

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



KEY INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION

DRAFT STATEMENT
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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Research by Parsons and Bynner (2007) notes the impact that poor educational attainment can have on a person's life trajectory. "The problem does not recede with time but can continue to limit opportunities and diminish life chances and the quality of life in all the main domains of adult functioning: education, family, workplace and community"¹.
- 1.2 Notwithstanding any progress that has been made in addressing inequalities in the field of education, this '*Draft Statement on Key Inequalities in Education in Northern Ireland*' highlights the Commission's assessment of the inequalities and educational experiences faced across the equality grounds in Northern Ireland.
- 1.3 To assist the Commission in compiling this *Draft Statement*, we contracted independent researchers from Queens University, Belfast to review a wide range of literature and data; conduct an analysis of available education data from government departments; and carry out primary qualitative research in the form of focus groups, interviews and an expert seminar with key stakeholders.
- 1.4 In compiling this *Draft Statement*, the Commission has drawn, in particular, on the resultant research report '*Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland*' - Burns et al. (2015)². Our development of the *Draft Statement* has also been supported with reference to a wide range of additional sources including publications and research reports from government departments, the community and voluntary sectors, academic research and the Commission's own research archive.
- 1.5 However, there remain significant and specific data gaps across a number of themes in relation to a number of equality grounds, specifically: gender identity; religion; political opinion; and sexual orientation. Additionally, there is lack of data disaggregation in relation to: ethnicity; disability status; marital status; and dependency status. This lack of data significantly impacts *not only the degree* to which overall inequalities in

¹ Parsons, S. And Bynner, J (2007) [*lluminating the disadvantage: Profiling the experiences of adults with Entry level literacy or numeracy over the lifecourse*](#)

² Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland*

education are assessed and monitored, but also impacts on the ability to monitor and evaluate individual actions taken by Government Departments and others to address these inequalities.

- 1.6 The Commission intends to further engage with key stakeholders, including representative organisations, to refine a final statement.
- 1.7 For each ground, observed differences and inequalities are set out. Drawing on the research, those inequalities **in bold** are considered to be the most pressing or key inequalities. These inequalities are highlighted as they are lifelong and impact upon the entire education journey for the equality groups concerned.

Attitudes / Bullying

- 1.8 **Bullying, including prejudice-based bullying, in schools is a persistent problem.** A number of equality groups are more vulnerable to bullying, or more likely to be bullied, in schools, including: Trans pupils, minority ethnic students, students with SEN or a disability, and students with same sex attraction.

Attainment

- 1.9 While progress has been made, it is clear that more work needs to be done. Despite the fact that overall levels of attainment are increasing, many of the attainment gaps between the equality groups are also increasing. This *Draft Statement* highlights the fact that many inequalities remain persistent and hard to tackle, and that there are a number of new and emerging inequalities that are impacting on some of the equality groups across the equality grounds.
- 1.10 Although there have been overall increases in the levels of attainment for all pupils, **males have persistently lower levels of attainment than females, beginning in primary school and continuing throughout schooling to GCSE and A Level.** The attainment gap increases, to the detriment of males, as pupils progress through both primary and post-primary education.
- 1.11 Similarly, **Protestants persistently have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE, GCSEs including English and Maths, and A Level.** Furthermore, between

2007/08 and 2011/12, the gap between Catholic and Protestant attainment has widened for all three education targets, therefore this is not only a persistent, but an increasing, inequality.

- 1.12 Social-economic status has an impact upon the overall attainment of school children. When we look at the educational attainment of males and females from different community backgrounds in respect to their socio-economic status, **there is persistent underachievement and lack of progression of working class Protestants, particularly males.** Protestant males pupils entitled to free school meals (a measure of social disadvantage) have the lowest rates of attainment in respect to GCSE and A Level results. They also have the highest proportions of non-attainment, and the lowest proportions of school leavers moving on to higher education.
- 1.13 Pupils who are Newcomer³ or from minority ethnic backgrounds have a smaller share of enrolees⁴ in grammar schools compared to their share of the population. Minority ethnic school leavers are more likely to leave school with no GCSEs and enter unemployment than white school leavers. Furthermore, an emergent inequality can be seen in that minority ethnic school leavers are less likely to attain 2+ A Levels or 5+ GCSEs (particularly 5+ GCSEs including Maths and English) than their white peers. In addition, **children from the Traveller community and Roma children have some of the lowest levels of attainment of all equality groups,**
- 1.14 **Students with SEN or a disability have lower attainment levels⁵ than students without any SEN or disability, and are less likely to go on to higher education.** In the education system in Northern Ireland, children can be identified as having 'special educational needs' (SEN) if they have 'a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made'⁶. It is important to note that not all children with SEN have a disability, and not all children with a disability have SEN.

³ The term 'Newcomer' pupils refers to a child or young person who has enrolled in a school but who does not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher.

⁴ In comparison to their share of the population according to the 2011 Census.

⁵ Attainment data presented in this report only covers SEN pupils in mainstream schools. There is no data available on attainment of pupils in special schools.

⁶ [Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1996](#)

Progression

- 1.15 Under achievement within primary and post-primary school impacts upon a young person's progression to further and higher education and their employment prospects.
- 1.16 Male underachievement in primary and post-primary education results in **fewer male school leavers entering higher education than females**. This is likely to have an impact on the composition of the future graduate workforce in Northern Ireland. As is, and despite the higher attainment rates of females in primary and post-primary education, their lower share of the enrollees in the STEM⁷ subject areas of 'Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology' in comparison to their share of the population in higher education.
- 1.17 The persistently lower levels of attainment for Protestant pupils may be a reason why fewer Protestant school leavers enter higher education than do Catholics. Catholics are persistently more likely to enter higher education than other groups. Protestants are persistently more likely to enter job training than the other groups.
- 1.18 There is a lack of available quantitative data on education outcomes in respect to political opinion. However, in general terms, any educational inequalities which may be perceived for the ground of political opinion could be closely related to the inequalities found by community/religious background.
- 1.19 We must recognise that the vast majority of enrollees on most further or higher education courses or job training programmes are young, single people with no dependants. The identification of inequalities for age, marital status and the presence of dependants is complex and is closely linked to individuals' different times of life bringing different opportunities or expectations with regards to accessing education. Therefore, the clear identification of inequalities in education in respect to these grounds cannot be achieved without further and extensive research.

⁷ Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Destination

- 1.20 Two emergent inequalities can be observed for minority ethnic students when moving into employment after education. While minority ethnic school leavers are slightly more likely than white school leavers to enter higher education, they are also over twice as likely to enter unemployment, after leaving school, than their white peers. Similarly, minority ethnic students are less likely to gain employment after leaving higher education than white students. While minority ethnic groups were found to be well represented in higher education (particularly in all STEM subjects), they are less likely to gain full or part-time employment after leaving higher education than white students.
- 1.21 Leavers from further education and higher education who self-report a disability were less likely to move into employment. The progression of students with a disability from further and/or higher education into employment is a persistent inequality, as leavers from higher education who do not have a disability are more likely to enter full-time work than leavers with a disability. Leavers with a disability are more likely to enter part-time work.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This *Draft Statement on Key Inequalities in Education in Northern Ireland* highlights the nature and extent of inequalities across the nine equality grounds covered by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: gender; racial group; disability status; sexual orientation; religious belief; political opinion; age; marital status; and dependency status⁸. Inequalities experienced by members of a particular equality group due to multiple identities are also highlighted.
- 2.2 This *Draft Statement* updates the education component of Commission's previous *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland*⁹ published in 2007. It will form part of a larger series of *Statements on Key Inequalities* that highlight key inequalities, from a wider set of inequalities, in other areas, for example: employment; health and social care; participation in public life; housing and communities; and, attitudes/prejudice.
- 2.3 In compiling this *Draft Statement* we have drawn, in particular, on independent research contracted from researchers at Queens University, Belfast - Burns et al. (2015), '*Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland*'¹⁰.
- 2.4 The Commission intends to further engage with key stakeholders, including representative organisations, to refine a final statement.

Methodology

- 2.5 Burns et al. (2015) analysed data from the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DE) and the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DEL) over the period 2007/08-2011/12, as well the results of the Census 2011. Their research report also drew on attitudinal data from the *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey* (NILTS)¹¹, as well as from the Commission's most recent *Equality Awareness Survey*¹².

⁸ Equality grounds are those specified above, equality groups are the categories within those grounds. E.g. gender is an equality ground, males and females are the groups within that ground.

⁹ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland](#)

¹⁰ Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland*

¹¹ 2006, 2010 and 2012

¹² Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2012) [Equality Awareness Survey](#)

- 2.6 The research also incorporated primary qualitative research in the form of focus groups, interviews and an expert seminar with key stakeholders to debate and refine emerging research findings.
- 2.7 In particular, the research presented information on trends across the nine equality grounds relating to educational access, attainment, progression and destinations, where information was available. In addition, the report outlined barriers and enablers experienced by each equality group in education, including the degree to which prejudicial attitudes were prevalent.
- 2.8 Our development of the *Draft Statement* has been further supported with reference to a wide range of additional sources including publications and research reports from government departments, the community and voluntary sectors, academic research and the Commission's own research archive.
- 2.9 For each ground, observed differences and inequalities are summarised followed by further discussion and evidence. Drawing on research, those inequalities **in bold** are considered to be the most pressing or key inequalities. These inequalities are highlighted as they are lifelong and impact upon the entire education journey for the equality groups concerned.
- 2.10 Bullying has also been highlighted as a key inequality across a number of grounds.

Challenges

- 2.11 The Commission both recognises and welcomes the fact that progress in addressing inequalities in the field of education has been made. For example, a 2015 review of the 'Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme' found that "highly effective practice in supporting pupils at risk of underachievement was evident in the majority of schools visited"¹³. It is disappointing that this programme will not be renewed due to a lack of funding¹⁴.

