

DISADVANTAGE:ITS NATURE AND EXTENT IN RELATION TO EDUCATION..

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SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

The advent of "free education", that is publicly provided education financed out of general taxation has prompted basic questions about education and disadvantage. Most of the industrialised countries now provide publicly financed education through primary, secondary and often third level. Educational qualifications act as "tickets", permitting access to employment slots. The higher the qualification, the higher the income received. But does free education increase or diminish the role of the disadvantaged groups in society? How much can education be expected to counter inequalities? What do we mean by inequality? How extensive is inequality in Ireland? What can be done about it? These are the types of question which this paper attempts to answer.

Educational disadvantage is reviewed under four headings before proceeding to some suggest ways in which pressure might be mounted for change. Because equality as applied to education is necessarily a moving target, renewed commitments and revised methods are always required. The four headings are:

- *the meanings of disadvantage and inequality and their implications for education,
- *the extent of inequalities in Ireland, by class, gender and region,
- *the performance of the Irish educational and training systems in response to the crisis of rising unemployment in the 1980's,
- *some international evidence and experience with schemes to counter educational disadvantage.

In summary, equality is shown to be a complex concept, despite its customary simplistic usages, and one which is capable of multiple meanings. It is argued that a concern with equality would lead one to the educational goal of equalising basic educational attainments for students of different backgrounds and abilities in a basic range of skills. Equality of attainment is a more demanding goal than, for example, equality of access, use, or resource use. Equality of attainment would necessitate high quality primary and post primary education organised so as to compensate for educational differences arising from family, class, gender, and regional inequalities so as to make students equally capable in a range of basic skills. Achievement or even movement towards such a goal would involve major changes both in national objectives and in the ways that schools are organised, including the setting of detailed objectives, and much improved management and monitoring. Local educational planning and new teaching practices, based on the diffusion of the results of the various pilot programmes, would also be required.

A review of the fragmentary, dated but compelling evidence in Ireland shows considerable inequalities along various dimensions. Income from earnings is very unevenly distributed with only slight amelioration by state taxes and spending. Of state spending programmes, cash benefits had the most equalising effect, while public spending on education tended to worsen rather than reduce inequalities. Disparities by income group/social class in educational expenditure resulted from higher participation rates by the higher income groups and higher costs per place the further one progressed through the educational system. Educational expenditure overall has not been reduced despite the budgetary constraints, and primary education has fared relatively well, but without developing the kinds of initiatives which are necessary. Early school leavers (those leaving before the Leaving Certificate) and drop-outs (those leaving without any qualifications), who are the most seriously disadvantaged, come predominantly from the lower income groups. Gender inequalities persist despite much increased female participation rates in education. Subject choice and availability is more restricted in girls schools, which have also been less flexible in responding to the changing labour market. Although regional inequalities in third level participation rates are striking, second level failure and drop rates taken together show little variation by region. Regional variations in staying on rates seem to be due to factors like social class and type of school rather than regional differences as such. There is some evidence however, that emigration rates vary both by region and gender, with higher rates for girls and for those with Leaving Certificate results compared to drop outs. Since early school leavers and drop outs are at particular disadvantage, the evidence that these can be predicted on the basis of a small number of factors (social class, sex and type of school) offers the exciting possibility that interventions could be specifically targetted at this group.

An examination of the performance of the Irish educational system suggests that only a very limited form of equality is practiced in education. Equality of access exists through second level but is only taken used up to fifteen, the school leaving age. Even then there is disturbingly high drop out rate before fifteen. Although very poor data exists on resource use, it is likely to be more unevenly distributed than use alone would suggest because of subject and school disparities. The goals of equality of attainment regardless of socio-economic background (model 4) or regardless of ability (model 5) are not taken seriously in Irish education. Looked at as a system responding to the crisis of high and rising unemployment, it has responded fairly rationally (less so in the case of girls) to the rules within it operates, but in ways that have increased inequalities. As competition for

better examination results has increased, schools have tended to seek out the more able students, with the result that low achievers have received less attention. The imbalance in the labour market has led to high unemployment which cannot be remedied by changes in the educational system. Only economic growth and economic restructuring could increase the demand for labour. Action to counter disadvantage could affect who gets which jobs, but with excess supply of labour, both unemployment and emigration tend to increase. The pressure on the labour market has been relieved temporarily by the development of new training and educational schemes and more permanently by youth emigration. The case is presented for a labour market policy which would integrate the range of measures affecting labour markets, including education and training. Because of the importance of emigration, some suggestions are proffered about what an emigration policy might be like including facilitating Irish students to study in the UK, and aid to "safety net" welfare organisations dealing with destitute Irish in the main emigration destinations abroad.

Ireland is not unique, particularly as regards the relationship between youth unemployment and early school leaving. Although similar levels of educational failure exist in many countries, the UK experience shows that the proportion leaving school without qualifications can be drastically reduced. However this raises questions about the value of minimal qualifications which have in the UK been based on new, lower quality examinations. Educational interventions can, it seems from the various experiments, be effective if clearly defined, measurable, targets are set, but with success confined to the fairly narrow areas where education can be expected to matter. Clear definitions of the role of management and teachers and students seems to be essential. But educational changes, it seems clear, cannot by themselves change society.

With regard to how greater educational equality might be improved in Ireland, it is suggested that, firstly, much improved routine data is needed on the performance of schools, training and employment over a wide range of indicators, and secondly, changes are required in the rules and incentives schools face so that the objectives of equality can be approached. Immediately, this could involve:

- * a continuing shift in resources to primary education,
- * the use of such extra resources to counter disadvantage via measures like focussing on the groups likely to leave early or drop out, and diffusion of the more effective interventions which have emerged from the pilot projects,
- * reorganisation of educational planning at local levels, in order to define catchment areas and clarify who is to manage

schools and to what ends. Particular problems are noted to do with changing the ethos and organisation of the many schools owned and managed by religious orders.

In the longer term, changes in the ways schools are remunerated may be necessary to ensure their achievements fall within the ranges of outcomes deemed desirable by national policy. Policy may need to be related more systematically to outcomes rather than at present being based essentially on the number of students, regardless of their performance. Such a move towards greater selectivity in state funding has parallels across the entire public sector.

This all of course implies a political will to implement such changes; a political will which can only be developed by continual work and publicity to these issues.

SECTION 2. DISADVANTAGE AND INEQUALITY : MEANINGS AND APPLICATIONS.

Any serious discussion of education and disadvantage requires clarification about the terms being used, particularly disadvantage and inequality. Disadvantage is used here to refer to those who are relatively disadvantaged, particularly in relation to the labour market but also socially and culturally. Since society and particularly labour markets have been changing rapidly, the meanings of disadvantage have been continually shifting. Inequalities are likely to arise and persist if income distribution is left to market forces; for this reason the state intervenes in the interest of economic justice, providing goods and services which are seen as publicly desirable (public goods and merit goods in economic terminology). The concept of economic justice owes much historically to the influence of Christianity which tended to argue for each individual being allowed a certain irreducible minimum, regardless of what the market might dictate¹. The importance of Christianity in discussing Irish education relates to the powerful role the Catholic Church continues to play because of its ownership and management of schools.

Inequality is the more basic concept underlying disadvantage, and as such requires more detailed discussion. O'Higgins, in a recent and useful review of how the concept of inequality might be made operational in evaluating welfare programmes² suggested that much confusion has been caused by the variety of meanings which are often attached to the term. He argues that equality would be simple rather than complex only in a world

a) with one subject for equality, one class of members: in the real world there are myriad patterns of groupings,
b) with one for-all-time allocation of items of value; in the real world allocation is multiple and plural,
c) where everything of value is infinitely divisible; but in the world there are indivisibilities,
d) where human beings are similar in tastes, preferences and the value they place on things - which is not true, and
e) where there is dichotomous thought: everything is true or false, equal or unequal. In the real world, however, some inequalities are greater than others.

All of these complexities apply to education. Different groups might include, for example class, gender,

¹The Rise and Fall of Economic Justice, CB MacPherson, Oxford, 1986.
²Egalitarians, Equalities and Welfare Evaluation, Michael O'Higgins, Jnl Social Policy, January 1987, vol. 16, 1, 1-18.

region, ethnicity, degree of able-bodiedness, etc. Educational achievements result from complex interactions of family and school, and can be acquired over varying time periods. Educational achievements are not infinitely divisible but "lumpy" in the form of graded certificates. Human beings obviously vary widely, inter alia, in their attitudes to education and in their "educability". And while inequalities in educational qualifications vary continuously, those who fail to receive any such qualifications in effect are not allowed join in the labour market "game" or do so with a heavy handicap.

For these reasons it becomes impossible to talk simply of equality but rather of equalities. This approach is different from the conservative objection to equality as too diverse for the uniformity implied by equality. Instead, this approach attempts to substitute a more complex and realistic concept for the simplistic concept often used.

