

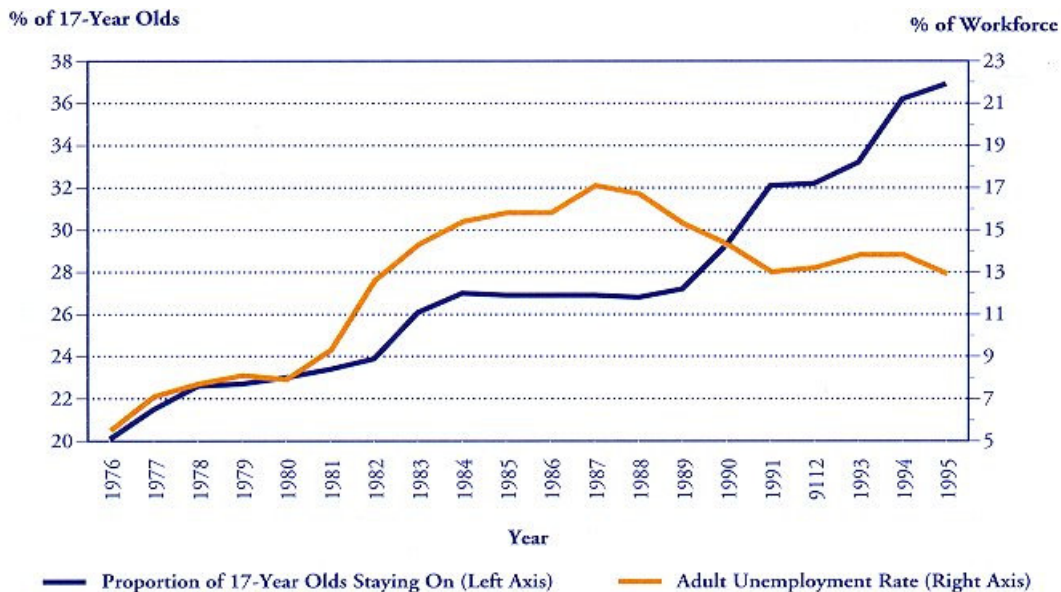
## Staying On In Full-Time Education in Northern Ireland An Economic Analysis

### Key Points

- There are quite large differences in educational participation between different areas of Northern Ireland, but these are not strongly related to local economic conditions. However, in the Belfast and Derry council areas it tends to be the case that in urban wards with high adult unemployment educational participation amongst young people is relatively low, and vice versa.
- School performance measures, such as the attendance rate and overall school examination results, are strongly related to whether or not young people choose to remain in full-time education after the compulsory age.

Figure 1

### School participation among 17 year-olds, and the adult unemployment rate in Northern Ireland (1975-95)



- Educational participation tends to be slightly higher amongst young Roman Catholics compared to Protestants, although this is not the case in some areas of Northern Ireland.
- Young people whose parents are employed, particularly in non-manual occupations, have relatively high educational participation rates.

### Introduction

1. The widely recognised links between education and economic performance provide an important rationale for investigating the factors which influence educational participation in Northern Ireland. Studies in Great Britain have indicated that local labour market conditions, school factors, sex, ethnicity and family background, all influence participation.

### Main Findings

## Participation across geographical areas

2. There are some important differences in educational participation between the different Travel-to- Work Areas (TTWAs) in Northern Ireland, although these differences do not appear to be particularly large (Table 1). For 17 year-old males, for example, the lowest participation rate is 42% for Ballymena and the highest is 56% for Enniskillen. The range, i.e. the difference between the highest and lowest, is 14 percentage points. For females, the orders of magnitude are similar, although the degree of dispersion is slightly larger. One interesting feature of the data is that the urban areas of Belfast City Council and Londonderry consistently have amongst the lowest rates of educational participation.

