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YOUNG, HIGHLY QUALIFIED MIGRANTS:

**THE EXPERIENCES AND EXPECTATIONS OF RECENTLY
ARRIVED IRISH TEACHERS IN BRITAIN**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**Middlesex
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INTRODUCTION

In the years since the collapse of the Celtic Tiger economy there has been a significant increase in Irish migration to Britain. While there is growing interest among academics and the voluntary sector organisations, there is still ‘a paucity of research’ on this new generation of migrants¹. In the ‘post-Celtic tiger’, ‘post-Peace Agreement’ context, how might their experiences and expectations differ from earlier waves of Irish migrants to Britain? There is some anecdotal evidence that more Irish people are arriving in Britain to take up professional occupations. For example, in February 2013, the Irish Post newspaper reported that hundreds of Irish teachers were ‘flocking’ to work in Britain (26.02.13). The article cited one recruitment agency which had employed 250 Irish teachers in the current year and was so confident of continued growth in the numbers seeking work in British schools that a recruitment office in Dublin had been opened.

Although it is very difficult to get accurate data on the numbers of Irish-born teachers working in Britain, the impression that numbers are reaching new heights was reinforced later in 2013 when the Kent branch secretary of the National Union of Teachers, John Walder, complained on radio about the number of Irish registered cars in school car parks: ‘There are schools which are significantly staffed by people from Ireland’ when instead ‘we should staff our schools with our own people’ (cited in Irish Post, 24.10.13)². This raises questions about how Irish teachers are perceived, what attitudes they encounter and how they negotiate their roles as migrants and as highly educated, skilled professionals in British society.

These are questions we sought to answer in this research project, the first of its kind on Irish teachers working in schools throughout Britain. However, this is not just a study about teachers per se, as young, recently arrived and highly qualified migrants; the participants in this research raise wider issues about intra-EU migration since the economic recession³. This is the ‘Facebook generation’. The study reveals how their notions of global mobility, transience, social networks and attachments to ‘home’, are shaped by new communication technologies. These young people are arriving in a post-peace agreement Britain, where the Irish are no longer the number one terrorist suspects. Given the changing landscape this research also raises questions about how this new generation of migrants may differ from previous generations of Irish in Britain and how these changing needs may be reflected in types of community formations.

¹ Glynn, Kelly and MacEinri (2013) Irish Emigration in the Age of Austerity.

² It has since been brought to our attention that this matter was dealt with by the NUT.

³ See other work by Ryan – for example, on Polish and French intra-EU migrants – www.sprc.info

BACKGROUND

After a period of unprecedented economic growth in the early 2000s, the banking collapse and economic crisis from 2008 onwards had a dramatic impact on Irish society. Unemployment rates soared from around 5% in the mid-2000s to 15% by 2011, though subsequently fell to 13.6% in 2013 – this may be related, in part, to rising emigration.

One of the most visible indicators of economic recession in Ireland has been the marked increase in the numbers of people leaving the country. According to the Central Statistics Office in Ireland, the net emigration of Irish nationals has continued to increase between 2012 and 2013. The number leaving for the year ending April 2013 was 35,200⁴.

The number of British national insurance numbers issued to people born in the Republic of Ireland during 2012-13 was 15,540, far fewer than Poles, Lithuanians, Hungarians, Italians or Portuguese. In fact, Republic of Ireland was ranked 11 in the top 20 countries of new migrants seeking work in Britain during that period⁵. The fact that less than half of those leaving Ireland during 2012-13 are seeking new national insurance numbers in Britain may partly reflect the more global dimensions of recent Irish migration, but also the fact that some Irish people may already have British national insurance numbers from previous periods of work, including student summer jobs, in this country.

Data also suggest that recently arrived Irish migrants are more likely to be concentrated in London and the south-east of England than was the case for previous waves of migrants from Ireland. During the 1960s just under one third of migrants, from the Republic of Ireland, moved to London. By 2010 that proportion had increased to just under half (Census, 2011).

