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# Early School Leaving: the Irish Experience

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# Overview

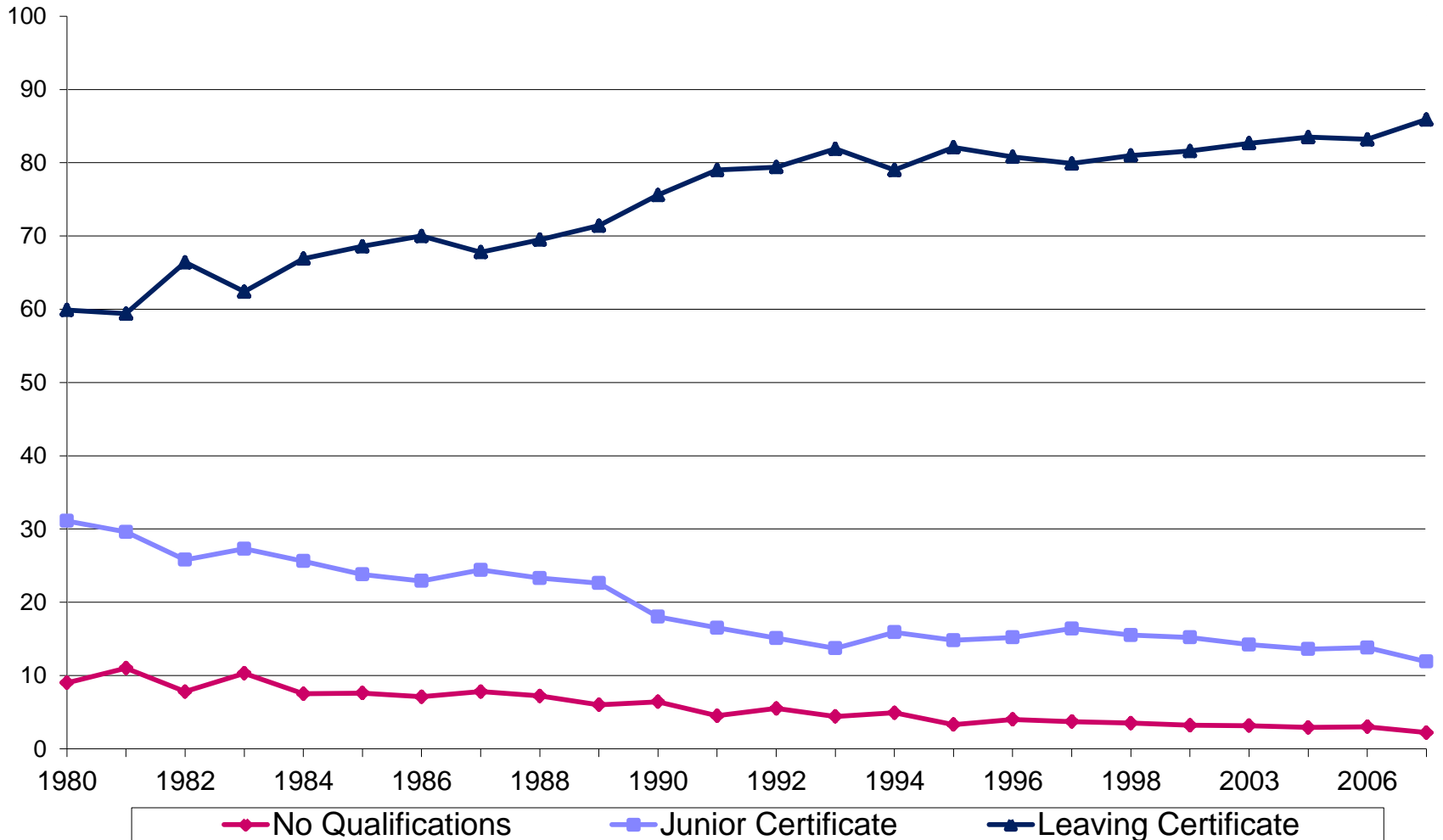
- Introduction
- Macro Patterns of Early School Leaving in Ireland
- DEIS as a Key Policy Instrument
- Getting Beyond the Macro
  - Stages at which young people leave school in Ireland
  - Variation between schools in rates of early school leaving
  - Student experiences that are associated with early school leaving
  - School organisation aspects that are associated with early school leaving
- Future Policy Direction.

