A case study that examines a number of early school leavers who did not continue their education after the Junior Certificate, analysing the causes of early leaving, the steps taken towards prevention and also looks at the impact that has been made by the introduction of departmental programmes to help prevention

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I would like to thank all of whom I interviewed as part of my research, for their willingness to help, and the courage each one of them displayed by sharing their experiences as early school leavers with me.

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Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends and work colleagues for their support and encouragement given to me at all times. My deepest appreciation is extended to you all.
The purpose of this case study was to investigate if early school leaving is still a problem in Ireland, and if so, what are the reasons for it and also what is being done to try and prevent the problem. The study focused on three research issues as follows:

1. Is early school leaving still a problem today as it was 10-15 years ago?
2. What are the reasons and causes identified that encourage students to leave school early?
3. What government policies are in place to help deal with the problem of early school leaving?

To measure the degree of the problem of early school leaving in Ireland, this case study adopted a mixed method research methodology. Interviews and Surveys were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data for the study. The early school leavers interviewed, were encouraged to express their true feelings and attitudes towards the problem of leaving early and the reasons which lead them to the decision to leave before completing their education.

The study suggests that early school leaving still exists in Ireland, approximately 14% in 2007. It indicates that there are a number of reasons and factors that influence students to leave school early. It also identifies the government policies that are in place to deal with the problem and shows the enhancements that have being initiated to effectively address the problem.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 An introduction to early school leaving

Early school leaving and educational disadvantage have continuously exercised the thinking of academics, policy makers, educationalists, sociologists and researchers over a number of years. The interest displayed by these groups has been recorded in a significant amount of academic literature which is sourced in many countries in the western world.

Previous studies have been based on one or more causes of educational disadvantage - family background, socio economic group, peer group, economic growth and demographics. Studies of this subject have been based on historical perspectives and also on empirical evidence gathered from those who left school early or suffered in other ways from disadvantage during their formative years in education.

Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) researchers, Delma Byrne et al (2009) report that those who leave school without any qualifications have the highest level of unemployment and also have the lowest level of employment. While a large amount of research has been carried out on many of the factors which have an influence on early school leavers, no definitive answers have been formed. (Dekkers 2003, Rumberger 1987 cited in Byrne et al, 2009).

This study is designed to investigate if the problem of early school leaving continues to exist, to look at the causes and factors associated with it and also the preventative measures if any. Findings from this study may provide useful information for future educational planning and decisions relating to the prevention of early school leaving.

1.2 Research Questions

The main research questions posed in this study are:

- Is there currently a problem with early school leaving in Ireland?
What are the causes of early school leaving?
What are the preventative measures if any that are being used at present?
Evidence to accept or reject these questions will be based on the analysis of findings from the data accumulated by the research. The research questions were formulated after conducting the literature review. The following are some of the themes which will be explored:

- Causes
- Multiple factors
- Prevention
- Preventative measures taken

1.3 Objectives of this study

The following are the objectives of this study which aim to investigate early school leaving in Ireland:

- To identify the problem of early school leaving.
- To review previous literature and findings on the subject of early school leaving.
- To establish the causes and factors which contribute to early school leaving.
- To conduct research by survey on a countrywide basis into the incidence of early school leaving.
- To conduct research by interviewing identified early school leavers in order to establish their personal reasons for dropping out of education.
- To document and analyse the findings.
- To compile a list of recommendations.

1.4 Justification for the research

The researcher has had a long standing interest in the educational system in Ireland – its development, its effects on the economic development of the country, the increased availability of courses and the increase in adult and further education etc.

Ireland has witnessed many social and economic changes over the past number of years. In more recent years, it has become a very wealthy country. Since the economic downturn, which commenced in 2008, the unemployment levels have risen dramatically
and experts predict a tough time ahead in the job market for early school leavers. In an article in The Irish Independent newspaper, Walshe and Donnelly (2009) report that of all the early school leavers in 2007, only half of them were employed at the end of that year. While the effects of economic development have contributed significantly to increased educational attainment the researcher discovered that there is relatively little information concerning the unprecedented changes in Ireland, which are affecting the employment prospects and social progression of early school leavers. For this reason, the researcher feels that this study subject requires attention.

1.5 Variables

As will become evident in the following chapters there can be many variables which influence an individual to leave school early – demographic factors, peer groups, gender, education and socio-economic background. Generally the reasons for an early exit from education are not one dimensional but multi factorial. Some of the variables that could influence this study are gender, education and socio-economic backgrounds. Research shows that often more boys leave school early than girls.

1.6 Background to the Study

The researcher is employed with the Department of Education and Science (DES), and this subject area is an element of the researchers’ daily work. This study was chosen by the researcher because of a particular interest in early school leaving.

The study is set out to investigate if early school leaving is an existing problem. It will also look at the causes and prevention as previously mentioned.

1.7 Outline of structure

Chapter 2 – The Literature Review. This chapter is a review of past and current literature that is examined with a view to critiquing and analysing substantive theories and perspectives. The chapter portrays the various issues affecting and surrounding early school leaving in Ireland.
Chapter 3 – Methodology. This chapter displays an assessment of research tools available and the researcher outlines the procedures used in employing Qualitative and Quantitative techniques in the study.

Chapter 4 – Research Findings. In this chapter themes which are recurring in the survey and interviews are explored. Data that refers to these themes is interpreted and displayed through the use of pie charts and bar charts which were produced showing graphical representations of the themes.

Chapter 5 – Discussion. The discussion chapter gives an analysis of all the data. It includes a number of personal excerpts from the interviews with early school leavers. The discussion attempts to find the answers to the research and subsidiary questions. The findings from the interviews and surveys were examined along side the research found while compiling the literature review, and are then brought to a conclusion in the conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Recommendations. As already mentioned the conclusions are outlined in the final chapter and recommendations are listed and highlighted with a view to implementing policy change as well as providing a strong foundation for the possibility of further research and study in this area.

The researcher has selected some of the most significant aspects of interest found in this study. This thesis will show the results of the study and may in the future be used by researchers for other studies undertaken to access and compare the changes in the different geographical areas of Ireland.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Early school leavers are recognised as students who leave school at a young age or without a recognised qualification. In a report compiled by the Combat Poverty Agency in September 2001, called “Submission on Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment to the National Economic and Social Forum”, early school leaving is referred to as the “non participation in school before reaching the age of 16 or before completion of three years post-primary education, whichever is later”. (Combat Poverty Agency, 2001).

According to Boldt et al (1998), early school leaving is still believed to be a problem within the European Union, even though there has been an extensive growth in education throughout the European Union.

The Educational Research Centre was established in St Patrick’s College, Dublin in 1966, as a means of widening the scope of research and to provide continuity in research efforts in Ireland at all levels of the educational system. (Educational Research Centre, 2000). The Department of Education and Science commissioned the Educational Research Centre to carry out a study on Early School Leavers, in November 1998, as part of the 8-15 Year Old Early School Leavers Initiative. This research identified a significant increase in the percentage of Irish students who had completed post-primary schooling since free education at this level was introduced in 1968. (Educational Research Centre, 2000). In 1964, 51.5% of 15 year olds were in full time education. By 1981 this had increased to 87% and throughout the 1990’s this has remained at over 95%. (Investment in Education, 1965). The point was made that even though the number of early school leavers is reducing, a small percentage of young people still leave school each year before they achieve a recognised qualification. (H. Lee, personal communication, 4 Nov 2008). This creates distinct economic consequences both at individual and societal levels. In general early school leaving is found within disadvantaged areas both urban and rural. The social exclusion effects of early school leaving are literacy problems, lack of social skills, and difficulty in
accessing training or employment. There is an increased possibility of long-term unemployment and low-skilled employment for the individual.

The European Youth Forum (YFJ) is an organisation made up of 99 National Youth Councils and international youth Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from many countries in Europe. The Youth Forum Jeunesse works to help young people to try and improve their living conditions and to encourage them to participate actively in society. (Youth Forum Jeunesse, 2009). Research by the Youth Forum Jeunesse on “Early Education Leaving”, states that the long-term costs of educational failure are very high both financially and socially. When people are without necessary skills to help them participate socially and economically within their country, health, social welfare and security costs increase. (Youth Forum Jeunesse, 2008).

This literature review will examine the historical background of early school leavers, and will aim to identify the predominant changes over the last number of decades. It will also briefly discuss the Irish Education System, and where it lies with comparisons to education systems within the European Union.

The causes of early school leaving are quite varied and consequently comparisons are difficult. However there are many factors that contribute to early school leaving. This literature review will examine and analyse these factors. The prevention of early school leaving is vital if the objectives of attainment of a full second level cycle are to be met, for e.g. the objective to retain every student in school until the Leaving Certificate is complete. (Northside Partnership, 2008). Preventative measures are crucial to the attainment of these objectives and they must be continuously monitored and reviewed.

The Department of Education and Science is responsible for the administration of public education, primary, post primary and special education. The mission of the Department is “to provide high-quality education, which will enable individuals to achieve their full potential and to participate fully as members of society and contribute to Ireland’s social, cultural and economic development” (Ireland, Department of Education, 2008).

The Department has adopted a broad-based approach to tackling early school leaving. In the region of €800 million was spent in 2008 on tackling educational disadvantage at
all levels, from pre-school to further and higher education. This represents an increase of nearly €70 million on the comparable 2007 figures at all levels. (Ireland, Department of Education, 2008).

Some of these departmental programmes will be examined throughout this literature review, looking at the objectives and the extent to which they have been achieved and their effectiveness in the prevention of early school leaving.

This review will conclude by discussing the findings within the literature reviewed.
2.2 Historical Background

Early school leaving is not a recent problem according to Schwartz (1996). Schwartz believes that this problem has existed for a long time, but because of the negative consequences to the individual involved and to society particularly in recent decades, the issue is now a priority in many countries. An historical perspective on the educational trends in Ireland is necessary in order to appreciate the ethos, culture and structure of the present system.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Catholic participation was limited in many of the organised educational structures mainly as a consequence of the Penal Laws. During these times a limited level of schooling was provided by what was known as the “hedge schools”. Only since the late twentieth century has there been a formalised education system in the schools to cater for the greater division of the population. (Boldt et al., 1998).

“It is commonly agreed that from the birth of independence up to 1960 the (education) system was both static and gravely under-resourced. In the compulsory sector many of the classes were much too large and the curriculum was much too narrow: it is recorded that, in 1957-58, 22% of teachers were untrained. The upper secondary sector was small, fee paying and catered largely for the children of better-off parents. Higher education was elitist”. (OECD, 1991, p25).

The reform of the education system became a priority in the 1960’s, and rapid changes were made. The “free education scheme” was introduced in 1967 by Donogh O’ Malley into almost all of the post-primary schools with the result that between 1960 and 1980, “….the number of pupils in each type of (post-primary) school almost trebled over the period”. (Coolahan, 1991). In 1995 Niamh Breathnach Labour Party Education Minister, announced that fees for third-level would be abolished. Breathnach compared it to the introduction of “free” secondary education in 1967 mentioned above and stated “abolishing fees will have a tremendous psychological impact, education will be seen as a right, not a privilege”. This has resulted in Ireland having one of the highest participation rates in third-level education within the E.U, and having the second highest level of third-level graduates in the 25-34 year old bracket also within the E.U. (Central Statistics Office, 2008). The number of students in higher education in Ireland grew from 18,200 in 1965 to more than 115,500 in 2000 (Department of Education, 2009). A contributing factor to this was the establishment of 13 Institutes of
Technology under the 1992 Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs) Act. Also there are currently seven universities in the Republic of Ireland.

The effect of abolishing fees is highlighted by the example of such a decision taken by the Government of Zimbabwe in the 1980’s. The provision of low-cost/free primary and secondary education was made a priority of the then administrator. Fees were reduced and in some cases education was free. For a period of time after this initiative, the country had the most educated workforce on the continent of Africa. (IrishTimes.com, 2009).

The Irish education system is administered mainly by the Department of Education and Science. However in recent years the Department has undergone a programme restructure which aims to delegate some of their functions to other agencies e.g. State Examinations Commission. The revised structure will ensure that the Department focuses on policy issues and meets educational challenges for the future. The improvement of education and training was declared to be a key objective after a meeting was held of the European Council in Lisbon. (Van Alphen, 2008). As part of its strategic goals for 2010, the Lisbon Strategy is aiming for Europe:

“to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”.


Alphen (2008) believes that this educational development by the E.U, to become a more competitive knowledge-based economy will decrease the likelihood of early school leavers in secondary (post-primary) education. Similarly Schofer and Meyer (2005) feel that an educational system that is more practical and attainable combined with an emphasis on human capital investments and its applicability will reduce the dominant factors that often cause an individual to leave school early.

Education is now seen as a central platform in the economic, social and cultural development of Irish society. Pre-schools and Primary education – children are not obliged to attend school until the age of six, although most children begin school in the September following their fourth birthday. Because of this much schooling that is considered pre-school education in other countries is provided free of charge for all children here in Ireland. At present there are approximately over 450,000 children in
primary education. (Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 2009). Second-level Education – consists of a three year junior cycle which is then followed by a two or three year senior cycle. The aim of second level education is to build on the foundation of primary education and to provide a comprehensive education to all students. The objective of the Junior Cycle is to encourage students to remain in full time education after the compulsory school leaving age which is sixteen.

The government view education as part of the national planning process. (Ireland, Department of Education, 2004). Provisions for the enhancement of the education system are provided for on the National Development Plan 2007-2013 with particular emphasis on social inclusion. This aspect is also stressed in the Social Partnership Agreement “Towards 2016”. The legislation governing school attendance is the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. Education policy has changed in relation to the compulsory age for school attendance. Under the Act, it is now compulsory for students to remain in education from ages 6-16 (was 15) or until they have completed three years of second-level (post-primary) education, whichever is the later. This has had a positive effect on the prevention of early school leaving.

The OECD Annual Report (2005) shows that more Irish people have now attained third level education than ever before, and by international standards, Ireland has a comparatively high proportion of graduates with Certificates and Diplomas. Also the numbers of students graduating with primary Degrees and Masters has risen over the last number of years. This report also highlights the fact that Ireland is among the countries where a higher number of students who were born in the 70’s have completed post-primary education compared to students who were born in the 50’s. The OECD states that Ireland is one of the small number of countries to have made such an outstanding improvement in the attainment of students in the post-primary sector over time. The above illustrates the vast strides in education, policy and in the delivery of educational programmes that have taken place in Ireland particularly since the introduction of free secondary education. However the challenge of reducing the number of early school leavers remains.
2.3 The different stages of schooling in Ireland

The Irish Educational System comprises four levels of education, primary, secondary, tertiary level and fourth level. The Department of Education does not provide a system of pre-school education. However in the supplementary budget in April 2009, the Irish government announced the introduction of a one year free pre-school for children aged between 3 years and 3 months and 4 years and 6 months which will commence in January 2010. This is a significant change in government policy, as experts worldwide acknowledge that quality early education is essential for a child. (IBEC Agenda, 2009).

An article written by IBEC Agenda (2009) states that neurologists have discovered approximately 90% of brain growth occurs by the time a child is aged three. All children learn to interact with new people and form relationships in a pre-school environment. They learn to play with people outside their immediate family. They also learn to be part of a team or a group. These experiences are essential to the child’s development both physical and psychological. However the experience of pre-school education is of even greater significance to disadvantaged children. The absence of education at this very important time in the life of a child will have repercussions for the individual for the remainder of their lives.

The HighScope Educational Research Foundation in Michigan, U.S.A studied a group of African Americans who were born in poverty and were at high risk of failing in education. The study called “The HighScope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40” (2005), found that at the age of 40, adults who had attended pre-school were more likely to have completed and graduated from high school, were more likely to be working, and had also a lower level of crime rate than other adults who did not attend preschool.

Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), (2009), who provide advice and support to the education community throughout Scotland, discuss pre-schools in a document called “The Importance of Pre-School Education”. It is stated in this document that:

“the vital contribution of pre-school education lies in developing and broadening the range of children’s learning experiences, to leave them confident, eager and enthusiastic learners who are looking forward to school”.

