

Men in Northern Ireland: Report 4 November 2004

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ARK is a joint project between Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster. Its aim is to make material on the social and political life of Northern Ireland available to the widest audience.

www.ark.ac.uk

The Men's Project within Parents Advice Centre aims to increase awareness of the issues facing local men and boys and to promote their social inclusion.

www.mensproject.org

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All reports are available online on the ARK and Men's Project websites.

Men and education

Key facts

- In 2002/3, 67% of males aged 16 or 17 attended full-time education, compared with 77.1% of females.
- In 2001/2, 30.9% of males and 47.7% of females left school with 2 or more A-levels, and
- 8.1% of males and 3.4% of females left school with no GCSEs.
- 39.4% of Northern Irish students in Northern Irish universities are male.
- Males are less likely than females to obtain a formal qualification, but more likely than females to hold the highest qualifications (above first degree level).

Participation in education

In 2002/3, approximately two thirds of males aged 16 or 17 years (67%) attended full-time education, which is lower than the participation rate for females (77.1%). However, both these figures are higher than in 1998/9 - 62.1% for males and 75.2% of females. Table 1 shows that the proportion of females attending school was much higher than that for males. In contrast, one in five males (22%) attended Further Education college for Jobskills courses, in comparison with only 2.9% of females.

Table 1: Location of full-time courses, 2002/3

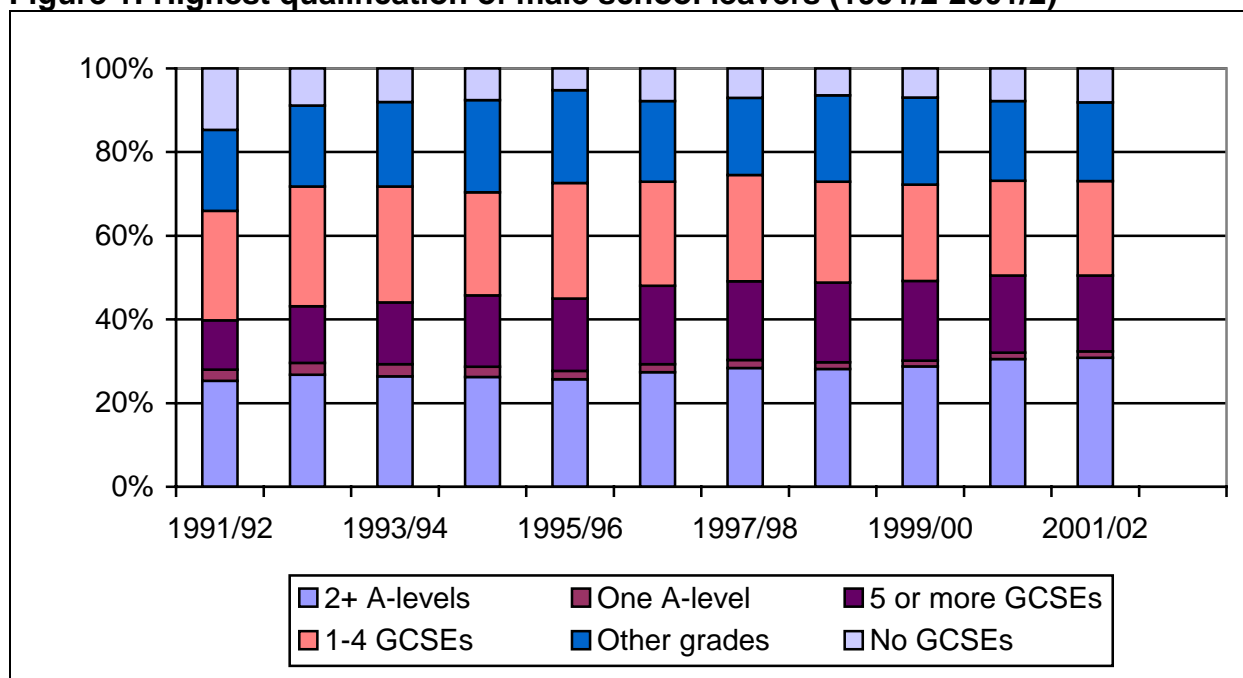
	% of male students	% of female students
School	56.1	70.3
Further Education College	42.8	29.7
<i>Mainstream course</i>	21.8	26.8
<i>Jobskills course</i>	22.0	2.9
Total number of students aged 16/17	18,596	20,532

Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland

School leavers

Figure 1 shows that there has been a steady increase in the proportion of male school leavers achieving two or more A-levels (or equivalent qualifications) from 25% in 1992 to 30.9% in 2001/2. However, nearly half of female schools leavers (47.7%) had the same level of qualifications. At the same time, the proportion of males leaving school with no GCSEs was 8.1% in 2001/2. Compared to this, only 3.4% of females leaving school in 2001/2 did not achieve any GCSEs. Whilst there appears to be a noticeable decline in the proportion of males leaving school without any qualifications over the previous ten academic years, it is noteworthy that this figure had actually risen again from an all-time low of 6.4% in 1998/9.

Figure 1: Highest qualification of male school leavers (1991/2-2001/2)



Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland (excludes special and independent schools)

The lower proportion of males leaving school with A-levels is reflected in the destinations of school leavers. Table 2 shows that in 2001/2, a higher proportion of males went into employment, unemployment and training (including Jobskills). However, more females went to Institutions of Higher Education and Institutions of Further Education.

Table 2: Destinations of school leavers, 2001/2

	% male	% female
Institutions of Higher Education	27.9	42.4
Institutions of Further Education – higher education courses	0.3	0.7
Institutions of Further Education – other courses	23.9	28.8
Employment	14.7	10.5
Unemployment	5.2	4.0
Training	26.7	12.1
Unknown	1.2	1.4
Total number of students aged 16/17	12,811	12,193

Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland (excludes special and independent schools)

University enrolment

One consequence of the data highlighted so far is that among students from Northern Ireland enrolled at Northern Irish universities for degree courses in 2001, the ratio of male to female students was 2:3. In particular, only one third of part-time undergraduate students (33.7%) was male (see Table 3). A study by Collins et al. (2001) confirmed that males had lower aspirations than females to follow a higher education path.

Table 3: Enrolments of N Irish students on higher education courses at N Irish institutions

		Total	% male	% female
Undergraduate	Full-time	28,100	42.0	58.0
	Part-time	14,997	33.7	66.3
	All	43,097	39.1	60.9
Postgraduate	Full-time	2,516	42.2	57.8
	Part-time	3,461	41.1	58.9
	All	5,977	41.6	58.4
All Students	Full-time	30,616	42.1	57.9
	Part-time	18,458	35.1	64.9
	All	49,074	39.4	60.1

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency, December 2001 (provisional)

Gender and educational courses

Table 4 provides evidence of the survival of traditional educational subjects for males and females in higher education. (Higher Education is defined as a course leading to a qualification above A-level standard. This includes postgraduate study, first degrees, BTEC Higher National Diploma (HND) and Certificate (HNC) courses and a number of professional qualifications.) Enrolment in subject areas which are often seen as traditionally 'male' is mostly by males. For example, in 2002, 60 times more males than females enrolled in courses relating to construction, built environment and civil engineering. On the other hand, ten times more females than males enrolled in higher education courses in health and social care, and eight times more females than males enrolled in administration and office skills courses.

Table 4: Enrolments on higher education courses (full-time and part-time), 1 November 2002

