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HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to provide an overview of higher education participation in Northern Ireland. The aims are to set out quantitatively, the main dimensions of participation located within a comparative United Kingdom (UK) context, to identify the main social characteristics of participation, to draw upon qualitative research evidence to contextualise the patterns identified and to briefly discuss the relevant public policies. The paper draws upon a range of official statistical sources and the findings from research conducted in the past twenty years in Northern Ireland.

Data Sources

The main data sources are from official *Department of Education for Northern Ireland* (DENI) statistical series. In the years up to 1993 these data were derived from the five *Education and Library Board* (ELB) records of those entering higher education courses, which were a result of administrative activities in relation to student finance. In latter years these data are derived from the *Higher Education Statistics Agency* (HESA). The HESA collates statistical returns from the *Higher Education Institutions* (HEIs). The HESA was created in 1994 in order to bring a more systematic approach to higher education statistics. Nevertheless, as Davies (1997) has demonstrated, there are still significant inconsistencies in the ways in which institutions file their returns. The HESA has made considerable efforts to introduce greater standardisation but there remain difficulties at making detailed comparisons between institutions. At the level of UK nations/regions (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England), however, these difficulties are less of a problem. The paper also makes use of data derived from the *University and College*

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Admissions System (UCAS). The UCAS was created from the separate centralised polytechnic and university admissions systems after 1992 and the elimination of the binary system. The UCAS is owned by the UK HEIs and in recent years has made significant data available on the application process. In recent years UCAS has extended its activities to institutions that offer higher education courses other than universities. As a result, the number of institutions covered by UCAS is significantly larger than the number covered by HESA. While UCAS data are comprehensive there are a number of specific issues in relation to some variables which will be considered within this paper.

In addition to official sources, the paper draws on several research projects conducted over a number of years on aspects of higher education. These projects have been variously funded by the *Social Science Research Council* (SSRC) now the *Economic and Social Research Council* (ESRC), the DENI, *the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council* (NIHEC), the *Central Community Relations Council* (CCRU) and the *Higher Education Authority* (HEA). These sources are discussed later in the paper.

2. COMPARATIVE INDICATORS OF PARTICIPATION 1985 -1998

We can start our analysis by constructing comparative figures for higher education participation in Northern Ireland in comparison with circumstances with the rest of the UK.[1] Conventionally, taking the number of full-time undergraduate entrants aged under 21 and relating these to the relevant age-specific population thereby creating the *Age Specific Population Index* (API) does this. The *Department for Education and Employment* (DfEE) in London when calculating the API for Great Britain takes the average of the age 18 and age 19 populations for the denominator. The convention in Northern Ireland is to just take the age 18 population. From 1996/97, the API for Great Britain includes nursing students while their inclusion for Northern Ireland took place in 1997/98.

Accepting this difference, the APIs for Great Britain and Northern Ireland are shown in Table 1. As can be seen, the Northern Ireland API has consistently exceeded that for Britain in the past decade or so. Within the UK, Northern Ireland's API is exceeded by that of Scotland as Table 1 shows. It should be borne in mind that the calculation for the Scottish API takes the base population as the total number of 17-year-olds. Over the period under review, the Scottish API has significantly exceeded that of GB as a whole and has tended to be slightly ahead of the Northern Ireland API.

Table 1: Age Specific Population Index for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Great Britain, 1986/87 -1997/98*

Year	Northern Ireland**	Scotland***	Great Britain****

1986/87	18.6	19.3	14.0
1987/88	19.5	20.5	14.6
1988/89	21.4	20.6	15.1
1989/90	24.6	23.8	17.1
1990/91	25.8	25.9	19.3
1991/92	27.9	29.9	23.3
1992/93	32.2	34.8	27.8
1993/94	36.1	38.3	30.1
1994/95	38.2	42.7	31.5
1995/96	40.0	42.7	30.32
1996/97	39.9	46.7	32.33
1997/98	45.5	n.a.	33.34

Notes:

* The figures prior to 1989/90 are estimates.

** This figure expresses the number of Northern Ireland domiciled initial entrants to full-time undergraduate higher education in the UK or Republic of Ireland aged under 21 as a percentage of the 18 year old population. The 1997/98 figure includes nursing students.

*** This figure takes Scottish domiciled initial entrants to higher education in the UK aged under 21 as a percentage of the 17 year old population.

**** The figure expresses the number of UK domiciled initial entrants to full-time higher education in Great Britain aged under 21 expressed as a proportion of the averaged 18-19 year old Great British population. These figures include nursing students from 1996/97

In many ways, however, the API no longer captures the nature of higher education participation. The UK has increasingly sought, under the banner of 'widening access', to provide for mature entrants, defined as aged 21 and over in the UK, and opportunities for part-time study. Particular groups have been deliberately targeted by the funding councils and individual institutions such as 'women returnees' to produce a far more diverse student population. In 1997/98 for example, it is estimated that there were 395,000 part-time undergraduates out of a total of 1.39 million and that 47 percent of first year undergraduates are mature entrants, of these 91 percent of part-time students, 28 percent of full-time students. Expansion has also extended to the ethnic minorities in Britain, who now constitute 13 percent of home students. More and more students now take postgraduate studies mostly through taught certificate, diploma and masters courses rather than postgraduate research degrees.

With current policy in higher education emphasising the concept of 'lifelong learning' a measure of participation based on 18 year olds increasingly misses what is taking place and what will undoubtedly will develop further in the future. As yet, however, no other indicators have emerged to capture the diverse nature of higher education activity. One minimalist additional measure is to take the number of full-time undergraduate entrants over the age of 21 and relate these to the age 21 population. Comparing Northern Ireland to the overall UK position, as in Table 2, suggests that Northern Ireland lags significantly in the ability to attract mature students to full-time undergraduate study. The underperformance of Northern Ireland

in all 'lifelong learning' has been noted by Field (1999). At this stage of the assessment of higher education participation, we can note that Northern Ireland does well in the UK context for young entrants, but comparatively less well for mature entrants.

Table 2: Mature Entrants to Full-Time Undergraduate Courses at United Kingdom Higher Education Institutes,
(Expressed as a proportion of those aged 21 and over to the 21 year old population)

Domiciled	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Northern Ireland	7.1	8.6	7.0	9.3
United Kingdom	12.7	13.6	13.5	13.4

Source: Northern Ireland Higher Education Council

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3. A RISING AGE SPECIFIC POPULATION INDEX IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

At various times it has been suggested that the Northern Ireland API has been maximised and that there is no further scope for growth. The question arises - can the API increase further? Table 3 shows the destinations of school leavers. Of course, as has been argued above, higher education participation involves far more than taking the conventionally qualified school leaver at aged 18, that is with 'A' levels/GNVQs, and, given the comparatively low level of participation of mature students, there is clearly room for expansion. In terms of the 18-20 year old population, the data suggest that there is only limited scope for increasing the proportions entering higher education from those currently attaining the necessary qualifications. As Table 3 suggests, around 93-94 percent of those with two 'A' levels or equivalent in 1996/97 entered higher or further education institutions.

Table 3: Destination of School Leavers of with 'A' levels and Advanced GNVQs 1995/96 and 1996/97

	2 + 'A' Levels		1 'A' Level	
	1995/96	1996/97	1995/96	1996/97
Institutes of Higher Education	80.5%	84.6%	30.4%	33.5%
Institutes of Further Education	13.1%	9.5%	46.1%	42.9%
Other Destinations	6.0%	5.5%	21.8%	21.7%
Unknown	0.4%	0.4%	1.7%	1.9%
Number of Students	7760	8356	586	529

The structure of secondary education, however, needs to be taken into account. In the final year of primary education the majority of pupils takes the transfer test and, on the basis of performance, attend either grammar or secondary schools. Currently, about 37 percent of pupils attend grammar schools. Only grammar schools can select on the basis of academic attainment. Under the policy of parental choice,

grammar schools can expand up to physical capacity. As a result, the proportion of pupils in grammar schools has increased, leaving secondary schools with slightly less than two-thirds of pupils. Many teachers in secondary schools find it difficult to motivate pupils who have been judged as 'failures' at the age of 11. It is at least possible that much talent is lost through this process thereby suppressing the levels of subsequent attainment at 'A' level/GNVQ. This view was suggested by the *Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee* (NIASC, 1997).

There is also evidence that there are substantial variations in the rates of staying on beyond the school leaving age by area, gender and religion. Notably, Belfast and Derry cities record some of the lowest rates. In addition, rates of staying on are higher for girls than those of boys and Protestant males record the lowest rates when religion and gender are considered together (DENI, 1997). Therefore, there is considerable potential for improvement in the numbers of those moving through the school system to subsequently enter further and higher education, resulting from reform and improvement at both primary and secondary levels in the education system.

More immediately, the policy of restricting the number of full-time undergraduate entrants, known as the *Maximum Aggregate Student Number* (MASN) during the mid to late 1990s effectively capped provision in Northern Ireland and helped dampen the API, as indeed it was designed to do for largely financial reasons. Finally, increases in the API could arise from redesignating courses as third level such as has happened with nurses. For example, reforms to the police service could lead to more sophisticated training leading to such courses being designated as higher education as is the case in the Republic of Ireland (RoI).

4. THE PROFILE OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The next stage of the exploration of participation in Northern Ireland is to look in greater detail at the trends over time in the student population. This is done in two ways. First in this section we shall examine the broad characteristics of student numbers, full-time and part-time at degree and sub-degree levels and at the changing numbers of postgraduates. In this assessment we shall also consider the destination of students since Northern Ireland domiciled students are not confined to Northern Ireland for study. Many go to elsewhere in the UK or to the Republic of Ireland for their studies. As we shall see, some go by choice while others are forced to go. The second part of the assessment which we address in the Section 5 will be to examine the social characteristics of participation including gender, religion and social class.

Participation

Table 4 shows the overall numbers of full-time and part-time undergraduates for the period 1985/86 to 1997/98. Full-time undergraduate entrants' numbers have gone

from 6,598 to 13,817, an increase of 109.1 percent. Part-time undergraduate numbers in the same period have gone from 2,865 to 9,434 an increase of 229.3 percent. As a result of this differential rate of increase, part-time undergraduate numbers represented 30.1 percent of undergraduates entrants in 1985/86 and this had increased to 40.6 percent in 1997/98. As well as this substantial change, another major change in both full-time and part-time undergraduate numbers is the increase in the numbers of entrants on sub-degree undergraduate programmes rather than first-degree studies.

While the relevant data are only available for recent years, there has been steady growth in entrants on full-time sub-degree, which increased by 27.1 percent compared with a 10.4 percent increase in entrants to full-time degree programmes from 1994/95 to 1997/98. Entrants to these full-time sub-degree programmes now represent a quarter of full-time undergraduates. The upsurge of entrants to part-time sub-degree programmes is even more marked. While entrants to part-time degree programmes increased by 61.1 percent those to part-time sub-degree courses increased by 139.7 percent from 1994/95 to 1997/98 so that the sub-degree numbers represented 82.8 percent of part-time undergraduate numbers in 1997/98.

In summary, while there has been a virtual doubling of entrants to full-time undergraduate programmes the more striking changes have been the growth of part-time numbers. Part-time entrants' numbers have gone up both for those on degree programmes but more especially in part-time sub-degree numbers which now represent 33.6 percent of all undergraduate entrants.

A study of all 1991 entrants to full-time *Higher Non-Degree* (HND) courses in Northern Ireland, followed up in 1996, revealed that 60 percent had gone on to further, largely degree level study, after completing their initial course.[2] The HND route may well be seen as an alternative route to obtaining a degree in the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland rather than a specifically vocational route with a labour market driven purpose. Expanding sub-degree provision, therefore, may have more to do with indirectly increasing the demand for degree level studies rather than providing a pool of vocationallly orientated graduates available for local employment.