Primary Education
Primary education covers the first years of a structured and disciplined education in a child’s life. Primary education is an eight year programme. The curriculum is divided
to cover the following areas – mathematics, languages, social and personal education, environmental and scientific education and a number of others. (Education Ireland, 2009). Although the curriculum is divided to cover these areas, the time spent by teachers on these key skills of mathematics and science and technology is one of the lowest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (National Competitiveness Council, 2009).

There is no recognised certification of standards achieved on leaving primary school. This may militate against low achievers on entering secondary school with consequences for early school leaving.

Secondary Education
The objectives of second level education are to build on the foundation of primary education and to progress the learning abilities of the children. All secondary schools aim to prepare students to progress to third level education, fourth level education and the workplace. (National Competitiveness Council, 2009).

Third Level Education
This level of education includes institutes of technology, universities, colleges of education and other providers of third level education. In recent years the participation levels in Ireland have increased considerably and continue to grow, having risen from 44% in 1998 to 55% in 2004. (National Competitiveness Council, 2009).

Fourth Level Education
Fourth level education includes Masters, PhD and post-doctoral research. Ireland’s development at this level is at an early stage but nevertheless is progressing. The government’s investment in this level of education will be a key to the development of Ireland as a knowledge based society in the global economy. The Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern in 2005 said:

“we want to encourage more of our third level graduates to pursue advanced postgraduate study and research at fourth level – a vibrant fourth level sector that will produce our future knowledge leaders and underpin a climate of innovation”.  

(An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, 21st October, 2005).
2.4 When is early school leaving a problem?

The causes of early school leaving are multifactorial. Early school leaving is primarily an issue affecting young people from backgrounds of multiple disadvantages. These multiple disadvantages include disadvantaged areas, poor housing, poor educational attainment, substance abuse, unemployment and disability. Early school leavers are recognised as having lower levels of self esteem, poorer social skills, literacy problems, inability to acquire labour market skills and a propensity to be long-term unemployed. Lack of educational attainment at an early age presents greater difficulties to those who may at some stage in their adult lives wish to take part in third level education. (Teese et al, 2000). The Combat Poverty Agency has identified reasons such as “high participation costs of education (clothes, books, meals etc), low levels of parental support, the lack of suitability of school curricula and the failure of the system to address the needs of minority groups (Travellers, refugees, children with disability)” (Combat Poverty Agency, 2001).

A study which was conducted by Hannon and O Riain (1993) found that those who left school without any qualification or without a Junior Certificate experienced a deep effect on their future. These deep effects included formation of social relationships including marriage and family life. This Irish study was based on a sample of students who had left school in 1982, and were interviewed five years later in 1987. They were then aged approximately 22. Another study carried out in America by Kaplan et al (1994) looked at the implications that early school leaving had on the mental health of the early leavers. The study tested 4,141 young students in seventh grade and again as young adults. A number of scales were used in this test such as an anxiety scale, depression scale and a scale designed to measure coping. The results of the study indicated that leaving school early had a serious damaging effect on mental health functioning as measured by the scales already mentioned above.

Early school leaving can affect the ability of people to participate fully in the labour market. McMillan and Marks (2003) while analysing Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) data from 1995-2001 in Australia, found that students and early school leavers from a low socio economic family status, those who are from non-English speaking families and also those who have poor literacy and numeracy levels, were more likely to be in and out of employment or indeed unemployed. Significant
percentages of those who are long-term unemployed are early school leavers, with a high percentage of those who get employed being in low paid jobs and with periods of employment interspersed with periods of unemployment. Early school leavers represented approximately one eighth of the 18-24 age group in Ireland in 2005 and their unemployment rate, at 22.3% in 2005 was almost 3 times the rate recorded for all persons aged 18-24. (C.S.O, 2008) McClelland and McDonald (1999) report that 26% of adults aged 20-24 years are in “at risk” situations such as – they are in part time work, they are unemployed and also they are not participating in any education or training. Early school leaving is a cost to the economy because of the propensity of early school leavers to have high risks of unemployment, to require state provision of housing needs and provision of health services. People who leave school early have tendencies to become dependent on alcohol and other substances; they generally have poor diet and consequently suffer a greater degree of health problems than their better off peers. (Teese et al, 2000). The Combat Poverty Agency (2001) recognises the problem of early school leavers, especially those who leave the education system before completing the Junior Certificate examination taken in the third year of post-primary education. It acknowledges that many of these early school leavers are young people from multi-disadvantaged backgrounds and are more likely to underachieve and leave early than some of their peers.

It is clear that inequalities exist throughout the educational system, which is particularly manifested by early school leaving at lower secondary level. Studies (O’ Fathaigh 1997) have revealed that almost 47% of second level students who left school early before reaching Leaving Certificate were from unskilled manual backgrounds where as only 3% from higher professional backgrounds failed to sit the Leaving Certificate examination.

To counteract these inequalities a number of policy issues are required: - the need to ensure basic education skills including literacy and numeracy before leaving primary school.
- the need to enhance access to education by policies to combat educational barriers which contribute to under achievement and alienation.
- support for parents to ensure that they recognise and appreciate the value of education and the importance of educational achievement from their offspring.
- the provision of state sponsored pre-schools which would to some degree eradicate disadvantage experienced at an early age.
2.5 Causes of early school leaving and the outcomes

Due to the increasing interest in the causes and consequences of early school leaving, the literature on the topic has broadened, and the awareness and understanding of why students leave school early have grown. However the subject of early school leaving remains a challenge for educationalists and policy makers. Boldt and Devine (1998) reported that almost 13,000 students leave school immediately after completing the Junior Certificate. According to Teese et al, (2000), the causes of early school leaving are complex, and may not be caused by one specific reason, but by many different reasons that overlap, and result in students dropping out of school. Many of these reasons can include the following – demographic, family related, school factors, economic factors and individual factors, which will be looked at individually. Lamb (1994) points out that an understanding of the pressures that lead students to early school leaving must be made before preventative measures can be successfully introduced and implemented. Consequently the solution to this perennial problem requires a comprehensive range of policies and actions which can only be achieved by multi agency responses.

Table 2.1 below shows the qualification levels of school leavers, from 1996-1999. While there was a percentage drop for those leaving without a qualification, i.e. 4% in 1996 down to 3.2% in 1999, it is important to highlight the small increase in the numbers who left school after completing the Junior Certificate i.e. 15.2% in 1996 and increased slightly to 15.3% in 1999. There was also an increase in those leaving after they have completed the Leaving Certificate, from 80.8% to 81.6%.

Table 2.1: Qualification Levels of School Leavers, 1996-1999 (%)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Certificate</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving Certificate</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparison to most OECD countries, Ireland’s attendance rates are quite high, but the data is not directly comparable as there are significant variations in the education systems in the different European countries (OECD, 2001).

**Demographics** - Many early school leavers come from lower socio economic backgrounds and are located in regional and rural locations. (Business Council of Australia (BCA), 2003). Studies from William *et al* (1987) and Marks and Fleming (1999) have found that students who live in rural and regional areas are more likely to leave school early in comparison to others. Lamb (1994) supports this idea also, by pointing out that early leaving is more likely to occur among rural students. Research completed by the Department of Employment, Education and Training in Australia concluded that students who came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and less educated families were more likely to leave school early (DEET, 1993). Other studies have similar results which show that of the number of those who leave school early, a higher percentage of them come from semi-skilled and unskilled manual backgrounds. This is evident (source: McCoy and Williams, 2000) in the number of those who left school having only completed the Junior Certificate, over 25% of the unskilled manual group. (NESF, 2002:34). Teese (1999) exemplifies this through a regional analysis of Year 10 to Year 12 transition in Victoria, Australia where it was found that the numbers leaving school early was much higher in the country than in urban regions, and this was inclusive for both boys and girls.

As noted earlier (O’ Fathaigh 1997) points out that almost half the number of second level students (47%) who left school without reaching Leaving Certificate level are from unskilled manual backgrounds. Similar ideas have emerged from international research where it is indicated that social background has a telling effect on educational outcomes. (Jencks *et al*, 1972, Halsey *et al*, 1980). In comparison to this only a fraction of students (3%) from higher professional backgrounds fail to undertake the Leaving Certificate.

Schools differ immensely in terms of environment, class numbers, demographics of the area, where the school is located e.g. urban and rural schools etc. Van der Werf *et al* (2002), showed that distinguishing factors like the number of educational levels in a school and the size of an area the school is in, can affect the chances of a student being successful at school.
**Family-Related** - A number of family related factors associated with early school leaving include low educational achievements by parents, single parent families, and also the absence of learning materials in the home. (Ekstrom et al, 1986). A study done in a High School in Washington by Astone and McLanahan (1991) examined the relationship between family structure looking at the single parent situation versus the traditional family and early school leaving in the United States of America. The results of the study showed that living in a single parent family resulted in young people being more likely to drop out of school. Astone and McLanahan (1991) similarly note that these effects can emerge because of less attention given to students from parents and teachers, lack of encouragement and also lack of help with homework and study in the single parent family in comparison to the “traditional” families.

Academic success is relative to the family background of the student. According to Boudon’s theory of social stratification, the type of social class a student belongs to will determine their educational choice. Those who belong to a lower social status group find the high financial costs difficult and place less emphasis on the value of education. Therefore educational success in low status groups will be less, and early school leaving is more likely for students in this group. Students, who are from higher social classes, do not face the barriers of costs of education. Consequently educational levels of success are generally higher and more common. Students from a higher social class are generally less likely to leave school before completing their education and graduating (Boudon 1974). Although this association between education and social backgrounds has decreased over the years (De Graaf 1993), it still remains relatively high for the lower educated i.e. those with little or no schooling (Hout 1988).

Another family related factor which can lead to early school leaving is the relationship between parents and their children. Effective communication between the parent and child will require a sufficient amount of interaction within the family (Coleman 1988). Coleman also feels that there should be an interaction between the two parents in the household, the child in question and any other siblings in the house on the expectations for the child’s education. Good communication is evident in households where the parent or parents take an interest in the child’s progression at school. If this is absent a child may lack the motivation to continually achieve. This can occur frequently with children from single parent families, as only one parent is available, and also in very
large families, where many children need their own interaction time with parents. These situations can increase the chances of a child leaving school early (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994, Ni Bhrolchain et al 2000, U.S Department of Education 2001, Heard 2004).

**School Factors** – It is known that poor academic achievement determined by grades and test results is associated with early school leaving (Rumberger, 1987). Rumberger also points out that students, who are questioned about their reasons for leaving school, often include answers such as disliking the school, falling behind academically, lack of social skills and isolation. School factors can be addressed by policy initiatives which provide for preventative measures. (Audas and Willms, 2001).

It is evident from earlier research in the U.S that there is a relationship between students who attend schools and experience an environment which lacks support and care from their teachers and these appear to have higher dropout rates. An environment with care and support between teachers and students, and a shared purpose has been proven to be a key factor in the decision for students to remain in school until they receive their qualifications. (State University.com, 2008).

**Economic Factors** – Rumberger (1983) refers to a study done in the United States of America, where it was found that on average about one fifth of those who left school early did so because they felt the need to work, in order to help themselves and/or their families.

How students perceive school and its relevance can have an impact on their decision to leave school early or not. If there is an indication from economic factors or other factors outside of school that the completion of their schooling is important for future success, students may be more inclined to remain in school to complete their education. (State University.com, 2008).

Globalisation has created economic, social and political restructuring which has affected young people (Schmidt, 2006). The main concern for young people is that of learning and education, and how globalisation will meet the needs and demands of the people of the world. The economy has changed from a manufacturing economy to a service economy which has resulted in the decline of permanent full-time jobs and a

Globalisation can have a negative effect especially in rural areas where there is a decline in small companies, affecting any opportunity of employment for young people (Epps and Soerensen 1996 cited in Schmidt 2006).

**Individual Factors –**

“Promoting the Health of Young People at Risk”, (1999), was a report of the National Consultative Committee on Health Promotion, North Western Health Board in Ireland. It emphasised that young people who lacked educational attainment were susceptible to poor health such as poor diet and substance abuse. The Crisis Pregnancy Agency (2008) highlighted this report as it emphasised that young people who lacked education, were vulnerable in relation to their health.

> “Early school leaving has now been well documented as a crucial factor for young people who become long-term unemployed, become involved in illegal activities, and engage in high risk health behaviours. On the other hand, educational attainment has been shown to be a major protective factor”

(Crisis Pregnancy Agency, 2008).

Suspension from school attendance can also contribute to early school leaving particularly for boys. In the case of girls, pregnancy, marriage and family reasons are more common factors. (Finn, 1989).

Boys and girls are in general, regarded as having varied learning abilities with for example girls having greater reading ability. However this distinction is not made in teaching methods.

The NESF received a submission, which emphasised the difference between boys and girls as follows:

> “I have been struck by the ease with which girls acquire skills in reading and writing while boys can experience great difficulty with the visual recall necessary in learning how to read...In school, children of both sexes are taught in exactly the same way, with boys lagging behind girls in academic
achievement. This leads to a slow erosion of self-esteem and ultimately contributes to the decision to drop out of the school system”. (NESF, 2002:32).

Outcomes

“There is evidence that early school leaving is associated with a range of unfavourable outcomes”. (Marks and Fleming 1999). Research in Ireland undertaken by the Labour Market indicated that early school leavers often find it difficult to transfer into the workplace once they leave school. (Breen, 1991, NESF, 1997). Breen also studied a cohort of students who left school in 1982 and 1987. These students fell into the following categories – unemployed, working or taking part in training and temporary employment. The following figures emerged: those who left school with no qualification, 45% were unemployed and the other 55% were in training and unemployment schemes. The students who left school after completing their Junior Certificate spent approximately 70% of their time at work and 28% unemployed. Those who completed their Leaving Certificate had figures of 81% employed and 10% unemployed. It is obvious from these figures that there is a significant link between education and the outcomes of the labour market.

The trend of young people who do not complete Year 12 in Australia or the equivalent in other countries will unavoidably result in lower employment rates, increased social welfare dependency, lower productivity and also lower tax revenue for their country of residence. (BCA, 2003). Again, the BCA (2003) is concerned to understand, that in spite of the great effort and commitment the Government has made to provide all young people with access to education, training and work – there has been an insignificant change in retention rates of young people completing their education. In its research the BCA also pointed out that at any given time young people aged 15 to 19 who left school early, at least 40,000 of them were not in any form of education or training and were employed for less than 15 hours a week. They were also in low skilled and part time employment. Similar themes have emerged from the research completed on early school leaving, finding that some of the causes of early school leaving are complex and also that there are many different reasons why students leave school early. According to the BCA (2003), there is a need to focus on the numeracy and literacy skills of those who are completing their early years of education and to try and develop them to an appropriate standard. The BCA also feel that increased flexibility between schools, universities and training centres should help students to continue their education.
Young people who leave school early and do not re-enter into any form of education or training, and do not find full time employment, will face a future characterised by poor living standards and unemployment. (BCA, 2003:14). A major finding of the OECD’s International Adult Literacy Survey was that, one in every four adults surveyed in Ireland did not have the confidence or the literacy skills to take an effective part in society. (OECD, 2000).
2.6 Prevention of early school leaving and the steps taken by the Department of Education.

Almost fifteen percent or nearly 13,000 students leave school every year with the Junior Certificate as their only qualification. (Boldt 1998). While the number of early school leavers has decreased over the last number of years, a significant figure still exists. Communities have many reasons to address the problem of early school leaving. There are important reasons for communities to try and reduce the rates of early school leaving. These include moral, social and economic reasons. Starting with the student themselves, an American study shows that ninety nine percent of high school (second-level) students expect to earn a high school diploma and almost seventy five percent of students expect to earn a bachelor’s degree. (Ingels et al, 2005). Thirty years ago most early school leavers were able to find jobs that paid them enough wages to support a family. Young people who leave school nowadays will face an economy of hardship especially since the economic downturn which has an effect on every country in the world at present, and this will make it much more difficult to find jobs where the person has little or no education. An article in the Irish Independent on March 7th 2009 by John Walshe and Katherine Donnelly, stated that early school leavers are facing a tough time in the jobs market. New figures showed that 11 percent of young people (aged 18-24) had left school early, and only half of all early school leavers were employed at the end of last year (2008).

