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Publication Date	2018-10-24
Publisher	Taylor & Francis
Repository DOI	10.1080/03323315.2018.1521731

Please quote original source:

Heinz, M., & Keane, E. (2018). Socio-demographic composition of primary initial teacher education entrants in Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies*, 1-21. DOI: 10.1080/03323315.2018.1521731

Sociodemographic composition of primary initial teacher education entrants in Ireland

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The homogeneity of the teaching profession is an international, as well as national, phenomenon. In an era of significant demographic change in schools and education policy development in Ireland and across Europe, the lack of solid data about the backgrounds of teachers and initial teacher education (ITE) applicants and entrants has hindered informed policy development, including in relation to ITE application procedures, selection criteria as well as teacher supply and demand. In this paper we discuss findings from the Diversity in Initial Teacher Education (DITE) national project. We present analyses of application (N=2,437) and survey data (N=530) to explore 2014 undergraduate primary (UG P) ITE entrants' socio-demographic backgrounds. Key findings confirm that primary teaching remains a popular career choice attracting high academic achievers in Ireland. We note the continuing underrepresentation of males and of people from minority national and ethnic backgrounds. Roman Catholics and students without disabilities are overrepresented in the UG P cohort compared to postgraduate post-primary ITE cohorts and the general Irish population. Findings are discussed with reference to Irish and international literature on teacher diversity.

Keywords: Initial teacher education, student teachers' socio-demographic backgrounds, diversity, barriers

1. Introduction

The last decades have seen a significant diversification of the pupil populations across Europe as a result of increased immigration (eurostat, 2018a) as well as a move towards inclusive education for children with disabilities (United Nations, 2006, Article 24). Today, around 35 million persons born outside of the EU-28 are living in the European Union (EU) representing nearly 8 per cent of its population (eurostat, 2018a, b). In addition, 27 per cent of EU citizens¹ are living with a moderate or severe disability (Grammenos, 2016). In response to the increasingly complex and diverse societies and school populations, policy interest has gradually turned from a narrow perspective of economic integration towards wider social integration focussing on a number of interlinked dimensions, including education and schooling, social participation and religion. ‘Inclusion and equity in and through education’ has been declared the ‘cornerstone of a transformative education agenda’ by education policy makers across the world through the signing of the Incheon Declaration (2015, p. 7) at the World Education Forum.

Within this context of change and diversification, the homogeneity of teaching bodies, which are predominantly composed of individuals from majority-group socio-demographic backgrounds, has gained growing attention (Donlevy, Meierkord & Rajania, 2016; Zumwalt and Craig 2005; Hartsuyker, 2007; Schleicher 2014). The equity of access to education perspective has been extended to higher education, including initial teacher preparation programmes, and benefits of a diverse teaching profession for student, schools and societies have been recognised by researchers and policy-makers internationally and in Ireland (DES 2002; Lynch and Lodge 2004; Moran 2008; Teaching Council 2008, 2011a; Conway et al. 2009; Heinz 2011).

Ireland's latest National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015–2019) (HEA 2015a) includes a focus on diversifying ITE. Under Goal 1 ('To mainstream the delivery of equity of access in HEIs'), objective 1.7 is 'to increase access by students from target groups to initial teacher education' through the 'development of access programmes and routes to teacher training' (HEA 2015a, 26). Following this, in 2017, the Department of Education and Skills established a €2.7million Government fund to diversify Irish ITE through the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) (Strand 1: Equity of Access to ITE) (2017–2020) and a number of projects have now commenced in the various centres for ITE around the country to increase the numbers of those from target groups accessing the teaching profession. The targeted under-represented groups specified in the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) are: entrants from lower socio-economic groups (non-manual and semi-skilled manual worker groups); first-time, mature entrants, students with disabilities, part-time/flexible learners, further education award holders, and Irish Travellers (HEA, 2015a, p. 34).

This paper provides baseline data on the diversity of *undergraduate primary initial teacher education entrants* in Ireland focusing on a wide range of socio-demographic variables. Our findings and discussion will contribute to a better understanding of the 'diversity gap' between teacher and student populations in Ireland, which can inform evidence-based discussions about the rationale for diversifying the teaching profession in Ireland and possibilities of how such an aim may be achieved. While set in the Irish context, the article is also relevant for other jurisdictions as it offers an exploration of the barriers for individuals from underrepresented groups with regard to entering and progressing in the teaching profession.

2. Literature review

2.1. Perspectives on the rationale for diversifying the teaching profession

In our recent paper focusing on diversity in postgraduate post-primary initial teacher education (PG PP ITE) (authors, 2015) we described two important ‘perspectives on the rationale for diversifying the teaching population’: firstly, the ‘*equity of access*’ perspective focusing on the benefits to individuals from underrepresented groups who may encounter barriers to progression into the profession and, secondly, *benefits of a diverse teaching profession for students, schools and society* (authors, 2015).

With regard to the latter, a diverse and representative teaching profession is regarded desirable as it can best prepare *all* children for life in a diverse and democratic society where knowledge is not seen as the special privilege of the power-holding majority group. At the heart of arguments highlighting the benefits for minority students is the idea that minority teachers can be “cultural translators” and inspiring “role models” (authors, 2015; Villegas and Irvine 2010) for minority students in and outside the classroom. While most of the research on teacher diversity has focused on teachers’ and students’ ethnic and cultural backgrounds, a small number of studies have provided initial evidence of similar benefits for working class and disabled students working with working class and disabled teachers (cf. authors, 2015).