How might these different equalities be applied to to the day to day allocation of education? The following list (derived from OHiggins and Weale ¹) shows egalitarian policy objectives in which the successive targets are increasingly demanding. Equality might be:

1. Equality of access to education so people were equally free to use a service,
2. Equality of use, so that they take equal advantage of this equality of access,
3. Equality of resource use, so that the equality of use was substantive rather than symbolic,
4. Equality of attainment despite socio-economic backgrounds. This can be seen as equalising global resources, so that public interventions in education are positively designed to favour the less well off by counterbalancing the inequality in private provision. In terms of outcome, the goal might be ensuring that students of the same ability perform equally well despite different socio-economic backgrounds.
5. Equality of attainment for all students despite differences in ability. This might imply going beyond equality in global resources in 4 above, to focus on correcting for ability disparities. This is clearly a more extreme form of egalitarianism, which could only be achieved in those subjects where differences in abilities were amenable to remedy.

A useful distinction can be made between global and allocational egalitarianism. Global egalitarianism is involved in models 4 and 5 which vary public provision in order to counter disparities in private provision. Under 1, 2 and 3, resources are allocated equally to each person on a

1 Weale, Political Theory and Social Policy, London, 1983.

universal basis, the more common method.

As noted above, each of these levels, or models, involves a progressively more thorough-going commitment to equality. The history of free school provision suggests that equality of access in model 1 above is too limited a means of achieving equality, because the freedom to be educated rather than the actuality of being educated is equalised. The equality of use in model 2 might involve all actually attending school, but can also be seen as too limited in that it can easily involve nominal attendance allied with differences in the resources used by different groups (different schools or streaming within schools). Model 3 attempts to counter this by insisting on equality of resource use, that is that students all study similar subjects in similar environments. However, equality of resource use may still fail to achieve equality of attainment because of differences in global resource use resulting from inequalities in private resources, for example students from privileged homes have better study facilities, more educated parents and so on. The more thorough-going equality of model 4 attempts to ensure equal global resource use by tilting public resources to balance out private resources, so that student attainment becomes independent of socio-economic background. The result of applying this model would be a meritocracy. However, inequalities resulting from ability differences will persist; ability differences which can be seen as socially or genetically determined or more likely due to a combination of both. The goal of equalising for ability differences in model 5 would involve the global egalitarianism of model 4 but with an extra dimension correcting for ability differences, perhaps by positive discrimination towards those initially judged less able.

Which of these models should be chosen? A concern with freedom and autonomy as underlying values would lead one, Weale¹ suggests, to favour model 4 or 5, the other models being likely to lead to widespread inequalities. The meritocracy of model 4 offers too little, according to Weale, who characterises it as offering equal opportunity to become unequal. Model 5 demands too much, however, unless confined to a less than comprehensive set of subjects. Abilities in say music or maths may be so different that equalisation of attainments might pose formidable problems. On this basis, Weale argues that the proper goal of educational equality involves going beyond the meritocratic model but without fully adopting the highly stringent fifth model.

The solution to how far education should go in attempting equality of outcomes regardless of socio-economic background (model 4) and ability (model 5) involves distinguishing between those cultural and educational skills which are essential for an "independent plan of life" and those which are essential to "particular plans of life" (Weales terms). In other words, the social and the individual levels are to be distinguished. Equality of educational opportunity entails securing a specified level of performance at the social level, perhaps in the form of a common or core curriculum which all persons should be taught to master and with particular attention being paid to those who have difficulties.

The above criteria echo the approaches of several other commentators. Dale Tussing¹ argued that education as a quasi public good should be publicly financed up to the end of compulsory schooling. Thereafter education should be considered as an private good, to be mainly funded privately since its returns accrue largely to individuals. A somewhat similar view of the role of education has been taken by Marshall², who sees a necessity for a basic level of education as essential to the concept of citizenship. This approach is also close to that advocated by Hargreaves³ who argues for dignity as a central aim in education. Dignity he suggests, depends firstly on the person acquiring competences and a sense of making a valid contribution to the life of the group he/she belongs to and secondly, having a sense of being valued by those other groups. According to the OECD, many countries have moved towards a core curriculum which emphasises "necessary" rather than "desirable" knowledge as a preparation for modern life, but few have followed through the implication of positive discrimination required to equalise attainments⁴. The prioritisation of primary education has also been urged repeatedly by the NESC in its commentaries and recommendations on social policy⁵. Thus it seems that a strong case can be made from a variety of sources for an egalitarian approach to education that provides a basic component of high standard to all up to a certain age.

If education was to take seriously the goal of equalisation

¹Irish Educational Expenditures, Past, Present and Future, AD Tussing, ESRI, Dublin 1978.

²The Social Thought of TM Marshall, T Rees, 1976.

³DH Hargreaves, The Challenge of the Comprehensive School, RKP, London, 1982

⁴Education in Modern Society, OECD, 1985, page 70.

⁵NESC Reports 8, 61, 70, 73, 79, 83.

of basic attainments, major changes would be required, not only in the curriculum but also in the organisation and ethos of schools. Schools are highly complex organisations, within which, as Handy and Atkins¹ point out, tend to have poor management structures, unclear goals and with teachers playing a variety of sometimes conflicting roles. The culture and organisation of schools varies drastically by level, with primary schools having small classes, single teachers and a "club" type atmosphere, while secondary classes tend to be bigger, and serviced by a succession of more specialised teachers as exams begin to assume greater importance. Students are assumed to make the necessary transitions without problems. Even across schools at the same level, enormous differences exist depending on the management styles (autocratic, autonomous, or team), the types of teachers and the social environment from which students are drawn. Typically educational organisation types are not recognised, objectives are not made explicit and appraisal is either unknown or haphazard.

Schools in Ireland exhibit at least two further characteristics which would pose problems for any attempt to pursue the goals of equality discussed above. First, many schools are owned and managed by religious orders, despite being almost entirely financed by the state out of taxes. While an egalitarian, non-market approach might in theory be facilitated by the power of the Catholic Church, in practice this has not turned out to be the case. Catholic schools seem to be among the most competitive in recruiting the more able students, in maintaining fee paying secondary education and in leaving vocational and latterly comprehensive and community schools to deal with the problems of educational disadvantage. Some orders of course have a proud record in providing free secondary education before the state undertook this responsibility, but these orders do not seem to have rethought their commitment to equality in the context of free secondary education. Whether or not the Irish religious orders can be embarrassed into a practice closer to the values they espouse is a question which perhaps can only be answered by endeavour.

The second difficulty in organisational terms perhaps flows from the first, and has to do with the lack of any institutional provision of local educational planning. Unlike the UK where Local Education Committees administer educational spending and plan catchment areas etc., control in Ireland is divided between the Department of Education, and individual schools which are allowed considerable autonomy. If

¹Understanding Schools as Organisations, C Handy, R Aitken, Penguin, 1986

education and training were to be reorganised to meet equality objectives, local educational planning would be required to fill the gap between the Department and individual schools, to monitor progress and to win local support.

SECTION 3. INEQUALITIES IN IRELAND.

This section briefly reviews the evidence on the extent of class, gender, school, regional and emigration inequalities in Ireland. Although the data is patchy, the patches all signal high levels of inequalities. Concern with inequality is a recent issue in Ireland, with most of the work having been done by the ESRI, NESC and more recently the YEA. This section starts with the more general inequalities relating to income and public expenditure, before focussing more specifically on educational inequalities.

Class and Income Inequalities.

The best way to approach the issue of class inequality is via income distribution, since variations in income are largely explicable in terms of class and family cycle¹. The data on income inequality is poor, the main relevant source being the Household Budget Survey, which has been carried out on a seven yearly basis (1966, 1973, 1980 and 1987). The purpose of the Survey is mainly to collect data on consumption patterns to be used in the construction of the Consumer Price Index. Consequently the definitions and categories used have not been those that analysts of equality might have proposed. However, the HBS provides by far the best source of data on income inequality and tax and public service utilisation. Some agencies have been critical of the HBS on the grounds of its deficiencies; but until a better alternative is offered, such objections lack both commitment to examining inequalities, and awareness of the extent to which similar studies have been extensively used and refined in other countries. What can the Household Budget Survey tell us about income inequality in Ireland?

In brief, that income is distributed highly unequally, and that the intervention of the state, while ameliorative, is very confined, and most effective in the case of cash transfers (social welfare) and least effective in education.

¹The Distribution of Income in the Republic of Ireland: A Study in Social Class and Family Cycle Inequalities. D. Rottamn, D. Hannan, N. Hardiman, M. Wiley, ESRI Paper 109.

To follow this ,the following definitions must be explained:
Direct Income refers to all market income earned by individuals in whatever form,
Gross Income refers to Direct Income plus Cash Transfers
Disposable Income refers to Gross Income less direct taxation,
Final Income refers to Disposable Income and the values of subsidies received less indirect taxes.

The share of these different incomes by decile of the population in 1973 and 1980 is shown in Figures 1 and 2 below. Although the data sources are somewhat dated ,the similarity in the two years is striking, suggesting that little has changed since. The top 10% of the population received almost 30% of income, however defined, while the bottom 50% received only around 20%

[Figures 1 and 2 here]

Between 1973 and 1980 inequality in direct income increased slightly. Gross income was also more unequal in 1980 than in 1973, although state cash benefits mitigated the increase. The top two deciles increased their share of gross income while the share of the lowest deciles fell. State cash benefits were more redistributive in 1980 than in 1973 but not enough to counteract the increased inequality in direct incomes.

The inequality in disposable income fell however between 1973 and 1980, due to the increased progressivity of direct taxation. The share of the top two deciles fell slightly, while the share of the rest either increased slightly or remained the same.

