EPASI *Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality*

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Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Country Report: The Republic of Ireland

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Introduction

With about one million individuals involved in some form of educational programme out of slightly more than four million inhabitants, education is a substantial focus of activity in the Republic of Ireland. Although levels of participation in education are increasing, issues of inequalities persist as some groups face disadvantage in terms of levels of access and participation and/or in terms of their overall experiences of education.

This report endeavours to provide a sense of how educational disadvantage has been constructed in the Irish[1] context by drawing on existing published literature. We are particularly indebted to the work of Lodge and Lynch, especially their report *Diversity at School* (2004). Section one (The Irish Education System: Overview) offers a general description of the education system as a preliminary to further analyses. Section two (Historical Overview: Education and Inequalities in the Irish Context) consists in an exploration of the rich developments which have taken place in the Republic since the 1990s in terms of the policies and legislative framework relating to equality and education. In Section three (Which Groups are Seen as Disadvantaged), we explore how each of the seven themes of the EPASI project (ie disability, ethnicity, gender, indigenous/non indigenous groups, language, religion and social class) have been dealt with in the Irish policy context. Finally, Section four (The Construction of a Policy Response) focuses on the constructions of educational (in)equality that underlie the development of policy.

The Irish Education System: Overview

School attendance is compulsory from six to 16 years old under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000[2], although the average age for starting school is four. The education system is divided into three sectors: the first or primary level (usually attended by children between the age of four[3] and 12), the second or post-primary level (between the age of 12 and 18) and the third or higher education level (beyond 18).

Although the responsibility for education as a whole lies with the Department of Education and Science (DES), arrangements vary according to the sector and the type of school. Such arrangements are explored below for each sector.

Primary level

The primary level consists of pre-schools (subdivided between Junior and Senior infants classes, part of the primary school to which they are usually attached) and primary schools themselves (composed of First to Sixth Classes). Since 1999 the Primary School Curriculum is taught in all schools, but the Church authorities retain the responsibility for devising and implementing the curriculum in the schools they have control of.

At primary level, a distinction is usually made between three types of schools: national schools, Gaelscoileanna and multidenominational schools. **National schools** were created at the time of the introduction of state primary education in the 19th century. They are usually owned by Catholic parishes and under the control of a board of management under the patronage of the diocese. Most

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[1] For practical purposes, in this report, the words 'Irish' and 'Ireland' refer to the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland is covered in the UK report.
[2] This is unless satisfactory alternative arrangements have been made.
[3] In some areas identified as 'at a disadvantage', the Early Start programme provides for three to four year old children. Some pre-school programmes target traveller children, children living in some inner-city Dublin areas and children with special educational needs.

Gaelscoileanna (schools in which the teaching is in the Irish language) are of recent origin (late 20th century), although Gaeltacht areas have always had Irish-language primary and secondary schools. They are established through the initiative of parents. Most all-Irish schools are denominational and under the patronage of a voluntary organisation (the Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge). **Multidenominational schools**, which, like Gaelscoileanna, are of recent origin, are usually run under the patronage of a non-profit company (often the voluntary organisation Educate Together). They are usually set up as a result of parental demand and welcome students from all backgrounds.

Secondary level

Schooling at secondary level is divided into three cycles:
- the Junior Cycle, which leads to the Junior Certificate Examination and is taken after three years of study at secondary level,
- a Transition Year, which is optional,
- the Senior Cycle, which eventually leads to the Leaving Certificate Examination after two additional years of study.

Killeavy (1999) distinguishes between five types of schools at secondary level.
- **Secondary schools**: most schools fall into this category. They were established at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century. These are usually privately owned and managed, usually under Church patronage. As noted by Drudy and Lynch (1993), for a long time only a minority of these schools had a board of management. Consequently, their running was entirely in the hands of religious bodies. However, since 1985 the management of these schools has been more in line with community schools, with representatives from trustees, teachers and parents sitting on the board.
- **Vocational schools**: these were established under the Vocational Education Act 1930 to provide vocational and technical education, although their role has evolved and they now cover all areas of the curriculum (with, note Drudy and Lynch, *ibid.*, a curriculum wider than those of either secondary or vocational schools). They are administered and funded by the Vocational Education Committees.
- **Comprehensive schools** have been set up in areas that did not have secondary schools. They cover a broad curriculum, inclusive of academic and technical areas, and are usually state-owned, though denominational (usually under Catholic management, some Protestant). The first were built in the 1960s as a result of a Department of Education initiative. Their organisation and curriculum are close to those of community schools and colleges. Since the 1970s, only one comprehensive school has been built, as they are being replaced by community schools.
- **Community schools** serve as neighbourhood cultural and education centres and cover a broad curriculum. As Drudy and Lynch state, "The community school concept was a development of the comprehensive school, with its emphasis on reciprocal relations between the school and the surrounding community" (1993:14). The first community school opened in 1972. As the comprehensive schools before them, they were part of the Department's attempts to create a unified post-primary system of education (Coolahan 1981; quoted in Drudy and Lynch, *ibid.*). As observed by Drudy and Lynch, "Although [community schools] are in the 'public sector' of education, … these schools allow for substantial church influence, and are in effect partly denominational, as a result of the involvement of Catholic religious orders in their management" (*ibid.*:14).
- **Community colleges** are similar to community schools but offer a broader curriculum and often cater for older students.

Secondary level schools are also managed by a Board of Management, on which members of the community sit. They are also often not state-owned (although community schools usually are), but

owned and run by community groups, usually of a religious nature. Secondary level schools are less likely to be denominational in comparison with primary level schools, although a large number are. As noted in a UNESCO report (nd), other groups have recently started to form their own schools (often all-Irish or multi-denominational).

