Who are the Irish in Britain? Evidence from Large-scale Surveys

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1 The Irish in Britain

Britain has always been an important destination for migrants from Ireland. The Gaels of Scotland have Irish origins, and the Lleyn peninsula in Wales is named for the Leinster people who settled there (Ó Corráin, 1992, pp. 6-7). Throughout the industrial revolution the Irish provided a great deal of labour and are conventionally said to have dug the canals and built the railways. In more recent time there has been a steady flow of people to (and sometimes back from) Britain in search of work or a better life. In the 1950s and early 1960s the sharp contrast between a booming Britain and a stagnant Irish economy triggered flows of an almost intolerable level, a situation which also threatened to develop in the mid-1980s.

As a result of the more recent migration, there is a substantial Irish-born minority in the UK. The Labour Force Survey estimates that there are 500,000 to 550,000 people born in the Republic of Ireland living in Great Britain:[1] this is approximately 1 per cent of the UK population, but perhaps 15 per cent of the Irish population. When second generation Irish are taken into account this represents an even more significant proportion.

[1] Figures derived from LFS 1994, second quarter data set and LFS 1996, first quarter data set, using 1991 Census weights.

There are many sources of information on who these people are and what their experience has been, from anecdote and personal experience at one extreme, through journalistic and literary accounts, to tables of Government-collected statistics at the other. When we go beyond the published tables and consider the raw data sources the Labour Force Survey (LFS), already quoted, represents a very important source of information, because it surveys a very large sample (of the order of 150,000 respondents), four time a year. The Census is another, decennial and comprehensive in coverage, though the frequency of the LFS and the fact that it is available directly to researchers makes it preferable for many purposes. However, officially collected surveys tend to ask a relatively limited range of questions. In the case of the LFS these are mainly limited to education, training and the labour market. Therefore it is tempting to look to other survey sources to get richer information. But here we run into the problem of small numbers: a group that represents as little as 1 per cent of the population may provide too few sample members to carry out meaningful analysis. Any candidate survey must have a large sample. In this paper I draw from, as well as the LFS, the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and the UK portion of the multinational European Community Household Panel survey (ECHP). Combined, this sample runs to over 23,000 and contains 240 respondents born in the Republic of Ireland. Though the number is small, the sort of information is rich enough to warrant analysis, tentative though it may have to be.

The British Household Panel Study is a survey of approximately 5,500 households, the members of which are interviewed annually. The first wave of interviews took place in September 1991, and there are at present five waves of data in the public domain. Extensive information is collected on employment, education, family formation and fertility, health, housing, income and wealth, household consumption, political behaviour, values and attitudes, and so on. In terms of employment continuous information is collected on every job or employment status spell since September 1990, and this is supplemented by retrospective information stretching back to when the respondent first left full-time education. Thus for most respondents we have information on their complete work-life histories. By combining the Wave 1 sample with new entrants in the subsequent four waves, we can assemble a sample in excess of 12,000 individuals.

The European Community Household Panel is a multinational panel study that is developing into an important resource for Europe-wide research. However, it is not fully available yet, nor have the participant countries been collecting data for very long. Nonetheless, it is possible to use data from the first wave of the UK portion, which was collected in 1994, and has over 10,000 respondents. In many respects this study collects equivalent information to the BHPS, with the exception of the retrospective work histories. In what follows we exploit this similarity by combining the two panel samples where this is appropriate.

2 Who are the Irish in Britain?

I will begin by presenting some important summary information on the Irish in Britain: what are their sex and age distributions, and when did they come?

2.1 Sex distribution

Table 1 shows the sex distribution of Irish-born GB residents. The first panel consists of LFS data (1994, second quarter) grossed up to population figures using weights based on the 1991 Census. This can be considered a good estimate of the true figure in Britain, whereas the figures generated from panel data (in the second panel) are too small to make such generalisations but they are nonetheless indicative of the overall pattern.

Table 1: Sex distribution, LFS and Panel Surveys.

1: LFS 1994 Quarter 1 (grossed up to population, 000s)

	Non-Irish	RoI	Total
Male	27,216 (49.1)	250 (47.4)	27,467 (49.1)
Female	28,183 (50.9)	277 (52.6)	28,460 (50.9)
Total	55,399 (99.1)	527 (0.9)	55,926 (100.0)

2: BHPS/ECHP (non-weighted)

	Non-Irish	BHPS RoI	BHPS NI	ECHP RoI	Total
Male	11,003 (47.7)	53 (44.9)	37 (47.4)	50 (41.0)	11,143 (47.7)
Female	12,063 (52.3)	65 (55.1)	41 (52.6)	72 (59.0)	12,241 (52.3)
Total	23,066 (98.6)	118 (0.5)	78 (0.3)	122 (0.5)	23,384 (100.0)

The first thing apparent is that Irish-born women are over-represented, at 52.6 per cent versus a population value of 50.9 per cent according to the LFS. Given a ratio of 50.3 : 49.7 in Ireland in 1991 (Central Statistics Office of Ireland, 1997), it seems that they are slightly more likely to emigrate to Britain (or to stay, once there) than are men. This over-representation is also apparent in the panel samples, where it is accentuated by the slight general over-representation of women (this is often the case in surveys, and normally weighting is used to compensate for it; however, since the panel data come from two different surveys they are not weighted in the summaries reported in this paper). Interestingly the Northern Irish figures are much closer to the overall figures.[2]

[2]Information on Northern Ireland is only available for the BHPS: neither the ECHP nor the LFS ask region of birth. But even the BHPS fails to ask NI-born respondents when they came to Great Britain.

