Equality Commission
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

KEY INEQUALITIES
IN EDUCATION

Table of Contents

1   Executive Summary

1.1   Research by Parsons and Bynner (2007) notes the impact that poor educational outcomes 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   The Commission both welcomes the progress made in advancing educational outcomes and recognises the role of educational, home and community environments in advancing outcomes. We are also aware of the pro-active steps taken by a range of bodies, including Government Departments across all the sectors, to promote equality in education across the equality grounds.

1.3   Whilst we both recognise and support this work, it is clear that significant challenges remain. This '*Statement on Key Inequalities in Education in Northern Ireland*' seeks to highlights the Commission's assessment of the inequalities and educational experiences currently faced by different equality groups in Northern Ireland.

1.4   To assist the Commission in compiling this *Statement*, we contracted independent researchers from Queens University, Belfast - Burns et al. (2015) '*Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland*'[2]. Our development of this *Statement* takes account of that research and has also been supported with reference to a wide range of additional sources as well as ongoing engagement with key stakeholders in Northern Ireland.

1.5   A key finding is that there remains significant and specific data gaps relating to pupils and students 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. While we recognise that, in some instances, small numbers will impact on how data is analysed and reported, this lack of data significantly impacts not only the degree to which overall inequalities in education can be assessed and

---

[1] Parsons, S. And Bynner, J (2007) *Illuminating 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*

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 Inequalities are presented under four broad headings (with those inequalities **in bold** considered to be the most pressing or 'key' inequalities):

- Attitudes/bullying in the education environment
- Access to education and attainment in formal examinations
- Progression through the different levels of education
- Destination after leaving education

Attitudes / Bullying

1.7 **Bullying, including prejudice-based bullying, in schools is a persistent problem.** A number of equality groups are more vulnerable to prejudice-based bullying, or more likely to be bullied, in schools, with: over two fifths of minority ethnic students having been the victims of racist bullying and harassment[3]; over two fifths of pupils with a disability being bullied[4]; students with SEN; over six out of ten trans pupils; and students with same sex attraction having been called hurtful names related to their sexual or gender identity[5].

Attainment

1.8 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 *Statement* highlights the fact that many inequalities remain persistent and hard to tackle, and that there are a number of

---

[3] NCB, NI and ARK YLT (2010) Attitudes to Difference: Young people's attitudes to, and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland. p.55. Table 16 - 42% of 16 year olds from a minority ethnic group stated that they had been victims of racist bullying and harassment in school.
[4] RSM McClure Watters (2011) The nature and extent of pupil bullying in schools in the North of Ireland. DENI: Bangor, p 62, p96. - 44.3% of Year 6 and 44.9% of Year 9 pupils with a disability reported they had 'been bullied at school in the past couple of months' at least once or twice'.
[5] O'Hara M (2013) Through our Minds: Exploring the Emotional health and Wellbeing of lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in Northern Ireland. The Rainbow Project: Belfast - 61.2% had been called hurtful names related to their sexual or gender identity

new and emerging inequalities that are impacting on some of the equality groups across the equality grounds.

1.9   Although there have been overall increases in the levels of attainment for all pupils, **males continue to 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. In 2014/15, the attainment gaps were eight percentage points for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs[6] and 16 percentage points for those obtaining 2 + A Levels[7]; both gaps were to the detriment of males.

1.10   Similarly, **Protestants continue to have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE, GCSEs including English and Maths, and A Level.** While the attainment levels of both Catholics and Protestants increased over the period 2007/08 to 2014/15 for all three areas of attainment, the lower achievement of Protestants remained between 2007/08 and 2014/15 for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs at (A*-C)[8], or 2+ A Levels Grades (A* - *-E)[9], with a reduction in the gap for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English[10]. This is a persistent inequality.

1.11   Socio-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 lower achievement and lack of progression to further and higher education of school leavers entitled to free school meals, particularly Protestants, notably**

---

[6] In 2014/15, the attainment gap was 8.2 percentage points for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) and 8.9 percentage points for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C).

[7] In 2014/15, the attainment gap was 16.7 percentage points for those obtaining 2 + A Levels.

[8] For those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C), in 2007/08 the attainment gap was 3.6 pp to the detriment of Protestants and in 2014/15 the attainment gap was 3.8 pp to the detriment of Protestants. A slight widening of the attainment gap by 0.2 pp.

[9] For those obtaining 2+ A Levels (A*-E), in 2007/08 the attainment gap was 6.8 pp to the detriment of Protestants and in 2014/15 the attainment gap was 7.0 pp to the detriment of Protestants. A slight widening of the attainment gap by 0.2 pp.

[10] For those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English, in 2007/08 the attainment gap was 2.8 pp to the detriment of Protestants and in 2014/15 the attainment gap was 1.2 pp to the detriment of Protestants. A narrowing of the attainment gap by 1.6 pp.

Protestants males[11]**.** Protestant males pupils entitled to free school meals (a measure of social disadvantage[12]) have the lowest rates of attainment in respect to GCSE and A Level results. In 2014/15, just over a quarter[13] of Protestant males entitled to free school meals attained 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths)(A*-C) compared with over four in ten[14] of all school leavers entitled to free school meals, and almost three quarters[15] of all school leavers not entitled to free school meals. They also have the lowest proportion of school leavers moving on to higher education.

1.12   The proportion of Newcomer[16] pupils attending grammar schools has nearly halved from 2007/08 to 2014/15, while the proportion of minority ethnic pupils and white, non-Newcomer pupils has remained relatively constant[17].

1.13   In addition, **children from the Traveller community and Roma children have some of the lowest levels of attainment of all equality groups**. Annually, over the 2007/08-2014/15 period[18], anywhere between a half to over eight in ten Irish Traveller children left school with no GCSEs[19]. This is in stark contrast to the proportions of all school leavers with no GCSEs, which has reduced from 3.5 percent in 2007/08 to 0.5 percent in 2014/15[20].

---

[11] This key inequality is primarily supported by Burns et al (2015) analyses of Department of Education (DE) data on free school meals entitlement. However, in this *Statement*, 'working class' is also used to refer to the discussion in literature around 'Protestant working class'.

[12] Entitlement is calculated based on parental receipt of income support or Jobseeker's Allowance, an annual taxable income of £16,190 or less, or receipt several other allowances or tax credits

[13] 26.7% of Protestant males entitled to free school meals attained 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C).

[14] 41.3% of all school leavers entitled to free school meals attained 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C).

[15] 73.7% of all school leavers not entitled to free school meals attained 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C).

[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] An analysis of data supplied by the Department of Education, Northern Ireland, for the period 2007/08 to 2014/15.

[18] Year on year, due to the small number of Irish Travellers school leavers, variability in the proportions of Irish Travellers leaving school with no GCSEs was observed.

[19] Commission analysis of DE data (2007/08-2014/15) – Proportion of Irish Travellers school leavers with no GCSEs in 2007/08 was 50.0%, in 2008/09 was 82.4%, in 2009/10 was 66.7%, in 2010/11 was N/A, in 2011/12 was 64.9%, in 2012/13 was 65.9%, in 2013/14 was 61.3% and in 2014/15 was 57.1%

[20] Commission analysis of DE data (2007/08-2014/15) - Proportion of All school leavers with no GCSEs in 2007/08 was 3.6%, in 2008/09 was 2.9%, in 2009/10 was 2.1%, in 2010/11 was 2.2%, in 2011/12 was 1.8%, in 2012/13 was 1.6%, in 2013/14 was 1.0% and in 2014/15 was 0.5%

1.14   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'[21]. It is important to note that not all children with SEN have a disability, and not all children with a disability have SEN.

1.15   Overall, **students with SEN or a disability[22] have lower attainment levels[23] than students without any SEN or disability, and are less likely to go on to higher education**. Over the period of analysis there have been increases in attainment levels for all SEN and / or pupils with a disability, and in particular for SEN 1-4 school leavers. The attainment gap between SEN 1-4 pupils and those with no SEN decreased from 46 percentage points to 23 percentage points for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs Grades A*-C between 2007/08 and 2014/15[24]. However, while pupils with SEN 5 have also experienced an increase in attainment, it has not been to the same extent as pupils with SEN 1-4; the attainment gap between SEN 5 pupils and those with no SEN decreased from 59 percentage points to 48 percentage points for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs Grades A*-C between 2007/08 and 2014/15[25].

Progression

1.16   Lower achievement within primary and post-primary school impacts upon a young person's progression to further and higher education and their employment prospects.

1.17   Male lower achievement in primary and post-primary education results in **fewer male school leavers entering higher education than females**. In 2014/15, just over a third of male school leavers went on to higher education, compared to just

---

[21] Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996

[22] In some cases, the nature of the need / disability itself can impact upon the pace and/or extent of educational attainment and/or progression. A core focus on maximising equality of opportunity thus remains paramount.

[23] 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.

[24] The attainment gap between SEN 1-4 and those with no SEN, for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs Grades A*-C was 46.2 percentage points in 2007/08 and 22.9 percentage points in 2014/15, to the detriment of pupils with SEN 1-4.

[25] The attainment gap between SEN 5 and those with no SEN, for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C), closed from 58.7 percentage points in 2007/08 to 47.5 percentage points in 2014/15, with pupils with SEN 5 at the bottom of the gap.

over a half of females[26]. 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, females accounted for a lower share of enrolees in the STEM[27] subject areas of 'Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology' in comparison to their share of the population in higher education.

1.18   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. In 2014/15, of Catholic school leavers, 45 percent went on to higher education, compared with 39 percent of Protestant school leavers[28]. Protestants are persistently more likely to enter job training than the other groups.

1.19   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.

1.20   We must recognise that the vast majority of enrolees 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.

Destination

1.21   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

---

[26] In 2014/15, 34.7% of male school leavers went on to higher education, compared with 50.2% of females. The gap between males and females entering higher education was 15.6 percentage points in 2014/15, to the detriment of males.

[27] Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

[28] 45.4% of Catholic school leavers, and 39.0% of Protestant school leavers went on to higher education.

