-level number of PISA eligible pupils. This gives an estimate in terms of the survey population of 15-year-olds in Northern Ireland for each characteristic.

School-level data from PISA was matched to school characteristic data from the Northern Ireland Government. The following matched variables were included in the school-level analyses:

- The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN).
- The percentage of Newcomer⁵⁹ pupils.
- The percentage of pupils who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) for any period in the last 6 years.

In addition, the stratification variable school attainment bands (1–5, or missing) were also included in these analyses.

A.2.2 Pupil-level analyses

The pupil-level analysis consisted of two stages:

- Analysis of the participating and non-participating pupils
We compared the distribution of the participating pupils in Northern Ireland ($n =$

⁵⁹ The term 'Newcomer' is used to refer to a pupil who does not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher.

3,455) to the distribution of all sampled pupils in the study ($n = 4,160$). Note that this analysis only includes sampled pupils in participating schools, and not pupils from sampled schools that did not participate in the study. Pupils were weighted by their base student weights.

- Analysis of the final sample of participating pupils using non-response adjusted weights

We compared the distribution of the participating pupils ($n = 3,455$) before and after the application of non-response adjusted student weights. Comparisons were also drawn to the total distribution of sampled pupils ($n = 4,160$).

Pupils in participating schools were compared using the explicit school-level stratification variables (school type⁶⁰ and region in Northern Ireland⁶¹), as well as the implicit school-level stratification variable (school attainment band).

The pupils who participated in PISA 2025 would have been expected to have taken their key stage 2 assessments in the spring term of the 2020/2021 academic year. However, these assessments were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was therefore not possible to assess whether there was any non-response bias associated with prior attainment.

A.2.3 Statistical analysis

For categorical variables, the distribution of characteristics of the original sample (either schools or pupils) was compared with the distribution for participants. For continuous variables, summary means were calculated and the difference between means was calculated. Bias and relative bias are also shown in each table. The bias is the difference between the respective estimates for the participants and the total sample. The relative bias is calculated as the bias divided by the estimate from the total sample. The relative bias is a measure of the size of the bias compared to the total sample estimate.

A.3 Comparisons of participating and non-participating schools

A.3.1 Analysis of the original sample (before replacement)

This section presents the non-response bias analysis based on the original sample of 125 schools. The distribution of the participating schools from the original sample was compared to the total original sample. School base weights were used for both the total original sample and the participating schools.

Appendix Table A1 shows that a relative bias greater than an absolute value of 10% was observed for schools in attainment bands 3 (0.21) and 4 (–0.11). Here, schools from attainment band 3 were underrepresented in the participating sample, but this was partly

⁶⁰ Grammar schools, non-grammar schools

⁶¹ Belfast, North Eastern, South Eastern, Southern and Western.

offset by having more schools in the participating sample from attainment band 4. The relative biases for other attainment band categories were small. In addition, whilst the original sample had 0.7 per cent of schools where the attainment band information was missing, there were no schools with missing attainment band information among the participating schools. Overall, this group constituted a small number of schools, and the level of bias was small.

Appendix Table A.1 Percentage distribution of schools in Northern Ireland's original sample for PISA 2025 by school attainment band

School characteristic	Original %	Participating %	Bias	Relative bias
Attainment band 1 (low)	21.9	23.5	-1.6	-0.07
Attainment band 2	18.5	19.1	-0.6	-0.03
Attainment band 3	22.1	17.3	4.7	0.21
Attainment band 4	18.8	20.9	-2.1	-0.11
Attainment band 5 (high)	18.1	19.3	-1.2	-0.06
Attainment band missing	0.7	0.0	0.7	1.00

All original sample schools n = 125

Bias is calculated as the difference between the estimates of the participating schools and the total sample (participating schools in original sample – all schools in original sample). Relative bias is calculated as the bias divided by the estimate from the total sample.

Schools were weighted by their school base weights.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

When the schools were weighted by their enrolled eligible 15-year-old pupils, the same pattern in relation to the attainment bands was present (Appendix Table A.2). This time the size of the relative bias for attainment bands 3 and 4 were more similar (0.22 and -0.16) indicating that more of the underrepresentation of schools from attainment band 3 was offset by having more schools from attainment band 4.