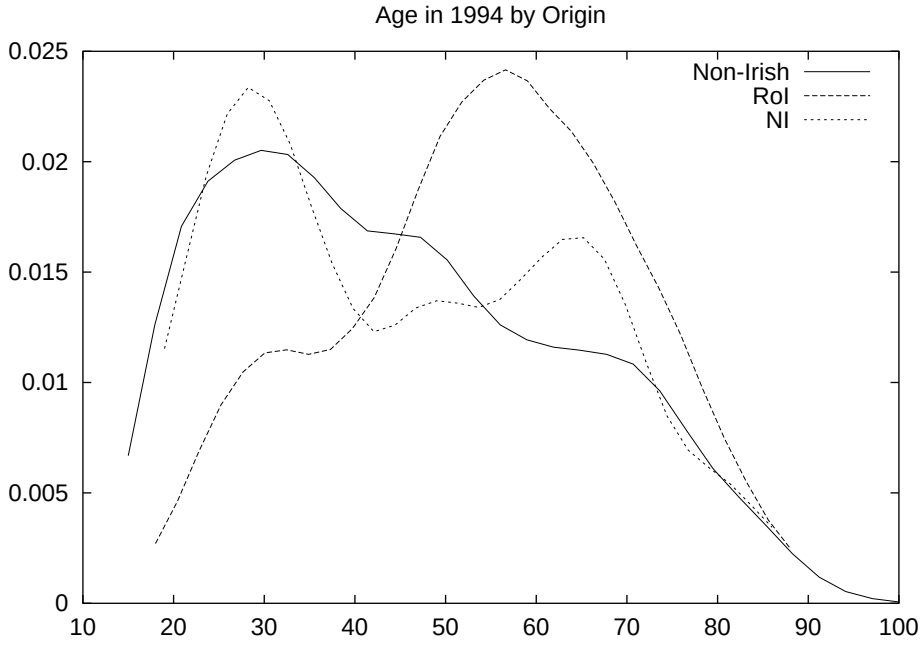

Figure 1: Age and origin: the age distribution for BHPS/ECHP non-Irish respondents, BHPS/ECHP respondents from the Republic and BHPS respondents from NI.

2.2 Age distribution

Figure 1 shows smoothed frequency distributions[3] of age in 1994, for BHPS/ECHP respondents, broken down into the three categories of non-Irish, Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland. The curve for non-Irish GB residents shows the conventional shape (apart from the omission of children from the samples), with the peak at a relatively young age and a slow subsequent decline. By contrast, immigrants from the Irish state are predominantly old, typically aged 50–70, but with a fair proportion in their late twenties and early thirties. This reflects the high level of emigration in the 1950s and early 1960s. However, the curve for Northern Ireland is dramatically different: there is a distinct preponderance of younger people, in the 20–40 range, with a peak around 28. We can speculate about reasons: presumably the industrial strength of the north relative to the Republic in the fifties meant they retained more of their people in that period, whereas the disorder and economic decline of more recent years is driving young people to Britain.

[3]Smoothing is by means of kernel density estimation, using Lisp-Stat (Tierney, 1990). This is a means of taking a sample and non-parametrically estimating the underlying distribution function.

2.3 Age at entry to UK

The distribution of age tells us something about the current state of the Irish in Britain: by contrast, the distribution of their age at first entry to Britain will tell us something about their life experience. Figure 2 shows the smoothed frequency distribution of age at entry to the UK for men and women separately, with the combined BHPS/ECHP data set shown in the top panel. For both sexes the main feature is a sharp peak around or slightly after age 20, falling off to quite low proportions from about age 30. A second notable characteristic is the substantial numbers of children that come to the UK, as children of adult immigrants.

A third feature worth commenting on is the difference in the age profiles of men and women: while both sexes are most likely to come in the 15–30 age range, men are relatively more likely than women to come at ages under thirty, whereas women are relatively more likely after.

When we compare these figures against LFS figures from the second quarter of 1994 (lower panel, Figure 2), we see the general pattern is reinforced, though the difference between adult men and women is lessened. However, we see one curious feature: there are relatively more males than females entering the UK as children (I have checked the data to ensure that this is not an artefact of the smoothing, and that it also shows up in other quarters' surveys).

Thus we see that emigration is typically, but not exclusively, a young adult's experience, with the vast bulk of first entries to the UK occurring between the ages of 15 and 30.

2.4 Age at entry and historical time: age now

By looking at age now and age at entry together we get a more general view of the historical pattern of immigration. It allows us to see *when* the immigration occurred, and to what extent the pattern of age at entry may change across cohort or historical time. The most immediate means of doing this is a scatterplot, such as those in Figure 3, of age against age at entry. The diagonal lines on the plots represent calendar time, exploiting the simple arithmetic relationship between age now, age at entry, and year of entry. Thus by inspection of these scatterplots we can get an idea of the combined age-related and historical pattern of migration (ignoring for the moment those immigrants who have left the sample frame, through death, further migration or return to Ireland).

The lower panel, using LFS data, is perhaps better to inspect, given it is denser and therefore the patterns are clearer, though the same patterns are apparent in the BHPS/ECHP data in the top panel. The single clearest feature of the plot is the dense cloud indicating entry to the UK in the period roughly between the early 1940s and the early 1960s, by people roughly between 15 and 25 years. This