## Introduction

- Ireland has experienced a **decline in rates of early school leaving since the 1990s**. In 2015, 89.4% of 20-24 year olds gained a terminal Leaving Certificate qualification compared with 82.6% in 2000 (DES 2015)
- Ireland has **lower rates of early school leaving than the average for EU28 countries**, with similar rates to those in Australia and Finland.
- In the Irish context, there are plans to **reduce the rate of early school leaving to 8 % by 2020** (Morris and Parashar 2012).



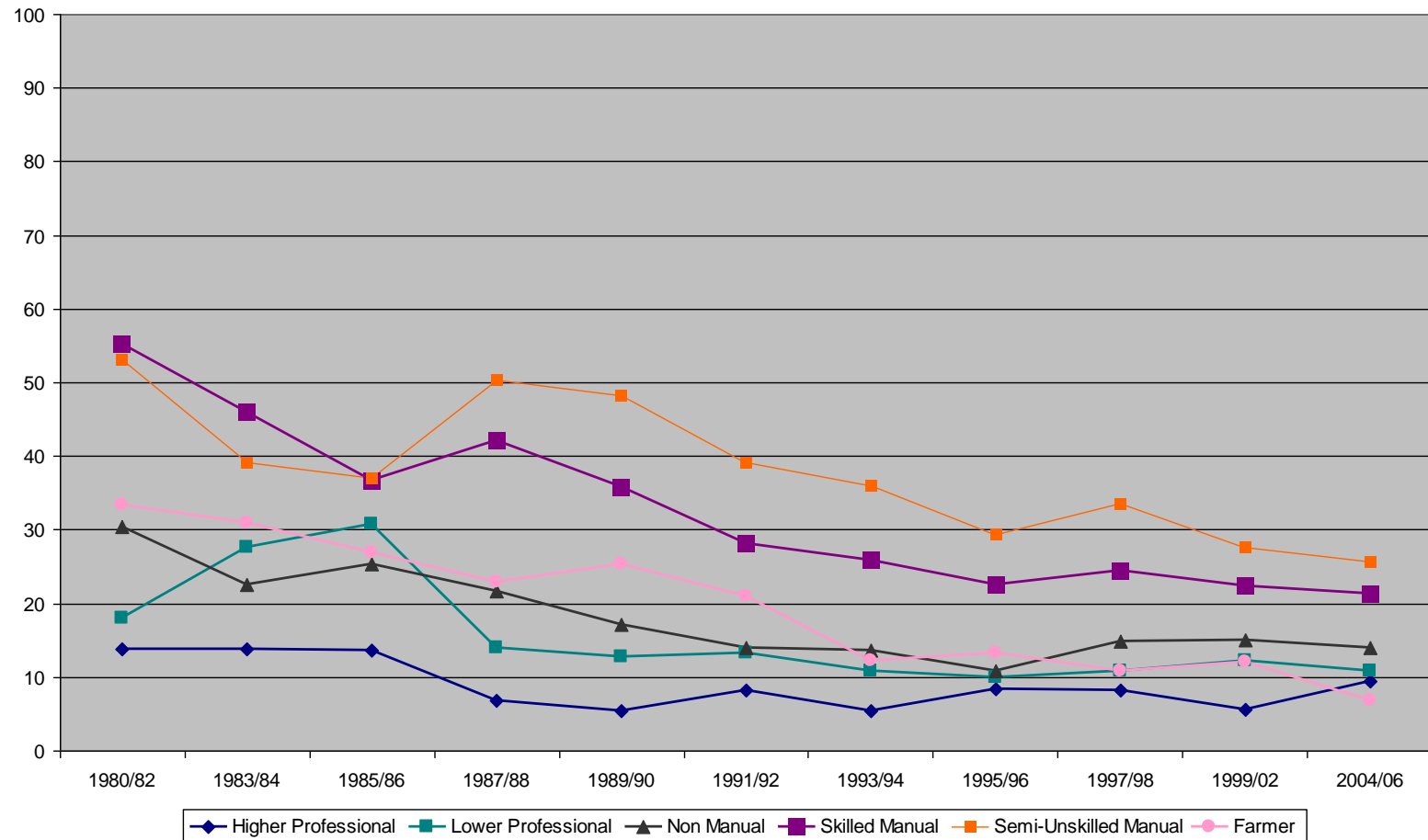
# Figure 1: Long Term Patterns of Educational Attainment Among School Leavers, 1980-2006