¹³ The Education and Training Inspectorate (2015) [An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Delivering Social Change: Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme](#)

¹⁴ BBC News website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-32990909>

- 2.12 While progress has been made, it is clear that more work needs to be done. Despite the fact that overall levels of attainment are increasing, many of the attainment gaps between the equality groups are also increasing. This *Draft Statement* highlights the fact that many inequalities remain persistent and hard to tackle, and that there are a number of new and emerging inequalities that are impacting on some of the equality groups across the equality grounds.
- 2.13 Furthermore, although socio-economic disadvantage is not a protected equality ground, the Commission continues to stress the need for urgent action to address the deprivation and exclusion experienced across a number of equality groups.

Lack of data and research

- 2.14 Despite the Commission's (2007)¹⁵ monitoring guidance for public authorities, there remain significant and specific data gaps across a number of themes in relation to a number of equality grounds, specifically: gender identity; religion; political opinion; and sexual orientation.
- 2.15 In addition, there is lack of data disaggregation in relation to: ethnicity; disability status; marital status; and dependency status.
- 2.16 Further, data currently collected on minority ethnic groups is not disaggregated beyond the classification of 'minority ethnic'. There is also little data concerning the experiences of asylum seeking and refugee children in Northern Ireland.
- 2.17 Monitoring of ethnicity within education does not allow for the disaggregation of the 'white' category by nationality which would enable the educational experiences of non-Newcomer¹⁶ Eastern European migrants and other minority ethnic groups, such as Travellers¹⁷, to be determined.
- 2.18 Additionally, there is currently no official monitoring of carers in school – particularly young mothers. Therefore, school age

¹⁵ ECNI (2007) [Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities](#).

¹⁶ The term 'Newcomer' pupils refers to a child or young person who has enrolled in a school but who does not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher.

¹⁷ Statistics from the Department of Education do monitor Traveller students as a separate category

parents/those with dependents are often hidden in official statistics, making it difficult to measure their needs and provide the necessary support. Indeed a 2013 report¹⁸ found that many young adults do not realise they are carers or do not want to be identified as carers so the limited data that is collected is very likely to be an underestimation of the real number of young adult carers.

- 2.19 Although quantitative data is collected on the marital status of students participating in education beyond post-primary school, there has been little research in this area to explain the trends that are observed.

¹⁸ NIACE (2013). [Access and Inclusion: Young Adult Carers and Education and Training.](#)

3 The Education System in Northern Ireland

- 3.1 In Northern Ireland, compulsory education extends from age 4 to 16 years, covering 12 years of schooling.
- 3.2 In 2011/12¹⁹, over 98% of pupils attended grant-aided schools, 1.4% attended special schools and 0.2% attended independent schools.
- 3.3 At Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16 years), the main measure of performance used is achievement of at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C, including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics.
- 3.4 The target for school leavers attaining this goal was set at 61% for 2011/12 by the Department of Education (although specific targets were 65% for females and 56% for males)²⁰. The target for 2020 has been set at 70% for both males and females²¹.
- 3.5 Research by Burns et al (2015) highlights that “the educational standards achieved by all school leavers have improved over the last five years”. In addition, Burns et al. note “the proportion of students leaving school with no formal qualifications has been reduced from 27% in 1980 to 2% in 2012”.
- 3.6 Further education colleges comprise six free-standing incorporated bodies: Belfast Metropolitan College; Northern Regional College; North West Regional College; South Eastern Regional College; Southern Regional College; and South West College.
- 3.7 Higher education in Northern Ireland is delivered through three universities and two higher education colleges (the two colleges are colleges of Queen’s University Belfast and provide Initial Teacher Education in Northern Ireland).
- 3.8 See Annex 1 for more detailed information on the education system in Northern Ireland.

¹⁹ 2011/12 figures are taken from: DENI. (2012). [Enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2011/12](#) (revised). Statistical Press Release 29 May 2012.

²⁰ DENI (2010) [Count Read Succeed: A strategy to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy](#).

²¹ Ibid

4 Gender

Summary

- 4.1 In respect to bullying and gender, **there is transphobic bullying and self-exclusion from school of gender variant or transgender young people.** A barrier to addressing bullying is the may lack the appropriate awareness, knowledge and support by staff, and by schools, in respect to incidences of transphobic bullying. Furthermore, being forced to wear a school uniform that did not match a young Trans person's gender identity can cause stress, anxiety and discomfort for the young person. Stress, anxiety and discomfort may encourage truancy, and as such impact upon educational attainment.
- 4.2 In respect to gender and educational attainment, **males have lower levels of attainment than females, beginning in primary school and continuing throughout schooling to GCSE and A Level.** The attainment gap increases, to the detriment of males, as pupils progress through both primary and post-primary education. Although there have been increases in the levels of attainment, for both males and females, since 2007, this is a key inequality as the gap between male and female attainment remains an ongoing and persistent challenge.
- 4.3 Across a range of studies, an overarching consideration regarding the education for males may be that elements of the school day structure and curriculum in Northern Ireland do not suit the specific needs of many male pupils such as: male pupil frustration with the formal nature of the classroom, some teachers having lower expectations of males, and a lack of connection between curriculum content and the lives of many males. Additional barriers impacting on male pupils include: a lack of male role models in primary schools; poor teacher-pupil relationships; and a lack of preparedness for transitional stages during adolescence. Some of these barriers may be more specific males from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 4.4 Social disadvantage (as measured by free school meals entitlement) can also impact on type of school attended, with socially disadvantaged children less likely to attend grammar

schools²². The research commissioned to inform this *Draft Statement* found that the type of school was a strong predictor of attainment (and destination after leaving school). Inequalities in respect to gender and social disadvantage will be highlighted in the section on Community/Religious Background.

4.5 Male underachievement in primary and post-primary education may be a reason why fewer male school leavers enter higher education than do females. This is likely to have an impact on the composition of the future graduate workforce in Northern Ireland.

4.6 However despite the higher attainment rates of females in primary and post-primary education, females in higher education have a lower share of the enrollees in the STEM²³ subject areas of 'Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology' in comparison to their share of the population. The industries which require graduates with STEM subject qualifications are currently expanding in Northern Ireland. More analysis needs to be conducted regarding the type of jobs in these industries as they are possibly more secure and offer higher wages than other forms of employment. Other graduates (i.e. mostly female leavers) without STEM subject qualifications may not be able to avail of similar forms of employment offering similar benefits.

Differences & Inequalities

Key Inequality: *There is transphobic bullying and self-exclusion from school of gender variant or transgender young people.*

4.7 The 'Grasping the Nettle' report²⁴ (2013) found that transphobic bullying is a significant problem in school settings and "such experiences left young people feeling profoundly isolated to the extent that they suffered depression, self-harmed and had suicidal thoughts".

²² See Atkinson A., Gregg, P. and McConnell, B. (2006). *The Result of 11+ Selection: An Investigation into Opportunities and Outcomes for Pupils in Selective LEAs*, CMPO Working Paper No. 06/150. Bristol: Centre for Market and Public Organisation, University of Bristol.

²³ Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

²⁴ McBride, R-S. (2013). [*Grasping the Nettle: The Experiences of Gender Variant Children and Transgender Youth Living in Northern Ireland*](#). Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research.

- 4.8 Research by Whittle et al.²⁵ (2007) in Great Britain found that 64% of young Trans men and 44% of young Trans women experience harassment or bullying at school, not just from their fellow pupils but also from school staff including teachers.
- 4.9 Further, the report stated that “typically staff lack the appropriate awareness and knowledge to respond to incidences of transphobic bullying” which presents a barrier to transgender young people in education.
- 4.10 The Grasping the Nettle report also highlights that “being forced to wear a school uniform that did not match a young trans person’s gender identity caused stress, anxiety and discomfort for the young person. In turn, it can encourage truancy.”
- 4.11 Missing school time is negatively correlated with educational attainment²⁶ and “many young trans people in Northern Ireland are dropping out of education permanently because of the negative impact transphobic bullying has on their lives and the inability of schools to adequately support them”²⁷.
- 4.12 In addition, the educational needs of transgender young people are not currently addressed in central policy directives. Guidance published in GB by the Equality Challenge Unit (2010)²⁸ recommends ensuring awareness of gender identity issues and developing proactive policies and procedures that are inclusive of Trans people.
- 4.13 The Grasping the Nettle report highlights that “[t]he exclusion of trans issues from the school curriculum reduces Trans equality and inhibits good-relations from developing”²⁹.
- 4.14 The report acknowledges that while DE is undertaking work to address this problem, “much more needs to be done to increase awareness, understanding and knowledge of trans issues in educational settings”.

25 Whittle, S., Turner, L., & Al-Alami, M. (2007). [*Engendered Penalties: Transgender and Transsexual People’s Experiences of Inequality and Discrimination*](#). The Equalities Review.

²⁶ McBride, R-S. (2013). [*Grasping the Nettle: The Experiences of Gender Variant Children and Transgender Youth Living in Northern Ireland*](#). Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research.

²⁷ McBride, R-S. (2013). [*Grasping the Nettle: The Experiences of Gender Variant Children and Transgender Youth Living in Northern Ireland*](#). Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research.

²⁸ Pugh, E. (2010). [*Trans staff and students in Higher Education*](#). Equality Challenge Unit.

²⁹ McBride, R-S. (2013). [*Grasping the Nettle: The Experiences of Gender Variant Children and Transgender Youth Living in Northern Ireland*](#). Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research.

Key Inequality: Males have lower levels of attainment than females, beginning in primary school and continuing throughout schooling to GCSE and A Level. This inequality results in fewer male school leavers entering higher education than females.

- 4.15 In analysing DE data (2007/08-2011/12), Burns et al. (2015) found that the attainment gap between males and females was clearly evident by Key Stage 2 (i.e. by the 7th year of schooling), and it increased after the transition to post-primary school to GCSE and A Level.
- 4.16 This inequality remained persistent from 2007/08 to 2011/12. It had been highlighted in the Commission's 2007 Statement on Key Inequalities³⁰.
- 4.17 Examination of the literature and qualitative data in Burns et al. highlighted that factors in the educational system can act as barriers to the attainment of young males, such as:
- a lack of male role models in primary schools;
 - a "one size fits all curriculum";
 - poor teacher/pupil relationships; and,
 - a lack of preparedness for transitional stages during adolescence.
- 4.18 Research by Harland and McCready³¹ (2012) examined the experience of boys in school life and the barriers they face, including: falling behind and feeling like they could not catch up; becoming frustrated due to the formal nature of the classroom; and a lack of connection between the content of lessons and boys' everyday lives.
- 4.19 The analysis of DE data by Burns et al. showed that the gender gap between male and female school leavers entering higher education is reflective of the gap in attainment between males and females at GCSE and A Level.
- 4.20 The lower attainment of males in school impacts upon the proportion entering higher education. This demonstrates that one inequality in attainment can lead to another in the

³⁰ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland](#)

³¹ Harland, K. & McCready, S. (2012). [Taking Boys Seriously – A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Male School-Life Experiences in Northern Ireland](#). Belfast: DoJ/DE

destination of school leavers as this lower attainment begins in primary school and continues throughout schooling.