Emigration had been a defining feature of Irish society throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries. The Irish have long been an important source of migrant labour and remain one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Britain's workforce⁶. The historical legacy of colonialism resulted not only in a shared language but also an absence of immigration restrictions. Through the long history of British colonialism in Ireland and Irish immigration to Britain, the Irish have been constructed as the 'other' in opposition to the formation of a hegemonic British national identity⁷. Religion also played a key role in this formation as 'anti-Catholicism was deeply

⁴ CSO, Dublin, August, 2013

⁵ Dept for Work and Pensions, Statistics Bulletin, March, 2013, p. 6

⁶ Hickman (1998), 'Reconstructing deconstructing 'race': British political discourses about the Irish in Britain' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 21 no.2 pp. 289-307, p. 288

⁷ Hickman 1998, p. 288

embedded in British nationalism'⁸. The 'othering' of the Irish drew upon class and gender based stereotypes of 'Mick' and 'Paddy', hard drinking, quick-tempered navvies⁹. However, the prevalence of such male, working-class stereotypes, simplify the diversity and complexity of Irish migration to Britain¹⁰. It is interesting to examine if and how recently arrived Irish migrants encounter these negative stereotypes in British society. This point will be discussed in more detail in our full report.

There have recently been a number of significant studies on changing trends of Irish migration. The Generation Emigration website, launched by the Irish Times in 2011, has proved an important and innovative resource for capturing the diverse experiences of recent Irish migrants across the world. The website also undertook a survey of migrants in 2012 which clearly demonstrated the global spread of Irish migrants¹¹. The London Irish Centre commissioned a study of new migrants in 2012¹², while the National Youth Council of Ireland also undertook a survey and interviews with migrants in London and Toronto in 2013¹³. In autumn 2013, University College Cork launched its report 'Irish Emigration in an age of austerity' by Glynn et al which combined an extensive survey of Irish households with interview data from recent migrants. Thus, there is clearly considerable interest in the trends, numbers, composition, experiences and trajectories of migrants from Ireland.

This new study on Irish teachers in Britain is the first to focus on one specific professional group.

AIMS OF STUDY

Focusing on Irish teachers, who arrived in Britain since the economic recession, this mixed method research project aimed to:

1. explore their motivations for migration
2. examine their training and employment pathways

⁸ Walter, B. (2001) *Outsiders Inside: whiteness, place and Irish women*, London: Routledge, 2001 p. 87; also see Ryan, L. 2007 'Who do you think you are?: Irish nurses encountering ethnicity and constructing identity in Britain' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30 (3), pp.416-438.

⁹ Walter, *Outsiders Inside*

¹⁰ Ryan, L. 'Who do you think you are?: Irish nurses encountering ethnicity and constructing identity in Britain' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30 (3), pp.416-438. 2007 and Ryan, 'I had a sister in England': family-led migration, social networks and nurses' *Journal of Ethnic and migration studies* 34 (3), pp.453-470, 2008.

¹¹ for a discussion see Gray, B. (2013) 'Generation Emigration: the politics of transnational social reproduction in 21st century Ireland' *Irish Studies Review*, 21 (1): 20-36

¹² Moore, Waters, Tilki and Clarke (2012) *Fresh Perspectives: a needs analysis of the Irish community in Britain*.

¹³ see McAleer, A. (2013) *Time to Go: a qualitative research study exploring the experience and impact of emigration on Ireland's youth* (Dublin).

3. analyse their expectations and experiences in Britain – as teachers and as migrants more generally
4. understand their connections to Ireland, involvement in Irish networks and/ or Irish organisations in Britain
5. assess their migration trajectories, career aspiration, future plans for settlement, migration to another country or return to Ireland

RESEARCH METHODS

This project used a range of methods including both quantitative and qualitative. We began with a secondary analysis of official data sources to provide a broad picture of the extent and location of recent Irish migration.

We then collected new data through an on-line survey using the Survey Monkey software. This survey (Appendix 1 of full report) was advertised through social media, on the Generation Emigration website at the Irish Times, on the Émigré website at University College Cork, through various universities and colleges, teacher networks, and community organisations. We received a total of 98 fully completed responses¹⁴ from across Britain giving us quantitative data on training, employment, migration trajectories and future plans.

Twenty in-depth interviews were carried out either face to face, with those based in London, or in the case of 5 based in other parts of Britain, over the telephone. This gives us rich qualitative data on key issues such as Irish identity, community formation, social networks, involvement in Irish organisations, experiences of anti-Irish sentiment, and connections with home. In addition, we also facilitated a focus group, with 4 additional participants at a school in south-west London. This allowed us to gather dynamic, interactive data on constructions and expressions of Irishness in London by these young migrants.