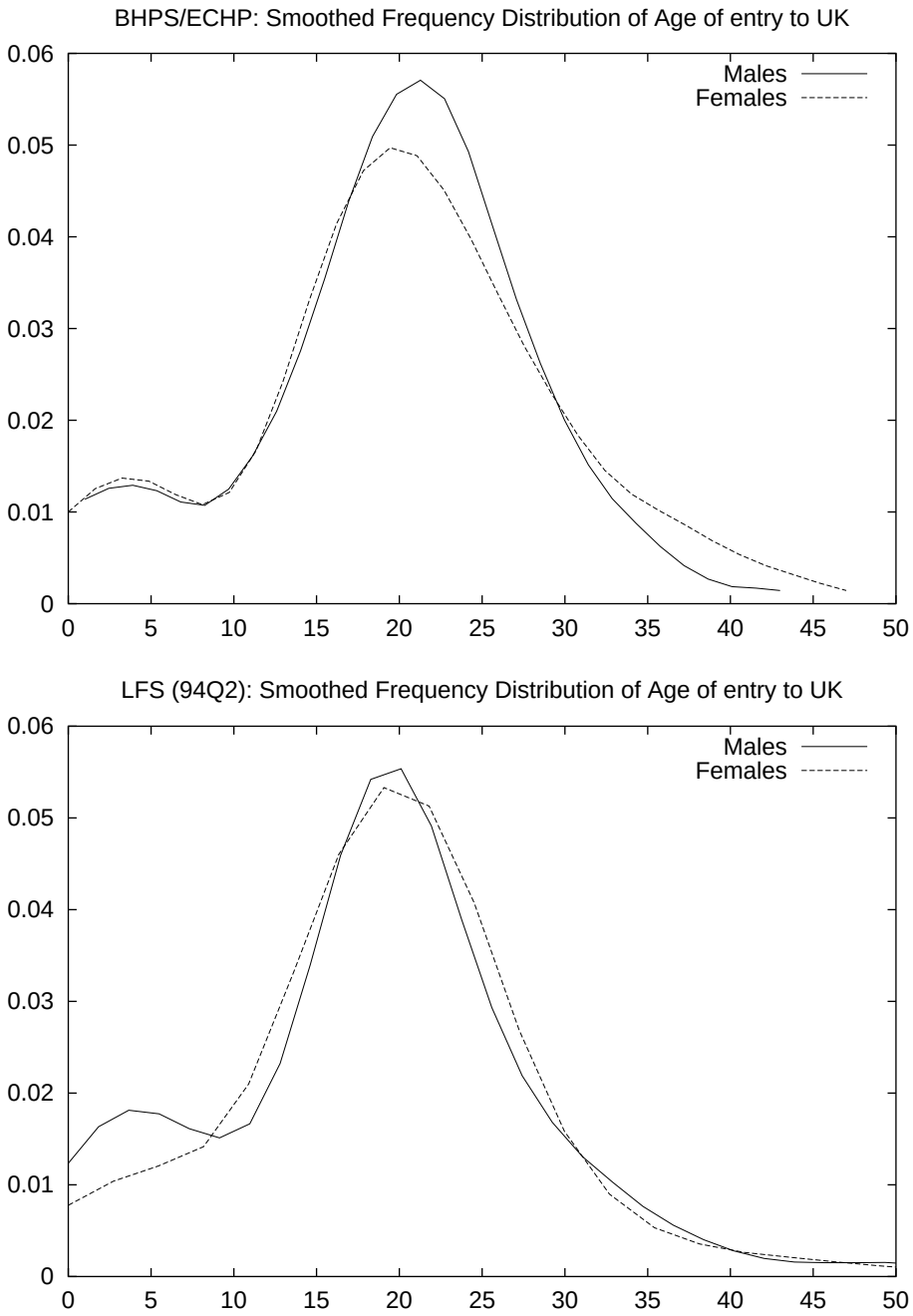

Figure 2: Smoothed frequency distribution of age at entry to UK, men and women.

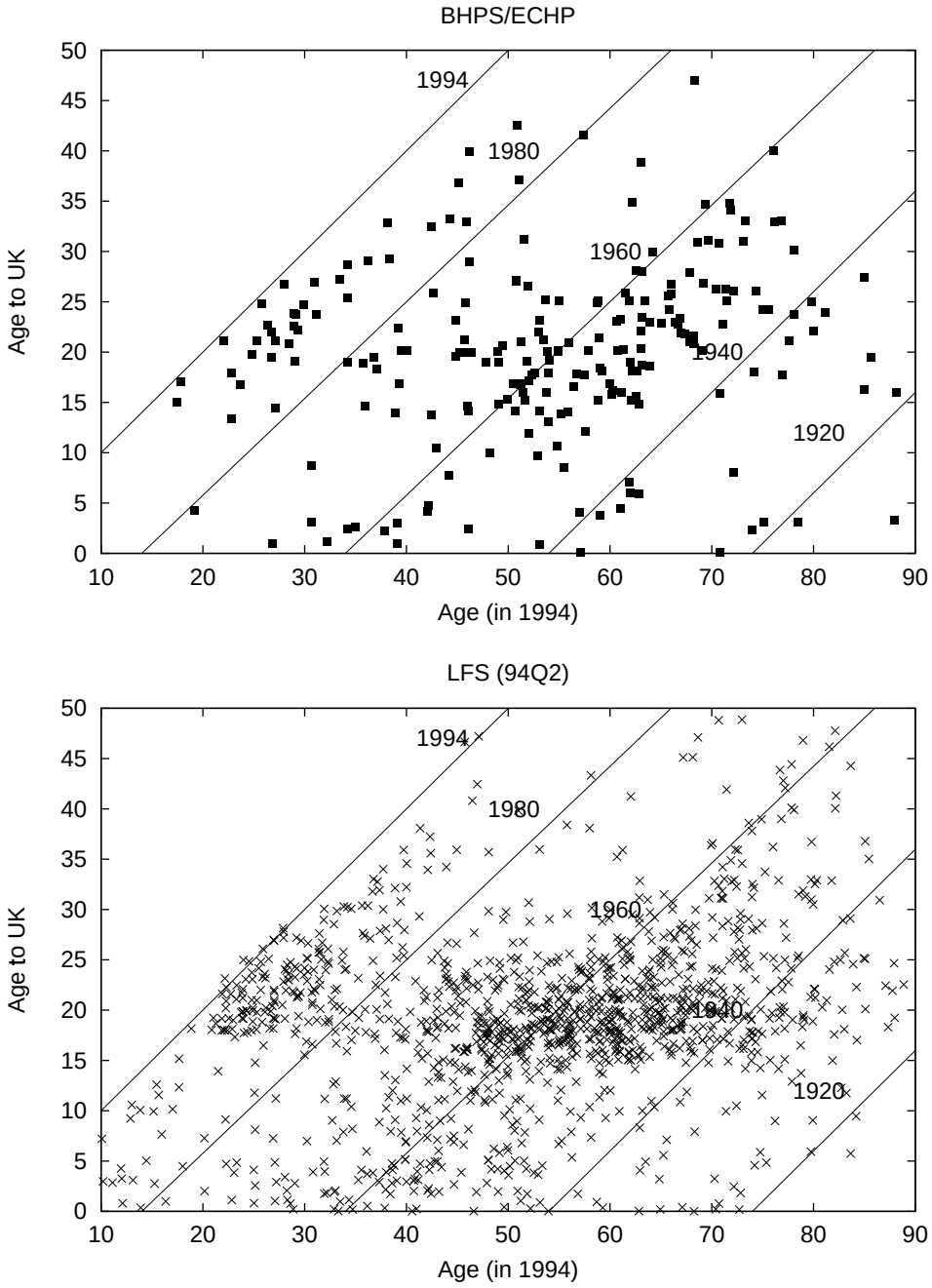

Figure 3: Age now and age of entry to UK, panel data and LFS (1994, Quarter 2).

was the period of mass immigration (though since those immigrating earlier in the period are less likely to be represented in the sample, this is not necessarily a true representation of the contemporary pattern of immigration). The next clearest feature is the lighter echo of this cloud in the mid-1980s/early 1990s (relatively speaking, this will overstate the level of recent migration compared with that in the 1950s, as it contains higher proportions of individuals not likely to stay long in Britain). What can also be seen is that there is a relatively sharp jump in the distribution of age at entry, around 15 to 17, and that this age rises with time, as education becomes more important.