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.

1.22   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 *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 status[29]. Inequalities experienced by members of a particular equality group due to multiple identities are also highlighted.

2.2 This *Statement* updates the education component of Commission's previous *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland*[30] 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.

Focus

2.3 The Focus of this Statement seeks to draw attention to persistent and/or emergent inequalities across the equality grounds. In doing so it highlights for attention key differences in equality outcomes and, where possible, key barriers faced by equality groups in Northern Ireland.

2.4 Given this focus, the *Statement* does not in general seek to report on any overall progress in advancing educational outcomes, but rather to set out the differences, by equality category, which remain and are therefore worthy of particular attention. Further, the *Statement* does not seek to consider or evaluate the effectiveness of specific government strategies, policies or programmes[31].

2.5 For each equality ground, inequalities and observed differences for equality groups are set out. Drawing on research, and for the purposes of this *Statement*, those inequalities in **bold** are considered to be the most pressing or key inequalities.

2.6 Findings are presented under four broad headings:

---

[29] 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.
[30] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland*
[31] Further to this, this Statement does not seek to analyse or comment upon the current system of standardised testing in Northern Ireland's education system.

- Attitudes/bullying in the education environment
- Access to education and attainment in formal examinations
- Progression through the different levels of education
- Destination after leaving education

Approach and Methodology

2.7 In compiling this *Statement,* the Commission has drawn on a wide range of sources including research reports from government departments; the community and voluntary sectors; academic research; and the Commission's own research archive.

2.8 In 2013 the Commission contracted independent research from The School of Education, Queens University, Belfast. The resultant research report '*Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland'* authored by Burns et al. (2015) [32] has played a key role in informing this *Statement*.

2.9 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)[33], as well as from the Commission's most recent *Equality Awareness Survey*[34] .

2.10 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.

2.11 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.

---

[32] Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland*
[33] 2006, 2010 and 2012
[34] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2012) *Equality Awareness Survey*

2.12   The Commission's approach has been to engage with our stakeholders throughout the development of this *Statement* and the earlier underlying research. Most recently (late 2015) the Commission met with key stakeholders, including via an expert seminar, to discuss a '*Draft' Statement*. This final Statement takes account of the further stakeholder input received as part of that process.

Successes and Challenges

2.13   The Commission both welcomes the progress made in advancing educational outcomes and recognises the role of educational, home and community environments in advancing those outcomes.

2.14   We are also aware of the pro-active steps taken by a range of bodies, including Government Departments across all the sectors, to promote equality in education across the equality grounds.

2.15   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".

2.16   The Commission recognises and welcomes key actions in support of tackling inequalities. 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*"*[35]. It is disappointing that this programme is not being renewed[36].

2.17   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 *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.

---

[35] The Education and Training Inspectorate (2015) *An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Delivering Social Change: Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme*
[36] BBC News website: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-32990909

2.18   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

2.19   Despite the Commission's (2007)[37] 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.

2.20   In addition, there is lack of data disaggregation in relation to: ethnicity; disability status; marital status; and dependency status.

2.21   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.

2.22   While we recognise that, in some instances, small numbers will impact on how data is analysed and reported, this lack of data significantly impacts not only the degree to which overall inequalities in education can be 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.

2.23   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-Newcomer[38] Eastern European migrants and other minority ethnic groups, such as Travellers[39], to be determined.

2.24   Additionally, there is currently no official monitoring of carers in school – particularly young mothers. Therefore, school age parents/those with dependents are often hidden in official statistics, making it difficult to measure their needs and provide

---

[37] ECNI (2007) *Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities.*
[38] 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.
[39] Statistics from the Department of Education do monitor Traveller students as a separate category

the necessary support. Indeed a 2013 report[40] 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.

2.25　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.

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 2011/12[41], 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)[42]. The target for 2020 has been set at 70% for both males and females[43].

3.5　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.

3.6　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).

3.7　See **Annex 1** for more detailed information on the education system in Northern Ireland.

---

[40] NIACE (2013). *Access and Inclusion: Young Adult Carers and Education and Training.*
[41] 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.
[42] DENI (2010) *Count Read Succeed: A strategy to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy*.
[43] 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 trans young people.** Research by Whittle et al.[44] (2007) in Great Britain found that a barrier to addressing this bullying is the lack of appropriate awareness, knowledge and support by staff, and by schools, in respect to incidences of transphobic bullying. Schubotz (2015) reported that over the course of a year, a quarter[45] of 16 year olds said their classmates had been called transphobic names, whilst almost one in ten[46] had also been called transphobic names[47]. 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. For those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C), the attainment gap between males and females has reduced from 13.9 percentage points in 2007/08 to 8.2 percentage points in 2014/15. For those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C)[48] the attainment gap has also reduced, from 12.4

---

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

[45] 24% of of respondents said that name calling and insults happened to their classmates 'once or twice a year', 'once or twice a term', 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day' in school.

[46] 9% of respondents that name calling and insults happened to them 'once or twice a year', 'once or twice a term', 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day' in school.

[47] Schubotz D (2015) Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Homophobic and Transphobic Name Calling: Evidence from the 2014 YLT survey. ARK: Belfast. p.20 & 21.

[48] The attainment gap for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) was 13.9 percentage points in 2007/08 and 8.2 percentage points in 2014/15, to the detriment of males.

percentage points in 2007/08 to 8.9 percentage points. In both cases however a gap remains, to the detriment of males.

4.3   However, for those obtaining 2+ A Levels, the reduction in gender attainment gap was marginal, from 17.5 percentage points in 2007/08 to 16.7 percentage points in 2014/15, again, to the detriment of males [49].

4.4   Across a range of studies, an overarching consideration regarding 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 to males from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

4.5   Social disadvantage (as measured by free school meals entitlement[50]) can also impact on type of school attended, with socially disadvantaged children less likely to attend grammar schools[51]. The research commissioned to inform this *Statement* found that the type of school was a strong predictor of attainment (and destination after leaving school).

4.6   Male lower achievement in primary and post-primary education may be a reason why there are **fewer male school leavers entering higher education than females**. In 2014/15, just over a third of male school leavers went on to higher education, compared to just over a half of females[52]. This is likely to have

---

- The attainment gap for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C) was 12.4 percentage points in 2007/08 and 8.9 percentage points in 2014/15, to the detriment of males.

[49] The attainment gap for those obtaining 2+ A Levels was 17.5 percentage points in 2007/08 and 16.7 percentage points in 2014/15 to the detriment of males.

[50] Entitlement is calculated based on parental receipt of income support or Jobseeker's Allowance, an annual taxable income of £16,190 or less, or receipt several other allowances or tax credits

[51] 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.

[52] In 2014/15, 34.7% of male school leavers went on to higher education, compared with 50.2% of females. The gap between males and females entering higher education was 15.6 percentage points in 2014/15, to the detriment of males.

an impact on the composition of the future graduate workforce in Northern Ireland.

4.7   However despite the higher attainment rates of females in primary and post-primary education, females in higher education have a lower share of the enrolees in the STEM[53] 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 trans young people.*

4.8   The 'Grasping the Nettle' report[54] (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".

4.9   Schubotz' (2015) examination of the experiences of 16 year olds in regard to transphobic name-calling in schools using the Young Life and Times Survey (2014)(YLT) found that, over the course of a year, a quarter of respondents[55] said that their classmates had been called 'transgender' or 'tranny, while under one in ten[56] of respondents reported personally being called those names[57].

---

[53] Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.
[54] 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.
[55] 24% of of respondents said that name calling and insults happened to their classmates 'once or twice a year', 'once or twice a term', 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day' in school.
[56] 9% of respondents that name calling and insults happened to them 'once or twice a year', 'once or twice a term', 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day' in school.
[57] Schubotz D (2015) Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Homophobic and Transphobic Name Calling: Evidence from the 2014 YLT survey. ARK: Belfast. p.20 & 21.

4.10   Earlier research by Whittle et al.[58] (2007) in Great Britain also 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.

4.11   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 trans young people in education.

4.12   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."

4.13   Missing school time is negatively correlated with educational attainment[59] 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"[60].

4.14   In addition, the educational needs of trans young people are not currently addressed in central policy directives. Guidance published in GB by the Equality Challenge Unit (2010)[61] recommends ensuring awareness of gender identity issues and developing proactive policies and procedures that are inclusive of trans people.

4.15   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"[62].

4.16   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".

---

[58] Whittle, S., Turner, L., & Al-Alami, M. (2007). *Engendered Penalties: Transgender and Transsexual People's Experiences of Inequality and Discrimination*. The Equalities Review.
[59] 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.
[60] 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.
[61] Pugh, E. (2010). *Trans staff and students in Higher Education*. Equality Challenge Unit.
[62] 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. Fewer male school leavers entering higher education than do females.*

4.17   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.

4.18   This inequality was highlighted in the Commission's 2007 Statement on Key Inequalities[63].

4.19   Increases in attainment for both males and females obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C), 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C) and 2+ A Levels[64] were observed by Burns et al. (2007/08-2011/12) and the Commission (2013/14[65] and 2014/15[66]).

4.20   This data also reveals a reduction in the attainment gap between males and females for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C), 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C)[67]. Gaps however remain, to the detriment of males. With regards to those obtaining 2+ A Levels, the reduction in the gender attainment gap was marginal[68].

4.21   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";

---

[63] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland*
[64] - Males obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) rose by 16.9 percentage points since 2007/08 to 76.9% in 2014/15, and female attainment rose by 11.2 percentage points since 2007/08 to 85.4% in 2014/15.
- Males obtaining 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C) rose by 11.4 percentage points since 2007/08 to 61.6% in 2014/15, and female attainment in this area rose by 7.9 percentage points since 2007/08 to 70.5% in 2014/15.
- Males obtaining 2+ A Levels rose by 11.8 percentage points since 2007/08 to 49.5% in 2014/15, and females attainment in this area rose by 11.0 percentage points since 2007/08 to 66.2% in 2014/15.
[65] School leavers - 2013/14 statistical bulletin, published: 21 May 2015, at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201314-statistical-bulletin
[66] School leavers - 2014/15 statistical bulletin, published: 26 May 2016 at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin
[67] - The attainment gap for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) was 13.9 percentage points in 2007/08 and 8.2 percentage points in 2014/15, to the detriment of males.
- The attainment gap for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C) was 12.4 percentage points in 2007/08 and 8.9 percentage points in 2014/15, to the detriment of males.
[68] The attainment gap for those obtaining 2+ A Levels was 17.5 percentage points in 2007/08 and 16.7 percentage points in 2014/15 to the detriment of males.