In Table 5 the numbers of post-graduate entrants are shown. In contrast with undergraduate level studies, the numbers of full-time postgraduates increased at a faster rate than part-time numbers. Overall, full-time numbers increased by 121

Table 4: Full-time and Part-time Undergraduate and Postgraduate Entrants of Northern Ireland Domiciled Students 1985/86 - 1997/98

	Full-time Undergrad	First Degree (%)	Other Undergrad (%)	Part-time Undergrad	First Degree (%)	Other Undergrad (%)	Full-time Postgrad	Part-time Undergrad
1985/86	6598			2865			1154	1240
1986/87	6928			2611			1132	1132
1987/88	7212			2711			1267	1381
1988/89	7685			3173			1335	1344
1989/90	8697			3048			1473	1518
1990/91	9113			3421			1600	1818
1991/92	9614			3701			1808	2045
1992/93	10905			4012			2022	2020
1993/94	11786			4021			2171	2438
1994/95	12116	9428 (77.8)	2688 (22.2)	4265	1005 (23.6)	3260 (76.4)	2263	2258
1995/96	12779	10007 (78.3)	2702 (21.7)	6209	1243 (20.1)	4960 (79.9)	2464	2382
1996/97	12270	9428 (76.8)	2842 (23.2)	7114	2028 (28.5)	5086 (71.5)	2234	2981
1997/98	13817	10405 (75.3)	3412 (24.7)	9434	1619 (17.2)	7815 (82.8)	2552	2079
Change (%) 1985-1998	109.1			229.3			121.1	67.7
Change (%) 1994-1998		10.4	27.1		66.1	139.7		

Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland

percent while part-time numbers rose by 67.7 percent. The growth of postgraduate studies, while substantial, is undoubtedly constrained by the limited availability of student financial support for study at this level.

Table 5: Full and Part-time Postgraduate Northern Ireland Domiciled Entrants 1985/86 - 1997/98*

	Full-Time Posts Graduates	Part-Time Post Graduates
1985/86	869	1181
1986/87	878	1094
1987/88	962	1287
1988/89	981	1292
1989/90	1018	1532
1990/91	1107	1749
1991/92	1250	1971
1992/93	1404	1901
1993/94	1525	2317
1994/95	2263	2258
1995/96	2464	2382
1996/97	2234	2981
1997/98	2552	2079

* Pre 1994/95 figures relate to those Northern Ireland domiciled in all Northern Ireland institutions excluding those studying elsewhere. From 1994/95 onwards includes Northern Ireland domiciled studying in UK or RoI plus part-time Open University numbers.

Location

The Lockwood Report of 1965 revealed that in the mid 1960s most Northern Ireland students either studied in Northern Ireland or travelled to Dublin to study at *Trinity College Dublin* (TCD), or to a lesser extent, *University College Dublin* (UCD). During the mid 1960s, however, the then UCCA system was extended to Northern Ireland and, following the report of the Anderson Committee, the system of student support in the form of fee payments and a means tested maintenance grant was introduced. As participation in Northern Ireland increased, so the location for study became more diverse. Data available for the early 1970s showed Northern Ireland student numbers studying in the Republic of Ireland declining both in absolute and proportionate terms while the numbers gaining entry to institutions in Britain rose substantially. At the same time, the relatively small numbers from Britain studying in Northern Ireland fell back substantially.

During the 1970s, the proportion of new entrants leaving Northern Ireland was consistently between 30 and 40 percent. Although this increase coincided with the civil disturbances being at their worst, survey evidence suggested that a desire to escape the 'Troubles' was only one factor at work. The 'pull factors' of

experiencing somewhere new and access to wider opportunities especially job prospects were important as well as the simple desire to get away from home (Osborne *et al.*, 1983; Cormack *et al.*, 1997).

In Table 6 the destination of all entrants to full-time undergraduate programmes are shown. The data differentiate for the different locations in Great Britain only for the most recent years. The rate of leaving during the period under review fluctuated between 31 percent and 39 percent. Given the range of institutions available, it is not surprising that the largest number of students go to institutions in England. Scotland is a very important destination for Northern Ireland students while Wales, perhaps as much for geographical reasons as any other, involves relatively small numbers. The numbers of students entering courses in the Republic of Ireland show considerable variations over the years. The very small numbers recorded in the mid 1980s reflect the situation during the early part of the decade and the 1970s. The rise of numbers towards the end of the 1980s and especially the early 1990s reflected the upsurge of entrants to the private sector third level colleges in Dublin which began to offer a number of third level courses, most notably franchised degree courses from UK institutions.

For a number of years the Northern Ireland authorities, such as the *Education and Library Boards*, awarded the same level of student support to entrants to these institutions as any other in the Republic of Ireland. Somewhat belatedly the support was withdrawn although existing students were supported to the end of their studies.[3] As can be seen, there has been a fairly substantial reduction in the numbers entering institutions in the Republic of Ireland reflecting the ending of financial support and the competitive nature of entry to HEIs in the south.

Table 7 examines the destinations of full-time undergraduates separated into those entering first-degree programmes and those entering other undergraduate studies. As can be seen there are substantial differences in the rates of leaving between the two groups. Just over 40 percent of first degree entrants leave Northern Ireland, while less than half of these proportions are involved with those entering sub-degree programmes. Indeed, the expansion of provision in Northern Ireland in the most recent years has resulted in a halving of the migration rate for students entering sub-degree courses.

The patterns of migration of full-time postgraduate students are shown in Table 8. The data suggest that while there has been a substantial increase in the numbers of full-time postgraduates there has been an important shift in migration patterns. The numbers studying in Northern Ireland increased by 88.7 percent which reflected the increasing propensity for full-time postgraduates to study elsewhere, most notably in Britain. In the mid-1980s approximately a quarter of full-time postgraduates studied outside Northern Ireland; by the late 1990s this had increased to over a third.

Table 6: Destination of Northern Ireland Domiciled Full-time Undergraduates 1985/86-1997/98

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland	Leavers as % of Total
1985/86	4530				1961	107	31.3
1986/87	4640				2179	109	33.0
1987/88	4720				2409	83	34.6
1988/89	4772				2827	86	37.9
1984/90	5308				3252	137	39.0
1990/91	5622				3347	144	38.3
1991/92	6056				3404	154	37.0
1992/93	6718				3855	332	38.4
1993/94	7233				4027	526	38.6
1994/95	7339	2203	1479	265	3947	830	39.4
1995/96	8109	2203	1730	150	4083	587	36.5
1996/97	7804	2370	1680	132	4182	284	36.4
1997/98	9178	2429	1755	157	4341	298	33.6

Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland

Table 7: Destination of Northern Ireland Domiciled Undergraduate Entrants for First Degree and Other Undergraduate Courses

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland	Leaversas % of Total
First Degree							
1994/95	5267	1908	1372	244	3524	637	44.1
1995/96	5953	1909	1605	137	3651	473	40.9
1996/97	5375	2131	1552	121	3804	249	43.0
1997/98	6173	2190	1614	140	3944	288	40.7
Other Undergraduate							
1994/95	2072	295	107	12	414	193	22.9
1995/96	2156	294	125	13	432	114	20.2
1996/97	2429	239	128	11	378	35	14.5
1997/98	3005	239	141	17	397	10	11.9

Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland

Table 8: The Destination of Northern Ireland Domiciled Full-time Postgraduate Entrants 1985/86

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales	Republic of Ireland	Leavers	Leavers as % of Total	Total
1985/86	869					285	24.7	1154
1986/87	878					254	22.4	1132
1987/88	962					305	24.1	1267
1988/89	981					354	76.5	1335
1989/90	1018					455	30.9	1473
1990/91	1107					493	30.8	1600
1991/92	1250					558	30.9	1808
1992/93	1404					618	30.6	2022
1993/94	1525					646	29.8	2171
1994/95	1536	473	195	44	15	727	32.1	2263
1995/96	1670	533	186	43	32	794	32.2	2464
1996/97	1398	564	201	41	30	836	37.4	2234
1997/98	1640	607	225	45	35	912	35.7	2552

Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland

Table 9: The Destination of Northern Ireland Domiciled Part-time Postgraduate Entrants 1985/86

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales	Republic of Ireland	Leavers	Leavers as % of Total	Total
1985/86	1191					49	4.0	1240
1986/87	1094					38	3.4	1132
1987/88	1287					44	3.3	1331
1988/89	1292					52	3.9	1344
1989/90	1532							
1990/91	1749					69	3.8	1818
1991/92	1971					74	3.6	2045
1992/93	1901					109	5.4	2010
1993/94	2317					121	5.0	2438
1994/95	2110	120	24	4	-	148	6.6	2258
1995/96	2216	122	43	1	-	166	7.0	2382
1996/97	2621	289	62	9	-	360	12.1	2981
1997/98	1803	217	47	12	-	276	13.3	2079

Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland

Part-time postgraduate study is often associated with those who seek to enhance qualifications while working. While there has been growth in the numbers studying at this level part-time, the numbers tend to fluctuate in the most recent years. Moreover, together with full-time postgraduates there has been an increase in recent years in the proportions studying outside Northern Ireland, as Table 9 indicates. It is not entirely clear why this has increased significantly in the most recent years.

Alongside the consistent patterns of migration of those undertaking full-time undergraduate study must be added the 'migration' of those undertaking full-time postgraduate study. The term 'migration' may not be fully appropriate since many of these apparent migrants will also include those who undergraduate studies outside Northern Ireland, but still classify themselves as domiciled in Northern Ireland when registering for postgraduate study. There is no ready way of distinguishing these students from those who actually migrate after graduating for postgraduate study.

One of the most striking characteristics of higher education participation in Northern Ireland is the extent to which Northern Ireland's high API is accommodated by the migration of students, predominantly into the rest of the UK. The main issue that can be examined is the extent to which these patterns of movement, especially at the undergraduate level, can be understood as voluntary. We can access a number of sources of information to help understand this issue including the provision of places, grades required, applications and interviews held.

Provision of Undergraduate Places

An important issue in the understanding of migration relates to the provision of places in Northern Ireland. An estimate of the first-degree places provided in Northern Ireland relative to the aged 15-19 population, compared with England, Scotland and Wales in 1990/91 was reported in Cormack *et al*. (1997). On this basis Northern Ireland had 36 places per 1000 aged 15-19 compared with 70 places in Scotland and 51 places in England and in Wales. On this basis, it was suggested that Northern Ireland needed up to 12,000 places to match the Scottish figure or 5,300 to match the Welsh figure. Subsequently this argument was accepted by the *Northern Ireland Higher Education Council* (NIHEC) and was endorsed in the Northern Ireland Appendix of the Dearing Report (1997) where an additional 10,000 places were called for. During 1999, additional places in Northern Ireland were announced by DENI. Crucially, however, the additional places were split between first degree places and sub-degree undergraduate places and, since expansion has also taken place in the other UK jurisdictions, it is not clear whether the differential underprovison of places has changed.

Table 10: Comparison of 'A' Level Points Scores in Northern Ireland with Great Britain's "Old" ("New") Universities 1999/00

	University Ulster	*Queen's Belfast*	*Edinburgh (Napier)*		*Glasgow (Glasgow Caledonian)*		*Dundee (Paisley)*		*Leeds (Leeds Metro)*		*Liverpool (John Moores)*		*Manchester (Sheffield Hallam)*		*QMW (South Bank)*		*Newcastle (Northumbria)*		*Average Northern Ireland*		*Average Great Britain*		*Range Great Britain*	
Medicine and Allied																								
Medicine		28	28		28		26		28		26		26		24				28		27		24-28	
Dentistry		28			26		24		24		28		26		24				28		25		24-28	
Physiotherapy	26					(18)				(20)	22		24	(18)				(20)	26	(26)	23	(19)	22-24	(18)-(20)
Occupational Therapy	22					(12)					16			(18)		(8)		(12)	22	(22)	16	(13)		(8)-(18)
Business Studies																								
Accountancy (Finance)	22	26	24	(14)	24	(14)	14		24	(16)	22	(16)	24	(14)		(12)	20	(18)	24	(24)	22	(15)	14-24	(12)-(18)
Business Studies (Management)	22	24	26	(14)	26	(18)	20	(14)	24	(18)	20	(16)	22	(18)	18	(14)	22	(18)	23	(23)	22	(16)	18-26	(14)-(18)
Engineeering																								
Electrical	18	24	18	(8)	16	(8)	18	(8)	22	(12)	22	(16)	24	(8)	20	(18)	26	(18)	21	(21)	21	(12)	16-26	(8)-(18)
Mechanical	12	20	18	(10)	12	(10)	8	(18)	22		20	(16)	18		24	(8)	24	(12)	16	(16)	18	(12)	8-24	(8)-(18)
Civil	16	24	16	(12)	16	(8)	22	(16)	18	(8)	20	(8)	18	(16)	24	(12)	24		20	(20)	20	(11)	16-24	(8)-(16)
Social Studies																								
Social Policy	18	22	26	20		(16)			22	(16)	20		22	(14)		(16)	18		20	(20)	21	(15)	18-26	(14)-(16)
Sociology	20	22	26	22	(16)		20	(14)	24		22	(14)	22	(16)		(18)	18	(14)	21	(21)	22	(15)	18-26	(14)-(18)
Humanities																								
History	18	20	24	22			22		24	(16)	24	(14)	24	(18)	22		24	(22)	19	(19)	23	(18)	22-24	(14)-(22)
English	20	20	28	22			20		26		26	(20)	26	(22)	22	(18)	24	(22)	20	(20)	24	(21)	22-28	(18)-(22)
Sciences																								
Mathematics	20	22	24	(12)	20	(12)	20	(12)	26		14	(10)	24	(14)	20		22	(12)	21	(21)	22	(13)	14-24	(10)-(18)
Computer Studies	20	22	20	(8)	16	(16)	16	(16)	22	(14)	18	(16)	24	(18)	22	(16)	18	(14)	21	(21)	20	(15)	16-24	(8)-(18)
Physics		18	16	(8)	12	(8)	12	(8)	24		20	(10)	22	(8)	24		18	(8)	18	(18)	20	(8)	12-24	(8)-(18)
Biochemistry	16	18	22		14	(16)	14	(16)	22		20	(12)	22		18	(12)	20	(12)	17	(17)	20	(13)	14-22	(12)-(18)
Biology	20	18	24	(10)	14		14		24		20	(16)	20		24		20		19	(19)	20	(11)	14-24	(8)-(18)