Source: Byrne and Smyth 2010 using School Leavers Survey, all available years



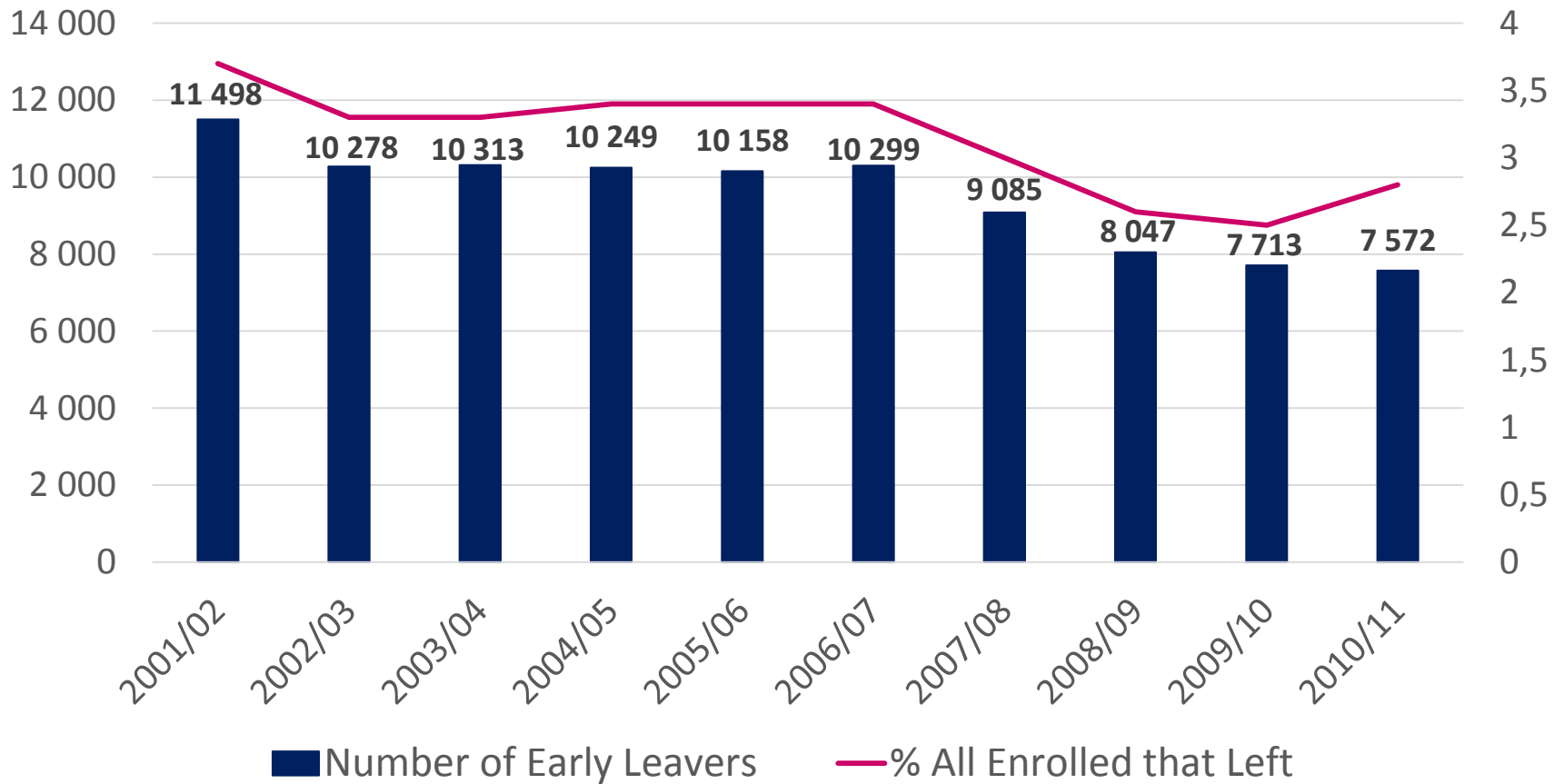
# Persistence in early school leaving by social class background



Over a 30 year period between the late 1970s and mid 2000s, **unskilled manual groups and those in work-poor households** were persistently more likely not to make the transition from junior cycle to senior cycle (Byrne and Smyth 2010; Byrne and McCoy 2017).