- poor teacher/pupil relationships; and,

- a lack of preparedness for transitional stages during adolescence.

4.22 Research by Harland and McCready[69] (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.

4.23 The analysis of DE data by Burns et al. showed that the gender gap between male and female school leavers entering higher education[70] [71] is reflective of the gap in attainment between males and females at A Level[72].

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

4.25 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 accredited[73] and non-accredited courses. This gap narrowed between 2007/08 and 2011/12[74].

---

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

[70] In 2014/15, 34.7% of male school leavers went on to higher education, compared with 50.2% of females. The gap between males and females entering higher education was 15.6 percentage points in 2014/15, to the detriment of males.

[71] In 2014/15, of undergraduate enrolments in higher education in Northern Ireland, males made up 44.6% while females made up 55.4% of undergraduate enrolments.

[72] In 2014/15, 49.5% of males obtained 2+ A Levels, whereas 66.2% of females obtained 2+ A Levels. The gap between males and females attaining 2+ A Levels was 16.7 percentage points, to the detriment of males.

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

[74] The gap between males and females enrolling in accredited courses decreased from 14.6 percentage points in 2007/08 to 10.6 percentage points in 2011/12, with more females enrolling than males at both time points. Updated data for 2014/15 is available but is not comparable with this data.

4.26   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 education[75].

4.27   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'[76] than their share of the population.*

4.28   Analyses of DEL data for 2007/08-2011/12[77] and 2014-15[78], found that females had lower shares of enrolees in the defined STEM subject group of 'Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology'[79] compared to their share of the population.

4.29   This inequality was also highlighted in the Commission's 2007 Statement on Key Inequalities[80].

4.30   Further, in analyses using the slightly wider 'Narrow STEM'[81] subject grouping and the 'Broad STEM'[82] subject grouping (as used by the Department of Education) the findings show that as the STEM subject group is widened, to firstly include biological and physical sciences ('Narrow STEM') and then medicine, dentistry and veterinary sciences ('Broad Stem'), the female

---

[75] 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.

[76] 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

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

[78] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland examination of Table 12c of 'Enrolments at UK Higher Education Institutions: Northern Ireland Analysis 2014/15' at https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/enrolments-uk-higher-education-institutions-northern-ireland-analysis-201415

[79] In 2011/12, of enrolees to 'Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology' 24.7% were female and 75.3% were male (Burns et al (2015); In 2014/15, of enrolees to Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology' 22.0% were female and 78.0 % were male (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland examination of Table 12c of 'Enrolments at UK Higher Education Institutions: Northern Ireland Analysis 2014/15')

[80] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland*

[81] Narrow STEM is a subset of Broad STEM and includes the following subject areas: Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, Mathematical Sciences, Computer Science, Engineering & Technology.

[82] Broad STEM includes the following subject areas: Medicine & Dentistry, Subjects allied to Medicine, Biological Sciences, Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture & related subjects, Physical Sciences, Mathematical Sciences, Computer Science, Engineering & Technology and Architecture, Building & Planning.

share increases to comparability with the male share[83] [84]. In all other subject areas, i.e. which are not defined as 'Broad STEM' subjects, females represent the majority of enrolees.[85]

4.31   The literature reviewed in Burns et al. indicated that gender stereotyping of subject choice at A-Level may be a contributory factor in such gender imbalances.

4.32   Statistics from CCEA showed that 'in 2007, 97% of students studying Home Economics were female compared to only 35% of those studying Economics'[86].

4.33   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 mathematics[87].

4.34   Research by Mason[88] (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.

4.35   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.

---

[83] In 2014/15, of enrolees to 'Narrow STEM' subject grouping, 35.3% were female and 64.7% were male (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland examination of Table 12c of 'Enrolments at UK Higher Education Institutions: Northern Ireland Analysis 2014/15')

[84] In 2014/15, of enrolees to 'Broad STEM' subject grouping, 51.6% were female and 48.4% were male (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland examination of Table 12c of 'Enrolments at UK Higher Education Institutions: Northern Ireland Analysis 2014/15')

[85] In 2014/15, of enrolees to all other subject areas, which were not defined a 'Broad STEM' subjects, 60.4% were female and 39.6% were male (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland examination of Table 12c of 'Enrolments at UK Higher Education Institutions: Northern Ireland Analysis 2014/15')

[86] CCEA (2007), *Overall Examination Statistics (Provisional) – Summer*

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

[88] 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 can hinder academic success[89]. Minority ethnic
students have reported being bullied - such as, mean names or
comments about their race or colour. Two fifths[90] of 16 year
olds had witnessed racist bullying in school, with one in ten[91]
experiencing racist bullying themselves[92]. Of those from ethnic
minorities, two thirds[93] aged 16 years stated that they had been
victims of racist bullying, with seven out of ten[94] having witness
racist bullying[95]. It is reported that the most negative
experiences of education were encountered by Irish Traveller
children[96]. Research by NICEM[97] (2011) suggested that 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. Annually, over the 2007/08-2014/15 period, anywhere
between a half to over eight in ten Irish Traveller children left
school with no GCSEs[98]. This is in stark contrast to the
proportions of all school leavers with no GCSEs, which has
reduced from 3.5 percent in 2007/08 to 0.5 percent in

---

[89] RSM McClure Watters (2011) *The Nature and Extent of Pupil Bullying in Schools in the North of Ireland*
[90] YLT (2014). - 39% said they had witnessed racist bullying in their school.
[91] YLT (2014). - 7% said they had said they had been a victim of racist bullying or harassment in school.
[92] YLT (2014). Available at: http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/results/yltback2.html
[93] 42% of 16 year olds from a minority ethnic group stated that they had been victims of racist bullying and harassment in school
[94] 68% of 16 year olds from a minority ethnic group stated that they having witnessed racist bullying and harassment in school
[95] NCB, NI and ARK YLT (2010) Attitudes to Difference: Young people's attitudes to, and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland. p.55. Table 16.
[96] 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',*
[97] NICEM (2011) *Promoting racial equality in NI post primary schools,*
[98] Commission analysis of DE data (2007/08-2014/15) – Proportion of Irish Travellers school leavers with no GCSEs in 2007/08 was 50.0%, in 2008/09 was 82.4%, in 2009/10 was 66.7%, in 2010/11 was N/A, in 2011/12 was 64.9%, in 2012/13 was 65.9%, in 2013/14 was 61.3% and in 2014/15 was 57.1%

2014/15[99]. Qualitative data and other literature[100] 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; seeking to maximise attendance, providing more support for parents; more engagement and consultation with the groups at hand; and more joined-up departmental working.

5.3   Newcomer[101] pupils were much less likely to go to grammar schools than minority ethnic pupils and white, non-Newcomer pupils. Furthermore, the proportion of Newcomer pupils attending grammar schools has decreased from 2007/08-2014/15, while the proportions of minority ethnic and white, non-Newcomer pupils remained relatively constant. 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. Any changes in the profile of newcomers over time (origin and age on arrival) may also exert an influence on observed patterns.

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   After leaving school, further or higher education, available data suggests that minority ethnic students are less likely to gain employment than white students.

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.

---

[99] Commission analysis of DE data (2007/08-2014/15) - Proportion of All school leavers with no GCSEs in 2007/08 was 3.6%, in 2008/09 was 2.9%, in 2009/10 was 2.1%, in 2010/11 was 2.2%, in 2011/12 was 1.8%, in 2012/13 was 1.6%, in 2013/14 was 1.0% and in 2014/15 was 0.5%
[100] Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland*
[101] 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.

5.7 Similarly, minority ethnic students are less likely to gain employment after leaving higher education than white students. The potential barriers to employment for minority ethnic leavers from both school and from higher education should be considered in more depth.

Differences & Inequalities

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

5.8 RSM McClure Watters (2011), research carried out on behalf of DE, highlighted bullying as a factor that can hinder academic success[102]. The research found that 14% of Year 6[103] and 7.6% of Year 9[104] pupils admitted being bullied *"with mean names or comments about my race or colour"*. Over a third[105] of Year 6 children and nearly two thirds[106] of year 9 children said race or skin colour made pupils more likely to be bullied. The vast majority of year 6 pupils[107] and year 9 pupils[108] thought it was always wrong to bully other pupils on account of their race or skin colour. However, 6.9% of year 6 and 4.1% of year 9 pupils said they had bullied another pupil "with mean comments about his or her race or colour"[109].

5.9 In respect to older pupils, aged 16 years, evidence from the Young Life and Times (2014)(YLT)[110] showed that two fifths of respondents[111] said they had witnessed racist bullying in their school[112]; a slight decrease since 2011[113]. In 2011, the YLT

---

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

[103] Year 6 pupils are those aged 9-10 years

[104] Year 9 pupils are those aged 12-13 years

[105] 37.6% of Year 6 children said race or skin colour made pupils more likely to be bullied

[106] 63.0% of year 9 children said race or skin colour made pupils more likely to be bullied

[107] (85.4%) of Year 6 pupils thought it was always wrong to bully other pupils on account of their race or skin colour.

[108] (89.5%) of Year 9 pupils thought it was always wrong to bully other pupils on account of their race or skin colour.

[109] FGS McClure Watters (2011) The nature and extent of pupil bullying in schools in the North of Ireland, DENI: Bangor

[110] YLT (2014). Available at: http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/results/yltback2.html

[111] YLT (2014). - 39% said they had witnessed racist bullying in their school.

