

Inequalities in Education

Facts and Trends
1998 - 2008



SUMMARY REPORT

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

In October 2007, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland published its Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland¹. This Statement identified education as one of six broad areas where inequalities exist and need to be addressed. Education is recognised as playing an important role in determining a person's life chances and opportunities. Poor educational attainment is seen as a barrier to both entering and progressing in employment.

While this report does not seek to replace the Commission's **Statement on Key Inequalities**, it does seek to present the latest educational data (at the time of writing) relevant to that statement, and to compare that to data from ten years previous. Over the period 1998 to 2008, this report presents evidence of the differentials in the educational attainment within the areas of community background, gender and disability and for the specific groups of 'children in care' and 'Traveller children'. These groups were selected due to their identification in the Commission's Statement on **Key Inequalities** as key groups for whom educational inequalities exist. Other key groups identified in the Commission's **Statement on Key Inequalities** were those from Black and Ethnic Minority communities and those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. However, detailed quantitative data on educational attainment proved problematical to obtain for these groups, most often due to small sample sizes.

This publication draws on key Northern Ireland departmental data sources, namely the Labour Force Survey, the Qualifications and Destinations of School Leavers Survey, the Enrolments in Further Education dataset, the Enrolments in Higher Education dataset and the Northern Ireland Care Leavers Survey.

A Glossary of terms and technical notes on the data used in the report are located at the end of this report.

We would like to thank all who assisted us to collate this data.

¹ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2007). *Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland*. Belfast, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

1. Community Background

1.1 Educational Attainment

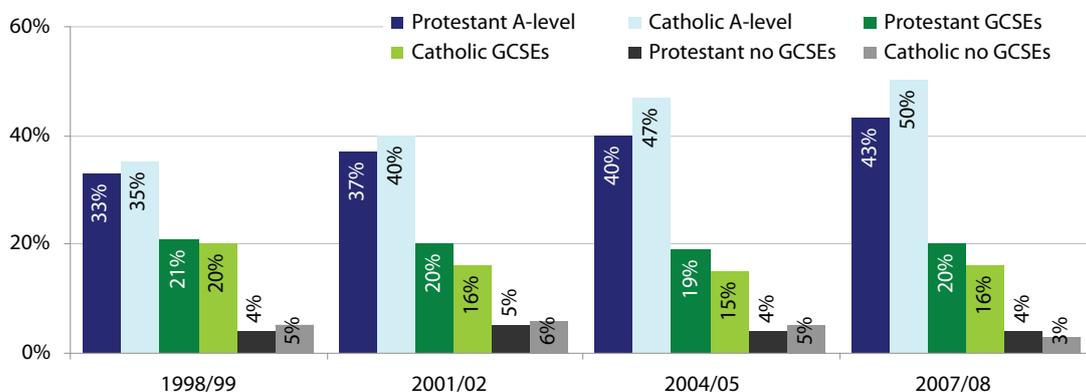
1.1.1 Amongst the population of Northern Ireland, in 2008 the highest level of **attainment** for Protestants and Roman Catholics was broadly similar, regardless of economic status - active or inactive. Differences did emerge with regards to:

- GCSE A*-C, where Protestants were more likely than Catholics to hold this as their highest qualification.
- economic **inactivity**, where Catholics were more likely than their Protestant counterparts to have **no qualifications**.

1.1.2 Amongst school leavers, over the period 1998/99 to 2007/08 a gap in the highest level of educational attainment had emerged (see chart 1):

- In 1998/99 educational attainment levels of Protestants and Catholics were similar;
- By 2007/08 the proportion of students leaving school with **2 or more A-levels A-E** had increased at a lower rate for Protestants than for Catholics (10 percentage points compared with 15 percentage points).

