

# Educational Inequality in Ireland, North and South

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## Introduction

OVER THE COURSE OF THE POST-WAR PERIOD all economically advanced societies have expanded their provision of public education. This has led to increased rates of educational participation among their populations. Such expansion, however, does not necessarily imply a reduction in class differentials and the issue of persisting class barriers to educational participation and attainment has, in recent years, generated a good deal of debate, at the centre of which have been differing expectations concerning the consequences of the social and economic changes experienced by industrial societies (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993).

On the one hand, the 'liberal theory' of industrialisation views the expansion of the educational system as a response to the functional requirements of industrial society. From this perspective, ascription gives way to achievement as educational qualifications become more important for occupational placement and educational selection becomes more meritocratic. On the other hand, it is argued that this approach takes too simplistic a view of the extent to which the forces of competition will lead to change in the process of social reproduction. Educational attainment is only one among several strategies that can be used in seeking to attain a more desirable occupation and privileged groups within society possess the capacity to adjust such strategies in the light of changing circumstances. As a result the liberal theory underestimates the extent to which education will come to be not only a means by which people can be allocated to jobs but also a factor mediating and, to a degree, maintaining class privilege (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1993: 303–7).

As Erikson and Jonsson (1996: 47) note, the Republic of Ireland provides a particularly appropriate test of the ascription to achievement hypothesis since, as a consequence of late and rapid industrialisation, recent surveys include cohorts whose members have experienced the transformation of agrarian society alongside those whose formative experiences preceded such change. Even by 1960, 36 per cent of males at work in the Republic were either themselves self-employed in agriculture or were occupied in assisting self-employed relatives. By 1990 this figure had been halved. Associated with this transformation of the occupational structure was a growth in the importance of educational qualifications as a means of acquiring a position.

Northern Ireland provides a point of comparison with the Republic of Ireland in assessing the move from ascription to achievement as well as being an interesting test case in its own right. Here, free post-primary education was introduced some 20 years earlier than in the South. However, although Northern Ireland has the same examination system—namely GCSE and A-level—as England and Wales, its educational system continues to be organised selectively, with pupils allocated to more or less academically orientated post-primary schools on the basis of tests taken at the age of 11. Thus a comparison between the systems of Northern Ireland and of England and Wales could yield a potentially interesting study of the effects of institutional selectivity within a common examination system (though we do not pursue this issue here).

In this paper our primary goal is to examine how class and gender differentials in educational attainment may have changed over the course of the second half of this century in Ireland, North and South. Do the rather different institutional arrangements for post-primary education in the two parts of the island give rise to differences between them, or does the logic of industrialism impose on them a commonality irrespective of such differences? Our secondary goal is to examine whether (and, if so, how), within Northern Ireland, educational inequality between the two major ethnic groups—Protestants and Catholics—has shown any signs of change over the same period.

We begin with a brief description of the educational systems in the two parts of Ireland. We then go on to discuss our data and the methods of analysis we employ. The results of our two analyses—the North/South comparison and the comparison of Catholics with Protestants in Northern Ireland—follow. The paper concludes with a summary of our findings.

## The Development of the Educational Systems of Ireland

### *Northern Ireland*

Our analysis of educational attainment in Northern Ireland is based on respondents who received their post-primary education within the system established after the Northern Ireland Education Act of 1947 (which was very similar to the 1944 Act applying to England and Wales). Following this Act post-primary education was reorganised into a tripartite structure, comprising grammar, secondary intermediate and technical intermediate schools (Dunn, 1993). Selection into grammar schools was by means of the so-called '11-plus' exam. Between 1948 and 1965 this consisted of tests in arithmetic and English supplemented by an intelligence test. From 1966 onward the selection procedure used a combination of scores on two verbal reasoning tests and scaled rankings from the primary school of pupils' suitability for a grammar school course (Sutherland, 1993: 108). The procedure was further amended in 1990 but this is not relevant to our analysis since the youngest members of our sample would have transferred to post-primary education no later than 1981.<sup>1</sup>

The other major change of relevance to our study is the raising of the minimum school leaving age from 15 to 16 in the school year 1972/73. This would have affected the youngest cohort in our data, the oldest of whom would have reached the age of 15 in 1973. We therefore might expect to see some change in the pattern of educational attainment among this cohort.

Within the post-primary educational system of Northern Ireland, Protestants and Catholics are, by and large, educated separately.<sup>2</sup> This arose as a result of historical opposition to the state's attempts to establish a non-denominational system of schools. Three types of school evolved: controlled, maintained and voluntary, each differing in its management and financial structures. Controlled schools are almost all Protestant; maintained schools are almost all Catholic, while voluntary schools are all grammar schools and can be either Catholic or Protestant. Figures for 1993/94 indicate that 98.6 per cent of pupils attended schools in the controlled, maintained or voluntary sector. Only 1.4 per cent of pupils attended integrated schools (Breen and Devine, 1999).

It is widely accepted that under the Stormont regime (1922–71) Catholics were subject to discrimination in housing, the labour market and in the electoral system (Whyte, 1983; 1990). It was also the case that, until very recently, Catholic maintained schools received less generous state support

<sup>1</sup> See Sutherland, 1993: 109 for details.

<sup>2</sup> This segregation is less marked at the primary level and does not extend to the higher or further education sectors.

than so-called controlled (but in effect, Protestant) schools. It is therefore of interest to compare Catholic and Protestant educational attainment. Furthermore, in recent years there has been a noted growth in the size of the Catholic middle class (Cormack and Osborne, 1994; O'Connor, 1993), which is believed to have come about primarily through increasing levels of educational attainment among Catholics. This has obvious implications for the Protestant/Catholic comparison but it may also have implications for the trend in the relationship between class origins and education.

In addition to focusing on class, we also look at the impact of gender. One of the most striking shifts in patterns of educational attainment over recent years has been the very rapid erosion of gender differentials that formerly favoured men over women. In Northern Ireland, examination results show that gender and religion enjoy a complex relationship. This is then reflected in the finding that the Catholic middle class, when compared with its Protestant counterpart, contains a much higher proportion of women (Duffy and Evans, 1997). This also points to the possibility of a complex pattern of change in the relationship between class origins and educational attainment that varies by both religion and gender.