[112] The Young Life and Times (2014)(YLT) survey asked young respondents of 16 years old, "have you yourself ever witnessed any kind of racist bullying or harassment in your school?".

[113] When this question was previously asked – 3 percentage point decrease from 2011 to 2014

showed that seven percent of all respondents[114] said they had been a victim of racist bullying or harassment[115].

5.10 NCB/ARK (2010)[116] research undertaken with Year 11 and 12 school pupils revealed higher levels of racist attacks and bullying experienced or witnessed in schools by young people from minority ethnic groups compared to those not belonging to a minority ethnic group[117]. Two fifths[118] of 16 year olds from a minority ethnic group stated that they had been victims of racist bullying and harassment in school, with seven out of ten[119] having witnessed such treatment[120].

5.11 Research by NICEM[121] (2011) suggested 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".

5.12 In addition, minority ethnic students experienced lower levels of belonging and higher levels of exclusion than their white, settled Northern Irish peers[122].

5.13 Research from Queen's University Belfast in 2013 found that the most negative experiences of education were encountered by Irish Traveller children[123].

5.14 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

---

[114] 12% of all respondents considered themselves to be a member of a minority ethnic community. YLT (2011).

[115] The Young Life and Times (2011)(YLT) survey asked young respondents of 16 years old, "have you yourself ever been a victim of any kind of racist bullying or harassment in your school?".

[116] NCB, NI and ARK YLT (2010) Attitudes to Difference: Young people's attitudes to, and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland. Available from: http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/results/Attitudes_to_difference_report.pdf

[117]This includes respondents who were identified as belonging to a minority ethnic group by the study or self-identifying as belonging to a minority ethnic group. pp.52-53

[118] 42% of 16 year olds from a minority ethnic group stated that they had been victims of racist bullying and harassment in school

[119] 68% of 16 year olds from a minority ethnic group stated that they having witnessed racist bullying and harassment in school

[120] NCB, NI and ARK YLT (2010) Attitudes to Difference: Young people's attitudes to, and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland. p.55. Table 16.

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

[122] Hayward, K., Dowds, L.and Shaw, C. (2014) Belonging and Alienation in the new Northern Ireland

[123] 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',

their self-worth, participation in clubs and their subjective health".

5.15   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".

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

5.16   This inequality was identified from an analysis of DE data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015)[124] and by Commission analysis of DE data (2007/08-2014/15). Year on year, due to the small number of Irish Travellers school leavers, variability in the proportions of Irish Travellers leaving school with no GCSEs was observed. Over the 2007/08-2014/15 period, anywhere between a half to over eight in ten Irish Traveller children left school with no GCSEs[125]. This is in stark contrast to the proportions of all school leavers with no GCSEs, which has reduced from 3.5 percent in 2007/08 to 0.5 percent in 2014/15[126].

5.17   This inequality was highlighted in the Commission's 2007 Statement on Key Inequalities[127].

5.18   Attendance statistics reported within the Audit of Inequalities from the ELBs[128] (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.

5.19   The Audit of Inequalities from ELBs also reported that there was evidence of stereotyping and low expectations of Traveller

---

[124] From 2008-2012, 67.0% of all Irish Traveller school leavers did not achieve any GCSEs (compared to 1.8% of the general school leaver population in 2011/12)..
[125] Commission analysis of DE data (2007/08-2014/15) – Proportion of Irish Travellers school leavers with no GCSEs in 2007/08 was 50.0%, in 2008/09 was 82.4%, in 2009/10 was 66.7%, in 2010/11 was N/A, in 2011/12 was 64.9%, in 2012/13 was 65.9%, in 2013/14 was 61.3% and in 2014/15 was 57.1%
[126] Commission analysis of DE data (2007/08-2014/15) - Proportion of All school leavers with no GCSEs in 2007/08 was 3.6%, in 2008/09 was 2.9%, in 2009/10 was 2.1%, in 2010/11 was 2.2%, in 2011/12 was 1.8%, in 2012/13 was 1.6%, in 2013/14 was 1.0% and in 2014/15 was 0.5%
[127] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland*
[128] Education and Library Boards (2012) *Audit of Inequalities, Second Edition, 'Work in Progress'*

pupils in schools, as well as evidence of lower levels of 'out of school' activities compared to other minority ethnic groups.

5.20 The Commission's 2014 policy position paper on Racial Equality[129] 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.

5.21 The Inclusion and Diversity Service (2014) notes that because Roma pupils have little previous experience of schooling, they often have difficulty adapting to school regimes[130]. 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.

> *Inequality: Newcomer[131] pupils are much less likely to attend grammar schools than minority ethnic and white, non-newcomer pupils.*

5.22 An analysis of DE data (2007/08-2014/15) has identified the lower, and decreasing, proportion of Newcomer pupils entering grammar schools between 2007/08 and 2014/15 This is a persistent and increasing inequality.

5.23 Furthermore, the proportion of Newcomer pupils going to grammar schools has decreased from 2007/08-2014/15[132], while the proportions of minority ethnic and white, non-Newcomer pupils has remained relatively constant over the same period[133].

5.24 As noted earlier, grammar school attendance is a strong predictor of attainment and destination for school leavers. Therefore, the notably lower and decreasing proportion of

---

[129]ECNI (2014) *Racial Equality Policy, Priorities & Recommendations*
[130] Inclusion and Diversity Service, Antrim Board Centre (2014) *Roma: Information for schools*
[131] 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.
[132] The proportion of Newcomer pupils attending grammar schools has decreased from 20.4% in 2007/08 to 10.6% in 20145/15.
[133] The proportion of minority ethnic pupils attending grammar schools was 47.6% in 2007/08 and 47.2% in 2014/15. The proportion of white, non-Newcomer pupils attending grammar schools was 42.2% in 2007/08 and 45.3% in 2014/15.

Newcomers going to grammar schools may have a negative impact on the educational attainment of these pupils.

5.25 A NICEM report[134] (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.

5.26 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[135]. Any changes in the profile of newcomers over time (for example, country of origin or age on arrival) may also exert an influence on observed patterns.

5.27 Furthermore, Government financial support for Newcomer children is dependent on class size, which presents challenges for schools with low numbers of Newcomer pupils[136].

> *After leaving school, further or higher education, available data suggests that minority ethnic students are less likely to gain employment than white students.*

5.28 This difference was identified from an analysis of DE and DEL data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015) and examination of DE data for 2014/15 by the Commission.

5.29 Burns et al found that minority ethnic school leavers were over twice as likely to enter unemployment than white school leavers[137]. Furthermore, they were less likely to enter further education[138], employment[139] or training[140] than their white peers. However, ongoing monitoring of this difference is

---

[134] NICEM (2011) *Promoting Racial Equality in Northern Ireland's Post Primary Schools*.
[135] NICEM (2011) *Promoting Racial Equality in Northern Ireland's Post Primary Schools*.
[136] DENI (nd) *Newcomer: Guidelines for Schools*
[137] In 2011/12, 3.1% of white school leavers entered unemployment; 7.5% of minority ethnic school leavers entered unemployment (MEG count is less than 40)
[138] In 2011/12, 34.7% of white school leavers entered further education; 30.8% of minority ethnic school leavers entered further education
[139] In 2011/12, 6.2% of white school leavers entered employment; 3.3% of minority ethnic school leavers entered employment (MEG count is less than 40)
[140] In 2011/12, 11.2% of white school leavers entered training; 8.2% of minority ethnic school leavers entered training (MEG count is less than 40)

recommended as the differentials in regard to destination between white and minority ethnic school leavers narrowed in the 2014/15 data[141].

5.30   When Burns et al. examined students leaving higher education they found that, while minority ethnic students were well represented in higher education (particularly in all STEM subjects[142]), they were less likely to gain full time employment than white students following their time in higher education[143].

5.31   Historic research by Hansson et al.[144] (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".

5.32   The report noted that research conducted in England[145] 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.

---

[141] In 2014/15, 2.7% of white school leavers entered unemployment; 3.6% of minority ethnic school leavers entered unemployment (MEG count is less than 40).
In 2014/15, 35.1% of white school leavers entered further education; 31.5% of minority ethnic school leavers entered further education.
In 2014/15, 8.4% of white school leavers entered employment; 7.1% of minority ethnic school leavers entered employment (MEG count is less than 40).
In 2014/15, 9.9% of white school leavers entered training; 5.1% of minority ethnic school leavers entered training (MEG count is less than 40).
Department of Education (2016) '*School leavers - 2014/15 statistical bulletin*' - Table 16: Destination of school leavers by ethnic origin 2014/2015, located at: https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin
[142] Burns et al found that the minority ethnic shares of enrolments were greatest in the STEM subject areas of 'Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology', and 'Medicine, Dentistry, and Subjects allied to Medicine' (both 2.1% in 2011/12). These enrolment shares were higher than the share of minority ethnic people in the Northern Ireland population as a whole (1.8%).
[143] In 2010/11, 55.1% of white HE students entered full-time employment; 44.3% of minority ethnic HE student entered full-time employment.
[144] Hansson, U., Morgan, V. And Dunn, S. (2002) *Minority Ethnic Groups in Northern Ireland: Experiences and Expectations of English Language Support in Education Settings*
[145] Pang, M. (1999) *The employment situation of young Chinese adults in the British labour market*, Personnel Review

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

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

5.34   Research by the National Children's Bureau[146] (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".

5.35   A 2010 Home Office report[147] 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.

5.36   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.

[146] 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.
[147] 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'[148].

6.2   It is important to note that not all children with SEN have a disability, and not all children with a disability have SEN. It should also be recognised that in some cases, the impairment/disability itself can impact upon the pace and/or extent of educational attainment and/or progression. A core focus on maximising equality of opportunity thus remains paramount.

6.3   **Students with any SEN or a disability are vulnerable to bullying.** When the incidence of bullying was examined (2011) by disability status, a greater proportion of pupils with a disability, particularly Year 9 students,[149] reported they had 'been bullied at school in the past couple of months 'at least once or twice' than pupils without a disability[150]. A report by the ELBs (2010) notes a clear link between the incidence of bullying and SEN[151] - those with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties were more likely to experience bullying. 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.

