

## OPINIONS OF THE IRISH PUBLIC ON THE GOALS AND ADEQUACY OF EDUCATION\*

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In a survey of a representative sample of the Irish adult population (n:994), respondents were asked in interview their opinions about the emphasis which schools place on a series of (i) core scholastic goals, (ii) cultural, aesthetic, and personal goals, (iii) vocational goals, and (iv) political goals. They were also asked to rate schools in general and to express their degree of satisfaction with their own education. Three core scholastic goals were perceived by majorities of respondents (61 to 73%) as receiving the right amount of emphasis. Opinions that the emphasis placed on seven cultural, aesthetic, and personal goals was right varied between 17 and 58% of respondents for the various goals; however, between 18 and 70% perceived the emphasis as too little. Three vocational goals were perceived as receiving adequate emphasis by between 36 and 49% of respondents; between 32 and 53% perceived the emphasis as inadequate. While 94% of respondents agreed with the principle of equality of educational opportunity, from 35 to 73% did not agree that the principle was being realized in three concrete situations. Today's schools were rated as 'good' or 'excellent' by 72% of respondents; further, schools were perceived as improving over time. While 64% of respondents were satisfied with their own education, 57% would have preferred to have stayed longer at school. A substantial majority (around 80%) were of the opinion that students today need a standard of education of at least the level of the Leaving Certificate.

Decision-making about the future shape and direction of education is dependent on various kinds of information. Data on enrolment, school facilities, and staffing are generally recognized as basic for this purpose. Less frequently recognized perhaps is the fact that information on student

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achievements and standards and on the effectiveness of curricula, programmes, and examinations is also pertinent. But it is the role of the values and attitudes of people involved in education that is probably least systematically assessed and taken into account in decision-making processes, even though it can be argued that in a democracy 'policy, eventually, if not immediately is made or unmade by public opinion' (5, p.1).

Surveys of public opinion concerning educational issues have been carried out frequently in Britain and in the United States over the past two decades. In Britain, surveys have been carried out under government auspices to stimulate discussion and reflection. The best known were those carried out in connection with the work of the Plowden Committee (cf. 1,4, 6). In the United States, major surveys have been the result of private rather than of government initiative. Such surveys have been carried out annually since 1969 by the Gallup organization (cf. 2, 3). Most surveys ask a core of common questions which deal with satisfaction with schools and problems in education. However, since the problems facing decision-makers are often temporary and specific, though pressing, many survey questions asked may be idiosyncratic; this makes comparisons across the surveys difficult.

The present paper contains the results of part of a survey, carried out in the Republic of Ireland in 1974, of the opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of a representative sample of adults regarding various aspects of education. The part reported in this paper deals with the goals of education and the public's assessment of the performance of schools.

#### METHOD

##### *Interview Schedule*

A personal interview schedule was developed at the Educational Research Centre and administered by Irish Marketing Surveys Limited. The part of the interview for which results are reported in this paper was concerned with opinions about a variety of scholastic and non-scholastic goals of education and the public's assessment of Irish schools.

*Goals of education.* Questions in the interview relating to goals may be categorized under four headings. For most of the questions, each respondent was handed a card containing a list of goals and asked to indicate how he or she felt about the emphasis which schools – primary and post-primary, but not third-level – placed on each one. For each goal, with the exception of those listed under (iv) below for which the item format differed, respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought the amount of emphasis

placed on it in schools was 'too much', 'too little', 'just right' or 'don't know/not sure'.

(i) *Core scholastic goals:* (a) teaching reading, writing, mathematics, sciences, languages, etc.; (b) preparing students for examinations, like the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate; (c) preparing students for further education.

(ii) *Cultural, aesthetic, and personal goals:* (a) giving students an understanding of their religion; (b) preparing students for marriage and having children; (c) helping them to value music, art, and literature; (d) developing interests and hobbies outside of work; (e) transmitting the traditions and languages of other EEC countries; (f) encouraging students to have opinions of their own; (g) maintaining and fostering the Irish language.

(iii) *Vocational preparation:* (a) preparing students for the world of work; (b) helping students achieve financial success; (c) teaching students to compete with others.

(iv) *Political goals.* Four statements related to the political goal of equality of educational opportunity were presented. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each of the statements; degree of agreement was registered on a four-point scale ('strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'), with a 'don't know/not sure' option. Three statements referred to the situation in the Irish educational system as perceived by respondents: 'All children regardless of social class have the same chance to get a good education', 'Girls' secondary schools are not as good as boys' secondary schools'; 'Children in small schools do not receive as good an education as children in big schools'. The final statement referred to what respondents thought was desirable rather than what they thought the actual situation was: 'Everyone should have the chance to go to university if they want to'.

*Assessment of schools.* Respondents were asked to rate schools in Ireland today and to compare today's schools with schools a few years ago and with schools as they thought they would be in a few years' time. For rating schools today, five options were provided: 'excellent', 'pretty good', 'only fair', 'poor', and 'don't know/not sure'. In comparing today's schools with those of the past, respondents were asked to judge the former as 'better', 'about the same', or 'not as good', while in the comparison of today's schools with those of the future, they were asked to judge the latter as 'better', 'the same' or 'worse'. In both cases, there was an option 'don't know/not sure'.

At a more personal level, respondents were asked to express their degree of satisfaction with their own education ('satisfied', 'not satisfied', 'not sure').

They were also asked whether or not they would have preferred to have stayed longer at school.

Finally, respondents were asked their opinion on the level of education which they thought young people (boys and girls separately) needed these days to make a decent living. Six options were provided for level of education: primary schooling, some post-primary schooling but no examination, Group Certificate, Intermediate Certificate, Leaving Certificate, and further education beyond the Leaving Certificate.

### *Sample*

A sample of 1,000 adults aged between 16 and 69 years was selected on a quota sampling basis to represent the general public in the Republic of Ireland. This was done in the following way.

The country was first stratified into provinces and, within each province, by county borough, other urban area (towns with populations greater than 1,500), and rural area. In all, ten strata were established. The number selected for each stratum in the sample was proportional to the population in each.