### *The Republic of Ireland*

A separate vocational/technical school system had also been present in the Republic of Ireland from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, but was greatly strengthened and expanded after the 1930 Vocational Education Act. These schools had separate vocationally oriented curricula and a specific final examination—the Group Certificate. Although both curriculum and examination were nationally standardised, they were directed towards the needs of local labour markets (Coolahan, 1981; Hannan and Boyle, 1987). Vocational schools were predominantly working class in composition, even to the extent of the social origins and separate vocational/technical training of the bulk of their teachers. These schools were free—at least up to the age of 14. By contrast, secondary schools provided access to university education and to a range of white-collar occupations and were mainly middle class in social composition. Such schools charged fees until the late 1960s, although these were often quite modest.

In 1967 all post-primary education was made free of charge through the replacement of secondary-school fees with an annual state capitation grant (though a small number of secondary schools remained outside the 'Free Scheme' and continued to charge fees). At the same time free transport to school was also made available to all pupils. These reforms were quickly followed by curricular and examination reforms which incorporated the

vocational system into the mainstream second-level system and allowed them, for the first time, to teach the full range of secondary subjects leading to a common examination system. Community and comprehensive schools were established which integrated the curricula of both pre-existing school types.

There has been a rapid growth in educational participation levels since 1960. Currently almost all students remain at school to sit for the Junior Certificate examination, usually taken around age 15, and almost 80 per cent of boys and 90 per cent of girls take the Leaving Certificate (the terminal post-primary examination) at age 17 or 18. Following the reforms of the 1960s there was disproportionately rapid growth among community and comprehensive schools. Nevertheless, the voluntary secondary sector still has around two-thirds of all pupils. Furthermore, most of the growth in senior cycle provision in the comprehensive sector has been in academic, rather than technical subjects as these schools have come into competition for pupils with secondary schools.

The reforms of the 1960s were, in part, a response to research which showed the high degree of class differentiation that was characteristic of local secondary and vocational schools at that time. Despite the growth in educational participation since that time, these sorts of distinction are still evident. Active selection of local schools by parents is the norm, particularly among the middle class, in the absence of any state regulation of local inter-school competition. As a result vocational schools report severe local competition for pupils—a competition in which they suffer most from ‘cream-off’ (Hannan *et al.*, 1996). The result is the persistence of class differences in the composition of secondary and vocational schools. On average, half of the intake of secondary schools comes from the middle class compared with 25 per cent in vocational schools. Fifty-five per cent of the pupil intake to the latter are drawn from the working class as against just over 30 per cent for secondary schools (Ibid.: 82). Besides this class selectivity, selection on the basis of academic criteria is almost as marked. One-third of the intake to vocational schools have general ability scores one standard deviation below the average, while this holds for just over 10 per cent of those in secondary schools (Ibid.: 86).

## **Data, Variables and Method**

Data for the Republic of Ireland come from the Living in Ireland Survey which was conducted in 1994 by The Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin. The survey provides a random sample of non-institutional households and of adult members within such households.

The data have been reweighted in line with independent population estimates.<sup>3</sup> Restricting our analysis to those aged between 25 and 49 years yields 4,994 valid cases. We confine our analysis to this range because at ages less than 25 a large proportion of respondents would still be in full-time education, while for older respondents information concerning father's class background is not available in the Northern Ireland data.

Data for Northern Ireland come from the annual Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey (CHS) which is closely modelled on the General Household Survey (GHS) in Britain. Interviews are carried out with all adults in a simple random sample of households in Northern Ireland and the data include a record for each resident in the sampled households. We use five rounds of the survey: 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989–90 and 1990–91.<sup>4</sup> In total there are 17,528 respondents. When we omit those for whom we lack relevant information this is reduced to 13,649.

In our comparative analysis we use four variables. These are the cohort in which the respondent was born, the respondent's gender, highest educational qualification achieved, and social class origins.

The three birth cohorts are 1937–43; 1944–56; and 1957–70. In the North the final cohort would have been the only one potentially to benefit from the raising of the school-leaving age and, similarly, in the South, this is the only cohort that could have taken advantage of the introduction of free post-primary education in 1967. We should therefore expect that, if any changes over time are to be found, they will be evident in the comparison between the two older and the youngest cohort.

Our measure of highest educational qualification distinguishes four levels:

*No Qualification.* In both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland this includes anyone terminating their post-primary education without a qualification.

*Junior Cycle Qualification.* In the North this comprises apprenticeships, CSE, GCSE, O-level or equivalent. In the South it covers those with the Intermediate, Group or Junior Certificate.

*Senior Cycle Qualification.* For Northern Ireland this is defined as A-level or equivalent (such as HNC) and all qualifications above A-level but less than a degree (for example, nursing qualifications). In the South it includes the Leaving Certificate, Post-Leaving Certificate courses and non-degree third level qualifications.

*University Degree.* In both cases this includes a university first or higher degree.

<sup>3</sup> Further details of the sample are provided in Callan *et al.*, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Data are also available for the 1991–92 survey but neither father's socio-economic group nor the information needed to code it are available.

The class origins variable is based on the categorisation of father's socio-economic group (SEG) in the North<sup>5</sup> and, in the South, on detailed occupational information about the main breadwinner in the family when the respondent was growing up. Both have been recoded to the CASMIN class schema (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). We employ a five-category version of the schema in our analysis with the constituent classes of the CASMIN schema indicated below by Roman numerals.

- Professional and Managerial or Service Class (I + II)
- Routine Non-Manual Class (IIIa)
- Petty Bourgeoisie, including farmers (IV)
- Skilled Manual (V/VI)
- Non-Skilled Manual (IIIb + VIIa+b)

For analyses within Northern Ireland we draw the further distinction between Catholics and Protestants. For our purposes, origin religion (that is, the religion in which the respondent was raised) is the relevant variable, although the data refer to *current* religion. Given the very low rates of inter-religious mobility in Northern Ireland (Breen and Hayes, 1996), its use as a proxy for origin religion is not problematic. The exception is those who report themselves as having no religion. We know (Ibid.) that around 99 per cent of Northern Ireland adults were born into a Christian religion; accordingly we exclude those of no religion from our analysis. We also exclude those of non-Christian religions, many of whom were probably not brought up in Northern Ireland and who, in any case, comprise a very small group.