6.4   **Students with any SEN or a disability have lower attainment levels[152] than students without any SEN or disability, and are less likely to go on to higher education**. The lower attainment of students with any SEN or a disability is a persistent inequality. Although there have been substantial

---

[148] Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996

[149] RSM McClure Watters (2011) The nature and extent of pupil bullying in schools in the North of Ireland. DENI: Bangor, p 62, p96. - 44.3% of Year 6 and 44.9% of Year 9 pupils with a disability reported they had 'been bullied at school in the past couple of months' at least once or twice'.

[150] RSM McClure Watters (2011) The nature and extent of pupil bullying in schools in the North of Ireland. DENI: Bangor, p 62, p96. - 38.6% of Year 6 and 28.2% of Year 9 pupils without a disability reported they had 'been bullied at school in the past couple of months' at least once or twice'.

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

[152] 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.

increases in the proportions of school leavers with any SEN or a disability achieving 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) and 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English, the attainment proportions are still substantially below the attainment proportions for pupils who do not have a special educational need or a disability.

6.5   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.

6.6   The overall increase in attainment of those with any SEN is driven by the notable increase in attainment of pupils with SEN 1-4, where the attainment gap between SEN 1-4 pupils and those with no SEN decreased from 46 percentage points to 23 percentage points for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs Grades A*-C between 2007/08 and 2014/15[153].

6.7   While pupils with SEN 5 have also experienced an increase in attainment, it has not been to the same extent as pupils with SEN 1-4; the attainment gap between SEN 5 pupils and those with no SEN decreased from 59 percentage points to 48 percentage points for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs Grades A*-C between 2007/08 and 2014/15[154].

6.8   School leavers with any SEN or disability are more likely to enter further education or job training than school leavers without a SEN or disability. However, on several further education courses and job training programmes, the shares of enrolees with a self-reported disability still remain lower than the share of people in Northern Ireland with a self-reported disability or illness. In higher education, students with a disability represent the smallest share of enrolees in the subject area of 'Medicine, Dentistry, and Subjects Allied to Medicine', compared with all other subject areas in higher education.

6.9   Leavers from further education and higher education who self-report a disability were less likely to move into employment.

---

[153] The attainment gap between SEN 1-4 and those with no SEN, for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs Grades A*-C was 46.2 percentage points in 2007/08 and 22.9 percentage points in 2014/15, to the detriment of pupils with SEN 1-4.

[154] The attainment gap between SEN 5 and those with no SEN, for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C), closed from 58.7 percentage points in 2007/08 to 47.5 percentage points in 2014/15, with pupils with SEN 5 at the bottom of the gap.

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 under-represented 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.

6.10   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 *Statement* outlines that, although not all young people with a disability have a statement of special educational needs, at times the educational needs of some young people with a disability can be overlooked if they do not have a statement that outlines for schools how exactly their needs should be met.

6.11   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.*

6.12   DE research (2011) 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

bullying'[155]. When the incidence of bullying was examined by disability status, a greater proportion of pupils with a disability, particularly Year 9 students,[156] reported they had 'been bullied at school in the past couple of months' at least once or twice' than pupils without a disability[157]. In addition, two fifths of Year 6 students and three fifths of Year 9 students felt that having a disability makes them more likely to be bullied[158].

6.13   Further, a report by the ELBs (2010) also indicates that there is a clear link between the incidence of bullying and SEN stating that 'The incidence of bullying was clearly related to the SEN classification associated with the pupils – those with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties were more likely to experience bullying at all Key Stages'. Furthermore, the same study found that pupils at all three levels (Key Stages 2, 3 and 4) reported a range of perceptions as to why bullying had happened to them. Two reasons were common to all three groups – a perception that they were not liked or were "different", and a perception that the bullying was related to their disability.[159]

6.14   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 any 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.*

6.15   This inequality for children with SEN[160] or a disability was identified from an analysis of DE data (2007/08-2011/12) by

---

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

[156] RSM McClure Watters (2011) The nature and extent of pupil bullying in schools in the North of Ireland. DENI: Bangor, p 62, p96. - 44.3% of Year 6 and 44.9% of Year 9 pupils with a disability reported they had 'been bullied at school in the past couple of months' at least once or twice'.

[157] RSM McClure Watters (2011) The nature and extent of pupil bullying in schools in the North of Ireland. DENI: Bangor, p 62, p96. - 38.6% of Year 6 and 28.2% of Year 9 pupils without a disability reported they had 'been bullied at school in the past couple of months' at least once or twice'.

[158] RSM McClure Watters (2011) The nature and extent of pupil bullying in schools in the North of Ireland. DENI: Bangor, p56, p.90. - 40.1% of Year 6 students and 59.2% of Year 9 students felt that having a pupil's disability makes them more likely to be bullied.

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

[160] Children with Special Educational Needs are identified, and their needs dealt with, using a five-stage approach. Stages 1 and 2 are carried out by the child's school and parents should be kept informed of

Burns et al. (2015) and by Commission examination of DE school leaver statistical bulletins for 2013/14[161] and 2014/15[162]. The inequality was also highlighted in the Commission's 2007 Statement on Key Inequalities[163].

6.16   In the period 2007/08 to 2011/12, Burns et al. found that there were substantial increases in the proportions of school leavers with SEN Stages 1-4 achieving 5+ GCSEs at A*-C[164], and similarly 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English[165]. In 2014/15, the proportion of pupils with SEN Stages 1-4 achieving these levels increased further, with over 6 out 10 pupils with SEN Stages 1-4 obtaining 5+ GCSEs at A*-C.[166]

6.17   The attainment levels of pupils with SEN 1-4 have markedly increased since 2007, although they are still below the attainment levels for pupils with no SEN, which also showed improvements during the period between 2007/08[167] and 2011/12[168], and in 2014/15.[169] In 2014/15, almost nine out of ten pupils with no SEN obtained 5+ GCSEs at A*-C.

6.18   For those obtaining 5+ GCSEs at A*-C[170], and similarly 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English[171], we see a

---

what is happening. At Stage 3 the school may request outside help, e.g. from an educational psychologist. Statutory assessment is the focus of Stage 4. Stage 5 involves the issuing of a statement of special needs, and at this stage the Education Authority will make additional resources available to a mainstream school or indicate that a change of placement may be necessary for the child.

[161] School leavers - 2013/14 statistical bulletin, published: 21 May 2015, at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201314-statistical-bulletin

[162] School leavers - 2014/15 statistical bulletin, published: 26 May 2016 at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin

[163] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland*

[164] In 2007/08, 27.8% of SEN 1-4 pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs at A*-C; In 2011/12, 49.6% of SEN1-4 pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs at A*-C

[165] In 2007/08, 18.9% of SEN 1-4 pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs including Maths and English at A*-C; In 2011/12, 30.6% of SEN1-4 pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs including Maths and English at A*-C

[166] School leavers - 2014/15 statistical bulletin, published: 26 May 2016 at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin. 63.5% of SEN Stages 1-4 achieving 5+ GCSEs at A*-C, and similarly, 38.3% achieving 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English.

[167] In 2007/08, 74.0% of No SEN pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs at A*-C; 63.0% of No SEN pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs including Maths and English at A*-C

[168]; In 2011/12, 83.1% of No SEN pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs at A*-C; 69.3% of No SEN pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs including Maths and English at A*-C.

[169] School leavers - 2014/15 statistical bulletin, published: 26 May 2016 at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin. 86.4% of pupils with no SEN achieved 5+ GCSEs at A*-C, and similarly, 73.3% achieved 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English.

[170] The attainment gap between SEN 1-4 and those with no SEN, for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs Grades A*-C was 46.2 percentage points in 2007/08 and 22.9 percentage points in 2014/15, to the detriment of pupils with SEN 1-4.

[171] The attainment gap between SEN 1-4 and those with no SEN, for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C) was 44.1 percentage points in 2007/08 and 35.0 percentage points in 2014/15, to the detriment of pupils with SEN 1-4.

reduction in the attainment gap between school leavers with SEN 1-4 and those with no SEN.

6.19   However, School leavers with SEN Stage 5, whose education and learning needs are greater, may not have benefitted to the same extent as pupils with SEN Stages 1-4.

6.20   While pupils with SEN 5 have also experienced an increase in attainment[172], the attainment gap between pupils with SEN 5 and those with no SEN closed only marginally for 5+ GCSEs (A*-C)[173]. The data however indicates a widening of the gap in attainment of those achieving 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English[174], and 2+ A Levels[175], with pupils with SEN Stage 5 not seeing the same rate of improvement.

6.21   In terms of pupils with or without a disability, Burns et al. noted that the attainment of students with a disability was at least 20 percentage points lower than the attainment of students without a disability at all levels of attainment in 2011/12[176]. The education and learning requirements of disabled pupils may or may not be the same as those pupils with a SEN categorisation; pupils with a special educational need may not have a disability and those who have a disability may not have a special educational need. Improved monitoring, data collection and reporting on the attainment of pupils with disabilities within mainstream schools needs to be undertaken to allow more robust analyses.