Between the years of 1974 and 2004, the earnings of a high school dropout who was the main earner of the family, dropped by almost one third. (Mortenson 2006). High numbers of early school leavers can cause social and economic adversity for the local community. Early school leavers are more likely to be unemployed, receive social welfare, and commit crimes. Increasing the number of students who graduate would boost the employment rate, greatly expand tax revenues, would reduce marginal tax rates, reduce crime and would improve citizenship overall. (Jerald 2007).

Early identification by way of risk assessment is the key role to prevention of early school leaving. Risk assessment identifies students with low grades in some of the core subjects, e.g. English and Maths, high rates of absenteeism or truancy, poor classroom behaviour and also students who are withdrawn and do not involve themselves in any extracurricular activities provided by the school. (Jerald, 2007). Many of these risk
factors may turn out to be poor predictors of which students will actually drop out of school early. Some research studies show that it is possible to predict dropouts more accurately. These studies involve individual students as they progress from one grade to the next. Roderick (1993 cited in Jerald 2007) followed a cohort of students who were entering fourth grade in a small urban school district, in Fall River in South-eastern Massachusetts, USA. Roderick found that pathways taken by many of the dropouts were predictable, and felt that the best predictions of who would not graduate would be given by those who looked carefully at the academic performance of these students and also the students’ engagement with the school. Roderick also found that “transition years” were for many, future dropout students, a decisive turning point. Academic performance and attendance declined for most students both during the transition to middle school and again during the transition to high school. More recent studies carried out in Chicago and Philadelphia have confirmed and added to Roderick’s findings. In Philadelphia, researchers who worked with community groups discovered that they can now identify about fifty percent of the city’s eventual dropouts as early as sixth grade and a full eighty percent of eventual dropouts by ninth grade. (Neild and Balfanz, 2006).

Improved and better preparation in the lower grades in schools can ensure that students are more prepared for high school/second-level school. During the 1990’s, reforms in Chicago known as K-8, improved reading and math achievement, which subsequently increased graduation rates. (Roderick 2006, Allensworth 2004 cited in Jerald 2007). In Ireland, the concern over young people leaving school early and entering the labour market without adequate or basic qualifications is provided for within the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. The Act makes specific provision for the continuing education and training of young persons aged 16 and 17 years who have left school early to take up employment. The Act also ensures that early school leavers are registered with the National Educational Welfare Board and the Board assists them in availing of appropriate educational and training opportunities. It prevents employers from employing early school leavers who are not registered with the Board for this purpose and also obliges employers to notify the Board when they employ an early school leaver. (Department of Education, 2000).

The Social Partnership Agreement “Towards 2016” is a ten year framework agreement, which outlines a number of key objectives for economic and social development in Ireland over the next number of years. Under the terms of “Towards 2016”, the
Government and the social partners have agreed to work together towards a number of long-term goals for children including the goal that every child should complete a senior cycle or a programme appropriate to their capacity and interests. A key focus of the Government’s education policy is to prioritise investment in favour of those most at risk and to optimise access, participation and outcomes at every level of the system for disadvantaged groups. (Department of Education, 2005). The Department of Education and Science has adopted a broad-based approach to tackling early school leaving with the main measures and supports as follows:

**DEIS-Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools**

DEIS, the Action Plan for Social Inclusion, focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. The DEIS plan provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and brings together and builds upon, a number of existing interventions. There are currently 876 schools in DEIS, 203 of these are post primary. Enhancing attendance, progression and retention are central to DEIS. (Social Inclusion Unit, 2009). In agreement to this is a statement made by Professor Davies and John Lee (2008), “schools need to be supported in ensuring that they provide a safe environment”.

**School Completion Programme (SCP)**

The School Completion Programme covers both primary and post-primary level and is focused on young people between the ages of 4 and 18 years. It is a key component of the Department’s strategy to discriminate positively in favour of children and young people who are at risk of early school leaving. There are 124 SCP projects in total, targeting approx. 36,000 young people and spanning 26 counties. €31.353m was allocated to the SCP for 2009. The SCP aims to develop local strategies to ensure maximum participation levels in the education process. It entails targeting individual young people of school going age, both in and out of school, and arranging supports to address inequalities in education access, participation and outcomes.

The main features of the Programme include the development of:

- An early response to the educational, social and personal needs of specifically targeted young people most at risk of leaving school early.
• A collaborative response to early school leaving by primary and post primary schools together with relevant local statutory, voluntary and community bodies, the Local Drugs Task Forces and County/City Development Boards.
• In-school and out-of-school support.
• Holiday provision.

(Social Inclusion Unit, 2009).

**Whole School Evaluation**

Both primary and post-primary schools are visited by inspectors from the Department of Education and then evaluated. After the evaluation takes place, the inspector writes up an evaluation report on the school. The report is used to inform teachers, parents, Board of Managements and the Department about the school and how well it is doing. The evaluation includes recommendations which may help the school in areas which need improving. Some of the following areas can be answered from the evaluation designed to provide information on them:

- how well the school is managed
- how well the school deals with children’s welfare and safety
- how well the school is planning for teaching and learning and the children’s learning progression.

(DES, 2009).

**Teen Parenting**

According to the Youth Forum Jeunesse (2008), teenage mothers run a high risk of leaving school early. Home tuition is provided to pregnant schoolgirls who are absent from school during the later stages of pregnancy or immediately following the birth of a baby when attendance may be impractical.

Funding is also provided for the educational element of 8 Teenage Parenting projects as a specific gender element of the SCP under DEIS in preventing early school leaving among teenage mothers. Approximately 1,000 young parents are targeted by the Teen Parenting Support Programme (TPSP), Lenihan, (2005). The aim of these projects is to enable young women who are pregnant and young mothers to stay in second level
education and to progress on to third level education or training. It does this by providing individual support, information and grinds where necessary and aims to give them the opportunity to reach their full potential. Links have been established between local School Completion projects in these areas, assisted by the SCP National Coordination Team and the Teenage Parenting Support Initiative Coordinators. (Social Inclusion Unit, 2009).

**Home School Community Liaison**

The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) is a major mainstream preventative strategy, targeted at pupils who are at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system, because of background characteristics which tend to affect adversely pupil attainment and school retention. The scheme is concerned with establishing partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning. It focuses directly on the influential adults in children's educational lives and seeks indirect benefits for the children themselves. The five goals of the HSCL scheme are:

- To maximise active participation of the children in the learning process in particular those who might be at risk of failure.
- To promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children.
- To raise awareness in parents of their own capabilities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills.
- To enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the educational system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to life-long learning.
- To disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally.

(DEIS, Social Inclusion Unit, 2009).

**National Educational Welfare Board**

The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 established the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) as the statutory body with responsibility for school attendance. The general functions of the Board are to ensure that each child attends a recognised school or
otherwise receives a certain minimum education. The Board’s network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) is the key means by which the Board delivers on its statutory remit to ensure that each child attends and benefits from education. EWOs deal with approximately 10,000 cases, involving children with reported school attendance difficulties, per annum. Officers work closely with the family, the school and other support services to address the particular issues for each child.

There is a strong correlation between early school leaving and poor school attendance. Attendance levels are affected by a range of factors, including the socio-economic circumstances of the family, their parents’ attitudes towards education and their own experience of school. Research shows that early intervention is much more effective in addressing the children’s issues and is more likely to be successful. The NEWB has responsibility for promoting positive school strategies designed to increase school attendance and participation and advise on curriculum and teacher training.

Some of the Board’s initiatives to improve attendance, participation and retention are:

(i) Improving Work Practices
In early 2008 a review of professional supervision practices within the NEWB identified that the theoretical framework for interventions needed further development and clarity on the role of EWOs. A model of intervention and a framework for best practice was developed and pilots established in six locations throughout the country for a six month period from mid October 2008 to establish new ways of providing a more effective service. It is anticipated that the learning achieved through this pilot will form the basis of a strengthened model of intervention, which will improve the way EWOs work with schools, families and young people.

(ii) Working in Partnership
The NEWB is strongly committed to developing protocols that promote innovative and collaborative ways to improve attendance and tackle attendance issues by working with other professionals and agencies to ensure an integrated approach to children’s educational welfare. The Board has developed National protocols with the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS), and is in the process of developing protocols with the Home School Community Liaison Teachers along with School Completion Coordinators and National Counsel for Special Education.
In addition, the Board has developed professional working arrangements with a wide range of statutory and voluntary service providers so that a focused service is provided to children and their families.

Some examples of work that the NEWB is engaged with in this area are as follows:

**Limerick Drop-in Clinics**

In 2008, the NEWB and Limerick Regeneration Agency joined forces and set up the first education focussed ‘drop in clinics’ for residents in the Moyross and Southill areas of Limerick. The ‘drop-in-clinics’ provide a free confidential information service to parents and guardians of children between 6-16 years of age who were experiencing difficulties with school attendance such as refusal to attend school, enrolment issues, no school places and expulsion and suspension issues. The effectiveness of the service will be evaluated later in 2009.

**Dundalk Initiative**

In Dundalk the local EWO, Home School Liaison Co-ordinators and the School Completion Programme united in a local school based initiative to target a number of children who have had poor school attendance records. Each service agreed to work intensively with a number of identified families to focus on improving the school attendance of the children concerned. The 10 week long initiative proved successful and resulted in a considerable improvement in the overall rates of attendance. In a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (2005), the education government department in the United Kingdom introduced a range of initiatives to support and fund tackling absenteeism at a local level. They examined the main initiatives, sought opinions and reviewed evaluations. The department has found that the initiatives are contributing positively to managing school attendance.

**Dublin Inner City Project**

The Dublin inner city interagency pilot project was initiated by the Secondary Schools Network and the NEWB in response to historical attendance issues in north and south
inner city schools. The project brings cohesion to interactions between the NEWB, Home School Community Liaison, School Completion, Secondary Schools Network and six Primary and four Secondary schools in Dublin 7 and Dublin 8. A three year pilot commenced in September 2008 and will track chronic absenteeism in 4th, 5th & 6th classes over the period.

(Social Inclusion Unit, 2009).
2.7 Conclusion

This review of research literature brings together many ideas and information on the topic of early school leaving. Leaving school early becomes a social problem when and if a student ceases their education or training. (Teese et al, 2000). The historical background to early school leaving shows that this is not a recent problem, but one that has been with us for many years. The recognition of early school leaving as a problem with long lasting effects is not just in Ireland, but is common to many countries and states across the world. (Boldt et al 1998). While there is currently an emphasis on the measures taken to deal with early school leaving throughout the E.U, it must be noted that each country has different organisational structures and significant differences in the structure of their education systems. Therefore what might work for one country may not necessarily be a solution in another. (Boldt et al 1998). Teese et al (2000) discuss the need for different policies to be used, as dropping out of school in an economically depressed suburb of a large city is not the same circumstances as early leaving in rural areas.

As discussed already, there is no world-wide agreement to the definition of early school leaving or “dropping out” but the following definition by Morrow (1987) is generally accepted:

“A dropout is any student previously enrolled in a school, who is no longer actively enrolled as indicated by 15 days of consecutive unexcused absences, who has not satisfied local standards of graduation, and for whom no formal request has been received signifying enrolment in another educational institution”.


Of the many factors and causes of early school leaving looked at in this literature, the influence of friends and similar age groups of early school leavers was not discussed or given much attention. It is unclear from the research why this is so. In fact research in general has not given it much attention, but Rumberger (1987) suggests that many early school leavers have friends in a similar situation. In an Irish study by Morgan (1995), students who were aware that their friends were intending to apply for third level education, often had the same intentions themselves, especially if it was their close friends, not just their peers in the same class. Teese et al (2000) emphasise the need for education and training authorities to record and map patterns of early leaving, both in population and geographical terms. They must also develop strategies which will tackle the problem at its root, be it structural, economic or cultural.
With reference to qualitative studies on early school leaving which have been undertaken to express the views of early school leavers and their experiences, Boldt (1994) and (1997) observes and presents the following:

- **All students need and benefit from support and encouragement in school.**
- **A programme designed to prevent early school leaving should be for all students with a sub-group targeted for special or additional support.**
- **It is not possible to know what interventions will prevent early school leaving, so such programmes should be flexible and should engage in ongoing monitoring and evaluation.**
- **It should be remembered that the decision to leave school early is sometimes an appropriate one; that the formal school system is not the best system for everyone; that there are a number of students in school who are “dis-engaged” and not benefiting from their experience; and, that many early school leavers get on well in their lives and do not regret their decision.**
- **It is important to meet and to listen to young people themselves. The experiences and views of students and early school leavers should be taken into account and incorporated into the design and delivery of prevention programmes.**
Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Purpose of the study

According to Shuttleworth (2008) a strict definition of scientific research is “performing a methodical study in order to prove a hypothesis or answer a specific question. Finding a definitive answer is the central goal of any experimental process”. Research is an activity that leads to the increase of knowledge. The OECD (1980) explains the context of research as work undertaken to increase the store of knowledge including knowledge of humanity, culture and society. If an activity is classified as research it must be original. Research should have a primary aim of investigation and the potential to secure results which will recognisably increase humanities stock of knowledge.

Hankel et al (1982) believe that there are a number of guidelines that should be followed to increase the usefulness of the research results to organisations. Close attention should be paid to the following guidelines: firstly they suggest that all involved in research should be aware of the outcomes, both the costs and benefits of the research. Secondly the study must provide information on the problem that is under discussion, provide a solution and aim to help the organisation to become more effective in dealing with the likely outcome of the problem. Thirdly it is critical that participants in the research are fully aware that any research outcomes will not be harmful to them in any way. Finally, it is essential that the investigator ensures the research is both reliable and valid. Reliability is defined as:

“…the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable”.

Joppe (2000).

Validity determines how accurate the research results are. Validity in quantitative research terms is described as follows:

“validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. In other words, does the research instrument allow you to hit “the bulls eye” of your research
Researchers generally determine validity by asking a series of questions and will often look for the answers in the research of others”.

The primary aim of this study is to look at the factors and causes which influenced students to make a decision to leave school at an early age, and to establish if these factors are still valid in relation to a student’s decision to leave school early. Another primary aim is to look at the guidance and assistance that is available to the schools and students from the department, and to establish if these programmes are effective in the prevention of early school leaving. Are these programmes supporting students and schools, and are they factors in preventing students from leaving school early.

This chapter outlines the procedures that were necessary to undertake this research. It examines the research questions and the rationale for choosing the research methods used. It also takes account of details of the participants and the setting, and the appropriate research tools. The final part of this chapter looks at the issues of validity and reliability and also addresses the limitations of the research methodology. It is hoped that the findings from this research will identify factors that accommodate decisions made by early school leavers and the identification of factors that hinder the decision to leave school early.

### 3.2 Research Questions

The aim of this research is to determine the main reasons for early school leaving, identify prevention initiatives and assess the effectiveness of these initiatives. The following research questions are addressed in the course of the study:

1. What is the extent of early school leaving in schools in Ireland?
2. What factors have facilitated students in their decision to leave school early?
3. What are the attitudes of students, parents and teachers to early school leaving?
4. Do the programmes run by the Department of Education and Science significantly improve the numbers staying in school?

It is envisaged that this research will give a clearer profile of the students who leave school early in Ireland. It is hoped that the findings of the research may make a contribution to the Department of Education and Science in preparing a more planned and sustained programme of retaining children in school.
3.3 Research Methodology

A wide variety of research methods can be used for testing and observing data. According to Cohen et al (2000) one should consider whether to adopt a quantitative or qualitative approach when undertaking research, as these approaches are based on assumptions on the relationships of humans to their environment. When selecting the research approach that is appropriate to the given study, one should base it on the nature of the topic/interest, the resources available and also the audience for the research.