Our analysis is based on the so-called 'Mare model' (Mare 1980; 1981) which focuses on the odds of attaining a given educational level, conditional on having attained the previous level. In this model our four educational levels define three transitions: from no qualifications to a junior cycle qualification; from junior to senior cycle qualifications; and from senior cycle to a degree. This model follows from a random utility specification in which the decisions to continue to a further level of education are made sequentially (Pudney, 1989: Chapter 3). That is to say, pupils and their families decide whether to continue to the next level of education,

<sup>5</sup> In the CHS if the respondent's father is not resident in the same household information for coding father's SEG is requested from the respondent. If the respondent's father is in the same household, this information is included in the father's own record. It thus becomes necessary to take this information from his record and attach it to the respondent's. We are grateful to Naomi McCay for doing this. In addition, the recorded SEG in the CHS data does not distinguish subgroups within groups 1 and 2 (employers and managers) and 5 (intermediate non-manual) according to number of workers employed or supervised. We are grateful to Iain Bryson and Naomi McCay for adding these distinctions to the data set.

given that they have completed the current level. This is a more plausible behavioural assumption than that which underlies the use of a multinomial or ordered logit model, since these models would imply that the decision of which educational level to attain is made at the outset of an individual's educational career.

## Trends in Educational Attainment

In our analysis of trends over time we make use of age groups from a set of cross-sectional surveys to make inferences about the experience of birth cohorts. This is sometimes referred to as the use of 'synthetic cohorts' and it is well known that the method has a number of potential difficulties although these are often ignored in practice (Breen and Jonsson, 1997). If this exercise is to be valid then it is necessary that these synthetic cohorts are indeed representative of the age cohorts of which they are a part. Put more precisely, we require that attrition of the original birth cohorts should be independent of the variables of interest in the study. In countries with histories of large-scale emigration—such as both parts of the island of Ireland—this is likely to be problematic. If emigrants are disproportionately drawn from among the less well-educated, analyses such as ours will tend to overstate the level of educational attainment in the true cohorts. But when, as here, the focus is on change over time in the effects of class, gender and religion, then we need to look at differentials in migration according to educational attainment between different classes, religions and genders. For example, if it were the case that the distribution of emigrants according to educational attainment or class origins (which is a proxy for educational attainment) differed as between the various religions, then conclusions concerning religious differences in educational attainment would be suspect. Consider the case in which Catholic emigrants were disproportionately drawn from the working class or from those of low educational attainment when compared with Protestant emigrants. This would make the educational attainment of those Catholics who remained, and who constitute our synthetic cohorts, higher, relative to Protestants, so leading us to erroneous conclusions about religious differences in educational attainment. If this disproportion changed over time, then we would be led to invalid conclusions about changes in the pattern of religious differences in attainment. These *caveats* should be born in mind in what follows. We will return to this issue in a later section of this chapter.

In Table 1 we set out the trend in educational qualifications across cohorts for both North and South. The most striking feature of the table is the significantly higher level of educational achievement in the South



across all three cohorts. In the oldest cohort, 61 per cent of the Northern respondents are classified as having no qualification, compared to 54 per cent of the Southern respondents. In both countries there is a sharp decline over time in the number without qualifications although the difference between them—of around ten percentage points—remains roughly constant. As a result in the youngest cohort just less than 20 per cent in the South and 30 per cent in the North are without qualifications. Differences in intermediate levels of qualification are fairly slight, although at the higher levels the advantage once again rests with the South. Here there has been a dramatic increase in the percentage completing senior cycle, while the corresponding figures in the North remain fairly static.

It is possible that the A-level qualification represents, on average, a higher level of qualification than the Leaving Certificate (which is analogous to the Scottish 'Highers') and, as we shall see later, the transition rate from A-level to university degree is higher than from Leaving Certificate to degree. Nevertheless, whether one looks at senior or secondary education as a whole, it is clear that expansion of educational opportunity has been substantially more rapid in the Republic of Ireland than in Northern Ireland. However, in evaluating the figures for degree level, it is necessary to take into account the fact that, although our Southern and Northern data relate to the same cohorts, the Northern surveys were conducted at earlier dates. Consequently, the youngest cohort in the North will have had less opportunity to achieve a degree than will its Southern counterpart. Thus the figure of 6.6 per cent for the most recent birth cohort in the North should not be considered reliable, particularly in view of the fact that it is lower than in the 1944–56 cohort. Clearly, however, in the earlier cohorts at least, the percentage with a degree is higher in the South.

These results may cause some surprise, particularly those relating to the earlier cohort. However, the finding of higher participation rates in the South is not new. Tussing (1978) showed that in 1970 school participation rates at age fifteen and above were significantly higher in the Republic of Ireland than Northern Ireland and indeed a good deal higher than those for the UK as a whole (Tussing, 1978: 91–2).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore he noted that by the late 1960s senior cycle participation rates in Ireland compared favourably with other OECD countries. Tussing (Ibid.: 54–9) suggests several factors to explain how a rural society such as the Republic of Ireland could have afforded such a highly developed system. Schools were operated in a spartan and frugal manner; resources for education were marshalled by the Catholic Church and the religious orders themselves

<sup>6</sup> See also *Investment in Education* (1965: 20).

contributed both in terms of school building and the provision of teachers; and, lastly, the educational system economised by emphasising subjects which required little in the way of costly equipment.

While the reforms in the 1960s were originally intended to produce expansion in enrolment at the post-primary stages, mainly in more vocational subjects, both the influence of educational interest groups and the substantial increase in service employment ensured that expansion occurred largely within the traditional secondary framework. Change took the form of across the board increases in participation rather than involving selective increase in provision aimed at serving the needs of the economy. Paradoxically, this general upgrading of human capital is now seen as one of the most important factors underlying the recent success of the southern economy (Duffy *et al.*, 1997).