Grades Sought

The grades sought by institutions in Northern Ireland compared with comparator institutions in the rest of the UK as set out in Table 10 show a range of courses with the 'A' level points sought for entry in 1999/00.[4] It can be readily seen that *Queen's University, Belfast* (QUB) asking grades for the range of sample courses is broadly equivalent to the selected pre-1992 universities in the rest of the UK. On the other hand, the asking grades for degree courses at the *University of Ulster* (UU) are significantly higher than the comparator post-1992 institutions in the rest of the UK.

The undersupply of first degree places in Northern Ireland, relative to elsewhere in the UK, and in the context of a high demand for higher education, has resulted in a steady escalation of entry grades sought particularly at the University of Ulster.[5] In effect this process has removed the opportunity for those with modest 'A' level qualifications to gain entry to degree courses in Northern Ireland.[6] Universities are now keenly conscious of 'league tables', for example, that which is published in the *Times*, purporting to rank institutions in quality terms and where 'A' level points for entry is one of the indicators.

Pattern of Applications

A possible way to examine locational preferences is to examine the pattern of preferences made by prospective students when completing the application form for entry to higher education courses. In the 1995/96 UCAS process, at the first stage, applicants could list up to eight applications, but this is now reduced to six, and applications can be made for more than one course at the same institution. We can classify Northern Ireland applicants into: those where 60 percent of applications were for courses/institutions outside Northern Ireland, the 'leavers'; those where 60 percent of applications were to courses/institutions inside Northern Ireland, the 'stayers'; and, those who have a mix of locations.[7] When this was undertaken for the 1995/96 entry cycle (Gallagher *et al.*, 1997) it revealed that 42 percent of applicants were allocated to the 'stayers' group, 48 percent were classified as 'leavers' and 11 percent were allocated to the mixed group. Almost half of the applicants in this year were 'leavers'.

The second stage is for applicants to refine their applications down to two: a firm choice and an 'insurance' choice. Using the same basis of classification, 60 percent of firm choices are for the two Northern Ireland institutions, 26 percent are for HEIs outside Northern Ireland and 15 percent did not specify a firm choice (84 percent of these subsequently did not obtain a place). Insurance choices showed 44 percent for Northern Ireland, 27 percent for HEIs outside Northern Ireland and 29 percent did not identify an insurance choice. Three quarters of those who had a firm choice outside Northern Ireland also had an insurance choice outside Northern Ireland. Similarly, three quarters of those with a firm choice for Northern Ireland had an insurance choice for Northern Ireland. In terms of success rates, 80 percent of those

with firm choices outside Northern Ireland gained a place outside Northern Ireland while 67 percent of those with a firm choice for either of the two Northern Ireland HEIs were successful.

We can disaggregate these data one more stage to examine those who might be reluctant leavers and reluctant stayers. Table 11 shows, in absolute terms, those who might, from this analysis, be reluctant leavers or stayers if we assume they would prefer their firm choice but would take their insurance choice if they had to. On this basis the Table 11 suggests that there are more than twice as many reluctant leavers as reluctant stayers.

Table 11: Firm and Insurance Choice Location of Northern Ireland Domiciled Accepted Candidates, 1995/96

	Insurance Choice		
Firm Choice	Out of Northern Ireland	In Northern Ireland	Total
Out of Northern Ireland	1825	511	2336
In Northern Ireland	1245	3740	4981
Total	3066	4251	7317

The evidence thus far in our examination of the migration of students for study suggests that there are a number of factors at work. The first relates to the undersupply of places for first degree study in Northern Ireland. The scale of the undersupply in relation to comparative provision in the rest of the UK and in the light of the demand for places, has resulted in an increase in the 'A' level points required. In particular as result of the increase in points sought at the University of Ulster, access to first degree courses is not available in Northern Ireland to those with modest points at 'A' level. The analysis of application data further suggested that there were determined leavers, reluctant leavers and reluctant stayers. We now turn to the final source of evidence on this matter.

Interviews with Prospective Students

We can utilise data generated by two sets of qualitative interviews conducted with groups of prospective students in 1995/96 and 1997/98. The earlier data also included interviews with parents.[8] The purposes of the two series of interviews, which both used focus groups, were slightly different. The first series of interviews in 1995/96 was primarily geared at assessing the value that parents and prospective students placed on higher education with secondary concerns about finance and the costs of studying outside Northern Ireland. The second set of interviews concentrated on the migration issue and the views of students in the light of the new arrangements for financial support, the introduction of fees, although means–tested, and the replacement of the grant with a loan.

In the 1995/96 interviews, prospective students suggested that financial

considerations were relatively unimportant in making their choices of institutions for study. Most suggested that parents, by and large, indicated that students should choose their place for study without taking finance into account as parents 'would manage'. This was confirmed through the interviews with parents. Only a small minority suggested that financial issues dictated that they should stay in Northern Ireland and live, if possible, at home. However, both parents and prospective students suggested that costs would be much higher south of a line drawn from Liverpool through Manchester to Newcastle. Moreover, there was a perception that they were more likely to encounter discrimination in the south of England rather than the north of England or Scotland.

Many students perceived the people in the more northern locations to be 'like us'. By far the most significant reason given by pupils for leaving Northern Ireland was the high grades sought by the two Northern Ireland universities. The second most important factor related to the desire to 'get away from home' and the perceived attractions of destinations in the north of England and Scotland. It was clear that there was a minority of students who were 'determined leavers' - who wanted to study outside Northern Ireland. At this time cost was a relatively insignificant factor for students who were considering leaving Northern Ireland to study.

It also emerged that there was another group of prospective students who were determined to stay in Northern Ireland. They argued that the quality of courses available were as good as elsewhere, as evidenced by the 'high grades' sought, and out of a desire to maintain networks based on family and community. The largest group of prospective students was relatively relaxed about location but some of whom felt they had to consider a choice outside Northern Ireland in case their grades were not as high as hoped for. This latter category can be considered as 'reluctant' leavers. Cutting across these views were students predicted grades for 'A' levels. As part of the UCAS process, schools estimate likely 'A' level attainment and these subject predictions are usually passed on to pupils. Many students sought to take these predictions into account when making their applications.

By the time of the second study[9], the cost of higher education and especially the cost of leaving Northern Ireland had become the most significant issue. Still, however, there were students who, while acknowledging the cost of leaving, were determined to leave. More students cited cost as a reason for seeking to stay in Northern Ireland and, indeed, some students indicated that although they had wished to leave, at their parents' insistence, they were seeking to study in Northern Ireland. This 'reluctant stayer' group was, on this round of interviews, a result of the perceived costs of leaving.

The achievement of a political settlement with the Belfast Agreement seemed to play

little part in students' thinking. Many exhibited a degree of cynicism about the prospects for a lasting peace arguing that they had lived all their lives in a violent society and that local politicians were 'too petty to make the deal work'. Only a very small number of students viewed the development at that time as one which would impact positively on their decision to stay or leave Northern Ireland. Of course, a successful implementation of the Agreement and a consequent improvement in community, economic and political relations could, in time, change perceptions and choices. But it is important to see that for many students who leave to study elsewhere in the UK, especially for those who go to Scotland and the north of England, the transition is perceived as educationally and socially unproblematic. This issue is explored further below.

It can be suggested, therefore, that there is a complex set of factors at work underpinning the observed patterns of migration for undergraduate courses. The following would seem to be the key factors:

- The undersupply of places relative to the demand for higher education and relative to provision elsewhere in the UK.

- The increase in asking grades especially at the University of Ulster which has removed the option of degree level entry for modest 'A' level achievers (except in relatively low demand areas such as engineering).

- The availability of degree level studies for modest 'A' level achievers at post-1992 universities in Britain.

- The desire of some students to leave Northern Ireland under all circumstances – the 'determined leavers'.

- The desire of some students to stay – the 'determined stayers'.

- The importance of finance as the reality of the new student finance arrangements start to impact on choices – the 'reluctant stayers'

A key finding, therefore, is that the relatively high API for Northern Ireland is only achieved through the 'export' of between 35-40 percent of each year's entry cohort. The policy implications of this pattern will be discussed in the conclusions to the paper. The socio-cultural dimension to these patterns will be examined below as well as the issue of whether 'displacement' has also been a factor in relation to the entry of students domiciled in the Republic of Ireland to the Northern Ireland institutions.

5. SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPANTS

The key social characteristics of participation can be set out in some detail. The sources of these data are mainly official but in one important area, religion, they are not. No official data on higher education participation record religion.[10] We have to rely on survey data collected periodically since 1980 about participation by religion between 1973 and 1991.[11]

Gender

The pattern of entry to higher education by gender can be seen in Table 12, which shows undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study. Full-time undergraduate entrants became predominantly female in 1992/93. In the years since 1993 the rate of increase in female entrants has been so much faster than that for males, that by 1997/98, females represented 57.8 percent of full-time undergraduates. Separating out first degree entrants from entrants to other undergraduate courses shows that, for the years for which the data are available, the patterns do differ between these courses.

Table 12: Proportion of Female Entrants to Full and Part-time Undergraduate and Postgraduate Entrants, 1985/86 - 1997/98*

	Undergraduate		Postgraduate	
	Full-time	**Part-time**	**Full-time**	**Part-time**
1985/86	49.2	30.8	49.2	37.0
1986/87	48.9	36.8	49.0	39.2
1987/88	49.5	38.8	49.4	38.5
1988/89	49.7	41.9	49.5	41.1
1989/90	49.8	43.0	50.5	44.0
1990/91	49.9	45.0	53.2	44.8
1991/92	49.6	45.6	49.9	46.8
1992/93	50.3	47.2	50.4	45.0
1993/94	51.3	47.0	51.0	46.7
1994/95	51.5	52.7	50.1	45.4
1995/96	52.5	59.1	51.9	50.9
1996/97	54.2	58.7	51.4	52.3
1997/98	59.4	63.2	53.1	55.6

* From 1994/95 onwards these include Open University entrants.

First degree entrants have been predominantly female with a slow increase from 1994/95 to 1997/98. Entrants to other undergraduate courses show a dramatic change in these few years with men and women almost equal in 1994/95 but a dramatic change by 1997/98. In part this results from the inclusion of nursing courses in the figures but the numbers of males have actually declined from 1,390 to 1,211.

Postgraduate numbers show a more steady position for females as a proportion of full-time entrants in the period under review. In the mid-1980s they represented just under 50 percent of entrants, while in 1997/98 they represented 53.9 percent of entrants. The year females became a majority was 1992/93. Part-time female entrants starting from a much lower proportion, 37 percent in 1985/86, became a majority in 1995/96 and this had become a clear majority by 1997/98. Taking 1997/98, the position of males is undoubtedly one of comparative decline in all levels and mode of study. In some instances it is a slower increase in male numbers compared with females that has accounted for this position while in others male numbers have remained static or even fallen back. The period from the mid -1980s to the end of the 1990s has undoubtedly been a period of female advance in higher education.

