

## Educational Migration and Non-return in Northern Ireland

May 2008

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (hereafter “the Commission”) in 2007 contracted the Employment Research Institute at Napier University, Edinburgh to collect and summarise research on Educational Migration and Non-Return in Northern Ireland. This update provides a summary of the key findings.

### In Brief ...

- In 2005/06, more Roman Catholic (40%) than Protestant (34%) students progressed to higher education. This was influenced by a number of factors, including different levels of educational attainment, aspirations and culture.
- For all school leavers, regardless of religion or community background, the share of girls (44%) continuing on to university was much higher than that for boys (31%).
- There is a clear link between the level of deprivation in the area in which a student lives and the likelihood of progressing to Higher Education.
- In 2005/06, 29% (2,736) of NI school leavers migrated to study in Great Britain. The total number of Protestants (1,217) and Roman Catholics (1,148) was broadly similar. However, Protestants (34%) were proportionately more likely than Roman Catholics (23%) to migrate.
- Factors that influence educational migration include personal choice, level of affluence and higher education policy. There is little recent evidence of political “chill factors” impacting on educational migration.
- Around two-thirds of Northern Ireland students who studied in Great Britain do not return to Northern Ireland in the short-to-medium term.
- Factors that influence graduate migration include employment opportunities, local ties to regions and knowledge of other regions.

### Introduction

The main aim of the research was to understand the key patterns and drivers of educational migration and non-return and the impact of this on the religious composition of the pool of qualified labour available to employers in Northern Ireland.

The research methods used in this study were an examination of existing research on educational migration and non-return and the analysis of a number of data sources on higher education by factors such

as religion, community background (Protestant, Catholic, Other), sex and socio-economic status.

In considering patterns, the research sought to profile those who progress to Higher Education before examining the composition of those who stay, migrate or return. The research then sought to summarise key drivers of student migration and graduate return so as to better understand potential impacts on the Northern Ireland labour market.

## Progression to Higher Education

### Religion and Progression to Higher Education

In 2005/06 a larger proportion of Roman Catholic (40%) than Protestant (34%) school leavers progressed on to Higher Education <sup>1</sup>. By contrast Protestant school leavers (32%) were more likely than their Roman Catholic counterparts (24%) to go on to Further Education (see Fig 1).

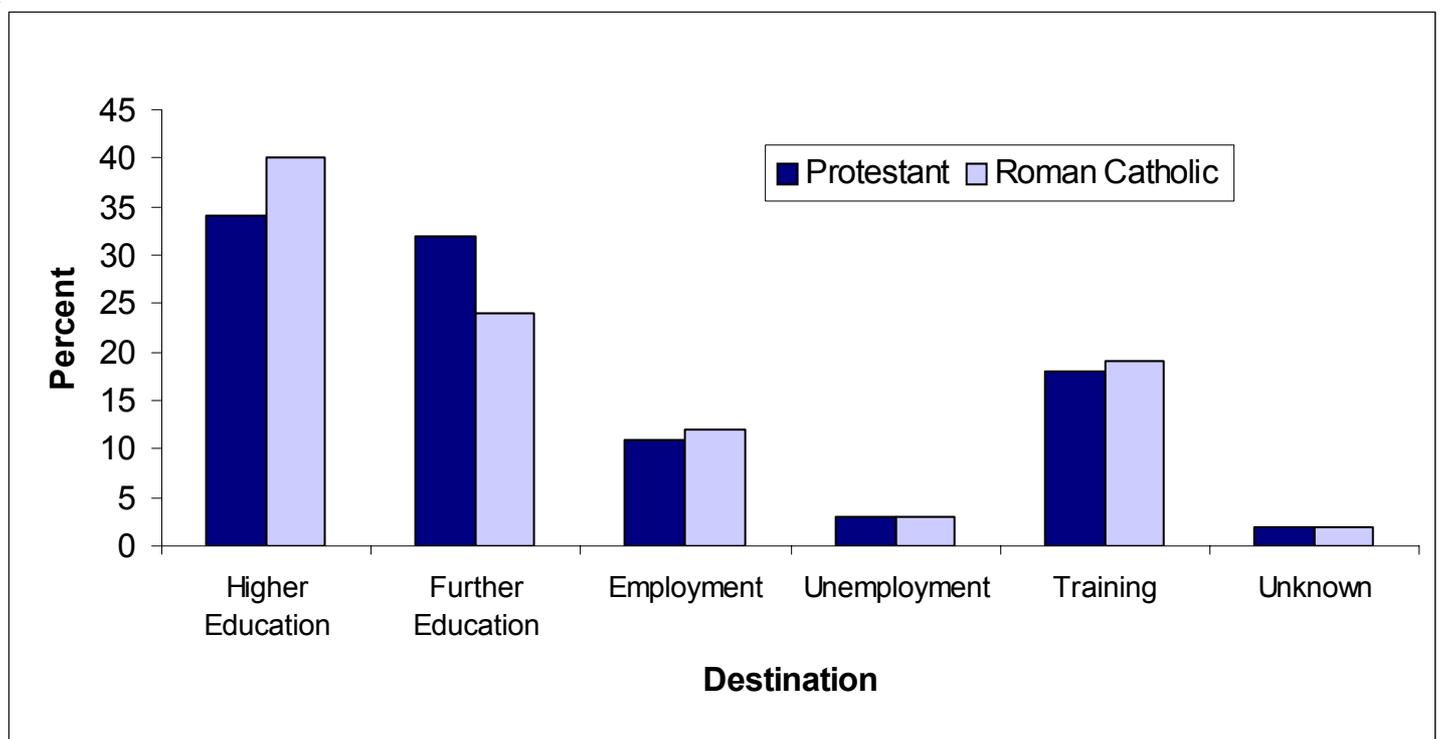
This may be due to a number of factors, for example:-