Within strata, primary sampling areas were constituted using District Electoral Divisions (DED), except in the case of urban districts with populations in excess of 1,500 where the complete urban districts formed primary sampling areas; wards within urban districts were then selected at random. In rural areas, several DEDs were grouped. Within each stratum, the primary areas were listed in descending order of population. A random starting point was determined and areas were selected systematically by the use of a fixed interval designed to yield the required number of points within each stratum.

After the selection of primary sampling areas, interviewers were provided with an address chosen at random from the electoral register for an area. Each interviewer was also supplied with a quota sheet setting out the required number of interviews, giving details of the numbers required within age and social class categories, and also distinguishing between male and female, and married and single respondents.

The sample was weighted toward urban areas by a factor of 2.3 : 1. This was done to obtain an adequate representation of the greater heterogeneity that one would expect in urban areas. Over-sampling was corrected at the analytic stage whenever urban and rural samples were combined.



After coding and cleaning, it was found that six interviews could not be used. Thus analyses were based on 994 people. Information was not available on the socio-economic status of five urban respondents or on the educational level of one rural and 23 urban respondents. The numbers in the analyses by socio-economic and educational level are reduced accordingly.

### *Analysis*

The responses of each of the following groups are presented in percentages:

- (i) Total sample (n:994).
- (ii) Parental status groups: (a) Parents of children attending school beyond first class in primary school (n:200 urban; 72 rural); (b) Non-parents: respondents who either had no children or whose children were not yet beyond first class in primary school or whose children had already left school (n:497 urban; 225 rural).
- (iii) Residence groups: (a) Urban: respondents living in towns or cities with populations of 1,500 or more inhabitants (n:697); (b) Rural: respondents living in areas of population with less than 1,500 inhabitants (n:297).
- (iv) Socio-economic level determined on the basis of the occupation of the head of household, not that of the respondent: (a) Professional/managerial (n:118 urban; 3 rural); (b) Middle class/white collar (n:149 urban; 10 rural); (c) Skilled worker (n:197 urban; 39 rural); (d) Unskilled worker (n:226 urban; 72 rural); (e) Farmer with 50 or more acres (n:73 rural); (f) Farmer with less than 50 acres (n:2 urban; 100 rural). Categories (a) through (d) are conventionally regarded as constituting an ordinal scale of socio-economic level. While we feel there are differences between these categories and farmers, who are assigned to two separate categories (e and f), it is not clear how the farming categories relate to the scale.
- (v) Level achieved at end of formal education: (a) Primary school only (n:249 urban; 176 rural); (b) Post-primary school but no public examination (n:112 urban; 47 rural); (c) Group Certificate (n:26 urban; 12 rural); (d) Intermediate Certificate (n:69 urban; 25 rural); (e) Leaving Certificate (n:125 urban; 25 rural); (f) Third-level education (n:93 urban; 11 rural).

Except in the case of the residence groups, results are presented in terms of weighted percentages, i.e., with each rural case weighted by 2.3.

All sampling surveys are subject to errors of sampling. Such errors indicate the extent to which results obtained may differ from what would have been obtained if the whole population had been surveyed. The size of sampling error depends largely on the number of people sampled. In the case of proportions or percentages, it also varies with the value of the proportion obtained. For a sample size near 700, the 95% confidence

interval is obtained by adding and subtracting 2 percentage points for percentages near 10 or 90, 3 percentage points for percentages near 20-30 or 70-80, and 4 percentage points for percentages near 40-60. The corresponding values for a sample size near 300 are  $\pm 3$  for percentages near 10 or 90,  $\pm 5$  for percentages near 20-30 or 70-80, and  $\pm 6$  for percentages near 40-60. If, for example, a reported percentage for the group of 297 rural respondents is 33%, this figure is subject to a sampling error of  $\pm 5$  points. Another way of putting this is that it is very probable that repeated samplings would produce results between 28 and 38 percent. In evaluating weighted percentages the reader should note that the amount of sampling error is affected by the unweighted numbers of urban and rural respondents contributing to the percentages.

## RESULTS

### *Core scholastic goals*

Results for opinions relating to the emphasis on core scholastic goals — the teaching of reading, writing, mathematics, sciences, languages, etc., the preparation of students for public examinations, and the preparation of students for further education — are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3 respectively. A majority of respondents agreed that schools place the right amount of emphasis on all three goals; for the total sample, the majorities were 73% for the first goal, 61% for the second, and 62% for the third.

There were, however, some interesting minority opinions. Approximately one-quarter of urban respondents and of respondents with third-level education felt that schools place too little emphasis on teaching basic curricular subjects (Table 1). This view was also held, though to a slightly lesser extent, by professional/managerial, skilled, and unskilled workers, and by respondents with a minimum of post-primary education.

Significant minority viewpoints are also to be found regarding the emphasis of schools on public examinations and the preparation of students for further education. Approximately one-quarter of the total sample, about 40% of people in the higher socio-economic groups, and nearly 50% of the group with the highest level of formal education felt that schools place too much emphasis on the preparation of students for public examinations (Table 2). At the same time, approximately a third of respondents in these categories felt that schools do not sufficiently emphasize the preparation of students for further education (Table 3).

TABLE 1

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS SCHOOLS PLACE ON TEACHING  
READING, WRITING, MATHEMATICS, SCIENCES, LANGUAGES, ETC.

	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	7	17	73	3
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	5	21	72	3
Non-parents	8	16	73	3
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	7	24	65	3
Rural	6	11	81	2
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	6	21	65	7
White collar	9	15	74	3
Skilled	5	21	72	2
Unskilled	8	21	68	3
Farmer (50 acres +)	10	11	78	1
Farmer (50 acres -)	2	13	82	5
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	7	17	74	2
Post-primary (no exam)	5	19	71	5
Group Certificate	13	13	74	0
Intermediate Certificate	5	13	78	4
Leaving Certificate	9	17	74	1
Third level	7	24	62	7

TABLE 2

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS SCHOOLS PLACE ON  
PREPARING STUDENTS FOR PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS

	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	24	11	61	4
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	24	14	56	6
Non-parents	24	9	63	3
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	30	12	53	5
Rural	19	9	72	
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	41	6	51	2
White collar	39	9	47	5
Skilled	22	16	57	5
Unskilled	20	13	61	6
Farmer (50 acres +)	25	6	69	1
Farmer (50 acres -)	13	7	78	2
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	19	13	63	5
Post-primary (no exam)	17	8	70	5
Group Certificate	26	8	64	2
Intermediate Certificate	29	8	58	4
Leaving Certificate	29	10	59	2
Third level	49	10	39	2



TABLE 3

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS WHICH SCHOOLS PLACE ON  
PREPARING STUDENTS FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	7	27	62	4
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	4	28	64	4
Non-parents	8	26	62	4
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	7	31	55	6
Rural	7	22	69	2
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	6	37	50	7
White collar	8	33	58	1
Skilled	7	28	62	3
Unskilled	7	26	61	7
Farmer (50 acres +)	7	21	71	1
Farmer (50 acres -)	10	20	67	3
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	7	24	65	4
Post-primary (no exam)	8	17	73	2
Group Certificate	8	26	60	6
Intermediate Certificate	6	40	49	6
Leaving Certificate	9	32	56	3
Third level	8	34	55	3

*Cultural, aesthetic, and personal goals*

Results relating to cultural, aesthetic, and personal goals are presented in Tables 4 through 10. A majority (58%) of respondents felt that schools give the right amount of emphasis to the development of children's understanding of their religion (Table 4). Parents were more likely than non-parents to express this opinion. The group in which this opinion was least frequently held was the one with third-level education (47%); the group in which it was most frequently held was the large farmer group (66%). Respondents were more likely to say that schools place too little emphasis on religion (25% of the total sample) than too much (14% of the total sample).

Of all the goals listed, the one that evoked the greatest amount of dissatisfaction was the emphasis which schools give to preparing students for married life (Table 5). Seventy percent thought that schools place too little emphasis on this goal, while only 17% thought the emphasis is right.

Satisfaction with the emphasis of schools on helping students to value music, art, and literature was moderate — 37% of the national sample (Table 6). Only in the case of small farmers (51%) was there a majority of respondents who felt the emphasis of schools on this goal is right. In fact, a majority (52%) of the total sample felt that too little emphasis is placed on music, art, and literature in schools. The majority rose to 74% for respondents with third-level education, to 75% for the professional/managerial group, and to 78% for those who held the Group Certificate.

Rather similar patterns of response were found for the goal dealing with the development of interests and hobbies (Table 7) and the one dealing with the transmission of the traditions and languages of other EEC countries (Table 8). Fifty-six percent of all respondents felt the amount of emphasis on the former goal is too little, while the comparable figure for the latter goal was 62 percent. Only for the former goal was there a group — small farmers — a majority (51%) of which felt the amount of emphasis is correct.

Respondents showed less agreement in their views on the emphasis which schools place on encouraging students to have opinions of their own. In the total sample, half (49%) felt that this goal receives the right amount of emphasis, while a large majority (37%) felt it receives too little (Table 9). Several of the groups in the population (e.g., urban dwellers, professional/managerial and white collar workers) were fairly evenly divided between the

TABLE 4

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS WHICH SCHOOLS PLACE ON  
GIVING STUDENTS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR RELIGION

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	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	14	25	58	2
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	7	25	66	2
Non-parents	17	25	56	2
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	21	24	52	3
Rural	8	26	65	1
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	19	21	53	7
White collar	17	25	54	4
Skilled	17	19	62	2
Unskilled	17	28	53	2
Farmer (50 acres +)	14	19	66	1
Farmer (50 acres -)	3	32	64	1
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	11	26	62	2
Post-primary (no exam)	9	32	59	0
Group Certificate	29	16	55	0
Intermediate Certificate	19	19	60	2
Leaving Certificate	21	19	55	6
Third level	21	28	47	5

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TABLE 5  
 OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS WHICH SCHOOLS PLACE ON  
 PREPARING STUDENTS FOR MARRIED LIFE

	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	3	70	17	10
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	3	67	14	16
Non-parents	3	71	18	8
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	3	71	12	14
Rural	3	68	22	6
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	3	70	15	12
White collar	2	72	14	11
Skilled	3	73	12	13
Unskilled	2	64	21	13
Farmer (50 acres +)	3	77	15	6
Farmer (50 acres -)	7	67	21	5
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	5	65	19	11
Post-primary (no exam)	3	66	19	13
Group Certificate	4	75	14	6
Intermediate Certificate	2	71	21	6
Leaving Certificate	0	85	8	8
Third level	1	75	16	9

TABLE 6

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS WHICH SCHOOLS PLACE ON  
HELPING CHILDREN TO VALUE MUSIC, ART, AND LITERATURE

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	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	2	52	37	9
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	1	51	42	5
Non-parents	2	53	35	11
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	2	58	30	10
Rural	1	47	43	9
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	0	75	19	6
White collar	0	60	33	7
Skilled	2	59	33	6
Unskilled	3	45	38	14
Farmer (50 acres +)	0	53	38	8
Farmer (50 acres -)	2	37	51	10
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	2	39	46	13
Post-primary (no exam)	3	53	36	8
Group Certificate	2	78	16	4
Intermediate Certificate	2	65	30	3
Leaving Certificate	0	68	27	5
Third level	0	74	21	4

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TABLE 7

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS WHICH SCHOOLS PLACE ON  
DEVELOPING INTERESTS AND HOBBIES OUTSIDE OF WORK

	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	3	56	36	5
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	3	54	39	4
Non-parents	3	56	35	5
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	1	67	27	5
Rural	5	44	46	5
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	2	70	23	6
White collar	1	70	26	3
Skilled	3	61	31	5
Unskilled	1	56	39	4
Farmer (50 acres +)	4	53	41	1
Farmer (50 acres -)	8	32	51	9
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	4	47	43	7
Post-primary (no exam)	3	54	40	4
Group Certificate	4	60	30	6
Intermediate Certificate	2	65	31	3
Leaving Certificate	2	69	26	3
Third level	1	74	23	3

TABLE 8

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS WHICH SCHOOLS PLACE ON TRANSMITTING  
THE TRADITIONS AND LANUGAGES OF OTHER EEC COUNTRIES