The distribution of final income is very little different from that of disposable income, showing that indirect taxes and publicly provided services together have little effect on inequality. The conclusion to be drawn from the data presented so far is that cash transfers in the form of Social Welfare have the main impact on inequality.

A more detailed account of the effects of particular programmes is provided in Figure 3 which shows that cash transfer payments are the most redistributive. Of the services which are publicly provided, health care is used fairly equally across the income groups but with education being shared out most unequally with the top fifth of households capturing 31% of the value compared to 9% by the poorest fifth:

Figures 1 and 2 are based on the reference cited in Table 1.

Table 1.
DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC SOCIAL EXPENDITURE TO INCOME GROUPS.

Gross Income Quintile	% of Public Expenditure on			
	Education	Health	Housing	Social Welfare
Top 20%	30.6	24.5	6.6	9.2
4th 20%	24.6	20.6	11.4	10.2
3rd 20%	20.3	18.8	20.0	12.6
2nd 20%	15.3	18.3	20.6	23.0
bottom 20%	9.1	17.8	41.4	45.0

Source: The Redistributive Effects of Social Expenditure and Taxation in the Republic of Ireland: An Evaluation of Welfare State Policies by DR Rottman, D Hannan and P OConnell, Paper read to European Centre for Work and Society Conference, 19-21 Dec. 1984.

[Figure 3 here]

The reasons that public expenditure on education is so unequally distributed are two fold:

*first, because participation rates for post compulsory education remain high for the higher income groups right up to third level but drop off sharply for the lower income groups, and

*second, the cost per place is much higher at post compulsory level and rises the further one goes through the system. The cost per student by level is shown in Figure 4, indicating that a primary pupil costs around half that of a secondary pupil and one fifth of the cost of a third level student. While third level unit costs have been declining in recent years, unit costs at primary and secondary levels have remained largely unchanged.

[Figure 4 here]

The budget restrictions of the 1980s have had little real impact on education, as evidenced by the share of public spending on education expressed as a percentage of GNP:

YEAR	EDUCATION AS % GNP.
1983	6.0
1984	6.1
1985	6.2
1986	6.2

Figure 4 is based on NESO Report No 70. Page 109, updated by the author.

The composition of public expenditure on education is not as one might expect if equality of educational attainment were an objective. Primary education accounts for just under 40% of total expenditure, with secondary accounting for just over 40%, with the remaining 20% split between third level and "Other" (The Office of the Minister, the Department, and Special Schools). The share of primary education increased slightly over the period. Combined with falling numbers due to the decline in births, primary schools have fared relatively well, but this does not seem to have been accompanied by use of such funds to counter disadvantage. The main programme countering disadvantage is that which provides remedial teachers to certain schools. Employing over 100 teachers, and costing L1.5 m in 1986, this programme amounts to well under 1% of the public education budget.

However, money or cost data are a poor guide to performance, since 90% of the spending is on teachers salaries, increases in which have dominated the increases in educational spending over the past 20 years¹.

What of output, since the above deals only with spending on inputs? Although the data are poor, it seems clear that levels of attainment are closely related to social class. As shown in Figure 5, those leaving post primary school to go onto third level came overwhelmingly from the top classes: over 50% of boys from Upper Non Manual backgrounds go onto third level, compared to just under 30% for Lower Non Manual, 14% for Skilled Manual and 8% for Semi Skilled and Unskilled².

[figure 5 here.]

Some 10% of male Irish school children leave without any qualification. The percentage leaving without any qualifications varies sharply by Fathers Class, with a drop-out/failure rate of 17% compared to under 1% for sons of Upper Non-manual Fathers. The rate for Leaving Cert achievement by social class is similarly class structured so that roughly twice as many children from non-manual families reach Leaving Cert compared to Manual and unskilled. At third level the disparity widens so that a child from upper

¹ M Maguire, Social Expenditure in Ireland and other European Countries Past Trends and Prospective Developments, in Public Social Expenditure - Value for Money, ESRI Conference, 20 November, 1984.

² Social Mobility in the Republic of Ireland: A Comparative Perspective, CT Whelan and BJ Whelan, ESRI Paper No 116, Table 7.7., based on analysis of the NMS School Leavers Surveys.

non-manual parents is some eight times more likely to reach third level than children from semi and unskilled manual families.

Further confirmation of the degree of inequality in the Irish educational system comes from a study by Greaney and Kellaghan¹ which has been subject of more than the usual academic scrutiny² because it initially suggested that "the meritocratic ideal was at least being approached if not being attained." This somewhat inaccurate conclusion and unfortunate phraseology was later largely retracted by the authors who accepted the results of a reanalysis of their data³ which showed class factors to be of greater importance than the above quote implies. In any case the study was of dubious validity in relation to class because of its use of a very crude measure, that is teachers assessment of pupils fathers occupation. The debate over this study was of importance because of its focus, for the first time, on different interpretations of the influence of socio-economic factors in education.

Gender Inequalities.

Since a number of studies have documented the degree of gender inequalities in Ireland (notably the official Irish Women; Agenda for Practical Action, as well as Women and Social Policy in NESC report No 83, and also John Blackwell's EEA study, Women in the Labour Force: A Statistical Digest), only those inequalities relating to education will be noted here.

Education participation rates for girls have increased rapidly as shown in Figure 6. Over 70% of girls now proceed to Leaving Certificate compared to under 60% for boys, with similar but higher rates evident at Inter Certificate⁴. Participation rates for both girls and boys have been increasing over the past two decades with only a temporary interruption in 1977-79 when it seems the job creation schemes of those years led to drops in participation rates

[Figure 6 here.]

The most important general point about gender inequalities

¹ Equality of Opportunity in Irish Schools, U Greaney and T. Kellaghan, Dublin, 1984.

² Symposium on "Equality of Opportunity in Irish Schools" Economic and Social Review, Vol 16, No. 2, January 1985.

³ Does Irish Education Approach the Meritocratic Ideal? A Logistic Analysis. A Raftery and M Hout, Economic and Social Review, January 1985.

⁴ Figure 6 is taken from D Hannah, Schooling and the Labour Market, p32.

relates to the different employment patterns of men and women. Although the pattern has been changing, the big majority of married women (80%) are not in the labour force. Married women's participation rate rose from 14% in 1977 to 20% in 1984, with sharper increases for the younger age groups so that some 40% of younger married women are now remaining in employment. These increasing participation rates can be seen as part of Ireland's late adjustment to international trends whereby women retain life-long attachments to the labour force associated with financial independence, lower fertility and later marriage¹. Ireland, it might be noted has strong disincentives to married women increasing their participation rates particularly in relation to income taxation².

However, one of the effects of this increased labour force participation by married women has been a reduction of the employment openings for female school leavers. This results from the degree of sex segregation in female employment³, as evidenced by the concentration of 70% of female employment in the 20-24 age group being in four occupational groups in 1981: clerical, shop assistants/barmaids, service workers, and professional/technical workers (mainly teachers and nurses).

Further pressure on the female labour market has resulted from structural declines in several of these occupations, notably clerical, public administration and banking/finance. Small expansion in some occupations were inadequate to prevent a major squeeze in job openings, which although similar in extent for both sexes, led to different responses by boys and girls.

Girls appear to have been less willing to switch out of their traditional narrow range of occupations. Boys by contrast have actively traded in the labour market, taking up manual jobs as non manual job openings dried up. As a consequence girls have been more likely to be unemployed or to emigrate. Gender inequalities have been exacerbated by the economic crisis of the past decade. This is all the more surprising because of the higher participation rates and examination successes by girls. As Damian Hannan notes "It almost appears as if school's, commerce training courses' teacher's and parent's expectations have remained frozen"⁴.

¹ The Integration of Women into the Economy, OECD, 1985.

² See NESR Report 83, pages 334/5.

³ The data in this section is taken from Schooling and the Labour Market, D. Hannan, Shannon CDU, 1986.

⁴ Schooling and the Labour Market, Damian Hannan, Page 17

Regional Inequalities.

Considerable regional inequalities exist in education, with data available on regional profiles of school leavers and of third level participation rates. The latter show considerable variation¹, and appear to be influenced by accessibility of third level institutions, indicating the insufficiency of equality of access, as discussed above in section 2. With regard to school leavers, drop out rates and failure rates show a regional pattern, but one which balances out when the two are combined. There are clear variations in staying on rates by region as shown in Figure 7, but these are explained mainly by differences in social class and type of school by region². While more work on the reasons why these individual rates differ would be desirable, the clear policy implication is that aid to combat inequality in education cannot be channelled on a regional basis. Inequalities by school may be more significant.

Inequalities by School.

Early school leaving is concentrated on particular types of school, with high drop out rates for vocational schools in particular, such that these schools account for two thirds of all drop outs. Vocational schools serve a very particular purpose in Irish education, with almost 80% of students going no further than Group Cert, compared to around 10% of students taking this course in secondary and community schools³. Vocational schools receive a mainly working class, male intake, but even when the figures are corrected for social class, the vocational schools still perform badly. Other schools with high drop out rates are those which cater for mainly children from working class and small farm backgrounds. The fact that early school leavers are so concentrated by school type would suggest that remedial action on the basis of school type might be effective.

Inequalities in Emigration Rates.

