Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland

Maynooth University
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Social Sciences Institute

Dr Garret FitzGerald Memorial Lecture 2021

Garret FitzGerald and Irish Education since 1800

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WELCOME ADDRESS
CHANCELLOR OF NUI

Dr Maurice Manning

Good afternoon, everybody. It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the seventh Garret FitzGerald Memorial Lecture.

Last year, our speaker John Alderdice gave a very prescient lecture on Brexit and the Belfast Agreement. The lecture has been published and is available on the NUI website. The six previous FitzGerald lectures touched on various aspects of Garret's public life: Ronan Fanning on the 'Quest for the New Ireland';' Sean Donlon on 'Irish Foreign Policy'; Peter Sutherland on 'European Integration and the Taming of Nationalities'; Judge John McMenamin on 'Legalities in the New Europe' and lastly, Brigid Laffan on 'Fractious Politics in Hard Times'.

Tonight's talk is on a subject very dear to Garret's heart – education – and the speaker is also somebody who knew him very well, his son, Professor John FitzGerald. But before calling on him, I want to welcome a few people this evening: members of the FitzGerald family, Mary, Mark, and Jennifer; scholars who collaborated with Garret, and later with John, in bringing Garret's research on the National School systems in the nineteenth century to publication: Professor Cormac Ó Gráda of University College Dublin, Gillian O'Brien of Liverpool John Moores University, Donald Akenson of Queen's University, Belfast, and Mike Murphy of University College Cork.

I would also like to welcome colleagues from all sectors of Irish education, especially from our new department of Further and Higher Education, and not forgetting our old friends in the Department of Education and Skills, you are all very welcome. We have quite a number of people joining us online from further afield; we have registrations from the UK, France, Canada, and from Italy.

I will now hand over to our host, Philip Nolan, President of Maynooth University, and on behalf of all of us, I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his extraordinary public service as a member of the National Public Health Emergency Team during the pandemic of the past year.

Dr Maurice Manning
Chancellor

OPENING REMARKS

Professor Philip Nolan

Chancellor, Senators, members of the university, ladies, and gentlemen, it is a real pleasure to welcome you all to the seventh Dr Garret FitzGerald Memorial Lecture. The National University of Ireland established this lecture series in honour of Dr Garret FitzGerald who served as Chancellor of the University from 1997 to 2009.

This seventh lecture is organised by the National University of Ireland in collaboration with Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute, and I am very grateful to both NUI and to Professor Linda Connolly, Director of the Social Sciences Institute, for their role in hosting this year's lecture.

Professor John FitzGerald, son of Garret FitzGerald will deliver a lecture on the topic of 'Garret FitzGerald and Irish Education Since 1800' and Professor Áine Hyland will respond. This is the second time that Maynooth has collaborated with NUI in arranging the lecture. In 2014, the Honourable Mr Justice John McMenamin gave a paper titled 'From Nightmare and Dreams to Realities: Citizens, Judges and Democracy in the New Europe' and at that time Baroness Nuala O'Loan gave the response.

I was privileged to work with Garret FitzGerald as a member of NUI Senate, as our times overlapped. I remember well many of his incisive and human contributions to the deliberations of that body. That same incisiveness and humanity is reflected in the lectures previously delivered in this series, by Lord John Alderdice, by Professor Brigid Laffan, by Sean Donlon and by the late Professor Ronan Fanning amongst others. These lectures in their strong intellectual rigor have been a wonderfully fitting tribute to Dr FitzGerald, and I know today's lecture will be no exception. Go raibh maith agat.

OPENING REMARKS

Professor Linda Connolly

Good evening, everybody. I am very grateful to NUI for inviting us to collaborate on this. It is a very important lecture on education, and it is particularly prescient at the moment, I think, as we live in our homes, which have temporarily become universities and schools, to be reflecting on the importance of education. I want to especially thank Dr Attracta Halpin and her team for all the work they have put into this event. We have worked with NUI before in the organisation of a conference called 'Political Voices: the Participation of Women in Public Life, 1918-2018', to mark the centenary of women's suffrage. I would like to take this opportunity to just say how important NUI is as a hub right now for those of us in universities. The Social Sciences Institute, Maynooth made a very early decision that despite the pandemic, we were going to keep going with all our conversations and events and that we would pivot online, as required, with Non-Governmental Organisations and within our university governance structures, so we are really, really pleased and honoured to be associated with this event today.

As the Chancellor said in his welcome address, it is important to welcome everyone from outside Ireland who is joining online, and I think what we have learned in this journey of adapting technology and life to the constraints of the pandemic, is that simultaneously we have both democratised and globalised access to these events. I particularly welcome all the people from overseas who are joining us, and I hope that this is the future in terms of providing more access to the events.

As a sociologist, I always valued the role of education, both personally and professionally. Looking at my own family and previous generations who did not have the same access to education that I did. Going from a three teacher National School to being a university educator is a very important journey that many of us have followed into the education system. In sociology, our early training in Ireland very much benefited by pushing education at the core.

I just want to again, thank NUI for organising this event. We are very honoured to be associated with it and with the speaker and the respondent as well, Professor Áine Hyland.

Garret FitzGerald and Irish Education since 1800

Professor John FitzGerald

Thank you very much, Maurice, Attracta, Philip and Linda. I am very grateful to the NUI for the invitation to give this lecture and to Maynooth University for hosting it, though I find myself in a slightly unusual situation; there is an element of filial piety in undertaking this task which makes it more intimidating and complicated than a normal lecture.

