

‘Between Two Places’

A case study of the Irish-born people living in England

By

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Executive Summary

Despite net in-migration to Ireland in the last years of the twentieth century, large numbers of Irish people continued to leave the country on an annual basis (29,000 is the estimate for 1999). Their primary destination was England where, according to the last British Census (1991), the Irish are the largest ethnic minority in England. This report reveals the findings of a case study of Irish emigrants living in England, drawing on data from a variety of sources including the British census, surveys, focus groups and interviews with employees of Irish agencies in England. The research was conducted by Dr. Nessa Winston of the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University College Dublin for the Irish National Committee of the European Cultural Foundation.¹

While most of the emigrants in the study said that their move to England had provided them with opportunities, many had encountered problems in terms of integration, prejudice and discrimination. Almost half of our respondents felt that they had been discriminated against because they were Irish. To understand these and other problems they experienced, it is important to emphasise that stereotypes of Irish people in England are negative, the most common being drunkards, lazy, stupid, violent, and/or fraudsters. These stereotypes had a significant impact on the lives of the emigrants in our study.

¹ The European Cultural Foundation is an independent, non-governmental organisation committed to the wider development of European integration with a special emphasis on culture. It operates two networks throughout Europe, one being its National Committees and the other consisting of independent Institutes. It conducts programmes and fosters initiatives which help people living in Europe to understand and respect the different cultures and traditions which constitute the European experience.

Another important factor affecting their experiences was the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, in particular Irish paramilitary activity in England. Even those who had no experience of discrimination were highly sensitive to the potential impact of the Troubles on their lives in England. All of the above can result in Irish emigrants having a low level of confidence when relating to English people. The study finds that many played down their Irishness in certain situations such as during Irish terrorist campaigns in England; when travelling through airports or ferry terminals; when contact with the police or other officials was likely; and/or in job interviews. Playing down one's identity can produce considerable strain for those involved and may have health implications. The study highlights startling statistics on the physical and psychological health of the Irish in England. For example,

- mortality rates for Irish-born people in England and Wales exceed those of all residents of England and Wales by 30% for men and 20% for women.
- Irish men and women were much more likely to be admitted to hospital for psychiatric treatment than people from any other group. Rates of depression for Irish-born men and women were about two and a half times those of their native-born counterparts. In terms of alcohol-related disorders, Irish-born men had nine times, and women seven times, the rate of English-born people.
- Irish people in Britain had a mortality rate for suicide which was 53% above that of the native-born rate.

The explanation for this relatively poor health of Irish people in England is linked to negative experiences as an emigrant, poor working conditions, diagnosis of Irish patients using stereotypes of Irish people and the reluctance of Irish people to make demands on the health care system in the early stages of an illness or health related problem. Further research in this area is essential.

The study also outlines a number of other important policy-related problems faced by Irish people in England. The most pressing problems are:

1. The relatively large elderly population with poor health who are socially isolated, in particular, men who worked in construction.

2. Vulnerable young people who arrive in England with few resources and a variety of problems. They often have a low level of education and, according to the voluntary agencies who assist them, many are not 'job ready'.
3. Homelessness. A number of studies reveal that the Irish are over-represented among the homeless in Britain.

One of the positive findings of this research is that the social standing of the Irish in England has improved significantly in recent years. This is linked to the decline of Irish terrorist activity in England, the peace process in Northern Ireland, the Celtic Tiger economy, and the very visible success of Irish (and second generation Irish) people like Seamus Heaney, Martin McDonagh and of shows like Riverdance. These positive representations of Ireland allow Irish people to raise their heads and be proud of both their Irish cultural identity and of Ireland as a country.

Main Recommendations

1. Regular monitoring of the situation of the Irish in England by the relevant statutory and voluntary authorities in England, including the Census, health authorities, housing providers and the Commission for Racial Equality.
2. Adequate funding must be provided for voluntary agencies working with Irish emigrants in England.
3. Regular contact between the Inter-departmental committee on Emigration and voluntary agencies working with Irish emigrants in England, including the provision of resources to support this collaboration.
4. The establishment of a taskforce on emigration and emigrants to examine practical measures to prevent involuntary emigration and to facilitate the integration of vulnerable emigrants.

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Chapter One: Emigration - The Central Issues

1.1 Background to the study

Since its inception in 1957, the European Union has promoted the ‘free movement’ of its citizens to live and work in any of its member states. However, little attention has ever been given to the effect of intra-European relocation on those who move. Even the term used to describe it, ‘migration’, is one which seems to underplay its significance. It is, in fact, *emigration*, the physical transfer of a person to a new jurisdiction and culture in which the ‘immigrant’ becomes a minority, different, to a greater or lesser extent, from the host community. Emigration can have both positive and negative effects on those who relocate, as well as on the sending and receiving countries. For the emigrant, relocation may provide a new life with opportunities for advancement but, it may also have social, cultural and psychological effects, such as culture shock, social isolation, stereotyping, racism and discrimination. Another important issue is whether or not emigrants can retain their national culture and identity in their new environment.

This study examines the above issues by exploring the situation of Irish people living in England. Despite a robust economy at the turn of the new century, emigration from Ireland continues to be significant. Most emigrants still go to England where they are currently the largest ethnic minority. It is often argued that the Irish and the English are so similar in terms of language and culture that Irish people could have little difficulty integrating into English society. However, Ireland has a distinctive cultural identity which embraces its history, language, religion, literature, music, sport, geography, landscape and way of life, each of which is different from its English counterpart. One example of this is language. While the language spoken by most Irish people today appears to be English, it is, in fact, ‘Hiberno-English’, a mixture of Irish, the first ‘official language’ of the

country, and English, its second ‘official language’.² Another example is sport, where Gaelic football and hurling are unique to Irish culture.

A study of the experiences of Irish emigrants in England is important for a number of reasons. First, it provides an example of intra-European relocation and an examination of the adaptation of people who undertake such a move. The fact that the two countries have a history of a common labour market makes this case study particularly interesting for people concerned about European integration. Second, Ireland’s status as a former colony of England and the Troubles in Northern Ireland add a political dimension to Anglo-Irish relations which could have negatively impacted on the lives of Irish people in England. This argument is supported by recent research conducted for the British Commission for Racial Equality (1997) which reveals that discrimination is a real problem for many Irish people. In addition, a recent article in the *British Medical Journal* reveals disturbing physical and mental health statistics for the immigrant Irish population.³ Despite these findings, and given the extent and duration of Irish emigration to that country, surprisingly little research has been conducted on the experiences of the Irish in England. This study addresses this gap in knowledge by exploring integration and identity issues for Irish emigrants living in England today. It refers only to the situation of *Irish-born* people living in England but, for simplification, this is often shortened to *Irish* people. The study examines England rather than Scotland and Wales, as the experiences of the Irish in each country are likely to be different and each location deserves separate attention. Furthermore, for the most part, the research focuses on the Irish in London because this is where the majority of the Irish in England live and London is the destination for the vast majority of recent emigrants to that country.

In 1991, a report on the economic and social implications of emigration from Ireland commented that a comprehensive analysis of the integration of Irish emigrants in Britain was ‘urgently required’ (NESC 1991:180). While a number of studies have examined

² There are differences between the two languages in terms of vocabulary and grammar. See Dolan (1998) for a discussion of this subject.

³ For more details on this, see Chapter Two.

assimilation and identity issues for the Irish in England, many of these were limited in some way and yield conflicting results. Some are historical (e.g. Jackson 1963; O'Connor 1972; Swift and Gilley 1983). Others were completed prior to the large-scale Irish emigration to England in the 1980s and, therefore, this important group is not included in the analyses (Walter 1984; Ullah 1985). Others focus on one particular group, such as the working class (e.g. Hickman 1995), graduates (Cappock 1996), or readers of the *Irish Post* (O'Connell 1993). Thus, it is not surprising that these studies show conflicting results.

Our study contributes to the NESC's request for more knowledge on the topic because it is the first to provide original, contemporary and comprehensive data on integration and identity issues for the Irish in London. The research involved the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data which facilitated a more complete understanding of these emigrants. It provided us with statistics about the emigrants and also detailed explanations which elaborate on the meaning of those statistics. Furthermore, our study is the first to include a survey sample which reflected the actual Irish population in London in terms of age, gender and occupational distribution. Finally, to supplement our own data we have additional original data on a sample of young Irish people living in England, collected by the Economic and Social Research Institute of Ireland and donated to our study for analysis. These data had never been analysed prior to the publication of this report.

1.2 Research questions

This study addresses the following questions in relation to the Irish in England:

1. How do Irish emigrants perceive Irish identity and culture?
2. To what extent do they retain their identity and culture while living in England?
3. What are the characteristics of those who retain their identity and culture in England?
4. To what extent do Irish people integrate into English society?
5. What are the characteristics of those who integrate into English society?

6. For those who do not integrate, does Irish identity retention impede integration into English society?

1.3 A note on terminology

Ethnic and cultural identity

Emigrants, to a greater or lesser extent, have an ethnic cultural identity which encompasses their national history, language, arts, religion, sport and way of life generally. This identity may be formed or refined when the emigrant comes into contact with people from another ethnic background (Barth 1969; Mach 1993). That is, a person's ethnic identity is a dynamic social process whereby the strength of one's identity is open to change depending on the circumstances in which the emigrant is situated and, in particular, the people with whom the emigrant is in contact. Therefore, an emigrant may emphasise his/her identity, de-emphasise it or conceal it (if possible), depending on the environment. This study explores the circumstances in which of these situations occur for Irish people in England.

Ethnic or national culture refers to those cultural traits which emigrants perceive themselves to share with members of their own ethnic group when they come into contact with people from a different ethnic background (Barth 1969). Certain cultural traits are emphasised when the emigrant wishes to distinguish him/herself from the main ethnic group with whom he/she is in contact. Given that this is the case, we explore whether or not Irish emigrants in England perceive differences between Irish and English culture and, if so, the nature of these differences. In addition, the study examines Irish cultural retention in terms of the retention of a sense of Irish identity.

Emigrant integration

The integration of an emigrant into the host society refers to his/her retaining a positive ethnic identity while participating in the new society to a relatively high degree. A number of forms of such participation were examined in this study:

- a) the formation of relationships with English people as partners, friends and colleagues
- b) joining English organisation/clubs

c) civic behaviour, namely, voting in English elections.

Emigrant assimilation

Emigrants may be said to have assimilated if they reveal a high degree of participation in the host society *and* largely reject or lose their ethnic identity and culture.

1.4 Research methodology

The research involved a case study of Irish-born people living in England. As such, it employed a number of methods to collect a variety of data on the situation of this group, including both quantitative and qualitative methods. These data include the 1991 census of Britain, responses from interviews with employees of Irish agencies in London, focus group data and a survey of Irish people living in London.

a) The 1991 Census of Britain

The 1991 Census of Britain contains a certain amount of information on the Irish-born population in England which allowed us to profile that population in term of geographic location, age, gender, occupation, social class, educational qualifications and housing tenure.

b) Visits to Irish Welfare agencies and interviews with employees

There is a dense network of Irish organisations in London which address a range of needs of Irish people there, including information, social, cultural and commercial needs.⁴ A number of these organisations offer important information and advice on housing, employment, health, education, social security and the law. Part of our research involved visits to a variety of these agencies to collect information on their services and a profile of their clients. In addition, we conducted interviews with employees in these organisations to investigate their views of the key issues facing Irish people living in London.

c) Focus groups with Irish people living in London

In September 1997, we organised three focus groups with Irish people living in the Greater London area to explore their ‘experiences of living in England’. A wide variety of emigrants took part in these groups, including those who emigrated at different times (1940s, 1950s, 1980s and 1990s), people from diverse occupational backgrounds and representatives of Irish organisations in London. The data obtained in these groups not only helped in the construction of the questionnaire for our survey, but also helped us to understand and explain some of the survey findings.

d) The European Cultural Foundation (ECF) survey of Irish emigrants in London

Between August 1998 and March 1999, we conducted a survey of 100 Irish-born adults living in the Greater London area. The survey examined Irish cultural/identity retention in terms of whether or not people see themselves as Irish; the importance to them of being Irish; their attachment to Irish heritage and their views on the importance of passing on Irish identity to children. Integration into English society was analysed in terms of the extent to which the emigrants develop relationships with English people as partners, friends and colleagues and the frequency with which they vote in English elections.

e) ESRI data on Irish people in England

Our survey data were supplemented by 1992 data on a sample of young Irish people living in England. Collected by the Economic and Social Research Institute, these data had never been analysed and they were donated to us because the young emigrants were asked questions which were particularly relevant to our study.