While Irish education was provided at a relatively low cost, prior to free education it was still necessary for parents to pay fees, even though these were usually modest. The comparatively high rates of participation suggest that a high value was placed on participation and one reason for this may have been the lack of alternative paths to advancement available in more advanced industrial societies such as the United Kingdom. The Northern Ireland rates of educational participation appear to form part of the broader UK pattern which is characterised historically by a high degree of selectivity at second level and the absence of strong linkages between the educational system and industry. Low participation rates are likely to be a consequence both of the structure of the educational system and a somewhat different evaluation of the balance of costs and benefits than in the Southern case.

**Table 1.** Educational qualifications by cohort for the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Level of Qual.	1937-43		1944-56		1957-70	
	Republic of Ireland	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland	Northern Ireland
None	53.6	61.2	37.7	46.4	19.1	30.2
Junior Cycle	17.9	21.7	24.7	32.3	28.0	48.0
Senior Cycle	21.1	13.4	27.4	13.7	41.9	15.2
Degree Level	7.4	3.6	10.2	7.5	11.0	6.6
N	755	1,794	1,983	5,983	2,388	5,870

## **Class Inequalities in Educational Attainment, North and South**

In Table 2 we present a preliminary analysis of class inequalities in educational attainment, ignoring for the moment differences between cohorts. It is apparent from this table that the higher levels of educational attainment in the South are accompanied by striking class differences. The five classes we have identified form a clear hierarchy in terms of educational outcomes. In the Republic of Ireland less than 4 per cent of respondents from the service class are without qualifications but this rises steadily to 47 per cent of respondents from the non-skilled manual class. The former thus have a relative advantage of 13:1. The corresponding figures for having a university degree are just less than 40 per cent and less than 3 per cent and the relative advantage enjoyed by the service class is thus 13.7:1. The product of these two ratios gives us a figure of 179:1. This is the odds ratio which summarises the outcome of the comparison between the classes with the least and the most resources to achieve the most favoured, and avoid the least favoured educational outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

The same comparison for Northern Ireland shows that 16.5 per cent of those from service-class origins report no qualifications compared to 59.1 per cent of the non-skilled manual class. This gives a ratio of 3.6:1 compared to 13:1 in the South. For a degree qualification the respective figures are 18.0 and 2.3, giving a ratio of 7.8:1 compared to the Southern figure of 13.7:1. The resulting Northern odds ratio of 28:1 would need to be multiplied by 6.4 to reach the Southern figure. While the extent of the differences between the two parts of the island will vary depending on the pairs of classes and educational destinations which enter into the comparison, the finding of stronger class effects in the Republic of Ireland is a general one and the pattern of class effects is such that the disparities in educational achievement between the two parts of the island are relatively greater for the higher than for the lower social classes.

Almost immediately, then, we see a striking contrast between Northern Ireland and the Republic. While levels of educational attainment are generally higher in the latter, so are class inequalities. As a result, despite the fact that respondents originating in the non-skilled manual class in the North, for example, enjoy a greater degree of equality of opportunity than their counterparts in the South, they are nevertheless 1.25 times more likely to be without qualifications and 2.7 times less likely to have achieved at least a senior cycle qualification.

<sup>7</sup> This observed figure will, of course, be subject to a large sampling error.

**Table 2.** Educational qualifications by social class for the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Level of Qual.	Professional and Managerial		Routine Non-Manual		Petty-Bourgeoisie		Skilled Manual		Unskilled Manual	
	RoI	NI	RoI	NI	RoI	NI	RoI	NI	RoI	NI
None	3.6	16.5	10.0	28.4	28.5	37.0	31.1	40.9	47.2	59.1
Junior Cycle	9.6	37.8	15.1	45.3	24.5	36.6	30.5	36.6	28.1	31.7
Senior Cycle	47.2	27.7	54.0	18.2	39.2	18.1	33.0	15.1	21.8	6.9
Degree	39.6	18.0	20.9	8.0	10.4	8.3	5.3	8.3	2.9	2.3
N	464	1,736	271	735	1,523	3,203	1,006	4,072	1,669	3,901

*Notes:* RoI: Republic of Ireland, NI: Northern Ireland

## The Effect of Migration to Britain

In the introduction to this paper we raised the question of the degree to which emigration might vitiate our results, based, as they are, on data concerning those who remained in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and excluding those who, though educated in Ireland, no longer live there. We can gain some limited insight into the likely magnitude of this problem by drawing on data on Irish immigrants to Britain contained in the General Household Survey (GHS). In 1982 and in 1985 through to 1992 the GHS collected data which allows us to assign respondents' fathers to a class position, so proxying respondents' class origins. We then take the same age cohorts as we have used thus far and we create tables of highest educational attainment by class origins and highest educational attainment by cohort for respondents born in Northern Ireland and for those born in the Republic of Ireland. These are shown in Table 3, panels A and B. Comparing these with Tables 1 and 2 allows us to assess the extent to which the trends over time and the overall class differences in educational attainment that we have found among non-migrants are also evident among migrants to Britain. This will allow us to form a judgement as to whether the comparisons we have made between the North and South might, in fact, be biased by selective emigration. Of course it would also be desirable to carry out a similar analysis to assess whether the pattern of change in ethnic (that is to say, Protestant/Catholic) differences in Northern Ireland over time or in gender differences in both parts of the island were also sensitive to the impact of selective migration. However, as is

evident from Table 3, the numbers of GHS respondents on which we could base such an analysis are too small to sustain any firm conclusions.

Table 3, panel A, shows that the trends over time are consistent with those already noted among non-migrants, with increasing percentages acquiring higher educational qualifications in the later cohorts. There is no evidence that this trend differs between Northern and Southern migrants: the model that posits the same trend among both groups provides an adequate fit to these data.<sup>8</sup> But what is noticeable in this table is that the migrants from Northern Ireland have somewhat higher levels of qualification than those from the Republic—the opposite of what we found among non-migrants. Similarly, when we examine Table 3 panel B we find that the association between class origins and educational qualifications differs as between Northern and Southern migrants<sup>9</sup>—but this is because class differences in qualifications are rather less among Southern migrants than among Northern. This is, again, the opposite of what we found among the non-migrants.