Subject group	Number of males	Number of females	% male
Administration & Office Skills	440	3,284	11.8
Agriculture	101	236	30.0
Applied Science	4,909	8,198	37.5
Art & Design	1,161	2,021	36.5
Business & Management	2,880	5,588	34.0
Construction, Built Environment & Civil Engineering	6,686	161	97.7
Distribution - Retail, Wholesaling & Warehousing	198	418	32.1
Education	2,684	3,112	46.3
Electrical/Electronic Engineering	1,461	44	97.1
Hairdressing & Beauty	117	4,094	2.8
Health & Social Care	762	7,644	9.1
Hospitality	1,304	1,852	41.3
Information & Communication Technology	6,492	9,726	40.0
Leisure, Tourism & Recreational	954	1,080	46.9
Mechanical Engineering & Manufacturing/Processing	3,721	312	92.3
Media & Communication	1,658	2,146	43.6
Mining, Oil Extraction & Quarrying	14	0	100.0
Motor Vehicle & Transport	1,209	359	77.1
Total number of enrolments	36,751	50,275	42.2

Source: Department for Employment and Learning, Further Education Statistical Record

Highest level of qualification

Statistics from the 2001 Census of Population show that in Northern Ireland the discrepancy between those aged 16-74 years having a higher degree and those with no qualifications is larger among males than among females (see Table 5). Whilst slightly more males than females hold a higher degree or NVQ 5 (or equivalent), 43.9% of men compared with 39.5% of women hold no formal qualification at all.

Table 5: Highest level of qualifications

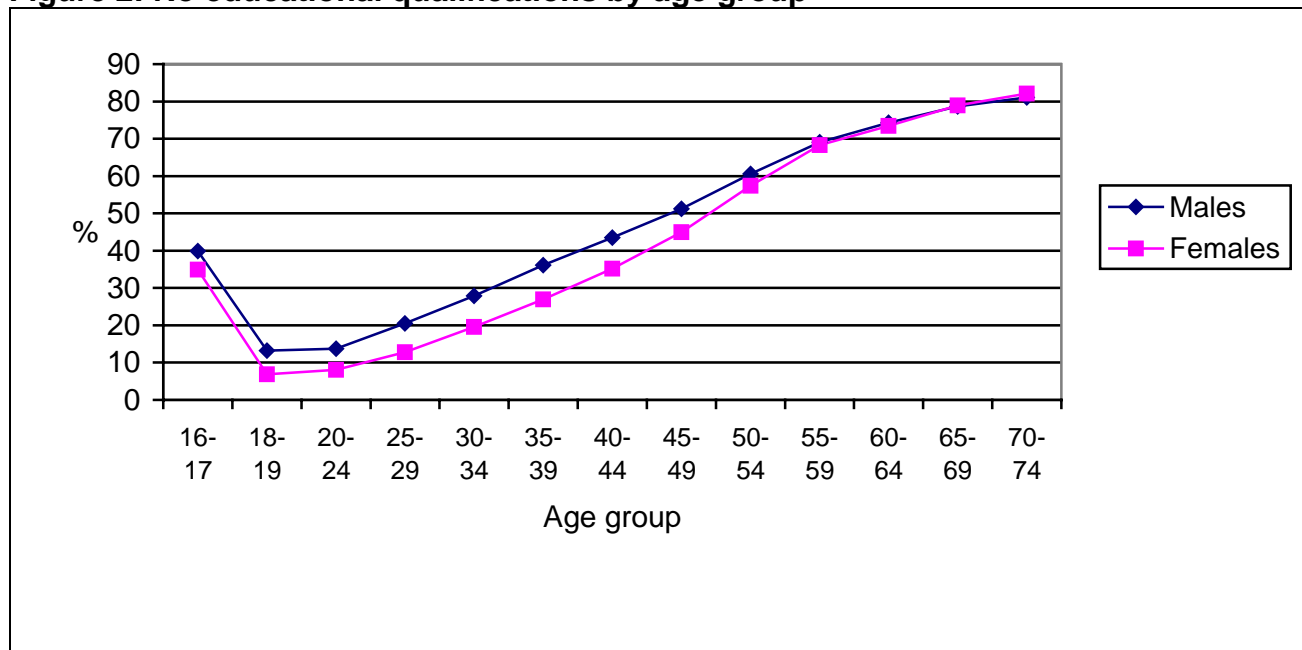
	% aged 16-74 years	
	Male	Female
No qualification	43.9	39.5
Level 1: GCSE (grades D-G), CSE (grades 2-5), 1-4 CSEs (grade 1), 1-4 GCSEs (grades A-C), 1-4 '0' level passes, NVQ level 1, GNVQ Foundation or equivalents	17.2	17.2
Level 2: 5+ CSEs (grade 1), 5+ GCSEs (grade A-C), 5+ '0' level passes, Senior Certificate, 1 A-Level, 1-3 AS levels, Advanced Senior Certificate, NVQ level 2, GNVQ Intermediate or equivalents	14.2	18.4
Level 3: 2+ A-Levels, 4+ AS levels, NVQ level 3, GNVQ Advanced or equivalents	8.2	9.7
Level 4: First Degree, NVQ level 4, HNC, HND or equivalents	11.0	10.8
Level 5: Higher Degree, NVQ level 5 or equivalents	5.4	4.3
Total number aged 16-74 years	581,232	605,847