Chart 1: School leavers' Highest Educational Attainment by Community Background



Source: School Leavers Survey, Department of Education NI (DENI)

1.2. Educational Destinations

- 1.2.1 In 2007/08, Protestants were less likely than Roman Catholics to enrol in third level education.²
- Amongst school leavers, Protestants were more likely than Roman Catholics to say they **intended** going on to Further Education and less likely than Roman Catholics to say they intended going on to Higher Education.
 - However, a lower proportion of Protestants than Roman Catholics were **actually enrolled** in both Further Education and Higher Education.
- 1.2.2 Between 1998/99 and 2007/08 the pattern of enrolments for Protestants and Roman Catholics in Further Education and Higher Education has remained broadly unchanged.

2. Gender

2.1. Educational Attainment

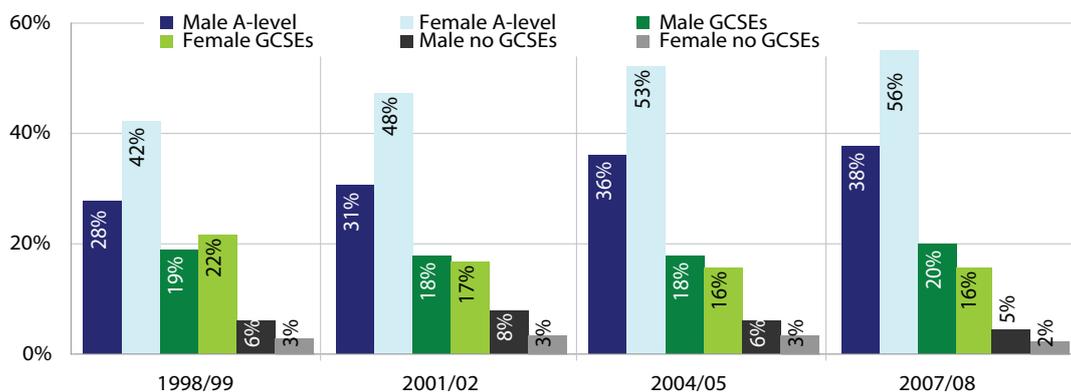
- 2.1.1 **Amongst the Northern Ireland population**, in 2007/08 working age females were more likely than males to be qualified to **degree or above**. Working age males were more likely than females to have left the education system with **no qualifications**.
- A greater proportion of working age males than females had A-levels as their highest qualification. This suggests that more working age males exit the education system at this point. However, a greater proportion of females than males left school with **2 or more A-levels A-E**, and have historically done so.

² Additional tables on enrolments in third level education can be accessed on the Commission's website at www.equalityni.org/research.

2.1.2 Over the period 1998/99 to 2007/088 the gap in educational attainment of males and females has widened.

- Amongst the Northern Ireland population the proportion of economically active males holding a **degree or above** has increased at a lower rate than for females. Further, the proportion of economically active and inactive males holding **no qualifications** has remained broadly unchanged, while the proportion of females has decreased.
- The proportion of both males and females **leaving school with 2 or more A-levels A-E** has increased substantially (28% to 38% males, 42% to 56% females). However, in parallel the gap in achievement has also widened (from 14% to 18%) with females outperforming males (Chart 2).

Chart 2: School leavers' Highest Education Attainments by Gender



Source: School Leavers Survey, Department of Education NI (DENI)

2.2 Educational Destinations

2.2.1 In 2007/08 males were less likely than females to continue on to third level education.

- Amongst school leavers, males were less likely to say they **intended** going on to Higher Education than females. Similar proportions of males and females intended to progress to Further Education.

Inequalities in Education

- In terms of actual enrolments, a slightly lower proportion of males than females were enrolled in Further Education, and a considerably lower proportion of males than females were enrolled in **Higher Education**.
- 2.2.2 Between 1998/99 and 2007/08, the gap in the proportion of males and females enrolled in **Further Education** has decreased, reflecting increased male participation. In **Higher Education**, males have consistently had lower participation than females, with the actual proportions of both genders enrolled remaining unchanged over this ten year period.
- 2.2.3 Between 1998/99 and 2007/08, there has been little change in the patterns of subject choice for males and females in **Further** and **Higher Education**, with both groups opting to study different subject areas in both sectors.
- In Further Education, **Construction, Built Environment & Engineering** has remained almost exclusively an area of preference for males. In contrast, **Health & Social Care** courses have remained almost exclusively female.
 - In Higher Education, **Maths, Computer Science & Technology** was the most popular subject area for males but had low participation rates of females. In comparison, **Medical Sciences** was the most popular subject area for females, while lower levels of males opted for this area.