Education and its wider impact on society was a key theme of Garret FitzGerald's work over the last twenty years of his career. He lectured extensively on the Irish economy and its experience. Wherever he went, he emphasised the importance of investing in a good educational system and how the relatively recent success of the Irish economy owed much to the choices made in earlier decades on education.

To some extent, this focus on education chimed with his own experience and career. He was the Fine Gael spokesman on education when he first entered the Dáil in 1969. At different times in his career, he was a university lecturer and deeply involved in issues of governance and wider policy in universities, including as Chancellor of NUI. He continuously emphasised the importance of education to an economy and a wider society. Much research was done on the wider economic impact of education, in particular the 1965 report 'Investment in Education', of which his friend Patrick (Paddy) Lynch had been a joint author.

As with all children, Garret's own background influenced his thinking over his later life in many different ways. His mother, Mabel McConnell, a Presbyterian from Belfast, had married the son of an Irish-Catholic immigrant, Desmond

FitzGerald, from east London. Garret's family experience influenced his thinking on the importance of education and in its role in bringing people of different religious backgrounds together. Mabel's upbringing herself was unusual in that she and one of her sisters graduated from Queens University in Belfast in the first decade of the twentieth century — a time when very few people had an opportunity to avail of third level education, and an even smaller proportion of women. Interestingly, Mabel's two brothers did not get the same opportunity. Mabel herself worked as a teacher for a short period as well as working as a secretary to George Bernard Shaw.

Garret's father Desmond also placed a high value on education. Desmond's great-grandfather, John FitzGerald, had been a teacher in Ireland in the 1840s, and Desmond's grandfather William Scollard, writing in 1883 to Desmond's mother Mary Ann, highlighted the importance of education, saying:

> What I always wish boys to learn and study well is a sound practical education of everyday use, namely a good accent, a genteel pleasing good address, fine plain liberal writing, not a slow studied hand, but a quick business hand the same style as clerks in offices, a thorough knowledge of arithmetic and a complete knowledge of keeping accounts combined with good sense, good manners, and good conduct.[1]

Desmond's sister became a headmistress of a London school, and he himself was a poet, as well as a revolutionary, and later a politician, though he had not progressed beyond second level education.

Garret was given a typewriter and from the age of twelve onwards, he kept a carbon copy of all correspondence. In his autobiography, he mentions how at home his mother, father, three brothers and himself were all simultaneously hammering away on their typewriters. Great training for a journalist, or a cacophony for any visitor, as my father really hammered away at his manual typewriter.

1 Garret FitzGerald, *Irish Primary Education in the Early Nineteenth Century: An Analysis of the First and Second Reports of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825-6* (Dublin, 2013), p. vii.

Mabel and Desmond tried to ensure that their children had a cosmopolitan education and Garret's three elder brothers spent at least a year studying abroad. In Garret's case, he spent a year at Ring, Co Waterford, developing his Irish when he was eight and two summers with a French family in 1938 and 1939 when he was twelve and thirteen. As the war then intervened, he missed that opportunity to study abroad. However, in his degree at University College Dublin he studied French and history, as well as Spanish. Simultaneously, he studied for the bar as his father, Desmond, wanted him to be a barrister.

Garret's time in UCD is exceptionally well documented by himself in his papers, with detailed diary entries and memorabilia and speeches from college societies. He recorded who attended meetings and even who attended picnics. There is material here for someone to write a social history of UCD in the mid-1940s. On a number of occasions my father said to me, 'the secret of success of FitzGerald men was that they married women cleverer than themselves'. He first mentioned this in the context of my mother, Joan, who had helped him in his studies, summarising lectures and suggesting essay themes when he was studying simultaneously for his finals and bar exams. However, I know he was also referring to his own mother, and on another occasion, he was referring to my wife, Eithne.

In this lecture, I want to first look at the initial development of a national educational system in Ireland almost two centuries ago, summarising the results of Garret's own research. Some of those decisions had a significant influence on the subsequent development of education. Then I want to consider the economic evidence on the failures and successes of the Irish education system since the foundation of the state, with particular emphasis on the post-war period that Garret was so intensely interested in.

Over the last thirty years of his life, Garret needed to have at least one major research project on hand to provide intellectual diversion and occupation, especially on holidays. I think he would have come well through the current Covid situation. In the late 1980s, to distract him from the stresses of being Taoiseach (that was his excuse) he undertook a study of Irish speaking at the beginning of the nineteenth century and this paper was subsequently published by the Royal Irish Academy.

In the early 2000s, in researching the background of his father's family, Garret discovered that his great-great-grandfather had had a school in Sceichín an Rince in the parish of Ballyporeen in County Tipperary in the 1830s. Thus, education in early nineteenth-century Ireland proved to be part of his own family history. When he discovered a series of official reports with very good data on education in Ireland in the 1820s and 1830s, he began a book on the development of the Irish primary education system around 1830. At Easter 2011, in my brother Mark's house in Mayo, he worked long hours to finish this book and he completed most of the text before returning to Dublin. When he entered hospital at the end of April, I tidied up his huge spreadsheet, checked all the formulae and returned it to him in the hospital. This completed his research and there remained little tidying up to be done to complete it for publication. After he died in May 2011, with the help of the Royal Irish Academy, Gillian O'Brien of Liverpool John Moores University, Cormac Ó Gráda of UCD, and Mike Barry of UCC and many others, the study was finally published in 2014.