3 General characteristics

In this section a number of further characteristics of the Irish in Britain are examined, namely:

- education,
- religion,
- health,
- region, and
- current employment status.

3.1 Education

The level of education of the Irish in Britain is patterned by when they immigrated (and, potentially, who remained). If we use the Labour Force Survey to look at the proportions holding a degree (discarding those 22 and under who have not had sufficient time to earn one) we see that there are proportionally fewer Irish (from the Republic: the LFS does not identify those from NI) than native graduates (7.3 per cent versus 11.1 per cent; see Table 2). However, if we break this down by age a different story emerges. Less than four per cent of the over-forty Irish-born hold degrees, compared with 8.2 per cent in the population as a whole. For those in their thirties, the proportions are much closer, but for those in the 23–30-year age range, almost one in four holds a degree, substantially exceeding the British level of 14.6 per cent.

Numerous processes lie behind these figures, most important of which are the general levels of education in the two countries, the differential likelihood of emigrating of people at different levels of education, and the differential likelihood of remaining in Britain by level of education. It is probable that change in all three has contributed to the present pattern. The general level of education in Ireland may have overtaken the British level (or may always have been ahead: I do not have the historical figures but the current level of participation in third,

Table 2: Education: Degree or not, by age group, LFS 94Q2

Age range	Others	Irish-born	Total
23 to 30	1,037,538	12,650	1,050,188
	(14.6)	(24.4)	(14.7)
31 to 40	1,304,758	8,914	1,313,673
	(16.1)	(14.1)	(16.0)
Over 40	1,973,644	15,330	1,988,974
	(8.3)	(3.9)	(8.2)
Total	4,315,941	36,894	4,352,835
	(11.1)	(7.3)	(11.0)

Note: Column percentages in parentheses, from Labour Force Survey 1994, second quarter, weighted to 1991 census levels.

for instance, level substantially higher, roughly 50 per cent versus 33 per cent); the relative chances of emigrating may have become higher for those with more education; the relative chance of remaining in Britain may be higher for those with lower education. However, the most important effect may be a shift between emigration of those who didn't have the qualifications to get work in Ireland (in the 1950s and 1960s, when the demand for relatively unskilled labour was great in Britain) and emigration of those who had the qualifications to get a job anywhere, in other words an increase in the relative chance of emigrating of those with more emigration.

Table 3: Education: Those with no qualifications, by age group, LFS 94Q2

Age range	Others	Irish-born	Total
23 to 30	1,775,032	8,472	1,783,504
	(14.9)	(13.6)	(14.9)
31 to 40	1,458,369	14,950	1,473,320
	(18.0)	(23.6)	(18.0)
Over 40	4,999,921	113,155	5,113,076
	(34.0)	(46.6)	(34.2)
Total	8,233,323	136,578	8,369,901
	(23.7)	(37.1)	(23.9)

Note: Column percentage in parentheses. Figures are population estimates from Labour Force Survey 1994, second quarter.

However, it is not sufficient to look only at the high end of educational achieve-

ment: what of those with little or no qualifications, those whom the educational system has failed? LFS figures are presented in Table 3. For the over-40s, the Irish are over-represented, at 47 per cent versus 34 per cent, but younger Irish show a rate closer to the population rate, with the youngest even slightly under-represented. However, we do not see the reverse of the story coming from degree-level: the young Irish are not under-represented among the unqualified as they are over-represented among graduates.

Since the LFS does not identify those from Northern Ireland, we must look to the panel data to compare these with those from GB and from the Republic. Figure 4 shows the proportions of each of these three groups achieving

1. degree level
2. complete second level
3. incomplete second level, and
4. less education.

The top panel is for all respondents, the lower for those 35 and under. For all respondents, those from the Republic have lower levels of education than those from GB, with particularly high levels of no-qualifications. For those 35 and under, the picture is more or less reversed, with those from the Republic showing higher rates of second level, or higher, than GB.

However, the picture for the Northern Irish is distinctly different. Even without restricting to younger ages, they show substantially higher levels of education than those from GB. This is partly because their age distribution is very skewed, with the 20–35 age range over-represented. Nonetheless, even when we restrict to the younger range, the Northern Irish still stand out. They show more with complete second level even than those from the Republic, and have a much higher proportion of graduates than either other group.

Over and above any general flight from NI, one can speculate that this pattern may be deepened by the UK system of higher education, and its expectation of, and support for, the practice of leaving home in order to go to University. For NI A-Level students, this means they are presented with the whole list of UK universities to which to apply, and high numbers do choose to go to Britain. Once graduated, many remain. However, it is also likely that the level of education in Northern Ireland is higher, than that in the Republic as well as that in GB.

3.2 Health

Both the panel surveys ask about health, including an overall question on how the respondent regards his/her general health, on a five-point scale. While subjective health assessment is not a particularly powerful measurement of health status, it is interesting to examine how it is distributed in the population.