- Roman Catholic students were more likely to have obtained the grades needed to enter university. In 2005/06 Roman Catholic school leavers (47%) were more likely to have two or

more A-levels on leaving school compared to Protestants (42%) <sup>2</sup>.

- There may be differences in aspirations towards university between the two communities. Previous research <sup>3</sup> conducted in the Belfast Education and Library Board Area suggested that year 12 pupils from Roman Catholic communities may be more likely than Protestants to aspire to “University only”, whereas Protestant pupils were more likely to consider a broader range of options including “None” (Neither FE or University), “FE only” or “Both” (University or FE).
- Similarly, research <sup>4</sup> has suggested that there may be cultural barriers to continuing in education facing boys from poorer Protestant communities. Interviews carried out with teachers and community leaders highlighted that many disadvantaged Protestant communities were still adjusting to the fact that there were no longer the same opportunities available to school leavers in manufacturing. In addition, the research found that there was less support from parents of disadvantaged Protestant boys regarding continuing their education.

Fig 1: Destinations of School leavers by religion, 2005/06



Source: DENI School Leavers Survey, 2006

It is also of note that the Roman Catholic population has a younger age profile than the Protestant population: in 2001, 41% of Roman Catholics compared with 31% of Protestants were aged less than 25 years. By contrast, 17% of Protestants were aged 65 years or over compared to 10% of Roman Catholics<sup>5</sup>. As a result, more young Roman Catholics may be available in the population to enter Higher Education and subsequently employment.

## Sex and Progression to Higher Education

For all school leavers, regardless of religion or community background, the share of girls (44%) continuing on to university was much higher than that for boys (31%)<sup>1</sup>.

When community background and sex were considered, girls from Roman Catholic backgrounds went to university in the greatest numbers, whereas boys from Protestant backgrounds were least likely to go to university.

This may be due to a number of factors:-

- In line with UK patterns and trends over the past number of years, girls are more likely than boys to have obtained the grades needed to attend university. In 2005/2006, 53% of girls in Northern Ireland obtained 2 or more A-levels, compared to 38% of boys<sup>1</sup>.
- Previous research<sup>4</sup> has indicated that girls are more likely to aspire towards university than boys.

## Profile of Students who Study in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has two major universities, namely: the University of Ulster and the Queen's University of Belfast.

In 2005/06, 71% (6,566) of Northern Ireland's school leavers chose to remain in Northern Ireland for their undergraduate study<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, Northern Ireland domiciles accounted for 91% of all first year, full-time undergraduate enrolments at the two local universities in 2006<sup>6</sup>. This also highlights that Northern Ireland is

a small destination in the UK Higher Education context, and indeed it stands out across the UK as having the joint largest imbalance between number of regional resident students accepted to Higher Education and the number of places available in that region.