The main present source is the School Leavers Surveys, which shows that in 1984, almost 5% or 3,000 school leavers of 1981's school leaver had emigrated, with the variation by qualifications as follows:

¹Participation in Higher Education: A National Survey, P. Clancy HEA, 1982.

²Figure 7 is based on Table 6.5 in Education and the Labour Market: Work and Unemployment among Recent Cohorts of Irish School Leavers, R Breen, ESRI Paper 119, 1984.

³Schooling and the Labour Market, D Hannan, ibid.

	Males	Females	All
No Qualifications	2.2%	4.6%	3.3%
Inter/Group Cert	4.1%	4.7%	4.3%
Leaving/matric	4.7%	4.1%	5.2%
Total	3.9%	5.8%	4.8%

Source; Transition From School to Work, YEA, 1986.

Over half of these young people emigrated to look for work and over a quarter to take up employment, with around 5% leaving to study. Girls were more likely to be employed after emigration, while boys tended to be either unemployed or in education. Overall, the female emigration rate was some 50% higher than for boys, perhaps in response to the low demand for female labour in Ireland. The regional pattern of emigration could be categorised as traditional in that the rate for the West and North West along with the Midlands and the North East, was double the national average, with a particularly high (11%) rate for girls from these areas. After emigration, girls were more likely to be employed, unlike boys who were likely to be unemployed or in education.

SECTION 4. THE PERFORMANCE OF THE IRISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM .

What can be concluded from the above discussion of educational inequality in Ireland? Returning to the five models of equality discussed in Section 2;

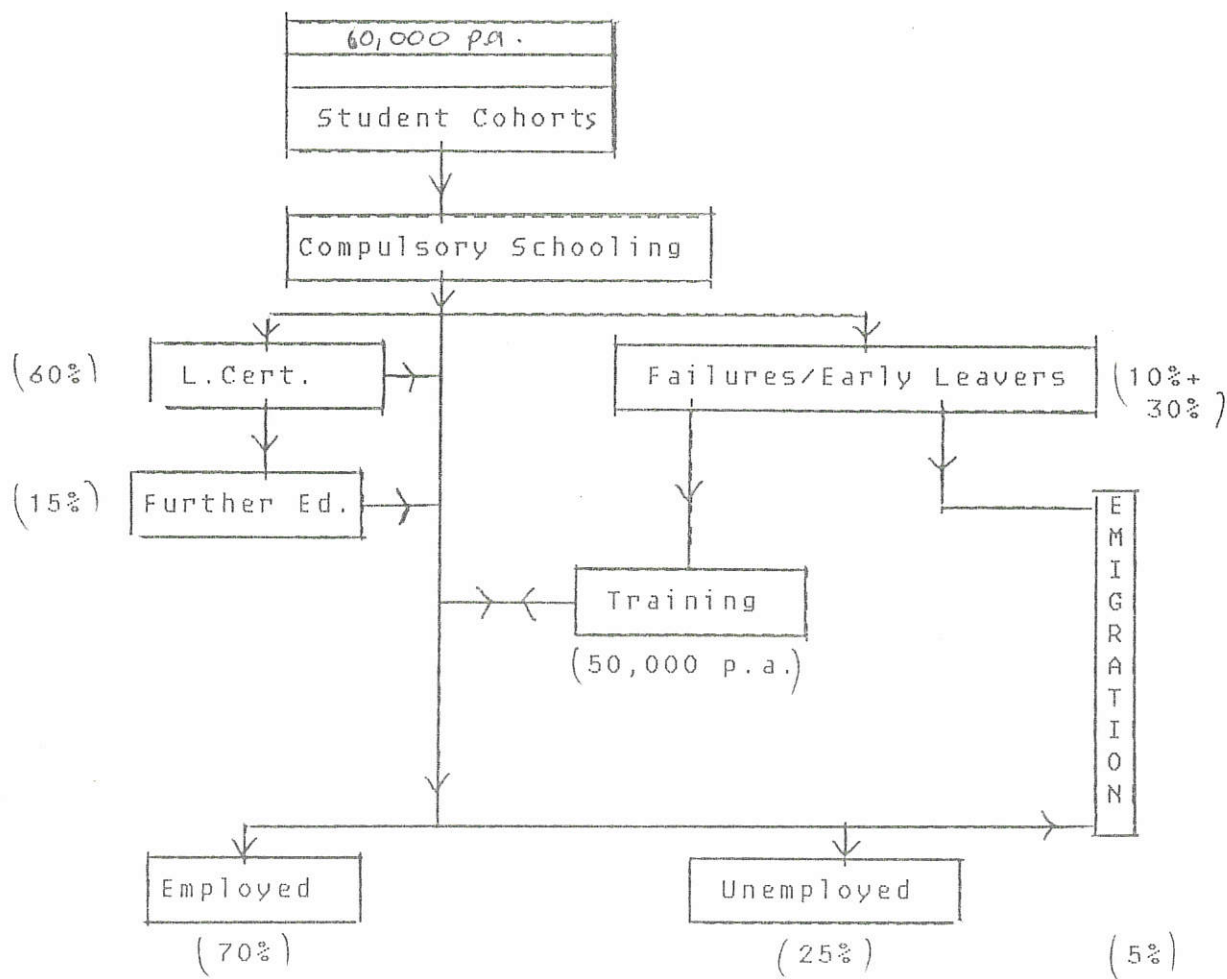
- equality of access exists in terms of the availability of free primary and secondary education,
- equality of use is not achieved even at the end of compulsory education and the deviations from this goal increase the further through the education system one progresses,
- equality of resource use is likely to be less than that for use alone in that expensive subjects are likely to be studied by those most likely to continue on in education,
- equality of attainment independent of socio-economic background is definitely not approached and is seldom even taken seriously as a goal,
- equality of attainment independent of ability would seem to be a concept which has received minimal attention in Ireland.

Any interventions to counter this poor performance must take account of the way in which the system works in relation to training and the labour market. One cannot but be struck by the absence of an overall labour market policy, which might include education, training and employment trends. Irish

society's response to the crisis of the 1980s has been typical of a system which is made up of very different components which respond to each other, not always in ways which those working in any component fully understand. Figure 8 attempts to summarise the overall system, based on the results of a number of studies of how the system has responded to the high and persistent unemployment of this decade.

In summary, the imbalance between labour supply and demand pushed up unemployment but also increased both the numbers staying on at school/going into training schemes and the numbers emigrating. While increases in the numbers in education/training relieve temporarily the pressure on the labour market, emigration offers permanent help. The key question is whether temporary relief is sufficient, that is whether the labour market imbalance will be corrected by economic recovery. If not, extra education/training will at most redistribute jobs from one group to another. More likely, those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds will continue to be unemployed. Because of the importance of emigration in permanently removing part of the excess labour supply, more information is urgently required on the educational and social backgrounds of those leaving the country. Further, consideration should be given to a national policy on emigration.

FIGURE 8
The Education/Labour Market/Emigration system.



School Retention Rate Up

As unemployment has risen, the schools have continued to retain more and more students each year, thus temporarily reducing the flow into the labour market. However this strategy only works from year to year by increasing the number absorbed each year. However, as retention rates approach 100% for particular age groups, longer education must be instituted if pressure on the labour market is to be reduced. [see graph]. If the recession passes, then these temporary measures may be seen to have worked. If however, the recession does not ease and unemployment remains high, then cynicism and scepticism may set in as young people have raised expectations from extended education and training without having increased the amount of labour demanded. Of course the possibility exists that increased education and training may have effects which increase the demand for labour (other than in education) but these effects are likely to be long term and intangible. Unless the increase in retention rates is spread equally across classes, the degree of disadvantage will be worsened.

Married Women Remain at Work.

At the same time more and more married women are remaining on at work after marriage and during child bearing/rearing so that the number of openings for all but particularly girls leaving school are reduced. Married women remain on partly because of the recession but also as part of a more general trend evidenced across many countries as outlined above.

Skill Requirements for Employment Rise.

The job openings that remain require more skills and thus more educational credentials to obtain entry. As more and more remain at school, the credentials required rises continually. The schools race to persistently produce pupils with the appropriately high grades, inevitably tending to paying less attention to the less able students. The high achieving schools recruit more actively the more able students/schools, leaving the less able to pass time in bottom classes or be segregated out into particular schools, notably the Vocational Schools.

Training Expands.

Training is expanded in an attempt to meet the needs of the many unemployed chasing the few jobs. At first training reduces the numbers chasing the jobs but as with education, the number in training needs to increase each year to have an effect each year. And those who have been trained may be competing more effectively for the few jobs. The less

qualified are less likely to go for training or to be accepted, unless special measures are taken.

Emigration Rate Increases

Emigration rates rise as young people search abroad for jobs; a trend which is increasingly being facilitated by the ageing populations of the UK and most other EC states. Young people have always emigrated but in the 1970's the outflow was balanced by an inflow of older persons, making the net emigration figures negative. The flow of young people out has risen and the return flow has probably fallen so that the net emigration figures have moved from negative to positive totals of about 30,000 per annum. From the point of view of the system emigration must rank as a more satisfactory solution than further expansion of education or training in that persons exit from the system, only likely to return older and with work experience. From the point of view of those who emigrate, the result may be positive or negative depending on their success abroad, still mainly in the UK, where many have relatives. However, remarkably little is known about what happens to those who emigrate.