Each denomination can control the teaching of its own religion in all schools and the high level of representation of Church representatives in policy-making bodies means they still can exert a significant influence (Drudy and Lynch 1993). This control of the Catholic Church on schools and educational policies is problematic in terms of equality issues. As Lodge and Lynch note:
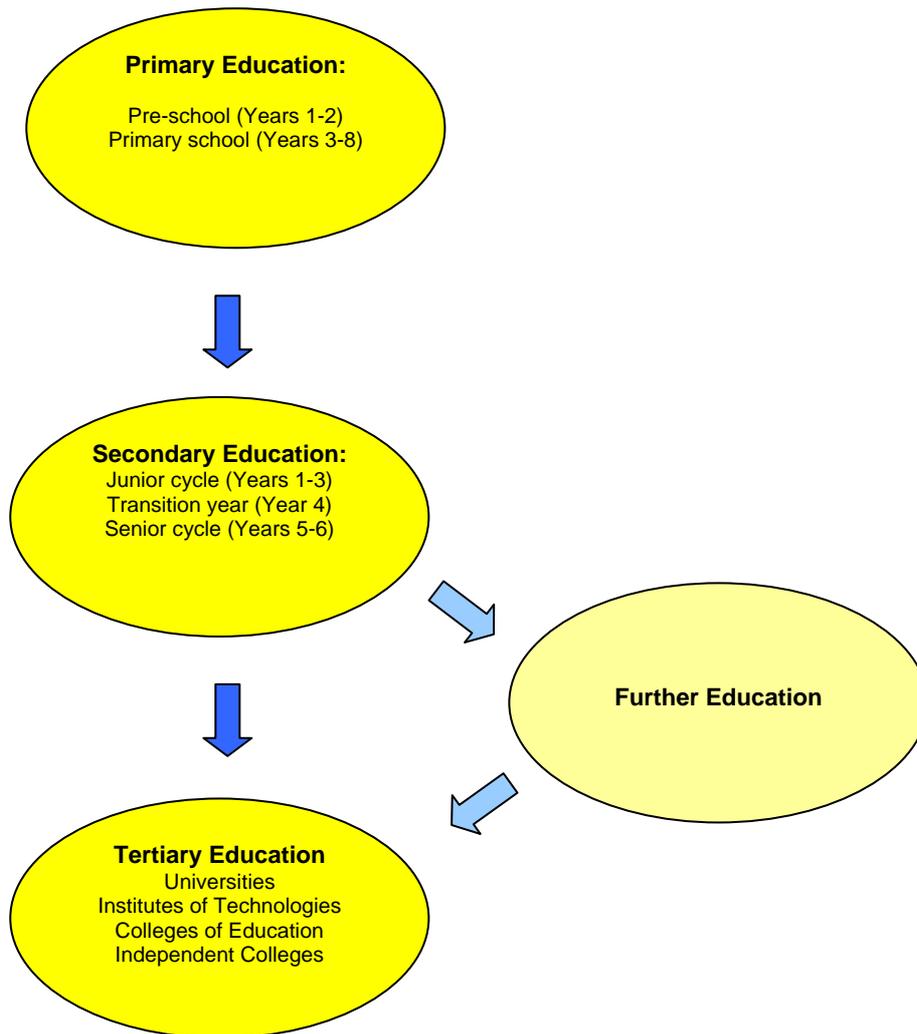
> Irish education is largely denominationally controlled at primary and second level. The daily operations of most schools assume that students are Christian, if not Roman Catholic, thereby raising important questions about how differences in religious beliefs are accommodated in schools. Given the teaching of the main Christian churches on sexual orientation in particular, it is almost impossible for those who are openly gay, lesbian or bisexual to feel that they have parity of status with heterosexual persons in religious-controlled schools, either as students or as teachers. … The religious control of schools in a predominantly state-funded system presents serious challenges to the pursuit of equality for particular minorities in education. (2004: 3)

The structural organisation of schooling also raises equality issues in terms of social class, with secondary schools having a much larger intake of students from middle-class backgrounds compared, for example, with vocational schools (Whelan and Hannan 1999).

Tertiary level (higher education)

The tertiary level includes the universities, colleges of education, institutes of technology and some non State-funded private third-level colleges (Killeavy 1999). Entry to higher education is competitive (based on the "Points Race" system). The proportion of school leavers entering higher education is high: it reached 50 percent in 2001, and has continued rising since. Undergraduate tuition fees in publicly funded third-level institutions were partly abolished in 1996, fully in 1997, for full-time undergraduate students (with exception of those in private colleges, which are not covered by this report). However, more recently, the reintroduction of fees has been envisaged. Some students also receive mean-tested maintenance grants. Despite this financial provision, the last national survey of HE students revealed important differences in terms of levels of participation on the basis of the socio-economic background which are discussed further in this report.

Figure 1.   The Irish Education System: Overview

Primary Education:

Pre-school (Years 1-2)
Primary school (Years 3-8)

Secondary Education:
Junior cycle (Years 1-3)
Transition year (Year 4)
Senior cycle (Years 5-6)

Further Education

Tertiary Education
Universities
Institutes of Technologies
Colleges of Education
Independent Colleges

Adapted from Education Ireland (www.educationireland.ie; accessed 5 October 2007).

Historical Overview: Education and Inequalities in the Irish Context

Overview

The Republic of Ireland has experienced many changes over recent decades, which, although not of an educational nature *per se*, have impacted on the education and equality agenda. These include demographic, economic, religious and cultural changes.

In demographic terms, the country is characterised by the relative youth of its population. Ireland has one of the youngest populations in Europe, as well as the highest birth rate. The country has also experienced dramatic economic changes. Levels of unemployment fell in the 1990s when the country experienced a rapid economic growth (the "Celtic Tiger" phenomenon). These demographic and economic patterns have led to an increased policy concern for education issues, as a large part of the population is in some form of education due to the demographic structure, and as economic growth and changes in industry have been accompanied by a need for a more qualified workforce.

The influence of the Roman Catholic Church on educational policies is well documented. Although the Church remains powerful and, as suggested earlier, still exerts a key influence in this area, the country has undergone a significant process of secularisation. In 1972 the Articles referring to religious groups were erased from the Irish constitution (Fifth amendment of the Constitution of Ireland), although Article 44 remains[4]. More than 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, although this proportion is declining.

Increased prosperity has attracted new groups to a country whose history of migration was predominantly one of emigration rather than immigration. The arrival of minority ethnic groups who do not necessarily have a tradition of Catholicism has raised new questions in terms of equality and social justice, especially as the policy response to educational disadvantage has been associated with a resistance to the acknowledgment of diversity. The inclusion of migrant groups has been complicated by the Catholic school ethos of most schools, as well as by the insistence on maintaining a national culture and Celtic identity which still permeates the education system (Killeavy 1999).

Legislative and policy framework related to educational disadvantage

Although educational disadvantage has been a long term concern, it is only recently that a legislative and policy framework has started developing, with key changes taking place in the 1990s. As observed in a report by UNESCO, "With the exception of the Vocational Education Committees, Irish education has up to recently lacked any significant legislative basis. This has changed with the enactment of a number of important pieces of legislation" (2001).

In the 1990s, important debates started taking place on education policy. This revived interest was reflected in the publication in 1992 of the Green Paper *Education For a Changing World*, which was followed by a wide-ranging consultation and a National Education Convention in 1993. This resulted in the 1995 White Paper *Charting our Education Future*, which planned significant changes in organisational terms, especially an increased devolution of the responsibility for the provision of educational services to the regional or school level and a new focus for the Department for Education and Science (Ministry) on strategic planning and policy. Increased concern for educational disadvantage was also reflected in the establishment of a target for the retention of students until the end of Senior Cycle. The target was 90 percent by the end of the 1990s, although

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[4] According to Article 44, 'The State acknowledges that the homage of public worship is due to Almighty God. It shall hold His Name in reverence, and shall respect and honour religion'.

in 2000 the actual completion rate was only 83 percent (Government of Ireland 1995; quoted in Jeffers 2002).

The 1999 White Paper *Early Childhood Education, Ready To Learn*, set a strategy for early childhood education for children up to the age of six. The paper's emphasis was on improving the quality of educational provision for this age range, increasing parental involvement, and developing a system of inspection to ensure providers meet quality criteria. A particular focus was children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special needs. The equivalent to 94 million Euros has been allocated, in the context of the National Development Plan (2000-2006), for early childhood education.

In 2000, the White Paper *Adult Education Learning For Life* followed another wide-ranging consultation process. It established a strategy for the development of adult education, with funding of IR£1 billion provided in the National Development for a Back to Education Initiative, including a range of "second-chance" education programmes (UNESCO, nd).