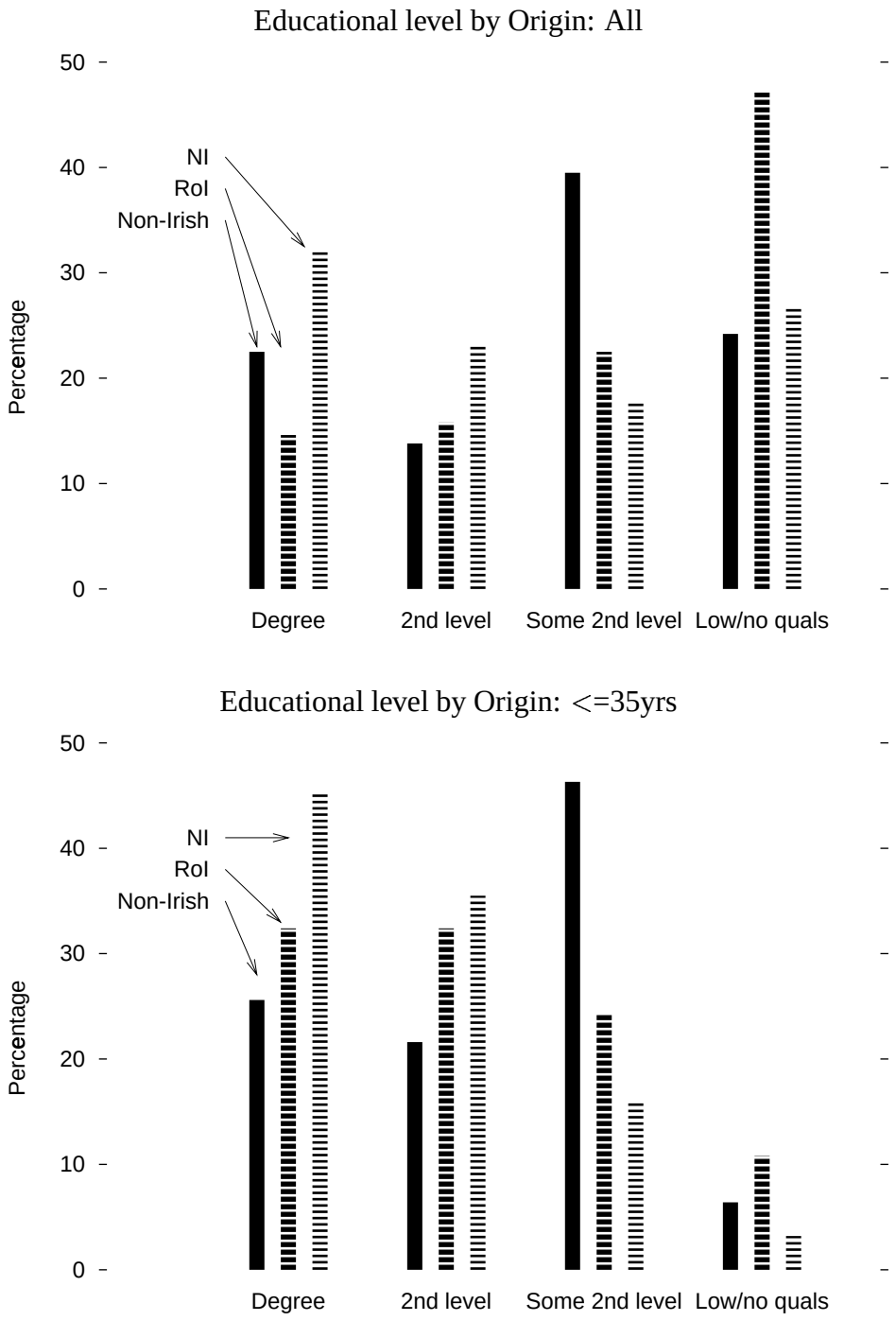

Figure 4: Highest educational level by origin, for all respondents and for those aged up to 35, combined BHPS/ECHP data set. (Information on NI from BHPS only.)

Table 4: Health Status: mean value on 5-point subjective health measure, BHPS/ECHP data

	Mean	Std Dev
Non-Irish	2.11	0.96
Male	2.06	0.95
Female	2.17	0.96
Republic	2.24	1.05
Male	2.14	1.02
Female	2.32	1.07
NI	2.05	0.90
Male	1.92	0.76
Female	2.17	1.00
Total	2.12	0.96

Table 4 gives the mean value of the health score (which ranges from 1 for 'excellent' to 5 for 'very poor'), by sex and origin. The Northern Irish are happiest with their health, and those from the Republic least. Men feel healthier than women, and this difference is greatest among those from NI. However, subjective health assessment is strongly related to age, and the ethnic differences reflect the different age distributions, as examination of the figures controlling for age confirms (not shown).

3.3 Religion

The BHPS asked respondents their religion in the first wave, and therefore we have this information for most, but not all of the BHPS-Irish sample. The LFS does not ask this question routinely in Great Britain (though it has been asked in NI), and it is not asked in the ECHP. Table 5 shows the breakdown: those from the Republic are 82 per cent Catholic, while those from Northern Ireland show equal proportions of Catholic and Protestant at one third each, which is somewhat of an over-representation of Catholics with respect to the proportions in Northern Ireland. (Protestants from the Republic may also be over-represented but the numbers are too small to be reliable.)

Table 5: Religion of the BHPS respondents

Religion	RoI	NI	Total
None	10 (9.3)	19 (30.6)	29 (17.2)
Catholic	88 (82.2)	21 (33.9)	109 (64.5)
Protestant	8 (7.5)	21 (33.9)	29 (17.2)
Other	1 (0.9)	1 (1.6)	2 (1.2)
Total	107 (63.3)	62 (36.7)	169 (100.0)

Note: Column percentage in brackets. Source: BHPS Wave 1.

3.4 Region

Where within Great Britain is the flow of Irish immigration directed? Table 6 presents figures from the 1994 second quarter LFS, weighted, showing percentages of the Irish-born and non-Irish populations by standard region. The clearest feature of the table is the high proportion of the Irish living in London and the south-east: 54 per cent of men and and 56 per cent of women live there. For London the Irish are substantially over-represented. The other regions where they are over-represented are the metropolitan West Midlands (*i.e.*, greater Birmingham), and Greater Manchester. It may be surprising that the Irish are under-represented in two formerly important destinations, Liverpool (Merseyside) and Glasgow (Strathclyde). Otherwise the pattern is for low levels in more rural regions (South-West, North, North-West, East Yorkshire, East Anglia, Wales and Scotland) and moderate levels in the other urban regions (East Midlands, West Yorkshire) apart from Tyne and Wear.

The general urban concentration is to be expected: Irish migration is usually to cities, where there is work to be found. The exceptions of Merseyside, Strathclyde and Tyne and Wear probably reflect the fact that these areas have been economically depressed for the past few decades, with traditional heavy industries in decline.

3.5 Current employment status

The Labour Force Survey is clearly the preferred source for current employment information. Therefore we use it in this section to examine current employment situation and occupation. Table 7 shows current employment status by origin and sex. Irish-born men are more likely than non-Irish to be self-employed, and slightly less likely to be employees or non-employed. Irish-born women are slightly more likely to be employed or self-employed, at the expense of non-employment.