The Lack of a Labour Market Policy.

One cannot avoid being struck by the lack of any overall policy relating to the workings of education and training system which, because of their importance for employment, can usefully be seen as part of a labour market policy. Individual policies were framed at a time of full employment and have not adjusted to contemporary realities, suggests the NESC consultants report on manpower policy in Ireland, perhaps the most comprehensive review to date of the overall education/training system. A labour market policy, they suggest, would have as objectives:

- *to develop human resources and adjust manpower resources to structural change with a view to fostering economic growth,
- *to improve the employment opportunities of marginal groups and thus contribute to social equity,
- *to improve the trade off between inflation and unemployment by stabilising employment during cyclical downswings and by removing labour market bottlenecks during upswings.

Labour market policy so conceived would encompass all those policies which impinge on the labour market, including education and training, but also income policy, taxation, social security, labour law etc. Besides advocating a labour market policy the consultants go on to suggest institutional changes which might give such a policy form, involving a strengthening of the Department of Labour and improved coordination with the Department of Education and reorganisation of the agencies in the the manpower area towards a more coherent role. The consultants see secondary education as having adjusted much less to the needs of the labour market than

third level. While taking care not to reduce education to labour market issues, the consultants considered secondary education has failed to adapt to contemporary employment conditions, which cannot continue to be based on growing administrative employment, mainly in the public sector. They judged the failure to develop a higher cycle structure in the vocational sector a notable lapse. A Manpower Research Agency is seen as essential in providing the basic data with which education and training can be planned. A wide ranging reassessment of second level education, including both the general and vocational sectors is seen as essential with a view to achieving a more coordinated and cost effective system which might be responsive to the changing needs of society. Uniform levels of cash allowances to students/trainees should be a part of a rationalised vocational/early youth training provision, according to them.

While one can quibble with particular parts of the NESC consultants detailed approach, the overall logic of their position seems unassailable. Ireland needs such coherent organised policies if the resources devoted to education and training are to be used to the best advantage of young people. Only with such planning can the goals of economic growth and social justice have any chance of being met.

To date nobody has addressed the idea of a policy for emigration, which could be seen as a part of a comprehensive labour market policy. The present implicit policy on emigration amounts, in effect, to doing the minimum possible, and perhaps hoping that a more positive perception of emigration will develop as stories filter back about the success of the new, well educated young Irish abroad. This positive perception is being continually upset by mainly London welfare rights agencies complaining about the flood of new demands on their services from young destitute Irish emigrants who arrive without contacts, skills, or money. While the truth clearly lies between these two extremes, very little can be done without improved information on what is actually happening. Such information could come from several sources, notably the Education Volume of the 1986 Census which (like that of the 1981 Census) has yet to be published. An important potential source of data might be the annual EC Labour Force Survey which is carried out in all the EC countries, which could be refined, particularly in the UK, to act as a monitor for the level and type of emigration from and to Ireland.

An Emigration Policy?

What might a policy in relation to emigration be like? Can the state have a policy on whom it would like to emigrate? Or should the composition of the emigrant flow be left to the market and to family and individual preferences? Since the

overall cost/benefit to the state depends on the amounts that each emigrating individual would have cost or contributed, the educational matters considerably. If poorly educated are emigrating, should some assistance be made available, perhaps in the form of a safety net through the Irish welfare agencies in the main places these emigrants go, like London. Since there are now strong incentives for Irish people to study free in the UK, an important form of assistance might be the establishing at official level an exchange rate between Irish and UK educational achievements. This was one of the recommendations of the NES/C/N.Ireland Economic Council study of 1985¹ but no action appears to have been taken to date.

Unemployment and Crime.

Although one should be chary about asserting relationships between youth unemployment and crime, some relationship seems inevitable. Young people classed as failures at school, street smart perhaps and with unrealisable expectations, take to the informal and illegal economies provoking strong reactions among the older, the more settled and the more prosperous groups. Crime is predominantly an activity of young people, with the 15 to 20 age group having a crime rate some four times the national average, with particularly high rates in the more deprived areas². The criminal justice system is ill equipped to deal with the 17 to 21 year age group who fall between the juvenile services and those designed for adults, with the result that what might have been a minor blip can lead to a criminal career.

SECTION 5. SOME INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE WITH EDUCATION

The experience from a range of countries shows that Ireland is not unusual in having the problems outlined above, and that action can be taken to alter these inequalities. High drop out rates existed around 1981 as follows³:

France 12% early drop out,

Italy 18% failure rate

Germany 10% leave before their tenth year in education,

Sweden 8% receive special courses at lower secondary levels.

The experience of the UK is perhaps of more interest since so many of Ireland's policies take their lead from there. The proportion of pupils leaving school without qualifications in the UK has fallen dramatically in the past 15 years, from 43%

¹ Higher Education in Ireland: Cooperation and Complementarity, NES/C and IEC, 1985.

² The Criminal Justice System: Policy and Performance, NES/C Report 77.

³ Education and Modern Society, OECD, 1985, page 66.

in 1972 to 12% in 1983¹. As Figure 9 shows, the decline in the proportion leaving school without any qualification was made possible by a growth in the percentage leaving with minimal qualifications, while the percentages with the two higher types of qualifications remained largely unchanged. The decline in the proportion leaving without qualifications was made possible by three factors; the introduction of a new examination, the CSE, the raising of the school leaving age, and the introduction of lower graded results to the O level. The importance of this development has to do with its bearing on an issue raised by Prof. Hannan regarding the undesirability of introducing a separate examination, with a different name which might be taken by the less able. The argument against such a development has to do with the way it would accept inequalities and institutionalise them.

Two main waves of work on educational disadvantage can be identified: that resulting from the Plowden Report in 1967 which led to the Educational Priority Programme, and the initiative by Keith Joseph in the mid 1970 to explain and remedy the so-called cycle of disadvantage. What can be learnt from these initiatives? [Note A contains a more detailed discussion of these initiatives]

The broad conclusions which arise from these initiatives can be summarised as:

a) the experience with positive discrimination programmes points to the need for commitment of resources and staff as well as clear definitions of objectives and close monitoring to achieve objectives.

b) use of geographical area as a focus for positive discrimination has not been effective, partly because those most disadvantaged are concentrated in schools and classes rather than areas, and also because the better rather than the worst schools in a disadvantaged area will tend to take up any extra funds

c) the reviews of the work on educational disadvantage suggests that school organisation and ethos is of considerable importance,

SECTION 6. WHAT CAN BE DONE ?

This section attempts to suggest what might be the best strategy for those interested in greater educational equality to pursue.

English School Leavers 1982/83, Statistical Bulletin, November 1984, DES, London.

First, what can be concluded from the above review?

Clearly Ireland does not provide equality of resource use, let alone any of the more comprehensive equalities which were discussed in Part 2. The economic crisis has led to greater pressure in the education/labour market; with some relief provided by increased training places (temporarily) and by emigration (more permanently). The increased pressure has been at the expense of the least qualified, who have tended to leave school with none or few qualifications, only to face increased competition from their better qualified peers in the unskilled employments. Serious doubts exist about the coherence of the array of educational and training initiatives which have been proliferating, leading to calls for rationalisation. In addition, questions have been raised about the suitability of post-school schemes to compensate for deficiencies which might have been ameliorated at school.

However, the contrast with the UK shows that similar problems exist regarding unqualified school leavers, but with action having been taken so that the proportion of school leavers falling into this category has been decreasing sharply.

The ways in which can come about will arguably depend on three factors:

- * good information on the performance of schools over the range of measures in which we might be interested,
- * a continuing but more focussed shift in resources to primary education, with particular attention to those schools most likely to produce early leavers and drop outs,
- * diffusion of the more effective interventions which have emerged from the pilot projects,
- * reorganisation of educational planning at local levels, to define, inter alia, catchment areas and clarify who is to manage schools and to what ends.
- * the development of a labour market policy which would encompass education, training and their relationships to employment,
- * the development of an emigration policy which would aim to facilitate Irish students wishing to study abroad, and increased financial assistance to those welfare agencies dealing with destitute young Irish emigrants in London and elsewhere.
- * building up a political pressure for such changes, including the development of a national policy on the objectives of education.

Good information is clearly a prerequisite for action on any of the issues which are under discussion. The range of information routinely available is abysmal and requires urgent attention. For example, Turas Staisticuil (Statistical

Schooling and the Labour Market, D. Hannan, ibid.

Report) should be revamped to provide data on participation rates by area and by school, along with measures of performance and expenditure levels. In this context the recent CIPFA publication on educational performance indicators¹ could be useful in drawing up a list of routinely available measures. Perhaps as a means to spur such a development, an unofficial annual report might be produced based on routinely available information, supplemented perhaps by data from specially tailored Parliamentary Questions.

Good information however is only a guide to the action which might be required. If one accepts the point that schools have (at least for Boys) responded rationally in pushing for the certificates which enable young people to obtain jobs, then the rules incentives must be changed to encourage schools to do better. The conclusions about the priority which should be attached to high level primary education in Section 2 would lead one to advocate that the focus of expenditure should be at that level, and not as has been suggested the official policy, to second level². Educational spending in general and primary education in particular has been spared the brunt of expenditure control policies, but these extra resources have not been used in ways which would reduce disadvantage.