Although the profile of our participants, as young and highly educated, fits the overall demographic profile of recent Irish migrants¹⁵, we make no claims as to the representativeness of our sample. While respondents to the on-line survey were quite randomly located and self-selecting, the participants for the qualitative element of the project were selected through a range of sampling techniques including snow balling from personal contacts in particular schools across London. Nonetheless, we did undertake some purposive sampling to try to increase the number of male teachers

¹⁴ In excess of 100 questionnaires were completed but several respondents did not answer all questions or were excluded from the analysis because they had arrived in Britain at a much earlier period in time.

¹⁵ see Glynn et al, 2013

among the interviewees and also to get a spread of teachers from both primary and secondary schools. However, in order to boost the number of participants from outside London respondents to the questionnaire were asked to indicate if they were willing to be contacted for telephone interview. From those who replied positively we selected 5 based on their geographical location, so as to include a range of experiences from across the country. Because some of those interviewed, including a few in the London sample, had also completed the questionnaire, we had a total of 114 participants in the study as a whole.

Key findings:

1. Most of the participants had come to Britain as graduates and completed their teacher training here. While we cannot generalise from this relatively small sample (114 participants), nonetheless, this data points to the significance of higher education as a factor in motivating some migration. Irish students have been under-researched in Britain.
2. The data point to the need for good advice and information, especially for younger students choosing to study at British universities.
3. Most had regarded their migration as temporary, usually just for a year or two, but in many cases this was slowly being extended.
4. The majority of participants had secured permanent teaching jobs relatively quickly and easily.
5. This contrasted with the situation in Ireland where many had failed to secure any work beyond short term contracts, such as maternity cover or 'subbing'. Those participants who had tried to secure employment in Ireland were very critical of the role that 'pull' plays in some Irish schools.
6. While economic reasons informed most migration decision making, this was not the only reason that people had left Ireland. Other factors included: wanting to travel, gain new experiences, pursue further training or to join a partner.
7. The participants in this study sharply contrasted teaching in Ireland and Britain: the curriculum, the school hierarchy and structure, the diversity of pupils, the pressures associated with Ofsted inspections and league tables, the longer school day and shorter holidays.
8. While the majority had travelled to Britain alone, most had pre-existing networks and these not only encouraged but often facilitated the move by providing information, advice and in some cases accommodation. Thus, the role of networks remains important even for highly qualified migrants¹⁶.

¹⁶ A point also noted elsewhere by Ryan and Mulholland (2013) French Connections: the networking strategies of highly skilled migrants French in London' Global Networks. DOI: 10.1111/glob.12038

9. The participants in this study were geographically dispersed around Britain. While London is the main destination, we should not ignore the fact that young Irish migrants are also moving to other parts of the country.
10. Few used Irish organisations as sources of information or support. Nonetheless, several were actively involved in Irish associations most notably the GAA – this applied to both male and female participants.
11. Although most said they did not need to access practical support through Irish organisations, several noted that Irish social groups could serve an important need, especially for newly arrived people, those located in places outside London where it was harder to make friends, and young students who may feel quite lonely.
12. Recently arrived migrants define their mobility in terms of ‘choice’, freedom and transience, in contrast to previous waves of migrants whom they associate with ‘forced’ migration from Ireland and permanent settlement in Britain.
13. Many commented that as the ‘Celtic Tiger’ generation they never anticipated having to leave Ireland in search of work - several felt angry about the state of the Irish economy.
14. The vast majority of participants said they felt no discrimination as Irish people in Britain and that Irish teachers were widely regarded as hard working professionals. However, several, particularly those outside London, commented on the persistence or even resurgence of anti-Irish stereotypes.
15. Almost all participants used new communication technologies to maintain regular contact with family and friends, not just in Ireland but scattered throughout the world.
16. These teachers visited Ireland very often, partly because of their opportunities for frequent holidays; several remarked that proximity to home was a distinct advantage of Britain over other more far flung destinations.
17. While most people intended to return to live in Ireland eventually, they were generally uncertain about when that might be. A significant number hoped to return home within 5 years, but many anticipated a prolonged stay in Britain, while others planned to move on elsewhere. The global reach of these migrants is noteworthy with a significant proportion having lived or intending to live in a country other than Ireland or Britain.
18. Although most found it impossible to imagine settling down and having children in Britain, a number of those who had been here for several years had begun to consider this possibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The arrival of significant numbers of young professional migrants poses many opportunities but also some challenges for Irish organisations and other services providers in Britain. The recommendations below are categorised into practical support and policy development and are directed at:

- Second and Third Level Education providers in Ireland and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation
- Universities, training and educational providers in Britain
- Teacher Recruitment agencies, Trade Unions, Employers and professional support organisations in Britain
- Irish Organisations in Britain
- Other organisations working with and on behalf of BME communities
- The Irish Government and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs

Practical Support:

1. **Better information provision while still in Ireland** – Young Irish students applying for university courses in Britain need higher quality information and advice about the full extent and variety of training options, qualifications and choices available to them so that they can make appropriate choices about the most suitable course of study and qualification for their needs.
2. **Specific supports in place on arrival and throughout course of study** - Young, English-speaking students arriving from Ireland may still face isolation and require specific support on taking up training places in Britain. There is an opportunity for Universities and providers here to create ways of working with existing Irish organisations in Britain to best support the needs of these young migrants.
3. **Partnership working in the Irish Sector** – It is clear that many young Irish professionals want an opportunity to meet and socialise with other Irish people but they may be unaware of the many different Irish organisations in Britain or do not believe such organisations can provide what they require. Irish organisations in Britain need to be better at developing ways of fully engaging with newly arrived migrants, but require support to do this. There is an opportunity for the Emigrant Support Programme to strategically develop a proactive approach to creating social and support partnerships across organisations, which collectively

meet the needs of young immigrants as well as those of the older Irish community.

4. **Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) Support Position** – Some Irish organisations have proved very successful in attracting newly arrived Irish migrants, the GAA stands out as a primary example. There is now an opportunity for the organisation to take the lead on facilitating young Irish migrants to obtain information about the wider range of services and support available to them in Britain. There is a real opportunity for the GAA to work with leading Irish organisations to develop and pilot a support officer post of this nature in Britain, which could then be rolled out to other locations such as Canada and Australia.
5. **Creation of an Irish Teachers Network** – There is an opportunity for the development of an Irish teachers' network in line with similar networks set up by Irish professionals in Britain, such as the London Irish Business Society (LIBS). Such a network could provide peer support, signposting, career advice as well as social opportunities.
6. **Cross sector partnerships** – Teacher recruitment agencies and school employers play a huge role in creating a smoother transition for newly arrived Irish teachers to Britain. There is a clear opportunity for more partnership working across the sectors to ensure that new arrivals are made aware of the wide range of support services which may be available to them, from, for example, Irish organisations throughout Britain.

Policy Development:

7. **Tackling negative stereotyping in professional settings** – While most participants had not experienced outright discrimination, there is an underlying 'casual racism' which continues to feature in day to day interaction for Irish people in Britain, even in professional settings. There is a need for dialogue about the impact and implications of persistent negative stereotyping, for example, anti-Irish 'jokes' and banter, and a recognition by employers and trade unions in Britain that this may negatively impact on experiences in the work place and should be addressed.
8. **Leadership from the Irish political system** – The anger and frustration felt by many Irish migrants is well documented by a range of research and other initiatives and there needs to be clear recognition of this by Irish political leaders. While working overseas may be seen as (and often is) a positive experience for young Irish people, this should not be regarded by politicians as an alternative to providing job opportunities at home, nor should it be a way of overlooking the

complex issues that come with emigration. The research findings of this study support earlier recommendations¹⁷ for a ministerial position to work with emigrants and Irish organisations outside Ireland as well as their call for a joined-up approach across Irish government departments in tackling the issues associated with modern Irish emigration.

9. **Wider migrant support in Britain** – Migrants in Britain, including the Irish, are often highly-skilled, well-educated and work in a multitude of professional settings, where they are successful and important contributors to the wider economy. In the current anti-migration climate, it is important that the positive role of migrants to British society is highlighted and celebrated. There are opportunities for groups such as Irish teachers and Irish organisations and professional networks to contribute to the wider dialogue and challenges faced by all migrant groups in Britain.

¹⁷ such as The National Youth Council of Ireland's 'Time To Go?' Report