**Table 1: Educational Participation Rates in Northern Ireland Travel-to-Work Areas (TTWAs)**

	16 Year Olds per cent of cohort			17 Year Olds per cent of cohort		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Ballymena	80	83	81	42	62	52
Belfast DC	75	81	78	44	60	52
Belfast RO	81	87	84	51	66	58
Coleraine	77	87	82	48	71	59
Cookstown	77	85	81	47	68	57
Craigavon	78	88	83	52	71	61
Dungannon	78	92	85	48	79	64
Enniskillen	82	94	88	56	76	66
Londonderry	76	82	79	46	58	52
Magherafelt	79	91	85	46	70	57
Newry	73	90	81	47	69	58
Omagh	79	93	86	53	74	64
Strabane	72	82	77	47	58	53
<b>RANGE</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Coeff of Variation</b>	<b>3.79</b>	<b>5.13</b>	<b>3.95</b>	<b>7.95</b>	<b>9.96</b>	<b>8.35</b>

### Source 1991 Census of Population

**Note:** Figures relate to young people either at school or an FE College. The range is the highest value minus the lowest value. The coefficient of variation is the standard deviation divided by the mean. Belfast DC refers to Belfast District Council and Belfast RO refers to the rest of Belfast Travel-to-Work Area.

3. An analysis of the correlation between educational participation and local economic conditions at TTWA level shows that, with the exception of 16 year-old males, none of the relationships is particularly strong. The picture is different, however, within the urban areas of Belfast and Londonderry. In these areas it tends to be the case that in wards with high adult unemployment educational participation amongst young people is relatively low, and vice versa. This is likely to be because in many high unemployment inner city areas young people judge there to be little benefit from staying-on in education, because their employment prospects in the local area are so poor. This is important because it suggests that if adult

unemployment in economically depressed urban areas could be significantly reduced, then this may have beneficial spillovers into the youth labour market, one of which might be a higher participation in full-time education amongst young people. This is important for the longer term regeneration of these areas because other research has shown that high standards of education and training are a prerequisite for high and sustained levels of economic growth.

### **School-based factors**

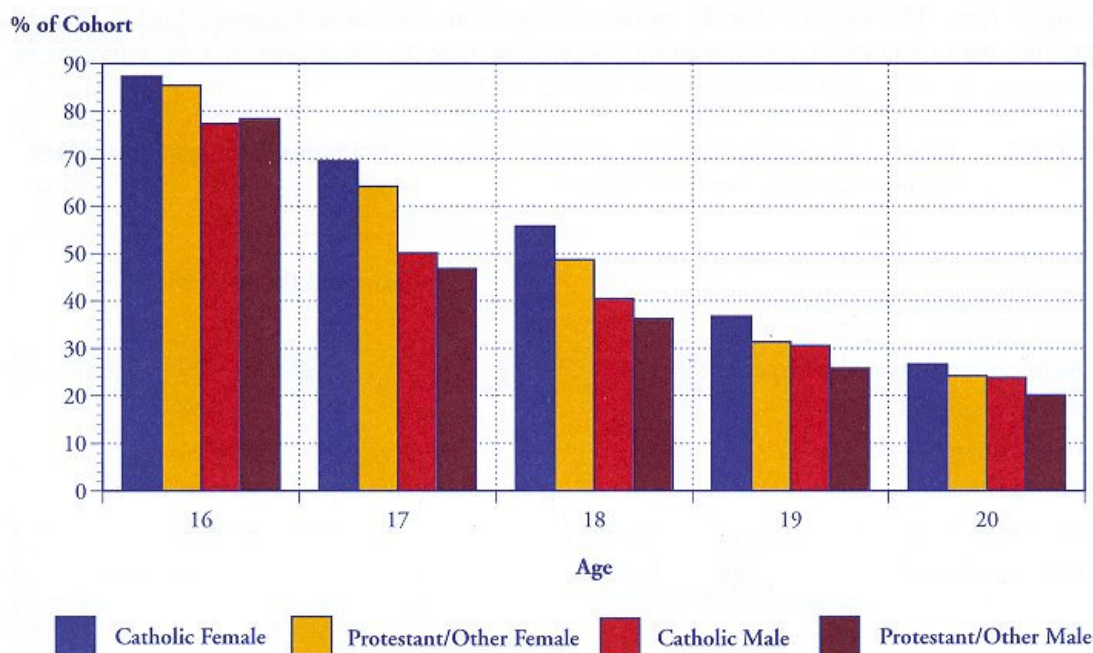
4. School performance measures such as the attendance rate and overall school examination results, are strongly related to whether or not young people chose to remain in full-time education after the compulsory age. Thus, young people who attended schools which performed relatively well up to 5th form are more likely to remain in full-time education after the compulsory age. This is the case even after controlling for a range of related factors such as, for example, the fact that young people who attend 'good' schools are more likely to come from families which encourage them to remain in education, and are more likely to perform well in GCSE examinations themselves. These results suggest that there is something associated with the 'culture' of such schools, for example, the attitudes and aspirations of teachers and pupils, which encourages young people to remain in full-time education. It was interesting that many of the schools in Northern Ireland which have performed relatively poorly according to the standard indicators, are attended by young people from the urban areas of Belfast and Londonderry. This reinforces the need to target educational investments, for both primary and secondary schools, towards the most economically depressed areas, many of which are in inner city areas.