However, this is relatively uninformative, and the differences are likely to be

Table 6: Population distribution by region, Irish-born and non-Irish, by sex.

Region	Men			Women		
	Non-Irish	Irish	Total	Non-Irish	Irish	Total
Tyne & Wear	2.0	.7	2.0	2.0	.5	2.0
Rest of Northern region	3.5	.9	3.5	3.5	.8	3.5
South Yorkshire	2.3	1.2	2.3	2.3	.2	2.3
West Yorkshire	3.8	2.9	3.8	3.7	2.8	3.7
Rest of Yorks & Humberside	2.9	.5	2.8	2.9	1.1	2.8
East Midlands	7.3	5.0	7.3	7.2	2.1	7.2
East Anglia	3.8	2.1	3.7	3.7	1.5	3.7
Inner London	4.5	18.8	4.7	4.6	13.1	4.7
Outer London	7.5	20.9	7.6	7.5	22.4	7.6
Rest of South East	19.2	14.3	19.2	19.1	20.9	19.1
South West	8.4	3.9	8.4	8.5	4.6	8.4
West Midlands (met county)	4.6	8.1	4.7	4.6	8.2	4.6
Rest of West Midlands	4.8	2.5	4.8	4.7	3.3	4.7
Greater Manchester	4.5	7.5	4.6	4.5	8.1	4.6
Merseyside	2.5	1.9	2.5	2.6	2.0	2.6
Rest of North West	4.2	2.6	4.2	4.2	3.1	4.2
Wales	5.1	2.2	5.1	5.2	1.8	5.2
Strathclyde	4.0	1.6	4.0	4.1	2.0	4.1
Rest of Scotland	5.0	2.5	5.0	5.1	1.3	5.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Notes: Source LFS 1994, second quarter, weighted.

Table 7: Employment status, by origin and sex, LFS.

	Men			Women		
	Non-Irish	Irish	Total	Non-Irish	Irish	Total
Employee	11,268,607	95,181	11,363,788	10,225,913	107,766	10,333,679
	(41.6)	(38.0)	(41.6)	(36.4)	(38.9)	(36.4)
Self employed	2,391,121	35,585	2,426,705	788,060	9,292	797,352
	(8.8)	(14.2)	(8.9)	(2.8)	(3.4)	(2.8)
Unpaid family	48,540		48,540	89,062	369	89,430
worker	(0.2)		(0.2)	(0.3)	(0.1)	(0.3)
Non-employed	13,389,679	119,458	13,509,137	17,009,892	159,763	17,169,655
	(49.4)	(47.7)	(49.4)	(60.5)	(57.6)	(60.5)
Total	27,097,946	250,224	27,348,170	28,112,926	277,190	28,390,116
	(99.1)	(0.9)	(100.0)	(99.0)	(1.0)	(100.0)

Notes: LFS 1994, second quarter, weighted. Percentages in parentheses below population estimates.

at least partly due to the different age-distribution. More interesting is *where* the Irish are employed: are the stereotypes true, suggesting builders, bar workers and nurses? Tables 8 and 9 pick out occupational groups where Irish-born LFS respondents are under- or over-represented relative to the non-Irish rate, to the extent of plus-or-minus 50 per cent or more.[4] For men, it looks as if the stereotypes have a basis in fact: they are over-represented among managers in building and related industries, building crafts, woodworking crafts, construction operatives and building labourers; among service industry managers (this includes pubs), and waiters and bar staff. However, some of the other popular occupations may be less expected: groups 22 and 64, health industry jobs; psychologists, clergy and social workers (of course, the stereotype of the Irish priest!); cleaners and domestics, and security guards. The latter categories are likely the refuge of those with few skills who are now too old for labouring jobs. Where Irish-born men are under-represented seems largely to be locations requiring training and apprenticeship in industries not (formerly) common in Ireland.

Women present quite a different profile. One stereotype is immediately confirmed: there are lots of Irish nurses, and other health workers. As their numbers in group 17, service industry managers, suggest, they are also present in the bar trade. But the other over-represented categories are interesting: specialist managers (financial, marketing, purchasing, advertising, personnel, *etc*.); engineers; architects and town planners; and computer professionals. These are predominantly occupations that require substantial training and educational qualifications, and perhaps the Irish educational system is better at steering women into the requisite disciplines than is the British.

Under-representation is also interesting. There are particularly low numbers as secretaries, receptionists, and Civil Service clerks, which may confound some stereotypes; also low numbers of cleaners and lower-grade sales assistants. Irish women are also poorly represented among teachers, which may be due to the poor portability of teaching qualifications.

Thus we find the occupational profile of women more surprising than that of men, with women over-represented in high-skill white-collar occupations, while men seem to remain in what might be thought to be their traditional locations. However, this could be due to occupational sex segregation causing under-representation of British women in these occupations, rather than under-representation of Irish men.

[4]The occupational groups are the so-called minor groups of the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) of the UK Office of National Statistics, of which there are approximately 75.

Table 8: Occupations in which Irish-born males are under- or over-represented, LFS.

SOC Minor Group	Percentage	
	Non-Irish	Irish
Over-represented		
11 Managers in Building *etc.*	2.9	4.5
17 Managers in Service industry (*e.g.*, pubs)	4.8	6.4
19 Managers and administrators nec	.9	1.8
22 Health professionals	.9	1.5
29 Psychologists, clergy, social workers	.5	1.6
50 Building crafts	4.1	8.4
57 Wood workers	2.3	3.9
62 Waiters, bar staff	1.5	2.6
64 Health and related occs.	.5	.8
67 Cleaners, domestics	.5	1.2
69 Security guards *etc.*	.4	.7
73 Door to door sales	.6	1.0
84 Engineering operatives	.8	1.2
85 Assembly workers	.9	1.5
89 Varied operatives incl construction	1.8	3.8
91 Industrial labourers	.4	.6
92 Building labourers	1.2	5.5
Under-represented		
14 Managers in transport	1.2	.5
16 Farm managers *etc.*	1.4	.3
32 Computer programmers and analysts	1.1	.3
52 Elec/electronic trades	3.3	.6
54 Motor trades	2.0	.6
56 Printers *etc.*	.7	.3
59 Dental, musical instrument makers *etc.*	2.0	.8
72 Sales assistants, check out workers	.8	.3

Notes: Source LFS 1994, second quarter, weighted to 1991 population figures. SOC Minor Groups where the Irish were under- or over-represented by 50 per cent or more are included.