Table 13: Gender Proportions of Full-time Undergraduate Entrants by Subject Group for 1994/95 and 1997/98

	1994/95		1997/98	
	Male (%)	**Female (%)**	**Male (%)**	**Female (%)**
Medicine/Dentistry	3.0	3.4	3.1	2.3
Subjects Allied to Medicine	2.6	8.2	5.2	18.0
Biological Sciences	4.7	7.0	4.3	6.5
Agriculture & Related	2.2	1.3	1.3	1.4
Physical Sciences	5.5	4.1	4.6	3.0
Mathematical. Sciences	4.1	1.8	3.7	1.9
Computer Science	6.7	1.9	7.5	2.2
Engineering & Technology.	16.0	2.6	12.6	1.8
Architecture and Planning	8.1	1.5	8.3	1.6
Social, Economics, Politics.	5.4	9.7	5.1	8.3
Law	2.6	3.2	2.9	2.5
Business & Administration.	17.0	23.0	15.9	20.3
Library & Information	1.5	1.5	1.9	1.9
Languages	2.0	5.0	2.5	4.3
Humanities	2.9	2.8	2.8	2.2
Creative Arts & Design	4.4	5.2	5.3	5.7
Education	2.3	6.6	2.5	5.8
Combined	9.0	11.4	10.5	10.3
TOTAL	5439	5728	5817	7610

Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland

Traditionally, females in higher education have tended to be concentrated in non-science and engineering courses. We can examine the position of female entrants in broad subject groupings from 1994/95 to 1997/98. The available data relate to

entrants in the UK (data are not available for entrants to the Republic of Ireland or the entrants to higher education courses in further education courses in Britain). The data are shown in Table 13.

In 1994/95, some traditional gender differences in subject studied are evident. Women show a small percentage in engineering and technology, mathematical sciences, architecture, building and planning, and computer science. On the other hand, females are strongly represented in subjects allied to medicine, biological sciences, business and administrative studies and social, economic and political sciences. There is a relatively high proportions of both men and women studying combined subjects.

The 1997/98 pattern reflects some overall changes in subject preferences that are particularly striking for women. Nearly one in five female entrants are now studying subjects allied to medicine and the proportion of males studying these subjects has doubled although only one in twenty males are in this category. Both males and females show a lower proportion in engineering and technology but the gender differential remains. Thereafter the subject patterns are fairly similar to the earlier data. There are no significant gender differences in the proportions of undergraduates migrating for study.

Social Class

Survey evidence has consistently shown that entrants from Northern Ireland show a higher representation of those from the manual social classes than entrants in the rest of the UK and this position is confirmed by the data available. UCAS records both applications and accepts for all those seeking entry to full-time undergraduate programmes.[12] The data for 1998 accepts are shown in Table 14. As can be seen, the Northern Ireland profile has a higher representation of those from the manual social classes (IIIM-V) but that most of this difference stems from the IIIM figures. As far as social classes IV and V are concerned there is no substantial difference between Northern Ireland and elsewhere. When Northern Ireland domiciled entrants to the Northern Ireland institutions are considered, the representation of the manual social classes increases as a result of the differential migration rates by social class (see below). As a result, the University of Ulster has one of the highest representations of those from IIIM-V of any UK HEI. Overall, it is clear that in terms of Northern Ireland domiciled entrants there is a higher representation of those from the manual social classes than elsewhere in the UK.[13]

A contributory reason for this phenomenon may well lie, in part, in the contrasting social structures of the different parts of the UK as shown in Table 14. Here it can be seen that the Northern Ireland population has a higher proportion of those classified in social classes IIIM, IV and V. Although these figures provide the context for participation it is clear that there are significant other factors at work. For Northern Ireland, the key issue is migration. Survey research has suggested that

students from the higher social classes show a higher propensity to migrate for study in Britain than those from the lower social classes (Cormack *et al.*, 1997).

Table 14: Social Class of Accepts for Degree and HND Proportions by Region 1997/98

Social Class	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
I	14.9	16.1	13.6	10.3
II	44.0	42.8	42.6	41.4
II NM	13.9	13.1	13.8	16.9
III M	16.4	17.2	18.7	20.9
IV	8.8	8.9	8.6	8.0
V	2.1	1.8	2.7	2.8
IIM + IV + V	27.3	27.9	30.0	31.5
TOTAL	223095	22679	12895	9523

As Table 15 shows these suggestions are broadly confirmed with over half of those from social class I recorded as accepts in the Northern Ireland institutions compared with two-thirds from social classes IIIM, IV and V. However, it is also clear that this migration is, as discussed above, of a different nature by social class. Those from the higher social classes tend to have higher 'A' level scores and go to pre-1992 institutions whereas those from the lower social classes have lower 'A'/GNVQ level scores and tend to go to post-1992 institutions (Gallagher *et al.*, 1999). Many of this latter group are 'reluctant leavers'. In class terms, the extensive migration of those from the higher social classes creates the space for the relatively high representation of those from the lower social classes in the two Northern Ireland institutions.[14]

Table 15: Migration of Northern Ireland Accepts for Degree and HND By Social Class and Destination 1997/98

Social Class	Northern Ireland	Great Britain
I	44.8	55.2
II	58.5	41.5
II NM	60.5	39.5
III M	65.6	34.4
IV	61.3	38.7
V	67.9	32.1

Source: Special UCAS tabulation.

One of the beliefs about higher education is that those seeking entry to higher non-degree (HND) and related sub-degree courses are more likely to come from the lower social classes. Increasing opportunities at this level, it is argued, could thereby enhance opportunities for participation for these groups. The study of all Northern Ireland entrants to full-time HND programmes in 1991 suggested, however, that

while social class IIIm showed a higher representation than the profile of degree entrants, social classes IV and V are only similarly represented. Therefore, it is not clear that expanding HND courses will itself widen access to the underrepresented classes. For this to happen it may be necessary for further education colleges, as the main providers of these courses, to engage in proactive recruitment and outreach measures, such as those organised by some HEIs (CVCP, 1998).[15]

One rather unexpected piece of evidence arising from the analysis of UCAS data relates to success rates. In Table 16 are shown the success rates of applicants by social class and by the four UK nations/regions for 1997/98. All four regions exhibit a lower success rate by social class. This can be readily demonstrated to be largely associated with lower attainment levels at 'A' level. The unexpected evidence, however, comes from the significantly lower Northern Ireland success rate for each social class. This issue has yet to be investigated. A preliminary hypothesis might be, however, that Northern Ireland applicants are less likely to accept places in institutions in Britain through the clearing process as a result of not attaining the 'A' level grades for their firm or insurance choices and would prefer to either retake 'A' levels or seek to enter a sub-degree/HND course in Northern Ireland.

Table 16: Acceptance Rates By Social Class and Region for Students Aged 17-21 Years 1997/98

Social Class	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
I	83.4	83.2	83.2	77.8
II	81.1	78.6	81.7	69.4
II NM	79.2	74.5	77.9	67.3
III M	76.0	72.1	75.6	62.0
IV	76.6	75.2	73.7	63.0
V	73.1	72.7	71.5	65.9
NK	73.8	70.7	72.8	58.0

Source: Special UCAS tabulation.

While we have outlined the current patterns of social class participation, it is quite likely that the new financial regime for students, means-tested fees and loans, could have two effects. First, it could depress the proportions of entrants from lower social classes and, second, it could encourage more students to seek to study nearer home, the 'reluctant stayers', which in turn could increase asking grades, thereby making it even more difficult for modestly qualified students to gain entry to Northern Ireland courses. These are also the students who increasingly will find it financially difficult to contemplate leaving Northern Ireland for study. At this stage, these are only possibilities but it is important to keep future developments under review.

Religion

There are no official data available on the religious characteristics of higher education participation. We can use survey evidence available for entrants up to the

start of the 1990s and both universities have recently commenced monitoring by religion. The failure of UCAS to introduce religion monitoring and the absence of accurate information for higher education courses in further education means that the contemporary picture is hard to establish in full.

Survey data from a series of major surveys conducted for the entry cohorts of 1973, 1979 and 1985 were confined to first degree entrants, whereas that for 1991 included both first degree and HND entrants.[16] The relevant data for first degree entrants are shown in Table 17. As can seen the Catholic proportion of entrants has risen throughout the period. This reflects both rising Catholic attainment at second level as well as the increasing Catholic share of the age-specific population. By the time of the 1991 census, Catholics represented approximately 50% of those recorded as students. Table 17 also shows that Catholics are more likely to come from the lower social classes than are Protestants and that Catholics are less likely to leave Northern Ireland for study. The survey evidence also suggests that working class Protestants, especially males, are underrepresented as entrants to first degree programmes.

Table 17: Participation and Migration of Northern Ireland First Degree Students by Religion, Social Class and Destination 1973 and 1991

	Protestant		Catholic	
	Non-Manual	**Manual**	**Non-Manual**	**Manual**
1973	75	25	57	43
1991	73	27	57	43

Destination	**Protestant**	**Catholic**
Northern Ireland	55	70
Great Britain	44	27
Republic of Ireland	1	3

Source: ESRC and DENI sponsored survey.

The lower social class profile of Catholics is consistent with the known social class differences between Catholics and Protestants as revealed by the 1991 census (Gallagher *et al.*, 1995). The lower migration rates of Catholics, suggested by this survey evidence, has also been found in the more recent qualitative studies. Pupils in Catholic grammar schools were more likely to seek entry to Northern Ireland institutions. These actions were sustained with views that argued that higher education was as good in Ireland, both North and South, as elsewhere and that cost was a major constraint on wider choice. Those who did leave indicated their preference for institutions in Manchester and Liverpool, partly because of the existence of Irish communities and partly because of the attractions of football teams and other social attractions. In contrast, Protestants tended to see study in an institution in Britain, especially in Scotland, as representing ‘a seamless transition’ where the local population ‘are like us’.

An interesting aspect to the situation in the mid-1990s was the row that broke out about certain actions taken by Queen's University. The university had become conscious that the convention of playing the national anthem at graduation ceremonies and of having *the Royal Ulster Constabulary* (RUC) band at the graduation garden party was increasingly controversial with a student population that had become majority Catholic. In order to create a 'neutral' environment, Queen's decided to replace the national anthem with the anthem of the European Union and to alternate the RUC with other bands. The university decided later to drop all anthems. A storm of protest came from some Protestants who objected to these changes and complained about the bilingual Irish signs in the students' union. The university held firm and the changes remained. Research underway at the time revealed an interesting contrast between prospective students in Catholic schools compared with those in Protestant schools. By and large, Catholics thought the university's changes were a modest and necessary community relations initiative. Most Protestants could not see why the changes were necessary but did not envisage that they would change their preferences if they sought entry to Queen's. Subsequently, the bilingual signs were removed from the student union building (Gallagher *et al.*, 1996; Osborne, 1996).

The religion monitoring introduced by the two universities has revealed that the majority of first year full-time undergraduate entrants at Queen's in 1997/98 were Catholic at 57.5 percent. At the University of Ulster, monitoring is more comprehensive and includes part-time students and those studying at postgraduate level (Osborne and Milner, 1998). Taking all Northern Ireland domiciled students, 56.1 percent are Catholic and 39.9 percent Protestant and 4 percent 'other'. The UU has four campuses and two, Coleraine and Jordanstown, record just over half of full-time undergraduates as Catholic, while Magee in Derry records 82 percent of its entrants as Catholic and the small Belfast campus records the two groups equally represented. These figures for the two universities are consistent with the differential migration patterns of the two religious groups.

Disability

No comprehensive statistical data are currently available on disabled students. The UU's equal opportunity monitoring records self designated disability and the first report shows that unseen disabilities, such as chronic asthma, are the largest category. An investigation in the early 1990s, sponsored by the *Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights* (SACHR), suggested that there was still much to be done by both universities but, that at that time, students with major disabilities perceived the University of Ulster as being particularly responsive to their needs (SACHR, 1994). Since that time, the progressive implementation of the disability discrimination legislation has meant that both universities have put considerable effort into responding to disabled students' needs.