3. Disability

3.1 Educational Attainment

- 3.1.1 Amongst the Northern Ireland population, in 2008 economically active and inactive people with a declared disability had lower overall levels of attainment, and were more likely to hold **no qualifications**, than those without a declared disability (see Charts 3 and 4).
- 3.1.2 Overall, between 1998 and 2008 the **gap** between the educational attainment of working age people with and without a declared disability has **widened**. However there have been changes in the attainment levels of people with a declared disability, particularly for those economically active.

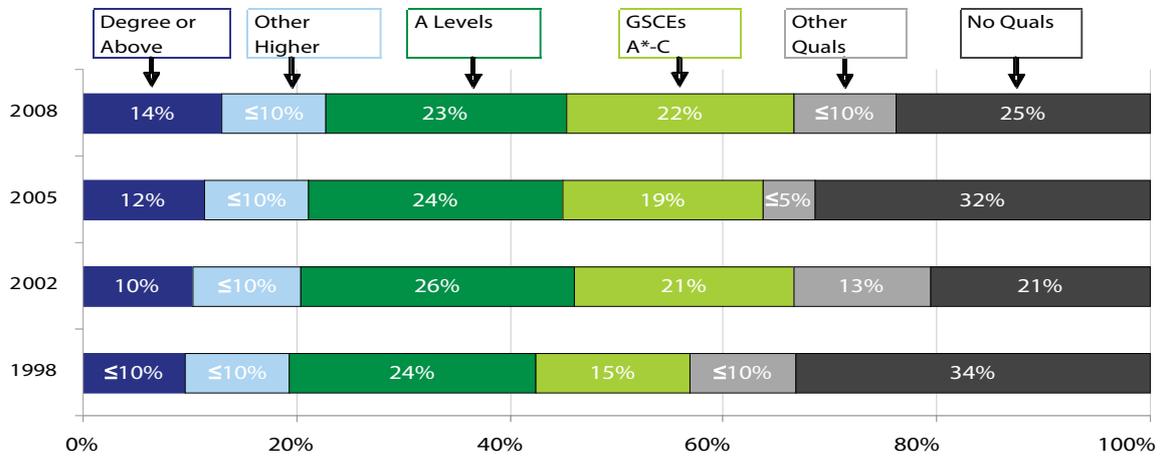
- The proportion of economically active people with a declared disability holding a **degree and above** has increased, but at a lower rate than for those without a declared disability.
- The proportion of economically active people with a declared disability with **no qualifications** has fluctuated but overall decreased (34% to 25%). The proportion of economically active without a declared disability and no qualifications has remained broadly unchanged (around 15 to 16%).
- The **proportion of economically inactive people with a declared disability holding no qualifications** has remained broadly unchanged, while the proportion of those without a declared disability has decreased.

3.2 Educational Destinations

- 3.2.1 Overall, people with a declared disability were less likely to enrol in **Further and Higher Education** than those without a declared disability.
- 3.2.2 Since 1998/99, there has been little change in the proportions of those with and without a declared disability enrolling in **Further Education** (around 4%), while the proportion of people with a declared disability enrolling in **Higher Education** has increased (from 4% to 7% in 2007/08).
- 3.2.3 Overall, in 2007/08, people with a declared disability were more likely to be enrolled at lower levels of study in **third level education** than those without a declared disability.
- People with a declared disability were considerably more likely to be enrolled at **level 1 & entry level** and less likely to be enrolled at every other level of **Further Education** than those without a declared disability.
 - People with a declared disability were slightly more likely to be enrolled at undergraduate level of **Higher Education** than those without a declared disability.