## Figure 2: Administrative Estimates of Early School Leaving, 2001-2011



Source: Department of Education and Skills 2013, 2016

## ➤ Who is not captured in this data!

- Neither data source includes young people who are attending:
  - Special Schools
  - High Support Special Schools
  - Youth Encounter Projects (YEPs)
  - Children Detention Schools
  - Children who are not in any of these services
- Administrative data from DES do not include young people who left school during the final year of senior cycle, those in alternative pathways, and those attending 'grind' schools.

# **DEIS: Key Policy Instrument: Key Actions**

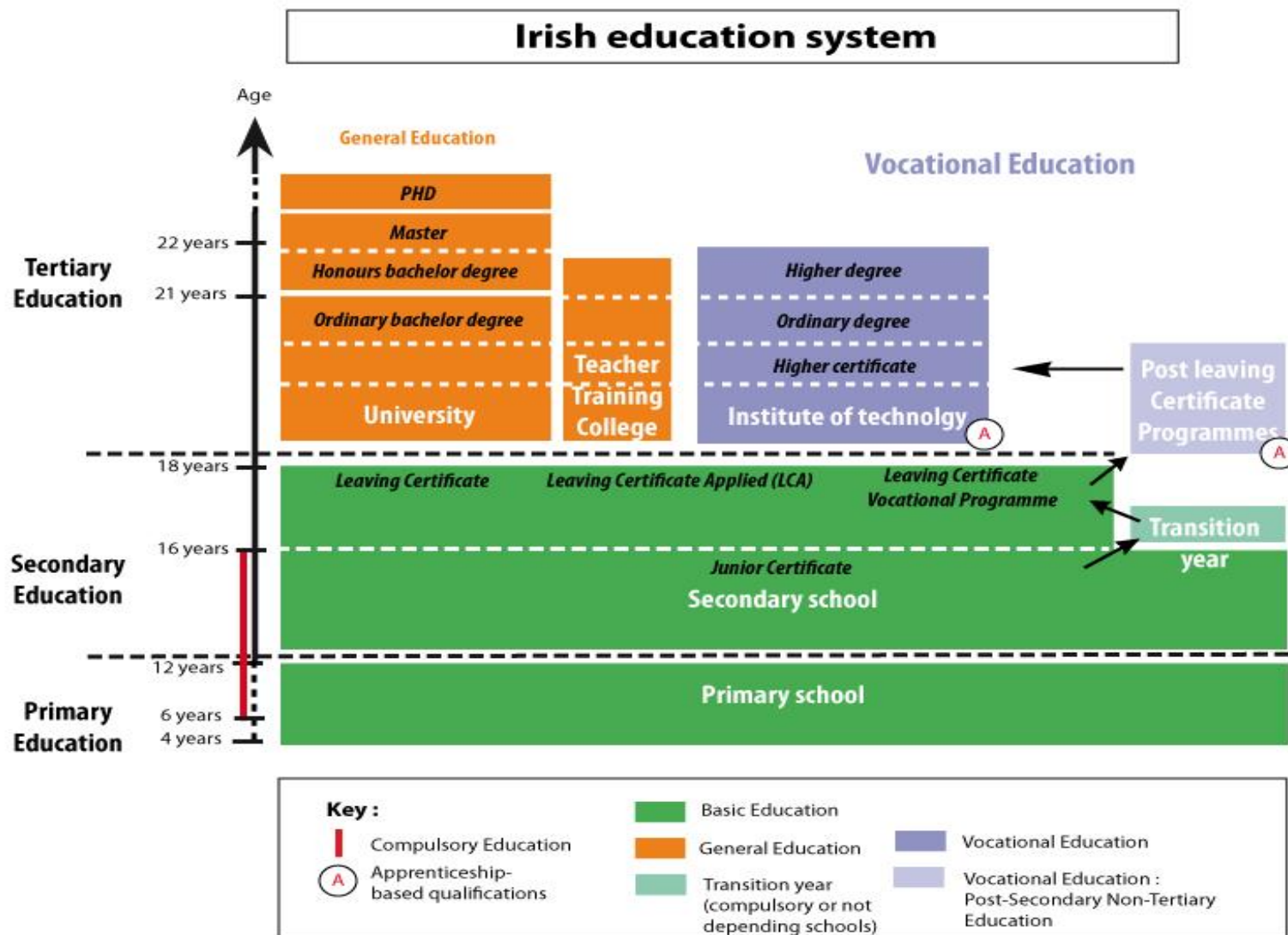
- **DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (2005)** is the Department of Education and Skills (DES) main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage (DES 2005).
- **Introduction of an Integrated School Support Programme**
  - Focus on **measures to enhance attendance, educational progression, retention and attainment**
  - School Leaving Age of 16 or the completion of 3 years
  - **NEWB Framework for Regular School Attendance and Absenteeism/non-Attendance**
  - **Supporting the transfer from Primary to Second Level**
  - **School Completion Programme**
    - In school and after-school supports, holiday-time activities (for those in school) and out-of-school provision (for those who have left school)
    - Home School Community Liaison Scheme
    - Junior Certificate School Completion Programme (JCSP)
    - Collaboration with National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) & Support Teacher Project