6. NON-DOMICILED STUDENTS PARTICIPATION IN NORTHERN

IRELAND

Thus far, this paper has been concerned with assessing the characteristics of participation by Northern Ireland domiciled students. However, one of the major characteristics of the UK's higher education system is the considerable movement of students. For example, there are major movements of Welsh students to institutions in England and a large scale import of English students into institutions in Wales (Rees, 1997) while Scotland is a substantial net importer of students from England and Northern Ireland. Current policies on fees may change these patterns especially in relation to Scotland.[17]

Northern Ireland has traditionally been a major exporter of students with only a small minority entering the two institutions for study from elsewhere. The outbreak of the 'troubles' saw even the 100 or so annual entrants from Britain largely disappear. This pattern began to change in the mid-1980s. With the European Court ruling that students from Member States were entitled to be treated the same as home students, students from Ireland began to seek entry to the UK system. At that time, entrants to Irish HEIs were eligible to pay fees while entrants in the UK had fees paid by local authorities. In the mid to late 1980s in Ireland there was a shortage of higher education places in the light of increasing participation rates and demographic growth.

There were both push and pull factors at work. Numbers of applicants seeking entry to the UK system from Ireland increased rapidly and the numbers were especially significant for those seeking to enter the University of Ulster. As these numbers increased there was a perception that these entrants from the Republic of Ireland were displacing, predominantly Protestant, Northern Ireland students. The universities official position was that they were obliged to treat students from anywhere in the EU as home students and could not discriminate.

The issue remains, however, of whether the rising numbers of students from the Republic of Ireland in Northern Ireland institutions have 'displaced' Northern Ireland students. The first task is to identify the numbers of entrants in Table 18.

Table 18: Entrants to Full-time Undergraduate Degree and Higher Education Programmes in Northern Ireland by Origin

	Northern Ireland	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland	Elsewhere	Total
QUB					
1985/86	94.4	1.5	2.1	2.0	1834
1990/91	85.9	3.3	6.4	6.4	2525
1994/95	88.3	1.8	7.2	2.7	2845
1997/98*	87.9	1.6	7.2	3.3	3278

UU[**]					
1985/86	74.9	17.3	5.3	2.5	1697
1990/91	72.3	7.1	12.7	7.9	2479
1994/95	79.9	2.0	17.0	1.3	3233
1997/98	87.6	0.8	10.0	1.6	3385

[*] Excludes figures for nursing but includes education.
[**] Figures for UU include entrants to first degree and sub-degree programmes

Source: QUB and UU.

Most of the entrants from the Republic of Ireland have been to the University of Ulster. At their peak, these students represented 17 percent of full-time undergraduate entrants but by 1997/98 the numbers had fallen back to 385 or 10 percent. A closer scrutiny of the data for the UU, however, reveal that the Coleraine and Magee campuses were particularly likely to record entrants from the South. Historically, these campuses have found it relatively difficult to attract Northern Ireland students. Moreover, although their representation has spread beyond science and information technology courses, students from the Southern Ireland were more likely to be enrolled on these courses which once again are areas difficult to fill with well qualified Northern Ireland entrants.

Table 19: Enrolments in Northern Ireland's Higher Education (sub-degree) Programmes by Republic of Ireland Domiciled Students.

	Full-time	**Part-time**
1993/94	183	40
1994/95	291	40
1995/96	355	55
1996/97	382	57
1997/98	351	101

Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

When numbers from the South were at their peak, a small number of courses at these campuses recorded a majority of entrants from the South. For QUB, numbers have grown but have stabilised in recent years and are at a lower number than at UU. Table 19 also shows that Southern enrolments (not entrants) have increased on higher education (sub-degree) courses in the further education sector but overall numbers are still relatively low.

Table 20 shows the most recent data available from UCAS for 1998. It reveals that just under 3,000 students are recorded as accepted into UK HEIs to undertake higher education courses with the overwhelming majority on first degree courses. Of these, approximately one fifth enter institutions in Northern Ireland. Although the data are for different dates, the 1998 entrants represented about 4 percent of total Northern Ireland higher education entrants in 1997. Taking full-time first degree entrants only, the figure rises to 5.3 percent. On this sort of basis it is difficult to argue that

there is a general displacement of Northern Ireland students. However, as has been discussed above, part of the migration of Northern Ireland students involves those with modest 'A' levels, unable to meet the grades sought by the Northern Ireland institutions.

Table 20: Republic of Ireland Domiciled Accepts into Higher Education Courses in Northern Ireland and Great Britain in 1998

	Northern Ireland	Great Britain
Degree	2172	551
HND	197	13
Total	2369	564

Source: Special UCAS tabulations

The availability of a supply of well-qualified, in terms of Leaving Certificate results, entrants from the South enabled the institutions to keep their 'A' level asking grades relatively high – a desirable objective in the era of the press publication of 'league tables'. While quantitatively there has been relatively little displacement, it has been these relatively less well qualified entrants who have been forced to enter the post-1992 institutions in Britain. As we have seen, these students are often more likely to come from modest socio-economic backgrounds. Ironically, just over 50 percent of entrants to Northern Ireland from the South are recorded as coming from non-manual backgrounds in 1998.[18]

The reaction of policy-makers to the allegations of displacement was interesting. The main response of both the institutions and the DENI was to reiterate the impossibility of differentiating students from another EU Member State. There was also a positive dimension to the issue as it introduced a welcome diversity to the student population. Of course, there were institutional gains so it was unlikely the institutions would investigate matters. The DENI, however, also failed to consider the matter – for example, no research was commissioned (there may have been internal investigations in response to parliamentary questions). Under Direct Rule arrangements there was no immediate political pressure on the department. Moreover, the claims of crowding-out of Northern Irish students by those from the South could be dismissed as 'sectarian'. It was surely a failure, however, not to investigate the issue thoroughly and to consider whether it was appropriate for any special measures to encourage institutions to retain paths of entry for modestly qualified and less well off students to remain in Northern Ireland to study at degree level.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The consideration of participation can be divided into two areas. The first relates to the impact of contemporary policies towards participation and related issues and the second considers how the policy debate may be carried forward in the context of

devolved government and the other dimensions of the Belfast Agreement. The most obvious factor, which will influence participation in the next few years, relates to student finance. The abolition of the grant and its replacement with a loan together with means-tested fees has yet to be fully played out.

There are three possibilities in the Northern Ireland context:

- A reduction in the numbers seeking entry to higher education from less well-off backgrounds. This is more likely to be a function of the abolition of the grant since students from modest backgrounds will not pay fees. It is estimated that that about 40% of Northern Ireland domiciled entrants will pay no fees.

- A decline in the number of mature students seeking entry to full-time undergraduate study. There has been some evidence of a decline in mature student applications. Since Northern Ireland levels of participation by mature students is already low this would be a most unwelcome result, especially in the context of 'lifelong –learning'.

- An alteration in existing patterns of migration. There is a widespread recognition that the impact of the new arrangements is leading to more students seeking to study nearer home. As a result, for example, universities such as Newcastle and Lancaster are experiencing a reduction in applications. In Northern Ireland, there could be an increase in the numbers of students seeking to stay in Northern Ireland, for which there is qualitative evidence, with possible consequences for existing social patterns of participation.

As yet, these remain possible consequences with empirical investigation to be undertaken. However, the most recent data for the 1999 entry cohort records a drop (from 1998) in the numbers of Northern Ireland domiciled applicants under 21 of 2.3 per cent (compared with a UK increase of 0.1 per cent) and a decline of 8.1 per cent in those aged 21 and over. Moreover this drop conceals a 19.1% reduction in male applicants aged 21 and over compared with a tiny increase amongst women.[19]

Also of substantial relevance is the nature of increased provision of places in Northern Ireland. Thus far there has been an announcement of 2,600 additional higher education places in Northern Ireland split between degree and sub-degree. Institutions have been asked to bid for the additional places with widening access as one of the criteria. Additional provision will come through the development of the Springvale campus (a joint campus of the University of Ulster and the *Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education* (BIFHE)). While located in a deprived part of Belfast it is not automatic that such a development will boost participation in this and other socially deprived areas without specific proactive interventions designed to achieve such an objective as the recent CVCP (1998) report on UK HEIs demonstrates.

It is not clear that additional provision of places at sub-degree level will necessarily widen participation in terms of encouraging greater participation from the lower social classes. It remains to be seen whether the new funding mechanism for the further education sector, which will provide a premium for recruiting students from socially deprived backgrounds, will be a sufficient incentive on its own to significantly change patterns. As can be seen, the policy context for participation is undergoing significant change and it will be important to monitor the impact of the totality of these changes against stated policy objectives and the fate of particular social groups. The existence of *Targeting Social Need* as a major government priority should ensure that the basic question of who gets access to higher education will be an important element of the policy agenda.

A separate issue relates to the policy-making context arising from devolved government and the implementation of the Belfast Agreement. In the subsequent agreement reached between the pro-agreement parties in December 1998, subsequently ratified by the Assembly in February 1999, ten government departments were agreed. The agreement envisages a department responsible for higher and further education together with adult training, already dubbed a 'department for lifelong learning'. In addition, in March 1999 the government issued a consultation document proposing a *Tertiary Council* to take responsibility for funding higher and further education funding. It would appear that the relatively small field of further and higher education (two universities, seventeen further education colleges and a small number of other colleges and organisations) would have a full government department and a separate funding agency.

While it remains to be seen how all these arrangements take shape, there is clear potential for a distinctive policy towards higher education and participation, in particular, to be fashioned. As Scotland moves towards its own parliament some Scottish political parties have already indicated a commitment to a distinctive policy on fees.[20] However, higher and further education policy has not been at the forefront of public policy discussion under direct rule arrangements and the fashioning of a distinctive policy may take some time. It is entirely predictable, however, there will be ever stronger calls for the sector to become ever more 'vocationally relevant' in the pursuit of economic regeneration. Higher education institutions will have to chart a judicious line between becoming viewed mainly as another regional agency for economic enhancement on the one hand and offering students a traditional range of options other than the purely vocational as well as a source of independent social comment and analysis.

One range of issues, which should be at the forefront of new policy developments, is the stimulation of much more systematic cross- border collaboration in research and student interchanges. While some of the possible detail has been spelled out elsewhere (Osborne, 1996) a clear political impetus is required since the institutions have generally been rather disappointing in taking substantial initiatives thus far.

There is no doubt that with the substantial changes in the financial environment for participation in higher education, together with the potential new political and administrative framework for policy development, the landscape of participation could undergo substantial change in the next few years. It will be important that properly designed and conducted research is undertaken both to inform policy development and measure the effects of policy implementation.

Endnotes

1. This paper does not locate Northern Ireland in an international comparative context. For these comparisons see Osborne (1996), and for data locating the UK in comparative context, see OECD (1997).
2. The study was funded by DENI and a report is available from CRHE.
3. The ending of the support for students studying at these colleges was challenged in the courts but the case was lost.
4. The source of these data is Brian Heap (1998). Of course, these are asking points - a small minority of students may enter through the clearing system, for example, without attaining these levels of attainment.
5. It should be noted, however, that the University of Ulster has significantly diversified its patterns of entry so that less than half of entrants to full-time degree programmes have 'A' levels (UU, 1999).
6. This process began during the 1980s after the merger of the Ulster Polytechnic with the New University of Ulster to create the University of Ulster in 1984.
7. Since alongside the UCAS process individuals may also seek entry through the CAO system this is not a strictly rigorous classification.
8. Both pieces of research were conducted for the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council (NIHEC) and are available from CRHE as research papers.
9. This study also used focus groups. The schools and colleges selected were deliberately skewed towards institutions that had a tradition of sending a high proportion of students outside Northern Ireland.
10. During the mid-1990s the DENI, the two universities and anti-discrimination regulatory body, the *Fair Employment Commission*, sought to persuade UCAS to add religion to the data sought from Northern Ireland domiciled applicants alongside the other social data collected from all applicants (social class, gender, ethnicity and disability). The UCAS board, much to the annoyance and amazement of the Northern Ireland bodies, rejected the request on two occasions. The DENI collects some data on the religious composition of schools but not on higher education. The two universities now conduct monitoring of their own students (Thanki and Osborne, 1999).
11. These surveys have been funded by the ESRC, DENI, NIHEC and the CCRU and conducted data on entrants in 1973, 1979, 1985 and 1991. The 1991 survey established religious affiliation by a direct question while the earlier surveys used school attended.
12. UCAS records the application process up to point at which an applicant accepts a place. Students may not turn up and register.
13. The structure of higher education provision is different in Scotland with a higher proportion of places provided in the further education sector. For a discussion see, Paterson (1997) and Osborne (1999).
14. Neither of the two universities currently undertakes any special programmes designed to increase the representation of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds as is the case in the Republic of Ireland and in many universities in the rest of the UK (CVCP, 1998).