According to Van Maanen (1979:520) qualitative research is seen as more of an approach rather than a design or an array of techniques. He describes it as an umbrella phase “covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode and translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning of naturally occurring phenomena in the social world”.

Qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting and involves the researcher’s identity and their values and beliefs. These will all play a role in the analysis of qualitative data. It is important therefore, that the researcher suspend their every day beliefs and judgements on social issues etc for the duration of their research. According to Sanchez (2006) qualitative research “attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants”. It does this through the use of methods such as interviews and focus groups.

Chadwick et al (1984) summarises the potential strengths and weaknesses that can be associated with qualitative research methods –

Strengths of Qualitative Research Methods:
1. Researches people in natural settings
2. Stresses interpretations and meanings
3. Achieves a deeper understanding of the respondent’s world.
4. Humanises the research process by raising the role of the researched.
5. Allows more flexibility
6. Presents a more realistic view of the world.
Weaknesses of Qualitative Research Methods:

1. Problems of reliability caused by extreme subjectivity
2. Risk of collecting meaningless and useless information.
3. It is very time consuming.
4. Problems of objectivity and detachment.
5. Problems of representatives and generalising of findings
6. Problems of ethics.

Quantitative research is research that is “concerned with investigating things which we could observe and measure in some way”, Charoenruk (2009). It generates statistics using methods such as questionnaires and surveys. The aim of quantitative research is to describe aspects of people’s experiences or circumstances with a view to explaining the subject of study. (Cormack 1991 cited in Charoenruk 2009).

(Duffy 1985, cited in Charoenruk 2009) explains that statistical sampling relies on the sample used for the study, and general rules can be developed, that can then be generalised to the larger population. Duffy feels that an advantage of quantitative research is the fact of the findings having an increased likelihood of being generalizable, but that a disadvantage of this approach is that it is so time-consuming.

There are a number of strengths and weaknesses of quantitative research as described by Johnson (2007). Some of these include the following:

Strengths:

- Tests and validates already constructed theories about how and why phenomena occur.
- Can generalise research findings when the data is based on random samples of sufficient size.
- Useful for obtaining data that allows quantitative predictions to be made.
- Provides precise, quantitative, numerical data.
- The research results are relatively independent of the researcher (e.g. statistical significance).
- It is useful for studying large numbers of people.
Weaknesses:

- The researcher’s categories that are used might not reflect local constituencies’ understandings.
- The researcher’s theories that are used might not reflect local constituencies’ understandings.
- The researcher might miss out on phenomena occurring because of the focus on theory or hypothesis testing rather than on theory or hypothesis generation (called the confirmation bias).
- Knowledge produced might be too abstract and general for direct application to specific local situations, contexts and individuals.

Ethical considerations for both qualitative and quantitative research are the same as that of human rights i.e. safety and protection. They are usually achieved by receiving informed consent. Using this process can be problematic in quantitative research, but is almost impossible in qualitative research as it is unknown what direction the research may take. (Ramos 1989 cited in Charoenruk 2009). It is therefore important for the researcher to have a good understanding of the different methodologies and an in-depth knowledge. When choosing a preferred method for a specific research, it is not just a technical choice, but one which is ethical, ideological, moral and political. (Moccia 1988 cited in Charoenruk 2009).

In terms of combining the research methods that are to be used in the research, this approach is called triangulation. Triangulation is concerned with issues such as data, theory and methodology. (Murphy 1989 cited in Charoenruk 2009). It is also argued by Morse (1991 cited in Charoenruk 2009) that triangulation not only maximises the strengths and minimises the weaknesses of each approach, but it also strengthens the results of the research and contributes to the development of theory and knowledge. It is hoped that this research, by using the methods of triangulation, surveys, interviews with early leavers and the interview with a colleague in the Department of Education, will provide more in-depth information on the problem of early school leaving.

### 3.3.1 The Setting

The research for the survey was carried out using every post-primary school in four counties in Ireland, one county from each province randomly chosen. The interviews
were carried out using a sample of twelve people who left school early i.e. before completing the Junior Certificate or the Inter Certificate as it was formally known as. (see Appendix 3). An interview was also carried out with a staff member from the Department of Education and Science who deals with early school leaving.

3.3.2 The Participants

The sample of schools involved in the study was as follows: Co. Donegal – 28 schools, Co. Kildare – 27 schools, Co. Mayo – 28 schools and Co. Cork – 89 schools (both city and county). The total number of schools contacted to complete the survey was 172.

The 12 participants who are living in Co. Roscommon were interviewed. The staff member from the Department of Education and Science deals with preventative measures for early school leaving.

3.3.3 Other Contributors

Principal Teachers
Department of Education and Science
Senior Management of the Department of Education

3.4 Research Instruments

Data can be collected from a number of sources for research. This research adopts the approach of a case study to investigate the current numbers of early school leavers in Ireland and the different causes and factors which contributed to students making a decision. A case study covers the background, development, current conditions and the environmental interactions of one or more individuals or groups. It observes records and analyses the different stages. Bogdan and Biklen (1992:62) define a case study as “a detailed examination of one setting, or single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event”. As part of this case study, the following research instruments were used:

- Interviews (semi-structured).
- Survey
3.4.1 Interviews

Frey and Oishi (1995:01) define an interview as “*a purposeful conversation in which one person asks prepared questions (interviewer) and another answers them (respondent)*”. The reason for an interview in research is to gain information on a particular subject. Interviews can be categorised as structured, unstructured or semi-structured.

Structured interviews involve “*one person asking another person a list of predetermined questions about a carefully selected topic*”. (Covington 2008). This method has both advantages and disadvantages which are listed by Covington as follows:

*Advantages:*
1. It enables the researcher to examine the level of understanding a respondent has about a particular topic - usually in slightly more depth than with a postal questionnaire.
2. It can be used as a powerful form of formative assessment. That is, it can be used to explore how a respondent feels about a particular topic before using a second method (such as observation or in-depth interviewing) to gather a greater depth of information. Structured interviews can also be used to identify respondents whose views you may want to explore in more detail (through the use of focused interviews, for example).
3. All respondents are asked the same questions in the same way. This makes it easy to repeat (“replicate”) the interview. In other words, this type of research method is easy to standardise.
4. Provides a reliable source of quantitative data.
5. The researcher is able to contact large numbers of people quickly, easily and efficiently.

*Disadvantages*
1. Can be time consuming if sample group is very large (this is because the researcher or their representative needs to be present during the delivery of the structured interview).
2. The quality and usefulness of the information is highly dependent upon the quality of the questions asked. The interviewer cannot add or subtract questions.
3. A substantial amount of pre-planning is required.
4. The format of questionnaire design makes it difficult for the researcher to examine complex issues and opinions. Even where open-ended questions are used, the depth of answers the respondent can provide tend to be more-limited than with almost any other method.

5. There is limited scope for the respondent to answer questions in any detail or depth.

Unstructured interviews have been defined by Minichiello (1990) as “interviews in which neither the question nor the answer categories are predetermined. They rely on social interaction between the researcher and informant to elicit information”. Another definition of similar character is that of Patton (1990) where he defines unstructured interviews as “relying entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction, typically an interview that occurs as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork”. The following are the advantages and disadvantages of unstructured interviews according to the education forum in the United Kingdom (2000):

**Advantages:**

- Sensitive issues can be researched.
- Interviewee is put at ease and may open up more.
- Answers can be developed and explained further.
- Interviewer can ask further questions.
- Data has greater validity.

**Disadvantages:**

- Interviewer bias is more of a problem.
- Age, gender, ethnicity etc of interviewer may affect responses.
- Social desirability- interviewees want to present themselves in a certain way.
- Truth – some tell lies intentionally.
- Reliability may be questioned.
- Comparability is difficult with the qualitative data produced.

The type of interview chosen for this research was the semi-structured interview. This interview format was appropriate to the study as it allowed the interviewees to develop their answers to a certain degree and it was felt by the researcher that it would help to accumulate the necessary information in order to understand the complex subject area of early school leaving. The advantages and disadvantages of a semi-structured interview are listed below:
Advantages:

- Share many of the advantages of structured interviews.
- Plus interviewer can probe for more information.
- Adds depth and validity to research data.

Disadvantages:

- Loss of standardisation and comparability.
- Probes make each interview slightly different.
- More chance of interviewer bias than in structured interviews.

(The Education forum, 2000).

The researcher made initial contact with a number of early school leavers known to her, outlining the researchers study and seeking agreement as to their involvement in the study. A follow up phone call was made to each respondent to seek approval for the interview and to agree a time for each interview to take place. An MP3 player was used to record the interviews, as it was practical and had a good quality of sound. All interviewees were asked for their permission to allow the researcher to record the interview, no interviewees refused. An outline of the questions used in the semi structured interview format is in Appendix 1.

The interview which was held with the Department of Education and Science was a little more structured than the interviews with the early school leavers as the information given to the researcher is mainly facts and statistics. (see Appendix 6).

A key feature of qualitative interviewing is the integration of varied types of questions that can be used. The investigator used different types of questions to maximise the information needed for the research. The questions used were as follows:

1. **Open questions** – designed to encourage the interviewee to provide an extensive and meaningful answer. It allows for attitudes to be revealed and additional facts to be obtained. (Grummit, 1980).

2. **Probing questions** – this can be used to encourage interviewees to elaborate more on certain questions. Important when using these types of questions that the interviewer does not influence the answer provided.
3. Specific and closed questions – allows the interviewer to gather information on specific information or understanding on certain straightforward topics. The researcher avoided the use of leading or proposing questions thereby eliminating bias from the research.

3.4.2 Surveys

Ferber (1980) describes a survey as “a word most often used to describe a method of gathering information from a sample of individuals”. Surveys have a variety of purposes and can be conducted in many ways including by mail, by telephone or in person. Jeff Lazo (2006), an economist discusses the advantages and disadvantages of survey research methods. They are as follows:

Advantages:

• Efficient for collecting large amount of information.
• Statistical techniques to determine validity, reliability and statistical significance.
• Flexible to collect a wide range of information – attitudes, values, beliefs and past behaviours.
• Standardized – relatively free from several types of errors.
• Relatively easy to administer.
• Economy in data collection.

Disadvantages:

• Subjects motivation, memory and ability to respond.
• Not appropriate for studying complex social phenomena.
• Structured surveys, particularly those with closed ended questions, may have low validity when researching affective variables.
• Respondents usually self-selected.
• Participants may not answer honestly.

The survey as a research method was chosen because the data needed was a nationwide sample of schools, the range of study was geographically broad and therefore the research methods were restricted. A pilot study was done by asking the local school to complete the survey. This involved sending the survey to the
school and then checking to ensure that it was completed correctly. The pilot study allowed the researcher to change the structure of the survey if it was unclear in any way, and to correct any errors in the survey before sending it to 170 schools. The pilot study can be seen in Appendix 2. Once this was done, the survey questions and cover letter were sent to each school in the four counties that were chosen (see Appendix 4 and 5). The response from the schools was very slow, and the researcher had to look at other options to obtain the information that was needed. The examinations section of the Department of Education was approached and the information the researcher needed was given to her through a set of reports.

3.4.3 Analysis

It is important for some analysis to be done during the collection of data as it gives it direction. (Bogden and Biklen 1992:154). Research involves the identity, values and beliefs of the researcher and this plays a role in the analysis of qualitative data. Due to the delicate issue of the study of early school leavers and to best serve the investigators own objectives, qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study.

3.4.4 Reliability and Validity

When assessing the reliability and validity of data from secondary sources, it is important to compare the data to a number of other sources including texts and references from reputable books and sites on the internet (McCloughan, 2001). Reliability is defined by the Colorado State University (1993-2009) as “the extent to which an experiment, test or any measuring procedure yields the same result on repeated trials”. Once data is collected and evaluated, reliability is the consistency of the information. The Colorado State University (1993-2009) describes validity as “the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. While reliability is concerned with the accuracy of the actual measuring instrument or procedure, validity is concerned with the study’s success at measuring what the researchers set out to measure”.

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3.5 Data Sample and Limitations

This study identified 15 early school leavers for interview. Out of this, 12 early leavers were successfully interviewed, i.e. 80%. The face to face interview and subsequent analysis was very time consuming.

The survey was issued to 170 schools in four counties. A response was received from 19 schools, giving a response rate of approximately 11%. This was a very poor response rate but maybe issues such as the time of year and the current economic climate had an impact on the response rate from the schools. The survey was the most practical approach to obtaining this information from the schools as it was likely to be the most accurate. Because of the poor response rate from the survey the researcher contacted the Department of Education and Science and the examinations branch to see if the information that was needed could be issued to her through a report. The data needed was supplied by the examinations branch, therefore the study’s final data coverage through the survey was 100% and through the interview was 80%. This information can be seen in the following charts:
The data from the survey was based on a fairly representative sample as a county from each province was used. The data collected from the interviews included many different causes of early school leaving, but was limited to 12 early school leavers from 2 counties in Ireland. The data presented in this report provides a good indication of the number of early school leavers, the reasons for early leaving and shows that early school leaving still exists. However, given the data limitations, the
results cannot be taken as being completely accurate or representative of the entire country.

### 3.5.1 Researcher Bias

Mehra (2002) in a written report believes “a researcher’s personal beliefs and values are reflected not only in the choice of methodology and interpretation of findings, but also in the choice of a research topic”. In addition to this (Scheurich 1994 cited in Mehra 2002) remarks that a person’s race, gender, class, religion etc can influence, limit and interact with a person’s production of knowledge.

It is important for the researcher to set aside any biases and prejudices they have and aim to learn as much about their research topic as possible, question as much as they can, even if they have a substantial knowledge of the topic already.

### 3.5.2 Participant Bias

There is a danger that participants may act or answer questions in ways they believe the researcher is looking for. If this is the case the participant may not act in a natural way. This can be a problem when using interviews as a data collection method, therefore it is important for the researcher to be aware of this. Surveys can sometimes leave it difficult to detect who actually completed and responded to the questions. Although with the data needed in this research, it is likely to be accurate.

### 3.6 Summary

The researcher had concerns over the low response rate to the survey, as without this vital information it would have been difficult to continue with the research. Fortunately the data was available through another channel and received from this source. The interviews were very successful, a lot of emotion was displayed by the interviewees and subsequently a significant amount of information was accumulated for analysis.

It is important for the researcher to interact with the interviewees and make sense of the feelings and emotions shown throughout the interview.
“People and their interactions are more than a collection of objective, measurable facts; they are seen and interpreted through the researcher’s frame—that is, how she or he organises the details of an interaction, attributes meaning to them, and decides (consciously or unconsciously) what is important and what is of secondary importance or irrelevant” (Brown, 1996).

Part of qualitative research is what Mintzberg (1979) calls "detective work" the search for patterns and recurring themes. This emphasizes the exploratory nature of a researcher's initial inquiry: watching, waiting, listening and feeling. The data collection can still be systematic and focused, but the researcher remains alert to any actions and angles he/she may not have considered before.
Chapter 4

Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter describes the data that was gathered from the survey of the number of students who sat the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate over a number of years, and also describes the findings from the interview sessions with a number of early school leavers. The scope of this research was quite broad, but those who took part in the interviews revealed a number of issues in their responses which contributed significantly to the overall findings.

The primary purposes of this study were to find out if early school leaving remains a problem, to identify the reasons why students are leaving school early and finally to look at the policies, if any, the government have in place to help deal with the problem. In order to pursue the purposes of this study, the researcher firstly undertook a survey of a number of schools from a county in each province to identify if early school leaving was still a problem.

As mentioned previously in the methodology chapter a survey was sent to a number of schools in 4 counties, one from each province in Ireland. The response rate was very poor and therefore the researcher looked for another method of obtaining this data. The Department of Education were able to provide the data. Because of this the figures and data are almost 100% accurate. The researcher then held a number of interviews with early school leavers to receive first hand information on the reasons why each of them left school early. The interviews were carried out on a face-to-face basis with 12 different early school leavers. The researcher felt the data that would be collected from this method of interview would be truthful and accurate. The researcher also felt that body language of interviewees would to some degree confirm the accuracy of the data. The face-to-face interviews also identified the early school leavers awareness of government programmes, whether they used them or not, and if they were offered help or not from their school or government at the time of their decision to leave school.
Qualitative data was organised by the researcher and structured thematically. The raw data and results that were used and compiled for this chapter can be found in the Appendices. This section will address each issue from the research separately. The findings and results for each issue will be examined and discussed.