With regard to the benefits that minority (ethnic) teachers offer majority students and schools more generally, research has highlighted the impact that the representation of minorities in professional roles can have on pupils’ attitudes and world views, allowing them to overcome internalized beliefs about racial inferiority and incompetence (Villegas and Clewell 1998 cited in Sleeter and Milner 2011, p. 83), as well as on measures of social cohesion, such as the prevalence of bullying in school environments (Larochette et al. 2010).

In its first phase DITE focuses on the ‘equity of access’ rationale. As such, we consider the provision of a clearer picture of the socio-demographic backgrounds of ITE populations at primary (in this paper) and post-primary (authors, 2015) level as an important first step in our work. We discuss our findings in the context of possible barriers that may prevent individuals from underrepresented and/or minority groups to consider and/or successfully enter ITE and teaching in Ireland and raise critical discussion points for education policy makers and practitioners.

While data collection for DITE is currently restricted to ITE applicants and entrants it is important to emphasise that entry into initial teacher education forms only one step on a much longer teaching career pathway. To achieve long term change, it is important to identify and address barriers for individuals from underrepresented groups at all stages of this pathway, including: 1) at the pre-entry point where individuals consider (or not) teaching as a desirable and viable career option; 2) at the entry to ITE point, where interested individuals successfully access (or not) ITE programmes; 3) during ITE, to explore barriers that may impact performance and/or prevent student teachers from completing teacher preparation; 4) post-qualification, to explore progression into employment; and 5) throughout the various phases of the teaching career to explore barriers to retention and/or reasons for attrition (see Figure 1).

The DITE study is philosophically aligned with the teacher diversity agenda considering a diverse teacher population a key ingredient in the successful evolution of the educational system and society. We are, however, acutely aware of the dangers of stereotyping diverse (student) teachers and of the perpetuation of a discourse of ‘racial tokenism’ (Brown 2013, 13) which will not contribute to, and may indeed even counteract, greater equity and a true transformation at school and societal level (Santoro 2013; Hopson 2013). As we have argued in our previous paper (authors, 2015), we

recognise that diversity ‘matching’ approaches are problematic as they can position, and burden, teachers from underrepresented groups as the panacea for ‘students like them’. There is a real danger that a naive role model approach can lead to essentialised constructions of the identities of teachers and students from underrepresented groups. Efforts to diversify the teaching profession ought, in our view, to be made alongside a critical exploration of discourses of identity/ies and disadvantage in education and a better preparation of *all* student teachers, irrespective of their socio-demographic position, to be effective teachers for *all* students (cf. Ladson-Billings 2004; Cochran-Smith 2009) within a social justice context.

2.2. The backgrounds of primary ITE and teacher cohorts in Ireland

In the Irish context, three published studies have investigated some background characteristics of entrants to primary ITE (Drudy et al. 2005; Greaney et al., 1987; Killeavy 1993) with the most recent data (describing UG P students’ sex, social class background, academic achievement and geographical origin) collected from the 1998/1999 second-year cohorts of the five Irish primary colleges of education (Drudy et al. 2005). Three studies have explored the socio-demographic backgrounds of postgraduate post-primary (PG PP) ITE cohorts (Clarke 2009; Heinz, 2008, 2011, 2013; authors, 2015). Findings from these studies will be summarised with reference to the international context.

Sex. The relative overrepresentation of female applicants and entrants to ITE is a widespread phenomenon in Europe and worldwide, especially in the developed countries (authors, 2015; Moran 2008; OECD, 2014; Richardson and Watt 2006). In Ireland the proportion of female primary teachers increased steadily from 57 per cent at the beginning of the 20th century to 73 per cent in 1979 (Greaney et al. 1987) and

further to 84 per cent in 2007 (OECD 2009). In contrast, male participation rates at post-primary ITE increased from 27% in 2006 to 39% in 2014 (authors, 2015).

Age. In the Republic of Ireland, few mature students participate in primary ITE (3 per cent over the age of 21) compared to Northern Ireland, Britain and several European countries (Heinz 2011), and to the situation in Ireland thirty years ago (Greaney et al. 1987) when members of religious communities, who usually completed three years religious training prior to entering ITE, comprised between one third and one half of the intake to the primary education colleges (Killeavey 1993). In contrast, the percentage of mature PG PP ITE students increased from 15.2% in 1999 to 32.8% in 2005.

Nationality/ies, ethnicity and languages. Studies originating in the US, Australia, Northern Ireland and China found that the majority of student teachers are White and members of the dominant culture (Brookhart & Freeman 1992; Moran 2008; Richardson and Watt 2006; Su 1997; Zumwalt and Craig 2008). In Australia, Richardson and Watt reported that, depending on the University, between 81-90% of first-year teacher candidates spoke English at home. A recent study commissioned by the European Commission (Donlevy, Meierkord and Rajania, 2016) has emphasized that data on student teachers and teachers with migrant and/or minority ethnic background is very limited in Europe. The study found that people with a migrant and/or minority background are under-represented among initial teacher education candidates in nearly all of the eight countries for which data was available (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Sweden, the UK) with the exception of the Netherlands and Lithuania, where the diversity of both the learners and teaching workforce are very low (p. 38-41).

In Ireland, authors (2015) found that 98% of the 2013 and over 99% of the 2014 PG PP entrant cohorts claimed Irish nationality (as a single, primary or secondary

nationality). With regard to ethnicity, White Irish (Settled) PG PP entrants were significantly overrepresented relative to university entrants and the general Irish population (authors 2015). DITE is the first study to explore nationalities, ethnicities² and first languages of student and/or practicing primary teachers in Ireland.