Clearly, any such increased expenditure on primary schools should be highly focussed, perhaps on diffusing and generalising the lessons learnt from the various pilot projects and further developing them so as to be applicable more widely. Examples include curriculum change and assessment, means of facilitating parental involvement, and improved career guidance. Some official acknowledgement has been given to the need of special funding for educational disadvantage initiatives, notably in the last Government plan, Building on Reality³ but on the basis of disadvantaged areas. Although the Department of Education has developed a programme of providing remedial teachers to certain "needy" schools, the outlays have been minimal.

A strong case can be made for local planning agencies for education and training, perhaps along the lines of the COMTECS proposed by the YEA, but with statutory responsibilities and close links with the Departments of Education and Labour. Definition of school's catchment areas would appear to be essential, as would publication of regular reviews of the performance of each school. The UK model of requiring schools to publish annually details of curricula and exam results would appear to offer a useful model. Local educational

¹ Statement on Performance Indicators in the Education Service, IPFA, 3 Robert St., London WC2.

² Schooling and the Labour Market, DHannan, page 49.

³ Building on Reality, 1984 and NESR Report 79, 1985, page 51.

planning would have to win the support or at least the compliance of the religious orders retain a disproportionate influence at management level in schools nominally owned by them. The scope for linking concerns with educational disadvantage and Christianity seems worthy of exploration in what is arguably the most Catholic country in the world. Local education committees would need to have clear guidelines as to their powers and responsibilities if they are to avoid some of the problems which have been experienced in trying to get the health boards to implement national policies, for example in relation to closure of mental hospitals.

More fundamental changes in the rules and incentives within which schools operate may however be worth considering. Without such changes, publication of better information, for example performance indicators, could lead to the collapse of poor performing schools. Many options exist. Since the state funds the schools almost completely, that funding could be tied to the achievement of certain levels of performance as assessed in a variety of possible ways. Performance could be assessed along a range of indicators, with schools being penalised for having more than a very low proportion of unqualified leavers. Clearly, experimentation would be required to ascertain the right balance of incentives. Education vouchers could have the effect of involving parents as consumers and as taxpayers. Despite attractions to both the right and the left of the political spectrum, however, this approach seems to have run into insuperable administrative and other difficulties. As a means of achieving equality in resource use, and of allowing education to be absorbed over a longer time scale and in a more form than at present, the idea does have considerable attractions.

A labour market policy has been advocated which would encompass education, training and all issues relating to employment. The basic approach is that advocated by the NESCC consultants who suggest that individual policies were framed at a time of full employment and have not adjusted to contemporary realities. A labour market policy, they suggest, would have as objectives:

- *to develop human resources and adjust manpower resources to structural change with a view to fostering economic growth,
- *to improve the employment opportunities of marginal groups and thus contribute to social equity,
- *to improve the trade off between inflation and unemployment by stabilising employment during cyclical downswings and by removing labour market bottlenecks during upswings.

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education and training, but also income policy, taxation, social security, labour law etc. Besides advocating a labour market policy the consultants go on to suggest institutional changes which might give such a policy form, involving a strengthening of the Department of Labour and improved coordination with the Department of Education and reorganisation of the agencies in the manpower area towards a more coherent role.

The problem of emigration will not be solved by changes within the educational system, but greater awareness of the types of students most likely to emigrate could lead to more relevant curricula. If students are likely to emigrate either with qualifications or to study, one important aid would be action by the Department of Education to ascertain the exchange rates of Irish qualifications relevant to those in the UK and perhaps the US. A number of organisations and recent conferences have drawn attention to the small amounts of financial help being made available to welfare bodies in the UK who deal with destitute Irish emigrants. There would seem to be a strong case for providing aid to such groups on a more generous basis, again perhaps based on some improved analysis of the scale and composition of the emigration flow. Rapid publication of the 1986 Census returns on education and collaborative work between the annual Labour Force Surveys in Ireland and the UK could provide much of the necessary data.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, the constituency for change must be built up over time. Only national leadership can develop an educational policy along the lines discussed here. The pressure for greater concern with equality can only be built up by sustained work, which might include providing the sort of information on educational performance talked about above, in readily accessible form, and raising these issues as widely as possible.

FIGURE 1
Income Distribution, 1973

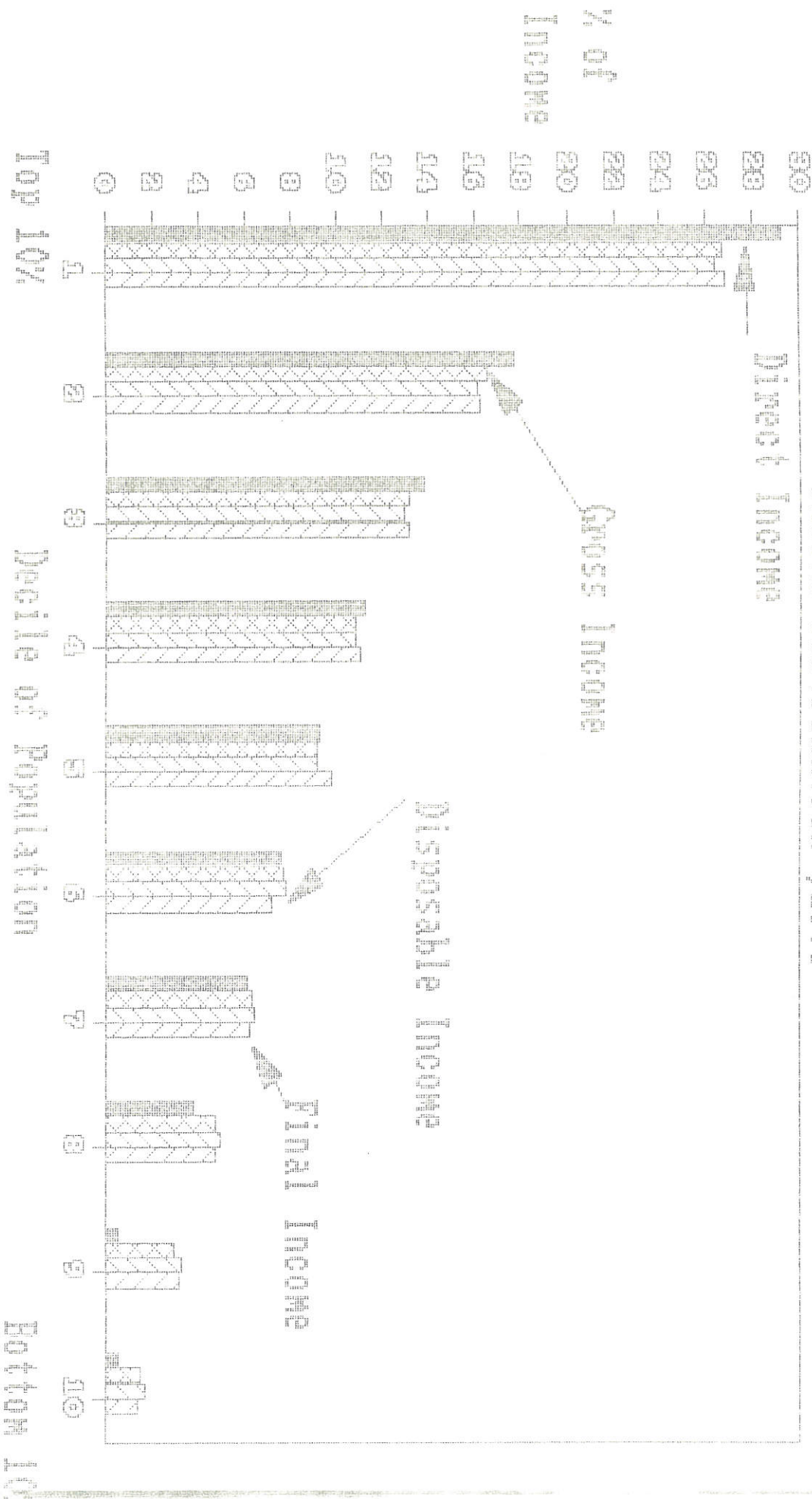


FIGURE 2
Distribution of Income, 1960.