4.21 Burns et al. highlighted that, although male school leavers were more likely to go on to further education than females, when looking at the composition of further education courses, males had lower shares of enrolees (in comparison to their share of the population) on accredited³² and non-accredited courses. This gap widened between 2007/08 and 2011/12 to the detriment of males.

4.22 Research by Osborne et al. (2006) found that girls were significantly more likely to want, and to plan, to go on to further and higher education³³.

4.23 Burns et al. reported that this trend is reflective of the broader situation in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

Inequality: Females in higher education have a lower share of enrolees in the STEM subject area of 'Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology'³⁴ than their share of the population.

4.24 In analysing DEL data (2007/08-2011/12), Burns et al. (2015) found that

males had lower shares of enrolees in all other subject areas compared to their share of the population. The lower shares of males in all other courses is however reflective of the lower proportion of males going on to higher education after leaving school

4.25 This inequality was also highlighted in the Commission's 2007 Statement on Key Inequalities³⁵.

4.26 The literature reviewed in Burns et al. indicated that gender stereotyping of subject choice at A Level may be a contributory factor in this gender imbalance.

³² Includes a range of assessed full-time and part-time education and training options from entry level to postgraduate level.

³³ Osborne, B., Smith, A., and Hayes, A. (2006). [Higher Education in Northern Ireland: A Report on Factors Associated with Participation and Migration](#). Belfast: University of Ulster.

³⁴ This is considered to be an area of job growth in Northern Ireland. Mason, N. (2013). [Realising Potential: Widening participation in Science and Technology](#). Presentation at the Northern Ireland Assembly

³⁵ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland](#)

- 4.27 Statistics from CCEA showed that ‘in 2007, 97% of students studying Home Economics were female compared to only 35% of those studying Economics’³⁶.
- 4.28 Statistics released by DE in 2013 revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between males’ and females’ scores when examining performance in science or mathematics³⁷.
- 4.29 Research by Mason³⁸ (2013) revealed that in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, only 13% of the STEM workforce are female, with the gender imbalance starting at subject choices for A Level.
- 4.30 It is clear that the differing subject choices and thereby employment destinations of males and females have wide implications for the future economy and makeup of the workforce in Northern Ireland.

³⁶ CCEA (2007), *Overall Examination Statistics (Provisional) – Summer*

³⁷ DENI (2013) [Press release – publication of PISA 2012](#)

³⁸ Mason. N. (2013). [Realising Potential: Widening participation in Science and Technology](#). Presentation at the Northern Ireland Assembly

5 Ethnicity

Summary

- 5.1 **Minority ethnic students suffer racist bullying in school.** Bullying as can hinder academic success³⁹. Minority ethnic students have admitted being bullied; such as, mean names or comments about their race or colour. It is reported that the most negative experiences of education were encountered by Irish Traveller children⁴⁰. Generally, a barrier to addressing bullying in schools is that schools tend to lack knowledge of how to effectively confront the issue of racist bullying and may in some cases have difficulty acknowledging that a problem exists.
- 5.2 **Children from the Traveller community and Roma children have some of the lowest levels of attainment of all equality groups.** This has been a persistent trend since the last Equality Commission statement on educational inequalities published in 2008. Qualitative data and other literature⁴¹ gathered for these groups indicates that while steps have been taken to redress these inequalities by government departments, and the Education Authority, there are further ways that education equality could be enabled, such as: placing the rights and needs of children first; providing more support for parents; more engagement and consultation with the groups at hand; and more joined-up departmental working.
- 5.3 Pupils who are Newcomer⁴² or from minority ethnic backgrounds have a smaller share of enrolees⁴³ in grammar schools compared to their share of the population. Factors that represent barriers to accessing grammar education include the use of tests to determine admission and lack of knowledge of the educational system by Newcomer parents, and a lack of recognition of diversity in the needs of Newcomer children.

³⁹ RSM McClure Watters (2011) [The Nature and Extent of Pupil Bullying in Schools in the North of Ireland](#)

⁴⁰ Biggart, A. et al. (2013) [A need to belong?: The prevalence of experiences of belonging and exclusion in school among minority ethnic children living in the 'White hinterlands'](#),

⁴¹ Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland*

⁴² The term 'Newcomer' pupils refers to a child or young person who has enrolled in a school but who does not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher.

⁴³ In comparison to their share of the population according to the 2011 Census.

- 5.4 The funding available to support Newcomer children and the attitudes of schools towards Newcomer children may present both a barrier and an enabler to educational inequality. Furthermore, unrecognised multiple inequalities, particularly in relation to disability and special educational needs, may present an additional barrier to educational equality for Newcomer and minority ethnic children.
- 5.5 Minority ethnic school leavers are more likely to leave school with no GCSEs and enter unemployment than white school leavers. While a high proportion of minority ethnic school leavers attain 2+ A Levels, there is also a high proportion of minority ethnic school leavers leaving school with no GCSEs. The research which provided evidence for this *Draft Statement* found that an emergent inequality is that minority ethnic school leavers are less likely to attain 2+ A Levels or 5+ GCSEs (particularly 5+ GCSEs including Maths and English) than their white peers. This was a reversal in the trend observed in 2007/08.
- 5.6 While minority ethnic school leavers were slightly more likely than white school leavers to enter higher education, they were also over twice as likely to enter unemployment after leaving school – and this is an emergent inequality since 2007/08.
- 5.7 An emergent inequality is that minority ethnic students are less likely to gain employment after leaving higher education than white students. While minority ethnic groups were found to be well represented in higher education (particularly in all STEM subjects), they are less likely to gain full or part-time employment after leaving higher education than white students.
- 5.8 It is therefore pertinent that the barriers to employment for minority ethnic leavers from both school and from higher education are considered in more depth.

Differences & Inequalities

Key Inequality: *Minority ethnic students suffer racist bullying in school.*

- 5.9 Research carried out by DE in 2011 highlights bullying as a factor that can hinder academic success⁴⁴. The research found that 14% of Year 6 (aged 9-10 years) and 7.6% of Year 9 (aged 12-13 years) pupils admitted being bullied “*with mean names or comments about my race or colour*”.
- 5.10 Research by NICEM⁴⁵ (2011) suggested that “the response of schools to the issue of racist bullying appears to vary enormously”, and that in the majority of cases, schools tend to lack knowledge of how to effectively confront the issue and in some cases have difficulty acknowledging that a problem exists.
- 5.11 In addition, minority ethnic students experienced lower levels of belonging and higher levels of exclusion than their white, settled Northern Irish peers.
- 5.12 Research from Queen’s University Belfast in 2013 found that the most negative experiences of education were encountered by Irish Traveller children⁴⁶.
- 5.13 The 2013 Queen’s research also found that while educational aspirations were high among Chinese/Asian children, “less positive outcomes were found in relation to other outcomes like their self-worth, participation in clubs and their subjective health”.
- 5.14 The research by Queen’s University also noted the need “to look beyond achievement gaps in assessing minority ethnic children’s differential experiences in education, highlighting the potential of belongingness as a concept for further study”.

⁴⁴ RSM McClure Watters (2011) [The Nature and Extent of Pupil Bullying in Schools in the North of Ireland](#)

⁴⁵ NICEM (2011) [Promoting racial equality in NI post primary schools](#),

⁴⁶ Biggart, A. et al. (2013) [A need to belong?: The prevalence of experiences of belonging and exclusion in school among minority ethnic children living in the 'White hinterlands'](#),

Key Inequality: Children from the Traveller community and Roma children have some of the lowest levels of attainment of all equality groups.

- 5.15 This inequality was identified from an analysis of DE data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015).
- 5.16 This inequality was highlighted in the Commission's 2007 Statement on Key Inequalities⁴⁷.
- 5.17 Attendance statistics reported within the Audit of Inequalities from the ELBs⁴⁸ (2012) revealed that there is a low level of pre-school uptake by Traveller children. Furthermore, the attendance rate of Traveller children dropped by over 20 percentage points between primary and secondary school.
- 5.18 The Audit of Inequalities from ELBs also reported that there was evidence of stereotyping and low expectations of Traveller pupils in schools, as well as evidence of lower levels of 'out of school' activities compared to other minority ethnic groups.
- 5.19 The Commission's 2014 policy position paper on Racial Equality⁴⁹ sets out that while there has been little formal research on the experience of Roma pupils, anecdotal evidence suggests exceptionally high levels of educational disadvantage, exacerbated by a low level of English language proficiency, social exclusion and poverty.
- 5.20 The Inclusion and Diversity Service (2014) notes that because Roma pupils have little previous experience of schooling, they often have difficulty adapting to school regimes⁵⁰. In addition, Roma parents have poor literacy levels themselves which means they are not always aware of the importance of sending their children to school and the investment required.

⁴⁷ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland](#)

⁴⁸ Education and Library Boards (2012) [Audit of Inequalities, Second Edition, 'Work in Progress'](#)

⁴⁹ ECNI (2014) [Racial Equality Policy, Priorities & Recommendations](#)

⁵⁰ Inclusion and Diversity Service, Antrim Board Centre (2014) [Roma: Information for schools](#)

Inequality: Pupils who are Newcomer or from minority ethnic backgrounds have a lower share of in grammar schools than their share of the population.