4.2 Response Rate

The first survey was issued to 172 schools in 4 counties, one county from each province. The reason for choosing one county from each province was to identify if early school leaving was a problem nationwide or just in one area specifically. 19 schools participated in the survey. From the four counties chosen, 9 were from Cork, 5 from Donegal, 3 from Kildare and 2 from Mayo. Ideally the survey was used as a research method to get as many schools as possible out of the 172 contacted, to give the number of students who sat both the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate for the years 1993-2008. Responses were posted back to the researcher but it was not possible to obtain results from so few responses.

4.3 Limitations of the Study

As mentioned earlier in chapter three (methodology), a number of constraints were encountered during the course of conducting this research. Firstly, 15 early school leavers were identified by the researcher and out of the 15, 12 were successfully interviewed. While the face to face interviews were very informative, they were lengthy and time consuming.

Secondly the survey which was issued to 172 schools was very costly, and proved to be almost worthless because of the poor response rate. As the response rate was so low, the researcher had to seek an alternative option in order to obtain the information originally sought in the survey. The researcher contacted the examinations branch through the Department of Education and Science and a report was issued to her after a number of weeks. This delayed the progress of the study by a number of weeks.
4.4 Results for Objective 1

Is early school leaving still a problem today as it was 10-15 years ago?

To achieve this objective, a survey was issued to 172 schools, in 4 counties in Ireland, one from each province. The researcher also contacted the Department of Education and Science by phone and requested the information needed. An email was then sent to a contact in the Department and the information that was needed was received a number of weeks later.

The survey included the number of students who sat both the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate for the years 1993 to 2008, a total of 16 years. In 1993, the total number of students who sat the Junior Certificate in the 4 counties surveyed was 14,939. In 2008, the total number of students who sat the Junior Certificate in the same 4 counties had reduced to 12,820. This was a drop in numbers of approximately 15% over the 1993 figures. In 1993, the total number of students who sat the Leaving Certificate in the 4 counties was 12,863. In 2008, the total number from these counties who sat the Leaving Certificate was 10,713. This constituted a reduction of 17% which indicates that a greater percentage of students left school before sitting the Leaving Certificate.

The key findings are highlighted below through different charts illustrating the number of students who sat both the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate over the chosen years. A summary of the main points highlighted in each chart is at the start of each bar chart.

The first four bar charts look at each of the four counties separately for both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. In each county the numbers sitting the exams each year is fairly static but the number of students that go on to sit the Leaving Certificate drops every time.
Bar chart 1 - Donegal:

Bar chart 2 - Kildare:
Bar chart 3 - Mayo:

Bar chart 4 - Cork:
The fifth bar chart below “4 counties surveyed 1993-2008” looks at the number of students who sat the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate in the 4 counties for the total number of years surveyed i.e. 1993-2008 a total of 16 years. In each county the numbers sitting the Leaving Certificate have decreased in comparison to the numbers who sat the Junior Certificate 2 years previous.

**Bar Chart 5:**

![Bar Chart 5](image)

Chart number 6 “Junior Cert 1993 & Leaving Cert 1995” which follows looks at the numbers of students who sat the Junior Certificate in 1993 and the numbers that went on and sat the Leaving Certificate in 1995. The same class of students who sat the Junior Certificate in 1993 would have sat the Leaving Certificate in 1995. The figures are compared, looking again to see if the figure has dropped, increased or stayed static. As shown in the chart the figures have dropped in each county except for Mayo, where there was an increase of approximately 1.5%.
Bar Chart 6:

Chart number 7 “Junior Cert 2006 & Leaving Cert 2008” looks at the numbers of students who sat the Junior Certificate in 2006 and the numbers who went on to sit the Leaving Certificate in 2008. As in 1993 and 1995 the numbers who went on to sit the Leaving Certificate in 2008 had significantly dropped in comparison to the numbers who sat the Junior Certificate in 2006.

Bar Chart 7:
4.5 Results for Objective 2

What are the reasons and causes identified that encourage students to leave school early?

There were a number of reasons and causes identified from the interviews that encouraged the interviewees to leave school early. There are a number of similar factors and these will be identified below under a number of headings.

Individual Factors:

- Lack of interest in general was a major factor that was identified as encouraging students to leave school early. Some students having more interest in sports or in getting a job made the decision to leave school early.
- Those who felt they were poor academically found they got bored easily, got into trouble with teachers and therefore decided to leave school and look for work.
- Other students didn’t like certain subjects, found them difficult and this lead them to the decision to leave school early.
- Some students decided to leave school because their friends were leaving and felt it was the “thing to do”.
- Relationships with teachers and parents were good for a number of students.
- A number of students felt they were troublemakers and rebellious at times.
- One student said “I don’t mind going to school, but it’s the studying I can’t handle”.

Family related factors:

- Lack of support from parents and no encouragement for students to stay in school and no motivation from parents was a common factor in the twelve interviews held.
- Some of the early school leavers interviewed felt that because their own parents had left school early, they did not try to stop their own children from leaving when they too decided to leave early.
- The relationship between parents and students was not good in some cases.
- Pressure from parents for student to leave school was a factor that was common in a number of cases studied.
• A sickness in the family – no options but to leave and look after siblings.
• Traveller family – tradition in family to leave school early.

School related factors:
• Pupil-teacher relationships for some were not good.
• Lack of support.
• No encouragement to stay at school when making the decision to leave.
• Suspension.

Demographic factors:
• If a number of students in the area were leaving school it encouraged others to leave also.
• Living in the countryside, farmwork was encouraged rather than schoolwork.
• The location of the nearest secondary school to small villages and country areas had an impact on decision making for some students.
4.6 Results for Objective 3

What government policies are in place to help deal with the problem of early school leaving?

4.6.1 Introduction

To achieve this objective, the researcher interviewed a staff member in the Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Education and Science, who deals with the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL). The following information was given to the interviewer by the staff member on the different agencies and programmes available.

4.6.2 The NEWB

- The NEWB was established in 2002 under the Education Welfare Act, 2000.
- Its statutory function is to ensure that every child receives an education by either attending school or receiving an education in some way.
- One of the key roles for the Board is to follow up on children who do not attend school on a regular basis.
- The Board is responsible for children who are being educated at home.
- The Education Welfare Act, 2000, raised the school leaving age to 16 or the completion of three years in senior cycle.
- It provides for young people aged between 16 and 18 who choose to leave school to take up employment.
- The schools play an important role in helping the NEWB achieve their aims.

4.6.3 SCP and HSCL

- The HSCL scheme is an important mainstream preventative strategy targeted at families of students who are at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of background characteristics which can sometimes affect pupil attainment and school retention.
• The HSCL scheme is concerned with establishing a partnership between the student’s parents and teachers in the interests of learning.

• The SCP is another preventative measure in place, which aims to have a positive impact on the levels of pupil retention in both primary and post primary schools.

4.6.4 The Department in general

• The Department has widened the range of curricula available to students by promoting the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA) in addition to the traditional Junior and Leaving Certificate curricula.

• In addition to the NEWB, there are currently in excess of 600 staff within the education sector working in various educational disadvantage programmes of which over 130 are additional posts allocated under DEIS.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss and analyse the results which are presented in the “Findings Chapter”, Chapter 4, in relation to the theories and research that has been highlighted in Chapter 2, the Literature Review chapter. The findings will be discussed under each of the research objectives as they are in the previous chapter. The majority of the schools surveyed, show that the numbers of students sitting their Leaving Certificate has dropped, when compared to the numbers who sat the Junior Certificate two years previously.

The discussion and analysis will firstly look at the numbers which have dropped, between Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. Secondly the researcher will examine the different reasons that encouraged early school leavers to come to their decision and lastly, the researcher will discuss what government policies are in place to help deal with the problem of early school leaving.

5.2 Analysis of Objective 1 –

Is early school leaving still a problem today as it was 10-15 years ago?

This study supports the findings of the 2007 ESRI School Leavers Survey Report, that early school leaving is still a problem. One of the findings of this report was “the percentage of early leavers remains relatively constant and gender differences in the educational attainment of males and females persist”. As previously mentioned the survey that issued to the four counties chosen had a poor response and the information was then sought through a different channel. This proved to be a time consuming task but was very beneficial to the overall findings.

Firstly, in 1993 the total number of students who sat the Junior Certificate in the 4 counties surveyed was 14,939. 15 years later the numbers who sat the Junior Certificate in the same 4 counties had dropped almost 15% to 12,820. The numbers who sat the
Leaving Certificate in 1993 in the same 4 counties was 12,863 and 15 years later the numbers sitting the Leaving Certificate had dropped to 10,713, an approximate drop of 17%. These figures clearly show that students are leaving school early before completing their Leaving Certificate. It must be taken into account that a small number of students go on to do transition year after the Junior Certificate, but while a number of students would go into transition year another group would be finished that year and would be re-entering the Leaving Certificate programme. The figures should therefore balance out.

The first four bar charts show figures for each county separately, showing the number of students who sat both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate for each of the 15 years. Starting with Bar chart 1 for Donegal, the number of students who sat the Junior Certificate in 1993 was 2427. This number was down to 2084 in 2008. The Leaving Certificate figures for Donegal were 2028 in 1993 and down to 1838 in 2008. The figures are down for both Junior and Leaving Certificate classes in Donegal indicating that students are dropping out somewhere between sitting their Junior Certificate and before they complete the Leaving Certificate examinations. Bar chart 2 shows the figures for Kildare county. The Junior Certificate figures in 1993 were 2405 and the figures for 2008 had increased to 2601. The Leaving Certificate figures for Kildare were 2097 in 1993 and decreased to 2041 in 2008. While the figures for students completing the Junior Certificate have increased in Kildare over the 15 years, the numbers continuing to sit the Leaving Certificate have dropped, with Donegal sharing similar trends. Again the indication of a problem with early school leavers is given here. Bar chart 3 – Mayo, 1993 figures for Junior Certificate were 2163 and decreased to 1789 in 2008. The Leaving Certificate figures were also down from 2055 in 1993 to 1537 in 2008. Mayo, as with Kildare and Donegal figures have dropped over the number of years studied. Bar chart 4 shows the figures for the county of Cork and as with the majority of other counties surveyed, the Junior Certificate figures are down from 7944 to 6346 and again for the Leaving Certificate from 6683 in 1993 to 5297 in 2008.

All of the above figures have dropped with the exception of the Junior Certificate figures in Kildare where there was an increase in population from 1993 to 2008. These results indicate that there is still a problem with early school leaving between the Junior Certificate programme and the Leaving certificate programme. The numbers sitting the
exams are reducing over the years, but the numbers who sit the Junior Certificate, who are not completing the Leaving Certificate are a worrying statistic.

The fifth bar chart shows the total number of students who sat both the Junior and Leaving Certificate in each of the 4 counties for the 16 years that was studied in the survey. Figures for the Leaving Certificate in each county have dropped, when compared to the figures that sat the Junior Certificate 2 years previously. Chart number 6 looks at the number of students who sat the Junior Certificate in 1993 and then looks at the numbers who went on and sat the Leaving Certificate in 1995. This would be the same class of students. The figures as seen in the chart show that in each county except Mayo, there is a drop in numbers again. Mayo had an increase in its numbers by a very small percentage i.e.1.5%. Overall there was a drop of approximately 6%.

As in Chart 6, chart number 7 is comparing the number of students that sat the Junior Certificate examinations and how many actually went on and sat the Leaving Certificate 2 years later. This chart looks at those who sat the Junior Certificate in 2006 and went on to sit the Leaving Certificate in 2008. As in 1993-1995, the figures have dropped significantly for each county with an overall percentage drop of approximately 17%. The continuous drop in the figures sitting the Leaving Certificate from the numbers that sat the Junior Certificate 2 years previously is supporting Boldt’s (1998) statement, that almost 14% of students are leaving school every year with the Junior Certificate as their only qualification.

5.3 Analysis of Objective 2 –
What are the reasons and causes identified that encourage students to leave school early?

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2 the literature review, there are many reasons and causes that encourage students to leave school early. Many of these reasons and causes have been discussed in the literature review under a number of headings, and the findings from the interviews have reiterated a number of these themes. As in the findings chapter, the researcher will analyse the reasons and causes under the same headings.
**Individual factors:**

- A broad theme which emerged from the findings was a lack of interest in general. Many students that were interviewed explained that there was no single factor that lead them to their decision to leave school early but an overall feeling of no interest in school or study. Some students told the researcher that the lack of interest was mainly from an academic perspective, because they enjoyed socializing with their friends at school and taking part in extra curricular activities.

- Some students who felt they were weak academically, got bored in class, found themselves getting into trouble with teachers and decided that they would be better off if they left school and got themselves a job. These findings concur with Rumberger’s (1987) statement in Chapter 2 that it is known that poor academic achievement determined by test results and grades received in certain subjects is associated with early school leaving. Students who did not like certain subjects and found them difficult, felt they were poor academically and lost interest very easily.

- Another reason for students leaving school early that was established in the interviews was that certain students felt it was the “thing to do” because some of their friends had decided to leave. Some students followed the decision of their peers only because they felt it was the right thing to do, and did not want to be any different to that of their friends.

- A number of students, described their relationships with parents and teachers as poor, and felt they could not open up to them or even talk about their decision to leave school early. Research in the U.S (State University.com, 2008) identified in the Literature Review, found that students who attend schools and experience an environment which lacks support from parents and teachers appear to have higher drop out rates. Likewise the research found that an environment with care and support from both the student and teachers was proven to be a major factor in the student’s decision to remain in school until they had completed their qualifications.

**Family related factors:**

- Lack of support from parents was a common factor in the twelve interviews held. Students found that their parents did not support them when they were finding things hard at school and did not encourage them to stay at school when
making their decision to leave early. This problem has already been discussed under individual factors, as it falls under both individual and family related factors. Research has shown that an environment that lacks support and poor relations from all involved can have a serious effect on the decision that is being made.

- Some students felt that their parents did not try to stop them leaving school early because they themselves had left school at an early age. Again if there is no support or motivation from parents for their child to do well at school, this can increase the chances of the child leaving school early and without any qualifications.

- In one student’s case, a sickness in the family was the cause of her leaving school early. One of her parents got ill, and she had no option but to leave school and look after her siblings. This was not identified as a common reason for leaving school.

- Pressure from parents for students to leave school early was a distinguishing factor in the decision making for a number of students interviewed. It was especially evident for traveller students, where the tradition in the family was always to leave school early, especially around the transition from primary to post primary level. DES (2006) highlights the progress in Traveller Education where 100% of travellers now transfer from primary to post primary. It is evident though that a high percentage of traveller students still do not complete post primary examinations, both Junior and Leaving Certificate.

**School related factors:**

- Lack of support and advice from teachers and mentors towards students needs can encourage a student to decide if they will leave school early or not. The same applies here under school related factors as with the individual and family related factors. Lack of support plays a decisive role in determining whether certain students will continue to attend school or leave school early.

- Suspension from school involves the student staying at home and this can sometimes give students the desire to continue this and not return to school at all.

- The relationship between the student and teacher can have an effect on the student’s decision to stay at school or to leave. If relationships are good and
teachers encourage the student, there is more of a chance that the student may continue to attend school.

**Demographic factors:**

- Peer pressure can sometimes force people to make decisions without giving themselves time to think about it and without looking at the consequences of their decision. In one student’s case when interviewed, it was explained that because a number of students in their neighbourhood were leaving early, he felt it was necessary to do the same. He felt he would get a job once he left school but didn’t really know what he wanted to do and didn’t speak to anyone about his decision.

- In some cases, students from a farming background are encouraged to help with all the farm work. It is tradition for some of the sons to take over the work of the land and the ownership and in a number of cases; they leave school early to do this.