## **DEIS: Key Policy Instrument: Additional Actions**

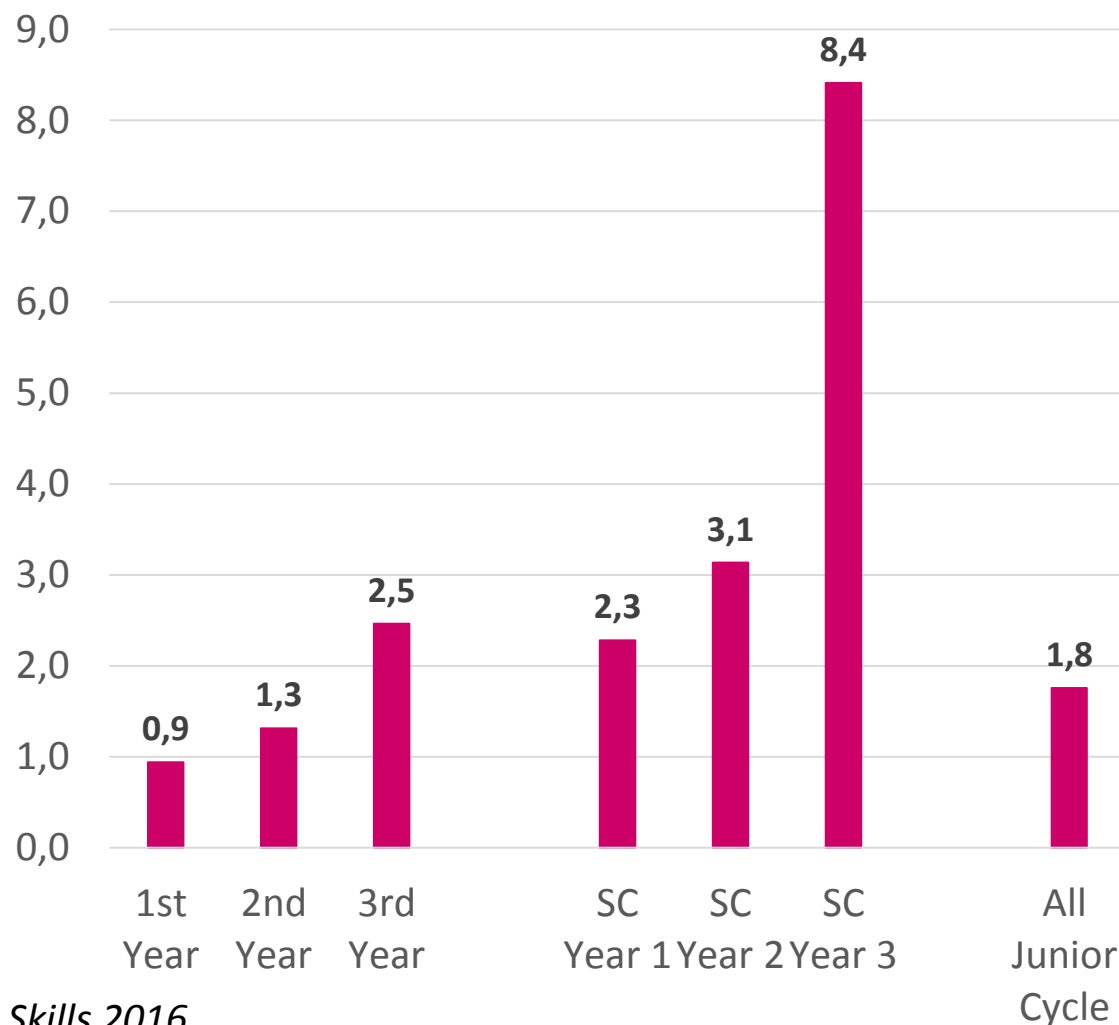
- Additional **financial support** to resource schools and school clusters
- **Planning, Target Setting and Ongoing Review Process**
- Professional Development
- Integration of Services and Partnership Working
- Liaison with School Principal's Networks
- Research and Evaluation
- Implementation of the Action Plan