1.5 Outline of the report

Chapter two provides both an historical overview of Irish emigration to Britain as well as a current profile of Irish emigrants living there. Using British Census data, this profile

⁴ For a detailed list of these organisations see *The Irish in Britain Directory* (1993) produced by the Brent Irish Advisory Service and *A Guide to London for Young Irish People*, an Action Group for Irish Youth publication.

examines the Irish population along characteristics such as the size of the population, geographic location, age structure, gender, education, occupation, social class, housing tenure, amenities possessed by Irish households and health. It also outlines some of the factors affecting the experiences of Irish emigrants in Britain today.

Chapter three presents our findings in relation to the experiences and attitudes of Irish emigrants in England. First, it reveals how the respondents felt about leaving Ireland and what their experiences and feelings were on arrival in their new location. The next section presents the emigrants views on Irish cultural and identity issues, as well as the extent to which they retain that culture and identity. This is followed by an examination of the integration of respondents into English society. The last section in chapter three reveals the extent to which the emigrants experienced prejudice and discrimination while living there.

The final chapter presents a summary of the main findings and conclusions of the study. In addition, there are a number of proposals for change to a variety of Irish and English policies and services.

Chapter 2: Irish Emigration to England

Historical Perspective and Recent Profile

2.1 Irish emigration to England: an historical perspective

Emigration has been a significant feature of Irish society for much of its history. Certain periods are often associated with this emigration, such as the famine and post-famine years (the 1840s and 1850s) and periods of major unemployment (1940s-50s and the 1980s). However, with the exception of two periods, the 1970s and from 1996 to the present (2000), the reality for the country has been one of out-migration. Even when there has been net in-migration, the numbers leaving the country still remained significant. For example, in 1999, the year for which the latest figures were available at the time of writing, it is estimated that 29,000 people left Ireland (Table 1).

Prior to the 1930s, the vast majority of Irish emigrants went to the United States with only a small proportion emigrating to England (Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems 1954). However, England replaced the US as the major destination for Irish emigrants following the Great Depression in the US (1929) when severe restrictions were placed on European immigration. Emigration to England continued throughout World War II and the post-war period of reconstruction so much so that, by the late 1940s, it is estimated that over 80% of Irish emigrants were going to England. This was facilitated by the Ireland Act (1949), Section 2 (1), which continued to allow Irish citizens to enter and settle in England without restriction.⁵ This level of emigration to England continued until about the end of the 1970s (Barrett 1998; Courtney 1995). A large proportion of emigrants continued to choose England as a destination in the 1980s and, while it is somewhat less popular now, 10,200 Irish people went there in 1999, approximately twice the number who went to other EU member states.⁶

⁵ However, there were a number of unsuccessful proposals to limit immigration from Ireland before the English Parliament - these were in 1929, 1932, 1934, 1935, and 1937.

⁶ As EU membership entitles each citizen to live and work in any other member state, it might be expected that increasing numbers of Irish people would move to live and work in EU members states *other* than England. While this is certainly the case, Table 1 shows that this is still much less important than emigration

Table 1 about here.

The recent literature on Irish emigrants often distinguishes between two emigrant cohorts (Mac Laughlin 1994; Ryan 1990). ‘Old wave’ emigrants - those who left Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s - were predominantly single, with few skills and a low level of education. They came ill prepared, with no job, money or accommodation (Ryan, 1990:48). By contrast, ‘new wave’ emigrants - those who left in the 1980s and 1990s - had higher levels of education and a higher socio-economic status, as is shown below.

2.2 A profile of Irish emigrants in England

The Irish are the largest ethnic minority in England (Commission for Racial Equality 1997; Owen 1995).⁷ Based on the 1991 Census, it is estimated that there were 845,057 Irish-born people living there at that time, suggesting that the Irish are the largest census-defined ethnic group in England, just ahead of the Indian population (823,821).⁸ If second generation Irish are taken into account, the most accurate estimate places the size of the Irish community in England alone at 2.7 million (Commission for Racial Equality 1997).⁹

Geographic settlement patterns of the Irish have changed over the years. Irish people who went to England in the 1950s tended to settle in the midland cities, like Birmingham and

to England. In 1999, only 16% of Irish emigrants moved to other EU member states compared with 35% who went to the England.

⁷ The NESC report points out that they have been the single largest immigrant group in England since the first census in 1841 (NESC 1991).

⁸ The 1991 census of England, with questions about ethnic group and country of birth, provides the most accurate and complete data on the Irish population in England. However, there is a problem of under-enumeration involving about 1.2 million people. In 1991, the actual number recorded were 837,464 people born in Ireland (1.5% of the population). Of these, seventy-three percent (592,550) were born in the Republic and 27% (244,914) in Northern Ireland. The SARS (Sample of Anonymised records) provides details of a 1% sample of households and 2% sample of households which enables us to get figures for the Irish population on a number of dimensions, such as the number of Irish people in each age group by gender and occupation.

⁹ SARS reveals that 1.95 million people lived in households where either the household head or his/her partner had been born in Ireland, though this is considered to be an underestimate of the numbers in the second generation (Commission for Racial Equality 1997).

Coventry, for example, while more recent emigrants settled in the South East (Table 2). The largest Republic-born population in 1991 was in London (Appendix Table 1). The reasons for this change in destination are probably linked to perceived employment opportunities as well as migrant networks.

Table 2 about here.

Owing to the large number of people who left Ireland for England in the 1950s, the Republic-born population is characterised by its relatively large number of ‘older middle-aged people’ (Table 3). These older Irish people tend to be in occupations traditionally associated with the Irish population in England, such as construction and domestic work (Appendix Tables 2-3). However, young Irish-born people (18-29 years) are over-represented in the highest occupation categories, namely, higher level managerial, administrative and professional work. Young Irish men are also over-represented in low-skilled work, not in the traditional construction jobs but in the personal social services.¹⁰

Table 3 about here.

The 1991 census also shows that Irish-born people are over-represented in Social Class V, the lowest grouping, more so than any other major ethnic group in England (Appendix Table 4). Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest that the Irish do not experience upward mobility at the same rate as the rest of the population (Commission for Racial Equality 1997).

In terms of education, Irish women are over-represented in terms of higher level qualifications, compared with the rest of the English population, whereas Irish-born men are somewhat under-represented in this regard (Table 4). However, when age is taken into

¹⁰ The CRE report points out that the young men missing from the Census enumeration are mainly in the casual labourer category (Commission for Racial Equality 1997).

account, young Irish men have a very high level of education, but this falls with age. On the other hand, Irish women have higher levels regardless of age.

Table 4 about here.

In regard to housing, the Irish-born are under-represented in owner-occupied housing and over-represented in private rental and local authority housing compared with the rest of the population (Table 5). The fact that the Irish are over-represented in private rented housing is cause for some concern as this form of housing tenure is considered to be the lowest quality housing available in England. This finding is supported by data on rates of overcrowding, where it is revealed that the Irish rates are almost twice those of the population as a whole. In London, Irish headed households have among the highest rates of poor amenities, especially shared facilities and lack of central heating. Furthermore, car-ownership, often used as an overall measure of standard of living, is much lower than average in Irish-headed households (Appendix Table 5).

Tables 5 about here.

Finally, in any discussion of housing and the Irish, it is important to highlight the issue of homelessness. Many studies reveal that the Irish are disproportionately over-represented among the homeless in London (Bennett 1991; NESC 1991; Randall 1990). The NESC report (1991) expressed some concern about this issue and the relatively large proportion of young emigrants with low levels of education who end up homeless in London. They noted that many of these young people come from deprived families, leave school early, perhaps get involved in criminal activity and then emigrate. Irish organisations in London emphasise that these problems are still of concern to them. To prevent these young people continuing on a 'cycle of deprivation', Irish policymakers need to address these problems. However, the issue of poor quality housing is one for the relevant English policymakers and local authorities.

Elderly Irish people in England

Many Irish organisations in London emphasise the problems faced by elderly Irish people living there, particularly those of older men (e.g. Tilki 1998). Many of these men never intended to settle in England and did not make provision for their old age. In most cases, these older men worked in construction, lived alone in poor quality accommodation, usually a bed-sit or boarding house, working long hours on the sites. They were often paid in cash, in a pub, some of which would have been sent back to family members in Ireland, with another portion spent in the pub. As elderly people, they have little money, continue to live alone in poor quality accommodation, with many suffering from depression. They are considered to be extremely independent with some social workers referring to them as ‘service refusers’.

Health of Irish in England

There are serious concerns about the physical and psychological health of the Irish in England. The evidence for this is as follows:

- mortality rates for Irish-born people in England and Wales exceed those of all residents of England and Wales by 30% for men and 20% for women (Haskey 1996). Some of this may be linked to class factors but it has also been shown that Irish men have higher mortality rates than other men in England regardless of social class (Marmot, Adelstein and Buluso 1984).
- the 1991 census shows that 17 per cent of Irish-born people have a long-term illness compared to only 12 per cent for all residents of Britain. For Irish men, the figure is 18 per cent compared to 12 per cent for men in Britain as a whole. The rates are higher regardless of age (Owen 1995).
- in both the 1971 and 1981 Mental Health Enquiries, Irish men and women were much more likely to be admitted to hospital for psychiatric treatment than people from any other group (Bracken et al 1998). Rates of depression for Irish-born men and women were about two and a half times those of their native-born counterparts. In terms of alcohol-related disorders, Irish-born men had nine times, and women seven times, the rate of English-born people (Bracken et al 1998).

- in the period 1988-92, Irish people in Britain had an age-standardised mortality rate for suicide which was 53% above that of the native-born rate (Harding and Balarajan 1996).

The explanation for this relatively poor health of Irish people in England has been linked to both economic and cultural factors including:

- low economic circumstances and the poor working conditions of manual labourers
- diagnosis of Irish patients using stereotypes of Irish people commonly found in English culture¹¹
- a ‘collective insecurity about their identity’ contributing to the reluctance of Irish people to make demands on the health care system in the early stages of an illness or health related problem¹² (Kelleher and Hillier 1996).

It is likely that the full explanation involves each of these factors to some extent and demands further research to tease out the causes of poor health among the Irish community in England. This issue was beyond the scope of our study. However, the importance of a secure collective identity for health further underlines the importance of our investigation into the identity of Irish emigrants in England and its relationship with their integration into English society. Before turning to examine the results of our study, it is important to note that there are a variety of factors which may affect the experiences of Irish emigrants and Anglo-Irish relations in England.

2. 3 Factors affecting the experiences of the Irish emigrants in England

Historical factors

From a historical perspective, there are issues for both Irish people living in England and English people. For the Irish, memories of a colonial past contribute to a sense of

¹¹ For a discussion of stereotypes of the Irish see Chapter 3.

¹² It has been suggested that there is some reluctance among Irish people in Ireland to visit a doctor for non-serious illness (McCluskey 1989).

grievance and an experience of deprivation. For the English, Irish immigration was perceived, in many parts and at various times, as a threat to the local labour market and a cause of social problems (Hickman 1995; Jackson 1963; O'Connor 1972; Swift and Gilley 1983). These historical factors are likely to affect how the English and Irish view each other, how they feel when they come into contact with one another and how they treat each other. Consequently, they will affect the identity and integration of the Irish in England.

'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland

The events of the past thirty years in Northern Ireland are likely to have affected the way in which the Irish are received and perceived by the English, especially when Irish paramilitary activity, such as that of the Irish Republican army (IRA), occurred in England. In fact, the Report of the Commission for Racial Equality (UK 1997) notes that the Troubles contributed significantly to experiences of prejudice and discrimination against the Irish there.

British policies and practices

Following the death and destruction caused by IRA bombs in Birmingham, Guildford and Woolwich, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was introduced in Britain in 1974. This Act gives examining officers at ports and airports the power to stop and interrogate an Irish person simply because he or she is Irish. The impact of such powers and their use on Irish emigrants is likely to have been considerable. The Commission for Racial Equality's Report (1997) on the Irish in England highlights the difficulties stemming from this Act for Irish people such as the high incidence of being stopped and searched at airports or seaports, including high ranking professionals and Government ministers.