Taken together these results suggest that the two major differences between North and South that emerged from our analysis based on data for non-migrants—namely that the North had a more open educational system but that levels of qualification in the South were rather higher—would, in fact, be somewhat less marked were we also to take account of the educational experiences of migrants.

## Educational Transitions

In Table 4 we show the rates for the three educational transitions on which we focus, namely, from no qualification to a junior cycle qualification; from junior cycle to senior cycle; and from senior cycle to a university degree. We distinguish between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and between our three cohorts. Inspection of the table shows, as we would have anticipated, that the transition rate to a junior cycle qualification is somewhat higher in the South for each of the cohorts. The rate increases rapidly across cohorts for both parts of the island but the South continues to enjoy an advantage with the difference rising from 7 percentage points in the oldest birth cohort to 11 points in the most recent one. For the transition to senior cycle the Southern rates, which are relatively constant at around 0.60, are once again substantially higher than for the North where they decline from 0.44 to 0.31 across cohorts. On the other hand,

<sup>8</sup> Deviance of 6.8 with 6 df.

<sup>9</sup> The model of common educational fluidity fails to fit the data returning deviance of 27.6 with 12 df,  $p = .006$ .

**Table 3.** Educational qualifications of Irish migrants (%).

Panel A: Qualifications by age cohort by country of origin.

Educational Quals	1937–43		1944–56		1957–70	
	RoI	NI	RoI	NI	RoI	NI
None	75	64	66	41	57	25
Junior	8	10	11	17	14	19
Senior	14	16	17	24	21	21
Degree	3	9	7	19	8	35
N	285	106	441	218	160	94

Panel B: Qualifications by class origins by country of origin.

Educational Quals	Professional and Managerial		Routine Non-Manual		Petty Bourgeoisie		Skilled Manual		Semi/Unskilled Manual	
	RoI	NI	RoI	NI	RoI	NI	RoI	NI	RoI	NI
None	44	12	55	39	65	33	69	58	83	69
Junior	14	8	9	17	10	18	10	18	9	16
Senior	24	32	33	22	22	31	13	17	8	8
Degree	19	48	3	22	3	18	7	7	1	7
N	119	102	33	18	270	78	222	125	211	74

*Notes:* RoI: Republic of Ireland, NI: Northern Ireland**Table 4.** Educational transition rates by cohort for the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Cohort	Junior Cycle		Senior Cycle		Degree	
	RoI	NI	RoI	NI	RoI	NI
1937–43	0.46	0.39	0.61	0.44	0.26	0.21
1944–56	0.62	0.54	0.60	0.40	0.27	0.35
1957–70	0.81	0.70	0.65	0.31	0.21	0.30

*Notes:* RoI: Republic of Ireland, NI: Northern Ireland

with the exception of the earliest cohort, the transition rates to degree level are higher in the North.<sup>10</sup> These results point to the very selective nature of the A-level system in Northern Ireland which, in contrast to the senior cycle in the Republic of Ireland, caters to a smaller proportion of each cohort, but whose output is then more likely to go on to acquire a degree.

We turn now to the use of the Mare model to analyse the multivariate relationship between educational transition rates, gender and social class origins in the two parts of Ireland. The crucial advance represented in the Mare model is that it yields parameter estimates whose values are not affected by educational expansion per se, but instead reflect the degree of inequality of opportunity in educational transitions associated with factors such as gender and class origins. Under this model the educational attainment process is viewed as a sequence of transitions from one level of education to the next highest level.

Tables 5A and 5B show the rates at which the individuals in our Northern and Southern samples make these transitions, differentiated according to class and gender. We seek to capture variation in these rates using a log-linear model where the object is to find a model which provides an accurate but also parsimonious account of the data. The details of the models we fitted are reported in the Appendix to this chapter. Here we concentrate on the main findings that emerge from our analysis.

In both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the greatest class difference in transition rates is found at the transition to a degree. For men in both North and South the major increase in transition rates between cohorts occurred in respect of the first transition, that is, to a junior cycle qualification. In neither part of the island is there any evidence that class differences in rates have declined over time, despite the various educational reforms that took place during the period covered by our data. In the North, however, women's position relative to men improves markedly in the youngest cohort and, among women in the Republic of Ireland, transition rates increased at all transitions as we move from the oldest to the youngest cohorts. However, once again we find that class inequalities in transition rates are much higher in the Republic of Ireland than in Northern Ireland. For example, in the South the odds of making the transition to junior cycle are 25 times greater for children from the professional and managerial class than from those of the non-skilled manual class. However, this ratio of 25:1 compares with a figure of just less than 6:1 for men in the North. Similarly the advantage enjoyed by the routine non-manual class over the non-skilled manual class in the South exceeds 12:1 while the

<sup>10</sup> This is true despite the fact that as explained earlier we are almost certainly underestimating the rate for the final cohort in the North.

**Table 5A.** Educational transition rates by class by cohort by sex for the Republic of Ireland: percentage successful.

Class	Men			Women		
	Junior Cycle	Senior Cycle	Degree	Junior Cycle	Senior Cycle	Degree
<b>1937–43</b>						
Prof. & Managerial	95.1	84.7	53.5	98.1	87.6	19.0
Routine White-Collar	82.7	78.2	—	90.3	66.6	17.2
Petty Bourgeoisie	40.0	65.9	50.5	54.7	58.9	15.7
Skilled Manual	41.1	36.9	31.2	43.9	71.8	0.0
Unskilled Manual	27.9	41.7	21.2	30.2	36.7	0.0
<b>1944–56</b>						
Prof. & Managerial	95.4	94.0	64.7	94.4	86.7	41.8
Routine White-Collar	88.5	83.9	39.4	81.4	75.1	20.1
Petty Bourgeoisie	63.0	62.8	25.4	79.2	67.0	14.0
Skilled Manual	66.2	52.0	22.4	54.6	44.1	20.0
Unskilled Manual	45.5	44.5	30.8	42.9	60.7	11.4
<b>1957–70</b>						
Prof. & Managerial	99.5	91.7	43.7	95.7	90.6	42.1
Routine White-Collar	95.3	83.8	40.7	94.8	92.6	22.3
Petty Bourgeoisie	89.6	55.2	20.7	90.2	85.3	19.3
Skilled Manual	83.6	53.3	15.9	78.8	64.6	7.9
Unskilled Manual	69.5	42.2	10.0	65.4	56.8	5.2

respective figures for men and women in the North are 6:1 and less than 4:1. Differences for the comparison involving the skilled manual group are more modest but conform to the same pattern—that is to say, one of substantially greater class inequality in the South than the North.