The educational system in 1824 was nationwide with schools in almost every parish, something that Garret found surprising. The system had grown up in an unplanned manner, showing very diverse characteristics, and it was largely funded by parental contributions. This showed a considerable commitment to the value of education at a time when most of the population were extremely poor, something that Garret also found very striking. The extensive evidence in the report shows that the schools of the 1820s were located indoors, in school buildings, albeit many of which were documented as being of very poor quality. Whether hedge schools ever existed in the outdoors is not clear. However, Garret was very insistent that it was certainly not true of the 1820s, and this should be borne in mind in selecting the illustrations for his book. No illustrations of hedge schools in the book!

The system of education was largely fee paid, as I said, with 90% of schools in the country dependent on parental contributions for their support. The portion was lower in Connacht at under 80%. This reflected the poverty of the province. On average, parents paid about £1.50 a year for education, somewhat less for Catholic parents, somewhat more for Protestants. Given the poverty of the country – remember this is 20 years before the Famine – and the fee-paying basis of the system, the Commission shows a picture of

quite high participation rates at that stage. Cormac Ó Gráda's chapter in the book suggests the importance of income in explaining the pattern of participation rates. Participation rates were highest in South Leinster (under 50%), with significantly lower rates in Ulster, and in particular in the poorest region, Connacht.

A region in the northwest covering Leitrim, Cavan, Sligo, and some of Roscommon had higher participation rates than the rest of Connacht or Ulster, and Garret particularly identified this, but did not produce a good explanation as to why this was the case. Participation rates were generally higher in cities, with Waterford City having the highest participation rate in the country. Clearly, the presence of Church schools in that city, with a number of schools run by the Christian Brothers and Presentation Sisters, already made a difference in 1824. Over the rest of the century, the spread of such religious-run schools proved very important in extending access to education. It also helped determine the characteristics of the educational system itself, schools, being predominantly single sex and catering for one religion.

Around 1830, throughout the country girls had much worse access to education than boys. In South Leinster, where girls' participation was highest, only 39% of girls were registered in school, compared to 55% of boys. In the poorest region, Connacht, only 17% of girls were registered at school. For Protestants outside Ulster, participation rates were much higher than for Catholics. Seventy-two percent in South Leinster and Munster, and 84% in Connacht. In Ulster it was only 36%, and this pattern probably reflected higher average incomes of Protestants outside Ulster. For Catholics, the highest participation rate of 43% was once again in South Leinster, falling to 23% in Connacht and Ulster. For Garret, one of the more striking conclusions was the relatively low participation rate in Ulster. He thought that this was due to a shortage of schools headed by Protestants. The shortage also manifests itself in the fact that many schools in Ulster with Catholic heads had a majority of pupils who were Protestant, something not observed elsewhere in the country.

One of the most striking features of the education system was just how multi-denominational it was in 1824. Around two-thirds of all schools in Ireland had both Protestant and Catholic pupils. The portion was particularly high in Ulster at 85% of schools having both Protestant and Catholic pupils. Thus, while there were major concerns among all the churches about protecting the faith

of their flocks, it was normal that children of different faiths were educated together. In addition, 84% of all schools in Ireland were co-educational, catering for both boys and girls. The highest proportion was in Ulster where over 90% of schools catered for both boys and girls. The newly established convent and Christian brothers' schools really stood out for the time in that they were single sex and they catered for only Catholic children.

Teachers were poorly paid. On average they earned under £20 a year, with Protestant teachers earning about £25 a year and Catholic teachers earning around £16. Remember that children paid on average about £1.50 a year. This would have been about one-third of what teachers would have been paid in England in the 1820s.

In the early 1830s, the government set up a Board of Education to run a national system of primary education. This initiative, creating a primary education system with wide coverage, was a major step forward. By the twentieth century, Ireland had begun to lag in educational development elsewhere, especially in northern Europe, a story to which I will return.

In his last article in the *Irish Times* in April 2011, Garret particularly referenced the work of Gillian O'Brien, later published as a chapter in his book. Gillian O'Brien's chapter reports the findings of the Commission on the quality of Education in the 1820s. The report does not paint a very pretty picture. For example, there was a clearly a shortage of reading material. This resulted in a vast range of books being used because children could not afford specialised textbooks. They read from whatever printed material they could get their hands on, and O'Brien quotes a small selection of the books that the Commission found in use in the schools, including *Paradise Lost, Robin Hood, History of the Persians and Grecians, Moll Flanders, Life of Oliver Cromwell* (surprising entry), *History of Jack the Bachelor, The Mutiny Act,* and the *History of Philander Flashway*.

What particularly interested Garret was how Gillian shows that the National Education System, set up in 1831, was designed to be integrated, with children of all faiths being educated together. The Catholic Church had bought into this model. They were clearly concerned at the time with the behaviour of institutions devoted to proselytisation, and the Archbishop of Dublin and the

Bishop of Kildare saw the national education system as providing safeguards against such practices. Gillian quotes Bishop Doyle, the Catholic Bishop of Kildare as saying,

> I do not see how any man wishing well to the public peace and who looks to Ireland as his country, can think that peace can ever be permanently established, or the prosperity of this country ever well secured if children are separated at the commencement of life, on account of their religious opinions.[2]

This is a rather revolutionary statement from a Bishop, at least by today's standards. While the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland (Archbishops of Dublin) tried to make the system work, it was sunk later in the 1830s by the Presbyterian Church, which insisted that they would have their own school system.

Garret never ceased to be a journalist, and in April 2011, he was already considering what story from the book would feature in his Saturday *Irish Times* article. Because of the resonance for contemporary Ireland of the results in Gillian's chapter on the political context for education policy in the early nineteenth century, he broke his own and Gillian's embargo on the publication to write about the findings, first in the *Irish Times* in February 2010 and again on the 23 April 2011. In that April article, he expressed support for the then Minister for Education, Ruairí Quinn's work, trying to build an education system that caters appropriately for the diversity of the population of children in Ireland today.