Parallel to this series of White and Green Papers, an important legislative framework has developed in relation to equality. The remit of these Acts has been much wider than education. **The Education Act 1998** gives a statutory basis to first and second-level education. It clarifies the role of teachers and school leaders, promotes the development of school partnerships and provides a framework for the development of teachers' working environment. The Act was established with a view to codify practices, rather than bringing about a radical reform of the system, as well as to increase transparency in terms of each stakeholder's responsibilities. Under the Act, the schools also have a number of duties, such as publishing their admission policy, promoting equality of opportunity and answering the needs of all students. They must have a plan which states the school objectives in terms of equal access and participation as well as measures planned to achieve such objectives.

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 provides a new statutory framework to fight absenteeism and early school leaving. It gives the main responsibility for strategies ensuring school retention to the National Educational Welfare Board, the agency in charge of developing and implementing school attendance policy. The Act raised the minimal age for school leaving to 16 years old. It also requires that schools have a code of behaviour for students, inclusive of policies to prevent bullying and harassment on the basis of the nine grounds (see below).

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) aims to establish inclusive education for children with SEN as a legal requirement and establishes procedures for assessing children with SEN and for schools to take action through education plans.

These policy and legislative developments partly overlap with the broad equality agenda. The equality legislative framework consists of the Equal Status Act 2000, Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004, Education Act 1998, the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 (see above) and the Equal Status Act 2000. In general, the equality legislation covers nine grounds:
- gender,
- marital status,
- family status,
- sexual orientation,
- religion,
- age,
- disability,
- race,
- Traveller community.

To further the implementation of a framework for equality, the **Equality Unit** was created in **2001** under the Equal Opportunities Promotion and Monitoring Measure of the National Development Plan and benefits from some funding from the European Union. The Unit is based in the Department of Education and Science.

The Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004, which replace the Anti-discrimination (Pay) Act 1974 and the Employment Equality Act 1977, cover employees in both the public and private sectors, as well as applicants for employment and training and outlaws discrimination on the nine grounds mentioned above. They allow an employer to put in place positive action measures to promote equal opportunities in certain cases (women, people over the age of 50, people with disabilities and members of the Traveller community). There are however exemptions to the Act, such as requirements in terms of residency, citizenship and proficiency in the Irish language for public service employment, or discrimination by religious, educational and medical institutions run by religious bodies, where more favourable treatment is given in order to maintain the religious ethos of the institution.

The Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 were put in place to promote equality and prohibit discrimination and harassment in relation with the provision of services, on the basis of the nine grounds mentioned above. The aims of the Equal Status Acts are to
- promote equality of opportunity,
- prohibit discrimination,
- prohibit harassment,
- require reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities,
- allow for positive action,
in relation to the nine grounds mentioned earlier.

The Equal Status Acts cover a wide range of areas, including public services, among which is education. They apply to all educational institutions, including primary and post-primary schools. Guidelines have been issued specifically for schools (The Equality Authority, 2005) to outline the main features of the Equal Status Acts and how they affect primary and second-level schools. These guidelines stipulate and recommend that:

> The inclusive school prevents and combats discrimination. It is one that respects values and accommodates diversity across all nine grounds in the equality legislation… It seeks positive experiences, a sense of belonging and outcomes for all students across the nine grounds. Outcomes include access, participation, personal development and achieving education credentials (1).

Under the Acts, schools are required not to discriminate across the nine grounds in terms of:
- the admission of the student (including conditions for admission),
- the access of a student to a course, facility or benefit provided by the school,
- any other term or condition of participation in the school,
- the expulsion of a student or any other sanction.

However, as in other areas, there are a number of exemptions. These operate mainly to accommodate the requirements of single-sex schools or of denominational schools, as noted in the guidelines:

> A school that has this objective [to provide education in an environment that promotes certain religious values] can admit a student of a particular religious denomination in preference to other students. Such a school can also refuse to admit a student who is not of that religion, provided it can prove that this refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school (*ibid.*: 9).

The Equality Authority is in charge of enforcing the equality legislation. Education represents one of its specific foci, and is the second highest sector for case work. The Authority funded the publication of the *Diversity in School* report (Lodge and Lynch 2004), on which much of this report draws. The report represents a significant milestone in terms of mapping out equality issues in education.

Although the focus of this report is on national policies, the EU played a significant role in the development of an equality framework in Ireland. Some of the Acts have been a direct response to the EU directives. For example, Lodge and Lynch note that the Equality Act 2004 aims to implement the Race Directive, the Framework Employment Directive and the Amended Gender Equal Treatment Directive of the EU, all of which have implications for education.

Which Groups are seen as Disadvantaged?

"Educational disadvantage" is the term favoured in contemporary Irish policy circles. As noted in the UNESCO (2001) report, "Promoting education for all is a major policy priority" (16), with the equivalent to more than 500 million Euros set aside in the National Development Plan for various measures to counter educational disadvantage in society. Drawing on the seven EPASI themes, this section highlights how each of these themes has been addressed in the Irish educational policy context.

Social class

Educational disadvantage has until recently been mainly constructed in socio-economic terms in Irish policy circles. This has led Lodge and Lynch (2004) to observe that: "Although vital for the promotion of equality generally, the focus on socioeconomic status has overshadowed the impact of other differences" (2004: 1).

However, the debate about social class and education did not start until the 1960s (Drudy and Lynch 1993), when the *Investment in Education* report (Department of Education 1966) was published. Since then, the educational disadvantage experienced by students from underprivileged backgrounds both in terms of access and participation has become a well-documented issue. The proportion of the 17-19 cohort entering higher education increased from 20 percent in 1980 to 54 percent in 2003 (Fitzpatrick Associates and O'Connell 2005). This has been associated with

> a general trend of enhanced equality of access since 1980… In particular, and as part of the very rapid increase in overall participation between 1998 and 2003, the participation rate of some of the lower groups, particularly skilled manual, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, and other non-manual workers all increased substantially. (iii)

The same report shows that over the 1998-2003 period, the participation of those from a disadvantaged socio-economic background has increased faster than those of other background. However, because they have started from a much lower base, they have not caught up with other groups (Fitzpatrick Associates and O'Connell 2005). Some 58 percent of HE entrants come from the four most privileged socio-economic groups, despite these groups representing only 37 percent of the population. Students from disadvantaged background are not just under-represented, but, as discussed earlier in this report, tend to concentrate in particular types of higher education institutions. Those from the less privileged socio-economic backgrounds tend to be found concentrated in the Institute of Technology sector. This classed access to the different types of HE institutions is also identifiable through the bigger proportion of students receiving means-tested maintenance grants in the Institute of Technology compared with universities (45 percent of Institute of Technology entrants, compared with 27 percent of university entrants) (Clancy 2002).

In compulsory schooling, it has been observed that the "burden" of dealing with educational disadvantage experienced by particular socio-economic groups falls on particular schools, with the designation as disadvantaged bringing additional resources as well as a stigma. Some have asked for educational disadvantage to be more evenly spread between schools. Parents' freedom to choose a school is an important value in Irish society but issues such as housing policies and school practices lead to the concentration of those who are at a disadvantage (Jeffers 2002).