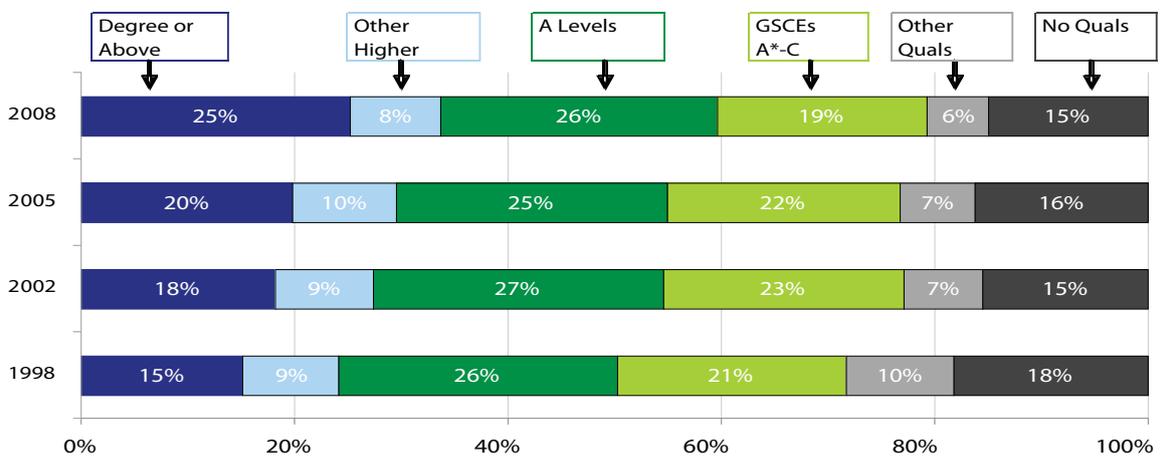
Inequalities in Education

Chart 3: Highest Educational Attainment of Economically Active People with a Declared Disability, 1998-2008



Source: Labour Force Survey, Department of Trade, Investment and Enterprise NI (DETINI)

Chart 4: Highest Educational Attainment of Economically Active People without a Declared Disability, 1998-2008



Source: Labour Force Survey, DETINI

3.2.4 Overall, people with and without a declared disability chose to study relatively different subject areas in **Further Education**, but similar subject areas in **Higher Education**. For example, in Further Education colleges, **Education** was the most popular subject area for people **with** a declared disability in each of the years, but only featured once in the top three subject

areas for those **without** a declared disability, in 2007/08. In Higher Education, Arts and Humanities has been the most popular subject area for people with a disability while Medical Sciences has been the most popular subject area for people without a disability. Of note was that over the period 1998/99 to 2007/08 increases in the proportions of students enrolling on **Medical Sciences** have been more marked for those with a declared disability (11 to 17%) than for those without a declared disability (18% to 21%).

4. Irish Travellers

4.1 Educational Attainment

4.1.1 Over the aggregate period 2003/04-2007/08,³ there has been a noticeable gap between the highest educational attainment of Traveller and non-Traveller school leavers. In this period, a majority (58%) of Irish Travellers left school with **no GCSE qualifications**. This compares with **5%** of non-Traveller school leavers.

4.2 Educational Destinations

4.2.1 Overall, in 2003/04-2007/08, school leavers who were Irish Travellers were less likely than non-Travellers to say they would be going on to **Further and Higher Education** or **training**. For example, in this aggregated time-period, zero percent of Irish Travellers indicated they intended to continue on to **Higher Education**.

4.2.2 In 2003/04-2007/08; school leavers who were Irish Travellers were more likely than non-Travellers to say they were going on to **unemployment**.

³ Data on Irish Travellers is presented in a combined 5 year period of 2003/04 – 2007/08 to compensate for low sample sizes. Consequently, it is not possible to examine trends in educational attainment.

5. Young people leaving Care

5.1 Educational Attainment

5.1.1 In 2007/08, a majority of 'care' leavers (53%) left school with no **GCSE qualifications**. This compares with 4% of all school leavers.

5.1.2 Between 2001 and 2008 the gap between the educational attainment of 'care' leavers and all school leavers has widened slightly.^{4,5}

Since 2001 the proportions of Care leavers leaving school with **A-levels A-E** has remained broadly unchanged, while the proportion of all school leavers has increased.