Chapter 3

The Experiences and Attitudes of Irish Emigrants in England

This chapter examines the experiences and attitudes of Irish emigrants living in England with a particular focus on integration and identity issues which arose for them. The analysis drew on data from a number of sources:

- the results of our survey of Irish emigrants in London
- previously unanalysed survey data collected by the ESRI
- qualitative data obtained in the course of our interviews
- qualitative data from focus groups conducted with Irish people living in London.

It is important to note that most of the analysis refers to the experiences emigrants have had while living in London. However, many of the respondents had lived in other locations in England too and, at times, the discussion drew on events or incidents which occurred outside London.

3.1 Leaving Ireland

A broad range of factors affected the decision of Irish people to go to England and many of these were revealed in the qualitative data. Some fell under the category of ‘pull’ factors, such as leaving to improve one’s economic or employment situation; to pursue higher education; following a partner; or being attracted to England in search of adventure or the relative anonymity of a large English city. There were also the ‘push factors’, people ‘escaping’ from Ireland or feeling ‘forced to leave’ the country. Some examples here included:

- people who were disillusioned with Ireland (e.g., those who viewed the system of taxation as ‘punishing’ and forcing them to leave)
- people fleeing situations of abuse (e.g. people who had experienced domestic violence)
- those who were forced to leave, such as people from Northern Ireland expelled by paramilitary organisations or people from the Republic who had been involved with drugs and compelled to leave by vigilantes.

For some people both push and pull factors motivated them to emigrate. Finally, some went to England without much thought at all.

According to our survey data, the *main* reasons for leaving Ireland were employment related. That is, most people went to England either to get a job, a better job or a better salary (Table 6). Not surprisingly, there were some people who reported that they left primarily for the sake of adventure (20% of our sample and 13% of ESRI sample).

Table 6 about here.

Although there are a number of organisations in Ireland available to give advice regarding emigration matters, their services were not utilised by the vast majority of people in our sample (Appendix Table 6). However, many people had family and/or friends in England who could act as an important resource in the search for accommodation and employment. For example, the ESRI data revealed that three-quarters of that sample had arranged some form of accommodation prior to their departure and almost a third (30%) had organised a job (Table 7).

Table 7 about here.

3.2 Arrival in England

Despite not seeking help from organisations in Ireland *prior* to their departure, the vast majority of respondents received help in looking for employment and accommodation on arrival. Again, the data reveal the key role of networks as a resource in the lives of emigrants. For example, friends and family were extremely important in the search for accommodation (Appendix Table 7). Similarly, many of the emigrants stated that contacts were the most important source in terms of finding their first job in England (Appendix Table 8).

Our data revealed the importance of what the literature refers to as ‘chain migration’ in the movement of Irish people to England, that is, one person emigrates and friends, family, and/or neighbours are facilitated to follow. For example, two-thirds of the emigrants in our study had Irish relatives in England when they arrived and a third of the sample had close friends there (Table 8). Initially, many (61%) stayed with friends or relatives who were Irish or of Irish descent (appendix Tables 9 and 10).

Table 8 about here

The qualitative data also reveal some interesting stories that elaborate on this process of chain migration. For example, there are accounts from people who emigrated in the 1950s following their siblings, friends and neighbours over to England. These people supported each other in terms of finding jobs and accommodation and, consequently, their first accommodation was often in an Irish neighbourhood and the first job in an Irish setting. It was in this way that ‘Irish neighbourhoods’ developed. Many people associate the 1950s emigrants with either construction work or nursing. Indeed, the Irish were hugely over-represented in these occupations at the time. In both cases, chain migration was in operation, though the circumstances were very different. Young Irish women often followed their sisters, other female relatives and/or friends into nursing in England with everything organised for them before they left Ireland, such as the in-hospital training and accommodation within the Nurses Home. Once there, they worked hard, sending money to their families in Ireland. Nevertheless, many described the thrill of having money for luxuries like stockings and going to the Irish dancehalls. Generally, these early days were remembered by the young women as being very exciting.

The story of the construction worker was different. Many left Ireland knowing other Irish people in England with jobs on the building sites. On arrival, they stayed with Irish people, getting a job on the sites through Irish connections and then, often, moved all over the country following the construction projects. Their story is one of extremely hard labour, loneliness, and being homesick for their family as well as the Irish landscape, so

different from their new location in England. Many lived in bed-sits or boarding houses above the landlord/lady, with their only solace being meeting with other Irish people at a dance, in the pub or at mass on Sunday.

Chain 'migration' also occurred in the 1980s, though to a lesser extent. Many of these emigrants stayed with Irish friends on their arrival in England, though this was not necessarily in Irish neighbourhoods, as these later emigrants often have a negative image of these areas and dissociate themselves from them. In addition, some of the highly educated, 1980s emigrants referred to people they knew from their college days in Ireland meeting in groups around London. There were also a number of Irish University Graduate Associations in London in the 1980s which provided a social focus and useful network for those emigrants.

In the early stage of emigration, approximately one half of our respondents (51%) did not think it would be hard to fit in. However, a third thought it would be difficult and 15% were unsure about this (Table 9).

Table 9 about here

3.3 Culture, identity and the Irish in England

Emigrants, to a greater or lesser extent, have an ethnic or cultural identity which encompasses their national history, language, arts, religion, sport and way of life. This identity is often discussed as if it were purely ascribed. That is, by birth and socialisation a person takes on their ethnic heritage and identity. However, ethnic/cultural identity is also a dynamic social process¹³, which means that it may be altered when people come into contact with people from another ethnic background, such as when they emigrate to a new country. Thus, emigrants may emphasise, de-emphasise or conceal their identity, if it is possible for them to do this, depending on how they feel the ethnic group with whom

¹³ For a detailed discussion on ethnic identity as a social process, see Barth (1969), Lyman and Douglass (1983) and Mach (1993).

they are in contact perceives them. To avoid identification, some may manipulate ethnic 'clues', such as their name or accent (Lyman and Douglass, 1983).¹⁴ For example, in some instances they may not give their surname if it indicates their identity (e.g. Murphy) and they wish to conceal that identity or they may anglicise their accent. There are, of course, restrictions on the extent to which people can manipulate their identity, including:

- circumstances in which names must be given
- people who cannot change their accent
- hair colour ('red') that can indicate identity.

Finally, some people may lack the confidence and skills to manipulate their identity when in contact with members of the dominant group.

It has been argued that Irish people place a negative value on their Irishness and feel that what is distinctively Irish is insignificant or 'peripheral' when interacting with 'more powerful' ethnic groups like the English (Tovey, Hannan et al 1989:4).¹⁵ Tovey et al (1989) attribute this to the Irish history of conquest and colonisation, a series of failures in the Irish economy and an inability to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland. However, since the publication of that work, progress has been made in terms of the peace process in Northern Ireland and the Irish economy has become so successful in the past few years that it is now the focus of much favourable international attention. Accordingly, it is likely that Irish people now have more positive perceptions of their culture and identity. As will be shown below, it is certainly true that our sample of Irish emigrants feel that the

¹⁴ Similarly, certain aspects of the group stereotype may be emphasised and others denied in an attempt to portray a positive image of the group.

¹⁵ As Tovey et al (1989) put it: 'Irish ethnicity has been shaped within a polytechnic context in which the various differentiated identities (Welsh, Scots, English etc.) were ranked according to the sequence of dominance within the earlier and larger United Kingdom. Combined with the historical experiences of conquest and colonisation, deliberate state educational and cultural policies, economic and more recently mass media dominance, this has meant that in terms of popular attitudes and feelings (though not necessarily in articulated belief or ideology) many Irish people accept a subordinate social and cultural position while the English in general assert a more dominant and prestigious one..... While the English conquest of Ireland in the seventeenth century initially aimed to be assimilationist, with the goal being that the Irish would become a part of English civilisation, this did not occur and Irish culture and identity, considered inferior, were deemed to be at the bottom of the polytechnic cultural system' (Tovey et al 1989:7-8,14).

English are now much more interested in Irish culture and, consequently, it is easier for Irish emigrants to express their identity.

Perceptions of the nature of Irish culture among Irish emigrants in London

The participants in our focus groups provided some interesting insights into emigrants' perceptions of Irish culture. When the groups were asked about Irish culture, their perceptions of it were initially vague. Many stated that their interest in it only really developed as a result of going to England. When pushed to state what Irish culture meant for them they mentioned the following: Irish music; dance; literature; oral tradition (storytelling, language); sports; and religion.

It appears that there is some distinction between the cultural attachments of those who left Ireland in the 1950s and those who left in the 1980s. One woman who works with 1950s emigrants in an Irish agency in London said the following about that cohort and culture:

People brought their image of Ireland with them and sometimes that's not quite realistic. I talk with people who are now caught in 'the thatched-cottage diddle-dee thing'... post-war emigrants, usually in the fifties, coming over to do the manual work being told their place. Having very overt racist behaviour towards them ... They learnt invisibility because they were white, so that whole pattern developed out of that. So, Ireland became their dream and our culture became their dream.

Some of the 1950s emigrants stated that they are more Irish than the Irish in Ireland. They believe that they are maintaining the true Irish culture (dancing, music etc.) while the Irish in Ireland are failing in this regard.

While the young professional emigrants appreciated Irish literature and theatre, they also linked Irish culture with what they felt were characteristics of the Irish personality such as openness, friendliness, warmth, familiarity and being artistic, as the following quotes reveal:

But there's a - and I was never really aware of this before I came over - a very separate and distinct as you call it 'culture' and you'd love to be able to very sort of rigidly define what it is, but you can't. I find myself, you know, harking back to these quiet man type of definitions of what it is to be Irish but there's still things that you recognise: as I said openness, friendliness, warmth, ability just to speak

to someone at the bus station or bus stop or whatever it is that you don't tend to get here.

And again:

You always know an Irish person because they look like they're about to say 'hello'.

The young professionals were also unanimous in their view that what they called 'plastic Irish culture' did not fit with their view of Irish culture. The 'Irish theme bar', 'imitating Irish culture' was mocked for being 'fake', 'fictional' and, in some cases, excluding Irish people. Some insisted that Irish people would never go to such an Irish bar, though a number of people joked about them in a way that suggested that they did frequent these bars.

Regardless of emigration cohort, many of the participants in our study suggested that Irish culture is increasingly visible in England, which a number of people attributed to the (re)construction and marketing of Irish culture. This quote is an example of what some felt was occurring:

Irish culture (in England) in the mid-nineties wasn't what it was in the mid eighties... what has changed?...the leading shows in the West End are the Riverdances and the Leenane Trilogies of the world, the young 'trendy' English people are drinking in the 'would be' Irish bars, listening to Irish music associating positive images with what is promoted to them as Irish culture.¹⁶

Irish and English cultures compared

Some discussion about the differences between English and Irish culture also took place in the focus groups. Many of the comparisons made between the two cultures were between Ireland of the past (urban/rural) and a large English city of the present (London). Obviously this affected much of what was said and many of the participants were aware of this.

¹⁶ Riverdance is an Irish dance and music show. The Leenane Trilogy refers to plays by a second generation Irish playwright, Martin McDonagh.

The participants in our focus groups found it much easier to talk about how Irish culture was different from English culture. Here their comments seemed to suggest that they perceived *differences in senses of the public and private domains* in the two cultures. For example, they felt that the English were less likely to pry into their personal lives than the Irish, though they recognised that this could be both positive and negative. One professional woman in her thirties referred to Irish people being more likely to pry into ‘what was going on’ and, while it could be very irritating, she sometimes missed it in England and wished that her English friends would enquire more about her personal life. Some felt that this explained why it took longer to get to know English people than it did to get to know Irish people. One of the young professionals referred to the Irish as being overly familiar, a characteristic that irritated him at times:

That's one thing that kind of annoys me in a way when I go back now (to Ireland). There's a degree of familiarity which I somehow ... you know, you call your bank-manager or something in Dublin and it's kind of 'ah hello Brian', you know, and you kind of go 'no, I don't want that. I want my problem sorted out'. 'Hello Mr Smith' would do fine, thank you very much.

Another aspect of this difference in perceptions of public-private domains concerns the participants’ beliefs that Irish people express their emotions more than the English and that they are more likely to talk about things. This was qualified by someone who thought that the English were more likely to be honest and open about topics such as divorce and sexuality than the Irish.

A related point is that the participants also felt that the Irish and English have different senses of humour as well as different ways of expressing and enjoying themselves. A young professional emigrant felt that one of the positive aspects of his stay in London was the appreciation by English friends and colleagues of this ‘wit’:

I will say something in a meeting where others wouldn't dare say it. I'll be happy to crack a joke at a time when others are not ... it has been a positive thing for me all the time that I've worked here because it's craic.¹⁷

¹⁷ ‘Craic’ is an Hiberno-English word meaning high-spirited entertainment (Dolan 1998).