Socio-economic backgrounds. Historically, teaching has been viewed as an upwardly mobile career choice for students from working and lower middle classes (Lortie 1975; Smith and Pratt 1996; Zumwalt and Craig 2008). In Ireland, an over-representation of the rural and farming community in teacher education has been reported since 1966 (Dunn and Morgan 1979; Killeavy 1998; Drudy et al. 2005) when 32.9 per cent of lay (non-religious) entrants to training colleges came from farming backgrounds and 50 per cent of non-religious entrants from the western seaboard (OECD 1966 cited in Dunn and Morgan 1979). While entrants to primary teaching in Ireland have come mainly from farming and middle-class backgrounds (Kelly 1970; Greaney et al. 1987; Drudy et al. 2005) recent studies (Heinz, 2013; authors 2015) described a broader socio-economic profile among PG PP entrants (see table 3).

Prior academic achievement. Teacher education programmes in the Republic of Ireland as well as in China, Taiwan, South Korea, Finland, Singapore, Hong Kong and Northern Ireland have attracted high academic achievers from within the top 30 percentiles (or higher) on academic ranking (Heinz, 2011; Barber and Mourshed, 2007). In Ireland and Northern Ireland, strong competition for restricted places on teacher education programmes together with academic selection criteria have been linked with academically strong ITE entrants (Drudy 2009b).

Religion. Very little research has explored religious affiliations and/or beliefs as a dimension of teacher diversity even though recent empirical studies have suggested a strong link between teachers' religious beliefs and professional identity as well as

practice (Hartwick 2015; White, 2010). Heinz (2013) found that a significantly larger proportion of PG PP ITE entrants did not belong to any religious group (9.5%) than was the case for the Irish population (4.4%). DITE is the first study to explore the religious backgrounds of primary ITE cohorts in Ireland³.

Disabilities. There is also a dearth of data about student teachers, and teachers, with disabilities in Ireland and internationally. Authors (2015) provided the first overview of the proportion of students with different types of disabilities entering PG PP programmes (see Table 5). They noted an increase in the proportion of entrants reporting disability/ies from 5.9% in 2013 to 8.9% in 2014.⁴

2.3. Barriers for potential primary teachers from underrepresented groups

Research seeking to uncover the reasons for the so-called “gender imbalance”⁵ in the Irish teaching body showed that many students’ third-level course choices followed *gender stereotypes*, with more girls than boys interested in teaching careers (Drudy et al. 2005). The stereotyping of teaching as “women’s work”, especially in the primary sector, has often been related to lower salaries relative to other professions resulting in teaching being viewed as a less prestigious profession for men in patriarchal systems (Drudy et. al 2005; Lortie 1975). Fears of being wrongly accused of child abuse have also been considered as a possible deterrent to males entering teaching, particularly at primary level (MCEETYA 2003).

Academic selection criteria have been discussed as a further barrier for males in Ireland. Drudy (2006) argued that poorer educational achievement by young men in second and third level education contributes significantly to the increasing feminisation of teaching. Her historical analysis showed that ‘the decline in male [UG P] entrants was immediate, rapid, dramatic and (with some fluctuations) continuous’ since primary educational colleges became co-educational in Ireland in 1975, leading to a change from

separate application systems for all-male and all-female colleges to universal cut-off points and programmes for all applicants (Drudy, 2006, p. 265).

US research focusing on ITE entrance patterns suggests that, due to historical inequities in opportunities and achievement, minority teacher candidates are less likely to meet high academic entry requirements (Cochran Smith and Zeichner 2005; Gilmer, Latham and Ziomek 1999). In Ireland, a small number of studies have shown that migrant students are more likely than non-migrant students to enrol in schools with designated disadvantaged status (Smyth et al. 2009) and that an achievement gap is emerging between young migrants and non-migrants (Darmody and Smyth, 2018; Ledwith and Reilly 2013). Various studies have, furthermore, demonstrated that a strong relationship exists between social class and academic attainment (Drudy et al. 2005; Clancy 1995; Smyth 1999). Academic selection criteria may, therefore, represent a significant barrier not only for men but also for socio-economically disadvantaged and/or ethnic minority groups in Ireland. Indeed, this barrier may be higher in the UG P ITE selection system, which is, in contrast to the PG PP system⁶, based exclusively on academic performance criteria.

The Irish language requirement represents another barrier for people of non-Irish origin (Hyland 2012; McDaid and Walsh, 2016) and for some people with disabilities (Lodge 2012). Irish is specified as an essential requirement for UG P ITE applicants and student teachers are subject to an oral Irish test at the end of year one. Indeed, primary teachers in Ireland are expected not only to develop a competence to teach the Irish language but to be able "...to teach the range of primary school curricular subjects through the medium of Irish" (DES, 2000) before being granted full recognition.

For many ‘students who are refugees, have certain learning difficulties, or have come from abroad and did not speak English when they enrolled in school’ the door to primary teaching is closed early as they ‘can be granted an exemption from the otherwise obligatory Irish instruction at school’ (DES 2005). In addition, Bachelor of Education programmes can currently prioritise ten per cent of places for applicants who live in Gaeltacht areas and speak Irish at home, allowing them to enter ITE programmes with significantly fewer points than non-Gaeltacht applicants.