Reflecting the strong focus of Irish policies on socio-economic disadvantage, many measures have been developed in this area. This includes, for example, the School Completion Programme (IE26) or the Giving Children an Even Break initiative (IE25), which both target schools with high proportions of students from a socio-economically disadvantaged background (see Case Studies section). However, it is all the more striking that while socio-economic disadvantage "remains a crucial equality concern in education" (Lodge and Lynch 2003:7), it is not one part of the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation in Ireland.

Gender

The influence of the Roman Catholic Church has been interpreted in the literature as implying some resistance to ideals of equality in relation to gender and sexual orientation. A predominantly conservative legislative framework was long favoured in relation to gender and sexuality. The original text of the Irish Constitution prohibited abortion and divorce, and it was only in 1995 that the latter was allowed following the Fifteenth Amendment. Contraception only became legal in 1979 and homosexuality in 1993.

Gender is one of the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation, although it has not been given the same level of attention as socio-economic status in policy circles. Since the 1980s an increasing number of measures have been developed in schools to tackle gender issues. Such changes have been partly the result of growth in research on the relationship between gender and education in the country (Drudy and Lynch 1993), under the influence of feminist thought, with the influential *Schooling and Sex Roles: Sex differences in subject provision and student choice in Irish and post-primary schools* report (Hannan *et al*. 1983) representing a milestone.

One particular concern of these policies has been to tackle gender issues in relation to subject choice. The gendered patterns of subject choice at second level are related to single-sex schooling as boys' and girls' schools offer slightly different provision (with issues of access to technological subjects for girls and to home economics subjects for boys). However, as noted by Lodge and Lynch (*ibid.*), although the Government supports co-educational schooling, the rights of schools to provide single-sex schooling are difficult to challenge as they are enshrined in the Equal Status Act. Although co-educational schooling has significantly expanded since the 1970s, following a trend which began in many European countries in the 1950s[5], the Irish education system continues to be characterised by a high proportion of single-sex schools. As a result, and as observed by Mac an Ghaill *et al*. (2004), measures have more often than not targeted a particular gender group to expand educational opportunities (eg FUTURES, TENET and Balance: Who Cares?). Girls have often been the target of such policies, with a particular dearth of measures targeting boys, particularly those in single-sex schools. This is problematic since boys in single-sex schooling have been identified as more likely to give little consideration to gender equality, have more gender-stereotyped views and express higher levels of prejudice against travellers and gay men, as well as often seeing hegemonic masculinity as "superior" (Mac an Ghaill *et al*. 2004).

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[5] Indeed, according to the Department of Education and Science data, in 1999-2000, 33 percent of boys and 44 percent of girls were schooled in single-sex institutions (DES, 2002; quoted in Mac an Ghaill *et al*. 2004).

More recently, concerns about boys' under-achievement have started to rise, as their academic performance is *on average* lower than that of girls, both at junior and leaving certificate levels. It has also been observed that boys are more likely to leave school earlier, although the situation is reversed at tertiary, especially post-graduate level, with men getting higher grades and outnumbering women at postgraduate level. However, as Mac an Ghaill *et al.* (2004) notes: "The response in Ireland to (some) boys' underachievement relative to that of (some) girls has been more muted than elsewhere". (17)

The Eurostat 2006 Labour Force surveys show that the proportion of "school early leavers" is much lower among women. Fitzpatrick Associates and O'Connell (2005) observe that in 2003 57.9 percent entrants to university were women. However, women tend to be under-represented among students of mathematics, science and technology (according to the Eurostat data, only 30.5 percent of students who obtain a degree in mathematics, science and technology are women, which is slightly below the average for all European countries).

The gender-related cases of the Equality Authority relate mainly to school uniform and dress code issues. The Equality Authority also deals with issues of sexual harassment in relation to sexual orientation. However, the educational experiences of sexual minorities have attracted limited concern in Irish policy circles and remain an under-researched area.

Before we turn to an exploration of the other themes addressed by the EPASI project, it should be noted that these have been given limited consideration compared with socio-economic disadvantage and, to a lesser extent, gender. As Lodge and Lynch observe:

> Other [than socio-economic status and gender] social differences have received relatively little research attention. The impact of statuses such as ethnicity (including membership of the Traveller community), family and marital status, sexual orientation and religion have been the subject of relatively little discussion and analysis (Lodge and Lynch 2004:1).

The validity of these comments remains today.

Disabilities

According to UNESCO (2001), in Ireland there are currently 6,800 children with disabilities attending 106 special schools, 3,600 children with disabilities attending 300 special classes attached to mainstream schools, 7,600 children with disabilities attending mainstream schools on a "fully integrated" basis. There are in total more than 1,700 special needs assistants and more than 750 resource teachers in primary schools alone.

In relation to higher education, a survey commissioned by AHEAD (2008) shows that the participation rates for students with disabilities can be very low for some types of disability and tend to diminish overtime. For example, in the case of the "Blind or Visually Impaired", the participation rate has decreased from 8 percent in 1993/94, to 3 percent in 2005/06. In the case of the "Deaf or Hard of Hearing", it has gone down from 7 percent to 5 percent over the same period. For those with a "Physical or Mobility Disability", the rate is still much below the national average, having only progressed from 12 percent to 13 percent.

Measures targeting students with special needs have developed since the 1990s, with the allocation of resource teachers, additional teaching hours and teaching assistants, as well as an extension of the learning support teacher service to all primary and second-level schools (UNESCO 2001). Examples include the Special Fund for Students with disabilities, which support students in post-compulsory education by paying for extra help or for adaptive equipment, or the Visiting Teacher Service, which targets pupils with visual or hearing impairment (see Project Summaries IE27:

Special Fund for Students with Disabilities and IE31: Visiting Teacher Service for Traveller Education).

Disabilities and special needs have been addressed in two different ways in the Irish educational system: the provision for students with disabilities includes special schools and additional support in mainstream schools. The favoured option in Irish policies was traditionally to develop specialist institutions. However, since the 1990s, a mainstream approach has been preferred, though specific schools and classes have also been maintained. As a result, the proportion of students with disabilities schooled in mainstream institutions has rapidly increased. At the same time, disability issues have been given some more attention and visibility, with the publication of several reports funded by the Government (Special Education Review Committee 1993; Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities 1996; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1999).

In 2001, the Government established the National Council for Special Education to coordinate the provision of education and support services for children with special educational needs, to advise the Minister and provide information on educational services for children with SEN. The Council was formally incorporated in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act). The Act takes a mainly "mainstream" approach: children should be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have SEN, unless this is contrary to the children' interests. The school principal should arrange for a student to be assessed in consultation with the parent, and once a student has been assessed as having SEN an Education Plan should be set up within a month.

Disability is one of the nine grounds covered by the Equality legislation. The Equal Status Acts, which cover educational institutions, stipulate that service providers must do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability. The Education Act 1998 insists on individuals with disabilities being included in education and plans for support services to be made available to students with disabilities. The Equality Authority deals with a number of cases in this group, mostly about issues of access to schools and to particular subject areas. Lodge and Lynch (2004) observe that the Equal Status Acts presume that students with disabilities are schooled in mainstream schools. In a more critical vein, they also note that a medical model of disability is used in equality legislation and in the Education Act 1998, in sharp contrast with the Commission on the Status of People with Disability (1996) report which recommended drawing on a social model of disability. Lodge and Lynch also remark that constructions of a policy response to disability issues draw mainly on a deficit model as disability remains overwhelmingly perceived as a deficiency, with a consequent lack of policies focusing on the attitudes of students and teachers towards those with a disability.