---

[172] For pupils who obtained 5+ GCSEs at A*-C: In 2007/08, 15.3% of SEN 5 pupils and 74.0% of no SEN pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs at A*-C; In 2014/15, 38.9%% of SEN 5 pupils and 86.4% of no SEN pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs at A*-C.
For pupils who obtained 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English: In 2007/08, 10.4% of SEN 5 pupils and 63.0% of no SEN pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English; In 2014/15, 18.9%% of SEN 5 pupils and 73.3% of no SEN pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English.
For pupils who obtained 2+ A Levels: In 2007/08, 9.0% of SEN 5 pupils and 51.9% of no SEN pupils obtained 2+ A Levels; In 2014/15, 15.8%% of SEN 5 pupils and 64.0% of no SEN pupils obtained 2+ A Levels.
[173] The attainment gap between SEN 5 and those with no SEN, for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C), closed from 58.7 percentage points in 2007/08 to 47.5 percentage points in 2014/15, with pupils with SEN 5 at the bottom of the gap.
[174] The attainment gap between SEN 5 and those with no SEN, for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (incl.. English and Maths) Grades (A* - *-C) was 52.6% percentage points in 2007/08 and 54.4% percentage points in 2014/15 to the detriment of pupils with SEN 5.
[175] The attainment gap between SEN 5 and those with no SEN, for those obtaining 2+ A Levels was 42.9% percentage points in 2007/08 and 48.2% percentage points in 2014/15 to the detriment of pupils with SEN 5.
[176] As reported numbers were low, these figures should be treated with caution. At time of publication, 2014/15 data could not be obtained.

6.22   The 2008 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People review on children's rights[177] raised some concerns about the ability of mainstream schools to meet the additional needs associated with SEN.

6.23   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'[178].

6.24   In examining the destinations of school leavers, the Audit of Inequalities (2012) published by the ELBs in Northern Ireland[179] 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.

6.25   An Education and Training Inspectorate[180] 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.

[177] NICCY. (2008). *Children's Rights: Rhetoric or Reality*. Belfast: NICCY.
[178] NICCY. (2008). *Children's Rights: Rhetoric or Reality*. Belfast: NICCY.
[179] Education and Library Boards (2012) *Audit of Inequalities, Second Edition, 'Work in Progress'*
[180] Education and Training Inspectorate (2014) *A Survey Report on Transition Arrangements from Special Schools and Mainstream Learning Support Centres to Post-School Provision*

6.26   School leavers with any SEN[181] or disability[182] are more likely to enter further education or job training than school leavers with no special educational need or without a disability. However, on several further education courses and job training programmes, the shares of enrolees with a self-reported disability still remain lower than the share of people in Northern Ireland with a self-reported disability or illness[183].

6.27   In higher education, students with a disability represent the smallest share of enrolees in the subject area of 'Medicine, Dentistry, and Subjects Allied to Medicine', compared with all other subject areas in higher education[184]. A 2007 report by the British Medical Association (BMA)[185] 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".

6.28   The report also cites a 2004 BMA report which highlights a number of barriers to a career in medicine, including:

- inflexible working patterns;

- poor contingency cover;

- unsympathetic colleagues, and those who are 'sympathetic until it affects them'; and,

---

[181] In 2011/12, 42.3% of school leavers with SEN 1-4 entered further education, 40.6% of school leavers with SEN 5 entered further education, whereas, 33.0% of those with no SEN entered further education. Data obtained from: Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland* In 2014/15, 42.8% of school leavers with SEN 1-4 entered further education, 49.5% of school leavers with SEN 5 entered further education, whereas, 32.9% of those with no SEN entered further education. Data obtained from: Department of Education (2016) '*School leavers - 2014/15 statistical bulletin*' - Table 18: Destination of school leavers by special educational need (SEN) status 2014/15, located at: https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin

[182] In 2011/12, 38.6% of school leavers with a disability entered further education, whereas, 34.6% of those without a disability entered further education. Data obtained from: Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland*

[183] The share of enrolees with a disability on ApprenticeshipsNI and Steps to Work programmes was 1.6% and 4.4% respectively in 2011/12. In the 2011 Census 5.8% of the general population aged under 25 years had a disability which limited their daily activities 'a little' or 'a lot'.

[184] In 2011/12, the share of students with a disability was largest in 'Social Studies and Law' (7.6%) and lowest in 'Medicine, Dentistry and Subjects Allied to Medicine' (5.3%). Updated data for 2014/15 was not available.

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

- the stigma attached to disabled doctors or doctors with a chronic illness.

6.29   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 enrolees in postgraduate and 'part-time/other'[186] enrolments than their share of the population[187].

6.30   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 disability[188].

6.31   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 disabilities[189].

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

6.32   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[190]. Burns et al. suggested that differential attainment is not a driving factor for this inequality.

6.33   The Equality and Human Rights Commission Review on Lifelong Learning (2010) has however noted that historically lower levels of educational qualifications among people with disabilities compared to people without disabilities has an

---

[186] 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.

[187] In 2011/12, students with a disability made up 6.5% and 6.0% of postgraduate and 'part-time/other' enrolments in higher education respectively. In the 2011 Census 20.4% of the general population aged under 16-74 years had a disability which limited their daily activities 'a little' or 'a lot' (over two-thirds of postgraduate enrolees are over 25 years old.)

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

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

[190] In 2010/11 (the most recent year for which data is available), 68% of higher education leavers without a disability entered full-time or part-time paid work, compared to 56.6% of leavers with a disability.

impact on their employment status, the sector they work in, and their participation in part-time work[191].

6.34   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.

---

[191] 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.** Over six out of ten[192] lesbian, gay, bisexual [and transgender] people over 16 years, when looking back on their school experiences, had been called hurtful names related to their sexual or gender identity[193]. Research suggests that "*name calling using homophobic terminology is commonplace among adolescent peer groups in Northern Ireland's schools.*"[194], whereby, over the course of a year, over half[195] of 16 year olds had been called 'gay', 'lesbian' or similar, and over eight in ten[196] children saying that it happened to their classmates[197]. Research by Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project[198] (2011) found that 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. Research by Queen's University[199] (2013) 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

---

[192] 61.2% had been called hurtful names related to their sexual or gender identity

[193] O'Hara M (2013) Through our Minds: Exploring the Emotional health and Wellbeing of lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in Northern Ireland. The Rainbow Project: Belfast

[194] Schubotz D (2015) Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Homophobic and Transphobic Name Calling: Evidence from the 2014 YLT survey. ARK: Belfast. p.19.

[195] 21% of respondents that name calling and insults happened to them 'once or twice a year', 'once or twice a term', 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day' in school.

[196] 85% of respondents said that name calling and insults happened to their classmates 'once or twice a year', 'once or twice a term', 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day' in school.

[197] Schubotz D (2015) Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Homophobic and Transphobic Name Calling: Evidence from the 2014 YLT survey. ARK: Belfast.

[198] 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*

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

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 with same sex attraction are more likely to be bullied in school than their peers with opposite sex attraction.*

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 Inequalities[200].

7.4   Just under half of the respondents to research commissioned in 2003 by DE[201] said they had been bullied at school because of their sexual orientation and 33% believed that they achieved lower grades as a result of their perceived sexuality.

7.5   O'Hara (2013), reporting the findings from an online survey, found that almost nine out of ten[202] lesbian, gay, bisexual [and transgender] people over 16 years, when looking back on their school experiences, had heard homophobic/transphobic language in schools often or sometimes. Two thirds[203] had often or sometimes heard verbal threats directed at lesbian, gay, bisexual [and transgender] people in school, with over six out of ten[204] being called hurtful names related to their sexual or gender identity[205].

7.6   Schubotz' (2015) examination of the experiences of 16 years old in regard to homophobic labelling, name-calling and bullying in schools using the Young Life and Times Survey (2014)(YLT) suggested that "*name calling using homophobic terminology is commonplace among adolescent peer groups in Northern*

---

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

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

[202] 88.6% of respondents had heard homophobic/transphobic language in schools often or sometimes

[203] 66.3% had often or sometimes heard verbal threats directed at lesbian, gay , bisexual [and transgender] people in school

[204] 61.2% had been called hurtful names related to their sexual or gender identity

[205] O'Hara M (2013) Through our Minds: Exploring the Emotional health and Wellbeing of lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in Northern Ireland. The Rainbow Project: Belfast

Ireland's schools."[206] The report found that one in five[207] respondents said they are called 'gay', 'lesbian' or similar 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day' in school, and four in ten respondents[208] said that it happened to their classmates 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day'[209]. Over the course of a year, over half of respondents[210] had been called 'gay', 'lesbian' or similar, with over eight in ten respondents[211] saying that it happened to their classmates.

7.7   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 authorities[212].

7.8   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 action[213].

7.9   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 bullying[214].

7.10   Schubotz (2015) reports that almost half of the 16-year old respondents to the YLT said that they had never witnessed a teacher or other school staff intervene when homophobic language is used in school. Schubotz points out that '*It is of course possible that teachers are not aware of this, but given the extent to which this language appears to be used in*

---

[206] Schubotz D (2015) Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Homophobic and Transphobic Name Calling: Evidence from the 2014 YLT survey. ARK: Belfast. p.19.

[207] 21% of respondents that name calling and insults happened to them 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day' in school.

[208] 43% of respondents said that name calling and insults happened to their classmates 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day' in school.

[209] Note: Schubotz D (2015) primarily reports using 'sometimes' and 'often', but table notes state that 'sometimes' means 'once or twice a week', and 'often' means 'almost every day'.

[210] 21% of respondents that name calling and insults happened to them 'once or twice a year', 'once or twice a term', 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day' in school.

[211] 85% of respondents said that name calling and insults happened to their classmates 'once or twice a year', 'once or twice a term', 'once or twice a week' or 'almost every day' in school.

[212] 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*

[213] 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*

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

schools, it is equally possible that it is simply being ignored and not challenged appropriately.'[215]

7.11 The Cara-Friend/Rainbow Project report and the Commission's statement on 'Promoting Sexual Orientation Equality'[216] (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.

7.12 Despite the prevalence of homophobic language as an insult, Schubotz (2015) found that the large majority of 16 year olds recognised that homophobic [and transphobic] labelling was unacceptable and must be challenged in schools[217].