FIGURE 2
Social Spending to Income Groups

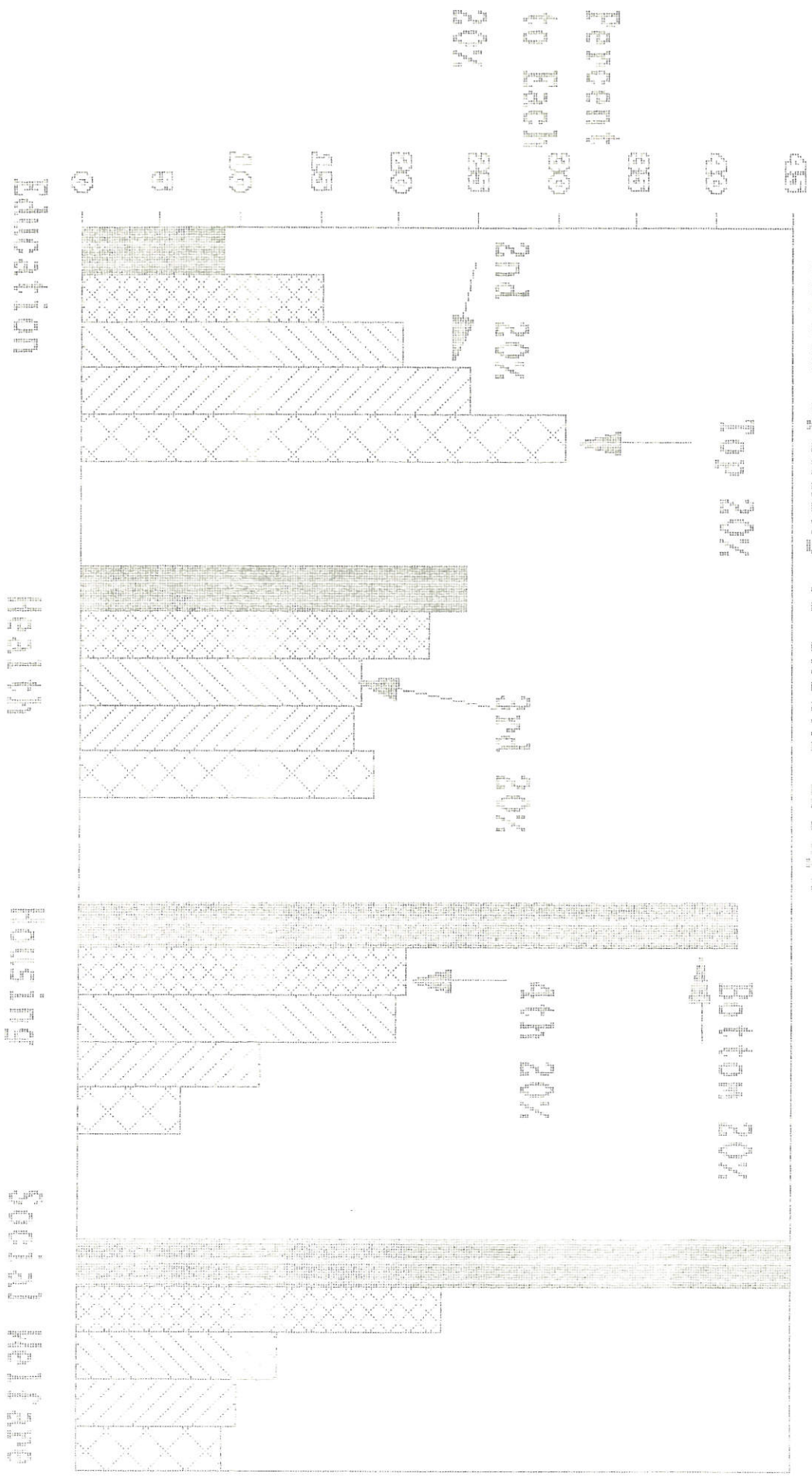


Figure 4
Cost Per Pupil by Level

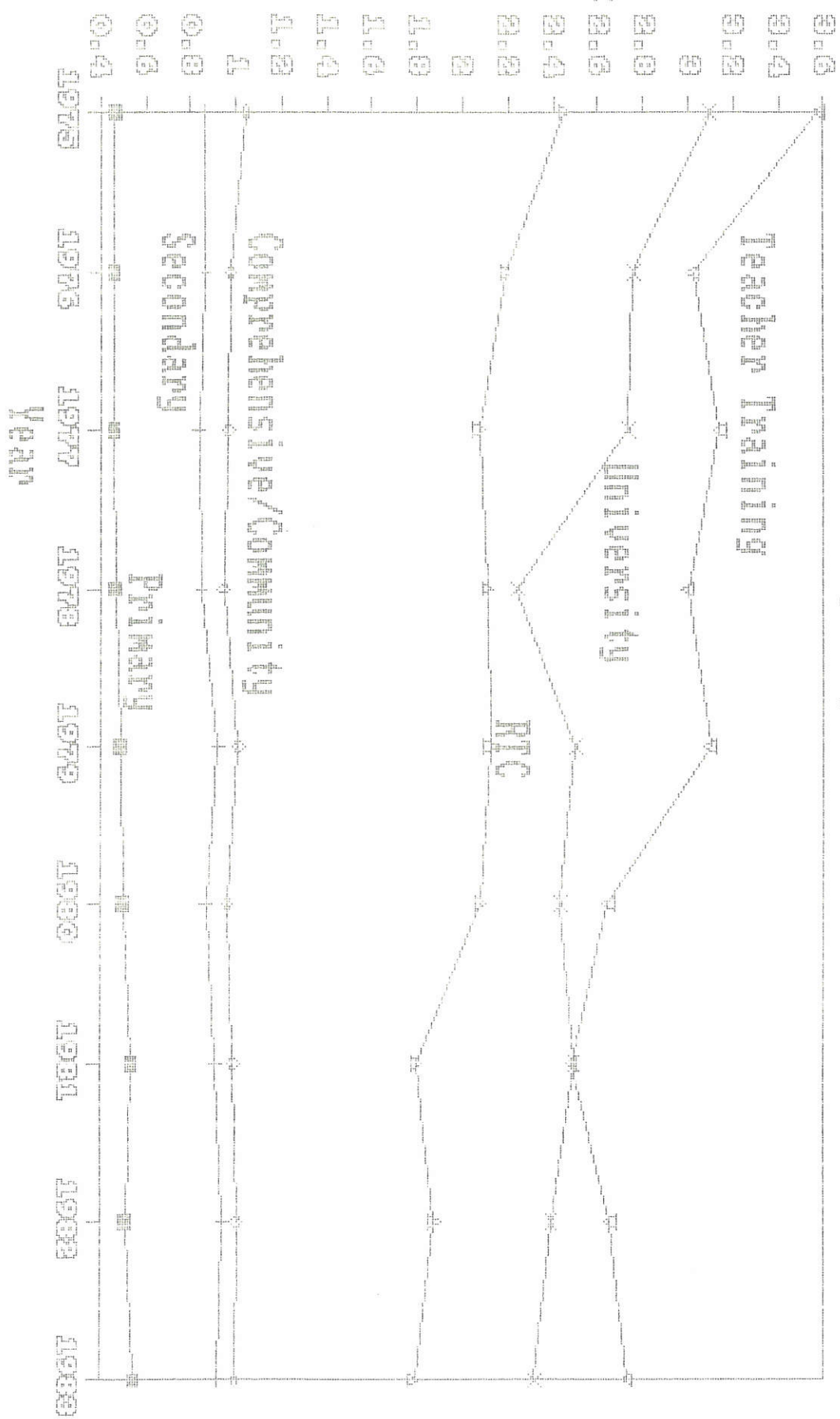
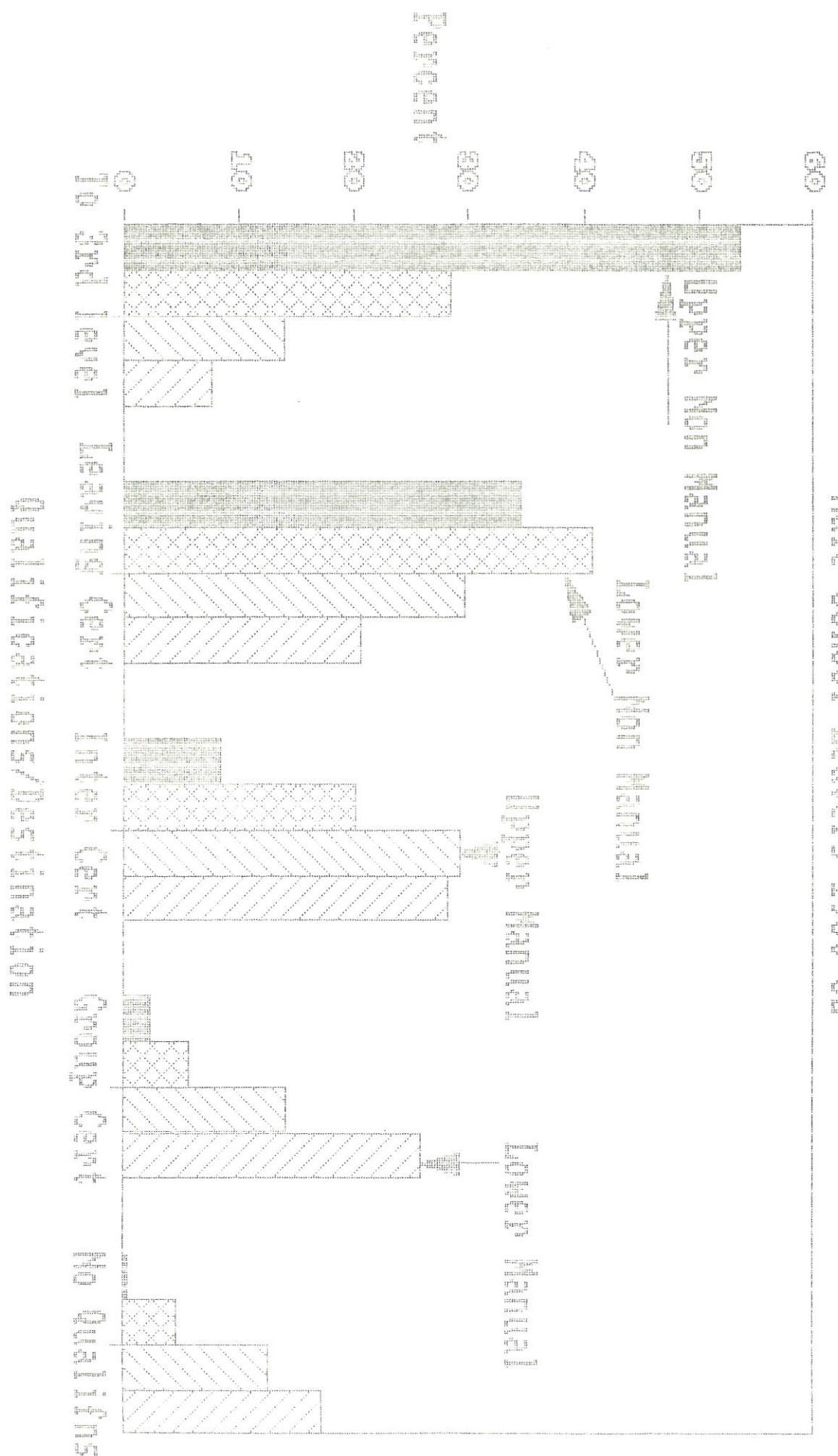