15. The new funding mechanism for further education colleges offers a premium for recruiting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, it not yet clear whether this will be effective without being coupled to a proactive outreach policy.
16. The surveys were administered to all Northern Ireland domiciled entrants. All were postal surveys which achieved very high response rates (e.g. 78 percent in 1991). When checked against known characteristics the responses were shown to have no systematic biases.
17. Currently, non-Scottish domiciled UK students are eligible for the fourth year of undergraduate fees while Scottish students are exempt. The impact of this differential is being reviewed by a committee chaired by Sir George Quigley.
18. These data are derived from an on-going project funded by the HEA. It is being undertaken by CRHE with Professor Pat Clancy of UCD.
19. These data were derived from UCAS. DENI statisticians cannot point to any variations in cohort numbers that might account for these changes.
20. There are already strong demands from some in Derry for the creation of a separate institution based on the University of Ulster's Magee campus. The political complexion and geographical origins of the first Minister for the new department could have a substantial impact on such matters.

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Discussion

Professor Lindsay Paterson: Professor Osborne's paper is very valuable. Doing this kind of careful statistical compilation is extraordinarily difficult, and yet also necessary if we are to have any sensible debates about policy or social trends. The context for my remarks is the changing constitution of the United Kingdom. There is bound to be an effect of this on higher education policy. This is most obvious in Scotland and, ultimately, Northern Ireland because of legislative changes. In Scotland, almost all aspects of teaching in higher education, as well as a substantial part of research policy, is the legislative responsibility of the new Scottish parliament, elected on 6 May 1999, under the *Scotland Act 1998*. But to some extent the same is true even in Wales, despite the absence of primary legislative powers for the National Assembly there. Much of what makes an education system distinctive is not a matter of legislation at all, but has to do with curriculum, institutional identity, and specific administrative schemes for influencing flows of students or influencing the character of research. That, after all, is ultimately why Scotland has had a distinctive system of higher education even within the unreformed Union.

The main point is then that comparative research will be needed much more thoroughly in the new constitutional context in order to encourage better understanding of policy.

Links

Nevertheless, the starting point for discussing the comparative aspects of the new constitutional arrangements is that the four systems of the UK are closely linked to each other. One interpretation of these links is social: the four systems have undergone similar trends in the last two or three decades, such as similar narrowing of gender differences, similar growth in participation by older students, and similar slow narrowing of social class differences (Paterson, 1997). Without these social links, policy learning would be much more complicated.

But the links in access are also more direct. Professor Osborne has reminded us that Northern Ireland sends many students to the rest of the UK, and to the Republic of Ireland. Scotland, by contrast, is a substantial net importer: around one third of its approximately 200,000 undergraduates come from outside the country - one quarter from the rest of the UK and the rest from outside the UK (Scottish Office, 1998a). Scotland tends to get Protestants rather than Catholics from Northern Ireland (Cormack *et al.*, 1997), and middle class rather than working class students from England (Woodley *et al.*, 1992). The proportion from outside Scotland is as high as one-half in Edinburgh University and two-thirds in St Andrews, but only about 4 percent of higher education students in the further education colleges (Scottish Office, 1998a).

For the higher education institutions, the total inward flow of undergraduates of

about 30,000 people is also, of course, a significant revenue source, which will grow to become an inward flow of more than £30m in a budget for these institutions of £700m (Scottish Office, 1999), and so the new parliament will probably want to encourage as much of this earning as possible. The fears that home rule would encourage a resentment of incomers is misplaced in this context because incomers have resources that otherwise would have to come entirely from the parliament's budget. In any case, the 1980s debate in Scotland about incomers 'displacing' Scots was largely a coded debate about anglicisation and about opposition to the educational policies of Margaret Thatcher's government (McCrone, 1990); the political landscape since then has been transformed.

Education and Autonomy

At the same time, however, you cannot escape the fact that, in Scotland, the project for political autonomy has been intimately linked to the record of educational autonomy. Education has been a symbolic and actual underpinning of Scottish identity within the Union (Paterson, 1998a). Scotland exports hardly anyone. Fewer than 10 percent leave for full-time first degrees (HESA, 1998). Unlike in Northern Ireland, most of these leavers are probably voluntary, on five main grounds:

- The proportion leaving did not change with the invention of a common UK selection system, nor with the growing recognition of Scottish qualifications elsewhere in the UK (Paterson, 1992, 1993).
- Scottish institutions offer courses in almost all subject areas.
- There are places in Scottish institutions for all levels of prior attainment (Paterson, 1993).
- There is no evidence that highly-qualified or middle-class school leavers prefer to leave Scotland (Paterson, 1993); after all, most Scottish professions have been supplying themselves from Scottish universities for centuries.
- And there is probably also now a cultural loyalty to Scotland that keeps many students in the country analogously to the points which Professor Osborne makes about Catholics in Northern Ireland

Similar points are in fact true at the other end. On graduating, around 85 percent of students entering employment stay in Scotland, as do a similar proportion of students entering further study (Scottish Office, 1998b). About three-quarters are still in Scotland five years after graduating (Scottish Graduate Careers Partnership, 1996) .

As well as this retention of students, Scotland also has some well-known distinctive features of its higher education system - four-year honours degrees, about 30 percent of degree-level undergraduates on ordinary degrees (HESA, 1997), and a broader curriculum in the first couple of years of undergraduate degrees, drawing on the broader curriculum at school that in turn is being reformed in ways that are likely to

reinforce that breadth (Raffe, 1997). It is also well known that Scotland has a higher *Age Participation Index* than the rest of the UK: in 1996, 47 percent of young Scots entered higher education by age 21 (Scottish Office, 1998c), and as a result of this and its sharing the relatively low UK drop-out rates, Scotland has probably the highest rate of graduation in Europe (HESA, 1997).

Scotland also has some less-well-known distinctive features, the most important of which is the high proportion of undergraduates in further education colleges. Of enrolments on undergraduate courses in 1996, the proportion going to further education colleges was 34 percent in Scotland, 22 percent in Northern Ireland, 11 percent in England and 3 percent in Wales (HESA, 1997). That Scottish difference is found in both full-time and part-time courses, and in both degree-level and diploma-level courses. As a result, further education colleges dominate part-time courses, 71 percent compared to 42 percent in Northern Ireland, 23 percent in England and 6 percent in Wales. Unlike in Northern Ireland, part-time courses have expanded at much the same rate as full-time courses (Scottish Office, 1998c).

Further education colleges also dominate sub-degree courses, 77 percent compared to 58 percent in Northern Ireland, 33 percent in England and 8 percent in Wales. So there is a larger proportion of higher-education students in sub-degree programmes in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK (HESA, 1997). They make up 86 percent of part-time students compared to 71 percent in Northern Ireland and 62 percent in England, although Wales has the same proportion as Scotland. And they make up 27 percent of full-time students compared to 20 percent in Northern Ireland, 16 percent in England and 16 percent in Wales. These proportions on sub-degree programmes in Scotland have been stable over the past decade (Scottish Office, 1998c). All these proportions are for enrolments. Among entrants to undergraduate courses, nearly one half in Scotland go to further education colleges (Scottish Office, 1998c, Table 8).

This matters in the new political context, because further education colleges are better than Scottish universities at attracting students from working-class homes, especially the skilled working class (Gallacher *et al.*, 1997, Osborne, 1999; and National Committee of Enquiry, 1997). The colleges also tend to recruit students locally (Gallacher *et al.*, 1997). So they offer to Scotland's new legislators a ready and not too expensive means of widening access. The further education colleges would be in a good position to respond: a consequence of the figures quoted above is that 26 percent of students in further education colleges on courses leading to a qualification are on higher education courses (Scottish Office, 1998d). The further education colleges are not supplicants looking for franchises, an arrangement that is largely absent in Scotland; see Alexander *et al.* (1995). The bigger colleges are self-confident and experienced providers of higher education in their own right (Scottish Office, 1998d). Nevertheless, about one-half of students on higher education courses in further education colleges move onto degree courses in higher education institutions when they graduate (Gallacher *et al.*, 1997), although only about 6

percent move to the high-status older universities. Nearly all, 96 percent, of the students who make this transition to higher education institutions then graduate (Gallacher *et al.*, 1997).

Because part of the putative Scottish tradition in higher education is open access, it is likely that the new parliamentarians will favour schemes to promote it. In a very public way, this has provoked the controversies over tuition fees which were prominent in the election campaign for the Scottish parliament in 1999 and in the process of forming the governing coalition thereafter (Paterson, 1999). The temporary resolution of this issue by setting up a committee of inquiry merely postpones having to take a decision on the potently symbolic issue of free education. More discreetly, the same concern with wide access has also inspired the various moves which the *Scottish Higher Education Funding Council* has been making since 1997 to anticipate a more radical policy towards access, such as commissioning research on the social demography of access (Raab, 1998), and putting in place various schemes to encourage institutions to promote access, some of which, notably, encourage collaboration with further education colleges (SHEFC, 1994, 1997). The governing coalition formed in the Scottish parliament has placed widening access at the core of its educational programme.

Policy Learning

Discussing Scottish distinctiveness and political autonomy brings me to my final point, which is about the many new opportunities for learning from experiments in policy that the new constitutional arrangements offer - in other words, opportunities for comparative research to stimulate better policy. Some examples can illustrate the potential:

- What would the effect on participation be of a different system of student finance, if the parliament eventually does decide to make changes in Scotland? How does any effect of Scotland's making such changes compare with the cross-border effects in the island of Ireland?

- What is the role of further education colleges; are they really like American community colleges in their role of promoting wide access?

- What does Scotland's overall higher level of participation by young people tell us about alleged ceilings?. There seems no limit to the desire by young Scots to take part, even as the proportion of them who are qualified to enter higher education rises. For example, the proportions of school leavers who choose to apply to higher education among those who are qualified to enter has remained almost unchanged despite a growth in that group who are qualified. We know from research commissioned by the Scottish Office that about 80 percent of those with 3-4 Higher Grade passes apply, as do over 95 percent of those with 5 or more Highers, even though the proportion of leavers getting 3 or more Highers

rose from 22 percent in 1987 to 30 percent in 1997 (Tinklin and Raffe, 1999; Scottish Office, 1998e; and also Paterson, 1992). In other words, expanding the pool does not appear to change its depth.

- What is the role of Scotland's non-selective system of secondary education in sustaining this interest in higher education? We have the apparently paradoxical situation in the UK that the systems with the highest progression rates beyond school are those that are most and least selective - Northern Ireland and Scotland. Why?

- What can Scotland's experience of denominational schooling offer to Northern Ireland? We know that the rates of entry to higher education from Catholic schools have risen to equal those from non-denominational schools (Willms, 1992), and we also can calculate, from analysis of the *Scottish Election Survey, 1997*, that the rates of upward social mobility in the Scottish Catholic population have risen to equal those in the non-Catholic population for those people who attended secondary school after the Scottish comprehensive system was fully in place.

- And, of course, there are many opportunities for Scotland to learn from the other systems:

    * Why do Scotland and Northern Ireland have such low rates of participation in adult education when they have such high rates of participation in initial education? Research is underway on this funded by the ESRC as part of its *Learning Society Programme;* see Bamford and Schuller (1998).
    * What can be done about the extraordinarily low rates of post-compulsory participation in Glasgow (Paterson, 1997)?
    * Is the reason why Scottish universities are not very good at attracting working class students because these students are siphoned off into the further education colleges (Osborne, 1999; Raab, 1998), or are the universities felt to be rather remote and anglicised (for further development of which argument, see Paterson (1998b))?
    * What can Scottish universities learn in this regard from several of the more adventurous former polytechnics in England which are rather good at attracting working class entrants (Osborne, 1999)?
    * What, if any, is the relationship between high participation and economic development (Ashton and Green, 1996; also symposium in the SSISI journal 1997/98)? Is the Republic's experience in the last quarter of a century really a classic demonstration that more education in one generation boosts economic growth in the next? Is, then, Northern Irish and Scottish economic growth rather poor, despite high participation, because so many graduates leave? Or do the Scottish and Northern Irish experiences show that the link between education and economic development is more complex than political

and academic orthodoxy would suggest?