When community background was examined, proportionately more Roman Catholics (77%) than Protestants (66%) and "Others" (51%) studied in Northern Ireland. In absolute terms, Roman Catholics comprised 59% (3,852) of all school leavers entering local universities, Protestants comprised 36% (2,331) and 'Others' the remainder (383)<sup>1</sup>. Despite increasing enrolments to NI institutions, the proportion of Roman Catholics to Protestants has not changed for a number of years<sup>7</sup>.

With regards to gender, more girls (3,777; 58%) than boys (2,789; 42%) progressed to Higher Education institutes in Northern Ireland. However, when considered as a proportion of all girls or all boys in the cohort, there was little gender difference (70.3% versus 71% respectively).

## Profile of Students who Migrate to Study in Great Britain

Around 29% (2,736) of students who live in Northern Ireland left to study in universities in Great Britain in 2006. The majority of students who went to GB, studied in England (18%) or Scotland (11%) with only 1% of students studying in Wales (see Fig 2). Despite the geographical closeness of the Republic of Ireland (ROI) to NI, less than 2% of NI students study at universities in ROI<sup>6</sup>.

When community background was examined, the total numbers of school leavers from Protestant (1,217) and Roman Catholic (1,148) communities migrating to study in GB were broadly similar. However, when expressed as a proportion of all Protestants or Roman Catholics in the cohort, Protestant school leavers (34%) were more likely than those from a Roman Catholic background (23%) to study in GB.

Also of note was that almost half (49%, 371) of those whose community background was recorded as "other" went to GB.

With regards to gender, in absolute terms more girls (1,597; 58%) than boys (1,140; 42%) migrated to university in GB. However, when considered as a proportion of all girls or all boys in the cohort, there was little gender difference (29.7% versus 29% respectively).

### Profile of Graduates who Return to Northern Ireland

The main data source for examining the destination of graduates is HESA's Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Institutions. There is a distinct absence of large scale data on religion or community background from HESA and UCAS, meaning that it is not directly possible to identify the religion or community background of graduates who return to Northern Ireland. Consequently, it is difficult to quantify the impact of graduate migration and non-return by community background and to quantify any impact on the pool of graduate labour available to NI employers.

It is, however, possible to examine the overall flows of graduates to and from Northern Ireland using HESA data. In considering location of university attended, six months after graduation 96% of graduates of

Northern Ireland universities remained in Northern Ireland<sup>8</sup>.

Although care must be taken for consistency of data, HESA statistics indicated that 29% of Northern Ireland students were studying in Great Britain, while 6 months after graduation some 19% were in Great Britain; this suggests that a net 10% of all Northern Ireland domicile students (but nearly a third of all those studying in GB) returned to Northern Ireland. Research<sup>9</sup> has found little evidence on the effect of community background on the likelihood of graduates returning to Northern Ireland after graduation, or in the longer-term.

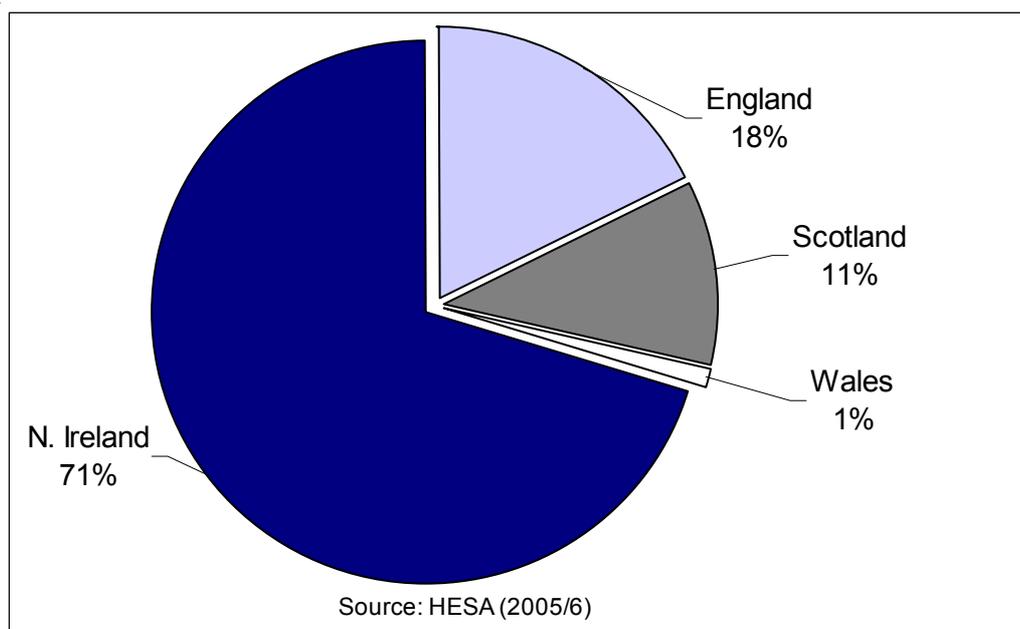
### Factors that Influence Student Migration to Great Britain