Another cultural difference noted in the groups was the *different use of the English language* by English and Irish people. As mentioned above, there are differences between the two languages in terms of both vocabulary and grammar. These linguistic differences can signal their Irishness (along with the Irish accent), triggering Irish jokes, discriminatory or racist attacks. However, the Hiberno-English language was also mentioned as a cultural characteristic. As one professional woman noted:

I think coming to the English language from another language (Gaelic) that was much more descriptive, whether we speak Irish or not, makes us more descriptive in our speech, more conversational.

Another difference that was mentioned by *all* of the 1980s emigrants was that Irish culture was more *spontaneous* than English culture. Take the following discussion, for example:

Participant A We found in the beginning that you had to plan things. They're not as impromptu as things are in Ireland.

Participant B 'Let's meet for a coffee three weeks next Saturday' kind of thing. I mightn't want a cup of coffee three weeks next Saturday, kind of thing, but you plan.¹⁸

Aspects of Irish culture with which some people expressed dissatisfaction included 'begrudgery' and backbiting. The following quote from a young professional male provides an example of these sentiments:

I deal an awful lot with people in Dublin, and the back-biting and everything is much more intense than when I deal with people here and I find that a very very ... I just don't find it a very attractive environment in which to operate, you know. You can have people who are immediately open, friendly, happy, 'I love you' bla-bla-bla-bla whatever it is, but I've become slightly disenchanted how in some cases that can be quite shallow. Then there's the, you know, you walk away and you get 'Oh Jesus he's full of...'. At least in a lot of cases these people here may be very formal, they may take a long time to get to know but in a lot of cases a 'spade is a spade', they'll tell you exactly what they think.

¹⁸ A number of people had conflicting feelings about this 'planning aspect', as illustrated by this quote from a professional woman. 'The other thing that struck me is that planning things, I couldn't get a handle on that for months. You feel that everybody is too busy working out their own selves to worry about you (in England), whereas at home it's like 'Oh God, I've just made the most awful mistake' and everybody discusses it for months. But here you just do it, pick yourself up and keep moving which I also like. I think that's better because then you're allowed to develop'.

Irish identity retention

The extent to which Irish emigrants retain their Irish identity was explored in our survey by examining a number of measures:

- self-identification as Irish
- importance of being Irish before leaving Ireland, on arrival in England and today
- level of attachment to Irish heritage when they first left Ireland and now
- importance of passing Irish identity on to children.

The data revealed that nearly all of our respondents (91%) identified themselves as ‘Irish only’, while 80% of the younger, ESRI sample did so (Table 10). It is interesting to note that approximately 16% of that sample saw themselves as ‘Irish but to some extent English/British’. This may be seen as some indication of assimilation or integration.

Table 10 about here

Some studies argue that emigration resulted in a ‘knowledge and appreciation’ of Irishness for old wave emigrants (e.g. Holohan, 1995: 8). Our findings support this and suggest that it is true for both emigration cohorts with both our survey and focus group data indicating that many respondents became more aware of their Irishness and more appreciative and proud of it after they left Ireland.¹⁹ For example, our survey revealed that 37% of respondents thought that their Irish heritage was either very or extremely important on leaving Ireland while 72% felt this way about it today (Table 11).

Table 11 about here

It is interesting to note that those who *planned to return* to Ireland were much more attached to their Irish heritage than those who planned to stay in England and those who would *like to return* to Ireland were significantly more attached to it than those who

¹⁹ In our analyses, ‘old wave’ emigrants are those who left Ireland prior to 1979, while new wave are those who left since 1980.

would not like to go back (Table 12). Both of these findings suggest some degree of cultural assimilation for those who indicate that they are staying in England.

Table 12 about here

Almost all of the people we interviewed (93%) indicated that they thought it was possible to pass on Irish identity to children if living in England (Appendix Table 11). Eighty-eight per cent felt that it was either ‘very important’ or ‘important’ to do so (Table 13), though the new wave were slightly more likely to feel this way (90%) compared to the old wave (84%). There were a number of stories provided by older emigrants referring to their children not seeing themselves as Irish, having English accents and little interest in Irish culture. This was a source of some pain to many parents. However, some people mentioned children who loved visiting Ireland and anything to do with Ireland.²⁰

Table 13 about here

Regular visits to Ireland and education in Irish history were considered to be very important in terms of passing on an Irish identity to children (Table 14). Giving children Irish names was also ranked as being very important but less so, especially among the younger respondents.

Table 14 about here.

One aspect of Irish culture which was not ranked very highly in terms of passing identity on to children was the Irish language. This is no doubt related to the fact that the majority of the sample (64%) said that they never spoke the language and only a small proportion of them could understand spoken or written Irish fairly well (Appendix Table 12). The percentage who were able to *speak* Irish fairly or very well was even lower at 11 per cent.

²⁰ The issue of ethnic identity among the second-generation Irish in England is one which requires some attention by researchers.

Respondents were also asked what part of the Irish way of life is most important if Irish culture is to survive in England. The most frequently mentioned answer here was ‘Irish friendships’ (Appendix Table 13). If friendships are central to the maintenance of identity, then our results suggest that there is little cause for concern for that Irish identity in England because, as we show below (Tables 19-20), the social circles of many of these emigrants consisted of a number of Irish friends. Furthermore, in most cases, their closest friends were Irish.

For the young professionals in our focus groups, regular contact with Ireland was considered to be the only way to retain a sense of Irish culture *as it exists in Ireland*. A distinguishing feature of this group was that they were fortunate enough to be able to go back to Ireland relatively frequently.²¹ By this, and other means, they were able to keep in touch with the people, politics, culture and so on. This is summed up by the following comment from one such individual:

I think for a lot of us in similar circumstances, be it through the Internet or reading the *Irish Times* and being able to go back and forth quite frequently, you keep in touch. So Irish culture, certainly for me, is not Irish here, it's Irish culture in my home because I keep up to speed with what's happening at home.

This was contrasted with their perceptions of the situation for older, less well-off Irish emigrants in London who they felt were not in touch with the ‘real Ireland’ or ‘real Irish culture’ as it is today. However, some of the 1950s emigrants believed that they were more in touch with Irish culture than the Irish in Ireland.

It should also be noted that in our survey we found that contact with Ireland was high for both cohorts and that this contact was positively associated with attachment to Irish heritage. That is, those who had more frequent contact with Ireland were more likely to say that their heritage was ‘extremely’ or ‘very important’ to them (Table 15).

²¹ They are often referred to as the ‘Ryanair generation’, benefiting from the relatively cheap airfares of this airline and travelling to Ireland regularly.

Table 15 about here.

Many of these findings are in line with Gray's conclusion in her study of Irish women in London:

The ways in which they (Irish women emigrants) identify with their native country are linked to their presence in London and to their sense of absence from their country of origin ... Most of the women also negotiate their Irishness in relation to their perceived future location and to whether they can maintain an Irish family life for themselves either in Ireland or in England (Gray 1996:94).

'Playing it up or down': ethnic identity management and the Irish in England

It has been argued that Irish emigrants in England distance themselves from what is perceived to be a low status group (the Irish in England) and from things which are likely to emphasise their Irishness (Ullah 1985) or that they are relatively invisible because many have been forced to adopt a '*low profile*' about being Irish (Hickman, 1995: 213). We found numerous examples in our focus groups and interviews of circumstances where our respondents 'played down' their Irish identity, regardless of age, education or occupation. This involved a) not speaking to give away the Irish accent or, alternatively, anglicising the accent; b) not mentioning an obviously Irish name (Seamus); and/or c) not making any reference to Ireland or Irish culture. To explain such reactions, one must understand that:

- stereotypes of the Irish are often very negative (the Irish are portrayed as drunkards, lazy, stupid, violent, and/or fraudsters)
- the Troubles in Northern Ireland and, in particular, Irish terrorist activity in England contributed immensely to this negative image of the Irish
- the effect of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) on Irish people living in England cannot be underestimated.

Each of these is discussed in some detail later in this report.

For many of the older emigrants, playing down their Irishness had been a feature of their lives in England since the time of their arrival when they saw signs on doors saying 'No blacks. No dogs. No Irish'. Following the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act

in 1974, travelling to Ireland became an ordeal, involving interrogation, searches, and racist comments from officials at ferry terminals and airports. Both the younger and older emigrants kept a low profile about being Irish when there were Irish terrorist bombings or bomb scares in England. Similarly, both cohorts played down their Irishness in situations of contact with authority figures such as the police, customs officials, and security at airports and ferry-terminals. In addition, Irish identity was often 'played down' in job interviews. As one of the young professionals put it: 'Playing it (Irishness) down has been a matter of survival in some instances'.

It is not the case that the Irish assimilate as a result of these experiences. Given our survey results on identity retention and the high level of attachment to Irish heritage, it is more likely that Irish emigrants in England try to make themselves invisible at times, playing down their identity when in contact with certain people and at certain times. For many, the expression of one's Irishness may have been limited to the home or to times when they were with other Irish people. However, it is also likely that some people play down their Irish identity to the extent that they 'switch' identity and become anglicised over time. In both the 1950s and 1980s focus groups, there were references to people having done this.

Finally, it should be noted that some of the 1980s professionals referred to instances where they 'played up' their Irishness to their advantage, usually in the workplace. This involved emphasising the Irish accent and name, cracking jokes when others would not do so and/or making references to things Irish. The following are quotes from two participants in the focus groups:

In the environment in which I'm working there's a lot of Oxford types and suddenly it's nearly a sense of relief, 'Oh my God it's someone different', you know. A lot of the foreigners that ... again, as I say, I've a lot of French people I work with and the French immediately find themselves more attracted to the Irish than the Brits, you know, and people will remember you ... and I always find this, this is not a relatively recent thing, that they remember you in a positive sense.

And another:

One thing I would say though that being Irish is quite helpful because it does set you apart. Now even with a name like mine (stereotypical Irish name), the jokes I would get. It does set you apart and I suppose you sometimes play on it as well...if you're in a situation where you're working with and you're doing a lot of telephone work where you're talking to a lot of English people all the time and you're the only non-English person, they'll remember you. They'll make some comment about it and they'll always remember the name...I just think in my particular situation that was a little bit helpful.

It is important to stress that the only people who talked about emphasising their Irishness were the 1980s emigrants, that is, those who were more likely to be successful professionals. One indication of the changing climate for the Irish in England is the fact that the second of the above quotes is from a man who had earlier discussed his anti-Irish experiences in the 1980s, times which he described as being 'grim'. This was much less likely to happen to him now owing to an increasingly favourable atmosphere for the Irish in London in 1999.

3.4 Integration and Irish emigrants living in England

On arrival in England, Irish emigrants are faced with a new culture and an increased consciousness of their Irish identity. Thereafter, a number of possible scenarios may ensue in terms of the extent to which they participate in English society, the extent to which they retain their Irish identity and whether or not their sense of that identity is positive or negative. We have summarised these scenarios in Figure 1 below.

1) Integration: Emigrants may be welcomed into the host society and encounter no barriers to participating in it socially, economically and politically. Their Irish identity may be appreciated by members of the host society, encouraging them to express this identity freely and with confidence. This route is frequently called integration and it is a central concern of this study because it involves the emigrant retaining a positive Irish identity while also embracing and participating in the host society.

Figure 1: Participation in the host society and identity retention

Participation in the host society		
Identity retention	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Low</i>	4) Isolation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distancing from the Irish • Isolation from host society • Negative Irish identity • Possible prejudice or discrimination in host society 	3) Assimilation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative/lack of interest in Irish identity • High participation in host society • Distancing from the Irish • Possible prejudice or discrimination in past
<i>High</i>	2) Segmentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible prejudice in host society • Embraces Ireland and the Irish community in England • Positive Irish identity 	1) Integration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embraces both the host society and Ireland • Positive Irish identity

2. Segmentation: Other emigrants may arrive into an Irish area in the host society (e.g. Kilburn), facilitated by Irish family, friends or neighbours living there who provide them with a variety of resources including accommodation, employment and/or social support. People in these neighbourhoods tend to have a low level of participation in the host society and ‘emphasise their identity in the creation of new social positions and patterned activities not formerly found within the society’ (Lyman and Douglass 1983: 345). The emigrant may stay in the area because of the supports they have there or they may move elsewhere after a period of time. Some may experience prejudice and/or discrimination in the host society and, consequently, decide to remain in the enclave. Other Irish emigrants, who have not encountered prejudice, may have negative perceptions of the English and choose to stay in the enclave for this reason. When emigrants live in such areas, with little participation in the host society, and they retain a positive sense of their ethnic identity, this situation is referred to as segmentation.