Ethnicity

Interest has grown in ethnicity issues in recent years in policy circles. This partly results from the arrival in Ireland of an increasing number of migrants from minority ethnic groups, whether Black, Asian or White other than White Irish. This has led to the development of research on ethnic minorities, including in relation to educational matters, as well as to an increased policy concern. Since the 1990s, a number of reports and policies have promoted the values of "cultural diversity" and "anti-racism" (eg Department of Health and Children 2000; Department of Education and Science 2002). Lodge and Lynch (2004) also note that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is devising guidelines for teachers so that the curriculum meets the needs of ethnic minority groups. Most policies seem to focus on ethnic minority groups which have recently migrated to Ireland. So as to explain the education system to migrants with school age children, information has been published by the Reception and Integration Agency, available in nine languages and in three versions (for the parents of asylum seekers, for unaccompanied minors and

for parents of other non-national children). The authors of a report produced by Eurydice (2004) observe that European countries have found different ways to organise life at school for migrant children, which correspond to an "integrated model" or to a "separate model". The former has been adopted by Ireland, which as such is part of a small number of European countries which "provide solely for direct integration within mainstream classes with additional support for pupils where appropriate" (42). Most forms of support towards children migrants in Irish schools consist of language support (for example through the allocation of a language support teacher) (Eurydice 2004).

However, little remains known about the educational experiences of ethnic minority groups (with the exception of Travellers, who are considered in another section in this report), something Lodge and Lynch (*ibid.*) relate to the fact that ethnic minority groups in Ireland have historically been white English speakers, mainly from the US or the UK. This lack of concern is also reflected by the fact that the national census does not collect specific data on ethnicity (other than for Travellers). As a result, the data available only relates to nationality or to the migration status. The European Commission Green Paper (2008) highlights that many children of migrants have lower levels of attainment than their non-migrant peers. However, data from the OECD PISA survey 2006 on academic skills at 15 (mentioned in the Green Paper) highlights differences in student performance in reading, mathematics and science in most OECD countries. Although this was also the case in Ireland, the gap between migrants and non-migrants was much smaller compared with most OECD countries. The Eurostat Labour Force Survey reveals that in most OECD countries the percentage of 18-24 with only lower-secondary education and not in education or training is highest among non-nationals compared with nationals. However, in Ireland, non-nationals were slightly less likely to be "early school leavers", something which is likely to be related to the characteristics of non-nationals in the country.

This lack of research does not allow us to draw firm conclusions in relation to the educational experiences of different ethnic groups, although it has been observed that "the lack of curricular recognition for ethnic difference can operate as a further barrier to full participation for learners" (Lodge and Lynch 2004:71) and that ethnic minority students are not exempt of bullying. A study by Fanning *et al.* (2001) identified issues of discrimination and racism in schools against ethnic minority groups, while a report from the Higher Education Equality Unit (1997) highlighted similar issues at tertiary level. Worryingly, there is also evidence that a default model of a white citizen underpins mainstream policies, and ignores the experiences of ethnic minority groups, as well as of refugees and asylum seekers. As an example, the Exploring Masculinities measure (IE23) (see also Case Study 4) has been criticised for referring only to white masculinity (Mac an Ghaill *et al*. 2004).

Because policy concerns about ethnic minority experiences in education has been very recent, it has been difficult to identity policies in this area. Examples of policy interventions identified for the EPASI project include the Transition Supports project (IE35).

Religion

There is a clear lack of data on issues relating to religious minorities and their experiences of education. This is partly related to the fact that the vast majority of Irish are Roman Catholic (more than 90 percent). As for minority ethnic groups, the diversification of the country in terms of religion is a relatively recent phenomenon (with exception of Protestant groups). In recent years, groups from a non-Catholic background, such as Muslim, Hindu or Christian Orthodox groups have migrated to Ireland. The fact that a large majority of schools are denominational (ie Roman Catholic, with the exception of a few Protestant schools, and a handful of Jewish or Muslim schools) has been identified as problematic for the inclusion of non-Catholic groups. The legislative

framework for equality makes exception for schools to have some control on the composition of the student population in terms of religion, so as to maintain their "ethos". This raises issues in terms of school choice, access to school and school experiences for non Roman Catholic students. Students may not have a non-denominational school in their neighbourhood, so may have to enrol in a Roman Catholic school even when they are from a different religious background or do not belong to a religious group, and thus experience a sense of alienation. The most popular schools can simply refuse students who cannot produce a baptismal certificate. While students are allowed to opt out from aspects of the life of the school reflecting particular beliefs, Lodge and Lynch (2002; cited in Lynch and Lodge 2004) observe that:

"The problem for those with minority beliefs in majority-belief schools is that the religious dimension of a school's ethos is not necessarily confined to periods of religious instruction" (50).

Religion is one of the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation. Considering the above, it is not then surprising that the Equality Authority deals with many cases in this area, especially in relation to access by members of particular religions to schools of another religious ethos and of access to non-denominational schooling.

Examples of educational policies targeting specific religious groups include the Protestant Block Grant for Protestant children from disadvantaged background, as well as the Educate Together initiative, which targets children of minority, secular or no beliefs, as well as those from any faith whom parents want them to be educated in a multi-denominational school (see Project Summaries IE33: Protestant Block Grant and IE34: Educate Together).

Indigenous minorities

The Traveller community is usually identified as the main indigenous minority in Ireland. It is only since 2002 that "Traveller" has been included as a census category. According to this census, 24,000 Travellers live in the country.

There have been significant shifts in the way Travellers have been considered in policy circles. Strikingly, in their 1993 book, Drudy and Lynch note that Travellers often fell in the category "special educational needs" and a view of them as "deviant" has long been dominant, while more recent work reflects on their "distinct culture". There are about 50 Traveller preschools in the country, three all-Traveller national primary schools, about 140 post primary schools, as well as a large number of training centres for Travellers. A survey (Department of Education and Science 2005) observes that the enrolment of Travellers concentrates in a small number of (often disadvantaged) schools, while "Anecdotal evidence suggests that some schools either discourage or obstruct the enrolment of Traveller children." (71)

According to this report, this raises issues as it stretches the resources of these schools and limits the choice of schools for Travellers. The number of Travellers continuing post-primary has increased, however the subsequent drop out remains very high and most Traveller students do not complete the Junior cycle (although there are significant differences with girls doing better than boys). The survey also confirms the small numbers who progressed to the senior cycle of post-primary education and also reports high levels of absenteeism in schools (on average for 20 percent of the year in primary, 50 percent post-primary). Test results provided by the primary schools involved in the survey (standardised tests administered by the schools themselves as part of their annual assessment process for all pupils) shows that in English the mean achievement level of pupils was very low in comparison with the population generally as 67.4 percent of pupils achieved scores that were at or below the 20th percentile (with 47.5 percent scoring below the 10th percentile). In Mathematics, 62.1 percent of the pupils achieved scores that were at or below the 20th percentile.