The predominantly denominational (and mostly Catholic) Irish primary school and ITE system may act as a further deterrent for people who do not share the religious beliefs and/or values espoused by the great majority of primary schools as well as colleges of education⁷ (cf. Hyland 2012). Currently, 96 per cent of primary schools in Ireland are under denominational (90% under Catholic) patronage (Coolahan et al. 2012)⁸. Potential primary teachers not only need to ask themselves if they are prepared to study and work in an environment characterised by a religious (and most likely Catholic) ethos. They, furthermore, need to consider the possibility of their employment opportunities being slashed by 90 per cent if they are not prepared to complete a Catholic Certificate in Religious studies and/or to teach the Catholic faith on a daily basis.

Medical requirements have been discussed as a further barrier for potential primary teachers with disabilities. All incoming UG P students are required to complete a medical information form and qualified teachers are, again, screened for medical fitness before taking up their first employment (DES 2015). While UG P application documents state that “individuals will not be excluded on the grounds that they possess a particular condition or disability if it is deemed likely that it would be possible for that person to fulfil the requirements of the course with reasonable accommodation(s)”, it is

unclear what the criteria for assessment and “reasonable accommodation” are (DES 2016).

Last but not least, *high and recently increased costs of ITE programmes* (in terms of both, resources and time) may prevent mature students and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds from participating in ITE programmes in Ireland. Authors (2015) observed that a significant decrease in participation rates of mature entrants and of entrants from unskilled socio-economic groups (from 2013 to 2014) coincided with the extension of PG PP ITE programmes. Moreover, for asylum seekers and refugees, applying to ITE or any other third level course is almost impossible, as immigrants whose citizenship status is not settled would be charged exorbitant non-EU college fees.

A recent European study focusing on teacher diversity with a particular focus on migrant and/or minority background (Donlevy et al., 2016, p. 122) identified a worryingly long list of additional barriers faced by aspiring and practicing teachers with a migrant/minority background including language barriers, lack of confidence and awareness to opt for a teaching career, low prestige/salary of teaching profession, negative/discriminatory experiences in schools, ITE and the workplace, lack of cultural and social support groups at ITE stage, a monocultural approach to ITE, high levels of competition at career entry stage, risk of discriminatory recruitment practices, complicated processes for recognizing foreign teacher qualifications, burn-out of practicing teachers due to working in less well-resourced schools, relative marginalization/isolation as the ‘minority staff member’, lack of desire to play the role of the ‘intercultural ambassador’, and lack of career progression.

3. Methodology

Two data sources were analysed to explore i) overall application numbers and course preferences for UG P ITE programmes and ii) socio-demographic backgrounds of UG P

ITE entrants. Firstly, CAO application/admission data (N=2,525) provided information about all UG P ITE applicants' (first preference)⁹ and entrants' (any preference)¹⁰ sex (male/female), nationality (Irish, British, Other EU, Non EU), Leaving Certificate points, third level course preferences and course acceptances. Secondly, DITE survey data¹¹ was analysed to explore UG P entrants' sex (male/female/intersex), age (continuous scale), nationality/ies (open-ended item), ethnicity (Census categories), first language (open-ended), socio-economic group and social class (father's current or former occupation coded using Census categories), dis/ability (Census categories) and religious affiliations (Census categories) (CSO, 2012).

Table 1. Survey response rates broken down by UG P ITE programmes

UG P ITE Programmes (with CAO course codes)	Min LC Score 2014 (CAO Admission Data) ¹²	Total N of entrants (CAO figures)	DITE Survey respondents	
			N	Response rate
B.Ed. Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education (MH 001)	510	65	37	56.9%
B.Ed. (Gaeltacht) Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education (MH002)	490	3	2	66.7%
B.Ed. Marino Institute in Education and Trinity College Dublin (CM 001)	460	110	53	48.2%
B.Ed. (Gaeltacht) Marino Institute in Education and Trinity College Dublin (CM 002)	420	5	2	40.0%
B.Ed. Church of Ireland College of Education and Trinity College (CE 001)	390	32	14	43.8%
B.(Hons)Ed. Mary Immaculate College (MI 005)	465	379	165	43.5%
B.(Hons)Ed. (Gaeltacht) Mary Immaculate College (MI 006)	425	24	14	58.3%
B. (Hons.)Ed. in Education and Psychology (MI 008)	550	31	13	41.9%
B.(Hons.)Ed. St. Patrick's College (DCU)	465	400	224	56.0%

(PD101)				
B.(Hons.)Ed. (Gaeltacht) St. Patrick's College (DCU) (PD102)	425	12	6	50.0%
Total Numbers and Percentages for all programmes	n/a	1061	530	50.0%

All 2014 UG P ITE applicants were invited via email (one invitation followed by two reminders) to complete the DITE questionnaire between June and July 2014. Overall, 530 out of the overall 1,061 UG P entrants participated. Table 1 provides an overview of response rates for the various ITE programmes. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for Windows (version 21).

Limitations

Some of the difficulties encountered in previous studies collecting socio-demographic data (Drudy et al. 2005; Heinz, 2013) have to be emphasised as limitations of this study as well. First, our analysis of socio-economic/social class backgrounds relies on parental occupation even though social class position describes a more complex sociological concept including other factors such as relations to property, educational background, income and 'life chances' (Drudy and Lynch 1993, 138)¹³. Similarly, the use of census classifications for ethnicity, religion and dis/ability is problematic as it restricts respondents to a small number of preselected and seemingly fixed categories. However, despite these shortcomings, DITE uses census items (alongside open-ended items always placed before the relevant categorical items) with the aim of providing baseline data for ITE populations which can be compared with relevant statistics for the overall higher education and Irish population. Finally, varying levels of item non-response to sensitive questions have to be considered when interpreting the results. Most affected were the survey items asking respondents to

provide information about their religious affiliations (N=374; 70.5% of all respondents), dis/ability (N=392; 74.0% of respondents) and parental occupations (N=395; 74.5% of all respondents).