3. Assimilation: Some emigrants arrive in England with either a negative Irish identity or little interest in it and proceed to distance themselves from their country and culture of origin. If they develop a high level of participation in the new society and lose or reject their Irish identity, these people may be said to be assimilated into the host society and culture. Emigrants who adopt this route may have experienced prejudice or discrimination in their early days in England or have had negative experiences of living in Ireland.

4. Isolation: Still others may have a negative sense of their Irish identity, distance themselves from Ireland, its culture and Irish people in England but also experience barriers to participation in the host society. These people may be said to be isolated from both the host society and the Irish community. It is a situation where the emigrant's cultural identity is negative and their level of social support is very low. This type of situation may have a negative effect on the emigrants' health, either mental, physical or both.

A key question concerning the integration of the Irish in England is whether or not Irish people believe that they can keep their Irish identity and also fit into English society. Our survey asked precisely that question and we found that the vast majority of respondents (89%) believed that it was possible to keep their Irish identity and fit in (Table 16). We then asked them about integration in terms of their participation in English society, i.e. the extent to which they do each of the following:

- marry or form relationships with English people
- cultivate friendships with English people
- work with English people
- live in an English neighbourhood.
- join English organisations/clubs

- vote in English elections.

Table 16 about here

Marriage and relationships

One of the indicators of emigrant integration is whether or not they form relationships with or marry members of the host society. Approximately 30% of our sample stated that their current or last partner was ‘born in England’ (Table 17). A much higher proportion of the younger ESRI sample (53%) claimed to have formed relationships with people ‘born in England’, though that survey also revealed that either one or both of the parents of their current or last partner was Irish in 54% of cases (Table 18). Thus, the majority of relationships they formed was with Irish *or second generation Irish people*.²² If we consider this in conjunction with our finding, discussed below (see Table 27), that only a third of our sample said that the Irish were accepted ‘very easily’ as either relatives *or* as neighbours, it is likely that there are integration difficulties for Irish people in terms of forming close relationships with English people.

Table 17-18 about here

Friendships and Irish emigrants in England

Whether or not an emigrant makes friends with people in the host society is another indicator of integration. In our survey we asked about the nationality of those with whom respondents ‘go out to enjoy themselves’. A third (33%) of our sample stated that this circle consisted of some or mostly English people (Table 19). It might be expected that they would have more English friends over time. However, our research suggests that this is not necessarily the case, for those who had been in England longest were most likely to say that their friends were all/mostly Irish (61%) compared with new wave emigrants (45%). Previous research has suggested that the old wave tend to socialise in an Irish environment (Holahan 1995; Cappock 1996). These findings support this view but

revealed that while the more recent emigrants also mixed with Irish people, their social circle was more mixed than those who emigrated in the 1950s.

Table 19 about here

Our survey also asked people to indicate the nationality of their three *closest* friends. What is striking is the relatively small percentage (18%) of people who mentioned English people here (Table 20). By contrast, 66% of the friends mentioned were Irish. It is interesting to note that there was hardly any difference between the old and new wave emigrants in this regard though the old wave were slightly more likely to mention English people here (20%) compared with the new wave (12%). This may indicate some degree of integration over time in terms of close friendships with members of the host society.²³ In our focus groups, there were some references to this happening and to the ways in which it happened. A number of people pointed out that they had moved in Irish circles in their early days because of the difficulty of meeting English people or getting to know them even if working with them. For example, despite working with English people in the financial district, one of the young professionals referred to socialising with mainly Irish people and other immigrants because his English colleagues lived outside London and did not socialise in the city. A number of people specifically stated that they had mixed in Irish circles in the early years owing to loneliness. Another 1980s professional working in an English environment (as a partner in a law firm) referred to ‘an instant sort of link, an instant connection when you’re Irish’ and that, therefore, it was easier to get to know Irish people. One of the young professionals referred to meeting more English people through his children:

We had children relatively quickly after we were married, so the nature of our friends changed because we then found that we were meeting people we wouldn't have met before. A lot of people who we now know have come about through the

²² The findings of the two surveys combined suggest that the 1991 census finding that Irish emigrants in England do not marry other Irish people concealed those who marry second generation Irish .

²³ Those people whose three closest friends were Irish were *slightly* more likely to perceive that they had been discriminated against because they were Irish than those who did not perceive discrimination (Appendix Table 14).

children ... you meet a lot of English people that way simply because a lot of them are professional, working hard, stressed during the day and don't have a lot of friends in a lot of cases and they're as eager to make friends maybe as you are, for different reasons and that's how I think the ties begin to break down.

Table 20 about here.

Some people in our focus groups also talked about English people not wanting to know Irish people. Some had very negative experiences of the English and, subsequently, 'kept to themselves'. Others were extremely derogatory about English people, describing them as 'cold', 'boring', 'dull', 'lacking a sense of humour' etc.

Another interesting point to emerge from the analysis of friendships is that very few of the respondents in our survey mentioned having close friends who were not Irish, second-generation Irish, or English. Only 8% of our respondents mentioned having friends who did not fit into any of those categories. In a multi-ethnic city like London, these results are somewhat surprising, especially when so many lived in areas which they described as racially mixed. Our research did not focus on attitudes to other nationalities and the only references to them were made by older emigrants who talked about the arrival of 'Blacks' as being beneficial to the Irish community, as it meant the Irish were no longer the ones at the 'bottom on the pile'. The above findings suggest that it is important that future research on Irish emigrants examine attitudes to people of different nationalities and races.

Neighbours and colleagues

With regard to neighbours, Table 21 reveals that the majority of our sample (70%) lived in mixed neighbourhoods and a relatively small proportion (17%) had any interest in living in an Irish neighbourhood (Appendix Table 15). It is often suggested that emigrants move into an ethnic area on arrival and, with time, move into more mixed areas (Rex and Moore, 1967; Walter, 1986). There is evidence from our qualitative data to suggest that this was the case for some of the older emigrants. However, many areas which were

considered Irish in the past are now ‘mixed’ in terms of the ethnic background of the inhabitants, but there would still be a large proportion of Irish people living there.

Table 21 about here

In terms of the work environment, the majority of respondents in our survey (59%) worked either with all or mostly English people (Table 21). Thus, we could say that the Irish are relatively integrated in terms of their residential location and their work environment, though younger emigrants seem to be more integrated in terms of their working environment than older emigrants.

As mentioned above, Irish people living in England are entitled to vote in English local and national elections, as well as European elections. A relatively large proportion of our sample (55.3%) revealed that they ‘always’ voted in English elections (Table 22). This is most likely to be an exaggeration of actual voter turnout as voting is perceived to be a socially desirable activity (Sinnott 1995: 157).

Table 22 about here

Emigrants are not entitled to vote in Irish elections, though there has been a campaign to allow them to do so for some time. It is interesting to note that about the same proportion who say they vote in elections in England felt they should be able to vote in Irish elections (Appendix Tables 16). Furthermore, those who always/sometimes vote in elections in England were less likely to feel they should have the right to vote in Irish elections (Appendix Table 23).

Organisational involvement

The survey results allowed us to compare the extent to which Irish people participate in English and Irish organisations. A relatively small proportion of both samples were members of Irish ‘sports or other recreational organisations’ when compared to membership in a variety of non-Irish organisations mentioned (Table 23).

Table 23 about here

In addition, our survey asked emigrants about the extent to which they participated in selected 'Irish' activities. The three most frequent activities were a) reading Irish papers, b) eating/drinking Irish products, and c) socialising in Irish pubs (Table 24). Other frequent activities include socialising in Irish clubs; reading books by Irish authors; and attending or watching Irish sports. Our research confirmed the suggestion by other studies regarding Irish clubs, that is, old wave emigrants were twice as likely to be frequent visitors to these clubs as new wave emigrants (Appendix Table 17).²⁴ It is also interesting to note that the new wave are more likely to attend Irish pubs on a frequent basis compared with the old wave (Appendix Table 18). Thus, both groups would appear to move in an Irish environment to some extent.

Table 24 about here

A foot in both camps or between two places?

Many of the participants in our study indicated that they planned to return to Ireland at some point. Most of our respondents (62%) felt that Ireland was 'home' (Table 25) and half of them expressed a longing for that 'home' and a desire to return (50%). Some described the pain they feel on their return from visits to Ireland, being depressed and homesick for some time afterwards and feeling dissatisfaction with their lives in England. These people could be described as being 'between two places'. As one of the 1980s emigrants put it, she felt 'England was home and yet not home'. Many of the younger emigrants noted that they would only stay for a few years. One of the young professional women who had recently arrived in London referred to herself as a 'short-stay guest':

I quite like it but I am a short-stay guest and I'm not staying. I don't know whether everybody said that years ago but I'm not staying. I will be home for the millennium. I will not be celebrating it in London ... I would miss it too much I really would.

Table 25 about here

Almost a quarter of the respondents said they ‘don’t know’ whether they want to go home or that they ‘like both places equally’. Some of the focus group participants indicated some degree of uncertainty about their current relationship with Ireland. One woman who left Ireland in the 1980s said that she felt that Ireland was another country - not a foreign country but another country. An older emigrant said that she loved Ireland but that she could never fit in there now. Others felt that the Irish in Ireland make them feel like outcasts on their visits to the country.

Slightly over a third of the respondents (36%) saw England as home or both Ireland and England were equally perceived as home (Table 25). These people might be considered to have ‘a foot in both camps’. Some may have English relatives but this was not true for the majority of them. The following is a quote from a young professional man who fits into this category:

When I'm here (England) I'm very much Irish. I know what's going on, I have a great desire to know what's going on and when I go back to Ireland I turn on (BBC) Radio Four and listen to what's happening in the UK. You know what I mean? It's very strange ... sometimes I feel like I have a foot in both camps...but my grandfather is English and my father was born over here. ... My name is Smith so I have a relatively English name. I was brought up in a household in the South of Dublin, which, although it was very middle-class and everything like that, it had an orientation towards this country in some shape or form. So it's not as if I ever felt very ... when I came over here I never felt uncomfortable ... I never felt uncomfortable in this country. But I feel very comfortable in what I would call 'back home'.

Despite feeling very comfortable living in England, this man who had lived there for about fifteen years, also contemplates returning to Ireland at times:

I feel the pang, on occasions, of feeling 'Well that's where I was brought up, maybe I should go home, maybe there's certain things I want to do at home'...I think if it was left up to me we really wouldn't go home but we've reached the stage where grandparents are not too well and also we may have to go home because my wife feels a need to look after her parents.

3.5 Perceptions of anti-Irish prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination

Prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination were not the central focus of this study, as this topic has recently been addressed by the Commission for Racial Equality (1997). That study concluded that there is ‘a widespread, and almost completely unquestioned, acceptance of anti-Irish racism in English society’ (Commission for Racial Equality 1997).²⁵ However, because one of the factors that will affect the integration of emigrants is the extent to which they perceive and experience anti-Irish prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination, a couple of questions on these topics were included in our study. Our survey asked people if they felt they had ever been discriminated against in England because they were Irish. Forty-six per cent of the sample said that they felt this had happened (Table 26).²⁶ These results are in line with other studies on this topic, including Cappock’s survey of Irish graduates living in England which revealed that 50% of the graduates had experienced some form of discrimination (Cappock 1996; Randall 1990).

Table 26 about here

It is important to emphasise the reluctance with which people in our study talked about discrimination or anti-Irish behaviour, whether in the survey or the focus groups. It may be that they did not wish to identify themselves as people who might be treated in such a way.²⁷ However, in our focus group interviews, accounts of anti-Irish racism and

²⁵ For a detailed discussion of discrimination and the Irish in England, see the Commission for Racial Equality Report by Walter and Hickman (1997).