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	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much	Too little	Just right	Don't know/ Not sure
	%	%	%	%
National total	3	62	20	15
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	4	58	25	12
Non-parents	3	64	18	16
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	2	69	15	14
Rural	3	56	24	17
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	2	77	15	6
White collar	3	72	16	10
Skilled	2	66	15	17
Unskilled	3	59	19	18
Farmer (50 acres +)	3	59	25	14
Farmer (50 acres -)	4	50	29	17
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	4	51	23	22
Post-primary (no exam)	4	62	22	12
Group Certificate	4	72	12	12
Intermediate Certificate	1	72	16	11
Leaving Certificate	1	78	15	7
Third level	1	82	13	4

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TABLE 9

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS WHICH SCHOOLS PLACE ON  
ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO HAVE OPINIONS OF THEIR OWN

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	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	7	37	49	7
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	8	29	57	6
Non-parents	7	40	46	7
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	6	43	45	7
Rural	9	31	54	7
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	6	42	45	7
White collar	8	42	45	6
Skilled	6	41	48	5
Unskilled	4	40	47	8
Farmer (50 acres +)	15	33	48	4
Farmer (50 acres -)	10	21	60	9
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	9	30	54	8
Post-primary (no exam)	13	34	46	7
Group Certificate	4	62	29	4
Intermediate Certificate	2	44	46	8
Leaving Certificate	1	45	48	6
Third level	7	50	39	4

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'too little' and the 'just right' responses. Exceptions to this trend are found among parents, rural dwellers, small farmers, and respondents with only primary education; in all of these groups a half or more of respondents indicated the emphasis is right. There are only two groups in which half or more of the respondents felt that too little emphasis is placed on encouraging students to have opinions of their own — respondents with the Group Certificate and respondents with third-level education.

The final goal in this section relates to the maintenance and fostering of the Irish language. Respondents' views broke fairly evenly between those who felt the schools give Irish the right amount of emphasis (42% of the total sample) and those who felt they give it too much (38%) (Table 10). The view that Irish receives too much emphasis was held most frequently by respondents with the Group Certificate (47%) and large farmers (45%); it was held least frequently by respondents with third-level education (27%). Respondents with third-level education were the ones who most frequently held the amount of emphasis on Irish is too little (27%).

#### *Vocational goals*

Results relating to schools' emphasis on three goals dealing with vocational preparation are contained in Tables 11, 12, and 13. In the case of none of these goals did a majority of the total sample feel that the amount of emphasis is correct. A majority (53%) felt that schools place too little emphasis on preparing students for the world of work (Table 11). Respondents with higher levels of education and those in higher socio-economic positions were more likely to hold this view than respondents with lower levels of education and in lower socio-economic positions. A plurality (44%), but not a majority, of the total sample felt that schools place too little emphasis on helping students achieve financial success (Table 12). Majorities among a number of the groups in the sample, however, held this view. This was true of respondents with the Group Certificate, the Intermediate Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate (though not of those with third-level education). Almost half the respondents (49%) agreed that schools' emphasis on teaching students to compete with others is 'just right' (Table 13). The percentage who perceived it as too little was also considerable (32%). Only 11% thought the emphasis is too much. Again, there are variations between groups in their opinions about schools' emphasis on competition. Small farmers seem most satisfied with the present situation (68%), those with the Group Certificate least satisfied (36%).

TABLE 10

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS WHICH SCHOOLS PLACE ON  
MAINTAINING AND FOSTERING THE IRISH LANGUAGE

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	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	38	18	42	3
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	36	16	47	2
Non-parents	39	18	40	3
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	39	17	40	3
Rural	36	17	43	2
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	29	18	44	8
White collar	36	22	38	5
Skilled	38	17	45	1
Unskilled	42	16	40	2
Farmer (50 acres +)	45	14	40	1
Farmer (50 acres -)	32	19	45	4
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	39	16	43	2
Post-primary (no exam)	37	14	48	2
Group Certificate	47	10	41	2
Intermediate Certificate	40	21	37	2
Leaving Certificate	38	20	35	6
Third level	27	27	42	5

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TABLE 11

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS WHICH SCHOOLS PLACE ON  
PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE WORLD OF WORK

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	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	7	53	36	4
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	7	54	37	3
Non-parents	6	53	36	4
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	7	62	27	5
Rural	6	45	46	3
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	5	70	22	4
White collar	6	63	28	3
Skilled	6	59	30	5
Unskilled	6	50	39	5
Farmer (50 acres +)	4	55	40	1
Farmer (50 acres -)	11	35	51	3
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	8	46	42	5
Post-primary (no exam)	5	44	46	6
Group Certificate	8	72	16	4
Intermediate Certificate	7	65	26	2
Leaving Certificate	2	70	25	3
Third level	6	69	25	0

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TABLE 12

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS WHICH SCHOOLS PLACE ON  
HELPING STUDENTS ACHIEVE FINANCIAL SUCCESS

	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	9	44	37	10
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	9	37	41	13
Non-parents	9	47	36	9
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	13	48	29	11
Rural	5	40	46	9
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	14	46	27	13
White collar	16	45	31	8
Skilled	11	48	31	10
Unskilled	6	46	37	11
Farmer (50 acres +)	6	45	43	7
Farmer (50 acres -)	6	33	51	10
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	8	38	43	11
Post-primary (no exam)	9	42	36	13
Group Certificate	4	72	18	6
Intermediate Certificate	6	51	33	10
Leaving Certificate	10	54	31	6
Third level	18	42	34	6

TABLE 13

OPINIONS ON THE EMPHASIS WHICH SCHOOLS PLACE ON  
TEACHING STUDENTS TO COMPETE WITH OTHERS

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	Amount of emphasis			
	Too much %	Too little %	Just right %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	11	32	49	8
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	13	28	52	7
Non-parents	11	33	48	8
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	17	34	40	9
Rural	5	29	59	6
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	22	23	48	7
White collar	19	28	45	8
Skilled	14	40	40	7
Unskilled	8	37	48	8
Farmer (50 acres +)	8	33	52	7
Farmer (50 acres -)	4	20	68	8
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	9	33	51	8
Post-primary (no exam)	8	27	57	8
Group Certificate	10	49	36	4
Intermediate Certificate	12	37	43	8
Leaving Certificate	15	30	49	6
Third level	25	24	47	3

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*Political goals*

Three items on equality of opportunity refer to the actual situation in Ireland. The first concerns social class: 'All children, regardless of social class, have the same chance to get a good education.' A majority (65%) of the total sample agreed (Table 14). However, there were substantial percentages in all the sub-groups who disagreed. Disagreement (either simple disagreement or strong disagreement) was most frequent among professional/managerial workers (58%) and among respondents with third-level education (54%). Disagreement was least frequent among farmers; only 17% of small farmers and 23% of large farmers disagreed.