A number of issues that influence NI students to migrate to GB for study were identified. These included:-

#### Socio-economic status

Research<sup>10</sup> has found that middle-class families have been better able to take advantage of increasing educational opportunities; and that working-class families' decision-making in relation to participation in

Fig 2: Destinations of NI domiciled undergraduates



N.B. figures are rounded and may not add to 100%.

post-compulsory education is affected by a range of factors, such as risk aversion, which make them more conservative in the choices they make.

### Social disadvantage or deprivation

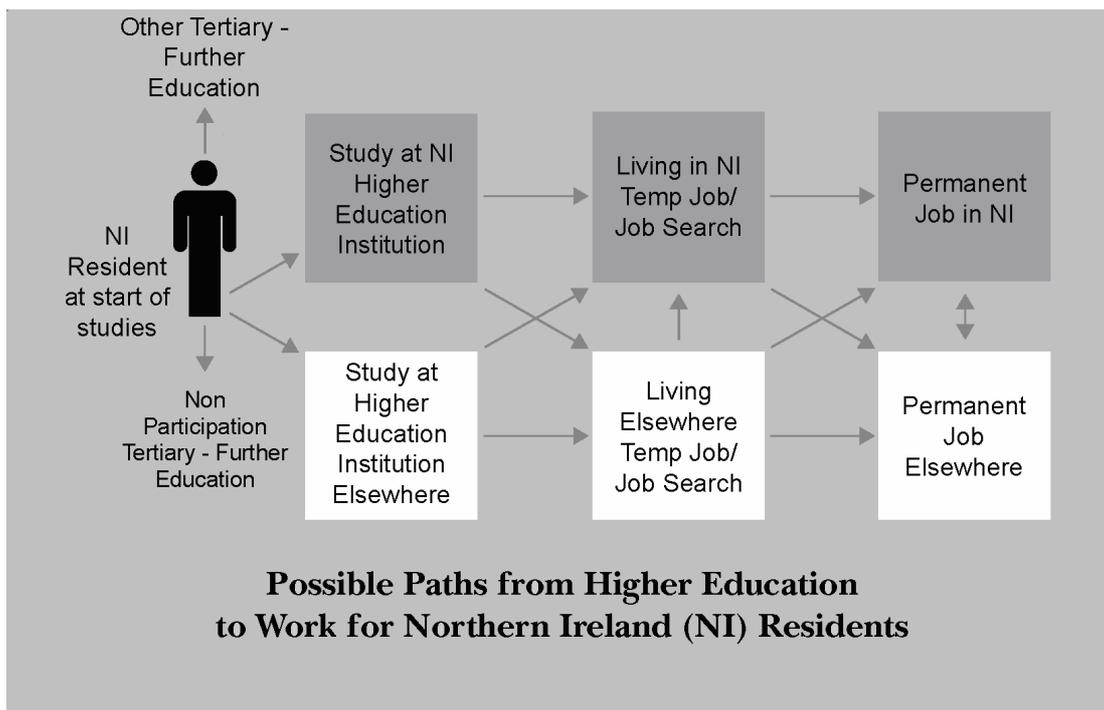
There is a clear link between the level of deprivation in the area in which a student lives and the likelihood of going to Higher Education. In terms of educational migration, 11% of those enrolling in GB Higher Education institutes were from the most deprived 20% (quintile) of super output areas in Northern Ireland. In contrast, 30% of those migrating to GB came from the least deprived quintile. Statistical analysis of Local Government District data found a correlation between deprivation level and out-migration rates, indicating that students from more affluent areas were more likely to migrate to GB for higher education. The analysis also found that students were more likely to migrate in areas where there are more Protestants than Roman Catholics, irrespective of levels of deprivation.

