



Northern Ireland  
**Statistics &  
Research**  
Agency

Equality Statistics  
file

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**FROM: EDGAR F JARDINE**  
**Chief Executive**

**18 JULY 2000**

**PS/MR NESBITT**

### UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

1. At the conclusion of our meeting with Mr Nesbitt on 16 June I agreed that NISRA would reflect on the terminology used to describe the differential unemployment rates of Protestants and Roman Catholics and report back. We are due to have a 'round table' discussion in the near future to help achieve consensus on the wider issues surrounding employment equality issues. This note is therefore concerned with the narrower issue of terminology.
2. NISRA reports regularly on the economic activity of Protestants and Catholics drawing on data from the Labour Force Survey. These reports, published under the title "Labour Force Survey - Religion Report", describe rates of economic activity, inactivity, employment and unemployment for Protestants and Catholics in the years to which the data relate. As this work has been on-going for a number of years, tabular information showing trends over time are also included.
3. While these reports contain a range of relevant and interesting data, the respective unemployment rates of the two communities, and in particular the ratio of Catholic and Protestant unemployment rates tends to be a focus of particular interest. In round figures the unemployment rate for Catholic males tends to be more than twice the rate for Protestant males, for females the Catholic rate is about 1.5 times higher and the overall ratio is around 2:1. In describing this difference NISRA has typically reported that "Catholics are twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestants".
4. Mr Nesbitt's concern is that this wording may create the impression that there is inequality in terms of employment flows ie disadvantage (or lower

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success rate) in securing jobs. He noted that Connor Murphy and others had, in a recent debate, made the direct (causal) link between higher Catholic unemployment and discrimination. Mr Nesbitt believed that using the term "twice as likely" inadvertently encouraged such an interpretation.

5. By using the term "twice as likely" we were simply trying to state that the unemployment rate of Catholics was twice the Protestant rate; we had not construed our terminology as inferring that Catholic and Protestant job applicants do not have the same chance of getting a job (indeed that the two communities do have similar success rates is confirmed by the analysis of applicants and appointments undertaken by the Equality Commission). However, it would not be our intention to use potentially ambiguous language to describe fair employment statistics or to use terms that may give rise to inferences we would not wish to make. I do not therefore believe that there is a point of professional or statistical integrity at stake in using alternative terminology when referring to the difference in unemployment rates between Protestants and Catholics. This would imply substituting "twice as likely" by stating that "the Catholic unemployment rate is twice the Protestant rate". However, as the Minister will be aware, the complexities and subtleties associated with fair employment statistics and not generally well understood and it is still possible that unwarranted conclusions will be drawn from the revised terminology.
6. I look forward to our forthcoming discussions. I would be happy to arrange for NISRA to make a short presentation to inform our discussion if Ministers would find that helpful. Perhaps you could let me know if this would be desirable.

*[Signed]*

*Edgar Jardine*

**EDGAR JARDINE**