A further item on equality of opportunity relates to gender. A majority (68%) of respondents disagreed that girls' secondary schools are not as good as boys' secondary schools (Table 15). Among the sub-groups in the population, those who felt that girls' secondary schools are not as good as boys' schools never reached 20%, except in the case of those who held the Leaving Certificate. However, responses in the 'don't know/not sure' category were exceptionally high for this item and for several groups were as large or larger (16% overall) than those who felt that girls' schools are not as good as boys' schools. Thus, approximately 30 to 40% of respondents in various groups felt that girls' schools are not as good as boys' schools, were not sure, or did not know. These figures indicate that a significant minority of respondents were at least doubtful about the equality of girls' and boys' secondary schools.

The third item on equality of opportunity refers to size of school, which is related to geographical location. A majority (73%) of respondents indicated that they did not agree that children do not receive as good an education in small schools as in large ones (Table 16). A sizeable minority (24%), however, agreed with the statement. Agreement was most frequent in groups that should have had the greatest experience of small schools — small farmers (32%) and the total sample of rural respondents (28%).

A final item relating to equality of educational opportunity is a statement of principle: 'Everyone should have a chance to go to university if they want to.' The vast majority (94%) of respondents agreed with this principle, 75% strongly so (Table 17). The strongest dissent from the view came from respondents who were most likely to have had university education; 20% of professional/managerial workers and 14% of respondents with third-level education disagreed.

TABLE 14

OPINIONS INDICATING THAT ALL CHILDREN, REGARDLESS  
OF SOCIAL CLASS, HAVE THE SAME CHANCE TO GET  
A GOOD EDUCATION

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	Degree of agreement				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know/ Not sure
	%	%	%	%	%
National total	40	25	15	20	1
<i>Parental status</i>					
Parents	44	21	14	21	1
Non-parents	39	26	15	19	1
<i>Residence</i>					
Urban	30	23	16	30	1
Rural	50	26	14	9	1
<i>Socio-economic level</i>					
Professional/Managerial	23	16	22	36	2
White collar	22	26	18	33	1
Skilled	40	19	15	25	0
Unskilled	39	30	11	18	2
Farmer (50 acres +)	52	25	19	4	0
Farmer (50 acres -)	55	26	10	7	2
<i>Level of formal education</i>					
Primary education	49	24	10	16	1
Post-primary (no exam)	36	32	12	18	2
Group Certificate	37	23	21	19	0
Intermediate Certificate	36	25	21	18	0
Leaving Certificate	30	23	20	27	1
Third level	24	21	22	32	2

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TABLE 15  
 OPINIONS INDICATING THAT GIRLS' ARE NOT  
 AS GOOD AS BOYS' SECONDARY SCHOOLS

	Degree of agreement				
	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	4	12	31	37	16
<i>Parental status</i>					
Parents	5	12	30	38	15
Non-parents	4	12	31	37	16
<i>Residence</i>					
Urban	5	13	26	36	20
Rural	4	11	35	38	12
<i>Socio-economic level</i>					
Professional/Managerial	2	14	21	38	25
White collar	8	9	19	47	17
Skilled	4	13	32	36	16
Unskilled	3	14	32	33	19
Farmer (50 acres +)	7	7	36	45	6
Farmer (50 acres -)	4	15	37	32	12
<i>Level of formal education</i>					
Primary education	4	12	36	31	17
Post-primary (no exam)	4	10	26	46	15
Group Certificate	2	16	32	30	20
Intermediate Certificate	7	11	28	45	9
Leaving Certificate	5	17	25	38	15
Third level	7	9	23	46	16

TABLE 16

OPINIONS INDICATING THAT CHILDREN DO NOT RECEIVE  
AS GOOD AN EDUCATION IN SMALL AS IN BIG SCHOOLS

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	Degree of agreement				
	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	10	14	28	45	3
<i>Parental status</i>					
Parents	12	11	25	49	3
Non-parents	10	15	29	44	4
<i>Residence</i>					
Urban	9	12	27	48	5
Rural	12	16	29	42	2
<i>Socio-economic level</i>					
Professional/Managerial	6	9	30	50	5
White collar	8	8	29	54	1
Skilled	11	12	27	46	4
Unskilled	10	18	26	40	5
Farmer (50 acres +)	6	15	36	44	0
Farmer (50 acres -)	17	15	24	41	3
<i>Level of formal education</i>					
Primary education	12	15	27	41	4
Post-primary (no exam)	8	14	25	48	5
Group Certificate	2	14	31	49	4
Intermediate Certificate	9	13	29	47	3
Leaving Certificate	12	11	28	48	1
Third level	4	11	32	51	2

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TABLE 17

OPINIONS INDICATING THAT EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE  
A CHANCE TO GO TO UNIVERSITY

	Degree of agreement				
	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	75	19	4	2	0
<i>Parental status</i>					
Parents	78	16	4	2	0
Non-parents	74	20	4	2	0
<i>Residence</i>					
Urban	76	16	6	3	0
Rural	75	22	2	1	0
<i>Socio-economic level</i>					
Professional/Managerial	65	15	10	10	1
White collar	77	17	5	1	0
Skilled	82	13	5	1	0
Unskilled	76	20	3	1	0
Farmer (50 acres +)	69	29	1	1	0
Farmer (50 acres -)	76	21	2	0	1
<i>Level of formal education</i>					
Primary education	74	22	4	1	1
Post-primary (no exam)	78	18	1	2	1
Group Certificate	80	20	0	0	0
Intermediate Certificate	85	12	2	1	0
Leaving Certificate	79	14	5	2	0
Third level	67	19	8	6	0

*Assessment of schools*

In their assessment of schools in Ireland today, a majority (56%) of respondents felt that they are 'pretty good' (Table 18). A further 16% felt they are 'excellent', while 23% felt they are 'only fair'. Only 5% thought they are 'poor'. Negative opinions were most frequently expressed by those who had spent the greatest amount of time in schools — respondents with third-level education, those with the Leaving Certificate, and those in professional/managerial and white collar employment. More than 30% of these groups felt that schools today are 'only fair' or 'poor'. A similar percentage of unskilled workers concurred in this view.