### Higher Education Policy in Northern Ireland

Higher Education policy in Northern Ireland can be seen to have had an impact on educational migration. In particular, the Maximum Aggregate Student Number <sup>11</sup> (MASN) limits the number of university places in Northern Ireland. Three main effects of MASN have been identified:

1. students with poor 'A' levels do not apply to Northern Ireland universities and so leave to study in GB;
2. school leavers, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, do not go to university at all, as they perceive that they would not be able to secure a place in a Northern Ireland university and furthermore could not afford the costs associated with studying away from home in GB; and,
3. students from other parts of GB might come to Northern Ireland if there were more places available.

Changes to student funding, introduced in 2006, are likely to have an impact on student migration behaviour. It has been argued <sup>4</sup> that these changes will affect those from higher socio-economic groups who would have traditionally left to study in GB but now opt to remain in Northern Ireland. Although recent evidence from UCAS <sup>12</sup> suggests that the number of students applying to NI universities from lower socioeconomic groups is holding up, this should continue to be monitored. In addition, the socioeconomic composition of those migrating to study in GB should be considered.



## Political 'Chill' factors and local universities

There is little recent research with regards to the extent that political 'chill factors'<sup>13</sup> have an impact on the community composition of either of the two main universities in Northern Ireland. That which exists (for example, Osborne et al. 2006<sup>4</sup>) suggests that "where pupils see discrimination existing it is in terms of class differences as opposed to different religious backgrounds".

## Factors that Influence Graduate Migration (including non-return)

Previous research<sup>14</sup> has stated that graduate migration is associated with a number of factors including where students think employment opportunities may be open to them, local ties to regions and knowledge of other regions. Evidence<sup>15</sup> suggests that:-

- it is those Northern Ireland graduates with the highest and lowest degrees that are the most likely to leave Northern Ireland to find employment.
- Amongst Northern Ireland graduates who studied in GB, it is those who get the lowest degrees that are most likely return to Northern Ireland.

Other research<sup>9</sup> has found little evidence that religion or community background has an effect on the likelihood of graduates returning to Northern Ireland after graduating from GB universities or in the longer term.

## The Impact of Educational Migration on the Labour Market

Overall, the number and proportion of graduates in the labour market in NI, GB and most developed countries, has been increasing in recent decades. In NI the number of graduates of working age has nearly doubled from 83,000 in 1995 to 155,000 in 2005<sup>16</sup>. Graduates in NI are more likely to be employed in the Public Sector than the UK as a whole, and are less likely to be

employed in higher earning sectors of ICT, Finance and Business.

In general, there is a lack of suitable available data on the religion/community background of graduates. Without robust data it was thus not possible to consider the extent to which graduate migration and non-return contributed to patterns evident within the Northern Ireland monitored workforce.

The research opted to examine the community composition of graduate level jobs, using SOC groups 1, 2 and 3 as a proxy for types of employment that might be expected to require a degree level qualification<sup>17</sup>. Analysis showed that Protestants accounted for the greatest proportion of both the public and private sector workforces, but that increases in employment share in the period examined (2004-2006) were primarily from the Roman Catholic community.

Assuming similar rates of non-return of graduates by community background, the overall share of graduates in Northern Ireland from a Roman Catholic background would be expected to increase<sup>18</sup>. Similarly, it might be expected that the share of graduates in Northern Ireland who are female will increase over time<sup>19</sup>. This highlights the issue of progression to university as important in determining the availability of graduates for the NI workforce.

## Recommendations

A number of recommendations were made regarding changes to data on higher education and employment, policy on higher education and employment and the need for future research.

## Data on Higher Education

Data from UCAS and HESA provide a very rich source of information for examining educational migration in the UK by social class, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, domicile, university, subject studied and graduate destination. However, neither UCAS nor HESA collect data on religion, making it difficult to examine the relationship between migration and community background for NI students studying in GB. Questions on religion in UCAS and HESA datasets would be useful in analysing the impact of educational migration and

non-return on the share of Protestants, Catholics and Others in the graduate labour force.

In Northern Ireland the share of Protestants, Catholics and Others in employment is, by law, monitored by employers. Working with employers to collect further data on characteristics of graduate appointees on a wider range of grounds, including highest qualification, university attended and age structure, could provide a greater insight into the impact of migration on patterns and trends in the monitored workforce.