- 5.21 An analysis of DE data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015) identified the lower share of minority ethnic students as an inequality.
- 5.22 As noted earlier, grammar school attendance is a strong predictor of attainment and destination for school leavers. Therefore, the lower share (in comparison to their share of the population) of Newcomer and minority ethnic pupils in grammar schools may have a negative impact on the educational attainment of these pupils.
- 5.23 A NICEM report⁵¹ (2011) highlighted a range of factors which may contribute to the lower share of Newcomer and minority ethnic pupils in grammar school, including the free exercise of parental choice, lack of knowledge of the educational system and how to apply to grammar schools and the use of tests to determine admission.
- 5.24 This report also highlighted shortcomings in relation to the provision of support for children who face a language barrier, including provision of support to children with gaps in their educational background and difficulties in assessing and tracking the progress of Newcomer pupils.
- 5.25 Furthermore, Government financial support for Newcomer children is dependent on class size, which presents challenges for schools with low numbers of Newcomer pupils⁵².

Inequality: Minority ethnic school leavers are more likely to leave school with no GCSEs and enter unemployment than white school leavers.

- 5.26 This inequality was identified from an In analysing DE data (2007/08-2011/12), Burns et al. (2015) found that minority ethnic school leavers were also less likely to attain 2+ A Levels or 5+ GCSEs than white school leavers.
- 5.27 A 2010 Equality Commission report⁵³ highlighted the day to day difficulties that can be faced by children from minority ethnic

⁵¹ NICEM (2011) [Promoting Racial Equality in Northern Ireland's Post Primary Schools](#).

⁵² DENI (nd) [Newcomer: Guidelines for Schools](#)

backgrounds in schools, for example, the reliance of some children and young people on peers from the same community for English language support.

- 5.28 Burns et al. note that across the UK, consideration of the factors that account for differences in education outcomes for different racial groups frequently goes hand-in-hand with discussions about the associations between class and achievement. However, 2005 data from England found that social class factors do not override the influence of ethnic inequality: when comparing pupils with similar class backgrounds there are still marked inequalities of attainment between different ethnic groups⁵⁴.
- 5.29 The Burns et al. analysis of DE data revealed that the factors which result in the underachievement of minority ethnic pupils are compounded for minority ethnic females. Minority ethnic females were the gender-ethnicity group most likely to leave school with no GCSEs.
- 5.30 This is in contrast to patterns observed for gender alone, where males are more likely to leave school with no GCSEs than females. This suggests that the multiple identity of minority ethnic females exacerbates the inequalities they face. More research is needed on the educational experiences of minority ethnic females in Northern Ireland to better understand this trend.
- 5.31 As disaggregated data is not available, it is not possible to discern which minority ethnic and/or newcomer groups are more successful at entering destinations such as further and higher education, and which are more likely to be unemployed.
- 5.32 However, research in England by Connors et al. (2004) on participation in undergraduate study found that within the different minority groups, different trajectories were evident⁵⁵:
- “Indian and Chinese groups are the most likely to take the traditional ‘A Level highway’ to higher education and are better qualified as higher education entrants;

⁵³ The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2010) [Inequalities in Education - Facts and Trends 1998-2008](#).

⁵⁴ Clare, H. (2005). [Gender in Education 3-19: A Fresh Approach](#).

⁵⁵ Connors, H., Tyers, C., Modood, T., & Hillage, J. (2004). [Why the Difference? A Closer Look at Higher Education Minority Ethnic Students and Graduates](#). London: Department for Education and Skills.

- Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups do not gain as high A Level qualifications as Indian or Chinese, though do better than black students;
- Black groups, and black Caribbean in particular, are generally older on entry, with a wider range of entry qualifications than the average. Black groups are more likely to progress to higher education via the further education college and work routes, and more are likely to have vocational entry qualifications.”

5.33 When examining accredited⁵⁶ further education courses, Burns et al. found that minority ethnic students were more likely to leave early, before course completion, than other groups.

5.34 The research by Connors et al. (2004) stated that the barriers for minority ethnic students that hindered progression of a course to completion were related to staff support, feelings of isolation and lack of cultural diversity.

5.35 In addition, the Connors et al. report suggested that “different patterns of term-time working and the different financial situations of minority ethnic and white students” may also impact upon continuation in further and higher education.

Inequality: *Minority ethnic students are less likely to gain employment after leaving higher education than white students.*

5.36 This inequality was identified from an analysis of DEL data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015).

5.37 Historic research by Hansson et al.⁵⁷ (2002) noted that the reasons why minority ethnic communities come to Northern Ireland is varied, including those who have come either permanently or temporarily to study at school, college or university. The report stated “therefore the problems which members of minority groups may experience are varied and complex and may include limited employment opportunities”.

⁵⁶ Includes a range of assessed full-time and part-time education and training options from entry level to postgraduate level.

⁵⁷ Hansson, U., Morgan, V. And Dunn, S. (2002) [Minority Ethnic Groups in Northern Ireland: Experiences and Expectations of English Language Support in Education Settings](#)

5.38 The report noted that research conducted in England⁵⁸ in 1999 suggested that, in some cases minority ethnic young people “tend to choose areas of study which have less stringent requirements in relation to fluency in English, such as science and engineering”. Therefore, although those students have successfully completed their higher education degree, they may still face language barriers when trying to find employment.

There may be particular issues for asylum seeking and refugee children, but analysis is impacted by a lack of data.

5.39 Burns et al. (2015) noted the lack of quantitative data concerning asylum seeking and refugee children.

5.40 Research by the National Children’s Bureau⁵⁹ (2010) noted that accessing second level education can be particularly problematic for refugee and asylum seeking young people if they are aged almost, or over, 16 years. For those young people it is very difficult to get a school place unless the young person had “high exam results from their country of origin” or “exceptionally good spoken English”.

5.41 A 2010 Home Office report⁶⁰ on new refugees reported that “14% of refugees had spent no years in formal education before they came to the UK”, with the majority of them women.

5.42 Further research is needed on the educational experiences of asylum seeking and refugee children in Northern Ireland to better understand any associated issues and inequalities.

⁵⁸ Pang, M. (1999) [The employment situation of young Chinese adults in the British labour market](#), Personnel Review

⁵⁹ National Children’s Bureau (2010) [New to Northern Ireland: A study of the issues faced by migrant, asylum seeking and refugee children in Northern Ireland](#). NCB: London.

⁶⁰ Home Office (2010) [Helping new refugees integrate into the UK: baseline data analysis from the Survey of New Refugees](#)

6 Disability Status

Summary

- 6.1 In the education system in Northern Ireland, children can be identified as having ‘special educational needs’ (SEN) if they have ‘a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made’⁶¹. It is important to note that not all children with SEN have a disability, and not all children with a disability have SEN.
- 6.2 **Students with a disability are more vulnerable to bullying.** There is a clear link between the incidence of bullying and SEN⁶². The protection against harassment and discrimination against pupils with a disability in primary and post-primary school is currently weaker than the protection offered to students in further or higher education.
- 6.3 **Students with SEN or a disability have lower attainment levels⁶³ than students without any SEN or disability, and are less likely to go on to higher education.** The lower attainment of students with SEN or a disability is a persistent inequality. Despite increases in the proportions of school leavers with any SEN or a disability achieving 2+ A Levels (A*-E) and 5+ GCSES (A*-C), the attainment proportions are still substantially below the attainment proportion for pupils who do not have a special educational need or a disability. In all measures of attainment, and for each SEN group, females are outperforming their male counterparts. The under achievement of students with SEN or a disability may reflect concerns that the existing provisions in mainstreams schools, to meet the needs of pupils with disabilities, do not meet all their individual needs, and the needs of all children with SEN or a disability.
- 6.4 School leavers with any SEN or disability are more likely to enter further education or job training than school leavers without a disability. However, on several further education courses and job training programmes, the shares of enrollees with a self-reported disability are lower than the share of people

⁶¹ [Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1996](#)

⁶² Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards (2010) [It's Good to Listen – Experiences of Pupils with Special Educational Needs](#)

⁶³ Attainment data presented in this report only covers SEN pupils in mainstream schools. There is no data available on attainment of pupils in special schools.

in Northern Ireland with a self-reported disability or illness. In higher education, students with a disability represent the smallest share of enrollees in the subject area of 'Medicine, Dentistry, and Subjects Allied to Medicine', compared with all other subject areas in higher education.

- 6.5 Leavers from further education and higher education who self-report a disability were less likely to move into employment. The progression of students with a disability from further and/or higher education into employment is a persistent inequality. In further education, leavers from the Steps to Work programme who self-report a disability are less likely to either move into employment or to sustain 13 weeks of employment than participants who do not self-report a disability. In higher education, students with a disability are underrepresented in postgraduate and 'part-time/other' enrolments. This is a persistent inequality. Leavers from higher education who do not have a disability are more likely to enter full-time work than leavers with a disability, and leavers with a disability are more likely to enter part-time work.
- 6.6 It is important for disability and SEN to be considered separately when addressing the educational needs of both. Research to inform the development of this *Draft Statement* outlines that although not all disabled young people have a statement of special educational needs, at times the educational needs of some disabled young people can be overlooked if they do not have a statement that outlines for schools how exactly their needs should be met. Furthermore, it appears that disability is often underreported by schools, parents and perhaps in further and higher education. Therefore, this makes understanding the needs and outcomes of people with disabilities in regard to education difficult to fully realise. In addition, other barriers include: delays in assessment and statementing processes; insufficiently specific provision within statements; the lack of funding for schools; the low expectations of pupils with a disability; and, the lack of appropriate support during the transition between primary and secondary levels of education.

Differences & Inequalities

Key Inequality: *Students with any SEN or a disability are more vulnerable to bullying.*

- 6.7 DE research (2010) on the nature and extent of bullying in Northern Ireland Schools found that there is evidence that disabled children and young people are more vulnerable to bullying⁶⁴.
- 6.8 A report by the ELBs (2010) also indicates that there is a clear link between the incidence of bullying and SEN⁶⁵.
- 6.9 Burns et al. (2015) highlight that protection against harassment and discrimination against pupils with a disability in primary and post-primary school is currently weaker than the protection offered to students in further or higher education.