# The Irish Education System



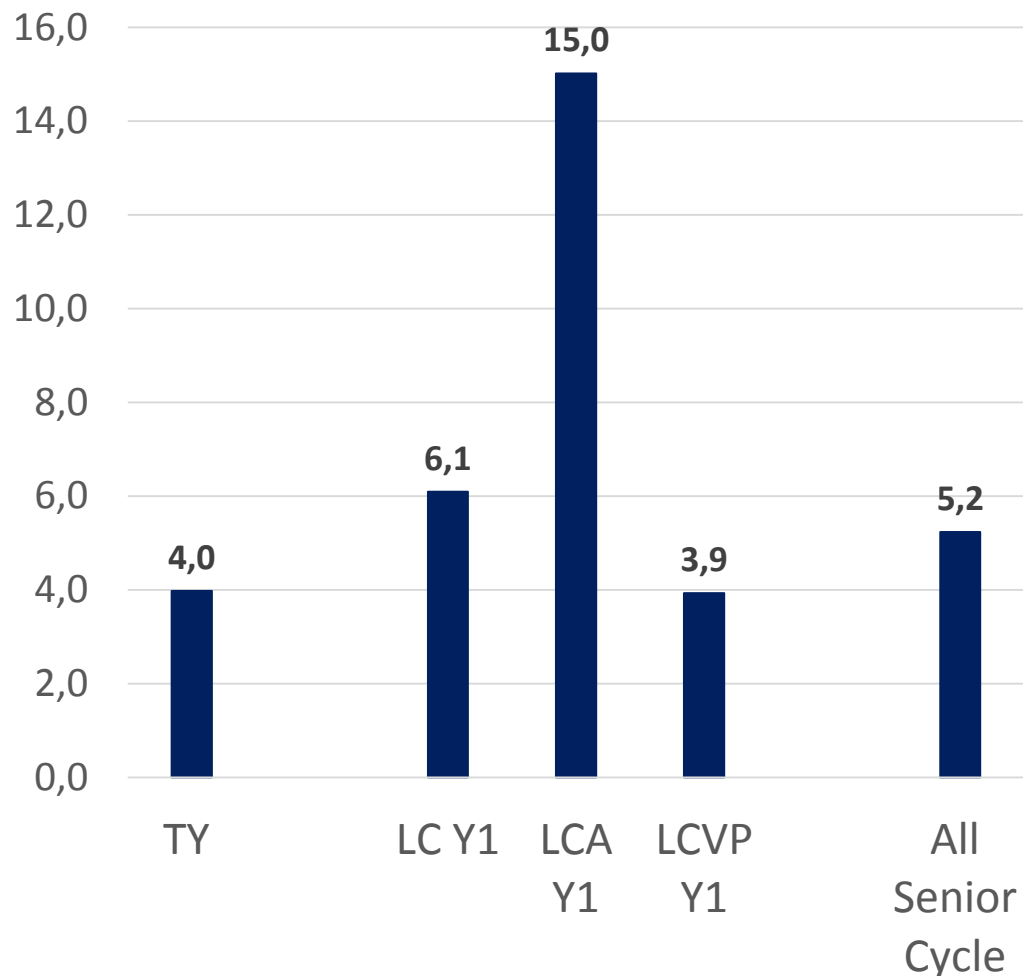
## ➤ Figure 3: Retention to the Junior Certificate

As illustrated by Figure 3, among Junior Cycle pupils, rates of early school leaving are greater in the **School Completion Programme**, a programme which specifically targets those at risk of early school leaving.