7.13 In discussion, Schubotz (2015) states that the comments received from YLT respondents clearly suggest that still more needs to be done by schools to improve 'Relationship and Sexual Education (RSE). Schubotz states, '*YLT respondents' suggestions especially relate to the failure by some schools to address issues that are often regarded as 'contentious' by adults or subjects that may not sit comfortably with a traditionally heteronormative Christian school ethos, such as sexual orientation, gender identity and the question of how to keep a relationship (outside marriage) going. Topics like this are evidently very important and relevant to a 16-year old.*'[218]

7.14 Schubotz (2015) found that only one in five[219] same-sex attracted respondents said that LGB issues were covered on RSE, whereas twice[220] that proportion of opposite-sex attracted respondents and respondents who said that they had never been sexually attracted[221] said they covered this topic. O'Hara (2013) also found that nine out of ten[222] gay, lesbian, bisexual [and transgender] respondents had never or rarely heard

---

[215] Schubotz D (2015) Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Homophobic and Transphobic Name Calling: Evidence from the 2014 YLT survey. ARK: Belfast. p.20.
[216] ECNI (2013) *Promoting Sexual Orientation Equality, Priorities and Recommendations*
[217] 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that homophobic bullying and insults are serious issues that should be challenged in school.
[218] Schubotz D (2015) Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Homophobic and Transphobic Name Calling: Evidence from the 2014 YLT survey. ARK: Belfast. p.28.
[219] 20% same-sex attracted respondents said that LGB issues were covered on RSE
[220] 42% opposite-sex attracted respondents said that LGB issues were covered on RSE.
[221] 41% never attracted respondents said that LGB issues were covered on RSE.
[222] 88.7% had never or rarely heard teachers talk about sexual orientation and transgender issues sensitively

teachers talk about sexual orientation and transgender issues sensitively[223]. On reporting the YLT survey findings, Schubotz' commentary states that '*this would suggest that the perception of the coverage is very different among same-sex attracted young people, and that the discussions that took place on LGB relationships did actually not meet their needs*'.

7.15 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 learning[224].

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

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

7.17 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".

7.18 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".

7.19 Although now dated, the 2003 ShOut report[225] 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.

7.20 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[226].

---

[223] O'Hara M (2013) Through our Minds: Exploring the Emotional health and Wellbeing of lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in Northern Ireland. The Rainbow Project: Belfast
[224] Guasp, A. (2009). *Homophobic Bullying in Britain's Schools*. London: Stonewall.
[225] ShOut Report. (2003). *The Needs of Young People Who Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender*.
[226] ECNI (2012) *'Indicators of Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations in Education'*. ECNI: Belfast.

7.21   Further data and research is needed to explore specific attendance patterns and to identify key drivers of non-attendance.

8   Community/Religious Background

Summary

8.1   In terms of religion and educational attainment, **Protestants continue to 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 (5+ GCSEs (A*-C), 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English and 2+ A Levels (A* - E), than both Protestants and 'Others'[227]. This is a persistent inequality. The lower achievement of Protestants, as measured by an attainment gap, remained between 2007/08 and 2014/15 for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs at (A*-C), or 2+ A Levels Grades (A* - *-E), with a reduction in the gap for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English.

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 *Statement* found that large differences are evident in respect to the destinations of school leavers. Catholics are persistently more likely to enter higher education than other groups. In 2014/15, of Catholic school leavers, 45 percent went on to higher education, compared with 39 percent of Protestant school leavers[228]. 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 enrolees than Protestants in further education courses. However, Protestants have larger shares of those remaining on and successfully

---

[227] '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.
[228] 45.4% of Catholic school leavers, and 39.0% of Protestant school leavers went on to higher education.

completing courses than other groups[229]. In respect to the Steps to Work programme, Catholics, and those of 'Other' 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 *Statement* also highlights that **there is persistent lower achievement and lack of progression to further and higher education of school leavers entitled to free school meals, particularly Protestants, notably Protestants males**[230]**..**

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[231]) have the lowest rates of attainment in respect to GCSE and A Level results. In 2014/15, just over a quarter[232] of Protestant males entitled to free school meals attained 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths)(A*-C) compared with over four in ten[233] of all school leavers entitled to free school meals, almost three quarters[234] of all school leavers not entitled to free school meals, and eight out of ten[235] Catholic girls not entitled to free school meals (those with the highest achievement level).

8.7   They also have the lowest proportion of school leavers moving on to higher education. In 2011/12, 51.5%[236] of Protestant males entitled to free school meals went on to further or higher

---

[229] 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.

[230] This key inequality is primarily supported by Burns et al (2015) analyses of Department of Education (DE) data on free school meals entitlement. However, in this *Statement*, 'working class' is also used to refer to the discussion in literature around 'Protestant working class'.

[231] Entitlement is calculated based on parental receipt of income support or Jobseeker's Allowance, an annual taxable income of £16,190 or less, or receipt several other allowances or tax credits

[232] 26.7% of Protestant males entitled to free school meals attained 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C).

[233] 41.3% of all school leavers entitled to free school meals attained 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C).

[234] 73.7% of all school leavers not entitled to free school meals attained 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C).

[235] 79.4% of Catholic girls not entitled to free school meals attained 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C).

[236] 51.5% of Protestant males entitled to free school meals went on to further or higher education.

education, compared to 62.3%[237] of all school leavers entitled to free school meals and 80.6%[238] of all school leavers not entitled to free school meals.

8.8　　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 of a child, as currently measured by free school meals entitlement, and their attendance, or not, at a grammar school. As iterated in the section on gender within this *Statement*, social disadvantage can also impact on type of school attended, with socially disadvantaged children less likely to attend grammar schools[239]. The research commissioned to inform this *Statement* found that the type of school was a strong predictor of attainment, and destination after leaving school.

8.9　　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 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 continue to have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE and A Level. Fewer Protestant school leavers enter higher education than do Catholics.*

8.10　　This inequality was identified from an analysis of DE data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015), and by Commission

---

[237] 62.3% of all school leavers entitled to free school meals went on to further or higher education.
[238] 80.6% of all school leavers not entitled to free school meals went on to further or higher education
[239] 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.

examination of DE school leaver statistical bulletins for 2013/14[240] and 2014/15[241].

8.11 The attainment levels of both Catholics and Protestants increased over the period 2007/08 to 2014/15 for all three areas of attainment - 5+ GCSEs (A*-C), 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English and 2+ A Levels (A*-E)[242], [243]. However, the lower achievement of Protestants, as measured by an attainment gap, remained between 2007/08 and 2014/15 for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs at (A*-C)[244], or 2+ A Levels Grades (A* - *-E)[245], with a reduction in the gap for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English[246].

8.12 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.

8.13 Research by Osborne et al. in 2006 found that there seemed to be more emphasis from Catholic parents than Protestant

---

[240] School leavers - 2013/14 statistical bulletin, published: 21 May 2015, at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201314-statistical-bulletin

[241] School leavers - 2014/15 statistical bulletin, published: 26 May 2016 at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin

[242] - In 2007/08, 68.6% Catholics achieved 5+ GCSEs A*-C and in 2014/15, 82.7% achieved 5+ GCSEs A*-C.
 - In 2007/08, 57.6% Catholics achieved 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths)(A*-C) and in 2014/15, 66.4% achieved 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths)(A*-C).
 - In 2007/08, 49.5% Catholics achieved 2+ A Levels (A*-E) and in 2014/15, 61.0% achieved 2+ A Levels (A*-E).

[243] - In 2007/08, 65.0% Protestants achieved 5+ GCSEs A*-C and in 2014/15, 78.9% achieved 5+ GCSEs A*-C.
 - In 2007/08, 54.8% Protestants achieved 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C) and in 2014/15, 65.2% achieved 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths) (A*-C).
 - In 2007/08, 42.7% Protestants achieved 2+ A Levels (A*-E) and in 2014/15, 54.0% achieved 2+ A Levels (A*-E).

[244] For those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C), in 2007/08 the attainment gap was 3.6 pp to the detriment of Protestants and in 2014/15 the attainment gap was 3.8 pp to the detriment of Protestants. A slight widening of the attainment gap by 0.2 pp.

[245] For those obtaining 2+ A Levels (A*-E), in 2007/08 the attainment gap was 6.8 pp to the detriment of Protestants and in 2014/15 the attainment gap was 7.0 pp to the detriment of Protestants. A slight widening of the attainment gap by 0.2 pp.

[246] For those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English, in 2007/08 the attainment gap was 2.8 pp to the detriment of Protestants and in 2014/15 the attainment gap was 1.2 pp to the detriment of Protestants. A narrowing of the attainment gap by 1.6 pp.

parents on the need to go on and enter higher education if at all possible[247].

8.14   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.

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

8.16   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 leavers[248]. Protestant school leavers were consistently more likely than Catholics to enter further education[249]. In 2014/15, of Catholic school leavers, 45 percent went on to higher education, compared with 39 percent of Protestant school leavers[250]. Whereas, 39 percent of Protestant school leavers went on to further education, compared to 31% of Catholic school leavers[251].

8.17   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 enrolees in both undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments in Northern Ireland in comparison to their share of the population[252].

8.18   This may be, in part, due to the lower number of Protestants continuing on to higher education after leaving school, but likely

---

[247] 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.

[248] In 2011/12, the number of Catholic school leavers going on to higher education was 5,149 pupils, representing 45.2% of Catholic school leavers, while only 3,555 Protestant school leavers went on to higher education, representing 39.2% of Protestant school leavers.

[249] In 2011/12, the number of Protestant school leavers going on to further education was 3,420 pupils, representing 37.7% of Protestant school leavers, while only 3,611 Catholic school leavers went on to further education, representing 31.7% of Catholic school leavers.

[250] 45.4% of Catholic school leavers, and 39.0% of Protestant school leavers went on to higher education.

[251] 31.4% of Catholic school leavers, and 38.7% of Protestant school leavers went on to further education.

[252] In 2011/12, 33.4% of undergraduate enrolments to higher education, and 33.9 of postgraduate enrolments were Protestant, whereas, 49.5% of undergraduate and 44.7% of postgraduate enrolments were Catholic.

is compounded by the fact that a higher proportion of Protestant school leavers migrate to Great Britain for higher education.

8.19   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 Catholics[253] - 30.2% of Protestant leavers compared to 21.5% of Catholic school leavers[254].

8.20   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.