4. Findings

Entrance patterns to undergraduate primary initial teacher education (UG P ITE) programmes

In total, 2,437 CAO applicants specified an UG P ITE programme as their first choice on their application form. Out of these, 77 applied (and 44 entered) via the Gaeltacht route, securing additional points in the selection system. The total number of places was at 1,061 less than half the number of first preference applicants.

Out of the 1,061 UG P entrants, 91% (N=937) had specified an UG P ITE programme as their first preference, 1.5% (N=16) had specified an UG PP ITE programme as their first preference, and 6.8% (N=72) had specified a non-ITE programme as their first preference on their CAO application.

UG P entrants' prior academic attainment

CAO data confirmed UG P entrants' high Leaving Certificate achievement with a mean point score of 491.9 (SD=44.7), and a median of 490 points. Well over a third of entrants (N=432) had achieved over 500 points compared to only 9.7% of all Leaving Certificate candidates exceeding the same threshold. The average minimum LC score required to enter UG P programmes in 2014 was 475.7 (excluding lower Gaeltacht point requirements). In comparison, a minimum of 480 LC points are required to enter an UG course in medicine in Ireland where selection is based on the combined score of LC points and scores achieved on a Health Profession Admission Test (HPAT).

Sex

CAO recorded 82.4% of entrants as female and 17.6% as male. The composition of DITE survey respondents was 14.0% male, 85.8% female and 0.2% (N=1) intersex.

Age

The mean age of UG P entrants who responded to DITE (N=524) was 18.35 (SD=2.10), with a median of 18, a minimum of 16 and a maximum age of 40 years. In the same year, the mean age of PG PP entrants was 24.9 (SD=5.94) with a median of 23, a minimum of 19 and a maximum of 55 (Authors, 2015).

Nationality

The CAO records the nationality of UG P applicants as 99.9% (N=1,060) “Irish”, 0.1% (N=1) “British”, 0% “Other EU” and 0% “Non-EU”. DITE survey results (N=498) indicated that 96.2% of UG P respondents claimed Irish nationality *only*, 2.8% claimed Irish nationality first + another nationality¹⁴, 1.0% claimed a non-Irish nationality first¹⁵ + Irish nationality.

ITE entrants claiming Irish nationality *only* are significantly overrepresented compared to the general population (88.4% Irish) (CSO 2016). The total absence of individuals of non-Irish nationality/*ies only* is also in stark contrast with the rising percentage of “non-nationals” in Ireland (5.8% in 2002 to 11.6% in 2016 (CSO 2016).

Ethnicity

UG P entrants from the White Irish settled group are with 99.0% significantly overrepresented compared to the whole population (82.2%, CSO, 2016) and new entrants to universities (89.0%, HEA 2015). One respondent (0.2%) identified as White Irish Traveller, one (0.2%) as “any other White” and three (0.6%) as “other including mixed.”

Table 2. Ethnicity of 2014 UG P entrants, 2014 PG PP entrants, university entrants and the general population

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>UG P Entr</i>	<i>PG PP Entr</i> (Authors 2015)	<i>HEA</i> <i>(Uni)</i> <i>2015</i>	<i>CSO (2016)</i>
	%	%	%	%
White Irish	99.0	98.3	89.0	84.4
White Irish Traveller	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.7
Any Other White	0.2	1.1	6.1	9.8
Black or Black Irish - African	0	0	1.2	1.3
Black or Black Irish - Any Other	0	0	0.1	0.1
Asian or Asian Irish - Chinese	0	0.3	0.5	0.4
Asian or Asian Irish - Any Other	0	0	1.3	1.7
Any Other including mixed	0.6	0	1.5	1.5
N	489	348	n/a	n/a

First language

96.9% (N=472) of UG P entrants declared “English” and 3.1% (N=15) “Irish” as their first language. No other first languages were specified. In contrast, 13% of Irish residents speak a language other than English or Irish at home (CSO 2016).

Socio-economic group and social class

With regard to representational patterns and changes over time we note the following (see figures in Table 3):

- The highest represented socio-economic group among UG P entrants is Employers and Managers (25%), followed by Manual Skilled (19%). The pattern is reversed for PG PP entrants.

- The Farmers group (11.4%) remains most significantly over-represented in the UG P entrant cohort. The overall participation rate of this group has, however, decreased significantly in line with a decrease of the farming sector in the overall population (4.6%).
- Entrants from Professional/Managerial and Technical (social class 1 & 2) backgrounds are significantly overrepresented in the UG P cohort (50.5%) compared to the general population (35.7%). Their participation rate has, however, decreased from 57.9% in 1998/1999 (Drudy et al. 2005).
- The participation rate from the Semi-skilled/Unskilled (social class 5 & 6) group increased significantly from 9.3% in 1999 to 16.2% in 2014 resulting in proportionate participation when compared to the overall population (15.4% from social class 5 & 6). A significant increase in participation rates of these groups was also noted for PG PP ITE entrants from 4.7% in 2006 (Heinz 2013) to 18.2% in 2014 (Authors 2015).