Lodge and Lynch (2004) observe that historically the Traveller community has been overlooked in terms of policy, despite the few reports that have identified issues relating to them (Commission on Itinerancy 1963; Department of Education 1970; Travelling People Review Body 1983; Task Force on the Travelling Community 1995). However, we found that a number of measures are being implemented more recently. Examples include the Parents and Traveller Education Project (Project Summary IE42), the Capitation Grants (IE32), the Visiting Teacher Service for Traveller Education (IE31), the Resource Teachers for Travellers (IE30) or Pre-schools for Travellers (IE29). Yet this group continues to face major educational disadvantages, both in terms of access and participation. In particular, low attendance, low retention rates and under-performance have been highlighted. In Higher Education, the presence of Travellers is minimal, with fewer than 20 Travellers pursuing their studies at that level (http://www.itmtrav.ie/education02d.html; accessed 13 May 2008). A key barrier to change may be the lack of involvement of Travellers themselves in the shaping of policies targeting them, as well as the lack of policies which aim to improve Travellers' educational experiences by targeting those outside the Travellers' community, eg by changing the public perception of Travellers. However, there is evidence of a shift: the Irish Traveller Movement has recently launched a pilot initiative targeting specifically educational organisations. The programme (called Yellow Flag: Celebrating Diversity in Schools), based on practical measures aiming to bring issues of multiculturalism and inclusion in the day-to-day running of the school. Schools which meet the challenge by following the different steps of the programme will be awarded the "Yellow Flag". Stages of this programme include inter-cultural and anti-racist training for staff, the involvement of local community groups, the establishment of a Diversity Committee, a review of intercultural issues in the school, an action plan, some monitoring and evaluation, as well as, among other things, the production of a diversity code.

"Travellers" represent one of the grounds for the equality framework, although they are also covered under the "race" ground. The cases the Equality Authority deals with in this area are mostly related to access to schools.

Linguistic minorities

Although there was always some all-Irish schools in the Gaeltacht areas of Ireland, **Gaelscoileanna**, ie schools in which the teaching is all in Irish have developed since the 1990s. Since the 1990s, more migrants have come to Ireland whom first language is not English. In some cases, the lack of proficiency in English has been identified as a key barrier in terms of access and educational achievement (Lodge and Lynch 2004). This has led to some policy initiatives aiming to improve the English proficiency of these new groups, both in adult education and in the compulsory education sector. Many of these measures have targeted refugees, although linguistic support has now been extended to other groups. Examples of this include the allocation of additional teachers to language support in schools with large proportion of non proficient speakers of English, the Together Towards Inclusion Toolkit IE40 (which consists mainly of a book for teachers distributed in schools) and the English Language Support Programme for Post-primary Schools (part of the Trinity Immigration Initiative IE41), which targets migrant post-primary students.

The Construction of a Policy Response

Drudy and Lynch (1993) have identified three dominant paradigms in educational discourse in Irish policies and research. These still continue to provide the ideological basis on which the construction of a policy response is developed. The paradigm of **consensualism** implies a dominant view of society as consensual and undifferentiated as a whole. Social structures such as social class and gender are taken into account, but are analysed as individual attributes, not as structural relationships or power generating inequalities. This approach is reflected by the terminology used in

official documents and government-funded reports (eg "disadvantage"). The second paradigm identified by Drudy and Lynch is that of **essentialism**, in which a person is defined in terms of given abilities, an approach which suggests that the solutions to identified issues lies within the individual, rather than within the school or social structures. Finally, the paradigm of **meritocratic individualism** suggests that talent and effort attract automatic rewards. This implies that success is solely related to the individual. Drudy and Lynch also observe that this latter discourse of meritocratic individualism is articulated with an ideology of equality of opportunities, in which educational policies ensure that every child receive the best education suited to their level of abilities.

Equality of opportunities has been the main way of addressing equality issues since the 1960s and remains so, as in most European countries characterised by a neo-liberal economical and political framework. While equality of opportunities has often been interpreted by theoricians as the more liberal version of equality (Riley 1994), it is worth noting that policy documents also sometimes refer to a more radical version of it, ie equality of outcomes. Positive action, which is allowed by the legislation, is sometimes encouraged in order to achieve equality of outcomes. For example, the Equal Status Acts allow such measures to target disadvantaged students and the Employment Equality Acts 1998 allow it for women, those over 50, the disabled and Travellers.

The policy response to equality issues has also long been characterised by a "top down" approach, with the DES taking the lead in the running of a number of initiatives. Yet, as Jeffers (2002) observed, government initiatives coexist with many initiatives taken at local or regional level, often by voluntary groups.

A recent change in the policy response has been the shift to a more mainstream approach of educational disadvantage. The DES attempts to maintain children with special educational needs in mainstream education as much as possible, in line with the EPSEN 2004 Act, although this change is reflected across all the themes dealt with in the EPASI project.

The Irish government shows little propensity to acknowledge diversity, and this is a characteristic of the policy response to educational issues (Lodge and Lynch, 2004). This is especially the case in relation to disability, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion. Lodge and Lynch suggest that resistance to acknowledge these different groups is related to the control of the Catholic Church over schools, especially in relation with accommodating the needs of those from religious minorities and of those from minority sexual orientation, as discussed earlier in the report.

Another barrier to the acknowledgement of diversity would lie with the consensual paradigm which dominates Irish policies. In the name of national unity, and in relation to the national history of Ireland, differences have been minimised:

> Even though Ireland has never been homogenous culturally or politically, there was a deep and persistent attempt to create an image of cultural and political homogeneity in the post-independence years. A culture of manufactured homogeneity developed that became almost incontestable; daring to name differences was seen as a challenge to authority, a deviant act, rather than a statement of fact. Differences around disability, ethnicity, beliefs, etc. became subsumed and suppressed in a society in which all were deemed to be the same. As historians have indicated (Coolahan 1981), the state project of political and cultural cohesion and homogenisation was realised in great part through education, hence the neglect, and even negation, of difference in educational life. (2004:3)

In comparison with the Church and other influential actors, minority groups have had a limited involvement in shaping policies, including educational policies. Their main involvement would have been through *ad hoc* consultation.

A summary of educational disadvantage in Ireland today: markers for inequality

As in other EPASI country reports, educational disadvantage is considered in this section in relation to seven indicators:
- Literacy levels,
- Exclusion/expulsion rates,
- Attainment levels at end of compulsory education,
- Continuing in education post compulsory leaving age,
- Participation rate in higher education,
- Employment rates,
- Evidence of social exclusion, being bullied, etc.

It should be noted beforehand that these data are not always available and, when they are, they are rarely available in relation to the seven dimensions explored in the EPASI project (namely, disability, ethnicity, gender, indigenous/non indigenous groups, language, religion and social class). However, the lack of availability/visibility of such data is *per se* of interest, as it suggests that limited attention has been given to educational disadvantage faced by particular groups in the construction of a policy response.

Literacy levels

In its 2006 report, the Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science recommended that "A new national adult literacy survey should be taken up as soon as possible to judge the current state of literacy after more than a decade since the first one." (7) Considering the considerable economic, social and cultural changes experienced by Ireland over the last ten years, we can only back this comment and regret the lack of more recent data at the time of writing.