Source: 2001 Census of Population

Figure 2 shows that the proportion of men and women with no qualifications increases with age. In addition, with the exception of those aged 65 years or over, men in all age groups are more likely than women to have no qualifications. However, the statistics for 16 and 17 year olds are somewhat deceiving because many 16 year olds had not sat their GCSE exams during the Census period.

There are many possible explanations for the discrepancy of educational achievements between men and women. One explanation includes the survival of traditional models of masculinity focusing on the male role as the main breadwinner of the family. Since this was traditionally based on 'male' jobs in manufacturing, construction and traditional trades, high educational aspirations were not paramount. Other explanations focus on the 'feminisation' of the classroom, especially the high proportion of primary school teachers who are female. In recent years, the focus on examinations has been replaced by continuous assessment, which is often seen as being more suitable to 'female' styles of learning. Recently there has been an increased awareness of the continuous under-performance of young men in school and efforts have been made to address this. However, a publication by the Equality Commission shows that sex-typing is still an every-day occurrence from as early as primary school age (Knipe et al., 2002).

Figure 2: No educational qualifications by age group



Source: 2001 Census of Population

Attitudes

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey explored issues relating to education. In 2000, there was support for the idea that schools should encourage pupils to train for non-gender specific jobs: 68% of men and 79% of women agreed that schools should encourage girls to train for jobs which were traditionally men's jobs, and similar proportions (68% of men and 76% of women) said that schools should encourage boys to train for jobs which were traditionally women's jobs. Just over one third of respondents believed that boys don't think that getting qualifications is important.

More generally, decreasing class size was seen as the most favoured way of improving both primary and secondary education. Both male and female respondents thought that the 11+ puts too much pressure on 10 and 11 year olds, although there was agreement that selection has to happen at some time.

Useful sources of information

Collins, K. et al., 2001, 'Participation Rate in Further and Higher Education', Jordanstown: University of Ulster (www.equality.nisra.gov.uk/archive/Publications/Religion/partrate.pdf).

Knipe, D. et al., 2002, 'Betty the Builder, Neil the Nurse. Sex-Typing of Occupations in Primary Schools', Belfast: Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

www.ark.ac.uk/nilt The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey included a module on attitudes to, and experience of, education in 1999, 2001 and 2003, as well as men's issues in 2000. Tables of results by age and gender are available online.

www.ark.ac.uk/ylt The Young Life and Times Survey includes questions on respondents' experiences of school. Tables of results by age and gender are available online.

www.delni.gov.uk The Department for Employment and Learning for Northern Ireland is responsible for higher education.

www.deni.gov.uk The Department of Education for Northern Ireland provides facts and figures relating to education on its website.

www.equality.nisra.gov.uk The Equality Research and Information website produced by NISRA was designed with the aim of collating and disseminating statistics and research relevant to equality of opportunity and its promotion within the public sector. Data are disaggregated by all Section 75 equality groups, including gender.

www.nisra.gov.uk The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is Northern Ireland's official statistics organisation. The NISRA website contains a comprehensive range of official Northern Ireland statistics and survey information.

www.nisra.gov.uk/census/start.html Background information, as well as data, are available online for the 2001 Census of Population.