- A number of years ago, the location of the nearest secondary school had an impact on students who lived in small villages and country areas. The nearest secondary school for some students may have been 5-10 miles from their homes. A number of them had no transport unless they walked or cycled and therefore chose the option not to attend and instead to go and find a job. This is not a significant problem now, as transport has improved, school transport is available and also there are a lot more secondary schools in each county than previous years.

**5.4 Analysis of Objective 3 –**

*What government policies are in place to help deal with the problem of early school leaving?*

**5.4.1 The NEWB**

- The statutory function of the NEWB is to ensure that every child receives an education either by attending school or receiving an education in some other way. The Act provides a framework to promote regular school attendance and to tackle the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving. The Board is
responsible for children who are being educated at home and also for young people aged 16-18 who leave school early to go working.

- The NEWB now provide a service from 31 office locations nationwide. One of the NEWB’s aims is to provide a service to the most disadvantaged areas and most at-risk groups. 5 regional teams have been established in Dublin, Leinster North, Leinster South, Munster and West/North West.

- The schools have a responsibility under the Act to maintain attendance records and have an obligation to report to the NEWB when:
  - a student has reached 20 days absence cumulatively
  - a Principal is concerned about a student's attendance
  - the Board of Management decides to expel a student
  - a student has been suspended for 6 days or more cumulatively
  - a student's name is to be removed from the school register for whatever reason.

- When reporting to the NEWB, the schools are required to include the reason for the absence so that the EWOs are in a position to decide on the most appropriate action to take, to protect a child’s educational welfare. The EWOs work in many communities throughout the country working with and supporting parents, guardians and children who are experiencing any difficulty with their attendance at school and their education.

- The NEWB held their first research conference in 2008, in the hope of developing guidelines to schools on school attendance strategies. Those who attended the conference which included educators, researchers, policy makers and representatives of the NEWB, came together to explore issues around school attendance. The theme of the conference was built on what schools can do and what support they need to develop attendance policies and strategies based on best practice both nationally and internationally. The main aim of the conference was to provide an understanding of the problem of absenteeism and to then start exploring what schools can do to address it.
5.4.2 SCP & HSCL

- In October 2006 under DEIS, the new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion 80 additional posts were allocated in order to extend the HSCL services to all 338 urban/town primary and 203 second level schools participating in DEIS that did not previously have a HSCL service. In addition to the 370 local HSCL co-ordinators already in place. In total some 652 schools were in receipt of a HSCL service.

- In the summer of 2008 the Department undertook a full review of HSCL clustering arrangements in all schools participating in the scheme to ensure that all schools had a level of service appropriate to both the size of the school as well as to its relative level of disadvantage. Any changes made in the HSCL clustering arrangements as a result of this review took place from 1 September 2008.

- The aims of the HSCL scheme are:
  - To maximise active involvement of children in the learning process
  - To promote the educational interests of children by having active cooperation between the parents, school and community agencies that are relevant.
  - To raise awareness in parents of their own potential to help with their child’s educational progress and to help them develop skills to do this. (DES, 2009).

- HSCL focuses directly on the salient adults in children’s educational lives and works to involve parents in their children’s education which is a crucial element in convincing young people of how valuable their education is. HSCL coordinators are assigned on a full time or shared basis between schools and are deployed to do full time home school community liaison duties.

- There was €31 million allocated to the SCP and in the region of €32 million allocated to HSCL for 2009. Approximately 224 post primary schools and 468 primary schools now participate in the SCP countrywide. The Management Committees of SCP engage on a consultative and planning process with the school staff, parents and local representatives of relevant statutory and voluntary agencies in the development of annual retention plans.
The main aims of the SCP scheme are:
- To retain students in the formal education system to continue and complete the Senior Cycle or equivalent.
- To improve the quality of participation in the educational process of targeted children and young people.
- To get all relevant local stakeholders to work together to try and tackle early school leaving. These include parents, schools and the community.
- To give support to primary and post primary schools to help with the prevention of educational disadvantage.
- To encourage those who have left school to return. (DES, 2009).

5.4.3 The Department in general

- From 1 September 2009 the Department has expanded the National Educational Welfare Board to include responsibility for HSCL and the School Completion Programme as well as Visiting Teacher Service for Traveller pupils. The main objective of this integration plan is to allow for greater efficiencies in the provision of services and to provide a new strategic direction for these services. Under its expanded role, the Board will bring together the individual services under one common management team. The Board will be responsible for the development of a single strategic approach, reflecting equally the nature and strengths of each of the services and provide for more focused service delivery at local, regional and national levels. This integrated approach is part of the Government's overall approach to Transforming Public Services announced in November 2008.

- Bringing together these significant resources, under a common management structure will also deliver some immediate benefits through improved targeting and appropriate responses for children at risk of early school leaving or poor attendance, reduction or elimination of any overlap that may currently exist and strengthening the Board to deliver upon its objectives.

- As a first step, the National Coordination Teams will work with the management team of the NEWB providing for this new strategic direction. Further
developments on the integration of these services will be carried out in consultation with all the relevant parties. The programmes will in the future, report to, and be directed by one single management structure comprising the SCP and HSCL national coordination teams and NEWB management.

- As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Department offer alternative programmes to those who do not complete the Junior and Leaving Certificate Programme: The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) is a national programme which aims to provide a curriculum for young people who may have left school, one which is usually more suitable to their needs.

- The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) was introduced in 1994 to combine the academic side of the Leaving Certificate with a focus on self directed learning and entrepreneurship. It’s a two-year programme that aims to cater for students with diverse needs in a rapidly changing environment.

- The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA) is administered by the State Examinations Commission. As with the LCVP, it is a two-year programme and is designed to help those with needs which are not supported by the other Leaving Certificate Programmes, to prepare students for their future.

- Youthreach is a programme directed at early school leavers aged between 15 and 20 who are unemployed. It focuses on the development of each individual and provides a structured learning environment. It places an emphasis on achievement and offers assessment and certification that is appropriate for the individual.

- The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is a scheme administered by the Department of Social and Family Affairs for people who are unemployed, lone parents and people with disabilities, who are in receipt of certain payments from the Department of Social and Family Affairs. It is payable to a person who wishes to do a second or third level course of education.

- VTOS is the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme which offers structured learning in an adult setting to people who are unemployed. It is funded by the
Department of Education and Science under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 and has over 100 locations in the country.
Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This research discussed and examined the problem of early school leaving in Ireland. It addressed the causes of early leaving, factors associated with early leaving, the outcomes and also the preventative measures that are currently in place. The findings revealed that no one factor associated with early school leaving was the cause of any individual to drop out of school early; the reasons were not one dimensional but multifactorial.

The solution to the problem of early leaving in Ireland will require an inclusive range of policies, direction and administration which can best be achieved through cross cutting measures and the interaction of policy makers, educationalists, academics, sociologists and researchers.

6.2 Review of Investigation

This investigation on early school leaving set out to explore and analyse the problems associated with early leaving. On approaching the research, the researcher identified areas of interest such as the causes, factors and outcomes associated with it, and also the preventative measures in place at present. The relevant literature was reviewed and from this, the researcher selected the most appropriate research methods to achieve a comprehensive insight on the subject in question.

6.3 Research Outcomes

Many of the outcomes of this research coincide with research and literature already completed on early school leaving. However the findings of the research carried out by interviewing individual early leavers suggests that lack of support and encouragement both from school and home were the main factors contributing to their decisions to leave school.
6.4 Conclusions

Early school leaving can be regarded as a process rather than an actual event. Most of the literature documents the risk factors associated with leaving school early. It is therefore important to dwell on preventative factors which if implemented would increase participation rates and consequently reduce the incidence of school leaving before a recognised qualification can be achieved.

The problem of early school leaving in Ireland continues, as the latest figures show 14% of students in 2007 left school before completing the Leaving Certificate. This percentage is significantly high when compared to other OECD countries where the percentage is as low as 3% in some countries. (OECD, 2007).

A number of policy initiatives have been initiated and implemented to address early school leaving. The Department of Education has decided to expand the remit of the NEWB to include responsibility for HSCL, SCP and the Visiting Teacher Service. By doing this, the Department hope to achieve greater efficiencies in the provision of their services and a new strategic direction for all of their services.

There are a number of factors which influence young people to cease their education at an early date. The decision to leave school early may not be dependant on just one variable. Such a decision may be multi-factorial.

Pre-school education is an important stage in a child’s life as it sets the foundations for their development, physically, socially and emotionally. The benefits of pre-school education last through a child’s years at school and into their adult life and this has been proven through much research.

Primary Education in Ireland focuses on providing children with learning opportunities. A priority of the government is to focus on the needs of schools, especially in disadvantaged areas and to provide what is needed especially for those with special needs.

The curriculum for second level education is geared towards academic achievement. While this suits a significant percentage of school children, it militates against those who may have abilities which are not academic in nature e.g. manual or technical skills.
In some European countries for e.g. Austria, there is a two-tier educational system at second level. School going children at age 15 or 16 are screened as to their future paths in the educational system. Those who do not wish to follow an academic career pursue an apprenticeship route. The success of this form of education is dependent on the involvement of employers throughout the country and it is strictly monitored. The success of this system is obvious given that Austria has the lowest youth unemployment rate in Europe.

Statistics on educational attainment by gender suggest that in the main girls have higher success rates than boys. This led to psychological tests for Leaving Certificate students aspiring to a career in medicine.

6.5 Recommendations

- Mainstream pre-school education should be part of the educational system. The implementation of this should commence in disadvantaged areas.

- Community based programmes should be introduced for parents, to assist them in understanding and appreciating the importance of education. The programmes would also provide them with the necessary skills to help children with their homework.

- Schools could be used as the focus for the provision of after school activities. Such an initiative would ensure that all children, regardless of socio economic background, would participate in sport or other extra curricular activities. This could be achieved through inter-organisational programmes involving voluntary and statutory agencies at local level. An arrangement of this type would particularly support pupils and students from more disadvantaged areas where the incidence of early school leaving is highest.

- Community based homework clubs should be set up and run by voluntary organisations and funded by central funds. These could be run through family resource centres or other community based initiatives.
• Classroom supports are needed where there are literacy and numeracy problems. No child should leave primary school illiterate or innumeracy.

• It is recommended that the Austrian system of education be examined and analysed with a view to giving consideration to the screening of school going children after the Junior Certificate and the provision of an apprenticeship based system for those who do not wish to pursue an academic career.

• The problem of perceived under attainment by boys should be addressed at an early stage in the school curriculum.

• A system of risk assessment should be introduced which would profile all students entering primary and secondary schools. This would identify factors in the life of a student which would increase the likelihood of early school leaving and could be used to apply preventative methods at the earliest possible date.

• Arising from the interviews of the early school leavers, it would seem appropriate to obtain the views of people who have left school before their Leaving Certificate to inform the design and delivery of prevention programmes.


Ireland, Department of Education and Science (2005), *Briefing.*

Ireland, Department of Education and Science (2006), Social Inclusion Unit Briefing.


Ireland, Department of Education and Science (2009), Social Inclusion Unit Briefing 2009.


An article published in *Curriculum Support, Science*, 2001 Vol. 6 No. 3. Available:  


Appendix 1

Interview Questions
Research for Master’s Degree in Digital Media in Education

Sharon Conroy

Name: ___________________
Age when left school: ________________
Address at time of leaving school e.g. town, village, city centre etc: ________________
Number of children in family i.e. your siblings: ___________

Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?

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2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects? Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?

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3. How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?

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4. How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

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5. (A) Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?

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5. (B) If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?
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6. How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?
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7. What have you been doing since you left school?
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8. (A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?
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8. (B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?

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9. Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?

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10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?

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11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?

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12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?

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13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?

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14. Any other comments.....

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Appendix 2

Letter that issued to schools
Re: Request for Data for Research Purposes

Dear Sir/Madam

I am presently undertaking research as part of my studies for a Masters Degree in Digital Media for Education through the University of Limerick. The research involves an analysis of the causes of early school leaving and the impact of departmental programmes on prevention.

The approach to this study will entail examining research already undertaken on the different causes of early school leaving, the preventative measures that have more recently been employed and the effectiveness of current methodologies being carried out by the Department of Education and Science in conjunction with schools.

I intend to carry out an analysis of the number of students who did not continue in education after sitting the Junior Certificate examination for the period 1988 to 2008.

I would be most grateful, therefore, if you would complete the attached sheet, as soon as possible and return to me in the envelope provided.

If there has been a change in the structure of the school e.g. schools have been amalgamated in your area, can you please provide the data requested in relation to these schools.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and effort in supporting me in this very worthwhile project.

Yours sincerely,

Sharon Conroy
Appendix 3

Pilot Study (for survey)
Research for Master’s Degree in Digital Media in Education

Sharon Conroy

NAME OF SCHOOL: _________________________________________________


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**Number of students who completed the Leaving Certificate from 1988 to 2008.**
[Name and address of school]

Re: Request for Data for Research Purposes

Dear Sir/Madam

I am currently undertaking research as part of my studies for a Masters Degree in Digital Media for Education through the University of Limerick. The research involves an analysis of the causes of early school leaving and the impact of departmental programmes on prevention.

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I intend to carry out an analysis of the number of students who did not continue in education after sitting the Junior Certificate examination for the period 1988 to 2008.

I would be grateful, therefore, if you would complete the attached sheet, as soon as possible and return to me in the envelope provided.

If there has been a change in the structure of the school e.g. schools have been amalgamated in your area, can you please provide the data requested in relation to these schools.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for your time in supporting me in this very worthwhile project.

Yours sincerely,

Sharon Conroy.
Appendix 4

Results from Interviews
Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?

   My parents told me I could leave whenever I wanted, all my brothers and sisters had finished school after primary school level, I was the only one who started secondary school. It was the normal thing to do for traveller children – to leave after primary.

2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects?

   Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?
I found it very hard in secondary school, didn’t really have any friends. My cousin started secondary school with me, but she left after a few months in 1st year. I started the 2nd year but then left. I found the subjects difficult and found it lonely.

3. How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?

My parents wanted me to leave school, but I wanted to continue. The teachers were nice to me like and let me do lots of things.

4. How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

My parents were delighted because they wanted me to get married as soon as it was possible. Don’t really know how the teachers felt.

5. (A) Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?

No.

5. (B) If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?

My parents never encouraged me to stay at school. I think they should have at least tried to help me do what I wanted. The teachers never said nothing to me
when I left. Even when I missed days they never said nothing but gave out to other students for not being in.

6. **How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?**

I thought about it for a while but didn’t want to give in. Eventually I did, after a month or two in 2nd year.

7. **What have you been doing since you left school?**

I didn’t do anything for a year or two, then I got married and I have 3 children now, at 19 years of age.

8. **(A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?**

Not now anyways, I have 3 children. Maybe sometime in the future, when my children are at school as well. I want my children to be able to read and write and hopefully get a good job when they grow up.

8. **(B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?**

I would love to do my Leaving Certificate but think its probably too late now!

9. **Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?**

Well if you have no education, you won’t get a job so it will definitely affect any earning levels.
10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?

   No, they were delighted I left. I hope it doesn’t affect my own kids though, I want them to go to secondary school and I will need to try and help them if they do. I hope I will be able to help them, even though I didn’t continue myself.

11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?

   No, I should have continued at school, when it’s what I really wanted.

12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?

   I suppose most children are encouraged to continue in school, probably not traveller children as much. I think the Department of Education is really trying to help all children now so that’s good.

13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?

   I would say stay at school if you can at all. Life is hard with no education so the more education you have the easier it will be.

14. Any other comments.....

   Thanks for asking me to do this.
Research for Master’s Degree in Digital Media in Education

Sharon Conroy

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Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?

I wasn’t very academic, got bored easily. I just wanted to get out and get a job so I could buy a car.

2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects? Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?
I didn’t have much interest in any subjects really, except for woodwork and metal work, where I could make things. I didn’t like the written work though. I had a good relationship with most of my classmates.