Key Inequality: *Students with SEN or a disability have lower attainment levels than students without any SEN or disability, and are less likely to go on to higher education.*

- 6.10 This inequality was identified from an analysis of DE data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015) and was also highlighted in the Commission's 2007 Statement on Key Inequalities⁶⁶.
- 6.11 The 2008 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People review on children's rights⁶⁷ raised some concerns about the ability of mainstream schools to meet the additional needs associated with SEN.
- 6.12 The review also states that 'the challenges facing mainstream educational establishments in meeting the needs of children with SEN are further complicated by the increasingly diverse and/or complex nature of children's needs'⁶⁸.
- 6.13 In examining the destinations of school leavers, the Audit of Inequalities (2012) published by the ELBs in Northern Ireland⁶⁹

⁶⁴ RSM McClure Watters (2011) [The Nature and Extent of Pupil Bullying in Schools in the North of Ireland](#)

⁶⁵ Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards (2010) [It's Good to Listen – Experiences of Pupils with Special Educational Needs](#)

⁶⁶ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland](#)

⁶⁷ NICCY. (2008). [Children's Rights: Rhetoric or Reality](#). Belfast: NICCY.

⁶⁸ NICCY. (2008). [Children's Rights: Rhetoric or Reality](#). Belfast: NICCY.

⁶⁹ Education and Library Boards (2012) [Audit of Inequalities, Second Edition, 'Work in Progress'](#)

points to issues that arise when children with disabilities transition to adult services.

- This can be a very stressful time for young people with disabilities and their families as they move from services and supports that focus on children and families, to those addressing the needs of adults.
- This transition process may be difficult due to a range of factors such as the numbers of agencies and professionals involved and the different approaches between those working in services for children and those working in adult services.

- 6.14 An Education and Training Inspectorate⁷⁰ report (2014) on post-school provision found that in rural areas, with limited Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) provision, young people's opportunities are additionally disadvantaged.
- 6.15 School leavers with any SEN or disability are more likely to enter further education or job training than school leavers without a disability. However, on several further education courses and job training programmes, the shares of enrollees with a self-reported disability are lower than the share of people in Northern Ireland with a self-reported disability or illness.
- 6.16 In higher education, , students with a disability represent the smallest share of enrollees in the subject area of 'Medicine, Dentistry, and Subjects Allied to Medicine', compared with all other subject areas in higher education. A 2007 report by the British Medical Association (BMA)⁷¹ describes the barriers that students with a disability face in the area of medicine as both explicit and implicit discrimination. The report states that there can be failures to make reasonable adjustments for students with a disability (explicit discrimination), while implicit discrimination can result from "the culture in the medical profession where doctors are traditionally viewed as having to be flawless and fully fit".
- 6.17 The report also cites a 2004 BMA report which highlights a number of barriers to a career in medicine, including:

⁷⁰ Education and Training Inspectorate (2014) [A Survey Report on Transition Arrangements from Special Schools and Mainstream Learning Support Centres to Post-School Provision](#)

⁷¹ British Medical Association (2007) '[Disability equality in the medical profession](#)'

- inflexible working patterns;
- poor contingency cover;
- unsympathetic colleagues, and those who are ‘sympathetic until it affects them’; and,
- the stigma attached to disabled doctors or doctors with a chronic illness.

6.18 An analysis of DEL data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. showed that, within higher education, students with a disability had lower shares of enrollees in postgraduate and ‘part-time/other’⁷² enrolments than their share of the population.

6.19 The Equality and Human Rights Commission Review on Lifelong Learning (2010) states that there are complex and difficult issues in relation to participation in adult learning and it must be recognised that part of the reason for the dramatic inequalities between disabled and non-disabled people in both employment and participation in adult learning is connected with the nature of disability⁷³.

6.20 Purdam et al. (2008) assert that a key factor behind the inequality in participation in adult learning is the lower prior educational achievement of people with disabilities compared to those without disabilities⁷⁴.

Inequality: *Leavers from further education and higher education who self-report a disability are less likely to move into employment.*

6.21 An analysis of DEL data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015) compared student leavers with the same level of qualification (i.e. higher education), with or without a disability. Burns et al. suggested that differential attainment is not a driving factor for this inequality.

6.22 The Equality and Human Rights Commission Review on Lifelong Learning (2010) has however noted that historically lower levels of educational qualifications among people with

⁷² Part-time students are those recorded as studying part-time, or studying full-time on courses lasting less than 24 weeks, on block release, or studying during the evenings only.

⁷³ Jones, P. (2010). [Equality and Human Rights Commission Triennial Review: Education \(Lifelong Learning\)](#). Southampton: University of Southampton.

⁷⁴ Purdam, K., P. Thornton, Olsen, W K., Afkhami, R. (2008). [Disability in the UK - Measuring Equality](#). *Disability and Society*, 23, 1

disabilities compared to people without disabilities has an impact on their employment status, the sector they work in, and their participation in part-time work⁷⁵.

- 6.23 Further research is needed to explore the transition of students with a disability (from gaining a qualification, to participating in the workforce) in order to uncover the reasons why students with a disability are less likely to gain employment than those without a disability, even when the level of qualification is the same.

⁷⁵ Jones, P. (2010). [*Equality and Human Rights Commission Triennial Review: Education \(Lifelong Learning\)*](#). Southampton: University of Southampton.

7 Sexual Orientation

Summary

- 7.1 The limited quantitative data available, which reflects findings within literature, and from qualitative data, demonstrates that **young people who report same sex attraction are more likely to be bullied in school than their peers who report opposite sex attraction only**. Many students who have experienced bullying do not report incidents of bullying and harassment to school authorities. The most frequently cited reason for this is that young people thought that the school would not take the incident(s) seriously. Of those who reported incidents to school authorities, one in five believed that the school did not take their claim seriously and a further two in five believed that the school took no action. Research highlights that there appears to be reluctance by schools in Northern Ireland generally to address homophobic bullying with the same rigour as other forms of bullying.
- 7.2 Attendance at school on a regular basis is not only important for increasing the prospects of educational achievement but it may also be a useful barometer for measuring the extent of marginalisation of individuals and groups. Young people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) often self-exclude from school. This can have negative impact upon the educational attainment of these pupils. Research reports that some respondents reported that their LGB stakeholder had to make up for the 'lost' school time at a later stage in life.

Differences & Inequalities

Key Inequality: *Young people who report same sex attraction are more likely to be bullied in school than their peers who report opposite sex attraction only.*

- 7.3 This inequality was identified from an analysis of Young Life and Times data by Burns et al. (2015) and was highlighted in the Commission's 2007 Statement on Key Inequalities⁷⁶.
- 7.4 Just under half of the respondents to research commissioned in 2003 by DE⁷⁷ said they had been bullied at school because of

⁷⁶ The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2010) [Inequalities in Education - Facts and Trends 1998-2008](#).

their sexual orientation and 33% believed that they achieved lower grades as a result of their perceived sexuality.

- 7.5 A report published by Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project in 2011 states that 75% of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people who participated in their research did not report incidents of bullying and harassment to school authorities⁷⁸.
- 7.6 The most frequently cited reason for not reporting incidents was that young people thought that the school would not take it seriously. Of those who reported incidents to school authorities, 22% believed that the school did not take their claim seriously and 40% believed that the school took no action⁷⁹.
- 7.7 The Cara-Friend/Rainbow Project report and the Commission's statement on 'Promoting Sexual Orientation Equality'⁸⁰ (2013) state that there are ample opportunities within the statutory curriculum to challenge negative stereotypes and present the diversity of sexual orientation to children and young people, but that the experience of LGB young people is that these opportunities are not taken up by teachers in schools.
- 7.8 A Queen's University report (2013) expressed concern that there appears to be reluctance by schools in Northern Ireland generally to address homophobic bullying with the same rigour as other forms of bullying⁸¹.
- 7.9 The Stonewall report (2009) in Great Britain emphasises that where people are confident that they will be treated fairly, they are more likely to engage in public activity, including adult learning⁸².

Inequality: *Young people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual often self-exclude from school.*

- 7.10 This inequality was identified from qualitative data collected and analysed by Burns et al. (2015).

⁷⁷ ShOut Report. (2003). [The Needs of Young People Who Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender](#).

⁷⁸ Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project (2011) [Left Out of the Equation, A report on the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Young People at School](#)

⁷⁹ Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project (2011) [Left Out of the Equation, A report on the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Young People at School](#)

⁸⁰ ECNI (2013) [Promoting Sexual Orientation Equality, Priorities and Recommendations](#)

⁸¹ Queen's University Belfast (2013) [Education reform in Northern Ireland: A Human Rights Review](#)

⁸² Guasp, A. (2009). [Homophobic Bullying in Britain's Schools](#). London: Stonewall.

- 7.11 Burns et al. interviewed two representatives from two different organisations which specifically support LGB youth. They reported that “stakeholders spoke of many times when they had worked with LGB young people who, because of homophobic bullying in school or at home, had self-excluded themselves from school or had left earlier than they wanted to”.
- 7.12 The stakeholders also noted that this had a negative impact upon the educational attainment of these pupils and that “some had to make up for this ‘lost’ school time at a later stage in life – later than their peers”.
- 7.13 Although now dated, the 2003 ShOut report⁸³ highlighted that many LGB young people left school earlier than they would have preferred and 65% of those who had achieved low results had also been bullied.
- 7.14 Attendance at school on a regular basis is not only important for increasing the prospects of educational achievement but it may also be a useful barometer for measuring the extent of marginalisation of individuals and groups⁸⁴.
- 7.15 Further data and research is needed to explore the attendance patterns and any related reasons for non-attendance.

⁸³ ShOut Report. (2003). [The Needs of Young People Who Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender](#).

⁸⁴ ECNI (2012) [‘Indicators of Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations in Education’](#). ECNI: Belfast.