* And, last - although this is not really about access directly - what is the most effective system of policy making for a small system? Do we really need the *Scottish Higher Education Funding Council*, or would a more direct relationship with the ministry work better? Are there lessons to be learnt here from both parts of Ireland, or from Wales as it seems to be moving towards a single tertiary education council?

So the new constitutional arrangements ensure that studying patterns of access now can stimulate varying patterns of policy, and then research can help policy makers to learn from these. Academics do, I think, have an important role in this respect, of carefully and rigorously documenting the different experiences of the different systems. This needs good-quality data produced on the same basis for each system, and available publicly for each system. This care and rigour is what Professor Osborne has shown us in his paper, and so I have great pleasure in proposing the vote of thanks.

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Dr. Don Thornhill: It gives me great pleasure to join with Professor Paterson and to second this vote of thanks to Professor Osborne. We know Professor Osborne quite well in Dublin and we are familiar with much of his work. He has been involved in assignments which the *Higher Education Authority* (HEA) has funded or partially funded and the HEA is currently funding a study which he is carrying out together with Professor Pat Clancy of UCD on undergraduate student flows between the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

In this paper he has provided us with a very interesting and useful overview of higher education participation in Northern Ireland. He has also raised some very interesting questions for policy. As an interested external observer of higher education in Northern Ireland I enjoyed reading and listening to the paper. The research results are presented in a very accessible way. He has an interesting story to tell and he tells it very well.

My comments will be very much 'a mixed bag'. I expect that, as well as teasing out possible policy implications, Professor Osborne's colleagues from Northern Ireland

will explore the statistical entrails of his paper. I won't trespass on that territory. What I would like to do is to selectively comment on some parts of the paper which have a bearing on the policy issues which are of common concern in both jurisdictions.

From a Southern perspective this material is very interesting. Three-quarters of a century ago both parts of this island would have been part of the same education system. There would, of course, have been different regional characteristics reflecting both economic factors and differences in the religious composition of the population. In virtually all countries, this century has been a period of remarkable change in education. In this island one of the effects of the political changes of the 1920s was that education policy and structures evolved in somewhat different directions so we now have systems which, though the common origins are still evident, nevertheless differ from one another in a number of important respects.

Transfer to Third Level

In the paper Professor Osborne has given us a very brief summary of the structure of second level education in Northern Ireland. His essential point is that within the context of the existing second level structure the data show that 93 to 94 percent of those with two A levels or equivalent in 1996/97 were entering higher or further education institutions. This suggests that there is only very limited scope for increasing the proportions entering higher education from those currently attaining the necessary entry qualifications. However, he makes the important point that the group sitting A levels accounts for only about one-third of the relevant age cohort. Also, of course, the A level route is not the sole means of access to third level.

Because of differences in the structure of second level education between the North and the South we must be careful in drawing inferences between the comparative data for entry into third level for North and South. As far as the second level system is concerned, the key difference of course between North and South is that we do not now in the South have a differentiated second level system – although a differentiated system did exist up to the mid 1960s. The system is not homogenous as regards ownership. We have voluntary secondary schools, community schools, community colleges and comprehensive schools as well as schools under the control of vocational education committees. However, all these schools operate in the framework of a common curriculum and prepare students for the Leaving Certificate. In contrast with the situation in Northern Ireland, second level schools are not allowed to impose selection tests at the point of entry.

Against this background it is interesting to compare the data shown in Table 1 of Professor Osborne's paper on the API or Age Specific Index with the data for an analogous measure used in the South – see Table 1.

Table 1: Transfer Rates to Third Level Education as Proportion of Specific Age

Population 1993/94-1997/98*

	Northern Ireland	Great Britain	Scotland	Republic of Ireland
1993/94	36.1	30.1	38.3	44.7
1994/95	38.2	31.5	42.7	47.2
1995/96	40.0	30.3	42.7	48.9
1996/97	39.9	32.3	46.7	47.7
1997/98	45.5	33.3	-	48.6
Memorandum Items for Republic of Ireland:				
1996/97	Number of mature students at third level			5,000
	Number of new entrants to third level			33,971
	Estimated population aged 17			71,300
1997/98	Number of full-time RoI students in UK third level courses			13,600

* The figures for the United Kingdom are the APIs as defined by Osborne in the paper, while the Republic of Ireland figures are based on the intake to third level institutions as a percentage of the estimated population at age 17.

The two measures are not identical. The denominator for the Northern Ireland API includes students studying elsewhere in the UK or in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) whereas the denominator for the estimated rate of transfer to third level institutions in the RoI relates only to those institutions in the RoI. The numerators are also different. In the RoI the measure includes all third level students - both mature and from outside the State whereas the figure for Northern Ireland relates only to full time undergraduate students under the age of 21. However, notwithstanding these differences it is reasonable to have regard to the two measures in a comparative sense if only because the number of mature students and students from outside the State studying in the RoI institutions is quite a small proportion of the total and, of course, the number of students from the RoI studying in the UK is quite significant.

It might also be useful to signal a reminder that there are also structural differences at third level between the two jurisdictions. The higher education system in the North is part of the unitary UK university system whereas in the South, despite strains and what the Americans call 'mission creep', there is a binary system broadly consisting of universities and the institutes of technology. Some of you may know that the *Dublin Institute of Technology* (DIT) which is the largest institute of technology recently applied for a change in status to university. Under the provisions of the *1997 Universities Act* this application was considered by an expert group and subsequently by the HEA. Following the completion of this process DIT remains in the technological sector.

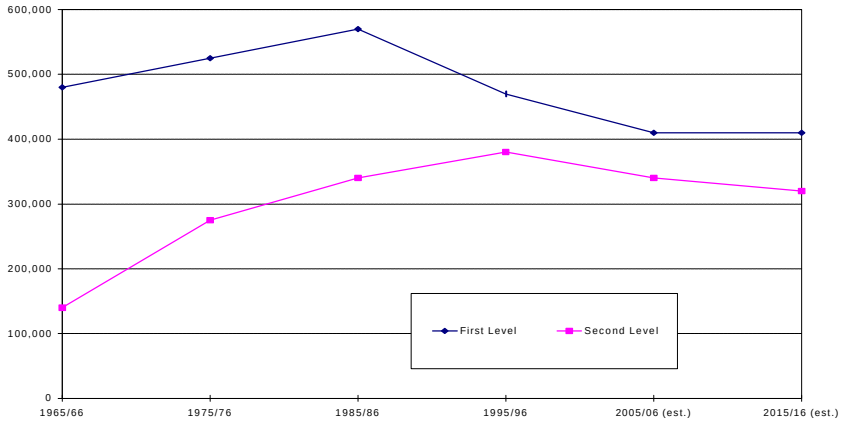
Migration

The discussion in the paper about the decision of a very substantial number of Northern Irish students to study in Great Britain is certainly very interesting. It remains to be seen whether or not the changes in the financial arrangements for students and the provision of additional places in Northern Ireland will alter what

seems now to be an established pattern of migration to Great Britain. The overall policy context could also be interesting in the future as Professor Osborne also points out. In particular, a distinctive policy towards higher education and participation by a devolved government could over time have a significant effect.

There is also the implication of future student flows from the Republic of Ireland. The historical relative position on student funding has now been reversed. Means tested fees have now been introduced in the North whereas tuition fees have been abolished in the South. The latter decision continues to be the subject of some recurrent criticism and debate, if somewhat muted. To the extent, however, that the flows from the South to the North are a result of 'excess demand' in the South, the changing demographic position in the South plus the provision of additional places may have a bearing on the position in the North.

Figure 1 Enrolments by Level of Education in the Republic of Ireland 1965/66 - 2015/16



Source: Department of Education and Science

Figure 1 shows the historical position and projections for enrolments in first and second level in the South. The usual caveats of course apply to the projections, particularly in light of the very significant change in migration patterns in the Republic; the historical position of substantial net emigration has in recent years been reversed and there are now quite significant levels of immigration. However we can see from Figure 1 that the primary school population peaked in the mid 1980s – the second level school population has just peaked – both of these of course reflect the very substantial decline in the birth rate since the 1980s. As a result, the pressure from school leavers, who to date, have constituted the bulk of first time entrants into the third level institutions in the Republic, will ease unless there continues to be substantial increases in the transfer rate from second level to third level.

In addition to the demographic change to that there has been a significant increase in capacity in the third level institutions as well as growth in the enrolments in *Post Leaving Certificate* (PLC) courses as set out in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 below.

Table 2: Full-time Aided Only Entrants to Third Level Education in the Republic of Ireland by Sector 1993/94 - 1997/98

	Universities*	Institutes of Technology	Other	Total
1993/94	12,587	15,396	236	28,219
1994/95	12,985	15,295	301	28,581
1995/96	13,460	17,474	522	31,456
1996/97	13,717	17,784	355	31,856
1997/98	14,868	17,102	408	32,378
Percentage Increase 1993/94 to 1997/98 = 14.7%				

* Includes *National College of Art and Design* (NCAD)

Source: Annual Statistical Report, Department of Education and Science

Table 3: Stock of Full-time Aided Only Entrants to Third Level Education in the Republic of Ireland by Sector 1993/94 - 1997/98

	Universities*	Institutes of Technology	Other	Total
1993/94	51,343	34,673	608	86,624
1994/95	53,450	35,475	768	89,693
1995/96	55,850	38,130	1,119	95,099
1996/97	58,090	41,000	1,114	100,204
1997/98	61,308	41,909	1,222	104,439
Percentage Increase 1993/94 to 1997/98 = 20.5%				

* Includes *National College of Art and Design* (NCAD.

Source: Annual Statistical Report, Department of Education and Science

Table 4: Entrants to Post Leaving Certificate Programmes in the Republic of Ireland by Sector 1994/95 - 1997/98

	Repeats	New Entrants	Total
1994/95	3,750	13,894	17,644
1995/96	1,339	14,161	15,500
1996/97	1,692	14,365	16,057
1997/98	1,880	16,469	18,349
Percentage Increase 1994/95 to 1997/98 = 18.5%			

Source: Department of Education and Science.

Table 5: Transfer Rates to Further and Higher Education from Leaving Certificate Programmes in the Republic of Ireland 1994/95 - 1997/98

	School Only*	School and VTOS**
1994/95	77.0	71.1
1995/96	79.2	73.2
1996/97	90.0	81.8
1997/98	88.2	81.3

* Entrants as a percentage of 'traditional' Leaving Certificate candidates.
** Entrants as a percentage of All Leaving Certificate candidates.

The overall picture emerging is one of where places at third level are expanding, the number of school leavers have peaked as a result of demographic changes and the changes in the student support regimes in the two jurisdictions have made it less financially attractive for students from the RoI to study in the United Kingdom. The contrary trends would, of course, include a growing pressure for mature student entry into the universities, institutes of technology and the PLC sector as well as 'excess demand' for courses such as medicine, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, dentistry and physiotherapy. In 1996/97, the intake of mature students to full time third level courses in publicly funded higher education institutions was approximately 4 percent of all full time entrants in the RoI compared with a broadly comparable figure of about 25 percent for the UK.

Despite a very tight labour market there may also be a continued increase in the transfer rate from second to third level. Some of this may result from putting into place a national qualifications structure with more explicit progression pathways than exist at present. It will be interesting to see if the data shown in Table 6 are indicative of a trend.

Interestingly, a 'counter-flow' issue may be emerging in the Republic. Some of you may have seen a report in the *Irish Independent* newspaper on 13 May 1999 under the headline "*Students from North have better choice of top place"* The report cited the following findings from a leaked report of the *Points Commission* :

- *" … last year 42.9 percent of places in the TCD medical school went to students with GCE A-levels"*
- *"In all 13 percent of places on the main healthcare courses – medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, pharmacy and physiotherapy – went to GCE A-level holders ..."*
- *"There were 609 admissions to these courses of which 79 were GCE A-level holders. Of these, 53 sat A-levels in the North …"*

Are there echoes here of the earlier displacement debate in Northern Ireland?