### **Sex and religion differences**

5. Generally speaking, girls are more likely to stay on in full-time education than boys, and Catholics are more likely to stay on than Protestants. The differences in participation by gender are significantly greater than the differences by religion. For example, data from the 1991 Census show that for 17 year-olds, the difference in the participation rates for males and females was 17 percentage points, and this compared to a difference of 5 percentage points between 17 year-old Catholics and Protestants/Others.

### **Figure 2**

#### **Educational Participation by Sex and Religion in Northern Ireland**



6. Catholic females tend to have the highest propensity to participate in full-time education and Protestant/Other males have the lowest propensity; in between these two are Protestant/Other females and Catholic males (Figure 2). One implication of the difference in participation rates is that the true extent of religious unemployment differences in Northern Ireland does not become apparent until after the age of 18. In particular, the religious unemployment gap for 16 and 17 year-olds is very small compared to that for adults, and much of this can be explained in terms of 16 and 17 year-old Catholics being more likely to participate in education or vocational training post-16. Therefore, there is a sense in which some young people who remain in education or enter vocational training schemes post-16, particularly young Catholics, are 'hidden unemployed' since they only begin to appear on official unemployment statistics after the age of 18.

### **Influence of family background factors**

7. Young people whose parents are employed, particularly in non-manual occupations, have relatively high educational participation rates. This can largely be understood in terms of either an income effect (ie that there is less pressure on such young people to begin to contribute to household income post-16) or else an attitudinal effect (eg that the parents of such young people are likely to have stayed on in post compulsory education themselves and so may encourage their offspring to do so). One important implication of these findings is that relatively poor educational standards seem to be transferred, to some extent, between successive generations, and this suggests that certain policy interventions may be required in order to break such cycles. For example, the findings suggest that if adult unemployment could be reduced, educational participation rates amongst young people are likely to increase. The findings also raise the issue of financial support for young people from low income families who wish to remain in full-time education. There is some evidence, from other research, albeit of a qualitative nature, that some young people in Northern Ireland leave full-time education mainly as a means of securing the allowance of around £30 per week, which they get from participating on vocational training programmes. This suggests that the current arrangements for financial support for low income families with children in post-compulsory education may, in some cases, not be sufficient to encourage disadvantaged young people to remain in education.

**Table 2: Parents' Economic Activity and Educational Participation amongst Secondary School Pupils in Northern Ireland**

	<b>Educational Participation rate</b>
Father in non-manual occupation	63.7 (n=135)
Father employed full-time	57.9 (n=345)
Father unemployed	50.4 (n=196)
Mother employed full-time	63.7 (n=149)
Mother unemployed or economically inactive <sup>1</sup>	49.7 (n=366)
Father and mother both employed full-time	64.2 (n=133)

Source: Status 0 Survey

**Notes:** <sup>1</sup> This is mainly comprised of young people who described their mother's main activity as "housework"; it also includes a small number in the sample whose mothers' activity was described as retired, "other" and "don't know". The numbers for n refer to the sample size. Educational participation includes young people either at school or FE.

### **Methodology**

8. An important aspect of the study involved comparing the experiences of young people in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. In order to do this a detailed literature review of existing studies was conducted. In addition four local data sets were used; the 1991 Census of Population; the DENI School Leavers Survey, the T&EA 5th Form Destinations Survey, and the Status 0 survey. Econometric analyses were also conducted.

### **The Project**

9. The project was commissioned by DENI from the Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre at a cost of £13,634.

### **Full Report**

10. The full report entitled 'Staying on in full-time education in Northern Ireland: an economic analysis', DENI Research Report Series No. 7, by David Armstrong of the Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre is available free of charge from DENI.

***This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views it contains are not necessarily those of DENI.***

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