8 Community/Religious Background

Summary

- 8.1 In terms of religion and educational attainment, **Protestants persistently have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE and A Level.** Despite overall increases in the attainment levels of all students, there is a persistent and overarching trend of higher proportions of Catholics achieving the education targets in all three areas (GCSEs, GCSEs including English and Maths, and A Levels), than both Protestants and 'Others'⁸⁵. Furthermore, between 2007/08 and 2011/12, the gap between Catholics and Protestants widened for all three education targets. This is a persistent, and increasing, inequality.
- 8.2 The persistently lower levels of attainment for Protestant pupils results in fewer Protestant school leavers entering higher education than Catholics. The research undertaken to provide evidence for this *Draft Statement* found that large difference are evident in respect to the destinations of school leavers. Catholics are persistently more likely to enter higher education than other groups. Protestants are persistently more likely to enter job training than the other groups.
- 8.3 Within higher education, there are more Catholics in comparison to their share of the Northern Ireland population, in both undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments. This gap in student enrolments in higher education has widened slightly as the share of Protestant enrolments has remained stagnant while the Catholic share has slightly increased. This is a persistent inequality.
- 8.4 Catholics represent a greater share of enrollees than Protestants in further education courses. However, Protestants have larger shares of those remaining on and successfully completing courses than other groups⁸⁶. In respect to the Steps to Work programme, Catholics, and those of 'Other'

⁸⁵ 'Other' refers to those all those who do not identify as Protestant or Catholic and therefore could include those of other/unknown religions and those of no religion.

⁸⁶ Given the high percentage of those of unknown religion in accredited courses, Essential Skills and non-accredited courses, care must be taken when interpreting these results as some of these 'unknowns' may be Protestant, Catholic, of a non-Christian religion or of no religion.

religions, are not as successful as Protestants at obtaining employment after leaving their course.

- 8.5 In 2007 and 2008, the Commission highlighted within its 'Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland' and in 'Every Child an Equal Child' respectively, as a key inequality the underachievement among working class pupils and in particular working class Protestant boys. This *Draft Statement* also highlights that **there is persistent underachievement and lack of progression of working class Protestants, particularly males.**
- 8.6 When looking across the gender and religious categories, and measures of social disadvantage, Protestant male pupils entitled to free school meals (a measure of social disadvantage) have the lowest rates of attainment in respect to GCSE and A Level results. They also have the highest proportions of non-attainment, and the lowest proportions of school leavers moving on to higher education.
- 8.7 The factors that appear to be most strongly associated with the greatest levels of inequality in respect to educational attainment, regardless of a pupil's gender or religion, are the socio-economic background, as currently measured by free school meals entitlement, of a child and their attendance, or not, at a grammar school. As iterated in the section on gender within this *Draft Statement*, social disadvantage can also impact on type of school attended, with socially disadvantaged children less likely to attend grammar schools⁸⁷. The research commissioned to inform this *Draft Statement* found that the type of school was a strong predictor of attainment, and destination after leaving school.
- 8.8 The particular barriers to educational equality for Protestant males entitled to free school meals must be considered and addressed, as their attainment is so far behind Catholic males and females or Protestant females who are entitled to free school meals. Some of the barriers for Protestant males include: intergenerational mistrust and negativity towards the benefits of education; the divided nature of the school system in Northern Ireland and lower post-16 provision in controlled

⁸⁷ See Atkinson A., Gregg, P. and McConnell, B. (2006). *The Result of 11+ Selection: An Investigation into Opportunities and Outcomes for Pupils in Selective LEAs*, CMPO Working Paper No. 06/150. Bristol: Centre for Market and Public Organisation, University of Bristol.

schools; a lack of male working-class role models in schools; and weakened community infrastructure in urban Protestant areas in particular.

Differences & Inequalities

Key Inequality: Protestants persistently have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE and A Level. This inequality results in fewer Protestant school leavers entering higher education than Catholics.

- 8.9 This inequality was identified from an analysis of DE data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015).
- 8.10 The underachievement of Protestants was noted for all three areas of attainment⁸⁸, and this gap widened between 2007/08-2011/12.
- 8.11 The range of literature reviewed in Burns et al. identified factors which may impact on how Protestant families perceive education and participation in schools such as:
- the past cultural association of Protestant working class families in industry leading to an undervaluation of education;
 - the loss of positive community role models; and,
 - community instability and weaker community infrastructure in Protestant working class communities.
- 8.12 Research by Osborne et al. in 2006 found that there seemed to be more emphasis from Catholic parents than Protestant parents on the need to go on and enter higher education if at all possible⁸⁹.
- 8.13 Osborne et al. argued that Catholics, perhaps due to past experiences in the labour market, were far more likely to see securing educational qualifications as the route to securing a job, and a job with goods prospects.
- 8.14 Osborne et al. also highlighted the “*apparent higher provision of post-16 provision in maintained schools than controlled schools*”. The authors contended that having significant post-16

⁸⁸ 5+ GCSEs at A*-C; 5+ GCSEs at A*-C including Maths and English; and, 2+ A Levels at A*-E

⁸⁹ Osborne, B., Smith, A., and Hayes, A. (2006). [*Higher Education in Northern Ireland: A Report on Factors Associated with Participation and Migration*](#). Belfast: University of Ulster.

provision can raise expectations of progressing into further, and especially higher, education.

- 8.15 With regards to destination, Burns et al. found that from 2007/08 to 2011/12, Catholic school leavers were consistently more likely to go on to higher education than Protestant school leavers⁹⁰. Protestant school leavers were consistently more likely than Catholics and 'Others'⁹¹ to enter further education and job training.
- 8.16 When looking solely at the composition of universities in Northern Ireland, the Burns et al. analysis of DEL data showed that Protestants had lower shares of enrollees in both undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments in Northern Ireland in comparison to their share of the population.
- 8.17 This may be, in part, due to the lower number of Protestants continuing on to higher education after leaving school, but likely is compounded by the fact that a higher proportion of Protestant school leavers migrate to Great Britain for higher education.
- 8.18 Statistics from DE revealed that in 2013/14, 26.4% of school leavers going on to higher education migrated to Great Britain to study. While Catholics made up a greater number of those migrating to Great Britain for education than Protestants (1,123 and 1,000 pupils respectively in 2013/14) the proportion of Protestant school leavers going on to higher education in Great Britain was greater than of Catholics⁹² - 30.2% of Protestant leavers compared to 21.5% of Catholic school leavers⁹³.
- 8.19 Burns et al. also highlighted that it has been argued that the outflow of Protestants is likely having an impact on the community composition of the graduate labour market in Northern Ireland, with Protestants comprising a decreasing share of those in graduate level positions.

⁹⁰ In 2011/12, the number of Catholic school leavers going on to higher education was 5,149 pupils while only 3,555 Protestant school leavers went on to higher education.

⁹¹ 'Other' refers to those all those who do not identify as Protestant or Catholic and therefore could include those of other/unknown religions and those of no religion.

⁹² Taking account of the fact that Catholics make up a greater number of school leavers than Protestants (3,970 and 2,266 pupils respectively),

⁹³ Department of Education (2015) [School Leaver Survey – Northern Ireland](#). 2013/14 data.

8.20 It is important to note that ‘Other’ school leavers were also performing less well than Catholics in terms of attaining the educational targets and progressing on to higher education.

Key Inequality: *There is persistent underachievement and lack of progression of working class Protestants, particularly males.*

8.21 This trend was highlighted as a persistent inequality in the Commission’s Statement on Key Inequalities in 2007⁹⁴. The pattern continued throughout the period examined in Burns et al. (2015).

8.22 The ‘Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan 2011-2016’⁹⁵ released by DEL also highlighted the persistently higher proportion of Protestant working class boys failing at education than any other group.

8.23 In addition, the most recent Audit of Inequalities released by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in Northern Ireland⁹⁶ (2012) points to, not only the underachievement of Protestant working class males, but also their lower pre-school uptake and lower school attendance rates.

8.24 The Dawn Purvis MLA and Working Group report on ‘Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class’⁹⁷ (2011) stated that there are additional cultural and community factors that impact upon how Protestant families perceive education and participation in schools. This subsequently impacts negatively on the attainment rates of young Protestant working class males. These factors include:

- a focus by previous generations of working class Protestants on the manufacturing industry and the view of trades as the main form of educational requirement, rather than attainment through schools, colleges or universities;
- the collapse in the manufacturing industry which has led to the movement towards a consumerist, service driven economy leaving some elements of the Protestant working class stranded with redundant skills-sets and abilities;

⁹⁴ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland](#)

⁹⁵ Department of Employment and Learning. (2011). [Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan 2011-2016](#). Belfast: DEL.

⁹⁶ Education and Library Boards (2012) [Audit of Inequalities, Second Edition, ‘Work in Progress’](#)

⁹⁷ Dawn Purvis MLA and the Working Group on Educational disadvantage and the Protestant working class (2011) [Educational disadvantage and the Protestant working class: A Call to Action](#)

- this collapse can create an intergenerational undervaluing of education as many families are left only with low wage, insecure, casual work, or benefit dependency; and,
- the special geography of urban Protestant communities – there are some ‘pockets of deprivation’ surrounded by more affluent areas rather than concentrated areas of disadvantage, which can lead to a weaker community infrastructure than in Catholic districts.

8.25 Research by Osborne et al. (2006) argued that Catholic maintained secondary schools have better educational outcomes for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds than controlled secondary schools.

8.26 Further, grammar schools adjacent to Protestant working class areas were highlighted as sometimes being ‘unhelpful’ in responding to pupils from poorer backgrounds, even if they had secured a good transfer grade⁹⁸. As noted earlier, grammar school attendance is a strong predictor of attainment and destination for school leavers.

⁹⁸ Osborne, B., Smith, A., and Hayes, A. (2006). [*Higher Education in Northern Ireland: A Report on Factors Associated with Participation and Migration*](#). Belfast: University of Ulster.