5.2 Educational Destinations

5.2.1 In 2007/08, 'care' leavers were less likely than all school leavers to say they would be continuing on to **Further and Higher Education** or **training** and more likely to say they would be going on to **unemployment**.

5.2.2 Between 2001 and 2008, the gap in the proportion of 'care' leavers and all school leavers saying they would continue on to **Further and Higher Education** has widened slightly.⁶

4 DHSSPS gather data on care leavers educational attainment and destinations from the Northern Ireland Care Leavers Survey. The questionnaire differs from the one used by DE to collect data for the School Leavers Survey, which is reflected in how the data is presented.

5 Please note that as 'all school leavers' data is not available for 2002/03, 2003/04 is used as a comparison

6 Ibid

When the different groups are compared, **community background** is the area where fewest differences exist in 2007/08. Amongst the **population**, the economically active from both communities hold very similar levels of highest education attainment. Amongst **school leavers**, there has been considerable improvement in the highest **level of educational attainment** of both communities, although this rate of improvement has been slightly greater for Roman Catholics than for Protestants. Thus, the gap between highest educational attainment of Protestant and Roman Catholic school leavers has widened.

Some differences are notable when looking at **gender**, particularly with regards to **levels of highest educational attainment** and **subject choices** within Further or Higher Education. Economically active females are more likely than males to hold a higher level of education attainment. In addition, while there has been considerable improvement in the **highest level of educational attainment** of both males and females **school leavers**, this improvement has been markedly more evident for females than for males. Thus, the gap between highest educational attainment of male and female school leavers has widened.

There are still considerable differences in the highest educational attainment and in participation in **Further or Higher Education** between those with and without a declared disability. Economically active people **without** a declared disability remain more likely than those with a declared disability to hold a **higher level of education attainment**. In addition, while there has been considerable improvement in the highest level of educational attainment of economically active people with and without a declared disability, this improvement has been markedly more evident for those without a declared disability. The participation in **Higher Education** of those with and without a declared disability was examined. While those with a declared disability remain under-represented in third level education, an **improvement** has occurred in the proportion who are accessing institutes of Higher Education in Northern Ireland.

While it was not possible, due to low numbers, to examine trends in the highest educational attainment of **Irish Travellers** and non-Travellers, over the aggregate period 2003/04-2007/08 there has been a noticeable gap between the highest education attainment and destinations of the two groups. The majority of Irish Travellers left school with **no GCSEs**, while the majority of non-Travellers left school with **GCSE or higher** qualifications. The most common intended **non-employment** destination for Irish Travellers leaving school was **unemployment**, while the most common intended destination for non-Travellers was **Higher Education**. Furthermore, in the aggregated time-period examined, zero percent of Irish Travellers indicated they intended to continue on to **Higher Education**.

Conclusions

While the comparator years for **children in care** differ somewhat to those for other groups, it is still evident that care leavers exit secondary education with **lower educational attainment levels** than all school leavers and have lower rates of going on to an educational destination. **Little or no improvement** in the educational attainment levels and non-employment destinations of **care-leavers** leaving school occurred between 2001/02 and 2007/08. In comparison, there has been an **improvement** in the highest level of educational attainment of **all school leavers**, and in the proportion of all school leavers continuing on to third level education.

Disability

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Declared disability | people who have stated that they do have a disability. |
| Without a declared disability | people who do not have a disability and also people for whom disability status is unknown. |

Economic status

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Economically active | people aged 16 and over who are either in employment or unemployed. |
| Economically inactive | people who are neither in employment nor unemployed on the ILO measure. This group includes, for example, all those who were looking after a home, are retired, sick or in education. |

Highest educational attainment of adults

| | |
|---|--|
| Degree or above | degree or degree equivalent and above including first degree, postgraduate diplomas and professional qualifications. |
| Higher Qualification (other than a degree or above) | other Higher Education below degree level including HND/ HNC/ BTEC (Higher), teaching and nursing qualifications. |
| A-level or equivalent | including vocational level 3. |
| GCSE A-C or equivalent | including Trade Apprenticeships, vocational level 2. |
| Other qualifications | including vocational level 1 and below. |
| No qualifications | encompasses those with no formal qualifications. |