Table 3. Socio-economic group of 2014 UG P and PG PP ITE entrants, university entrants and the general population

Socio-economic group	UG P ITE Entr %	PG PP ITE Entr (Keane and Heinz 2015) %	HEA 2014 (Univ) %	CSO 2016 (Male) %
A - Employer and Manager	25.1	20.0	18.8	16.7
B - Higher Professional	8.1	8.8	13.9	7.8
C - Lower Professional	11.6	8.1	9.9	10.7
D - Non-manual	12.9	10.5	9.9	15.4
E - Manual Skilled	18.7	22.8	8.2	11.3
F - Semi-Skilled	7.6	9.5	4.2	8.6
G - Unskilled	1.3	2.8	3.6	3.5
H - Own Account Worker	1.3	5.3	6.9	4.9
I - Farmers	11.4	11.6	6.8	4.6
J - Agricultural Workers	1.5	0.7	0.3	0.6
Z - Other (homemaker)	0.5	0.0	17.6	15.8

N	395	285	n/a	2,320,460
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Geographical Origin

Overall, 51.2% of respondents stated that they grew up in a rural area, 22.6% in a suburban area, 15.4% in a small town and 6.9% in an urban area. Seventeen respondents (3.9%) had lived in multiple locations (Total N=434).

Respondents' county of origin demonstrates that 2014 UG P entrants are more representative of the geographical distribution of the general Irish population than has been the case historically in Ireland. However, we note low participation rates of entrants from Dublin (15.8%) relative to the overall population (27.7%) (see Table 4).

UG P entrants who applied via the Gaeltacht route (N=44, 4.1% of entrants) were overrepresented compared to the proportion of Gaeltacht residents (2.0%) in the overall population (CSO 2016).

Table 4. Distribution of 2014 UG P entrants and the overall population by county

<i>County</i>	<i>UG P Entr N</i>	<i>UG P Entr %</i>	<i>CSO 2011 %</i>
Carlow	3	0.7	1.19
Cavan	10	2.3	1.59
Clare	8	1.8	2.55
Cork	59	13.5	11.31
Donegal	20	4.6	3.51
Dublin	69	15.8	27.75
Galway	30	6.9	5.46
Kerry	21	4.8	3.17
Kildare	17	3.9	4.58
Kilkenny	12	2.7	2.08
Laois	11	2.5	1.76
Leitrim	3	0.7	0.69
Limerick	19	4.3	4.18

Longford	5	1.1	0.85
Louth	12	2.7	2.68
Mayo	19	4.3	2.85
Meath	18	4.1	4.01
Monaghan	9	2.1	1.32
Offaly	7	1.6	1.67
Roscommon	10	2.9	1.4
Sligo	11	2.5	1.42
Tipperary	22	5	3.46
Waterford	9	2.1	2.48
Westmeath	7	1.6	1.88
Wexford	18	4.1	3.17
Wicklow	8	1.8	2.98
Total	437	100	4,588,252

Dis/ability

4.8% of UG P entrants declared a disability, just over half the proportion recorded for entrants to higher education (8.0%) in Ireland (HEA 2015). Table 5 provides an overview of the representations of different disability types for UG P entrants, PG PP entrants, higher education entrants and the overall Irish population¹⁶. UG P entrants with “physical” (N=1, 0.3%) and/or “learning” (N=1, 0.3%) disabilities are significantly underrepresented compared to disabled higher education entrants. The participation rate of individuals with a learning difficulty was also significantly higher among PG PP entrants (3.5%, N=10).

Religion

Roman Catholics are overrepresented and non-religious individuals are underrepresented in the UG P entrant cohort compared to the PG PP entrant cohort (Authors 2015) and the general population in Ireland (CSO 2016). In more detail we note:

- 90.4% of UG P entrants identified as Roman Catholics. This compares to 85.8% of PG PP entrants and 78.3% of the general population.
- 3.7% of UG P entrants compared to 1.9% of PG PP entrants declared their affiliation with the Church of Ireland. These figures compare to 2.6% of the overall population.
- The proportions of UG P (0.5%) and PG PP (0.6%) entrants affiliated with Presbyterianism reflect those in the general population (0.5%).
- UG P entrants who reported having no religion (4.8%) were underrepresented compared to PG PP entrants (9.7%) and the overall population in Ireland (9.8%).
- There were no members of the Muslim community (the third biggest religious group recorded in Ireland¹⁷ (1.3% of the population) represented in UG P or PG PP entrant samples.

Table 5. Proportions of disabled UG P and PG PP entrants, higher education entrants and the overall population with different disability types

<i>Disability Type</i>	<i>UG P Entr</i>	<i>PG PP Entr</i> (Authors 2015)	<i>HEA 2015</i>	<i>CSO 2016</i>
Physical Disability	N=1 (5.3%)	N=2 (7.4%)	14.2%	65.5%
Learning Difficulty	N=1 (5.3%)	N=10 (37.0%)	57.3%	34.8%
Psychological/emotional condition	N=6 (31.6%)	N=8 (29.6%)	25.1%	19.2%
Other, including chronic illness	N=12 (63.1%)	N=10 (37.0%)	23.4%	46.1%
Total N of respondents with disability	N=19	N=27	n/a	n/a

Notes:

Physical Disability includes: Deafness or a serious hearing impairment, Blindness or a serious vision impairment, a difficulty with basic physical activities

Learning Difficulty includes: A difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD). The separate category of “intellectual disability” introduced in Census 2011 is included under Learning Difficulties for the CSO data.