Appendix Table A.2 Percentage distribution of schools weighted by enrolled eligible 15-year-old pupils in Northern Ireland's original sample for PISA 2025 by school attainment band

School characteristic	Original %	Participating %	Bias	Relative bias
Attainment band 1 (low)	20.7	21.1	-0.4	-0.02
Attainment band 2	17.2	17.1	0.1	0.01
Attainment band 3	18.2	14.2	4.0	0.22
Attainment band 4	20.6	23.8	-3.3	-0.16
Attainment band 5 (high)	22.7	23.8	-1.1	-0.05
Attainment band missing	0.7	0	0.7	1.00

All original sample schools n = 125.

Bias is calculated as the difference between the estimates of the participating schools and the total sample (participating schools in original sample – all schools in original sample). Relative bias is calculated as the bias divided by the estimate from the total sample.

Schools were weighted by their school base weights.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

The mean values of the variables related to the percentage of pupils who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) over the last 6 years, the percentage of pupils who have SEN, and the percentage of Newcomer pupils are given in Appendix Table A.3 and Appendix Table A.4. The relative bias in both tables in relation to all measures are small indicating no sizeable bias in relation to these characteristics.

Appendix Table A.3 School average pupil characteristics of schools in Northern Ireland's original sample for PISA 2025

School characteristic	Original %	Participating %	Bias	Relative bias
Percentage of pupils who have been eligible for FSM for any period in the last 6 years	42.0	40.1	2.0	0.05
Percentage of pupils with SEN	19.6	19.6	0.0	0.00
Percentage of Newcomer pupils	3.4	3.6	-0.1	-0.04

Bias is calculated as the difference between the estimates of the participating schools and the total sample (participating schools in original sample – all schools in original sample). Relative bias is calculated as the bias divided by the estimate from the total sample. Schools were weighted by their base weights.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

Appendix Table A.4 School average pupil characteristics of schools in Northern Ireland's original sample for PISA 2025, weighted by enrolment of 15-year-olds

School characteristic	Original %	Participating %	Bias	Relative bias
Percentage of pupils who have been eligible for FSM for any period in the last 6 years	39.8	37.6	2.2	0.05
Percentage of pupils with SEN	16.1	15.7	0.4	0.03
Percentage of Newcomer pupils	3.1	3.1	0.0	-0.01

Bias is calculated as the difference between the estimates of the participating schools and the total sample (participating schools in original sample – all schools in original sample). Relative bias is calculated as the bias divided by the estimate from the total sample. Schools were weighted by their base weights.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

A.3.2 Analysis of the final participating sample (with replacements)

This section presents the non-response bias analysis based on the original sample of 125 schools comparing against the final participating sample of 104 schools. School base weights were used for the original sample of schools, whereas non-response adjusted weights were used for the participating schools.

The distribution of schools from the original sample by the implicit stratification variable is shown in comparison with the participating final sample in Appendix Table A.5. The high value of relative bias is still present for attainment band 3 (0.19), but the offsetting relative bias for attainment band 4 is reduced (-0.10). When we consider the final sample of schools including replacement schools a high relative bias was also present for the lowest attainment band schools (-0.12). Here, schools from the lowest attainment band were overrepresented in the participating sample.

However, when the sample is additionally weighted by the school enrolment of 15-year-old eligible pupils (Appendix Table A.6), all of these relative biases are reduced to below 10 per cent, indicating that relative biases by the attainment bands of schools are all within acceptable levels.

Appendix Table A.5 Percentage distribution of schools in Northern Ireland's final participating sample for PISA 2025 compared with the original sample by school attainment band

School characteristic	Original %	Participating %	Bias	Relative Bias
Attainment band 1 (low)	21.9	24.4	-2.6	-0.12
Attainment band 2	18.5	18.6	-0.2	-0.01
Attainment band 3	22.1	18.0	4.1	0.19
Attainment band 4	18.8	20.7	-1.9	-0.10
Attainment band 5 (high)	18.1	18.3	-0.1	-0.01
Attainment band missing	0.7	0	0.7	1.00

All original sample schools n = 125, participating schools, n=104

Bias is calculated as the difference between the estimates of the participating schools and the total sample (participating schools in original sample – all schools in original sample). Relative bias is calculated as the bias divided by the estimate from the total sample.