Further Education levels of study

| | |
|--|--|
| Level 1 & under (F.E. subject level enrolment) | equates to GCSE Grades D-G and the following at NVQ/ HE Level 1-0 or HESA levels R,S,X: NVQs, Certificates, Diplomas, Professional Qualifications, Credits and other qualifications. |
| Level 2 (F.E. subject level enrolment) | equates to GCSE Grades A*-C and the following at NVQ/HE Level 2 or HESA level Q: NVQs, Certificates, Diplomas, Professional Qualifications, Credits and other qualifications. |

Further Education levels of study (continued)

| | |
|---|--|
| Level 3 (F.E. subject level enrolment) | equates to A-levels and the following at NVQ/HE Level 3 or HESA level P: NVQs, Certificates, Diplomas, Professional Qualifications, Credits and other qualifications. |
| Higher Education level (F.E. subject level enrolment) | equates to the following at NVQ/HE Levels 4-8 or HESA levels D,E,L,M,H,I,J or C ⁷ : NVQs, Certificates, Diplomas, Professional Qualifications, Credits and other qualifications |

Northern Ireland school leavers

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| School Leavers | those leaving grammar and secondary schools in Northern Ireland. Independent and special school are not included in this category. |
| Educational Destinations | destinations are reported by the school leavers and recorded by the school. Destination is defined by intended Institution (e.g. Queen's University Belfast is defined as an institute of Higher Education). Institutions may provide courses at both Further and Higher Education levels. |
| Further Education | includes all Institutes of Further Education |
| Higher Education | includes all Institutes of Higher Education and teacher training colleges. |

School leavers levels of attainment

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| 2 or more A-levels A-E | includes those with 2 or more A-levels at Grades A-E and those with GNVQ advanced qualifications. |
| 5 or more GCSEs A*-C | includes those with 5 or more GCSEs at Grades A*-C and those with GNVQ Intermediate qualifications. |
| No GCSEs | includes those who did not undertake any GCSE examinations or who obtained no graded results. It also includes those who obtained other qualifications such as RSA, Pitman, City & Guilds etc. |

⁷ HESA level C is equal to a Certificate of Higher Education and is the lowest Higher Education level at which a student can be enrolled in an institute of Further Education.

Labour Force Survey Data - Please note that the data defined as working age in this publication has been categorised using the pre-2010 definition. Also, please note that 2008 data has been grossed to 2008 mid-year population estimates, not 2009. LFS data is rounded to the nearest 1,000, as per ONS guidelines. The reader should also bear in mind that estimates from the LFS have an associated degree of statistical error as they are based on a sample of the population and care should be taken when making inferences from them.

School Leavers Data - Please note that the schools leavers data presented in this publication is not a fully representative of NI schools leavers because it excludes those with 1 A-level, those with 4 or less GCSEs at Grades A*-C and those with GCSEs at Grades D-G. DENI recommend that the GCSE highest qualification data should not be viewed at only those achieving 5 or more GCSEs at Grades A*-C, as the statistics are a subset of the information published by DE entitled 'Qualifications and Destinations of NI school Leavers'.

Enrolments in Further Education Data - Please note that the definitions of 'subject areas' used in this report have been coded from a wider range of subjects as listed by DELNI.

Enrolments in Higher Education Data - Please note that DELNI round Higher Education data to the nearest 5, as per HESA guidelines. From 2000/01 figures are based on full year enrolment data. Prior to this they were based on a snapshot of enrolments at 1st December in the relevant academic year. Full year enrolment data is based on the new HESA Standard Registration Population definition introduced in the 2007/08 academic year. Writing up and sabbatical students are now excluded from the enrolments population where they were previously included in published enrolment data.

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

**Research, Evaluation & Knowledge Management
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland**

Equality House

7-9 Shaftesbury Square

Belfast BT2 7DP

Tel: 028 90 500 600

Fax: 028 90 331 544

Website: www.equality.org/research

Email: research@equalityni.org

June 2010