9 Political Opinion

Summary

- 9.1 There is a lack of available quantitative data on education outcomes in respect to political opinion. However, in general terms, any educational inequalities which may be perceived for the ground of political opinion could be closely related to the inequalities found by community/religious background. General correlations between community background and political opinion can be supported by findings from the Northern Ireland Life and Time Survey (2012) which shows that unionists/loyalists are predominantly Protestant, and nationalists/republicans are predominantly Catholic⁹⁹.
- 9.2 **Unionists are doing less well than nationalists, and those of neither political opinion, in terms of highest qualification.** Burns et al (2015) found that there was a strong feeling amongst stakeholders that if the issue of the underachievement of Protestant males was adequately addressed, many of the perceived barriers to education articulated by unionist students in higher education would be solved.
- 9.3 Other barriers are experienced by students of both ends of the political spectrum. Although requiring further, more in-depth, research, educational institutions may place an emphasis on political neutrality rather than openness, tolerance and acceptance of differences in political opinion. The research undertaken to inform this *Draft Statement*, found that those students from student political groups felt that their progression in higher education, and the likelihood of entering their preferred destinations afterwards, was hampered if they overtly stated their political affiliations. The expected silence and secrecy that surrounds the holding of political affiliations is an unhealthy symptom in a democratic society, especially in educational institutions wherein debate is a crucial aspect of learning.

⁹⁹ In 2012, 89.4% of unionists were Protestant and 96.1% of nationalists were Catholic – [see Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey website for full dataset](#)

Differences & Inequalities

- 9.4 There is a lack of available quantitative data on education outcomes in respect to political opinion. In general terms, any educational inequalities which may be perceived for the ground of political opinion could be closely related to the inequalities found by community/religious background. These general correlations can be supported by findings from the Northern Ireland Life and Time Survey (2012) which shows that unionists/loyalists are predominantly Protestant, and nationalists/republicans are predominantly Catholic¹⁰⁰.

Inequality: *Unionists are doing less well than nationalists and those of neither political opinion in terms of highest qualification.*

- 9.5 This inequality was identified from an analysis of NILT data by Burns et al. (2015).
- 9.6 Burns et al. found that education inequalities by political opinion are difficult to disentangle from education inequalities by religion, given the often overlapping nature of religious background and local political opinions in Northern Ireland.
- 9.7 Given this correlation, addressing issues aligned to religion/community background are therefore also likely to derive benefits aligned to the ground of political opinion. For example, findings from the literature review and qualitative research suggest that addressing Protestant underachievement, and thereby unionist underachievement, was perceived to be a route to greater equality on the grounds of political opinion.

Young people of various political opinions may self-exclude themselves from particular courses and campuses of higher education.

- 9.8 Research by McQuaid and Hollywood (2008) examined educational migration and non-return in Northern Ireland. The authors concluded that “[t]here is little recent research with

¹⁰⁰ In 2012, 89.4% of unionists were Protestant and 96.1% of nationalists were Catholic – [see Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey website for full dataset](#)

regards to the extent that ‘chill factors’ have an impact on the community composition of either of the two Northern Ireland HE institutes”.

- 9.9 Burns et al. (2015) interviewed representatives from two political student groups.¹⁰¹ The student representatives who were interviewed, from both ends of the political spectrum, felt that several campuses of higher education were unwelcoming to them because of their political beliefs.
- 9.10 A nationalist student group said that they would not apply to Stranmillis College for teacher training (a college of Queen’s University) – which traditionally trains teachers to work in state controlled or integrated schools and has a mainly Protestant intake. However, they also thought that Protestants would not feel comfortable applying to St Mary’s Teacher Training College – which trains teachers to work in Catholic maintained schools, as well as other schools, and has a mainly Catholic intake.
- 9.11 Burns et al. raised particular concern regarding the emphasis on political neutrality within many educational establishments. The authors found that those students from student political groups felt that their progression in higher education, and the likelihood of entering their preferred destinations afterwards, was hampered if they overtly stated their political affiliations. The expected silence and secrecy that surrounds the holding of political affiliations is an unhealthy symptom in a democratic society, especially in educational institutions wherein debate is a crucial aspect of learning.
- 9.12 Burns et al. highlight that other stakeholders recommended that more research be conducted on the perceptions of cold houses versus the reality of people’s experiences. For example, *“If both unionists and nationalists perceive Queen’s to be a cold house, who is it warm for?”*
- 9.13 Although research¹⁰² has been undertaken in regard to political opinion and attendance at Northern Ireland institutions of further and higher education, further research is needed to examine the extent and cause of any current chill factors.

¹⁰¹ Unionist Students’ Society and Mairéad Farrell Republican Youth Committee

¹⁰² McQuaid, R. and Hollywood, E. (2008) [*Educational Migration and Non-Return In Northern Ireland*](#). Edinburgh: Employment Research Institute, Napier University.

9.14 The McQuaid and Hollywood (2008) analysis of Osbourne et al. (2006) suggested that although chill factors in higher education were found in relation to political opinion, these were mostly related to the geographical location of educational institutions rather than the educational institution itself.

10 Age

Summary

- 10.1 The likelihood of a person's enrolment on either further or higher education course is closely associated with their age. There is a clear age profile difference between accredited and non-accredited courses. The majority of enrollees on accredited courses are under the age of 25 years. The majority of enrollees on non-accredited courses are over the age of 25 years; however, the participation of the older age groups (56+ years) has decreased, whilst participation for younger groups has slightly increased since 2007.
- 10.2 When looking at an accredited course, older age groups (25 years+) face more difficulties finding and sustaining employment after completing the job training programme, 'Steps to Work', when compared to younger age groups (under 25 years).
- 10.3 The evidence suggests that this may be an inequality. However, further research is required across a range of job training programmes to determine if there is potential that older groups may face a disadvantage in finding employment and sustaining employment after job training programmes compared to younger age groups is a persistent inequality. Barriers to educational inequality for older persons include the location of courses, caring responsibilities, and psychological barriers, such as lack of confidence and a perception that education is for 'young people'. Furthermore, traditional teaching methods, which may not engage older people, may act as a barrier to the participation and retention of older learners.

Differences & Inequalities

Inequality: Older groups face more difficulties finding and sustaining employment after the job training programme, 'Steps to Work', compared to the younger age groups.

- 10.4 This inequality was identified from an analysis of DEL data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015).

- 10.5 Older 'Leavers' from the Steps to Work programme (those aged over 25 years) were persistently less likely to gain employment and sustain employment after completing their course.
- 10.6 A report for DEL¹⁰³ (2011) examining the destinations of Steps to Work 'Leavers' showed that 'Leavers' aged 25-44 years were more likely to be 'looking after the home or family' than those aged below 25 years. 'Leavers' aged 35 years+ were more likely to be 'too ill to work or study' than the younger age groups.

¹⁰³ RSM McClure Watters (2011). [A Survey of Leavers from the Steps to Work programme](#)

11 Marital Status

- 11.1 The vast majority of enrollees on most further or higher education courses or job training programmes are young, single people with no dependants. As potential enrollees age, the number of potential barriers to accessing or returning to education increase. Barriers may include: caring and parenting responsibilities; a lack of available and affordable childcare or flexible respite care; other financial burdens such as fees, materials and travel costs; less time; and any previous negative experiences of education.
- 11.2 The identification of inequalities for marital status and/or the presence of dependants, their interaction with each other and with other characteristics such as age and gender, are complex and are closely linked to individuals' life trajectories; with different phases of life bringing different opportunities or expectations with regards to accessing education. Therefore, the clear identification of inequalities in education in respect to differences in marital status, and for those with and without dependants, cannot be achieved without further and extensive research.
- 11.3 Overall, there is a lack of research and literature in relation to the educational experience of different marital status groups. This *Draft Statement* observes the following: widowed people have the lowest achievement rate out of all other marital status groups in accredited courses in further education; and, separated/divorced people are more likely to leave accredited further education courses early than other groups, and are persistently less likely to gain employment and sustain employment after completion of job training programmes.

Differences & Inequalities

There is a lack of research and literature in relation to the educational experience of different marital status groups.

- 11.4 Burns et al. (2015) noted that those who are married/co-habiting/in a civil partnership, separated, divorced or widowed are more likely to be enrolled in the same type of courses (i.e. full/part-time, under/postgraduate courses) as mature students. The vast majority of enrollees in higher education are single and under the age of 20 years.

- 11.5 Burns et al found that widowed people have the lowest achievement rate out of all other marital status groups in accredited courses in further education; and that separated/divorced people are more likely to leave accredited further education courses early than other groups, and are persistently less likely to gain employment and sustain employment after completion of job training programmes.
- 11.6 A 2007 report commissioned by OFMdFM¹⁰⁴ noted that “there was a perception that people were more likely to suffer disadvantage because they had dependants rather than because of their marital status”.
- 11.7 The report further states “many of the differences that are attributed to marital status are more directly due to living arrangements” and noted that it is difficult to consider these factors in isolation.
- 11.8 Therefore, although a number of differences, or potential inequalities, were found in Burns et al., it is difficult to analyse these differences solely on the basis of marital status.
- 11.9 The impact of marital status on educational participation and achievement can only be accurately analysed when data has been disaggregated by gender, dependency status and age.
- 11.10 Although marital status data was not gender disaggregated, it is important to recognise research which highlights the differential impact a change in marital status can have on males and females.

¹⁰⁴ Hill-Carr, R. and Dixon, P. (2007) [*Indicators of equality and diversity in Northern Ireland – Patterns of social difference*](#). Commissioned by OFMdFM

12 Dependency Status

- 12.1 As stated above, the vast majority of enrolees on most further or higher education courses or job training programmes are young, single people with no dependants. The clear identification of inequalities in education in respect to differences in those with and without dependants cannot be achieved without further and extensive research.
- 12.2 Overall, there is a lack of research and literature in relation to the educational experience of those with and without dependants. This *Draft Statement* observes that there is a lack of quantitative data in relation to the educational experience of young carers. However, those who have dependants are persistently less likely to gain employment and sustain employment after completion of job training programmes.
- 12.3 The barriers to education for those with and without dependants can overlap with the barriers to education faced by women, and older women in particular¹⁰⁵, and will be influenced by marital status. These may include: the absence of adequate support services for carers; the cost of providing alternative care may often be prohibitive relative to disposable income; there may be a lack of affordable or accessible transport, particularly for carers from rural areas; the pressure and unpredictability of caring; the way that ‘carers’ are defined and how educational outcomes are monitored for people with caring responsibilities; the difficulties for young carers with transitioning between child and adult support services; and, a lack of awareness about the support available for carers to enter adult education.

Differences & Inequalities

There is a lack of quantitative data in relation to the educational experience of young carers.