### **Educational Transition Rates Among Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland**

Within Northern Ireland, as noted earlier, the two ethnic groups—Catholics and Protestants—are educated separately. Has this led to different levels of educational attainment and to different patterns of change over time and, more generally, is the relationship between class, gender, cohort and educational attainment different among Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants?

To address this issue we once again fit a set of log-linear models to tables showing transition rates between our four educational levels according to class origins, gender and cohort for Catholics and for Protestants.



**Table 5B.** Educational transition rates by class by cohort by sex for Northern Ireland.

Class	Men			Women		
	Junior Cycle	Senior Cycle	Degree	Junior Cycle	Senior Cycle	Degree
<b>1937-43</b>						
Prof. & Managerial	69.7	60.4	31.3	73.0	66.4	19.1
Routine White-Collar	59.0	53.8	28.6	56.3	50.0	15.0
Petty Bourgeoisie	34.8	48.7	40.5	51.1	43.0	9.6
Skilled Manual	50.2	38.2	26.2	32.7	33.7	10.0
Unskilled Manual	25.4	32.3	22.7	16.7	32.7	11.8
<b>1944-56</b>						
Prof. & Managerial	79.7	61.1	59.1	84.7	56.5	33.5
Routine White-Collar	72.6	37.6	40.6	63.9	42.5	24.4
Petty Bourgeoisie	68.5	39.7	49.7	63.9	50.8	24.9
Skilled Manual	67.5	29.6	40.6	53.0	31.7	22.6
Unskilled Manual	53.0	26.3	35.6	30.4	26.1	20.8
<b>1957-70</b>						
Prof. & Managerial	84.2	51.5	34.4	88.6	49.5	27.5
Routine White-Collar	76.8	31.0	52.8	79.8	31.9	20.8
Petty Bourgeoisie	68.5	31.6	32.3	83.0	41.9	29.9
Skilled Manual	67.5	21.6	31.4	68.8	25.4	18.7
Unskilled Manual	53.0	17.9	26.6	56.4	18.5	22.9

**Table 6.** Educational transition rates for Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

	Transition: Cohort	1	2	3
CATHOLICS	1937-43	0.34	0.54	0.23
	1944-56	0.46	0.41	0.27
	1957-70	0.65	0.31	0.32
PROTESTANTS	1937-43	0.41	0.40	0.20
	1944-56	0.59	0.39	0.40
	1957-70	0.73	0.31	0.29

Doing this we find that the best-fitting model for these data is one which allows changes in transition rates to vary by class, gender, cohort and religion, and in which the patterns of differences in transition rates according to social class differ for men and women, and in which the change in transition rates over cohorts is different for Protestants and Catholics. This model returns a deviance of 108.22 with 98 df, so yielding a satisfactory fit to the observed data.

Since the variation in transition rates by gender and class has already been noted in our earlier analysis we can here simply concentrate on the changes over time in religious differences. Further, since the effects of class and gender on transition rates are conditionally independent of religion, we can discuss the latter without referring to the former, since, although the odds of making the various educational transitions are influenced by class and gender, religious *differences* in such odds are not. Accordingly, Table 6 shows the transition rates in the Northern data broken down by religion. For the first transition (no qualifications to O-level or equivalent) the standard errors around these rates are less than 0.02, while for the second and third transitions they are less than 0.03 and 0.04 respectively. There we see that in the oldest cohort, Protestants had a much higher chance of reaching O-level or equivalent, but thereafter, among those who reached O-level, Catholics were more likely than Protestants to continue, and the rate of transition from A-level to a degree showed no significant difference between the two. In the second cohort the overall transition rate to O-levels increases markedly, but particularly so among Protestants. In addition, in this cohort the Catholic advantage at the second transition disappears and Protestants also become more likely to make the transition from A-level to a degree. However, by the time we reach our youngest cohort, religious differences in transition rates have almost disappeared. At the first transition Protestants did better than Catholics but their advantage has been eroded by the very large increase in the Catholic rate in the youngest cohort compared with the second. The transition rates from O- to A-level and from A-level to a degree now show no religious differences.

In all, the pattern of religious differences in Northern Ireland shows Protestants to have had a relatively slight advantage over Catholics in the oldest cohort, a widening of this difference in the second cohort, followed by their diminution and virtual disappearance in the youngest. It is perhaps not entirely surprising that religious differences were relatively small in the oldest cohort: Catholics had their own educational system (albeit one which received less generous funding than the state system) so there could be no religious discrimination within the system and, as McGarry and O'Leary (1995: 209) point out, the complaint of the civil rights campaigners in the late 1960s 'was not that they had received a bad education, or had been denied access to state schools and universities, but that they were not receiving the jobs for which their qualifications entitled them'. And while the widening of religious differences in the 1944–56 cohort is puzzling, the fact that, in the youngest cohort, Catholics made up most of this ground can be taken as evidence for the widely held view that it was the Catholic community in particular which benefited from free education.

## Conclusions

Both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have seen large increases in levels of educational attainment. This growth seems to have been more rapid in the South but this cannot simply be attributed to some 'catching-up' process whereby the South industrialised later and thus invested in education at a later date. Rather, we find, even in our oldest cohort, a smaller proportion with no qualifications, and a higher proportion with a degree in the Republic than in Northern Ireland. Thus, these differences predate the period of rapid industrialisation in the South. This is particularly surprising given that one would expect a more rural and less industrial society to have lower levels of educational provision. And, although our analysis of migration suggested that less-educated people from the South were likely to migrate to Britain while more-educated people from the North did so, it seems unlikely that this could account for all the differences between the two.