Table 6: Republic of Ireland Applicants and Acceptances in UK Universities and Colleges 1996-1999

	Applicants	Acceptances
1996	-	3,815
1997	9,298	3,878
1998	6,448	2908
1999	5,361	-

Source: UCAS

Social Class:

Professor Osborne has analysed the position in the North and compared with that in the rest of the UK. We don't have recent data available for the Republic but a new study is being undertaken by Professor Pat Clancy of UCD. The data we have for period 1980 to 1992 set out in Table 7 shows participation rates increasing for all social classes but with the higher income groups much more strongly represented.

One would expect that the relative position of the lower income groups will show some improvement in the 1998 study given the fact that the overall participation rate has increased significantly since 1992 and that the participation rate for some groups – in particular the higher professional group at 89 percent - was coming close to what one might regard as 'saturation level'.

I strongly believe that the access issue is at the centre of both economic policy and social policy and should not be regarded as a residual policy matter. The policy challenges of increasing participation in third level extend well beyond that sector and require intervention at the very beginning of the educational process. In the South this is encompassed in a number of interventions including *the Early Start Programme* at pre-primary level, the *Breaking The Cycle Programme* which involves enhanced pupil/teacher ratios and focused programmes for primary schools in disadvantaged areas, a home school liaison scheme and special programmes to encourage 15-18 year olds who are at risk to remain in the system.

Table 7: Estimated Proportion of Age Cohort Entering Full-Tme Higher Education by Father's Socio-Economic Group in 1980, 1986 and 1992

Socio-Economic Groups	1980	1986	1992
Farmers	0.24	0.36	0.49
Other Agricultural Occupations	0.04	0.12	0.22
Higher Professional	0.67	0.75	0.89
Lower Professional	0.38	0.54	0.53
Employers and Managers	0.48	0.43	0.67
Salaried Employees	0.59	0.58	0.53
Intermediate Non-Manual Workers	0.22	0.30	0.33
Other Non-Manual Workers	0.09	0.11	0.26
Skilled Manual Workers	0.09	0.13	0.26
Semi-Skilled Manual Workers	0.09	0.11	0.16

Unskilled Manual Workers	0.03	0.04	0.13
TOTAL	0.20	0.25	0.36

Source: Clancy
Note: New study covering 1998 is underway by Professor Pat Clancy (UCD)

At second level the policy approaches have included a broadened curriculum with three examination options under the broad umbrella of the *Leaving Certificate* i.e. the so-called 'traditional' Leaving Certificate, the *Leaving Certificate Vocational* programme and the *Leaving Certificate Applied* programme. Other measures at this level include the provision of some income supports in some pilot schemes and putting in place home study, tutoring, and mentoring arrangements and also taking a more structured approach to partnerships between schools and communities.

At third level measures include income supports, provision of student tutors, special access arrangements and partnerships between third level institutions and schools. Direct entry arrangements for late entrants and for students from disadvantaged backgrounds may become increasingly important in the Republic where the entry system is much more focused on direct transfer from school through the Leaving Certificate route than is the case in the United Kingdom where non-GCE entrants now account for a very substantial proportion of those entering third level. The provision of foundation courses for mature students and recent Leaving Certificate holders as well as an increasing emphasis on adult and continuing education are part of the policy approach.

Many of these types of measures are also in place in the UK and in some instances have been going on for much longer and on a more extensive scale than in the Republic. In this respect I share the emphasis which Professor Osborne has put on the importance of both further education and higher education institutions undertaking outreach measures and engaging in pro-active recruitment in order to widen access to further and higher education.

The key requirement in devising policies to combat educational disadvantage is to recognise the persistence of the problem and the recurring need to evaluate and to fine tune the measures that are in place. We need an involvement from schools, community, parents and institutions and there must be a continuing premium on innovation and, of course, resources are important. The key issues that I see for consideration here are:

- the future direction of policy and measures for income support for lower income students;
- the issues relating to non-standard forms of entry
- the development of measures and mechanisms by institutions to encourage increased access from students of less advantaged backgrounds.

Finally, it gives me great pleasure to thank Professor Osborne for his paper and to commend it highly. It is a further valuable contribution from him to the analysis, debate and discussion of higher education policy and I am delighted that he presented this paper to the Society.

Professor Dermot McAleese: Dr. Osborne's paper contains a wealth of fascinating statistics and valuable analysis. I wonder if I could ask him to comment on two further aspects of the higher education debate that were not specifically covered in his paper?

First, is there evidence of systematic differences between the subject choices of third level students in Northern Ireland and those in other parts of these islands? And if there are, do they matter? One reason for being interested in this question is that the contribution of higher education to economic growth might depend not just on the participation rate, but also to some extent on the subjects being studied. The increasing weight of business studies in the higher education curriculum of the Republic of Ireland, for instance, has not only provided much needed managerial skills to the business community but has also helped to improve the climate of opinion towards entrepreneurship and business. Also, in certain instances, a supply of suitably qualified graduates can play a vital role in attracting foreign investment and stimulating the setting up of local businesses. Much has been made of the availability of electronic engineering and computer science graduates as a magnet for high technology industries considering the Republic of Ireland as a location. This is not to argue that only 'practical' subjects matter for economic development; or to deny that a successful university system requires exposure to a wide range of disciplines. But the correct subject positioning of third level students can make a significant difference.

Second, do those leaving Northern Ireland tend to be academically more able than those staying at home for their third level education? Irish universities are devoting much effort to attracting students from lower income backgrounds in the interests of promoting equality of access. Fine, but the task of also attracting the academically privileged, who will often by the nature of things come from higher income backgrounds, must not be neglected. The top end of the student cohort plays a vital role in setting the intellectual tone and standards in any academic environment. Competition for the best students from UK universities is becoming more intense. I wonder if Irish universities are doing enough to attract and retain high quality undergraduates -- through provision of prizes and scholarships and through pro active contact between schools and universities? This issue could have long range importance if, as seems likely, students who take their primary degree at home have a higher propensity to be employed at home, perhaps after a period studying or working abroad, than those who leave the country for their undergraduate studies. It takes only a small pool of highly talented people to make a major difference to the intellectual, social and economic progress of small regions such as ours.

Professor Norman J. Gibson: I would like to comment on the importance for the future of Northern Ireland of the very high proportion of 'leavers', those who pursue their university studies in Britain and do not return. This indeed is surely a great loss to every aspect of community life and not only in economic terms. Thanks to the important work of Bob Osborne and his colleague Bob Cormack it has been known for ten or more years that around 80 percent of 'leavers' do not return, perhaps over the last fifteen years some forty to fifty thousand people.

There seems to be little evidence that this publicly available and often repeated information was properly taken into consideration by those responsible for higher educational policy in Northern Ireland, either as regards the provision of places or the structure of incentives that influence student choice of institution between Northern Ireland and elsewhere. Why this is so raises many questions about governance and accountability in Northern Ireland that cannot be pursued here. But without in any way suggesting that there should be a prohibition or restriction on the number of Northern Ireland domiciled students undertaking higher education in other countries it remains critical that the issue of 'places' and 'leavers' should have a much more prominent place in future policy formulation and execution.

Dr. Brian Caul: With regard to widening participation, I believe that, in the North and the South of Ireland, we need to bring about structural changes which will enable all potential learners to progress both within an institution and between sectors. Thus there are two current initiatives which should command support.

The first is credit accumulation and transfer. A Northern Ireland scheme has now been agreed and is moving into its second phase of implementation. By defining levels of study and ascribing value to them, this scheme encourages everyone, including people from disadvantaged backgrounds, to deepen their learning, if needs be by starting for instance in part-time evening classes. TEASTAS in the South is also doing similar sterling work, I understand.

The second initiative is harmonisation of admission procedures and mutual recognition of qualifications. I am convenor of a North-South Standing Conference and we are hoping to arrange a joint North/South workshop on credit accumulation at a conference being organised by UCAS and the CAO in October 1999 in Dublin. This is a most interesting development and is an attempt to investigate the harmonisation of admission procedures to third level in United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and clearer mutual recognition of qualifications. This also has immense implications, both for widening participation and for North/South mobility of students. It could also open up the possibility of more jointly validated degree courses North/South with staff and student exchanges, work experience under joint supervision and so on.

All in all, we are in a most interesting and exciting period of educational change on our island.

Response by Professor Osborne: I would like thank my discussants Professor Paterson and Dr. Thornhill for their interesting and insightful comments on this subject. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the points raised by Professors McAleese and Gibson and Dr. Caul in the general discussion. Taking each in turn. The subjects studied by Northern Ireland domiciled students do show some differences from those of elsewhere. Unfortunately, the categorisation of subjects used by the main sources of data, masks some of the fine detail. Nevertheless, Northern Ireland domiciled entrants are more likely to study subjects classified as *'social, administrative and business studies'* than those elsewhere in the UK. The two Northern Ireland universities have experienced difficulty in attracting well qualified entrants to engineering, for example. As a result, Queen's University, Belfast has retained a 'Level O' entry into engineering for those with lower entry qualifications.

A more general point is that the Northern Ireland universities have sought to respond positively to the demands of the local economy and the business community. Both institutions can point to a range of innovative curriculum and partnership developments. However, the position of schools has received less analysis and comment. Many large grammar schools regard it as a significant part of their task to enable their best students to gain entry to the professions and do so by entering well-regarded universities in Britain. School principals would argue that this is what many parents wish them to do. In these circumstances, the needs of the Northern Ireland economy have had little impact on schools' priorities. If the reconstruction of the Northern Ireland economy is to be significantly driven by the supply of well qualified graduates, schools as well as universities and further education colleges must be drawn into the debate.

Professor McAleese's second point raises an interesting issue. The paper did seek to point out that those who leave Northern Ireland show a bi-modal distribution. Undoubtedly, a significant proportion of those with the highest qualifications do leave and many of these are 'determined leavers'. It is also clear that the migration of those with lower qualification levels, is a function of the under-supply of higher education places in Northern Ireland and the resultant increase in entry grades sought as shown in Table 10 of the paper. Many of these individuals would prefer to remain in Northern Ireland to study but cannot gain entry - they are 'reluctant leavers'.

Professor McAleese's questions focus on Northern Ireland as the unit of analysis in a way that has not been fully evident in the past twenty- five years. Under *Direct Rule* arrangements introduced in 1972, Northern Ireland has seen a difference between British political policy, which has stressed the separateness of Northern Ireland, and the need for distinctive political arrangements while, at the same time, day-to-day-

public policy has been driven by an increasing integration of policy with the rest of the UK. A crucial concept has been that of 'parity'. Parity means that Northern Ireland broadly follows whatever happens in Britain. In the higher education field this has allowed the view to develop that since students move around between different parts of the UK (English students in Scotland; Welsh students in England) what is so different about Northern Ireland? The movement of students is being accommodated within a UK context. Since the age specific participation index (API) in Northern Ireland is already high, how can more public expenditure on additional provision be justified?.

Two major developments could challenge this orthodoxy. The first, and most important, are the new political arrangements for devolution in the UK. The implementation of devolution arrangements in Scotland and Wales will radically change the idea of a uniform UK policy in many policy areas. The idea of Northern Ireland continuing to design public policy on the basis of 'parity with England' when Scotland and Wales will undoubtedly seek to strike their own priorities in relation to their own needs is nonsensical. A reorientation towards Northern Ireland as the unit of analysis and the identifications of its specific needs will, however, pose a challenge to many public officials who have spent their careers seeking to ensure that Northern Ireland shadows developments in Britain and more especially in England.

Professor Gibson's observations drive home the issues discussed above. The loss of forty to sixty thousand students, graduates who are now domiciled in Britain, who undoubtedly contribute intellectually and financially to the communities in which they live is a major drain to Northern Ireland. Survey evidence suggests that many who leave indicate they would like to return 'at some time' (Osborne *et al.*, 1987 and Leith, 1997). However, the realities of gaining a job and starting a family means that a return is less likely. Of course the experience of the Republic of Ireland, suggests that there are circumstances when graduates, often with young families, are prepared to return. A politically stable Northern Ireland with a growing economy could provide just those circumstances.

Finally, Dr Caul's observations are very pertinent. Greater collaboration between the institutions of further and higher education in the two parts of Ireland must be developed. Thus far, the responses of the institutions have been disappointing. The new cross-border institutions ought to provide the opportunity to develop a policy framework for much more to take place. These are potentially exciting times indeed.

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