8.21   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 lower achievement and lack of progression to further and higher education of school leavers entitled to free school meals, particularly Protestants, notably Protestant males[255].*

8.22   This trend was highlighted as a persistent inequality in the Commission's Statement on Key Inequalities in 2007[256].

8.23   The Burns et al. (2015) analysis of DE data (2007/08 to 2011/12) noted that school leavers entitled to free school meals are more likely to have lower attainment levels at GSCE and A Level.

8.24   In terms of Protestant males entitled to free school meals, while their attainment had improved at all levels between 2007/08

---

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

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

[255] This key inequality is primarily supported by Burns et al (2015) analyses of Department of Education (DE) data on free school meals entitlement. However, in this *Statement*, 'working class' is also used to refer to the discussion in literature around 'Protestant working class'.

[256] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007) *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland*

and 2011/12[257], and 2014/15[258], reflecting the overall trend of improvement, they remained at a persistent disadvantage when compared to all other gender-religion-socio-economic status groups[259],.

8.25   The 'Audit of Inequalities and Action Plan 2011-2016'[260] released by DEL also highlighted the persistently higher proportion of Protestant working class boys failing at education than any other group.

8.26   In addition, the most recent Audit of Inequalities released by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in Northern Ireland[261] (2012) points to, not only the underachievement of Protestant working class males, but also their lower pre-school uptake and lower school attendance rates.

8.27   In terms of progression to further or higher education, the analysis by Burns et al. of DE data (2007/08-2011/12) highlighted that school leavers entitled to free school meals were less likely to enter either further or higher education than those not entitled to free school meals. Protestant males entitled to free school meals were the least likely of all groups to go on to further or higher education[262].

8.28   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.

---

[257] Between 2007/08 and 2011/12, the proportion of Protestant males entitled to free school meals attaining No GCSEs decreased from 12.5% to 6.9% compared to decrease from 8.9% to 4.4% for Catholic males entitled to free school meals (Burns et al (2015) analyses of DE data from 2007/08 to 2011/12).

[258] Between 2011/12 and 2014/15, the proportion of Protestant males entitled to free school meals attaining No GCSEs decreased from 6.9% to 0.8% compared to decrease from 4.4% to 1.6% for Catholic males entitled to free school meals. Ongoing monitoring of these trends is recommended. [Equality Commission for Northern Ireland findings from DE school leaver statistical bulletins for 2013/14 and 2014/15]

[259] In 2014/15 the proportion of Protestant males entitled to free school meals attaining 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths)(A*-C) was 26.7%, compared with 41.3% for all school leavers entitled to free school meals, 73.7% for all school leavers not entitled to free school meals, and 79.4% for Catholic girls not entitled to free school meals (those with the highest achievement level).

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

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

[262] In 2011/12, 51.5% of Protestant males entitled to free school meals went on to further or higher education, compared to 62.3% for all school leavers entitled to free school meals and 80.6% for all school leavers not entitled to free school meals. Updated data for 2014/15 was not available.

8.29   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 grade[263]. As noted earlier, grammar school attendance is a strong predictor of attainment and destination for school leavers.

8.30   The Dawn Purvis MLA and Working Group report on 'Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class'[264] (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;

- 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.

---

[263] 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.

[264] 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

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 (NILT)(2012) which shows that unionists/loyalists are predominantly Protestant, and nationalists/republicans are predominantly Catholic[265].

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 lower achievement 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 *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.

Differences & Inequalities

9.4 There is a lack of available quantitative data on education outcomes in respect to political opinion. In general terms, any

---

[265] 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

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 (NILT)(2012) which shows that unionists/loyalists are predominantly Protestant, and nationalists/republicans are predominantly Catholic[266].

> **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) for 2012 and by the Commission for 2015.

9.6 In 2015, a larger proportion of nationalists than unionists had 'Degree level or higher' or 'Higher education – diploma or equivalent' as their highest qualification (26.6% and 21.7% respectively).

9.7 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.

9.8 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 lower achievement, and thereby unionist lower achievement, 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.*

9.9 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 regards to the extent that 'chill factors' have an impact on the*

---

[266] 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

community composition of either of the two Northern Ireland HE institutes".

9.10   Burns et al. (2015) interviewed students from two different groups of political students[267], from opposite ends of the nationalist / unionist political spectrum. The students interviewed reported that they perceived that several campuses of higher education were unwelcoming to them because of their political beliefs.

9.11   The nationalist student group said that they would not apply to Stranmillis University College for teacher training (a college of Queen's University) – which Burns et al. note is generally considered to train teachers to work in state controlled or integrated schools with a mainly Protestant intake. However, the nationalist student group also perceived that Protestants would not feel comfortable applying to St Mary's Teacher Training College (which Burns et al. note trains teachers to work in Catholic maintained schools, as well as other schools, and has a mainly Catholic intake). The group of Unionist students interviewed reported that overall they perceived both Queen's University and the University of Ulster as 'cold houses' for unionists, and indicated that their level of comfort would vary depending on the specific university or campus thereof.

9.12   Burns et al. suggested that potential chill factors may be due to the location where a student has grown up impacting upon their perceptions regarding access / entry to certain campuses. Those students growing up in areas where their own ethno-religious or community background forms the majority may feel uncomfortable going to campus in areas that are not similarly comprised of their ethno-religious or community background.

9.13   A 2008 McQuaid and Hollywood analysis of Osborne 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.

9.14   Burns et al. also highlight that 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?".* Further consideration is thus likely needed

---

[267] Focus groups were held with members of a unionist students' society and of the Mairéad Farrell Republican Youth Committee

to examine the extent and specific cause(s) of any current chill factors.

9.15   On a wider point, Burns et al. raised a 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. Burns et al. state '*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'.*[268] Furthermore, Burns et al. stated that '*This situation did not depend on the institution attended – it was deemed to be across the board'.*[269]

---

[268] Burns et al. (2015), Page 150
[269] Burns et al. (2015), Page 151.

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 enrolees on accredited courses are under the age of 25 years. The majority of enrolees 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[270].

10.6 A report for DEL[271] (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.

---

[270] In 2011/12, 42.3% of all 'Leavers' from Steps to Work aged under 25 years moved to employment and 34.5% sustained 13 weeks of employment; 34.7% of the 25-49 years age group moved to employment and 29.0% sustained 13 weeks of employment; and 22.0% of the 50+ years age group moved to employment and 18.3% sustained 13 weeks of employment. Updated data for 2014/15 is not comparable.
[271] RSM McClure Watters (2011). *A Survey of Leavers from the Steps to Work programme*

11   Marital Status

11.1   The vast majority of enrolees on most further or higher education courses or job training programmes are young, single people with no dependants. As potential enrolees 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 *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 enrolees 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 OFMdFM[272] 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.

---

[272] 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 *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 particular[273], 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.

---

[273] 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 report[274] 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-being[275] 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 parents[276].

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 compromised[277]. This can make engaging in education a challenge.

12.10   A 2010 Audit Commission report[278] 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.

12.12   Research by Spielhofer et al.[279] (2010) found that the most common barriers to education for teenage parents were:

- a course not being available to them in their area;

---

[274] NIACE (2013). *Access and Inclusion: Young Adult Carers and Education and Training.*
[275] National Union of Students. (2012). *The Pound in Your Pocket*.
[276] National Union of Students. (2009). *Meet the Parents: The experiences of students with children in further and higher education*. London: NUS.
[277] NIACE (2013). *Access and Inclusion: Young Adult Carers and Education and Training.*
[278] Audit Commission. (2010). *Against the Odds: Targeted Briefing – Young Carers*.
[279] 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.

- 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)[280].

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.

---

[280] In 2011/12, 31.9% of 'Leavers' from Steps to Work with dependants moved to employment and 27.6% sustained 13 weeks of employment compared to 37.8% of those with no dependants who moved to employment and 30.8% who sustained 13 weeks of employment. Updated data for 2014/15 not comparable.

13   Conclusions

13.1   This *Statement* reflects identified inequalities in education and communities, and brings to the fore six key inequalities:

- Bullying, including prejudice-based bullying, in schools is a persistent problem.

- Males continue to have lower levels of attainment than females, beginning in primary school and continuing throughout schooling to GCSE and A Level. Fewer male school leavers enter higher education than do females.

- Protestants continue to have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE, GCSEs including English and Maths, and A Level. Fewer Protestant school leavers enter higher education than do Catholics.

- There is persistent lower achievement and lack of progression to further and higher education of school leavers entitled to free school meals, particularly Protestants, notably Protestants males.

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

- 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.

13.2   The Commission recognises the pro-active steps that a range of bodies, including Government Departments 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.

13.3   It is intended that the consideration of differences, inequalities, and barriers contained within this Statement, will be utilised to inform the ongoing development of policy positions and associated interventions not only across the relevant Departments, agencies and functions of government, but by all those organisations who have responsibilities for, or an interest in, education in Northern Ireland.

13.4   The *Statement* also makes clear that there is a lack of robust education data relating to a number of equality groups including: trans students; asylum seeking and refugee children; minority ethnic groups; LGB students; and, young carers.

13.5 This lack of data significantly impacts *not only the de*gree 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.

13.6 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.

13.7 We recommend that Government, public bodies and others use this *Statement* to develop and implement appropriate actions to address identified inequalities; including those pursuant to their equality and good relations duties under Section 75.

13.8 While research indicates that the educational standards achieved by all school leavers have improved over the last five years, many of the inequalities between groups highlighted in this *Statement* are persistent and have worsened over time. These issues must therefore be prioritised and addressed as a matter of urgency.

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

October 2017

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 Authority[281].

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 Ireland[282]. This figure increased slightly each year from 330,974 in 2011/12[283].

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)[284].

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.

---

[281] Education Act 2014

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

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

[284] 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 equality[285]*:*

- '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.[286] 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 2011[287] 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.

---

[285] DENI (2013) *Country Background Report for Northern Ireland*.
[286] Northern Ireland Executive (2013) *Publication of PISA 2012*
[287] 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 Framework[288], 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.

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).

---

[288] 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.

14.19   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.