Table 9: Occupations in which Irish-born females are under- or over-represented, LFS.

SOC Minor Group	Percentage	
	Non-Irish	Irish
Over-represented		
12 Specialist managers	2.9	5.4
17 Managers in Service industry (*e.g.*, pubs)	3.8	8.2
21 Engineers (qualified)	.3	.8
22 Health professionals	.6	1.0
26 Architects, town planners *etc.*	.1	.7
32 Computer programmers and analysts	.3	1.1
34 Nurses	5.3	14.2
64 Health and related occupations	5.1	7.9
95 Other sales	8.8	13.1
Under-represented		
10 Managers in large organisations	.9	.4
19 Other managers	.9	.3
23 Teaching professionals	5.6	2.3
30 Scientific technicians	.6	.3
38 Arts occupations	1.3	.7
39 Associate technical and professional	.9	.3
40 Low level Civil Service	2.3	.3
44 Store clerks	.6	.3
45 Secretaries, *etc.*	6.6	3.2
46 Receptionists, *etc.*	2.4	1.1
67 Cleaners, domestics	.6	.3
72 Sales assistants, check out workers	9.2	5.2

Notes: Source LFS 1994, second quarter, weighted to 1991 population figures. SOC Minor Groups where the Irish were under- or over-represented by 50 per cent or more are included.

4 Work-life histories

While the LFS is a particularly good source for information on current employment and occupation, the BHPS has the advantage of collecting complete work-life histories, with retrospective data to supplement that collected during the period of the panel. Thus for some of our panel respondents we can reconstruct their complete working lives, and relate that to their coming to Britain. For this analysis we must drop the ECHP respondents, because the ECHP does not collect retrospective information, and the BHPS respondents from NI, as we do not know their date of coming to Britain. This gives us relatively small numbers, but the information available is quite rich, making a tentative analysis very interesting.

4.1 Employment status history

There are 58 respondents who started their work-lives in Ireland, or within 12 months of moving to Britain, for whom we have complete employment-status histories (for a discussion of the BHPS work-life histories, see Halpin, 1997). I include those who had recently moved to Britain, prior to entering the Labour Force, because they can be considered very like those who work for a short period before moving. Table 10 presents the person–months spent in various employment statuses, by when they took place (before or after emigrating) and by sex.

For men, the dominant state before and after is that of employee. Time spent otherwise before emigrating is negligible. For women, time before is largely divided between full-time employment and family care duties. After emigrating, men spend their time in employment, self-employment, retirement, sickness and unemployment, in that order. Women move from the simple pattern of full-time work versus home, to spend much more time in part-time work. That retirement becomes a significant category after migration highlights the fact that much of the difference is due to life-cycle: of necessity, the respondents were younger before they emigrated, and many of them have lived long lives in Britain since. But it is not simply retirement that is a life-cycle effect: so also perhaps the move into part-time work for women concomitant with having children (we can speculate also that they would not as easily have found part-time work in Ireland, given its different labour market). So also the incidence of self-employment for men, this being a status typically entered into after gaining experience and capital.

4.2 Occupational history

Given that most people went to Britain to work, it is interesting to consider what sort of jobs they held. For this again we have recourse to the BHPS, this time exploiting its occupational life history data. Due to the data collection design, this

Table 10: Person–months in employment statuses, before and after migration, by sex.

	Men			Women		
	Before	After	Total	Before	After	Total
Self-employed		1300	1300	74	57	131
		(14.0)	(8.7)	(1.3)	(0.8)	(1.0)
F/t employee	5388	5595	10983	3555	1593	5148
	(94.3)	(60.3)	(73.2)	(61.7)	(21.6)	(39.2)
P/t employee	39	54	93		2363	2363
	(0.7)	(0.6)	(0.6)		(32.1)	(18.0)
Unemployed	146	303	449	16	53	69
	(2.6)	(3.3)	(3.0)	(0.3)	(0.7)	(0.5)
Retired		1350	1350		578	578
		(14.5)	(9.0)		(7.8)	(4.4)
Maternity leave				8	23	31
				(0.1)	(0.3)	(0.2)
Family care				2076	2648	4724
				(36.1)	(35.9)	(36.0)
FT student/school	8		8			
	(0.1)		(0.1)			
LT sick, disabled		611	611		52	52
		(6.6)	(4.1)		(0.7)	(0.4)
Other	132	72	204	29		29
	(2.3)	(0.8)	(1.4)	(0.5)		(0.2)
Total	5713	9285	14998	5758	7367	13125
	(38.1)	(61.9)	100.0	(43.9)	(56.1)	(100.0)

Notes: Percentages in parentheses. Source: BHPS. Person–months before emigrating are likely to be over-estimates.

is available for fewer people, giving us 45 persons with complete histories, who began work in Ireland or within 12 months of moving to Britain.

This number is small enough to examine the individual cases, though of course they cannot be reported individually, for confidentiality reasons. Looking through the data we see many 'typical' careers: several women work (or train on the job) as nurses for two or three years in Ireland, before moving to Britain where they continue to work in nursing; several men start in low-skilled jobs of various descriptions, and continue in Britain in low-skilled jobs in construction and allied areas. On the other hand there are cases of women starting in clerical/secretarial work in Ireland, resuming in similar jobs in Britain but quickly climbing the career ladder into management; also several men start at the bottom but end up in management in construction. Information technology jobs also seem to offer opportunities for advancement for those in younger cohorts. Semi-skilled jobs in the transport industry (bus drivers and conductors, HGV drivers, railway maintenance) also recur. Women's careers tend to show interruptions, some long, and one or two do not work at all after moving to the UK (presumably on marriage). Men in low-skilled careers show a good deal of instability, with spells of unemployment and frequent changes of occupation.

We can look at the data more systematically, as in Table 11 which represents job spells before and after emigration, by broad occupational group and sex. The same caveat must be entered here as with the analysis of person–months of employment statuses: the pattern is strongly age-related. It should also be noted that the average spell lenght is probably less before than after migration, again due to the age pattern of employment. Thus, the substantial increase in management jobs, for instance, may be as much due to career advancement as to moving to another country. On the other hand, the big rise in 'Plant and machine operatives', especially for men, is clearly due to the greater availability of such jobs in the UK. 'Personal and protective services' – a broad category including hairdressers, bar and hotel staff, child-minders, cleaners, soldiers and security guards – shows a rise for women but a fall for men. So also do sales occupations. This is also the case for quite a different category, associate professional and technical occupations, which also seems to offer opportunities for women after moving to Britain, but not for men.