An explanation must, rather, be sought in more long-standing differences between the two parts of Ireland. During the later nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth, the Catholic Church was chiefly responsible for the provision of education in Ireland. As Inglis (1987: 218) among others, has argued, this occurred with the support of the British government which saw the Catholic Church as a more effective means of social control in Ireland than the repression in which it had engaged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But it is also clear that, once it established itself during the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Church and its educational system became a focus for anti-imperialism and for the propagation of a distinct Irish identity (as witnessed by, for example, the role of the clergy in the 'gaelic revival' of the late nineteenth century). However, while this might provide an explanation for the unusually high level of educational provision in Ireland—albeit of a rather frugal and often spartan kind—it cannot explain differences between the two parts of Ireland in their rates of participation. In particular, given that the Catholic Church's activity in education has not been confined to what is now the Republic, one might reasonably wonder why there should be a such stark difference in Catholic participation rates between North and South.

To answer this question we must focus on the framework within which individual educational decisions are made. The Catholic Church and, particularly in Northern Ireland, the state, provided the necessary institutional setting for high rates of educational participation, but differences in the extent to which these opportunities were taken up can only be explained in terms of the alternatives to which individuals and their

families had access. And here the economic differences between North and South would seem to be of central importance. The industrialised labour market of Northern Ireland, like that of Britain, offered employment to those with few or low levels of qualification within industrial establishments and also provided avenues for upward mobility outside the school system—most notably, of course, via apprenticeships. But this was less true in the Republic where, in the absence of large industrial employers, the prospects for those who lacked educational qualifications were bleak. This distinction also explains why rates of emigration among the unqualified were higher in the South than the North. For the unqualified, prospects within the Republic were poor: education offered almost the only avenue through which those who would not inherit a family farm or business could find a reasonably comfortable position in society.

Notwithstanding this striking difference between the two parts of the island, in recent decades they have also shared in some trends in educational participation that are common to very many other Western societies. On the one hand, gender inequalities in transition rates have narrowed over time, although they have not been completely eliminated in the transition to university education. On the other hand, there is no evidence, either North or South, of any trend towards declining class inequalities in educational opportunity.

However, while class differences are equally resilient in the two societies they are much stronger in the South than in the North. This is consistent with what has been found in research on social mobility (see Breen and Whelan, this volume), although once again the observed differences between North and South may have been exaggerated by the effect of migration. Nevertheless, our analysis shows that, while class inequalities are not unduly low in the North, they are particularly high in the Republic. This is the case despite the fact that a reduction of such inequalities was one of the most important objectives of the educational reforms initiated in the 1960s. Breen *et al.* (1990: 136) argued that the lack of state control over the educational system is an important part of the explanation of why the effects of such changes were quite unlike what seems to have been envisaged. *Investment in Education* (1966) showed clearly the degree of class differentiation that was characteristic of local secondary and vocational schools at that time. In the absence of appropriate structural reform these inter-school class distinctions continue to be extremely strong. Whelan and Hannan (forthcoming) argue that the structure and nature of the educational system in the Republic of Ireland and its connection to local stratification systems, which, in their turn, are linked to local and

national economic structures, are such as to promote particularly high levels of educational inequality.<sup>11</sup>

More generally, one might suggest that in a society, like the Republic of Ireland, in which education counts for so much in terms of life chances, and in which other avenues of social advance are absent, not only will levels of educational attainment be high, but so will levels of class inequality. This is because families are prepared to devote substantial resources to ensuring their children's success in the system. In the absence of state intervention the consequence of this is that the probability of educational success comes to be closely associated with class position.

Overall, the two parts of Ireland differ in quite marked ways, which might be summarised by saying that the Northern educational system is characterised by low class inequalities and low average levels of educational attainment, while the Southern system demonstrates higher inequalities and higher average levels of attainment. These distinctions between the two are not of recent origin and any explanation of them must be sought in the long-standing economic and other differences between the two parts of the island of Ireland.

## **APPENDIX: Fitting models to the transition data**

While our aim is to fit a joint model for both parts of the island, it is convenient to begin with separate discussions of the results for North and South. In each case the baseline model is the one that allows for only main effects and thus posits that transition rates are affected by cohort, gender, class origin and type of transition but that there is no interaction between these variables. Thus, for example, this model would specify that the effect of gender, transition and class is the same across cohorts and so on. From Table A1 we can see that for Northern Ireland this model (1A) produces a deviance of 913.73 with 80 df and clearly does not provide a satisfactory fit to the data. A model which allows for all two-way associations except that between class and cohort (1B), and which therefore assumes no change in

<sup>11</sup> Comparative analysis of the educational system in the Republic of Ireland has tended to represent it as a highly standardised (in the sense of having a national curriculum and a set of standardised examinations) but weakly stratified system with an absence of specific vocational linkages (Müller and Shavit, 1998). However, the connection between education and class position has then been found to be a good deal stronger than might be expected on the basis of this particular profile (Breen and Whelan, 1998). It may then be hypothesised that strong standardisation overrides weak differentiation. However, a more convincing case can be made for the argument that both standardisation and stratification are potent factors in the system. The form of stratification although though not adequately captured by a distinction between academic and vocational education has deep historical roots and pervades the system (Whelan and Hannan, forthcoming).

class inequalities across time, has a deviance of 118.44 with 60 df. In order to produce a statistically satisfactory fit it is necessary to use a further four degrees of freedom to capture specific three-way interactions between class (excluding the petty bourgeoisie), gender and the transition to senior cycle and between the petty bourgeois class, gender and the transition to third level. With the inclusion of these additional terms this model (1C) gives a deviance of 77.05 with 56 degrees of freedom and constitutes our final model. It represents a reduction of 91.2 per cent in the deviance statistic compared with the baseline model (1A).

The two-way effects for the North capture the following substantive effects.

- There is a significant increase in success rates over time for the first transition but a slight decline for senior cycle completion among those who achieved a junior cycle qualification. There is no clear trend over time in the transition rate to third level among those in possession of a senior cycle qualification.
- In the youngest cohort there is a significant improvement in the relative position of women. The relative position of women is poorest at the final transition.
- The effect of social class, for men and women, is weakest at the transition to third level.
- The impact of social class is stronger for women except among the petty bourgeoisie. In other words the routine non-manual and manual classes experience greater disadvantage relative to men in the likelihood of making a given educational transition than do women in the professional and managerial classes. However, among the petty bourgeoisie the position is reversed and women are, in general, more likely to be successful than men .
- Class differences in the pattern of transition rates have remained constant over time.