When asked to compare schools today with schools of a few years ago, a large majority (80%) said that today's schools are better (Table 19). Only one in ten respondents felt that schools today are not as good.

Further, a majority (74%) of respondents felt that schools would continue to improve in the coming years (Table 20). While 5% of respondents, not unreasonably, did not know or were not sure about this, only about the same percentage felt that schools would 'get worse' in the future.

To obtain further information on their assessment of schools, respondents were asked about their satisfaction with their own education and whether they would have preferred to have stayed longer in school than they actually did. A majority (64%) were satisfied with the education they had received (Table 21). There was a tendency for respondents' level of satisfaction to be related positively to the level of formal education they had actually attained. For all groups, with the exception of large farmers and respondents with at least the Intermediate Certificate level of education, at least three out of ten respondents indicated they were not satisfied with their own education.

Responses relating to preference to have stayed longer in school indicate that a majority (57%) of the total sample would have preferred to have stayed longer than they did (Table 21). Not surprisingly, this preference was negatively related to the actual amount of education which respondents had received. Thus, while only 28% of respondents with third-level education would have liked to have obtained more education, the figure for respondents with only primary education was 71 percent. Similarly, the percentage of professional/managerial workers who would have liked more education was relatively small (29%), while the percentage of unskilled workers was relatively large (70%). A greater percentage of rural respondents (62%) than of urban respondents (52%) would have liked to have stayed longer at school.

TABLE 18  
RATING OF SCHOOLS IN IRELAND TODAY

	Excell- ent %	Pretty good %	Only fair %	Poor %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	16	56	23	5	1
<i>Parental status</i>					
Parents	20	52	23	5	0
Non-parents	15	57	23	5	1
<i>Residence</i>					
Urban	14	53	26	6	2
Rural	19	58	19	4	0
<i>Socio-economic level</i>					
Professional/Managerial	5	48	35	8	5
White collar	9	56	29	5	1
Skilled	20	55	19	6	2
Unskilled	17	51	26	5	1
Farmer (50 acres +)	15	62	21	3	0
Farmer (50 acres -)	22	62	13	3	0
<i>Level of formal education</i>					
Primary education	20	55	20	5	0
Post-primary (no exam)	21	58	17	4	0
Group Certificate	8	69	17	6	0
Intermediate Certificate	13	59	24	3	0
Leaving Certificate	10	56	27	6	2
Third level	7	44	38	8	3



TABLE 19

## RATING OF SCHOOLS TODAY COMPARED TO A FEW YEARS AGO

	Better %	About the same %	Not as good %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	80	9	10	1
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	79	7	14	0
Non-parents	80	9	9	2
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	79	9	11	2
Rural	81	9	10	0
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	74	9	13	5
White collar	75	9	14	2
Skilled	80	9	11	1
Unskilled	82	8	9	1
Farmer (50 acres +)	84	8	8	0
Farmer (50 acres -)	78	12	10	0
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	79	8	13	0
Post-primary (no exam)	84	10	5	1
Group Certificate	82	8	10	0
Intermediate Certificate	82	12	5	1
Leaving Certificate	74	12	11	4
Third level	83	3	10	3

TABLE 20  
 EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOLS IN NEXT FEW YEARS  
 COMPARED TO TODAY'S SCHOOLS

	Get better %	Stay the same %	Get worse %	Don't know/ Not sure %
National total	74	16	6	5
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	68	17	8	8
Non-parents	76	16	5	4
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	74	13	6	7
Rural	74	19	5	2
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	72	14	7	6
White collar	67	19	5	10
Skilled	74	12	10	4
Unskilled	78	12	4	6
Farmer (50 acres +)	78	19	3	0
Farmer (50 acres -)	69	24	5	2
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	75	14	6	5
Post-primary (no exam)	76	18	2	3
Group Certificate	58	34	8	0
Intermediate Certificate	71	20	2	7
Leaving Certificate	75	10	11	5
Third level	69	21	3	6

TABLE 21

## SATISFACTION WITH OWN EDUCATION

	Degree of satisfaction			Preferred to have stayed longer %
	Satisfied %	Not Satisfied %	Not Sure %	
National total	64	35	1	57
<i>Parental status</i>				
Parents	57	42	1	67
Non-parents	66	32	2	53
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	64	36	1	52
Rural	65	34	2	62
<i>Socio-economic level</i>				
Professional/Managerial	69	30	1	29
White collar	68	30	2	43
Skilled	61	38	1	57
Unskilled	62	38	1	70
Farmer (50 acres +)	77	23	0	55
Farmer (50 acres -)	57	39	4	62
<i>Level of formal education</i>				
Primary education	56	43	1	71
Post-primary (no exam)	64	34	2	65
Group Certificate	66	30	4	49
Intermediate Certificate	75	23	2	42
Leaving Certificate	75	25	1	29
Third level	74	24	2	28