An alternative to the somewhat uninformative occupational group classification (numbers are too small to use a finer version) is social class. While this is largely based on occupation (combined with information about managerial or proprietorial status) it represents a more orderly set of categories. Here we see a substantial rise in spells in the professional/managerial class for women, but not men: Britain seems to offer them an increase in opportunities that it doesn't offer men. The routine non-manual class (lower white-collar) is predominantly female, but doesn't show growth with migration. Self employment (small propri-

Table 11: Job spells before and after migration, by sex (SOC major groups).

SOC major group	Men			Women		
	Before	In GB	Total	Before	In GB	Total
Managers & administrators	5	20	25		8	8
	(11.6)	(17.5)	(15.9)		(7.3)	(5.6)
Professional occupations		3	3	1	2	3
		(2.6)	(1.9)	(2.9)	(1.8)	(2.1)
Associate professional	4	4	8	2	8	10
& technical occupations	(9.3)	(3.5)	(5.1)	(5.7)	(7.3)	(6.9)
Clerical & secretarial	1	7	8	7	25	32
occupations	(2.3)	(6.1)	(5.1)	(20.0)	(22.9)	(22.2)
Craft & related occupations	7	20	27	3	4	7
	(16.3)	(17.5)	(17.2)	(8.6)	(3.7)	(4.9)
Personal & protective	5	5	10	7	19	26
service occupations	(11.6)	(4.4)	(6.4)	(20.0)	(17.4)	(18.1)
Sales occupations	4	4	8	4	13	17
	(9.3)	(3.5)	(5.1)	(11.4)	(11.9)	(11.8)
Plant & machine operatives	4	25	29	5	8	13
	(9.3)	(21.9)	(18.5)	(14.3)	(7.3)	(9.0)
Other occupations	13	26	39	6	22	28
	(30.2)	(22.8)	(24.8)	(17.1)	(20.2)	(19.4)
Total	43	114	157	35	109	144
	(27.4)	(72.6)	(100.0)	(24.3)	(75.7)	(100.0)

Notes: Percentages in parentheses. Source: BHPS

etors) shows up only in Britain (the slight inconsistency with Table 10 is due to working with a smaller data set). Skilled and supervisory blue-collar occupations are poorly represented after migration: these tend to be occupations which require specific training from a fairly young age, less available in Ireland.[5] On the other hand, semi-skilled work features strongly, for both men and women. For men, migration leads to a growth in such work, with over 50 per cent of men's spells in Britain in low-skilled occupations (this high proportion is partly due to the inherent insecurity of such jobs: the unskilled tend to have series of shorter jobs, whereas those with more skill, and especially those in the professional/managerial class, tend to spend much longer in each job). Almost as a footnote: agricultural labour hardly features at all, with only two spells in Britain. Emigration is largely to cities, and away from the farm. The class of farm proprietors is completely absent from the table: farming is a very absorbing occupation, in that once people

[5]Alternatively, people with such qualifications may have good prospects of work in Ireland, and emigrate less.

Table 12: Social class spells before and after migration, by sex (SOC major groups).

Social Class	Men			Women		
	Before	In GB	Total	Before	In GB	Total
Professional and managerial	9 (21.4)	28 (24.6)	37 (23.7)	3 (8.6)	18 (16.5)	21 (14.6)
Routine non-manual	4 (9.5)	2 (1.8)	6 (3.8)	13 (37.1)	39 (35.8)	52 (36.1)
Small proprietors		16 (14.0)	16 (10.3)		2 (1.8)	2 (1.4)
Skilled and supervisory	9 (21.4)	8 (7.0)	17 (10.9)	3 (8.6)	5 (4.6)	8 (5.6)
Semi-skilled	13 (31.0)	58 (50.9)	71 (45.5)	15 (42.9)	45 (41.3)	60 (41.7)
Agricultural labour	7 (16.7)	2 (1.8)	9 (5.8)	1 (2.9)		1 (0.7)
Total	42 (26.9)	114 (73.1)	156 (100.0)	35 (24.3)	109 (75.7)	144 (100.0)

Notes: Percentages in parentheses. Source: BHPS. Class is the 7-point 'EGP' version of Goldthorpe's schema (1992).

acquire farms they tend to stay farming all their working lives. Thus farmers don't tend to emigrate.

For men the general picture is dominated by people moving from semi-skilled work in industry and agriculture, and moving to semi-skilled work in industry, with important subgroups in professional/managerial work and self employment. For women, the move is one from routine non-manual and semi-skilled work to the same categories, with an interesting growth in professional managerial work.

5 Conclusions

Large scale surveys can tell us quite a lot about the Irish in Britain, despite their relatively low proportion in the population. Granted, surveys by their very nature leave many questions unanswered, but this is more true of the LFS than the smaller panel surveys used. On the other hand, the narrowness of the LFS goes hand in hand with its very large sample size and concomitant precision. The panel surveys compensate for their smaller sample size by bringing in more information, and this is particularly the case with the BHPS's retrospective histories.

The overall picture they give us of the Irish in Britain is that they are old,

and largely the products of the 1950s emigration of the less educated and less skilled. There is nonetheless a younger wave of immigrants, which seem to have very different characteristics as far as education and occupation go. However, the simple dichotomy between low-skill 1950s emigration and high-skill 1980s emigration does not hold entirely: even among more recent migrants, the poorly educated are well represented.

The BHPS further allows us to consider the differences between emigration from the two parts of the island, and these seem to be profound. Northern Irish emigration tends to be much more recent, and the migrants are disproportionately well educated.

This paper has been exploratory and entirely descriptive. As a result it raises questions as often as it answers them: why, for instance are Irish women over-represented in skilled white-collar occupations? Why are the Northern Irish so well educated? Is the experience of the poorly educated recent emigrant similar to, or worse than that of the unskilled of the 1950s? These are all questions for further research, some requiring other sources of data, but it is clear that large-scale survey data is a very important resource for describing the Irish in Britain.

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