A report published by the Department of Education (1997) constitutes the main source of information relating to literacy levels. The authors have identified that about a quarter of the Irish population score at the lowest level of literacy ('level one', out of five levels), which means that although not 'illiterate', this particular group has issues with the simplest literacy tasks. The study distinguished between three different domains of literacy: "prose literacy", "quantitative literacy" and "documents". Whether men or women are more likely to have issues with literacy depends on the domain of literacy considered. In relation to prose literacy, the study found that 24.2 percent of men and 21.0 percent of women scored at level one. In relation to quantitative literacy, 22.0 percent of men and 27.7 percent of women scored at level one. In relation to documents, 23.6 percent of men and 27.0 percent of women scored at level one. The report also highlights a close (and expectable) association between literacy performance and level of education, which holds for all domains of literacy. Among individuals who have completed primary schools only, levels of literacy for the three domains vary between 56.7 percent (prose literacy) and 61.4 percent (documents literacy). For those who have completed Junior Secondary only, levels of literacy vary between 23.6 percent (prose) and 27.0 percent (documents). For those who have completed Senior secondary, levels of literacy between 7.9 percent (prose) and 11.1 percent (quantitative). For college graduates, the proportion of those facing literacy issues varies between 1.0 percent (prose) and 2.0 percent (quantitative). The study also reveals that literacy levels are related to socio-economic background (as measured through occupation), with about 6 percent of managers and professionals scoring at level one, compared with about a third of those working in the agriculture/primary sector.

More recently, the OECD PISA survey 2006 on academic skills at 15 (mentioned in the Green Paper and to which we have referred earlier in this report) identified differences in student performance in reading in most OECD countries, including Ireland. However, the gap between migrants and non-migrants was much smaller in Ireland compared with most OECD countries. A survey by the Department of Education and Science (2005), mentioned earlier in this report, also found that at primary level, the mean achievement level of Traveller students in English was particularly low as 67.4 percent of pupils achieved scores that were at or below the 20th percentile (with 47.5 percent scoring below the 10th percentile).

Exclusion/expulsion rates

In their study, Darmody *et al* (2007) analysed data from the School Leavers' Survey from 2004 and 2006. Using a logistic regression model in order to control for a number of factors, they found a strong association between higher truancy levels and some particular groups (men, working-class students and Traveller students).

Attainment levels at end of compulsory education

The Junior Certificate is awarded to students who have successfully completed the Junior Cycle of second level education and achieved a certain level in their examination. Typically students will be 14-15 years old when they take this examination. The Junior Certificate thus appears to represent an appropriate indicator for attainment level at end of compulsory education. Typically, students take nine to 12 subjects. Most examination subjects can be taken at one of three levels ("Higher", "Ordinary" and "Foundation"). The website of the State Examinations Commission (www.examination.ie; accessed 9 December 2008) indicates results by subject at each of the three levels, with a breakdown by gender only. Women outperform men in the large majority of subjects, and at all levels. If we look at the core subjects (Irish, English and Mathematics), we see that women outperform men in Irish (47.8 percent of women who have taken English at higher level pass it with a Grade A or B, compared with 36.0 percent of men), in English (45.2 percent compared with 33.2 percent) and in Mathematics (50.5 percent compared with 49.5 percent).

A survey by the Department of Education and Science (2005), mentioned earlier in this report, also found that most Traveller students do not complete the Junior cycle (though girls are doing better than boys).

Continuing in education post compulsory leaving age

Data from the 2006 Eurostat Labour Force Survey mentioned earlier in this report reveal that in most OECD countries the percentage of 18-24 with only lower-secondary education and not in education or training is highest among non-nationals compared with nationals (nationality being used here as a proxy for ethnicity, something which is debatable). However, in Ireland, non-nationals were slightly *less* likely to fall in the category "early school leavers", something that may be related to their socio-economic characteristics compared with those of nationals. The same survey also shows that the proportion of "school early leavers" is higher among men.

According to the *School Leavers' Survey Report* (McCoy *et al*, 2007), in 2006, among school leavers, 86 percent of women obtained Leaving Certificate qualifications, compared with 77 percent of men.

Typically, students take the Leaving Certificate Examination two or three years after completion of the Junior Certificate. Data from the website of the Department of Education and Science

(www.cso.ie; accessed 10 December 2008) suggest that among men aged 20-24, 81.8 percent have completed Upper Second Level Education, compared with 89.1 percent of women in that age group. Data from the State Examinations Commission (www.examination.ie; accessed 10 December 2008) shows that women outperform men in most subjects and at most levels. For example, in Irish, 50.6 percent of women pass it with a grade A or B, compared with 44.2 percent of men. 41.1 percent of women pass English with a grade A or B, compared with 33.8 percent of men. 50.5 percent of women pass Mathematics with a grade A or B, compared with 47.2 percent of men (data for "higher level" Irish, English and Mathematics).

The authors of the *School Leavers' Survey Report* (McCoy *et al*. 2007) identified that men are more prone to early school leaving than women. In particular, the report showed that, in 2006, 5 percent of men left school without qualifications compared to 3 percent of women and that the percentage of men exiting the second level system without sitting the Leaving Certificate is 9 percent higher than for women. They also found a strong correlation between the socio-economic background (measured by parental occupation) and propensity to leave school early, with those with parents in non professional occupations more likely to leave school early.

Participation rate in higher education

The participation rate in higher education for those from a disadvantaged socio-economic background has substantially risen over the past ten years, faster than for other groups. However, because of the low starting baseline, these students remain under-represented in higher education: 58 percent of HE entrants come from the four most privileged socio-economic groups, despite these groups representing only 37 percent of the population (Fitzpatrick Associates and O'Connell 2005). Students from the less privileged socio-economic backgrounds also tend to concentrate in particular types of higher education institutions (eg Institutes of Technology sector). Clancy (2002) mentions that 45 percent of Institute of Technology entrants, compared with only 27 percent of university entrants, receive means-tested maintenance grants.

Fitzpatrick Associates and O'Connell (2005) observe that, in 2003, 57.9 percent entrants to university were women. However, women tend to be under-represented among students of mathematics, science and technology (according to Eurostat data, only 30.5 percent of students who obtain a degree in mathematics, science and technology are women, which is slightly below the average for all European countries).

The participation rates in HE for students with disabilities can be very low for some particular types of disability and in some cases the situation has worsened overtime (AHEAD, 2008). For example, in the case of the "Blind or Visually Impaired", the participation rate has decreased from 8 percent in 1993/94, to 3 percent in 2005/06. In the case of the "Deaf or Hard of Hearing", it has gone down from 7 percent to 5 percent over the same period. For those with a "Physical or Mobility Disability", the rate is still much below the national average, having only progressed from 12 percent to 13 percent.

Employment rates

According to the Central Statistics Office (2008), the participation rate of men in the labour force (ie ratio between the number of men in the labour force and the number of men aged 15 or over) is 73.4 percent, compared with 54.1 percent for women. The participation rate is also closely related to the level of education, especially for women, as the higher the level of qualification, the higher the chances to participate in the labour market.

Educational attainment exerts a major influence on employment. However, investment in education does not bring the same returns for all. Besides, employment rate only gives a partial picture, as one group may be more employed than another, yet have lower salaries and not be in so called graduate occupations. For example, while women, as students, may be 'over-achieving' compared to men, they tend to start with lower salaries once they have graduated. The Higher Education Authority (2007) highlighted that the most common initial salary for men, following graduation, was in the €25,000 – €28,999 bracket, while the most common for women was in the €21,000 – €24,999 bracket. More men than women graduates tend to earn salaries greater than €33,000. The same report reveals that even when the area of study (faculty) is controlled for, the pay gap between men and women graduates persist.