Original sample schools were weighted by their school base weights. Participating schools were weighted by their non-response adjusted weights.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

Appendix Table A.6 Percentage distribution of schools in Northern Ireland's final participating sample for PISA 2025 compared with the original sample by school attainment band weighted by school enrolment of 15-year-olds

School characteristic	Original %	Participating %	Bias	Relative Bias
Attainment band 1 (low)	20.7	22.0	-1.4	-0.07
Attainment band 2	17.2	18.1	-0.9	-0.05
Attainment band 3	18.2	16.6	1.5	0.08
Attainment band 4	20.6	22.3	-1.7	-0.08
Attainment band 5 (high)	22.7	22.3	0.5	0.02
Attainment band missing	0.7	0	0.7	1.00

All original sample schools n = 125, participating schools, n=104

Bias is calculated as the difference between the estimates of the participating schools and the total sample (participating schools in original sample – all schools in original sample). Relative bias is calculated as the bias divided by the estimate from the total sample.

Original sample schools were weighted by their school base weights multiplied by the number of enrolled pupils. Participating schools were weighted by their non-response adjusted weights multiplied by the number of enrolled pupils.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

The mean values of the percentage of pupils who have been eligible for FSM over the last 6 years, the percentage of pupils who have SEN, and the percentage of Newcomer pupils including replacement schools are given in Appendix Table A.7 and Appendix Table A.8. The relative bias in both tables in relation to FSM are small indicating no sizeable bias. However, for SEN, numbers weighted by enrolled pupils show a slightly larger relative bias than compared with numbers just weighted by non-response weights (–0.10 compared to –0.03). This indicates that a slightly higher percentage of schools with a higher percentage of SEN pupils were in the participating sample. This was just on the limit of an acceptable level of relative bias, but because the average percentage of pupils with SEN was only around 20%, the bias itself was not high.

For newcomer pupils the same is true. There was a high level of relative bias shown in both tables (–0.24 and –0.22), but because the average percentage of newcomer pupils in the original sample was only 3.4%, the bias itself was small (–0.7 and –0.8).

Appendix Table A.7 School average pupil characteristics of schools in Northern Ireland’s final participating sample for PISA 2025 compared with the original sample 2025

School characteristic	Original %	Participating %	Bias	Relative Bias
Percentage of pupils who have been eligible for FSM for any period in the last 6 years	42.0	41.2	0.9	0.02
Percentage of pupils with SEN	19.6	20.2	–0.7	–0.03
Percentage of Newcomer pupils	3.4	4.3	–0.8	–0.24

All original sample schools n = 125, participating schools, n=104

Bias is calculated as the difference between the estimates of the participating schools and the total sample (participating schools in original sample – all schools in original sample). Relative bias is calculated as the bias divided by the estimate from the total sample.

Original sample schools were weighted by their school base weights. Participating schools were weighted by their non-response adjusted weights.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

Appendix Table A.8 School average pupil characteristics of schools in Northern Ireland's final participating sample for PISA 2025 compared with the original sample 2025, weighted by enrolled eligible 15-year-old pupils

School characteristic	Original %	Participating %	Bias	Relative Bias
Percentage of pupils who have been eligible for FSM for any period in the last 6 years	39.8	39.7	0.1	0.00
Percentage of pupils with SEN	16.1	17.7	-1.6	-0.10
Percentage of Newcomer pupils	3.1	3.8	-0.7	-0.22

All original sample schools n = 125, participating schools, n=104

Bias is calculated as the difference between the estimates of the participating schools and the total sample (participating schools in original sample – all schools in original sample). Relative bias is calculated as the bias divided by the estimate from the total sample.

Original sample schools were weighted by their school base weights multiplied by the number of enrolled pupils. Participating schools were weighted by their non-response adjusted weights multiplied by the number of enrolled pupils.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

A.4 Comparisons of participating and non-participating pupils

This section presents the non-response bias analysis of the participating pupils: the distribution of the participating pupils (n = 3,455) was compared to the distribution of sampled pupils within participating schools (n = 4,160). First, pupils were weighted by their pupil base weights, excluding any non-response adjustment factor; then the non-response adjustment factor was taken into account.

A.4.1 Analysis of pupils (using student base weights)

Appendix Table A.9 and Appendix Table A.10 show the relative bias by school type, region and attainment band using student base weights. For all categories of all the variables the relative bias was small.