Respondents can specify more than 1 condition and therefore data does not add up to 100%.

With regard to DITE data, one UG P entrant and three PG PP entrants specified multiple disabilities which are all recorded in the table – percentages therefore don’t add up to 100.

Multiple: 1 UG P Entrant with Depression and Asthma; 1 PG PP entrant with Learning and Psychological; 1 PG PP entrant with Psychological/emotional & Other; 1 PG PP entrant with Learning & Other

5. Discussion and conclusion

DITE's core aim is to promote a diverse and inclusive teaching profession in Ireland by informing policy makers and educational practitioners about the current "diversity gap" (between pupil and teacher populations) and by promoting discussions of benefits and challenges associated with a more diverse teaching population as well as of barriers that may discourage or prevent individuals from underrepresented groups from considering and/or pursuing teaching careers in Ireland.

Our analyses of entrance patterns to and diversity in *undergraduate primary initial teacher education* is timely and highly significant in the context of the enormous diversification of school populations in Ireland over the past two decades. While the young age profile, the underrepresentation of males and the overrepresentation of individuals from farming and/or rural backgrounds among UG P ITE cohorts have been previously, though not recently, noted in empirical studies (Drudy et al. 2005; Greaney et al. 1987; Killeavy 1993), discussions of barriers to participation for minority ethnic and otherwise disadvantaged groups (i.e. disabled and lower socio-economic groups) have lacked an empirical evidence base.

Our findings demonstrate that primary teaching continues to attract high numbers of academically strong applicants. Analyses of application data showed that the vast majority of UG P entrants specified primary teaching as their first course choice indicating a high regard for and strong commitment to the career. However, while these findings may provide some welcome, albeit limited, evidence of the continuing high

quality of Ireland's teaching profession, our analysis of UG P entrants' socio-demographic backgrounds raises serious questions with regard to the equity and diversity in Ireland's future primary teaching body.

We noted a total absence of individuals claiming a non-Irish nationality *only* among 2014 UG P entrants. With regard to ethnicity and first language, 99% of respondents identified as White Irish Settled and 100% specified either English or Irish as their first language. These figures contrast starkly with the greatly diversified pupil and general populations (CSO, 2016).

We provided baseline data with regard to dis/ability in ITE demonstrating an overall underrepresentation of disabled students and near absence of students with learning and physical disabilities in the 2014 UG P cohort. While issues of disclosure, which remains difficult for disabled ITE applicants/students (Treanor 2012), may have impacted our results despite a strong emphasis on anonymity and confidentiality, the significantly higher participation (and disclosure) rates of PG PP ITE applicants with learning disabilities (Authors, 2015) may point to differences in perceived and/or actual structural and cultural barriers. As such, it might be that primary teaching is perceived to be less appropriate than post-primary teaching for individuals with learning disabilities and/or that exclusively academic selection criteria and additional Irish language requirements make access to primary ITE nearly impossible for students with learning disabilities in contrast to postgraduate post-primary ITE.

Our data showed that the previously reported overrepresentation of students from professional and managerial/technical social class backgrounds as well as from farming and rural communities in UG P ITE continues even though the percentage of farmers' children decreased significantly in line with a continuing decrease of farmers in the overall population. We noted a significant increase of the numbers of primary ITE

entrants from semi-skilled and unskilled social class backgrounds, an encouraging trend pointing to greater diversity of ITE cohorts with regard to their socio-economic/social class backgrounds. We also note a more representative cohort in terms of UG P entrants' geographical origin than has been the case historically despite the persistence of relatively low participation rates of people from Dublin. These changes in the composition of Irish nationals entering UG P ITE are likely associated with an economically and infrastructurally changed Ireland providing better access to and a greater choice of careers, particularly for those from rural and farming communities.

While this study therefore provided evidence of some changes in the composition of the Irish (i.e. non-migrant) UG P ITE cohort, it points to its homogeneity in terms of nationality/ies, ethnicity/ies, and first language as well as to the underrepresentation of people with disabilities and of minority religious (or non-religious) groups. It is important to note that the patterns of underrepresentation reported here for both primary and post-primary ITE cohorts are only partially reflected in Ireland's first national initiative (HEA, PATH Strand 1: Equity of Access to ITE, 2017-2020) aimed at supporting increased access and participation in initial teacher education by six identified target groups. While the Higher Education Authority's important PATH, Strand 1 initiative aims to increase participation by individuals from lower socio-economic groups, the Travelling community and from persons with a disability/ies, it does not include a focus on the very significant underrepresentation of individuals from a minority ethnic, religious and/or language background.

In light of these findings and considering the potential barriers for underrepresented groups discussed in the literature review of this paper, we recommend that policy-makers and education practitioners:

- 1) engage in critical discussions about the rationale for supporting the growth of a more representative teaching population in Ireland, including in relation to the desirability and benefits of a teaching body that represents the cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity of the country today,
- 2) continue and monitor the impact of the current PATH – Strand 1 initiative and consider more teacher diversity policies and initiatives that provide support to people from underrepresented and/or disadvantaged groups at every stage of the teaching ‘pathway’, focusing on 1) encouraging individuals from underrepresented groups to consider teaching as a career; 2) access and entry to ITE; 3) performing well and graduating from ITE; 4) entering the teaching profession; 5) and staying in the teaching profession.
- 3) provide support for further research to track trends over time in terms of the socio-demographic backgrounds, motivations, and experiences of ITE applicants/entrants and qualified teachers (including those from minority backgrounds) at every stage of the teaching ‘pathway’.