FIGURE 5 Educational Level by Social Class Male School Leavers 1980-82



2 PARTICIPATION

Figure 6,
Participation Rate by Sex, 1961-1985.

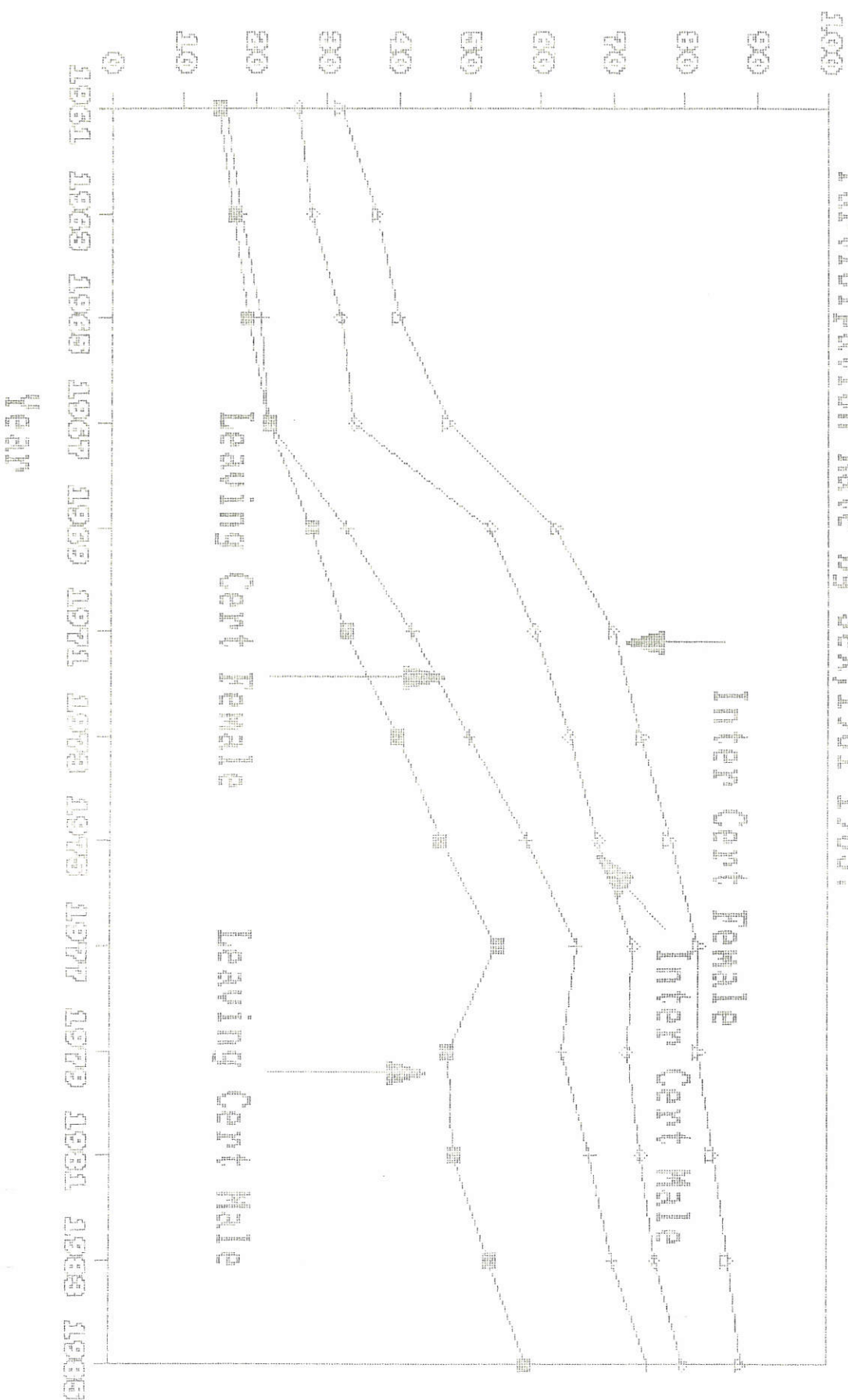


Figure 7

Regional Variations in Qualifications, 1980-82.

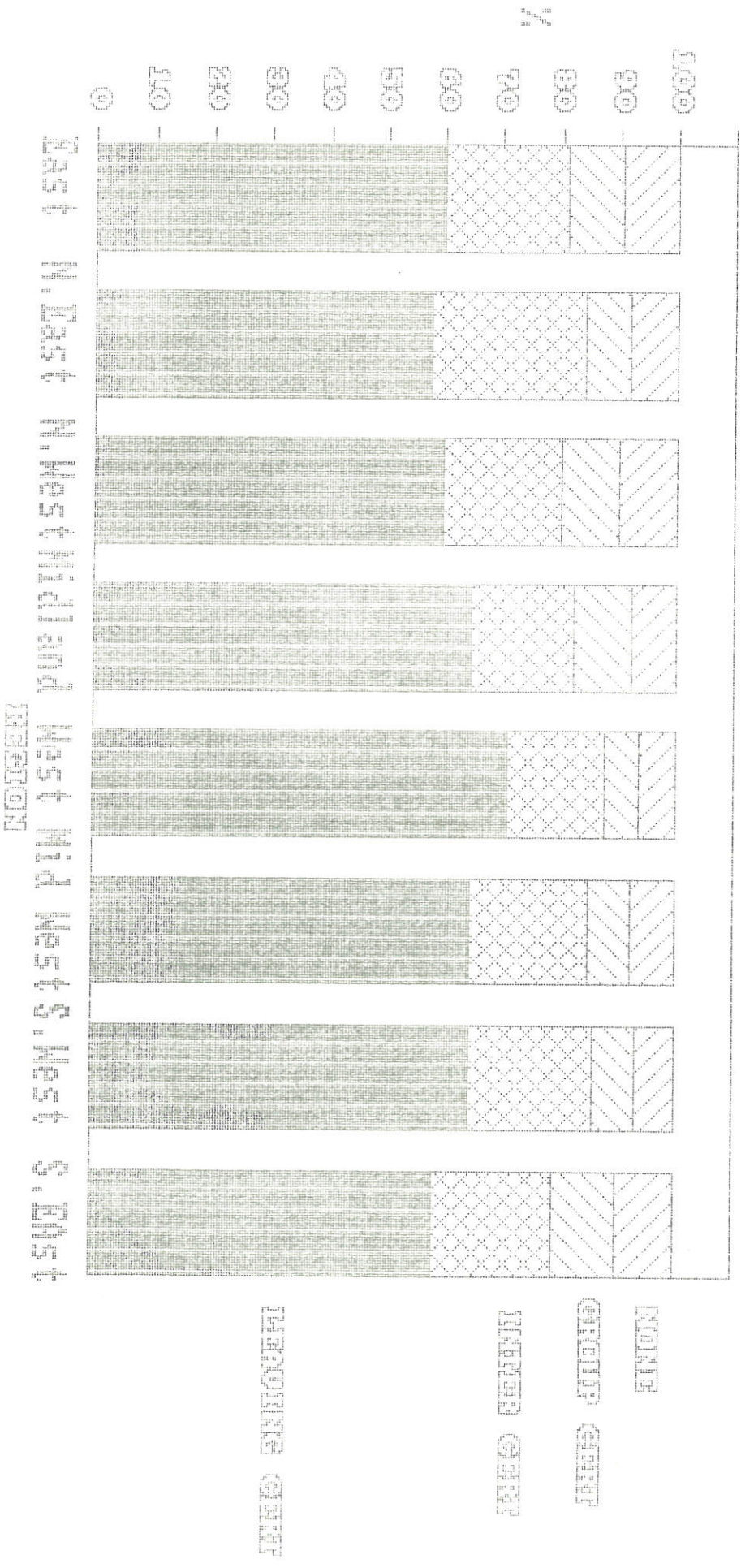


FIGURE 9
 IN SENIOR TEACHERS BY QUALIFICATIONS, 1970/1 TO 1983/4.