As O'Brien documented in her chapter, Garret went on to draw parallels with the design for the national education system of 1831 and what was needed in contemporary Ireland. The integrated primary school system, initially implemented in 1832, if it had survived, would have served Ireland well today. Instead, we have a much messier approach, which is still evolving, and the planned change in governance of schools in 2011 by the then Minister has not worked as hoped. Áine Hyland is especially qualified to reply to this

2 *Second Report of Evidence from the Select Commission of the State of the Poor in Ireland*, quoted in Donald H. Akenson, *Small Differences: Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, 1815-1922*, (Dublin, 1991), p.119.

paper on how this issue has played out in Ireland in recent decades, given her involvement in the Dalkey School Project, the subject of her interesting recent book. She has direct experience of trying to develop an appropriate new model for contemporary Ireland. Unfortunately, we still have to iterate towards a long-term solution along the lines of the 1830s model.

Over the last twenty years of his life, Garret FitzGerald wrote and lectured widely on the Irish economy. He placed particular emphasis on the importance of investment in education, and it is something that chimed with his background, and was based on a growing body of evidence from a wide range of researchers. I want to devote the rest of my lecture to this topic.

Forty years after Irish independence, there was relatively little progress in the Irish education system. Meanwhile, across northern Europe, from the Urals in Russia through Snowdonia, countries invested steadily in upgrading their nation's human capital. For those born in early 1930s in Ireland, and also in Northern Ireland, approximately three quarters of them would not complete a high school education (they would not get a Leaving Cert), a rather similar proportion to countries in southern Europe at that time. By contrast, over 50% of the same cohort in Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, the UK, and Germany completed high school. Similarly, the proportion of the population going on to third level was very low in Ireland and much higher in other Northern European countries.

For those born in Europe in the early 1950s, after the war, that is roughly my cohort as I was born in 1949, there was an improvement in educational attainment in many countries but, once again, Ireland lagged far behind, remaining in the southern European group of Spain, Italy, Romania, and Greece (with half or more of the cohort still leaving school early). However, for those born in the early 1980s in Ireland, the situation had changed dramatically, with Ireland moving to have some of the highest levels of educational attainment in the EU. Even then, while low by EU standards, there was a significant problem of early school leaving in Ireland, especially among boys. This persisted up to the financial crisis in 2008. Surprisingly, the financial crisis had a very positive side effect: many boys, who would have dropped out of school early, possibly to take employment in building and construction, remained on to complete their Leaving Cert.

Quite a number of them also went on to third level education. Among girls too there was an increase in educational participation after 2007, with more women remaining on in education and progressing to third level education, including doing postgraduate work. So, there was a significant increase in participation and there was also a big fall in participation in the labour force by those aged fifteen to twenty-five in that period, because they were students. Thus, there was an important improvement in educational attainment and, as I will discuss later, this will have long term benefits for the individuals involved and for the wider economy. If this increase in educational attainment were all attributable to the financial crisis, it is possible that the financial crisis could end up leaving Ireland better off in the long term than if it had never happened, a very unexpected silver lining.

To draw on work by Cormac Ó Gráda, Frank Barry, Brendan Walsh, and Patrick Honohan, after the Second World War Irish policymakers made two major mistakes: they failed to follow the rest of Western Europe in embracing free trade and they failed to invest in education. The result for the Irish economy was two lost decades from 1945 to 1965. The importance of embracing free trade and opening the economy was realised by Whitaker and reflected in his Department of Finance report 'Economic Development,' published in 1958. However, it took a further 15 years before Ireland joined the EU in 1973 and took another 15 years before Ireland began to reap the benefits of this decision through rapid economic growth, due to the gradual globalisation of the Irish economy.

The second major mistake of successive Irish governments was the failure to invest in education in the post-war years. The British Education Act of 1944 introduced free second level education in Great Britain, with a similar act in Northern Ireland in 1947. By contrast, in Ireland there was little progress until the publication of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) report, 'Investment in Education 1965' authored by Martin O'Donoghue, Paddy Lynch, Bill Hyland, and Pádraig Ó Nualláin. This report highlighted the economic and social costs arising from the very inadequate educational system in Ireland. Of all the policy documents produced by the Irish Public Service since the war, this must be one of the most important. I am particularly grateful to have Áine Hyland as the respondent to this lecture as she worked on this hugely important document at the time.

The report was also of significance, as Áine herself also found romance as part of this work, subsequently marrying one of the authors, Bill Hyland.

Garret FitzGerald realised the significance of the report at the time and in 1966, with a team of advisors, he developed a Fine Gael education policy document, which planned to introduce a form of free second level education. However, the model which he and his team proposed would have involved a mixture of free and fee-paying education, which probably would have been cheaper than the free education policy subsequently introduced by Donogh O'Malley in 1967, but it would almost certainly have been less satisfactory from an educational point of view. Donogh O'Malley, having also recognised the significant lessons from investment in education, and knowing that Fine Gael was going to propose some form of free education, pre-empted that policy in his initiative by making the unexpected announcement of free secondary level education to start in 1967, something that seriously discomforted the Department of Finance at that time. Since then, the development of the Irish educational system in terms of educational participation has gone way beyond that envisaged in the late 1960s.

As I have indicated, this successful expansion of the educational system has played a vital role in transforming Irish living standards, and it has also been responsible for major changes in Irish society, something I will leave for other writers to analyse, and maybe Linda Connolly and her team in Maynooth may look at this.