### Policy on Higher Education

Although Protestants are proportionately more likely to migrate for study than Roman Catholics, there are also many Protestants who do remain in Northern Ireland but do not progress to university. While we know social class to be a predictor of access to Higher Education, this is particularly the case for boys, and those boys from less affluent Protestant communities, who are least likely to attend university. Widening access to Higher and Further Education for those from lower socio-economic groups may encourage individuals to attend university who otherwise may not have considered this as an option. One such example might be the greater use of more flexible forms of learning such as part-time study. This would not affect the MASN as part-time students are not counted in this.

### Attracting Graduates for Employment

Most regions in developed countries use the presence of a large pool of well qualified graduates as a major attraction in bringing in investment and aiding local development. Given the known trend for graduates to remain in their university region, it is therefore surprising that the policy in Northern Ireland is to limit the numbers of graduates educated in Northern Ireland universities (both local domicile and GB students) through the MASN cap. Whilst there are issues associated with graduate underemployment, this should not be seen as necessarily outweighing the benefits of attracting graduate labour for the economy.

### Future Research

Overall, there is a complex association between the migration of NI students to GB for study and the community composition of the NI workforce. The linking of datasets from UCAS and HESA and also the School Leavers Survey (DENI) is likely to provide further detail

on educational migration from school to first graduate destination. Although community background is important, gender, social class and levels of deprivation may also contribute. Hence, more research is needed on the differences in characteristics, barriers and aspirations within and between the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities that effect participation in Higher Education, educational migration and non-return.

### Endnotes

1. DENI (2007). Qualifications and destinations of Northern Ireland school leavers 2005/06. *DENI Statistical Press Release*, May 2007.
2. It should, however, be noted that Roman Catholics were also more likely to have limited or no qualifications compared to Protestants, for example, in the same year 7% of Roman Catholic boys left school with no GCSEs compared with 5.3% of Protestant boys.
3. Collins, K., McAleavey, G., Adamson, G., Donegan, H (2006). *Participation rates in Further and Higher Education*. DELNI: Belfast.
4. Osborne, B, Smith, A and Hayes, A. (2006). *Higher Education in Northern Ireland: A Report on Factors Associated with Participation and Migration*. OFMDFM: Belfast.
5. NISRA. 2001 Census of Population
6. DELNI (2007). *Higher Education: a statistical profile of Northern Ireland Higher Education 2005/06*. DELNI: Belfast.
7. DELNI (2005) *Northern Ireland domiciled Higher Education applicants: an analysis of UCAS data – 2003/4 academic year*. DELNI: Belfast.
8. Analysis of HESA 'Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Institutes 2005/06' database.
9. MacGregor, P., McKee, P., Thanki, R. (2003). From University to Employment – Experience of the 1991 NI cohort. *DEL Labour Market Bulletin 17*, pp147-153.

10. DWP (2007) 'Factors influencing social mobility' (Authors: Nunn, A. et al.), *Research Report No. 450*. DWP Corporate Document Services, Leeds.
11. The MASN was introduced in 1994 in order to contain what was seen as escalating public expenditure on student costs. It was subsequently abolished in England in 2002/03 but remains in place in Northern Ireland.
12. [http://www.ucas.co.uk/website/news/media\\_releases/2008/Final-2007.doc](http://www.ucas.co.uk/website/news/media_releases/2008/Final-2007.doc)
13. In Northern Ireland, the term 'chill factor' has developed to summarise the concept of a desire to reduce or avoid interaction with a person, place or organisation as a result of attributes that are negatively perceived. In practice the term is often associated with negative perceptions relating to community background.
14. For example Bond, R. & Grundy, S. (2006). *Scottish Graduate Migration and Retention: a case study of the University of Edinburgh 2000 cohort*. Scottish Executive: Edinburgh.;
15. Purcell, K., Elias, P., Davies, R., Wilton, N. (2006) *Northern Ireland's graduates: the classes of '95 and '99*. DELNI: Belfast.
16. DETINI (2005). Graduates in the Labour Market in Northern Ireland, 2005. *DETI Labour Market Statistics Bulletin*. National Statistics; Newport.
17. Caveat – graduates may enter employment below SOC group 1-3, and conversely, not all employees in those SOC groups will hold a degree.
18. Reflecting the community background composition of the Northern Ireland universities.
19. In 2005/06 the gender composition of NI universities was 61% female, 39% male (HESA, 2007).

### Contacting the Equality Commission

If you need information or advice or would like to request copies of our publications, please contact our Enquiry line at:

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You can also use Typetalk to contact us.

The full research report 'Educational Migration and non-return' is available for download from [www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)