- 12.4 Burns et al. (2015) noted the lack of data concerning young carers; therefore, it has not been possible to quantitatively identify specific inequalities for this group.

¹⁰⁵ Hinds, B. (2011). [*Women on the Edge? A Comprehensive Analysis of the Impacts of the Financial Crisis: Lone Parents*](#). Belfast: Women’s Resource and Development Agency.

- 12.5 However, a number of reports have found that young carers suffer significant disadvantages in education.
- 12.6 For example, a 2013 NIACE report¹⁰⁶ highlighted that young adult carers often have to miss or be late for classes and are tired and therefore struggle to complete work on time.
- 12.7 A 2012 National Union of Students (NUS) report on student finances and well-being¹⁰⁷ in England showed that 2.9% of the students surveyed were carers, and that 56% of student carers had seriously considered leaving their course, compared to 39% of students without adult caring responsibilities.
- 12.8 Another NUS study (2009) revealed that student parents are an at-risk group in terms of student retention, with 60% of student parents having thought about leaving their course; this figure rises to 65% for lone parents¹⁰⁸.
- 12.9 A 2013 study by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) found that young carers often live in poverty, miss large chunks of learning, are isolated, have restricted social networks, and their own health and wellbeing can be compromised¹⁰⁹. This can make engaging in education a challenge.
- 12.10 A 2010 Audit Commission report¹¹⁰ revealed that for young people between the ages of 16-18 years, having responsibilities as a carer was a factor that significantly increased their risk of being Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). In addition, the risk of being NEET for more than six months was twice that of their peers.
- 12.11 There is a growing recognition and acceptance that young adult carers aged 16-25 years have particular needs that are distinct from those of young carers (under 18 years) and adults who are carers.

¹⁰⁶ NIACE (2013). [Access and Inclusion: Young Adult Carers and Education and Training](#).

¹⁰⁷ National Union of Students. (2012). [The Pound in Your Pocket](#).

¹⁰⁸ National Union of Students. (2009). [Meet the Parents: The experiences of students with children in further and higher education](#). London: NUS.

¹⁰⁹ NIACE (2013). [Access and Inclusion: Young Adult Carers and Education and Training](#).

¹¹⁰ Audit Commission. (2010). [Against the Odds: Targeted Briefing – Young Carers](#).

12.12 Research by Spielhofer et al.¹¹¹ (2010) found that the most common barriers to education for teenage parents were:

- a course not being available to them in their area;
- finance; and,
- not knowing all of the options available to them.

Inequality: *Those who have dependants are persistently less likely to gain employment and sustain employment after completion of job training programmes.*

12.13 This inequality was identified from an analysis of DEL data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015).

12.14 Aligned to this, the 2012 National Union of Students research found that many young adult carers cannot go out to work, or, if they can find time to work part-time, it can prove difficult to find a job that allows enough flexibility to fit with caring responsibilities.

12.15 Very often the kind of work that does offer this flexibility is low skilled, low paid work.

¹¹¹ Spielhofer, T., Golden, S., Evans, K., Marshall, H., Mundy, E., Pomati, M., and Styles, B. (2010). [*Barriers to Participation in Education and Training*](#). London: Dept for Children, Schools and Families.

13 Conclusions

- 13.1 This *Draft Statement* has highlighted the nature and extent of inequalities in education in Northern Ireland across the nine Section 75 equality grounds. It is clear that there is a range of both emergent and persistent inequalities.
- 13.2 This *Draft Statement* reflects identified inequalities in education, and brings to the fore a number of key inequalities.
- 13.3 We are aware of the pro-active steps that a range of bodies, including Government Departments and employers across all the sectors, have taken to promote equality in education across the equality grounds. Whilst we both recognise and support this work, it is clear that significant challenges still remain.
- 13.4 The *Draft Statement* also makes clear that there is a lack of robust education data relating to a number of equality groups including: transgender students; asylum seeking and refugee children; minority ethnic groups; LGB students; and, young carers. This lack of data significantly impacts *not only the degree* to which overall inequalities in education are assessed and monitored, but also impacts on the ability to monitor and evaluate individual actions taken by Government Departments and others to address these inequalities.
- 13.5 We also recognise the key role we play in addressing these challenges through effectively using our full range of powers and duties in terms of promotion, advice and enforcement, research and working with education providers across all sectors to highlight and adopt good practice so as to improve outcomes for disadvantaged groups.
- 13.6 Once finalised, Government, public bodies and others should use this *Draft Statement* to take appropriate action to address these inequalities; including those pursuant to their equality and good relations duties under Section 75.
- 13.7 Many of the inequalities highlighted in this *Draft Statement* are persistent and have worsened over time; therefore, these issues must be prioritised and addressed as a matter of urgency by Government Departments.

Equality Commission

September 2015

14 Annex 1

Primary and post-primary schools

- 14.1 On 1st April 2015, Northern Ireland's five Education and Library Boards were replaced by a single Education Authority. The functioning and use of schools remains the same. However, the Education Act 2014 places new Shared Education duties on the Education Authority¹¹².
- 14.2 According to DE, in 2014/15 there were approximately one-third of a million children in primary, post-primary and funded pre-school placements in Northern Ireland¹¹³. This figure increased slightly each year from 330,974 in 2011/12¹¹⁴.
- 14.3 At the end of pupils' primary education, children can sit unregulated tests which focus on English and Maths. While the majority of post-primary schools do not use academic admissions criteria, many schools which were traditionally academically selective (largely grammar schools) still admit their pupils based on the results of these tests.
- 14.4 The Commission continues to hold the position that the transfer test, and academic selection, contributes to social exclusion and that is heavily influenced by social class.
- 14.5 In 2012/13, 43% of pupils attended grammar schools; the majority attend non-selective schools (or in a small number of cases, partially selective schools)¹¹⁵.
- 14.6 Both the quantitative data and literature review in Burns et al. (2015) highlighted that the type of school attended (i.e. grammar or non-grammar) was a strong predictor of attainment and destination after leaving school.
- 14.7 Schools are further defined by different types of school management: controlled (including a small number of controlled integrated and controlled Irish-medium schools), integrated, maintained (mostly Catholic maintained), voluntary maintained and grant maintained integrated schools.

¹¹² [Education Act 2014](#)

¹¹³ DENI (2015) [Statistical Bulletin 3/2015: Enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland, 2014/15](#).

¹¹⁴ DENI (2014). [Schools and pupils in Northern Ireland 1991/92 to 2013/14](#).

¹¹⁵ DENI (2013) [Country Background Report for Northern Ireland](#).

Curriculum and assessment

- 14.8 There is a statutory curriculum in place for all grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland, which was revised in 2007. This curriculum has three key aims, underpinned by their emphases on equality¹¹⁶:
- *‘to ensure that the core curriculum delivered in all grant-aided schools was relevant to the needs, aspirations and career prospects of all young people;*
 - *to promote a greater focus on skills and their application as well as knowledge and on connecting learning across the curriculum; and,*
 - *to reduce the prescription that had applied since 1989 and to give teachers much more flexibility to exercise their professional judgement in planning and delivering lessons that were connected, relevant, enjoyable and supported pupils in achieving their full educational potential’.*
- 14.9 Comparisons with other OECD countries via the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2012) show that in Northern Ireland, 15 year olds perform at the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science.¹¹⁷ However, the results also showed that Northern Ireland has a higher proportion of students at the lowest level of mathematical proficiency compared to the average. While no statistically significant gender difference was found for performance in mathematics or science, girls significantly outperformed boys in reading (as was the case for all OECD countries).
- 14.10 Results from the recent Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) for 2011¹¹⁸ show that primary school pupils in Northern Ireland are performing significantly above the international average in both literacy and numeracy. The results show that 19% of children in reading and 24% in mathematics are performing at the advanced international benchmark – the highest level possible. This compares with international averages of 8% and 4% respectively.

¹¹⁶ DENI (2013) [Country Background Report for Northern Ireland](#).

¹¹⁷ Northern Ireland Executive (2013) [Publication of PISA 2012](#)

¹¹⁸ Sturman, L., Twist, L., Burge, B., Sizmur, J., Bartlett, S., Cook, R., Lynn, L. and Weaving, H. (2012). [PIRLS and TIMSS 2011 in Northern Ireland: Reading, Mathematics and Science](#)

Further education

- 14.11 There are six regional further education colleges. All colleges have several campuses throughout the regions they serve, and deliver community education through a range of community outreach locations and in partnership with local communities.
- 14.12 The colleges offer a range of full-time and part-time education and training options from entry level to postgraduate level: GCSEs, A Level, and BTEC courses; Essential Skills; apprenticeships; accredited courses; higher education degrees; and non-accredited courses.
- 14.13 Each college currently works in partnership with a large number of local schools in the delivery of the Entitlement Framework¹¹⁹, and all six regional colleges offer a range of courses for adult learners to support returners to education, to provide up-skilling and re-skilling opportunities and to facilitate progress to further study.
- 14.14 The further education colleges are also the main providers of government-funded, work-based training programmes in Northern Ireland, for example ApprenticeshipsNI, Training for Success and Steps to Work.

Higher education

- 14.15 Higher education in Northern Ireland includes four types of qualifications: foundation degrees; Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas; bachelor's degrees; and postgraduate qualifications.
- 14.16 Foundation degrees are offered in the further education regional colleges, combining academic and work related learning as a route into employment.
- 14.17 Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) are work-related courses available in a wide range of subjects, and are provided by higher education colleges and further education colleges.

¹¹⁹ [The Entitlement Framework](#) (in operation from September 2013) is the post 14 curriculum which puts the needs of pupils first. It aims to provide access for pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum to enable them to reach their full potential no matter which school they attend or where they live.

- 14.18 Bachelor's degrees are offered at universities, higher education colleges and via distance learning. The entrance requirements usually include at least two A Levels at grade E or above (or equivalent grades in other qualifications).
- 14.19 There are four types of postgraduate qualifications offered in Northern Ireland: postgraduate certificates; postgraduate diplomas; master's degrees; and doctorates. Only the universities in Northern Ireland that have research components offer doctorate-level qualifications.