TABLE 22  
 OPINIONS ON LEVEL OF EDUCATION NEEDED BY YOUNG PEOPLE (BOYS & GIRLS SEPARATELY) TODAY

	Primary		Post-Primary (no exam)		Group Cert		Inter Cert		Leaving Cert		Third Level	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
National total	1	1	1	3	11	4	7	15	46	53	35	24
<i>Parental status</i>												
Parents	2	2	0	3	9	3	8	14	43	51	38	27
Non-parents	1	1	1	3	11	5	7	15	47	53	34	22
<i>Residence</i>												
Urban	1	3	0	3	11	4	9	17	41	47	38	26
Rural	1	0	1	4	10	4	6	13	50	58	32	21
<i>Socio-economic level</i>												
Professional/Managerial	0	0	0	1	6	2	6	12	32	39	56	47
White collar	0	0	0	0	5	1	2	8	44	59	48	33
Skilled	3	3	1	4	9	5	9	19	44	49	34	20
Unskilled	1	3	1	7	17	7	11	19	41	45	29	19
Farmer (50 acres +)	0	0	1	0	8	1	4	12	59	67	27	19
Farmer (50 acres -)	0	0	0	2	10	5	5	11	54	61	31	21
<i>Level of formal education</i>												
Primary education	2	3	1	5	14	5	8	17	46	50	30	20
Post-primary (no exam)	0	1	0	4	13	4	9	17	48	53	30	22
Group Certificate	4	0	0	4	12	10	12	20	46	55	27	11
Intermediate Certificate	0	0	2	2	7	3	11	19	51	63	29	13
Leaving Certificate	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	4	42	56	55	38
Third level	0	0	0	1	6	1	3	9	37	46	55	43

The final item asked respondents for their opinion on the level of education which they thought was needed by young people today to make a decent living. The level that attracted the largest percentages of responses in the total sample was the Leaving Certificate (46% for boys and 53% for girls) (Table 22). The level that attracted the next largest percentages was third level (35% for boys and 24% for girls). Only 11% of respondents felt that the Group Certificate is adequate for boys, while an even smaller percentage (4%) felt it is adequate for girls. Very small percentages — even among respondents who themselves had only primary education or a minimum amount of post-primary education — felt that a primary education or post-primary education with no examination is adequate today.

#### DISCUSSION

A majority of respondents in this survey rated Irish schools as being generally good (though not excellent). Further, they perceived schools as improving over time. A majority too expressed satisfaction with their own education. Despite these favourable views of schools, respondents showed considerable discrimination in their assessments of the emphasis which schools place on different goals.

Scholastic goals were perceived by the greatest numbers of respondents as receiving the right amount of emphasis. Almost three-quarters of respondents thought that the teaching of reading, writing, mathematics, sciences, and languages receives the correct amount of emphasis, while somewhat smaller majorities (about 60%) thought that preparing students for public examination and for further education also receives the right amount of emphasis.

The public's general acceptance of the emphasis placed on the scholastic activities of the school is of interest when considered in conjunction with the views of Irish secondary school teachers who say that they put a lot of effort into examination-oriented activities and that it is in these activities that they see themselves as most successful (7). It would appear that, in general, the public approves of teachers' efforts in this area.

Although we do not have data to examine possible changes over time in people's opinions of schools in Ireland, their acceptance of schools' emphasis on scholastic goals, when considered in conjunction with their view that schools are improving over time, suggests that the Irish public does not share the concern that people in other countries have expressed in recent years about a decline in the quality of education (cf. 3).

Respondents were less satisfied with the emphasis of schools on other goals. For only one of the cultural, aesthetic, and personal goals — giving students an understanding of their religion — did a majority (almost 60%) think the emphasis of schools is correct. It will be noted that this goal, although not classified as a core scholastic one, by its use of the term 'understanding', implies a strong cognitive component. Almost half the respondents thought that the emphasis of schools on encouraging students to have opinions of their own is right, while a plurality (42%) held that schools' emphasis on maintaining and fostering the Irish language is right. Majorities of respondents held that schools place too little emphasis on four other goals: preparation for married life (70%), transmitting the traditions and languages of other EEC countries (62%), developing interests and hobbies outside of work (56%), and helping children value music, art, and literature (52%).

Satisfaction with the emphasis of schools was more in evidence in the case of vocational goals than it was in the case of cultural, aesthetic, and personal ones. However, for none of the three vocational goals did a majority of respondents agree that the emphasis of schools is right. About half the respondents agreed that schools' emphasis on teaching students to be competitive is right, though 32% felt it is too little. In light of the many criticisms which have been made of schools for over-emphasizing competitiveness at the expense of co-operation, it is of interest that such a large proportion thought that schools place too little emphasis on teaching students to compete with others, while only 11% thought they place too much emphasis on this goal. For the other two vocational goals, large proportions of respondents felt the emphasis is insufficient — a majority (53%) in the case of preparation for work and a plurality (44%) in the case of helping students achieve financial success.

While the vast majority (94%) agreed with the principle of equality of educational opportunity expressed in a fairly stringent form — that everyone should have a chance to go to university — smaller proportions agreed that the principle is realized in the Irish educational system in relation to social class, gender, and size of school. A majority (65%) of respondents agreed that all children regardless of social class have the same chance to get a good education. Majorities did not agree that girls' schools are not as good as boys' schools, or that size of school, which we may take as being related to urban-rural location, affects quality of education.

Despite dissatisfaction about a number of the activities of schools, a striking feature of responses concerning the level of education thought



desirable for young people today was the generally high level that was recommended. Anything less than the Group Certificate was regarded by very few people as adequate. Indeed, even the Group and Intermediate Certificates were regarded as adequate by relatively small numbers of respondents. In the case of boys, 81% of respondents thought that at least the Leaving Certificate is needed, while the percentage in the case of girls was only slightly lower (77%). Despite the similarity of these two percentages, respondents felt that boys need a higher level of education than girls. Thirty-five percent of respondents thought that boys need third-level education; only 24% thought that girls need it. These views reflect the actual situation on the Irish educational system in which, while the proportion of girls taking the Leaving Certificate is greater than the proportion of boys, the position is reversed for third level.

It is usual in surveys to pay most attention to the opinions of majorities, or at least pluralities, of respondents. However, minority responses, particularly if they are the responses of influential groups, can also be significant. There are several instances of minority responses in our survey which are of considerable magnitude. Thus large minorities of the total sample felt that *too little* emphasis is placed on encouraging students to have opinions of their own (37%), on teaching students to compete with others (32%), on preparing students for further education (27%), on teaching religion (25%), and on teaching reading, writing, mathematics, sciences, and languages (17%), and that *too much* emphasis is placed on maintaining and fostering the Irish language (38%) and on preparing students for examinations (24%). Further, almost a quarter of respondents thought that Irish schools are 'only fair'.

