

DIFFERENCES IN ATTAINMENT BETWEEN PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC SCHOOL LEAVERS

1. Examination of the qualifications of school leavers, reveals that Protestants have attained proportionately more higher level qualifications than Catholics (Table 1). For example, 12% of Protestants leaving school in 1988 had 5 or more 'O' levels, compared with 10% of Catholics. Moreover, a higher proportion of Catholics (24%) than Protestants (19%) left school with no qualifications. As can be seen from Table 1, there has been, over time, a general pattern of rising levels of qualifications among school leavers and a narrowing of the difference in educational attainment between Protestants and Catholics.
2. It should be noted that this difference in educational attainment is largely due to the imbalance in the proportions of Catholics and Protestants attending Grammar schools. Indeed, few differences in attainment are found when like school (Secondary, Intermediate, Grammar) is compared with like. The difference between the two communities in the proportions attending Grammar schools can be attributed to:-
 - (a) proportionately more Protestants than Catholics taking advantage of the review and fee-paying systems to gain grammar school places;
 - (b) proportionately more Catholics than Protestants self-selecting out of the grammar school system by opting not to take up the places on offer.
3. The two communities also differ in the type of subjects which they study. Examination passes obtained in Protestant schools are weighted towards science subjects, whereas examination passes obtained in Catholic schools are weighted towards the humanities, languages and arts subjects. For example, while 26% of Protestant pupils were studying science at 'A' level in 1989, the corresponding Catholic figure was 19%. Conversely, while 47% of Catholics were studying arts, only 39% of Protestant pupils were doing so (Table 2). As with levels of attainment, differences in the subject profiles of the two communities have been converging over time.

TABLE 1

SCHOOL LEAVERS' QUALIFICATIONS BY RELIGION - 1975 AND 1988

	1975		1988	
	PROTESTANT	CATHOLIC	PROTESTANT	CATHOLIC
3 or more 'A' levels	11.8%	7.5%	17.3%	15.1%
2 'A' levels	5.5	5.6	5.9	6.4
1 'A' level	3.6	3.3	3.8	3.3
5 or more 'O' levels	9.3	7.8	11.5	9.5
1-4 'O' levels	18.3	17.3	23.4	22.5
CSE Gr. 2-5	10.9	12.1	19.0	19.1
No qualifications	40.6	46.4	19.2	24.1

TABLE 2

A LEVEL SUBJECT CHOICE - SCHOOL CENSUS 1989

	SCIENCE	ARTS	MIXED
PROTESTANT	25.8%	38.8%	35.3%
CATHOLIC	18.5%	47.2%	34.3%