Because of its failure to embrace free trade or to invest in education immediately after Second World War, the Irish standard of living remained at around 70% of the EU 15 level between 1960 and 1990. However, having belatedly adopted appropriate policies since 1990, the Irish standard of living has risen rapidly so that it is now 110% of the EU 15 average.

I now want to turn to the evidence on how the rising educational attainment of the population has contributed to rising output per head, and greatly improved living standards in Ireland, especially since 1990. I will then briefly consider some aspects of the educational system as it has evolved. In comparing it to the education system of Northern Ireland, we can see that some aspects of how things developed in the Republic, which may not have been fully thought out at the time, have turned out to be important strengths of the current system.

Over at least the last 30 years, the demand for third level graduates in the EU labour market has continually increased. The financial crisis did not alter this trend, with graduate employment continuing to rise even in the worst years. By contrast, the demand for those who have not completed high school (Leaving Cert), has fallen continuously. A problem in the modern economy is that you cannot substitute a number of unskilled people for one skilled person. Thus, unless the educational attainment of the workforce matches the needs of the modern economy, those with limited education may end up suffering extensive unemployment or very low wages. This is the background against which educational policy across the EU must be made.

There are at least three ways that enhanced education can impact on the economy. First, improved education increases the productivity of individuals, and this effect is widely recognised. Many individual studies for Ireland, and for other countries, show that, as a result, individuals who have completed their Leaving Cert earn substantially more than early school leavers and, in turn, those with the third level education earn substantially more again. This earnings premium for education provides a proxy measure of the increase in productivity because of enhanced human capital.

The second way that education impacts on the economy is through its effects on educational participation. Those with a good education are more likely to enter and remain in the labour force. This effect is particularly important for women. While girls had much lower participation in education than boys in the 1830s, this was reversed in the twentieth century. However, while girls were better educated than boys, female labour force participation was very low in Ireland up to the 1980s by EU standards. With a growing proportion of graduates being women with high potential earnings in the labour market, this began to change in the 1990s. Today there is a strong gradient in labour force participation by women related to their education. This gradient partly reflects the fact that the costs of child-care are very high. High earnings are needed to offset the expense of child-care. Thus, the increasing educational attainment of the female population over the last 30 years has been a major contributor to labour force growth and, hence, to output growth and the rise in living standards.

The third way that higher levels of educational attainment confer economic benefits in society is that it renders individuals much less likely to be unemployed, and if they lose their jobs, they are much more likely to rapidly find alternative posts. A 1992 study by Richard Breen and Sally Shortall, now professor in Queens, showed that if all those who dropped out of school early were helped to stay to at least Junior Cert level, their higher probability of employment would have saved the state a huge amount in future unemployment payments. This saving took no account of the much more important benefits for the individuals themselves, or for the wider economy. A more recent study for Northern Ireland by Vani Borooah and Colin Knox in 2015 reaches similar conclusions for Northern Ireland: if you could reduce the share of early school leavers in Northern Ireland it would have major economic benefits, as well as benefits for the individuals.[3]

While it is very clear that enhanced educational attainment has substantial economic benefits, it's also obvious that investment in education takes a long time to mature. Thus, Ireland's failure to invest in improving the educational system in the immediate post-war years continued to affect the economy adversely for decades. In turn, the gradual rise in educational participation, that began after free education took effect in 1967, took decades to pay off.

First, individuals remain in education and do not take employment, resulting in a short-term loss of output, and this loss continues while they are in education. Even when they start working it can be one or two decades before the effects of their participation in the labour market raises productivity to the full extent. Ultimately, it takes a generation or two for the full effects of investment in education to mature.

Keeping this lecture very much in the family, there is a paper by Joseph Durkan, Doireann FitzGerald, Garret's granddaughter, and Colm Harmon, published in 1999, which considers the macroeconomic effects of investment education in the post-war years.[4] The paper used a formal economic model to decompose

3 Vani Borooah and Colin Knox, *The Economics of Schooling in a Divided Society: The Case for Shared Education*, (London, 2015).

4 Joe (Joseph) Durkan, Doireann FitzGerald and Colm Harmon, 'Education and Growth in the Irish Economy' in *Understanding Irish Economic Growth* (London, 1999)

the contribution to Irish economic growth coming from increased educational attainment, labour force numbers, and capital. They considered the period between 1960 and 1992 and concluded that about 20% of the increase in output over that period arose from the rising educational attainment of the labour force. However, other studies showed that the peak effects of the upgrading of the educational attainment of the population were probably not experienced until after 2000, suggesting a bigger effect after 2000 than in the earlier period. A study of my own in 2012 estimated that between 1992 and 2010, the rising educational attainment of the labour force contributed up to one percentage point a year to the growth of just under 4% a year. In addition, the labour force participation effects, primarily by women, were also very important as women contributed at least another half percentage point a year to growth. A series of other studies, using different methodologies, has confirmed this result: that education has been a very important factor in raising living standards. I summarised the results from seven different studies on the effects of investment in education in a paper in 2019 to the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland.

Another factor, adding to the growth in productivity and output, has resulted from the transformation of the pattern of migration. While many young Irish still emigrate, in most cases they are homing pigeons, returning to Ireland after a period working abroad. The research by Alan Barrett and Jean Goggin in 2010 showed that, when they return, they earn 10% more than if they had not gone away, reflecting their increased productivity as a result of what they have learned abroad.

Comparing the educational system in Ireland with that of Northern Ireland highlights some of the factors that have been important in promoting economic and social progress south of the border. Northern Ireland began off with a rather similar education system to that in the Irish Free State in 1922. While the first Minister for Education in Northern Ireland, Lord Londonderry, initially tried to enforce the Multidenominational Educational system, it evoked very strong opposition from both Catholic and Protestant school communities, and the Orange Order ran him out of Northern Ireland. In the 1930s, he was a Minister in the British Cabinet and an arch appeaser — probably not a good swap!