On the question of the realization of the principle of equality of opportunity in Irish schools, a large minority (35%) did not agree that all children, regardless of social class, have the same chance to get a good education, while a quarter of respondents believed that size of school affects quality of education. Thus, a sizeable minority of respondents seemed to feel that the implementation of the principle of equality of opportunity is not satisfactory in the Irish educational system.

In light of the extent of dissatisfaction which respondents expressed about schools' achievements in working towards a variety of goals, it is not surprising that a sizeable minority (35%) also expressed dissatisfaction with their own educational experience.

In many cases, the proportions of sub-groups holding strong minority

opinions were larger than the proportions of the total population which were cited in the preceding paragraphs. Obviously there is a considerable divergence of view on the performance of schools in a number of areas and one should not lose sight of minority points of view in considering the opinions expressed by majorities or pluralities of respondents. Divergence of opinion seems particularly strong in the case of the place of the Irish language in schools, in the encouragement of students to have opinions of their own, and in implementation of the policy of equality of educational opportunity.

Indeed, variation between groups which comprise the total sample in their opinions — both majority and minority — on the goals and adequacy of education was a feature of our survey. Before considering some of these differences, we should note the overlap that exists between some groups. Thus, as one would expect, there is a strong positive relationship between socio-economic status and level of formal education. Socio-economic status is also related to place of residence, high status being positively associated with urban location. Level of education is similarly related to location.

Differences were not found between parents and non-parents for place of residence or for socio-economic status. However, the educational level of non-parents was higher than that of parents. This is probably due to the fact that the parents were older than the non-parents; while one-third of non-parents were less than 25 years of age, none of the parents fell in that age group. At the same time, the younger the age group, the more likely its members were to have taken at least one public examination. Although age is not a variable in our tables, we may note that it is also related to respondents' place of residence, rural respondents being older than urban ones. These relationships should be borne in mind in considering the responses of the sub-groups. In particular, we might expect that the level of respondents' education would be a factor influencing their perceptions of the educational system.

Rural respondents, whose level of education was generally lower than that of urban respondents, were less critical of schools than were urban dwellers. They more frequently rated schools as good or excellent; they also more frequently rated as 'just right' schools' emphasis on all the core scholastic, cultural, aesthetic, personal, and vocational goals, with the one exception of maintaining and fostering the Irish language. Rural respondents were also more likely to agree that neither social class nor gender militates against equality of educational opportunity. Their general high degree of satisfaction makes even more striking their greater degree

of agreement, compared to urban respondents, with the statement that small schools, of which they presumably had experience, do not provide as good an education as large schools. Given rural respondents' generally favourable view of schools, it is not surprising that many of them would have wished to have stayed longer in the formal educational system.

Differences between the parent and non-parent groups were not as striking as were those between urban and rural groups. In general, parents were more conservative and expressed more concern about the basic traditional activities of schools. They felt, for example, that the emphasis placed on the core scholastic subjects and on public examinations could be greater. Non-parents, on the other hand, tended to favour greater emphasis on helping students achieve financial success, teaching students to compete with others, teaching the traditions and languages of EEC countries, and developing students' personal opinions. A higher proportion of non-parents than of parents expressed satisfaction with their own education, while a higher proportion of parents wished they had stayed longer at school. These views seem realistic since, in fact, the non-parents in our sample had received more education than the parents.

That the dissatisfaction of respondents with their own educational experience was to some extent a function of the length of time they had spent at school can be seen by inspecting the responses of respondents of varying levels of formal education; the less formal education a respondent had received, the less likely he or she was to express satisfaction with his or her own education. However, increasing length of stay in the formal educational system, it would appear, does not necessarily remove the dissatisfaction of respondents. Even respondents with relatively high levels of education — about a quarter of those with the Leaving Certificate and of those with third-level education — expressed dissatisfaction with their own education. The concern with the quality of education, as well as with the quantity, implied in these findings corroborates the concern which respondents earlier expressed in their assessments of the emphasis which schools place on a variety of goals.

While degree of satisfaction with one's own education was positively related to the amount of education received, at the same time, criticisms of school practices in general were more frequent among those with higher levels of education and those in the higher socio-economic groups. For example, these groups, relative to others, tended to think that too much emphasis is placed on public examinations and on teaching students to compete, while too little is placed on the development of interests and

hobbies outside of work, on valuing music, art, and literature, on the languages and traditions of EEC countries, and on preparation for the world of work. Thus, it would seem that they would like to see a shift from the more traditional academic role of the school to one in which the personal development of the student would receive more attention. While in general this position reflects support for a more 'liberal' type of education, one cannot help but notice some inconsistencies in the position. While wishing for less stress on public examinations, they would like to see more stress on preparation for further education; while wanting more emphasis on preparation for the world of work, they would like to see less stress on competitive behaviour.

The responses of holders of the Group Certificate were in some ways unusual in that, in many cases, they were not as one would have expected given their position in the educational hierarchy. On some issues their responses were very similar to those of the most highly educated groups; on other issues, they were sharply dissimilar. For example, they tended to agree with the more highly educated that there is a need for increased emphasis on music, art, and literature, and on preparation for work, and for less emphasis on teaching religion. However, they disagreed with the more highly educated in their perception of schools' emphasis on competition, which they saw as insufficient, and in their perception of schools' emphasis on core scholastic subject areas, which they saw as excessive. It may be that respondents with the Group Certificate, being on the whole much younger than other groups of respondents (61% were under 25 years of age), were reflecting the values of younger people in society while at the same time they perceived education as a device for upward social mobility through competition, a position that set them apart from those who had derived the greatest benefit from education.

In conclusion, while allowing for the fact that opinions in this survey show considerable variation according to the background of the participants, one gets the general impression that the public is reasonably satisfied with the over-all performance of schools but would like to see more attention being paid to the non-scholastic goals of education. They would like to see more attention given to a range of cultural, aesthetic, and personal goals, while at the same time maintaining the present emphasis on core scholastic subjects. In the former, they reflect the opinions of Irish secondary school pupils (7) as well as of many commentators on education, not only in this country, but in much of the western world. Whether or not schools, given the many constraints under which they operate, can meet the wide range of expectations which people hold for them will continue



to be a topic for discussion and debate. The diversity of opinions recorded in this survey suggests that no matter what schools do it is unlikely they will please all the people all the time.

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