Finally, the three-way interaction terms capture the following features:

- Within the petty bourgeois class women are more likely than men to make the first two transitions but less likely to make the transition to third-level education.
- For women the impact of social class is weaker at the second as well as the third transition. The pattern for women is therefore close to that observed in a number of other countries where the effect of class declines as one advances through the educational hierarchy (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993).

For the Republic of Ireland the baseline model (2A) gives a deviance of

482.55 with 80 df. The model of all two-way associations except that between class and cohort (2B) has a deviance of 143.83 with 60 degrees of freedom and clearly does not provide as good a fit as in the North. In order to provide such a fit it is necessary to:

- 1 use two degrees of freedom to allow for variation between cohorts in the impact of being in the petty bourgeoisie;
- 2 use seven degrees of freedom to include certain three-way interactions which capture the fact that:
  - a transition and cohort interact in a rather different fashion for women than for men;
  - b transition by cohort effects have a distinct pattern for the petty bourgeoisie;
  - c the consequences of being a women in the petty bourgeois class are different for the final transition compared with the earlier ones.

These modifications use a total of nine degrees of freedom. However, in the final model we only allow for gender differences in the transition odds among the petty bourgeoisie, rather than within all classes. This saves three degrees of freedom and as a consequence there is a difference of six degrees of freedom between models (2B) and (2C). The latter yields a deviance of 68.91 with 54 df.

The model for the South captures the following substantive effects:

- For men, just as in the North, the success rate increases across cohorts for the first transition but not for the others. For women, however, the pattern of gain is spread more evenly across the transitions. The gender difference is particularly striking at third level where women in the South started out in the oldest cohort at a particularly heavy disadvantage.
- Unlike the North, social class has an equal impact across gender except for the fact that, as in Northern Ireland, the propensity for men to inherit farms and businesses is reflected in the significant educational advantage that women in the petty bourgeoisie have in comparison with their male counterparts.
- The effect of class is significantly lower at entry to third level.
- The impact of being in the petty bourgeois class interacts with cohort and transition in a manner that results in a significant improvement in the transition rates of that class across cohorts for the first transition, a deterioration at the third transition and no clear trend at the second.
- Otherwise the effect of class across cohort does not vary.
- As in Northern Ireland, the advantage enjoyed by women in the

**Table A1.** Goodness of Fit Statistics.

	Deviance	df	% Reduction in Deviance
<b>Northern Ireland</b>			
1A: all main effects	913.73	80	
1B: 1A + all two-way effects except CL*C	114.44	60	87.0
1C: 1B + CL(2)*T(2)*S(2) + CL(4)*T(2)*S(2) + CL(5)*t(2)*S(2) + CL(3)*T(3)*S(2)	77.05	56	91.2
<b>Republic of Ireland</b>			
2A: all main effects	482.55	80	
2B: 2A + all two way effects except CL*C	143.83	60	70.4
2C: (CL*T + S*C + S*T + T*C + CL(3)*S + CL(3)*C) + (T(2)*C(3)*S(2) + T(3)*C(2)*S(2) + T3*C(3)*S(2) + T(2)*C(3)*CL(3) + T(3)*CL(2)*CL(3)+T(3)*C(3)*C L(3) + T(3)*S(2)*CL(3)	68.91	54	85.7
<b>Joint Models</b>			
3A: main effects constant by country	2,015.80	169	
3B: main effects varying by country	1,396.3	160	30.7
3C: 1B + 2B	262.3	120	87.0
3D: 1C + 2C	146.96	110	95.2
3E: 3D (Holding Constant (T*C + S*C + S*T + T*(CL2 + CL4 + CL5) ) + S(2)*C(3)*CO(1) + T(3)*C(3)*CO(1) + S(2)*T(3)*CO(1)	161.09	122	94.0

*Note:* CL = class; S = sex; C = cohort; T = transition; CO = country.

petty bourgeois class at the earlier transitions is not evident at the third transition.

Finally, we pool the two data sets and Table A1 reports results for models applied to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland jointly. The baseline model (3A) gives a deviance of 2,015.8 with 169 df. Model 3B which allows the main effects to be different for the North and South results in a deviance of 1,396 with 160 df and reduces the baseline deviance by 31 per cent, indicating the extent to which differences North and South can be accounted for by allowing the effects of class, gender and transition to vary but constraining each factor to operate uniformly across categories of the other factors. Fitting all two-way effects except class by cohort (3C)



but allowing the parameters to vary across country produces a deviance of 262.3 with 120 df and reduces the baseline deviance by 87 per cent. A model which combines the best fitting models for both countries gives a deviance of 146.96 with 110 degrees of freedom and reduces the baseline deviance by 95.2 per cent. Constraining gender and the two-way interactions between transition and cohort, gender and cohort, gender and transition, and transition and class (except for the petty bourgeoisie) to be equal across country would give a model with 125 degrees of freedom. However, in order to achieve a satisfactory fit it is necessary to fit three terms that capture specific sex by cohort, transition by cohort and sex by transition variations across country. With the addition of these terms Model 3D gives a deviance of 161.09 with 122 degrees of freedom ( $p = .0102$ ) and accounts for 94.0 per cent of the baseline figure.

The joint model captures the following similarities and differences between North and South:

- Transition rates are significantly higher in the South at the first and, more particularly, the second transition.
- In both countries success rates increase across cohorts for the first transition but not for the remaining transitions. The exception to this is women in the South who start out with extremely high levels of comparative disadvantage and for whom the pattern of gain is more even.
- With the exception of the petty bourgeoisie in the South no trend in class effects across cohort is observed.
- Class interacts with gender differently in the two countries. In the North women in the routine non-manual and manual classes are more strongly disadvantaged than those in the professional and managerial class. No such effect is observed in the South. However, in both the North and the South among the petty bourgeoisie it is women who have higher transition rates, although this advantage largely disappears at the final transition.
- Finally, class effects are significantly stronger in the South.

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