3. How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?

I got given out to a lot by teachers for not listening in class, talking to others and not having my homework done every day. I fought with my Mum sometimes too, I always wanted to watch t.v or go out when she wanted me to do my homework or study.

4. How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

Mum wasn’t pleased at all, and wanted me to try and make an effort with study etc. so I could do the Leaving Certificate. I didn’t really discuss it with the teachers.

5. (A) Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?

Not that I can remember. My Mum would have liked me to stay at school, but in the end she didn’t bother fighting with me about it. My Dad was living in England, Mum thought I would leave and go over there, I think that is why she was trying to keep me at school. She told me if I got a job at home I could then leave school.
5. (B) If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?

The teachers probably should have done more to try and keep me at school, but I guess it's hard when a student is rebellious like me!

6. How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?

As soon as I turned 16, I left school. I was just waiting till I was the legal age so I could leave.

7. What have you been doing since you left school?

I worked for a while in a local petrol station and then I joined the army. I've been working in the Lebanon for the last 6 months, but I'm based back at home for the moment again.

8. (A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?

No, I'm happy with what I'm doing.

8. (B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?

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9. Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?
Yes, I suppose the more education you have, the more chances and opportunities you will have in life. I was lucky to get into the army when I did, even though it’s hard earned money!

10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?

My Mum was disappointed that I didn’t stay at school and do my Leaving Cert. My younger brother wanted to leave before he did his Leaving Cert, but eventually I persuaded him not to leave. My decision to leave early was influential on his decision to leave.

11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?

No, I should have stayed at school, got my Leaving Cert and at least then I would have had a choice in what I could do after. I do like the army, but don’t see myself staying in it long term.

12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?

I’m sure things have improved by now, I hope the schools show more of an interest in students now than they did when I was there.

13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?
My advice would be to stay at school and get as much education as you can. There are very few jobs available now, so the more education you have, the better chance you will have of getting a job.

14. Any other comments.....

\
Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?

   I was always in trouble for turning up to class late and not having my homework done etc. I had no interest in learning what so ever, and whatever I did in primary was all I did. Once I hit secondary, I was forever being given out to and suspended a few times so I decided I had enough!

2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects?

   Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?
I wasn’t interested in learning. I wasn’t too bad in primary but once I started secondary I didn’t care at all. I didn’t mind going to school, it was just the studying I couldn’t handle.

3. **How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?**

My parents told me to stop causing trouble at school because I had to go regardless of whether I wanted to or not.

4. **How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?**

In the end I think they were relieved, because they were called into the school so many times with me being suspended on a few occasions.

5. (A) **Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?**

The teachers were delighted to hear I was leaving school. Mam and Dad were disappointed but realised it was easier just to let me finish.

5. (B) **If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?**

I think when the teachers suspended me, it was easier for them because I’d be missing for a while and they wouldn’t have to deal with me disrupting the class. I think they should have punished me differently and maybe I might not have
got the taste of being out of school, which then led me to the decision to leave school.

6. **How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?**

   I was told at the time that I must complete the Junior Cert, so I did that and I never went back.

7. **What have you been doing since you left school?**

   I’ve just been working with a builder for the last few years as a labourer.

8. **(A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?**

   Up to recently I would never have even thought about going back to do something, but with the building trade gone so quiet in the last few months, I’ve been thinking about doing some kind of a course.

8. **(B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?**

   I really don’t know, maybe a management course, or maybe I might do a FÁS course and try and get a trade out of that. The only problem with doing a FÁS course is, it will be hard to get a sponsor, and put in the hours of work.

9. **Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?**
Yes definitely. If I was educated or had a trade, I could apply for many jobs. As I am now, I’ve only 3 days work. There is no point in applying for most jobs because I don’t have a Leaving Certificate never mind the degrees they are looking for.

10. **Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?**

I was never really close to my parents, I would never sit down and talk to them about things. Maybe if I had, things would have turned out differently. I moved out of home when I was finished school as well, which probably effected my relationship with my parents also.

11. **In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?**

I thought it was a great idea at the time, but looking back now it definitely was not the right decision. I really should have tried to pass my Leaving Cert at least, even if I never went on to college, I would have had that much.

12. **Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?**

Ya, my youngest brother wanted to leave school early, but as far as I know the Department intervened and convinced him to stay. He was provided with extra help after school and did really well in his Leaving Cert.
13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?

Try and stay at school. The Leaving Cert is so important, and it’s a tough life if you don’t have it.

14. Any other comments.....

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Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?

My mum got seriously ill when I was 15 years old. I was the eldest in the family so I felt it was my duty to leave school and help look after all of my brothers and sisters. Dad had to look after the farm and my brothers helped with the farm work every evening and at weekends, but someone needed to help in the house with the cooking, cleaning etc. My younger siblings, the youngest being 3 years of age, really needed a lot of looking after. To be honest I thought it was just going to be a temporary thing at the time.
2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects?

Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?

I didn’t have any great difficulty with subjects at the time, I didn’t like French much, but had an interest in most other subjects. I had a lot of friends, but when my Mum got ill, I suppose I didn’t fully understand how serious it was, and I thought it was brilliant that I could stay at home and help out there. The idea of no homework and study was great at the time!

3. How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?

Relationships were good both with parents and teachers. The principal knew my Dad quite well, and sent some work home to me, so I wouldn’t fall behind too much. After 2 months had passed, my Mum died and my work load in the house increased so I no longer had time to do any school work.

4. How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

My parents were apologetic first. Mum was always apologising and blaming herself. She worried that I would fall behind too much and would not catch up. I convinced her at the time, that I was doing all the extra work the principal had sent home to me, even though I rarely got a chance to even look at it. Mum believed me and relaxed a little when she thought I was going to be able to sit my exams that June, at the same time as my friends. The teachers were disappointed to hear I was going to be missing school for a number of weeks,
but felt I would catch up once it was only on a short term basis. My Irish, English and Maths teachers sent work home to me through the principal every week, but this was discontinued as I was unable to find the time for it.

5. (A) Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?

The teachers at my school did question the situation as to whether there was a real need for me to be off school, but they were told it was only a short term arrangement, until my Mum got a little stronger, and then once she was able to look after my youngest sister, I could return to school. Unfortunately this was not the case, my mother’s condition worsened and she died a number of weeks later.

5. (B) If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?

6. How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?

In my case, I didn’t really have time to make a choice, the decision was made for me, and of course it was thought to be a short term arrangement at the time.

7. What have you been doing since you left school?

After leaving school, I worked at home for 4 years full time, I spent my days cooking, cleaning and washing. I walked to the school to collect my younger
brothers and sisters and helped them with homework and study. As they got older, I started working part time in the local grocery store, working mornings only and spent the afternoons and evening helping out at home.

8. (A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?

3 years ago, I decided I would like to complete my exams. I decided to do 6 subjects and sit my Leaving Cert. I went to the local school for 2 of the subjects and got grinds and help from friends in the other 4. I sat my Leaving Cert the following June and received 4 honours and 2 passes. I was absolutely delighted with myself and I am now about to finish my last year in college where I am doing a course in Business and Accounting.

8. (B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?

Now that I have completed my Leaving Cert and started college, I feel I can do anything! I would love to complete the degree and maybe go on to do a masters or something. I’m not sure yet!

9. Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?

I suppose because I’m a few years behind my peers, then yes my earnings haven’t really started yet, but hopefully now that I’m in college, I will get a good job in a couple of years.

10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?
My Dad felt responsible and guilty I suppose for taking me out of school when Mum was ill, but I guess I’m trying to take that guilt off him by showing him that I can still achieve what I want, even if it is a few years later than I thought it would be.

11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?

Yes, my family needed me at the time I left school. My Mum needed me and needed to be reassured that I could look after everyone. I also feel going back to school when I did was the right decision for me also.

12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?

I suppose schools and teachers especially try to encourage people to stay at school and continue in education wherever possible. I am only aware of one or two departmental programmes that are available to help retain students at school.

13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?

Well I suppose it would all depend on their circumstances but I would always encourage people to complete their education and achieve as much as possible. It is not easy to go back and do it in later life, and some people may not get the chance or the opportunities that I got.
14. Any other comments.....
Research for Master’s Degree in Digital Media in Education

Sharon Conroy

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Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?

   I went to an all girls school and most of the girls there left early. It never really occurred to me to stay on at school.

2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects?

   Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?

   I found Maths and Science difficult. I got on fine with my classmates.
3. How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?

Grand.

4. How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

Nobody said anything to me, it was like as if it was just expected.

5. (A) Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?

No.

5. (B) If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?

Thinking back on it, I’m surprised my parents didn’t talk about it to me and maybe have encouraged me to go on a little further. The school should have tried to keep more students in the school and complete their education.

6. How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?

I just did what nearly everyone else in the class was doing, after our 3rd year in secondary school we were all going off to try and get a job.

7. What have you being doing since you left school?
I got a job in an office with an insurance broker where I worked till I got married at 21. After my first child, I had to give up work.

8. (A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?

I returned to work part time after having my third child. I decided to do a management course by distance learning.

8. (B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?

I have completed the management course, and I am now working full time as a manager in a nearby Tesco store.

9. Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?

The less educated you are, the less job opportunities you will have, so yes I’m sure it effected my earning levels. I was fortunate enough to be able to go back and do a management course so I could better myself.

10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?

Not really, my younger sisters and brother all continued at school and completed their Leaving Cert. They have all done quite well for themselves.

11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?

Yes, it was the right decision at the time.
12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?

I would imagine very few students leave school early nowadays? Students are encouraged to stay in school and go on to college these days, by schools, parents and the Department.

13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?

Make sure its really what you want and that your doing it for the right reasons. If your having difficulty with certain subjects get some help!

14. Any other comments.....

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Research for Master’s Degree in Digital Media in Education

Sharon Conroy

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Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?

   Pressure from my parents to leave school and to work on the farm and land at home.

2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects?

   Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?

   I enjoyed school, was not the most intelligent in the class but got on well at the same time.
3. How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?

My relationship with teachers and parents were fine.

4. How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

My parents were delighted as it was what they wanted. Both of my older brothers had left school early, they had worked at home, but were now married and had their own farms and families to look after.

5. (A) Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?

No teacher tried to keep me at school or my parents.

5. (B) If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?

I thought my parents could have encouraged me to stay at school and work on the farm in the evenings and at the weekends. The school should have shown some concern at the time of my leaving also.

6. How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?

I finished the Inter cert and that summer I decided with much encouragement from my parents that I wasn’t going to go back to school.
7. What have you been doing since you left school?
   
   I’ve been working on the farm with my Dad since, we have quite a number of cattle and sheep so I’m kept very busy all of the time. Also my Dad doesn’t do as much work now as he used to with the farm.

8. (A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?
   
   No, not at the moment.

8. (B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?

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9. Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?
   
   It would have under different circumstances, but I’m lucky the farm is going quite well and I’ve built my house on our own land. We also sold land at the right time.

10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?
    
    I will always be conscious of the fact that my parents did not encourage me or really give me a choice to stay on at school if I wanted to.

11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?
    
    Well I’m happy with my life and work life at the moment, so I suppose it all worked out okay!
12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?

The teachers are more involved nowadays in helping students continue their education, they are probably under pressure from the Department to do this.

13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?

Make sure it’s for the right reasons, and if it’s possible at all, don’t leave! Try and stick it out to Leaving Cert level at least.

14. Any other comments.....
Research for Master’s Degree in Digital Media in Education

Sharon Conroy

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Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?
   
   My family was from a working class background and no one in my family had ever completed the Leaving Cert or gone onto college or university.

2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects?

   Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?

   Money was not plentiful in our house and so we were all expected to pull our weight and help out on the farm. I didn’t have much of an interest at school anyway.
3. How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?

Relationships were fine.

4. How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

There wasn’t much of a reaction really, my parents were expecting it, as all of my other brothers and sisters had left early.

5. (A) Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?

No, I don’t remember any of them trying to persuade me to stay.

5. (B) If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?

I think the school should have spoken to my parents about it and myself, and tried to persuade me to stay on.

6. How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?

Well my other brothers and sisters had finished school once they completed the Group and Inter Cert. I was just staying in school until I had the same done, and then I left.
7. What have you been doing since you left school?

I work on the farm mainly, but also do some work on the digger for a local builder.

8. (A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?

No, not at this stage.

8. (B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?

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9. Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?

Yes, I have fewer opportunities than most. I can never apply for a really well paid job as I’ve little or no qualification.

10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?

I always thought some day I would have a big job and plenty of money….but without a qualification this is not really possible. I often wonder why my parents didn’t encourage me to stay at school, and I try not to hold this against them but I still sort of old a grudge!

11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?

Maybe it was the right decision at the time for others because I was able to work full time on the farm and land, but for me, I don’t think it was the right decision. I would have liked to do something else.
12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?

I think there is much more emphasis on education now than there ever was before. The schools and the Department are responsible for this and provide much more help and advice to students and parents.

13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?

Talk to your teachers, parents and the Department if necessary. Make sure it’s your own decision and not someone else’s.

14. Any other comments.....
Research for Master’s Degree in Digital Media in Education

Sharon Conroy

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Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?

   I didn’t do very well at school, and many of my friends were leaving early so I decided I was going to go too.

2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects?

   Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?

   I had a lack of interest in general I suppose. My relationship with school friends was fine.
3. How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?

I felt I was never really encouraged much by my parents even though my older sister was in college. I wasn’t as close to my parents as my older sister was. The teachers were fine, they didn’t pass too much heed on me.

4. How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

The teachers asked me would I not like to go on and do well like my sister. My parents never tried to motivate me like they did with my sister and didn’t seem to mind when I told them I was leaving school to get a job.

5. (A) Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?

Some of the teachers asked me would I not like to stay on and do as my sister did and go to college. While they asked me about it, they didn’t pursue the issue.

5. (B) If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?

I’m not sure why my parents didn’t make me stay at school, like my older sister, but maybe they couldn’t afford to send a second child to college, and when I said I was leaving school, they didn’t pass any heed. I’m surprised the school didn’t try and do more about it.
6. How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?

A couple of weeks.

7. What have you been doing since you left school?

I got a few part time jobs and then started working in the civil service, I am still working there.

8. (A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?

Since working in the civil service, I have done a few computer courses, but really it’s just to keep me up to date with my work in the office.

8. (B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?

I wouldn’t really be thinking of doing anything else.

9. Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?

When I compare myself to my sister who went onto college, she has her own company and is very wealthy. I have enough money to get me by, but dropping out of education definitely affected my earning levels.

10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?

Not really, no.
11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?

No, I should have stayed at school. I may never have been as successful as my sister but at least if I had stayed I might have had the opportunity.

12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?

Yes, the Department of Education provide a lot of help to parents, teachers and students to encourage them to stay in school and further their education as much as possible.

13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?

Look for advice from parents, teachers or your friends. It might seem like the right thing to do at the time, but try and stick it out, it will be worth it in the end.

14. Any other comments.....

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Research for Master’s Degree in Digital Media in Education

Sharon Conroy

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Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?
   
   There was no secondary school in the village so I had to cycle to the nearest one every day with my two older brothers. The nearest secondary school which we attended was almost 5 miles away.

2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects?
   Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?
I had no major difficulty with any particular subject. The only one I really didn’t like was Irish, and the teachers loved Irish!

3. How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?

Relationships were good with parents, teachers were fine too.

4. How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

Both of my brothers left school after completing 3 years in secondary school, so it was no big surprise to them when I said I was doing the same. I think they were glad at the time that I was going to look for a job and would then be able to contribute to the household.

5. (A) Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?

No one tried to keep me in school at the time. To be honest it was very common for students to leave when I did, after 3 years in secondary.

5. (B) If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?

At the time, it was very common for students to leave at the age of 15 or 16. Looking back on it, I suppose we should have been encouraged to stay on by both parents and the teachers.
6. How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?

I never really thought about finishing school much, I just assumed I would finish when my brothers did, after completing 3 years.

7. What have you been doing since you left school?

I worked as a typist and secretary, then I went on to work in a factory, where I still work.

8. (A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?

Not now, no! I don’t think I would ever go back studying again.

8. (B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?

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9. Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?

I’m sure it had an effect on my life already.

10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?