²⁶ Respondents were also asked if they felt that people knew they were Irish without being told so. The vast majority of people indicated that people knew they were Irish (83%), though slightly less people felt this was the case today compared with when they arrived when 95% of respondents said that people knew they were Irish then (Table Appendix 19). For some this was due to a loss of their Irish accent. This may be done purposely. Some of the participants in our focus groups referred in a derogatory manner to people they knew who they believed had purposely acquired an English accent. However, some people may ‘pick up’ accents more easily than others, not purposely or as the result of a decision on the part of the individual. On this note, it was interesting to listen to the accents in the focus groups become more ‘Irish’ as the discussions progressed.

²⁷ This argument is in line with comments we obtained from people working in Irish agencies who note that they receive some opposition to their attempt to have the Irish recognised as an ethnic minority because many see it as a derogatory term.

discrimination emerged as the discussions progressed and people shared their experiences, often on other topics. Many of the older emigrants referred to the time when there were signs on doors saying ‘No blacks. No dogs. No Irish’. One of the 1950s emigrants talked about the ‘nightmares’ of his past in England, trying to be understood, trying to be accepted. For both cohorts, many of their negative experiences were linked to the Troubles in Northern Ireland, a topic which is discussed in more detail below.

The type of incidents referred to in the study ranged in intensity and include:

- significant questioning in job interviews about the IRA and their views on the politics of Northern Ireland
- being asked about their level of alcohol consumption in interviews
- people spitting on them (something which was mentioned by two of our female participants, each in a different focus group)
- physical attacks.

One example of this came from a young woman who talked about the ‘bad times’ she had as a young mother in the early 1980s:

Whether it was because of the very strong northern (Irish) accent, I don't know. But literally I've been physically attacked, I've been spat on, I've been all sorts. You learn to take care of yourself and that. Sometimes you can cope with it and other times you can't.

In terms of the integration of Irish people in England, our survey findings revealed further disturbing evidence regarding the extent to which respondents felt English people accept the Irish as neighbours and as relatives. Approximately a third of the sample said that the Irish were ‘very easily’ accepted as both neighbours and relatives (Table 27). However, to put this in context, 80% of respondents felt that the Irish are accepted much, or a bit, better by the English, compared to people from other countries (Appendix Table 20).

Table 27 about here.

In our focus group discussions, many of the emigrants referred to the negative stereotypes they believed that English people have of the Irish. The most prevalent of these were ‘stupid’, ‘drunkards’, but ‘lazy’, ‘violent’ and ‘fraudsters’ also appeared to be relatively common. Many of these stereotypes appeared in ‘Paddy’ jokes, though these were mostly about the ‘Thick Paddy’ or the ‘Drunken Paddy’.²⁸ Such jokes were experienced by people regardless of occupation, class or age (e.g. a partner in a law firm, a financial consultant in the city and a construction worker). Many people did not appear to mind them and, if they did, they said they tried to ignore them or had learnt to do so. However, some jokes were more acerbic than others and the emigrants’ reactions often depended on the context or the way in which the jokes were told.

While the above findings must not be underestimated, a number of findings from our survey suggested that the atmosphere may be improving for Irish emigrants living in England. First, the majority of respondents (73%) indicated that they thought the social standing of the Irish in England at the time of interview ranged from ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ (Table 28). However, it is extremely important to note that most people indicated that there had been a vast improvement in this regard in the years prior to the survey. Our evidence to support this statement came from both our survey and focus group data.

Table 28 about here

Second, Table 29 shows that the majority of our respondents (56%) said that they never felt uncomfortable about being Irish in England and, of those who did feel uncomfortable, most (68%) indicated that ‘things have got better in this regard’ (Appendix Table 22). Interestingly, new wave emigrants were more than twice as likely as the old wave to say that they frequently or sometimes felt uncomfortable. It is likely that the old wave emigrants have become hardened to this over the years or avoid situations where they might feel this way. Alternatively, they may feel that they are accepted in England.

²⁸ Most respondents in our survey (87%) said that people tell them Irish jokes (Appendix Table 21).

Table 29 about here

These positive trends were usually linked to the decline in Irish terrorist activity in England and increasing knowledge of and respect for Ireland.

The impact of the Troubles in Northern Ireland on Irish emigrants in England

The Troubles in Northern Ireland have had an immense effect on the lives of Irish emigrants living in England. As one man in our focus group put it, ‘the Irish in England are on the defensive all the time in relation to the Troubles. Three-quarters of our sample stated that the Troubles had had an impact on their life in England (Table 30). This figure varied somewhat by emigration cohort with the 1980s emigrants most likely to say that the Troubles had an impact on their lives in England - 88% of them claimed this compared to 77% of the older emigrants. Those least likely to have felt this way were those who arrived in the 1990s, though even among this group 55% indicated that the Troubles had affected their lives. This is probably owing to the fact that there has been less Irish terrorist activity in England during their stay than was the case for the other cohorts.

Table 30 about here.

Even those successful professionals who had had no experiences of prejudice or discrimination were sensitive to either the real or potential impact of the Troubles on their lives. For example, after the bombing of Canary Wharf in London by Irish terrorists, one young professional woman said that she suddenly began to wonder about how her English friends and colleagues would react to her:

I sort of questioned were things going to change. Will people treat me differently? What will it be like when I go into work in the morning? ²⁹

²⁹ As it turned out, nobody ever did question her but the point to emphasise is that she agonised over this for a significant period of time.

One of the 1950s emigrants referred to the fact that, at work, she was never really considered to be Irish until there was an Irish terrorist bomb in England. She described her extreme discomfort at being ‘quizzed’ by colleagues about her views on the IRA and the situation in Northern Ireland.

A young, professional man noted that the fact that he was Irish aroused suspicions among his neighbours about his political views:

I mean I recall when I was a student in digs 200 yards away from where an IRA bomb was going off and I remember my door being banged down and all the residents, I think, chastised on the basis of my Irishness.

The effect of these types of experiences was that they undermined the confidence of the Irish in England and caused many people to play down their Irishness or, as one man said, ‘you put your head down’ about being Irish. A good example of this was provided by a young woman who had never experienced any form of anti-Irishness, viewed ‘Paddy jokes’ as purely jokes and was extremely confident about being Irish. Yet she described an incident where she felt most uncomfortable about being Irish during a period when there were a number of bomb scares in the London Underground:

The only one time I didn’t want to feel like I was Irish, I was in a train station. I put a bag down. I walked down the platform a bit and somebody came up. I was only three feet from this bag and somebody tapped me on the shoulder and said ‘Excuse me, dear – is that your bag?’ and I suddenly thought, you know, they’re going to think that I’m walking away from this bag and then I didn’t want to have a blatant Irish accent.³⁰

Despite the fact that she claimed this was the only one time she ‘didn’t want to feel’ Irish, she actually referred to another incident later in the discussion. This is in line with our argument that people were reluctant to talk about these topics and wished to de-emphasise them.

³⁰ IRA bomb scares often involve a ‘device’ being left in a bag on public transport.

The Role of emigration cohort and class in experiences of the Irish in England

It has been argued that there are differences between the old and new wave emigrants which are linked to their varying educational levels and occupational status. Thus, Cappock (1996) argues that the old wave, with low levels of education and occupational status, have a stronger Irish identity than the more educated new wave emigrants. She also contends that the old wave circulate in an Irish environment more than the new wave, such as visiting Irish pubs and clubs, and living in Irish neighbourhoods. However, our study shows that the new wave emigrants were also embedded in an Irish environment to some extent. While the ethnic mix of their social circle was slightly more varied than the old wave, they were also slightly more likely to say that their closest friends were Irish. The majority of them went to Irish pubs, like the old wave, only more so. They were less likely to go to the Irish clubs. In terms of identity retention, we found that they were somewhat more likely to value their Irish heritage than the old wave, though both did so, to a large extent. Similarly, they were slightly more likely to believe in the importance of passing on Irish identity to children.

The assumption that new wave emigrants do not experience difficulties in relation to prejudice and discrimination must be challenged. Our data revealed they were more likely than the old wave to feel that they had been discriminated against because they are Irish, though it must be acknowledged that many people in both cohorts felt this way. In addition, the new wave were much more likely to say that they frequently/sometimes feel uncomfortable being Irish in Britain compared with the old wave. These findings indicate that, regardless of educational background, people may experience difficulties in relation to prejudice and discrimination. Examples of some of these difficulties emerged in the qualitative data and include stories where job interviewers asked questions relating to alcohol abuse, laziness, and feelings about Northern Ireland. However, most of the stories related to feeling uncomfortable when the Troubles in Northern Ireland were highlighted and, as noted above, most felt that the improving situation there was also having a positive impact on their lives in Britain.

The role of class may be over-emphasised at times in relation to experiences of those living in Britain. Perhaps equally or more important are things like whether or not the person has ethnic cues (e.g. accent and name) which indicate their ethnicity, their level of confidence and the ethnic mix of their social environment. Take, for example, these two cases from our qualitative data. Both are young, well-educated professional men with the same occupation but one experienced problems in relation to being Irish in the workplace while the other never had any difficulties. The former had a typical Irish name, a strong Irish accent, and most of his colleagues were English. He also appeared to be a lot less confident than the other man, whose accent and name were not noticeably Irish and whose colleagues were from a variety of countries with English people being the least numerous. Whether or not the first man's low level of confidence is a consequence of the difficulties he experienced as an emigrant is a most interesting question, though it could be that he came to England lacking self-confidence.

Knowledge of and respect for Ireland

A young construction worker in one of our focus groups argued that there is a lack of respect for the Irish in England compared with the Irish in the United States. Others linked this lack of respect for the Irish and the 'cracking of Irish jokes' with a low level of knowledge about Ireland, Irish history and Irish people as illustrated by these quotes from two young men:

But that (lack of knowledge) must go back to the historic relations because every Irish person that comes into this country has to deal with English people who have no knowledge of Irish history. They're not being told Irish history that hasn't been told in an English way. They don't understand Irish people really ... I'm sure its not malicious, its just a lot of ignorance. Not all English people are to blame for what was done. They need to understand what they inflicted around the world on other cultures and the price that other cultures had to pay for their meddling, their decimation of cultures, their liquidation of whole populations.

The second young man:

You know, you take the Irish jokes but you sort of bounce back, you know? You give as good as you get but in a pleasant context, a pleasant manner ... but you know it reflected their view of Ireland because they weren't aware of it. That's what I felt... I think at the time there was not an anti-Irish feeling in London, but

there was certainly a general misunderstanding and that translated to me in a way. It translated on a personal level with jokes etc. and, as I said, you have to cope with that. It wasn't a major problem but it was quite commonplace.

On a positive note, many of the participants felt that there is now a greater knowledge of Ireland owing, in part, to an increase in the number of English people travelling to Ireland.³¹ Accordingly, they argued that their situation in London has improved, that the increased knowledge about Ireland was linked to a growing respect for the country and things Irish. One young professional emigrant described the transition thus:

I was discouraged by my initial few years but now ... I don't find it now. I think it's changed tremendously. You still get Irish jokes but I think, you know, they obviously believe that to be humour. Whereas before there was a lot of ignorance. I think that's very comforting, it has changed my life.

Another participant argued that the recent economic growth (the 'Celtic Tiger' phenomenon) and the peace process in Northern Ireland also helped to evoke respect for and interest in the country:

You could have had great writers and theatres in a poor country and maybe there would have been a little grey 'chicness' associated with all of that and they're not poor anymore... They are doing as well as we are and maybe even better. They are attracting all this industry and they kind of think 'Shit, they're not the underdogs anymore'. There is a greater respect for Ireland as a whole now, you know. And there's got to be an element of the peace dividend associated with all of that. From all sorts of angles there were lots of positive things coming out of Ireland over the last few years. Even your 'Joe Soap' who had his most negative view of Ireland had to realise one of them as being something that he had to say 'that was quite good'.

Another factor which enhanced the respect English people have for Ireland was the election of its first woman president, Mrs Mary Robinson, widely perceived to be an intelligent, articulate and progressive lawyer. Her high profile on the international stage, her frequent visits to Britain, and her presidency generally, had the effect of boosting the

³¹ The increase in English tourists travelling to Ireland has been linked to the peace process in Northern Ireland, the increasing attractiveness of Dublin as a cosmopolitan city and the favourable exchange rate for the English visitor in the late 1990s.

confidence of the Irish in England.³² Other Irish people or groups were also mentioned in the focus groups as helping to improve the image of Irish people in England such as Seamus Heaney, Martin McDonagh and the Riverdance group.

Increased knowledge of and respect for Ireland, its people and culture goes hand in hand with a greater acceptability and positive visibility of Irish people and Irish culture in England. It is important to note that this seems to have had an immense impact on the self-esteem of Irish people living there, as indicated by the following quote from a man who worked in an Irish agency:

What we're really talking about is the increased confidence amongst the Irish in England to assert their Irish identity positively.