Evidence of social exclusion and bullying

As mentioned earlier in this report, the legislative framework for equality makes exception for schools to have some control on the composition of the student population in terms of religion, so as to maintain their "ethos". This raises particular issues in terms of choice of and access to school as schools can refuse students who cannot produce a baptismal certificate, even when there is no non-denominational school in their neighbourhood. However, even students who are not from the dominant creed who gain access to a Roman Catholic schools may experience a sense of exclusion as they may find difficult to fit in (Lodge and Lynch 2004). Students who are gay, lesbian and bisexual may also experience such issues considering the positions of the Roman Catholic school on those who do not define themselves as heterosexual.

Despite the existence of guidelines for schools for dealing with bullying and the fact that schools are encouraged to have a written policy to prevent and tackle the issue (Department for Education and Science 1993), one may wonder about the exposure to bullying of those who do not fit with the dominant model of sexuality or who are not from the dominant creed or ethnicity. As recalled earlier, a study by Fanning *et al.* (2001) identified issues of discrimination and racism in schools against ethnic minority groups, while the Higher Education Equality Unit (1997) identified similar issues at tertiary level. A study by Norman (2005) and Norman and Galvin (2006) has identified that students who are perceived as gay or lesbian by others are at particular risk of being bullied. In the first phase of this study (Norman 2005), which consisted in a survey of Social, Personal and Health Education teachers, the author found evidence of homophobic bullying in 79 percent of Irish second-level schools (with higher figures in boys' single-sex schools and, to a lesser extent, in co-educational schools, compared with girls' schools). In the second phase of the project (Norman and Galvin 2006), the authors investigated the attitudes and experiences of students, parents, teachers and headteachers about homophobic bullying (also in the context of secondary schools) and found that heteronormativity, fear, stereotyping, pervasive terms, and religious influence all contributed to homophobic bullying on the part of students.

Conclusion

The Irish educational landscape is one made of continuity and change. While the influence of the Roman Catholic Church on the education system persists, the country has undertaken massive economic, social and cultural changes over the last fifteen years. The economic boom of the 1990s, encapsulated in the well-known expression "Celtic Tiger", has brought needs for a more qualified workforce. This increased prosperity has been a major factor in the reverse of migration trends in a country whose history of migration had been, until recently, mainly one of emigration rather than immigration. Parallel to this, an important legislation has been implemented in relation to equality issues.

As we hope to have demonstrated in this report, the Irish construction of a policy response to educational disadvantage has much focused until now on socio-economic explanations and on groups at a socio-economic disadvantage. Gender issues, as well as issues faced by students with disabilities and Traveller students, have led to the development of a policy response, albeit to not to the same extent. However, in sharp contrast with the focus on social class, the possible educational disadvantage faced by some minority ethnic, religious and linguistic groups has been ignored in the construction of a policy response, as reflected by the project summaries analysed for the purpose of this report (see Appendix) and by the lack of data informing the educational situation of these groups (See the following section: "A summary of educational disadvantage in Ireland today: markers for inequality"). Although not all minority ethnic groups, nor all individuals from a particular minority ethnic group, face educational disadvantage (we know for instance from evidence collected in other countries that some minority ethnic groups achieve better educational outcomes than the majority ethnic group), the lack of policies targeting specifically those from minority ethnic groups remains particularly problematic in a country where multiculturalism has become a reality.

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Appendix 1: List of Project Summaries

The projects described below have been selected mainly on the basis of the following criteria: level of information available for each policy and relevance with the seven EPASI themes. The prior knowledge and interests of the research staff in the field also influenced the choice of these policies. Some of these policies are representative of the Irish approach to tackle a particular issue (eg Giving children an even break, in relation to socio-economic disadvantage). The unequal number of policies falling under each theme is unintended. Rather, it reflects the difficulties met by the research team in identifying some policies for a particular theme (eg minority ethnic groups), something which in turn seems related to the lack of priority and visibility given to the theme by the government and other policy-makers.

Theme	Project	subsidiary themes
Minority ethnic groups	Transition Supports Project IE 35	**L**
Socio-economic	School Completion Project IE 26 [Case Study ❶]	**I**
	Giving Children an Even Break IE 25 [Case Study ❷]	**I**
	Home-School-Community Liaison Project IE 36	**I**
	YouthReach IE 39	**I**
Religious Minorities	Protestant Block Grant IE 33	
	Educate Together IE 34	**E**
Linguistic Minorities	Together Towards Inclusion IE 40	**E**
	English Language Support Programme for Post-primary Schools IE 41	
Disabilities	Special Fund for Students with Disabilities IE 27	
	Visiting Teacher Service in Ireland IE 28	
	Junior Certificate School Programme IE 38	**I**
Indigenous Minorities	Pre-schools for Travellers IE 29	
	Resource Teachers for Travellers IE 30	
	Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers IE 31 [Case Study ❸]	
	Supplementary & Additional Capitation Grants IE 32	
	Parents and Traveller Education Project IE 42	
Gender	Exploring Masculinities IE 23 [Case Study ❹]	
	Equal Measures IE 24	
	Jobs for the Girls: Role Models CD-Rom IE 37	

Key: **E** ethnic minorities; **C** social class; **R** religious minorities; **L** linguistic minorities;   **D** disability; **I** indigenous minorities; **G** gender

Appendix 2: Overview of Project Summaries

Project	pre-school	primary	secondary	higher	working life	minority ethnic	Socio-economic	religious minority	linguistic minorities	disability	indigenous minorities	gender
Transition Supports Project IE 35				✓	✓	✓			✓			
School Completion Project IE 26 [Case Study ❶]		✓	✓				✓				✓✓	
Giving Children an Even Break IE 25 [Case Study ❷]		✓					✓				✓✓	
Home-School-Community Liaison Project IE 36		✓	✓				✓				✓✓	
YouthReach IE 39					✓		✓				✓✓	
Protestant Block Grant IE 33			✓					✓				
Educate Together IE 34		✓	✓			✓✓		✓				
Together Towards Inclusion IE 40		✓				✓✓			✓			
English Language Support Programme for Post-primary Schools IE 41			✓						✓			
Special Fund for Students with Disabilities IE 27					✓					✓		
Visiting Teacher Service in Ireland IE 28		✓	✓							✓		
Junior Certificate School Programme IE 38			✓							✓	✓✓	
Preschools for Travellers IE 29	✓										✓	
Resource Teachers for Travellers IE 30		✓									✓	
Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers IE 31 [Case Study ❸]	✓	✓	✓								✓	
Supplementary & Additional Capitation Grants IE 32		✓	✓								✓	
Parents and Traveller Education Project IE 42											✓	

[Exploring Masculinities](#) IE 23 [Case Study ❹]	✓		✓
[Equal Measures](#) IE 24			
[Jobs for the Girls: Role Models CD-Rom](#) IE 37	✓		✓

✓✓Indicates main theme addressed,
✓Indicates additional themes also address