Maybe if I had been in school and went onto college, I might have been able to help my children more with their studies especially when they were in secondary school.
11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?

I suppose it was the right decision at the time. It was better for me to be out working and contributing to the household than if I were at school.

12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?

Yes, there is much more emphasis on education nowadays than before and the schools and Department are much more involved. There is much more communication between parents and the school nowadays.

13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?

I would advise them to stay and complete their Leaving Cert and then if they don’t want to go to college that is fine. At least by having done the Leaving Cert you may have the option to go on further if you want. Also jobs are easier got when you have the Leaving Cert at least.

14. Any other comments.....

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Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?

   I was bored at school, and never wanted to get up in the mornings to go either. I had no interest in learning and just wanted to go out and get a job.

2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects?

   Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?

   I was a sports fanatic and looked for every excuse possible to miss classes, so I could go to any games that were on or training sessions. I wasn’t too bad at most
subjects, but had a lack of interest in general. Relationships with school friends was good.

3. How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?

   Relationships were fine with both parents and teachers. Both repeatedly asked me to try harder and to do more work at my books, that once I had my Leaving Cert finished I could play as much sport as I wanted!

4. How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

   Some of my teachers were not pleased, told me I had a lot of potential and should really try and do one more year to complete my Leaving Cert exams. My parents were disappointed and tried talking me out of it on numerous occasions.

5. (A) Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?

   Both my English teacher and P.E. teacher tried to convince me to stay. They called me in after class, and discussed it with me, trying to advise me. They asked me to try and stick it out so I could at least complete the Leaving Cert. My parents wanted the same.

5. (B) If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?
6. **How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?**

I continued at school till the end of fourth year, but I had decided myself I did not want to go back after the summer. I told my parents and teachers I would think about it over that summer but I had really made my decision the day I finished fourth year.

7. **What have you been doing since you left school?**

I got some work with a local builder, I’ve had plenty of work with him for the past 3 years, although it’s gone very quiet since Christmas of this year (2008-2009).

8. (A) **Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?**

Not really, I play a lot of sport, almost every evening so wouldn’t have much time for studying. The only way I would do something is if I was really stuck for work and needed to do a course or something to get a job.

8. (B) **If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?**

Oh if anything – a short course, just to train me in on something!

9. **Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?**
Yes, it limits your job prospects, but I’m happy enough to work as I am for now.

10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?

My Mum would have liked me to do my Leaving Cert at least. Two of my brothers sat the Leaving Cert exams and one of them went on to college. Apart from that, the decision didn’t have any effect on our relationships or anything.

11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?

Well I’m happy, so yes I think I did.

12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?

I think there is a lot of encouragement for children /young adults to stay in school. Nowadays its important to stay at school and get the best qualification you can, because no matter what job you go for you need at least a degree level of qualification. I’ve heard of some programmes that the Department run to try and keep students at school.

13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?

I would try and advise them to stay at school. Jobs are not permanent anymore so its important to have a good qualification, and it will make it easier to get a
job both in this country and in any other country where one might like to travel
to and work in.

14. Any other comments.....

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Research for Master’s Degree in Digital Media in Education

Sharon Conroy

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<th>Name: Mark Molloy</th>
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<td>Age when left school: 17</td>
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<td>Address at time of leaving school e.g. town, village, city centre etc: town</td>
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<td>Number of children in family i.e. your siblings: 3</td>
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Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?

I was bored at school, and never wanted to get up in the mornings to go either. I had no interest in learning and just wanted to go out and get a job.

2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects? Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?

I was a sports fanatic and looked for every excuse possible to miss classes, so I could go to any games that were on or training sessions. I wasn’t too bad at most
subjects, but had a lack of interest in general. Relationships with school friends was good.

3. **How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?**

   Relationships were fine with both parents and teachers. Both repeatedly asked me to try harder and to do more work at my books, that once I had my Leaving Cert finished I could play as much sport as I wanted!

4. **How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?**

   Some of my teachers were not pleased, told me I had a lot of potential and should really try and do one more year to complete my Leaving Cert exams. My parents were disappointed and tried talking me out of it on numerous occasions.

5. (A) **Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?**

   Both my English teacher and P.E. teacher tried to convince me to stay. They called me in after class, and discussed it with me, trying to advise me. They asked me to try and stick it out so I could at least complete the Leaving Cert. My parents wanted the same.

5. (B) **If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?**
6. How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?

I continued at school till the end of fourth year, but I had decided myself I did not want to go back after the summer. I told my parents and teachers I would think about it over that summer but I had really made my decision the day I finished fourth year.

7. What have you been doing since you left school?

I got some work with a local builder, I’ve had plenty of work with him for the past 3 years, although it’s gone very quiet since Christmas of this year (2008-2009).

8. (A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?

Not really, I play a lot of sport, almost every evening so wouldn’t have much time for studying. The only way I would do something is if I was really stuck for work and needed to do a course or something to get a job.

8. (B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?

Oh if anything – a short course, just to train me in on something!

9. Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?

Yes, it limits your job prospects, but I’m happy enough to work as I am for now.
10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?
Can’t think of anything off hand but I suppose if I ever get married and have children I will probably be sorry then that I didn’t work harder at school, go to college and have a good job to support them.

11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?
Well I’m happy right now as I am so I would say yes I feel it was a good decision.

12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?
Ya there are other programmes available to students who don’t want to stay in mainstream schools such as Leaving Cert applied and Youthreach. I know the Department try to help and encourage students to stay at school and further their education.

13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?
I suppose I would tell them to think about it for a long time before making their final decision, talk to people such as parents, teachers and other early school leavers. Also in the current climate there aren’t many jobs available so I would be advising people to get as much education as they can.
14. Any other comments.....
Sharon Conroy

Name: Brenda Johnston
Age when left school: 17
Address at time of leaving school e.g. town, village, city centre etc: town
Number of children in family i.e. your siblings: 3

Questions for Interviews held with early school leavers

1. Can you explain why you considered leaving school early?

I was in my Leaving Cert year, but I never studied and missed a good few days over the two years for the Leaving Cert programme. I knew it would to pointless doing the exams because I would only fail the whole lot, so I decided to leave after Christmas of the final year.

2. What were your main problems? E.g. certain difficult subjects?

Lack of interest in general? The relationship with your school friends?

Lack of interest in general, although I did find Maths and Irish the most difficult. I had a good few friends and got on with most people in my class.
3. How were your relationships with your teachers and parents at that time?

Relationships with both teachers and parents were fine.

4. How did they react when they became aware that you were dropping out?

My parents told me it was my own decision to make. The teachers didn’t seem to pass any heed.

5. (A) Did anyone (parent or teacher) try to keep you in school and if so what did they do?

No not really, the teachers didn’t say anything to me. My parents told me it was up to me if I wanted to leave, but that I would have to get a job.

5. (B) If answer to part (A) is “No”, do you feel anything could have been done by the school or your parents to keep you in school?

I often wondered if someone had pushed me into staying at school, would I have stuck it out and passed my Leaving Cert but really I can’t blame anyone else for it. I did make the decision myself. If there was more pressure from parents or teachers though, it might have been a good thing.

6. How long did it take you approximately to arrive at this decision?
I think been off school for the Christmas holidays got me thinking about getting a job and not going back. A lot of my friends were studying over the Christmas period but I didn’t open a book. Then I thought sure what’s the point in going back so I decided not to bother.

7. **What have you been doing since you left school?**

   I was working in a clothes shop for a few years and did some hours in a local pub. I am currently out of full time employment as the clothes shop I was working in closed down due to the recession.

8. **(A) Do you have plans to continue your education some time in the future?**

   Probably not, as it seems so long ago since I was at school now, I don’t think I could ever go back. I am doing an exam at the moment so I will be a qualified choreographer and Irish Dance teacher, at least I will have that.

8. **(B) If yes, what type of schooling are you thinking about?**

   

9. **Do you feel this decision to drop out of education will affect your earning levels throughout your lifetime?**

   Not having a Leaving Cert or higher qualification is most certainly a restriction on my earnings, and I guess this will always be the way, especially now that so many students go to college and complete degrees and masters The level of education is much higher now than it ever was.
10. Do you feel this decision affected your family life in any way?

No I don’t think so.

11. In hindsight, do you feel you made the right decision?

I don’t think it was the right decision, I would like to have my Leaving Cert at least, but at the same time I couldn’t face going back to doing it again!

12. Do you feel there is more help available to students who are considering leaving school early nowadays, e.g. from schools and departmental programmes provided by the Department of Education?

I think the Department of Education are more aware now of the young people who are missing school and have also encouraged the schools to do something about it. I think this is a positive thing because it encourages children to come to school and also encourages parents to keep sending them.

13. If you were to advise someone who is considering leaving school early, what advice would you give them?

I would advise them to stay at school and do their Leaving Cert. Once you have that you can always consider doing other courses or furthering your education at some point in your life, even if you don’t continue straight after the Leaving Cert. Also it makes it very hard to get a job without at least having your Leaving Cert on your C.V.
14. Any other comments.....

Because I left school early, I now find myself insisting that my daughter goes to school every day. I want to make sure she doesn’t fall behind in anything and want her to do well. If she misses school, I would be afraid she would get a taste for it, and might not want to continue. I think because I missed out myself I want to make sure she doesn’t.
Appendix 5

Results from interview held with representative from the Department
Interview with a representative from the Department of Education and Science

1. In general, what approach does the Department of Education and Science take to tackle educational disadvantage?

- The Department’s approach to tackling educational disadvantage is based on a continuum of provision, from early childhood through adulthood, with the focus on preventative strategies, targeting and integrated community responses. These are designed to bring about an education system that allows all our citizens to realise their full potential.

- Some €730 million was provided by the Department of Education and Science in 2007 for programmes specifically designed to tackle educational disadvantage in accordance with strategies outlined.

2. What is DEIS? Can you give me an overview of this?

- DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), is a new action plan for educational inclusion, which was launched in 2005. It aims to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities are prioritised and effectively addressed.

- The plan provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) which will bring together and build upon, a number of existing interventions for schools who have a significant level of disadvantage.

- Approximately 670 primary schools and 203 second-level schools will be included in the School Support Programme. The new action plan has been implemented on a phased basis over five years, which started during the school year 2005/2006. It will also involve the provision of some 300 additional posts across the education system.

- Since 1997, the Government has increased funding on specific measures at primary and second-level to tackle educational disadvantage from approximately €50m in 1998 to about €730m in 2007.
3. What will the action plan address?

The action plan will address a number of key issues such as:

- improving identification of disadvantage – a standardised approach will allow the Department to target resources more effectively.

- increasing early childhood education provision in the most disadvantaged communities.

- improving supports for pupils with low attainment levels in literacy and numeracy.

- enhancing procedures for measuring the outcomes achieved from educational inclusion measures.

- enhancing integration and partnership working, both within the education sector itself and cross-sectorally.

- enhancing professional development supports for principals and school staff.

- enhancing research and evaluation.

4. What is the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)?

➢ The HSCL scheme is an important mainstream preventative strategy targeted at pupils at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of background characteristics which tend to affect pupil attainment and school retention.

➢ The scheme is concerned with establishing partnership between parents and teachers in the interests of the child’s learning.

5. What are the aims of HSCL?

➢ The aims of the scheme are:

- to maximise active involvement of children in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure.

- to promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children.

- to raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children’s educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills.
• to enhance the children’s uptake from education, their retention in the educational system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to lifelong learning.

• to disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally.

- Schools already in the HSCL scheme but not in DEIS, continued to receive HSCL services up until the end of the 2008/09 school year. Given the current challenging economic climate a decision was made to withdraw the HSCL services from all Non DEIS schools from 1 September 2009. The main focus of Social Inclusion measures for the 2009/10 school year is to retain HSCL resources in schools participating in DEIS, as there is a need to focus targeted resources on the schools serving the most disadvantaged communities.

6. What is School Completion Programme (SCP)?

- The School Completion Programme is based at both primary and post-primary level and is focussed on young people between the ages of 4 and 18 years. It is a key component of the Department of Education and Science’s strategy to discriminate positively in favour of children and young people who are at risk of early school leaving. The programme is funded on a multi-annual basis under the National Development (NDP) and assisted from the European Social Fund (ESF) up to 2007.

- Eligible schools were selected for participation in the School Completion Programme in 2002 on the basis of their pupil retention rates from the Department’s Post-Primary Pupil database. The School Completion Programme operated in 82 sites nationally from 2002 to 2007, and has been extended to all urban/town primary and second-level schools participating in DEIS, the new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion since 2006/07 school year. €31m has been allocated to the School Completion Programme for 2009.

- School Completion Programme necessitates the establishment of local management committees to manage the projects, comprising of all school Principals, relevant statutory, voluntary and community agencies, Local Drug Task Forces and County/City Development Boards. Projects are required to engage in a consultative and planning process with the school staff, with parents and with local representatives of relevant statutory, voluntary and community agencies in the development of annual retention plans.

- The level of funding for each SCP project depends on the size of the cluster and ranges from €97,000 to €471,000 in respect of a full year’s involvement in the Programme.

7. What is the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB)?

- The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 established the National Educational Welfare Board as the single national body with responsibility for school
The Act provides a comprehensive framework promoting regular school attendance and tackling the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving.

8. What is the function of the NEWB?

- The general functions of the Board are to ensure that each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education.

- The Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Education and Science has responsibility for the National Educational Welfare Board. The NEWB was launched in December 2003, the aim of the board is to provide a service to the most disadvantaged areas and most at-risk groups. Five regional teams have been established with bases in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.

- The NEWB currently has 109 sanctioned posts:
  - 13 Head Office posts
  - 91 service delivery posts (73 EWO’s, 13 SEWO’s, 5 regional managers)
  - 5 clerical staff assigned as service support staff to the 5 regional offices in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Waterford, and Limerick.

- In deploying its service staff, the National Educational Welfare Board has prioritised the provision of services to the most disadvantaged areas and most at-risk groups. Five regional teams are in place with bases in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, staff have been deployed in areas of greatest disadvantage and in areas designated under the government’s RAPID programme.

- Towns which have an educational welfare officer allocated to them include Dundalk, Drogheda, Navan, Athlone, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Bray, Clonmel, Tralee, Ennis, Sligo, Naas, Castlebar, Longford, Tuam, Tullamore, Letterkenny and Portlaoise. The NEWB provides an intensive service in the areas where educational welfare officers are located. All other areas receive an urgent service where the NEWB prioritises children who, for example, are out of school or where no school place exists for them.

9. What were the departments reasons for the integration of services i.e. NEWB, SCP and HSCL?

- From 1 September 2009 the Department will be expanding the remit of the National Educational Welfare Board to include responsibility for HSCL and the School Completion Programme as well as the Visiting Teacher Service. The main objective of this integration plan is to allow for greater efficiencies in the provision of services and to provide a new strategic direction for these services.

- Under its expanded role, the Board will bring together the individual services under one common management team. The Board will be responsible for the
development of a single strategic approach, reflecting equally the nature and strengths of each of the services and provide for more focussed service delivery at local, regional and national levels. This integrated approach is part of the Government's overall approach to Transforming Public Services announced in November 2008.

- Bringing together these significant resources, under a common management structure will also deliver some immediate benefits through improved targeting and appropriate responses for children at risk of early school leaving or poor attendance, reduction or elimination of any overlap that may currently exist and strengthening the Board to deliver upon its objectives.

- As a first step, the National Coordination Teams will work with the management team of the NEWB providing for this new strategic direction. Further developments on the integration of these services will be carried out in consultation with all the relevant parties. The programmes will in the future, report to, and be directed by one single management structure comprising the SCP and HSCL national coordination teams and NEWB management.

10. Any other comments:

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Appendix 6

Survey form
Research for Master’s Degree in Digital Media in Education
Sharon Conroy

NAME OF SCHOOL: _________________________________________________

**Number of students in your school/s who completed the Intermediate Certificate/Junior Certificate from 1988 to 2008.**

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Junior Cert contd...

March 2009
Number of students who completed the Leaving Certificate from 1988 to 2008.

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