³² Mary Robinson reached out to Irish emigrants throughout the world in speeches, most notably her address to the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) on the 2nd of February, 1995, but also by visits to particular locations. For a detailed discussion of the Robinson presidency and Irish emigrants in Britain see Gray (1996) and O'Leary and Burke (1998).

Chapter 4: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite a situation in the last years of the twentieth century where there was almost full employment in Ireland, large numbers of Irish people continued to leave the country on an annual basis. England was the destination for many of these emigrants. Regardless of the reason for emigration, this study argues that Irish emigrants in England have needs which must be both understood and met. While most people in our study said that they were happy living in England, many of them encountered problems in terms of integration, prejudice and perceived discrimination. When these findings are taken in conjunction with the disturbing mental and physical health statistics of the Irish in England, it is clear that some attention must be given to these issues by the relevant authorities.

Irish identity and the Irish in England

The Irish emigrants in our study tended to feel more positively towards Ireland and more appreciative of Irish culture than when they left the country, a finding which is in line with the results of research on other emigrant groups in other locations. In part, this may be related to what appears to be an increasing attachment to Irish culture among Irish people in Ireland.

While the vast majority of Irish emigrants in our study retained their Irish identity while living in England, it is clear that this identity is manipulated at times so that people can ‘play it up’ or down depending on the circumstances. In particular, we found many examples of people ‘playing down’ their Irishness in certain circumstances, for example: during Irish terrorist campaigns in England; when travelling through airports or ferry terminals; when contact with the police or other officials was likely; and/or in job interviews. This type of identity manipulation can produce considerable strain for those involved and may have mental and physical health implications.

A key question in this study was whether or not those who retain their culture can also integrate into English society. The vast majority of our sample stated that it was possible to do this. However, other findings from both our survey and the focus groups data revealed that many people experienced some difficulty with integration in English society.

Integration and the Irish in England

If one considers integration in terms of close relationships with English people, it would appear that there is a relatively low level of integration of Irish people in London. A third of our respondents stated that their current or last partner was or had been English. Our survey also reveals that the majority of people were in relationships with either Irish or *second generation* Irish people. Similarly, in terms of friendships, only a small percentage (18%) counted English people among their three closest friends, though approximately a third stated that their social circle consisted of some/mostly English people. This is surprising given that most of our respondents lived and worked in non-Irish settings. In addition, many of our respondents had joined non-Irish organisations and clubs and the proportion of emigrants who joined Irish organisations was relatively small by comparison.

If these results are considered in conjunction with our findings that only a third of our sample felt that the Irish were accepted ‘very easily’ as relatives *or* neighbours, it reveals that there are integration difficulties for Irish people in terms of forming close relationships with English people.

Perceptions of prejudice, anti-Irish racism, stereotyping and discrimination

Ireland’s status as a former colony of England and the political situation in Northern Ireland had a strong impact on the integration of Irish people living there and on their identity while in that country. Three-quarters of our sample stated that the Troubles had had an impact on their life in England. One of the effects of the Troubles on the lives of the Irish in England is discrimination. Almost half of our respondents felt that they had

been discriminated against because they were Irish. This figure may even be an underestimate because, initially, there was some reluctance among respondents to discuss discrimination in the focus groups, so a survey question on the topic may not be the best way to elicit information on this topic.

It is often assumed that the more educated new wave emigrants have little difficulty in terms of prejudice and discrimination. However, our data revealed that the new wave emigrants were slightly more likely to feel they had been discriminated against (49%) than the old wave (45%). These results support Cappock's finding that half of the Irish graduates she surveyed had experienced discrimination in England.

Even those who had no experience of discrimination were highly sensitive to the potential impact of the IRA and the Troubles on their lives in England. This can result in a low level of confidence when relating to English people, playing down Irishness or keeping a low profile about it at such times, particularly when the situation in Northern Ireland is featured in the news. This is certainly in line with the literature that suggests that Irish people distance themselves from what is perceived to be a low-status group, the Irish in England. This type of behaviour is also strongly linked to the fact that stereotypes of Irish people are negative. These stereotypes also had a significant impact on the lives of the Irish emigrants in our study. An important step towards improving the perceptions of Irish people in England is their recent inclusion as a category in media standards relating to the representation of minority groups in various mass media.

The study also revealed some positive findings on the experiences of the Irish in England. Overall, the respondents felt that the social standing of the Irish in England was good at the time of interview (1998-99), that it had improved greatly in the previous few years. Furthermore, we found that Irish emigrants had begun to evaluate their Irishness positively. There was also a strong pride in relation to Ireland, linked to the decline of Irish terrorist activity in England, the peace process in Northern Ireland, the election of Mrs Mary Robinson as President of Ireland, the Celtic Tiger economy, and the very

visible success of Irish (and second generation Irish) people like Seamus Heaney, Martin McDonagh and of shows like Riverdance.

Increasing numbers of English people are visiting Ireland and, consequently, our respondents felt that there was an enhanced awareness and appreciation of Ireland and its culture among English people. This allowed Irish people to raise their heads and be proud of both their Irish cultural identity and of Ireland as a country.

This study revealed a number of important policy-related problems faced by Irish people in England, many of which are related to their age, health, and class but also to their experiences as emigrants. The most pressing problems are:

1. elderly people with poor mental and physical health who are socially isolated, in particular men who worked in construction. Many of these are the ‘service refusers’ referred to by social workers
2. poor health of the Irish in England, regardless of age and class
3. vulnerable young people who arrive in England with few resources and a variety of problems. They often have a low level of education and, according to the voluntary agencies who assist them, many are not ‘job ready’. To a large extent, these problems are a result of social and economic disadvantage they experienced in Ireland.

Some recommendations are made below in relation to these issues.

Recommendations

Preventing involuntary emigration

1. Emigration and poverty are often linked, resulting in what is often referred to as ‘involuntary’ emigration. Despite the continued success of the Irish economy, large numbers of Irish people still experience poverty and official statistics reveal that a significant number of people emigrate on an annual basis.³³ Irish policymakers need to

³³ It is often argued that those who emigrate during times of economic prosperity may be considered to be ‘voluntary emigrants’ or ‘adventure-seekers’. However, our interviews with personnel in voluntary agencies in London revealed that a high proportion of their clients would be classified as ‘involuntary emigrants’.

consider this issue by persisting in their efforts to alleviate poverty in Ireland. In line with the recommendation of the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants (Harvey, 1999), we argue that emigration policy should be linked to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

2. Many of the Irish voluntary organisations in England are concerned about the number of ‘vulnerable’ young people who arrive there ill equipped for living in a foreign city. They are often early school leavers from disadvantaged areas. To address this problem, the following proposals are made:

- a) It is very important that pre-departure emigration advice be targeted specifically at people in this category (some proposals for the nature of this advice are provided below)
 - b) The Irish Department of Education needs to monitor the effectiveness of recent measures targeted at early school leavers and potential early school leavers
 - c) The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and FAS need to review the scope and effectiveness of training schemes for young people in this category.
- Previous reports on this subject have suggested that there are insufficient places, that there is a need for a counselling and guidance dimension to them as well as progression routes to either further education or jobs (ESF Evaluation Unit 1996; NESF 1997).

3. The recent announcement by the Irish Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs, Dermot Aherne TD, that money is to be allocated for developments in pre-departure advice for emigrants is most welcome. However, we recommend that there should be a module on emigration issues sufficiently early in the education system to catch early school leavers. This module should cover topics such as:

- the experiences of emigrants
- different religions and minority cultures
- adaptation and integration issues for emigrants (stereotypes, racism, discrimination, culture shock, homesickness etc).

Such an approach would facilitate an understanding of emigrant experiences (positive and negative) and the difficulties which emigrants may encounter. While our research shows that this would be a necessary step for both the Irish and British Departments of Education, given the integral role of emigration in European integration, the European Commission should consider recommending such an approach be adopted in each EU member state.

4. Voluntary agencies working with Irish emigrants in England play a central role in dealing with many of the problems experienced by Irish emigrants. It is most important that the Irish Government and the Inter-departmental Committee on Emigration have close contact with representatives of these organisations. In this context, it should be noted that, in May 1999, the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs stated that he would welcome these agencies becoming more involved in policy formulation with the Interdepartmental Committee on Emigration. Resources are required to support this collaboration, especially with regard to facilitating the attendance of personnel at meetings.

Addressing the social and economic problems of Irish emigrants in England

5. This study, and many others, reveals that the Irish are disproportionately over-represented among the homeless in London and in poor quality housing. While there are a number of Irish housing associations in the city which aim to improve this situation and to address the problem of poor quality private rented accommodation for the Irish population, these issues must also be addressed by both British and Irish policymakers. In May 1997, the British and Irish Prime Ministers highlighted homelessness among the Irish in England as one of the potential areas for co-operation between the two governments. The issue of homelessness is still a most urgent one and this statement of intent by the governments needs to be translated into action.

6. Considerable work is required to address the health status of the Irish in England, especially that of the significant elderly Irish population living there. Health promotion

campaigns are required to address issues such as the impact of early intervention and lifestyle on health. In addition, adequate funding of services and culturally sensitive health personnel are essential.

7. It is most important that culturally sensitive practices be developed among all frontline personnel with whom the Irish in England are in contact, not just those working in health services. It is especially necessary for the police, customs officials and airport staff but it is also essential for people who work with the Irish in relation to their welfare and housing. Models of good practice already exist in culturally sensitive provision for Irish clients and these must be expanded into mainstream services (Tilki 1998).

8. One of the reasons why culturally sensitive practices need to be adopted is because Irish people living in England face prejudice and discrimination in a variety of areas. These issues were of major concern to the people in our study. While advances in the peace process have improved this situation, it is extremely important that it be monitored. In this regard, we recommend that the British Commission for Racial Equality include the Irish in any of their investigations of discrimination, as suggested by the Hickman and Walter Report for that Commission (1997).

9. Regular collection of accurate data on the Irish in England requires that ethnic monitoring by all statutory and relevant voluntary agencies in England incorporate an 'Irish' category. This includes the census, health authorities and housing providers.³⁴ In particular, it is most important to analyse the results of the 2001 Census of Britain comparing the Irish with English people and other ethnic minorities especially on topics such as health, housing, and other quality of life indicators included in the Census.

10. Adequate funding must be provided for voluntary agencies working with Irish emigrants in England (Commission on the Family, Ireland, 1998; IECE 1999). First, this

³⁴ In relation to the census, it would also be useful to include a question on the ethnicity and religion of the spouse or partner.

involves recognising that these agencies are crucial in coping with the needs of the significant elderly Irish population in England and the needs of other vulnerable emigrants. The Irish and British Governments obviously have a role here but so too must the European Union. Given the EU emphasis on the free movement of labour, it is essential that it support this process by providing services to facilitate the integration of those people who relocate to a new Member State and culture. EU information offices are insufficient in this regard. An additional requirement is the provision of support services for those who need them. These could be similar to the type of agencies which currently exist for the Irish in England, agencies which are poorly resourced and do not attract a certain portion of the emigrant population who view them in a negative light.

Suggestions for future research

Owing to financial constraints, this study could not include comparison groups in the research to compare and contrast the situation of Irish-born people living in London with those residing in other parts of England or in Ireland. In addition, there were no comparisons of the experiences of Irish-born people with those of the second and subsequent generations of Irish people living in England nor with those of other ethnic minorities. Future research could examine these groups in terms of both integration and identity.³⁵

Comparisons of the Irish with other ethnic groups in Britain could be addressed by including the Irish in the British Survey of Ethnic Minorities. Such an approach would provide invaluable data for a large, random sample of Irish people of different generations living in different locations in England as well as facilitating comparisons of their experiences with those of other ethnic minorities. Another approach would be to conduct a study which compares Irish people in Ireland with the Irish in England. This could yield some very useful data, especially on the topic of health.

³⁵ In addition, it would be interesting to examine the experiences of rural Irish people moving to Dublin and of English people moving to London.