Specifically, discussions and further research addressing teacher diversity in Ireland should explore the following questions:

- What are the goals and expected benefits (for teachers? for pupils? for society more broadly?) of current and future teacher diversity and equity initiatives?
- What measures could be taken to attract and recruit more individuals from currently underrepresented/minority groups into the teaching profession?¹⁸
- What are the principles/goals underpinning currently-employed ITE selection criteria¹⁹? Are there barriers in the current application/selection system for those from underrepresented/minority groups? Should (and if yes, how) diversity and

equity policies (in terms of affirmative action²⁰) be included in the ITE selection process?

- Are there other barriers²¹ preventing individuals from underrepresented/minority groups from considering teaching as a career? (the culture of Ireland's teaching profession and schools, hiring practices in schools, career guidance practices in schools, financial issues including programme fees, living costs, access to grants and other financial supports, the religious (mostly Catholic) ethos of Irish schools and primary ITE institutions, the Irish language requirement for primary teaching, negative/discriminatory experiences, others?)
- If more students from underrepresented/minority backgrounds were successfully recruited into ITE programmes, what adaptations/supports are required at ITE programme level to support successful retention and completion, for example in relation to pedagogy, assessment, student support, and cultural practices? What adaptations are required at school placement level, for example, in terms of schools' policies for accepting and supporting student teachers? Are supports required in relation to mentoring and inducting newly-qualified teachers from minority groups into the teaching profession?

Meaningful engagement with teacher diversity issues will require readiness and determination to critically interrogate: firstly, some long-standing (and historically rooted) structures and cultural practices of the Irish education system, and, secondly, tensions between quality, equity and diversity goals of ITE selection criteria as well as the need for efficiency and fairness in the selection process. Furthermore, research that explores career motivations and decision making of students from minority groups as well as the experiences of minority ITE students and newly qualified teachers is needed in the Irish context²², in addition to the ongoing collection and analysis of ITE cohorts'

socio-demographic data, to support the development and review (in terms of impact and potentially unintended side effects) of strategies that can effectively contribute towards a high quality, equitable and diverse teaching profession in Ireland.

¹ Based on data on disability conducted from persons aged 16 and over.

² For a more detailed discussion of ethnicity of primary and post-primary initial teacher education applicants see Keane and Heinz (2016)

³ For a detailed discussion of ITE applicants' religious backgrounds, religious practice and attitudes towards teaching religion see Heinz, Keane and Davison, 2018.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of dis/ability in ITE see Keane and Heinz, 2017.

⁵ While males are underrepresented in teaching they are, in contrast to other underrepresented/minority groups, a political (power holding) majority group and, thus, positioned differently to other disadvantaged minority groups. For critical discussions of the "gender imbalance" in teaching see Davison (2007) and Drudy et al. (2005).

⁶ In the PG PP ITE selection system, points are available for prior relevant experience and interviews are held at Dublin City University and Trinity College Dublin. See Author (2011) for a detailed description of PG PP selection systems.

⁷ Four of the five state-funded colleges of education are guided by a religious ethos. Marino Institute of Education, Mary Immaculate College and St. Patrick's College promote a Catholic and the Church of Ireland College of Education an Anglican ethos.

⁸ The patronage system is currently under review by the Irish Government but, at the time of writing, there is no clear indication of what shape the reform will take.

⁹ CAO applicants who had specified an UG P ITE programme as their first preference on their CAO application form

¹⁰ CAO applicants who had specified an UG ITE programme anywhere among their course preferences and who accepted, and thus entered, an UG P ITE programme

¹¹ The anonymous DITE questionnaire was granted full ethical approval by the Authors' institutional ethics committee

¹² http://www2.cao.ie/points/lvl8_14.pdf, Accessed 01/03/2016.

¹³ DITE includes further relevant survey items, i.e. parental education, parental work status, 1st in family to attend higher education as well as a social class self-classification item together

with an open ended item where respondents explain reasons for their self-classification. The DITE team is currently working on an in-depth social class in ITE paper.

¹⁴ 4 American, 1 Australian, 1 British, 4 English, 2 German, 1 Italian, 1 Motswana

¹⁵ 3 American, 1 British, 1 English

¹⁶ When using CSO disability statistics for comparison it is important to consider that a strong link exists between increasing age and disability with rates of less than 8% recorded for people in their twenties compared to over 20% by age 60. This link is particularly strong for physical disabilities and chronic illnesses.

¹⁷ Muslim community grew from 0.1% in 1999 to 1.1% in 2011

¹⁸ For an overview and discussion of minority teacher recruitment policies and programmes in the US see Villegas, Strom & Lucas, 2012.

¹⁹ For a discussion of international research exploring ITE selection criteria, and an exploration of the predictive value of the PG PP (NUI) selection criteria for ITE students' achievement see Heinz (2013b). Heinz's (2013b) calls into question the quality, fairness and transparency rationale behind the strong emphasis on academic selection criteria.

²⁰ For explorations of the concept of affirmative action (philosophical, legislative and judicial analyses as well as case studies) see Cunningham (2000).

²¹ Due to word limit constraints we could not explore the full range of factors impacting on career decisions.

²² Research conducted in the UK emphasized lower completion rates of minority ITE students many of whom experienced social isolation and stereotypical attitudes which put them in danger of marginalization (Wilkins and Lall 2011).

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