There was little new investment in education until after Second World War on either side of the border. However, Northern Ireland followed, as I mentioned earlier, the 1944 Education Act of England and Wales,[5] with its own Act in 1947 and developed a second level system similar to that in England. The nature of the new second level system in Northern Ireland mirrored that in England, rather than Scotland, having grammar schools for the brightest 30% of children, selected by competitive examination at age eleven, and secondary schools for the other 70%.

While England has modified that system over the decades to deal with the problems selection causes, it remains broadly unchanged in Northern Ireland, and Borooah and Knox show that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are badly affected by the selection process, with very high rates of early dropout. [6] While the dropout rate for Catholics is lower than for Protestants, it is still at an unacceptable level.

As a result, Northern Ireland has the highest proportion of early school leavers of any UK region, while Scotland and London have the lowest. It is lower still in Ireland. In addition, Northern Ireland has the lowest share of third-level graduates, partly as a result of emigration. The result of the low level of educational attainment is a very poor economic performance, not to speak of the wider political and social effects. Borooah argues that a much higher priority for Northern Ireland than integrating schools currently divided on religious grounds is to end selection on ability into separate grammar and secondary schools.

The evidence suggests that this low level of education in Northern Ireland has had serious negative effect on productivity. It has not affected living standards, but that is because of a large fiscal transfer from central government in London.

5 The Education Act of 1944, post-war secondary education in Britain aimed to remove the inequalities which remained in the system.

6 Vani K. Borooah and Colin Knox, 'Segregation, inequality, and educational performance in Northern Ireland: Problems and solutions', *International Journal of Educational Development*, vol. 40 (2015), pp.196-206; Vani K. Borooah and Colin Knox, 'Inequality, segregation and poor performance: the education system in Northern Ireland', *Educational Review*, vol.69 (2017), pp. 318-336.

Looking at the Northern Ireland experience is interesting as in Ireland we could possibly have gone down that route, following the English example rather than developing our own system of second level education. However, instead we gradually merged schools across the country producing in many cases co-educational schools, and nearly always schools catering for children of mixed ability. Across the country, especially in towns outside Dublin or Cork, there is a single school catering for children of all abilities and all backgrounds. (South Dublin stands out from the rest of the country with a high proportion of fee-paying schools.) In 1970, when he was education spokesman for Fine Gael, Garret FitzGerald advocated a more integrated educational system, introducing co-education, putting together secondary and vocational schools, as well as schools of different religions. However, I do not think that he or his contemporaries fully understood the significance of the road they were going down in developing a system of mixed ability schools.

Subsequent research by Damian Hannan, Emer Smyth and others in the ESRI in the 1980s highlighted the fact that streaming within schools was bad for children in the bottom half of the distribution of ability and did not significantly benefit the most able children. This research has influenced subsequent development of the educational system, so that not only do schools cater for mixed abilities, but gradually individual classes also do so. More recent work by Emer Smyth of the ESRI has shown that there has been a reduced use of streaming in schools because of what we have learned about how the education system works. So, the ongoing research feeds back into improving the system that we have.

To conclude this lecture, I have only considered the economic impact of the transformation of the educational attainment of the population today. This investment in human capital has resulted in what is, by EU standards, a high proportion of the population having third level qualifications and a very low proportion of early school leavers. While this transformation of the population in a generation and a half has had major effects on the standard living, it has also had wider social and political effects. These latter effects would have also greatly interested Garret FitzGerald, but I am not the person to analyse them.

I have focused on some of the themes in Irish education that particularly interested Garret FitzGerald. However, as was reflected in his last article in the *Irish Times* in 2011, he continued to be concerned about how the education system at first and second level can adapt to a very different Ireland from the one he grew up in. As documented in his book, some of these problems of governance have not changed since the education system was first formally established in 1830. For him, this was unfinished business.

Finally, I would like to thank the National University of Ireland for the opportunity to give this lecture. Garret FitzGerald ran for election to become the Chancellor of the National University of Ireland because he believed that it had an important continuing role in coordinating activity at third level in Ireland, and its continued success was dear to his heart.

Thank you.

RESPONSE

Professor Áine Hyland

Thank you very much Chancellor and thank you very much John, for your comprehensive and inspiring lecture which brought us on a tour of Irish education from the 1820s to 2020. I am honoured and delighted to respond.

You mentioned that in the nineteenth century your great-great-grandfather had a pay school in Sceichín an Rince near the Cork-Tipperary border. Coincidentally, at that time, my in-laws, the Hyland family, lived in the same parish, and my late father-in-law attended National School in the 1890s in Sceichín an Rince. So, there we are, it's a small world.

I loved the book *Irish Primary Education in the Early Nineteenth Century* written by Garret and prepared for publication by John in 2013.[7] Apart from the fascinating content, is also beautifully illustrated and produced by the Royal Irish Academy with some financial support from the National University of Ireland. Moreover, the book also contains a statistical analysis by Garret FitzGerald of the second of nine Reports of the Commission of Inquiry set up by government in the early 1820s to examine education provision in Ireland. The report is one of the most comprehensive studies ever carried out of Irish education.