Future research on the Irish in England needs to examine some of the following topics and issues:

1. Immigrant integration. Based on our research findings, it is clear that the literature on immigrant integration is limited when applied to the case of the Irish in Britain. Future research needs to include questions which explore the following:

- the extent to which the emigrant participates in the host society in a variety of areas, such as economic and political, social and cultural. The role of sport should also be examined here, especially support for Irish and English teams
- whether or not they perceive their Irish identity and heritage to be positive or negative
- the extent to which they feel English people view Irish cultural identity and heritage as positive or negative
- experiences of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination
- how emigrants perceive people from England, Ireland, Irish people in England, as well as people from other countries and people of a different race³⁶
- how English people perceive the Irish, both those in Ireland and emigrants living in England.

2. Mental and physical health. Our research suggests that the emigration experience is likely to be part of the explanation for the relatively poor health of the Irish in Britain. Future studies on the health issue should include questions about integration experiences, including whether or not the emigrants experience prejudice and discrimination

3. Cultural change. Culture in Ireland is in the process of change. Research is required to examine the nature and extent of this change as well as the causative factors.

³⁶ A related issue here is why the closest relationships that Irish people formed were with other Irish people, including spouse or partner and closest friends. It would also be interesting to examine the relative importance of ethnicity and religious identity in the emigrant's choice of a spouse or partner.

POSTSCRIPT

March, 2000

A number of important changes have occurred since this study was completed. First, as a result of the peace process in Northern Ireland, Article 2 of the Irish Constitution has been changed and now states that ‘the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage’. If this statement is to have any real meaning, the Irish Government must act to assist in addressing problems faced by Irish emigrants.

Our research showed that the former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, was an important positive symbol for Irish emigrants. Her successor, President Mary McAleese, has also expressed her concern for emigrants, revealing both an understanding of the issues which affect them, as well as an appreciation of their role. The following is an abstract from an address given by President McAleese to the Joint Houses of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) on 16 December 1999:

We owe a debt of gratitude too, to those who left this island. ... It was our emigrants who globalised the name of Ireland. They brought our culture with them, refreshed and enriched it with the new energy it absorbed from the varied cultures into which it was transplanted. ... They gave us that huge multicultural Irish family now proudly celebrated and acknowledged in the new Article Two of the Constitution.

This report has not identified policy solutions to a number of important problems highlighted here, many of which are extremely complex. According to the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants (IECE), the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Bertie Ahern TD, and the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, David Andrews TD, have favourably received an IECE proposal to establish a Taskforce on Emigration. This should be done as soon as possible. As an immediate starting point, the taskforce should pursue the issues raised in this report. However, the British Government also needs to be involved in addressing some of these problems. The recently established British-Irish Inter-

Governmental Conference Forum, whose purpose is to promote bilateral co-operation between Britain and Ireland, is an ideal location for the discussion of many of the issues raised in this study.

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Appendix A: Research Methodology

This report is based on a case study of Irish-born people living in England. The study employed a number of methods to collect a variety of data on the situation of this group, including both quantitative and qualitative methods. These data include the 1991 census of Britain, responses from interviews with employees in Irish agencies in London, focus group data and a survey of Irish people living in London.

a) The 1991 Census of Britain

The 1991 Census of Britain contains a certain amount of information on the Irish-born population in England such as geographic location, age, gender, occupation, social class, educational qualifications and housing tenure.

b) Visits to Irish Welfare Organisations and interviews with employees

There is a dense network of Irish organisations in London which address a range of needs of Irish people there including information, social, cultural and commercial needs.³⁷ A number of these organisations offer important information and advice on housing, employment, health, education, social security and the law. Part of our research involved visits to a variety of these agencies to collect information on their services and a profile of their clients. In addition, we conducted interviews with employees in these organisations to investigate their views of the key issues facing Irish people living in London.

c) Focus groups³⁸

In September 1997, we held three focus groups with Irish people living in the Greater London area. The participants were invited to attend to discuss ‘their experiences of living in England’. These people were from a wide variety of backgrounds living in

³⁷ For a detailed list of these organisations see *The Irish in Britain Directory* (1993) produced by the Brent Irish Advisory Service and *A Guide to London for Young Irish People*, an Action Group for Irish Youth publication.

³⁸ Focus groups are unstructured interviews with groups of people. For more details on this see Morgan (1997).

London. While snowball sampling was used to obtain our sample of focus group participants, there was also a purposive element to the sampling method. That is, we wanted people who had left Ireland in the 1980s and those who left in the 1950s; men and women; people from different occupational backgrounds; people who were likely to be in touch with Irish agencies and those who were not.

The first group (n=8) consisted, in large part, of people who had left Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s. They were from a variety of occupational backgrounds, e.g. nurse, construction worker, clerical officer etc. The second group (n=5) was composed of people who left in the 1980s and 1990s, including partners in law firms, high and middle level financiers, a social worker etc. Finally, the third group (n=12) consisted of people who worked in a variety of Irish organisations in London, organisations providing advice, assistance and/or cultural or recreational activities to Irish people.

The data gathered in the focus groups are used to illustrate points or to reveal additional information related to some of the statistics and other quantitative data employed. There is substantial quoting from participants throughout the report.

d) The European Cultural Foundation (ECF) survey

We conducted a survey of Irish-born adults living in the Greater London area inquiring about issues relating to identity and integration. The sample consisted of 100 Irish-born people, selected using purposive/expert choice sampling (Kalton 1983). This procedure was chosen in order to match our sample with characteristics of the Irish-born population in London according to information obtained from the 1991 census of England – namely, age, gender and occupation.

Rationale for choice of sampling method

In the original proposal for this survey, we intended to obtain a random (probability) sample of Irish-born people living in England. However, as there is no comprehensive list

of Irish people in England, the only satisfactory way of drawing a probability sample is by means of a large scale face to face screening survey to identify Irish people in households. That is, the researchers are required to conduct two surveys, one to find the required respondents and the second to interview them. Screening surveys are particularly expensive when the population of interest is not heavily concentrated in a small number of geographical areas. Owing to the low geographic concentration of the Irish there, this approach turned out to be prohibitively expensive.

Sampling

The sample consisted of 100 Irish-born people, selected using purposive or expert choice sampling (Kalton 1983). This procedure was chosen in order to match our sample with characteristics of the Irish-born population in London according to information obtained from the 1991 census of England – namely, age, gender and occupation. Based on the number of Irish-born men and women in different age and occupational groups in the 1991 census, we were able to come up with a grid revealing the numbers we would require in each category for a total sample of 100. For example, we needed eight women over the age of 55 who were retired.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of the following sections: cultural and identity retention; factors which may be relevant for identity retention such as socio-economic background of the emigrant, religion, intermarriage patterns, Irish language retention, ties to Ireland, reading/listening to Irish media, availability of and participation in networks of Irish emigrants and organisations, intention to stay/not, duration of residence in England, prejudice or discrimination experienced in England; degree of integration into English society and socio-demographic information. Fieldwork took place between August 1998 and March 1999. The average time to completion for interviews was approximately thirty-five minutes.

Measurement of ethnic identity and cultural retention

For the purpose of this study we equate Irish cultural retention with Irish identity retention. However, also of interest are perceptions of the importance of passing on this identity and traditions to children. Specifically, identity/cultural retention is measured in these ways for this study:

- self-identification as Irish
- importance of being Irish before leaving Ireland, on arrival in England and today
- level of attachment to Irish heritage when they first left Ireland and now
- importance of passing Irish identity on to children.

Measurement of integration

Integration refers to the situation where an emigrant has high levels of participation in the host society and ethnic identity retention. It involves an attachment both to Ireland and the host society as well as the retention of a positive Irish identity. The measures of integration employed in this study relate to the extent to which they:

- form relationships with English people
- make English friends
- have English colleagues
- have English neighbours
- vote in English elections.³⁹

However, these measures alone are insufficient as indicators of integration. In addition, a person must also a) feel that they can keep their Irish identity and also fit in in English society and b) retain their Irish identity.

e) ESRI school leavers data

The aforementioned data are supplemented by Economic and Social Research Institute data on Irish people living in England (sample size =97). This was a 1992 postal survey of young people seven years after they had left secondary school in Ireland (1985/86).

³⁹ Irish people are entitled to vote in all elections in England: local, national and European.

The young emigrants were asked questions which were particularly relevant to our study: questions about identity; ethnic background of friends, partners and co-workers; attachment to Ireland, its norms and culture; contact with home etc. However, the data are limited in that they only include young people who have been in England for, at most, seven years. In addition, those who responded to the postal survey may be more positively oriented towards Ireland than those who did not.

Appendix 2: Additional Tables

Table A1: The regional distribution of Irish-born people resident in Britain, 1991

Population totals and regional percentage share					
Standard Region or <i>metropolitan</i> <i>county</i>	Total Population (000s)	All White People (%)	Minority ethnic groups (%)	Born in the Irish Republic (000s)	Born in the Irish Republic (%)
South East	17208.3	29.9	56.2	323.3	54.6
<i>Greater London</i>	<i>6679.7</i>	<i>10.3</i>	<i>44.6</i>	<i>214.2</i>	<i>36.2</i>
East Anglia	2027.0	3.8	1.4	28.5	4.8
South West	4609.4	8.8	2.1	10.9	1.8
West Midlands	5150.2	9.1	14.1	67.1	11.3
<i>West Midlands MC</i>	<i>2551.7</i>	<i>4.2</i>	<i>12.4</i>	<i>50.9</i>	<i>8.6</i>
East Midlands	3953.4	7.3	6.2	27.9	4.7
Yorks & Humberside	4836.5	8.9	7.1	25.3	4.3
<i>S Yorkshire MC</i>	<i>1262.6</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>5.1</i>	<i>0.9</i>
<i>W Yorkshire MC</i>	<i>2013.7</i>	<i>3.6</i>	<i>5.4</i>	<i>14.9</i>	<i>2.5</i>
North West	6243.7	11.6	8.1	65.9	11.1
<i>Greater Manchester</i>	<i>2499.4</i>	<i>4.5</i>	<i>4.9</i>	<i>37.8</i>	<i>6.4</i>
<i>Merseyside</i>	<i>1403.6</i>	<i>2.7</i>	<i>0.9</i>	<i>11.4</i>	<i>1.9</i>
North	3026.7	5.8	1.3	7.4	1.3
<i>Tyne and Wear</i>	<i>1095.2</i>	<i>2.1</i>	<i>0.7</i>	<i>2.6</i>	<i>0.4</i>
Wales	2835.1	5.4	1.4	13.5	2.3
Scotland	4998.6	9.5	2.1	22.8	3.8
Great Britain	54,888.8	100.0	100.0	592.5	100.0

Source: 1991 Census Local Base Statistics; Crown Copyright.

Table A2: Occupational groups of Irish-born in Britain by gender, 1991 (10% sample)

Standard Occupational Classification		Women		Men	
		% Ir-bn in employ	% total	% Ir-bn in employ	% total
1a	Corporate managers & administrators	5.7	1.7	10.9	1.5
1b	Managers/proprietors in agric and services	5.1	1.7	5.2	1.2
2a	Science & engineering professionals	0.7	2.5	3.4	1.5
2b	Health professionals	0.9	3.6	1.4	3.0
2c	Teaching professionals	4.4	1.6	2.3	1.5
2d	Other professional occupations	2.0	2.3	3.1	1.9
3a	Science, engineering and associate professionals	1.1	2.0	2.5	1.3
3b	Health associate professionals	12.3	4.3	1.0	3.0
3c	Other associate professionals	3.5	1.9	3.4	1.4
4a	Clerical occupations	12.2	1.3	5.1	1.3
4b	Secretarial occupations	8.0	1.5	0.2	0.1
5a	Skilled construction trades	0.1	1.9	7.1	2.6
5b	Skilled engineering trades	0.2	1.4	5.4	1.2
5c	Other skilled trades	1.7	1.0	9.1	1.4
6a	Protective service occupations	0.5	1.6	3.9	1.9
6b	Personal service occupations	15.0	2.3	2.5	2.2
7a	Buyers, brokers + sales reps	0.7	1.3	1.8	1.2
7b	Other sales occupations	5.6	1.1	0.9	0.8
8a	Industrial plant and machine operators, assemblers	4.2	1.6	8.6	1.8
8b	Drivers and mobile machinery operators	0.4	1.7	7.7	1.9
9a	Other occupa in agric/				

	forestry/fisheries	0.1	0.5	0.3	0.6
9b	Other elementary occupations	14.6	2.9	11.2	2.8
	Not stated/inadequately stated	1.0	2.3	1.3	2.0
	On a Government scheme	0.6	0.9	0.8	0.8

Source: Crown Copyright, Census, 1991, Ethnic Group and Country of Birth Tables, table 13.