Appendix Table A.9 Percentage distribution of pupils in Northern Ireland's final participating sample for PISA 2025 compared with the original sample by school type and region

Stratification variable	All sampled pupils	Participating pupils	Non-participating pupils	Bias	Relative bias
Grammar School	41.0	43.9	26.5	-3.0	-0.08
Not Grammar School	59.0	56.1	73.5	3.0	0.05
Belfast	17.8	16.9	22.2	0.9	0.05
North East	20.1	20.4	18.2	-0.4	-0.02
South East	22.0	21.8	22.9	0.2	0.01
Southern	25.5	25.5	25.2	-0.1	0.00
Western	14.7	15.4	11.5	-0.7	-0.04

All sampled pupils = 4,160. Participating pupils = 3,455. Non-participating pupils = 705.

Pupils were weighted by their student base weights.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

Appendix Table A.10 Percentage distribution of pupils in Northern Ireland's final participating sample for PISA 2025 compared with the original sample by school attainment band

Stratification variable	All sampled pupils	Participating pupils	Non-participating pupils	Bias	Relative bias
Attainment band 1 (low)	22.7	21.2	29.9	1.5	0.07
Attainment band 2	16.3	15.8	19.2	0.6	0.04
Attainment band 3	16.4	16.5	16.1	-0.1	0.00
Attainment band 4	22.2	23.0	18.4	-0.8	-0.04
Attainment band 5 (high)	22.3	23.5	16.5	-1.2	-0.05

All sampled pupils = 4,160. Participating pupils = 3,455. Non-participating pupils = 705.

Pupils were weighted by their student base weights.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

A.4.2 Analysis of pupils (using non-response adjusted weights)

Finally, Appendix Table A.11, Appendix Table A.12 and Appendix Table A.13 show the distribution of pupils for all sampled pupils, participating pupils weighted by both the

student base weights and the non-response adjusted weights. The distributions are similar across all reported characteristics indicating no strong evidence of significant bias in line with the earlier analysis.

Appendix Table A.11 Percentage distribution of pupils in Northern Ireland's final participating sample for PISA 2025 by school type and region, before and after adjusting for pupil non-response

Stratification variable	All sampled pupils	Participating pupils (student base weights)	Participating pupils (non-response adjusted student weights)
Grammar School	41.0	43.9	40.5
Not Grammar School	59.0	56.1	59.5
Belfast	17.8	16.9	19.0
North East	20.1	20.4	21.0
South East	22.0	21.8	20.0
Southern	25.5	25.5	23.6
Western	14.7	15.4	16.4

All sampled pupils = 4,160. Participating pupils = 3,455. Non-participating pupils = 705.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

Appendix Table A.12 Percentage distribution of pupils in Northern Ireland's final participating sample for PISA 2025 by school attainment band, before and after adjusting for pupil non-response

Stratification variable	All sampled pupils	Participating pupils (student base weights)	Participating pupils (non-response adjusted student weights)
Attainment band 1 (low)	22.7	21.2	23.0
Attainment band 2	16.3	15.8	16.9
Attainment band 3	16.4	16.5	16.3
Attainment band 4	22.2	23.0	21.9
Attainment band 5 (high)	22.3	23.5	21.9

All sampled pupils = 4,160. Participating pupils = 3,455. Non-participating pupils = 705.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

Appendix Table A.13 Pupil characteristics in Northern Ireland's final participating sample for PISA 2025 before and after adjusting for pupil non-response, compared to all sampled pupils

Pupil characteristic	All sampled pupils	Participating pupils (student base weights)	Participating pupils (non-response adjusted student weights)
Eligible for FSM for any period in the last 6 years	39.9	36.7	39.0
Percentage of Newcomer pupils	2.5	2.7	2.9

All sampled pupils = 3,870. Missing data for 290 pupils. Participating pupils = 3,455.

Source: OECD, PISA 2025. Department of Education, 2025.

A.5 Summary

Overall, this analysis provides reassurance that the final sample of schools and pupils that participated in PISA 2025 was representative of all schools and pupils in Northern Ireland. We first investigated non-response bias at the school level, finding that the final sample does not differ in a statistically meaningful way from the original sample in terms of attainment band, and in terms of the average percentage of pupils eligible for FSM over the last 6 years, the percentage of pupils with SEN, and the percentage of newcomer pupils.

Similarly, we investigated non-response bias at the pupil level, which supported the analysis at the school level, finding that the final sample did not differ in a statistically meaningful way from the original sample in terms of school region, school type or school attainment band.

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ISBN: 978-1-0369-7917-1

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