7 Garret FitzGerald, *Irish Primary Education in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Dublin, 2013).

The report eventually led, in 1831, to the setting up of the National School System in Ireland, the first state funded system of primary education in the United Kingdom, and indeed in the British Empire. It was to quote Donald Akenson, 'the Irish Education experiment'.[8] The Stanley letter written in 1831 by Edward Stanley, then Chief Secretary for Ireland, outlined his proposal which helped the U.K. Government to establish the legal basis for national schools in Ireland.[9] The Stanley letter remained the legal linchpin of the National School System until the Education Act became law in 1998, when Micheál Martin, our Taoiseach, was Minister for Education. Amazingly, 167 years after the setting up of the National School System, we had no other legislation to underpin the system until 1998.

The new 1831 system was well planned and delivered. The curriculum was mandatory. Schoolbooks were provided to all schools free of charge — something to remember. There was also an inspection system, a teacher training system and capital grants for school buildings. The system was state aided and not state-owned, and this has continued to be the case until the present day, very unusual by European standards.

While a devolved system of ownership and governance has some advantages, its disadvantages have become apparent in recent years when the Department of Education and successive ministers have had to face the reality that national schools are privately owned, and their ethos is determined by their owners making the issue of transfer or divestment which, Ruairí Quinn initiated back in 2011, almost impossible.

John mentioned that one of the main objectives of the Board of Education in 1831 was to unite in one system children of different creeds, and the schools were required to provide combined moral and literary and separate religious instruction. The pupils stayed together for the literary and moral instruction, and they were separated into religious groups for religious instruction, which was provided by the pastors of various denominations. Detailed rules regarding

8 Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment: The National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1970).

9 The Stanley Letter of 1831 anticipated the complete control of schools by the State (through the Commissioners).

religious and secular education were included in every version of the rules for national schools from 1831 until 1965, and they were legally enshrined in school leases. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the National School System had become increasingly segregated, and by 1922 most of the schools were under denominational church control.

After Independence, the rules for national schools continued to assert that schools were religiously mixed, but in 1965, as recently as that, a preface was added to the rules to the effect that quote 'The State gives exclusive recognition to the denominational character of the schools' and added in the rules was a statement that religious instruction is by far the most important subject of the school curriculum. This latter rule was taken out by John O'Sullivan in fairly recent years, but the rules to this day contained the preface.

In the early 1970s an instruction by Minister for Education, Richard Burke, to the manager of the Church of Ireland school in Dalkey to give priority of enrolment to children of the Church of Ireland, ultimately led to the setting up of the Dalkey School Project National School by a group of parents, which was the first of the co-educated schools, and had many similarities to the original national schools.

John has mentioned some twentieth century developments in Irish education. The first fifty years of Independence were doldrum years as far as investment in education was concerned. However, the report 'Investment in Education,' as John has mentioned, in 1966 was a landmark report. I was a research assistant to the team of the Investment in Education Report, which is where I met and fell in love with my husband, Bill Hyland, who was the statistician. As a result, I became a victim of the marriage bar and my career changed direction some years later.

I have written about the outcome of that report in a chapter in Judith Harford's recent book *Education for all? The Legacy of free Post-primary Education in Ireland*.[10] How for the first time in the twentieth century and the first time since the 1824 report, a comprehensive statistical analysis of the Irish system

10 Judith Hartford (ed.), *Education for all? The legacy of free post-primary education in Ireland* (Oxford, 2018).

of education was carried out and the stark reality of the inequalities of the system were identified. The evidence-based approach of the report meant that there could be no denying the issues that would have to be faced. No politician could ever again say that quote 'Ireland has the best education system in the world' a statement that was common enough. It was a common refrain in my youth in the 1940s and the 1950s.

In 1963, 35% of pupils left full-time education, either during or at the end of primary education, fewer than 50% completed junior cycle secondary and only 20% completed the Leaving Cert. Only 4% of the age cohort went on to university and were very privileged and 20% of those either dropped out or failed their final exams. Young people from professional backgrounds were at that time five times more likely to complete senior cycle than the children of unskilled or the unemployed, and there were twenty-five times more likely to attend university. As regards to the condition of national school buildings in 1963, more than half of them did not have running water, flush toilets, or electricity. A major investment would certainly be required to bring Irish education not just into the second half of the twentieth century, but into the twentieth century.

The resultant reform of Irish education has been well documented and many listening here today will remember the introduction of free secondary education in 1967 with grants for transport and for the building and extending of secondary schools; the building of comprehensive and community schools and colleges in the 1970s; the new primary school curriculum in '71; university grants; the setting up of the regional technical colleges, afterwards renamed Institutes of Technology and now pivoting to technological universities; the abolition of the group and intermediate certificates in the late 1980s and the introduction of the Junior Cert. The Leaving Cert, however, like the Ten Commandments, remains unchanged in spite of the recommendations of a variety of reports, for example, the Curriculum and Examinations Board in the 1980s and the Points Commission in the late 1990s, not to mention the recommendations of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in 2004, described by the then Minister for Education as a Rolls-Royce model of reform.

A lot has changed in the past fifty years and there have been many improvements. The completion rate to Leaving Cert is now almost 95%, one of the highest completion rates in the OECD. More than two-thirds of the age cohort complete third level education. The differential between those from wealthier backgrounds and those from less privileged backgrounds has been considerably reduced. I mentioned that it was twenty-five times more likely that the child of a professional family would complete university education in the sixties. Today it has been reduced to twice the amount, but it has still not been eliminated.

However, much remains to be done and we cannot be complacent. Considerable inequalities still exist in society and in education for children from less advantaged to poor backgrounds: for the children of the Traveller community, for the homeless, for refugees and asylum seekers, for those from ethnic minorities. And of course, there is a considerable digital divide.

The Covid crisis will undoubtedly result in a greater number of people who will find themselves disadvantaged in society and in education. Will schooling ever be the same again after months of home schooling, which has inadvertently widened the gap between the haves and the have nots of society? And we will not even mention the Leaving Cert.

Finally, John referred to the challenges and inequities in Northern Ireland and the continuing existence there of an eleven plus exam, which was abolished decades ago in other parts of the United Kingdom. I was an adviser to the post-primary review body set up by the Northern Ireland government, which recommended twenty years ago that the eleven plus transfer tests and any form of selection practices should be abolished in Northern Ireland. Sadly, that never happened, and as John has pointed out, the inequalities that result continue to have significant and negative economic consequences. Again, on behalf of everyone listening today, I would like to thank John very sincerely for his wonderful lecture. Thank you all very much.

BIOGRAPHIES

John FitzGerald is an Honorary Fellow of Trinity College Dublin, an Adjunct Professor in the School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, University College Dublin, and Chairman of the Climate Change Advisory Council. He is a former research professor at the Economic and Social Research Institute where he is now a Research Affiliate. A member of the Royal Irish Academy, John completed his father Dr Garret FitzGerald's final book *Irish Primary Education in the Early Nineteenth Century*, published by RIA in 2013.

Áine Hyland is Emeritus Professor of Education and former Vice-President of University College Cork. One of Ireland's most distinguished educationalists, she has been active in the field of education for over fifty years. She has published nationally and internationally on the history of Irish education and on educational policy. She is co-editor with Kenneth Milne of a three-volume collection of official documents relating to Irish education from earliest times to 1980.

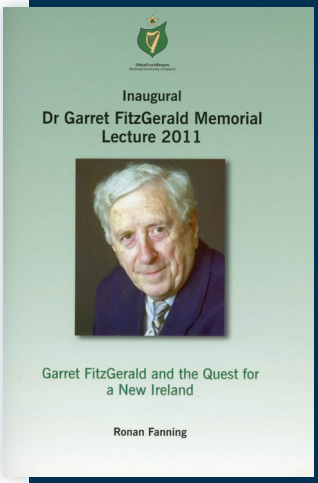
Garret FitzGerald

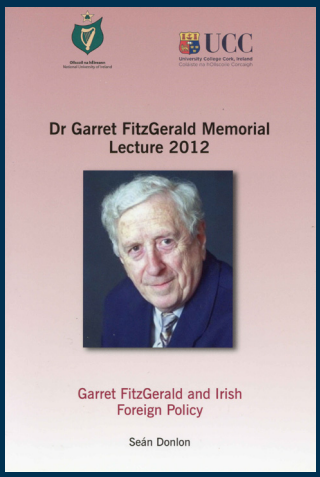
Dr Garret FitzGerald PhD MRIA had careers in air transport, economic consultancy, university lecturing, journalism, politics, and business. After graduating with a first-class honours' degree in history and modern languages from University College Dublin and being called to the Irish Bar, he spent the first twelve years of his working life in Aer Lingus.

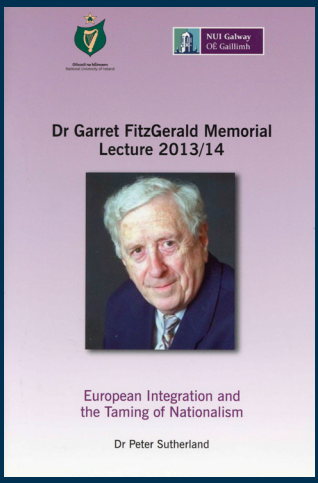
Portrait by Carey Clarke PPRHA of Dr Garret FitzGerald in his Chancellor's robe. This painting is on display in the NUI offices on Merrion Square

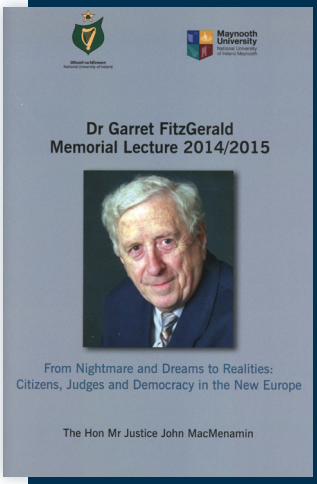
In 1959, he was appointed a lecturer in Economics in University College Dublin. His political career began in 1965 when he was elected to Seanad Éireann. Four years later, he was elected to the Dáil. From 1973 to 1977 he was Minister for Foreign Affairs, following in the footsteps of his father, Desmond FitzGerald, who had served as first Minister for External Affairs in the new Irish State from 1922 to 1927. Garret became leader of Fine Gael in 1977 and held the position of Taoiseach between June 1981 and March 1982, and again between December 1982 and March 1987. As Taoiseach, he was President of the European Council in the second half of 1984.

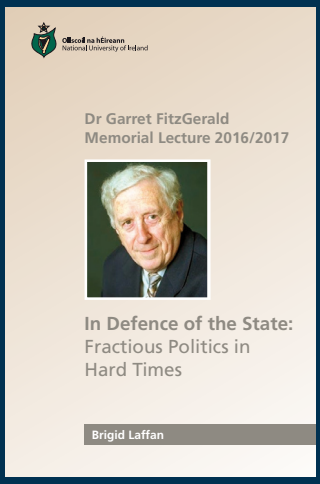
Garret FitzGerald Memorial Lectures











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Dr Garret FitzGerald PhD MRIA, 1926-2011

Political leader, international statesman, scholar, writer, and public intellectual, was Chancellor of the National University of Ireland from 15 October 1997 until 12 March 2009 and a member of the Senate of the University from 1972 until 1997.

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