Source: Department of Education and Skills 2016

## ➤ Figure 4: Retention to Leaving Certificate

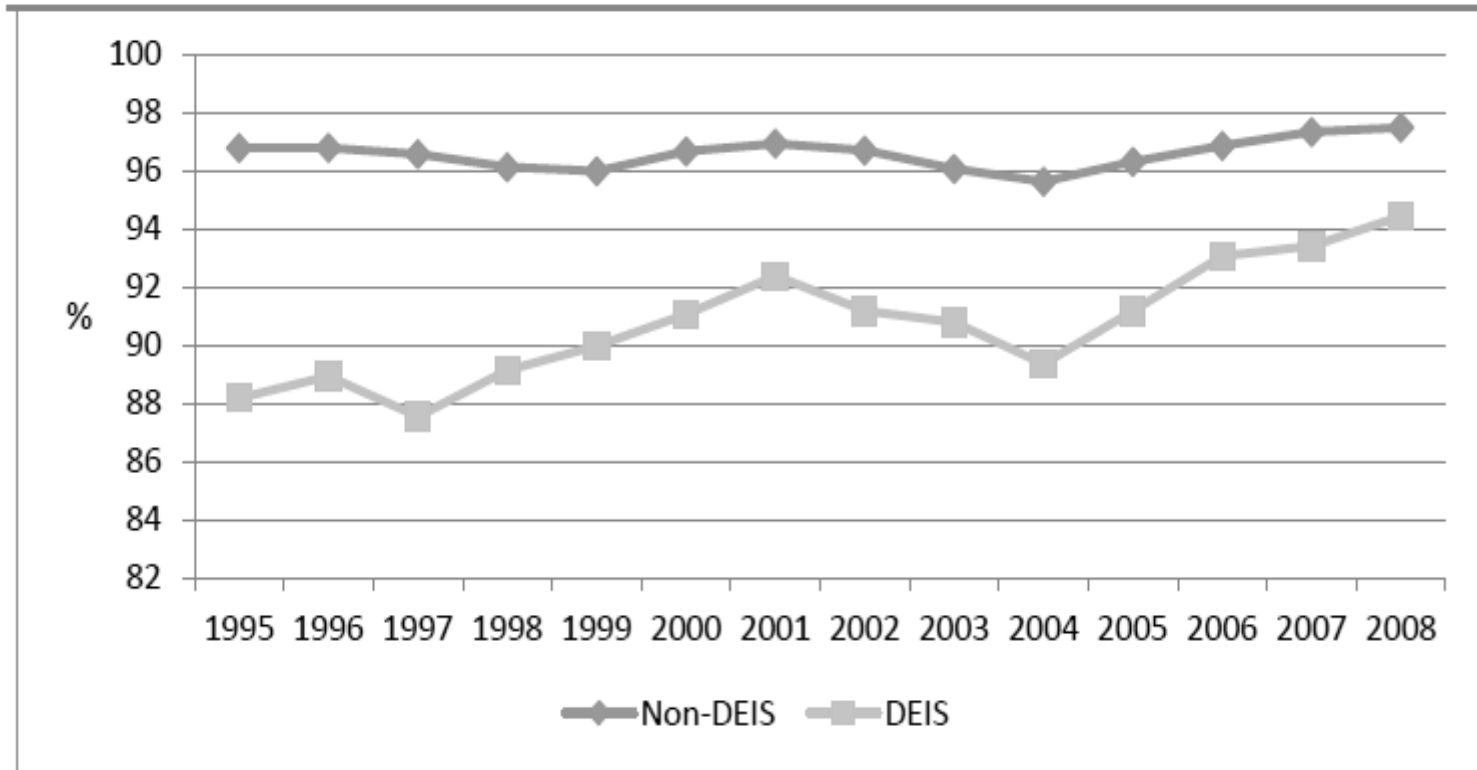


- Rates of drop-out are higher in senior cycle than junior cycle (1.8% compared to 5.2%).
- Curriculum Differentiation at Senior Cycle.
- Early School Leaving Rates higher in the pre-vocational track, **the Leaving Certificate Applied**, at senior cycle.

Source: Department of Education and Skills 2016



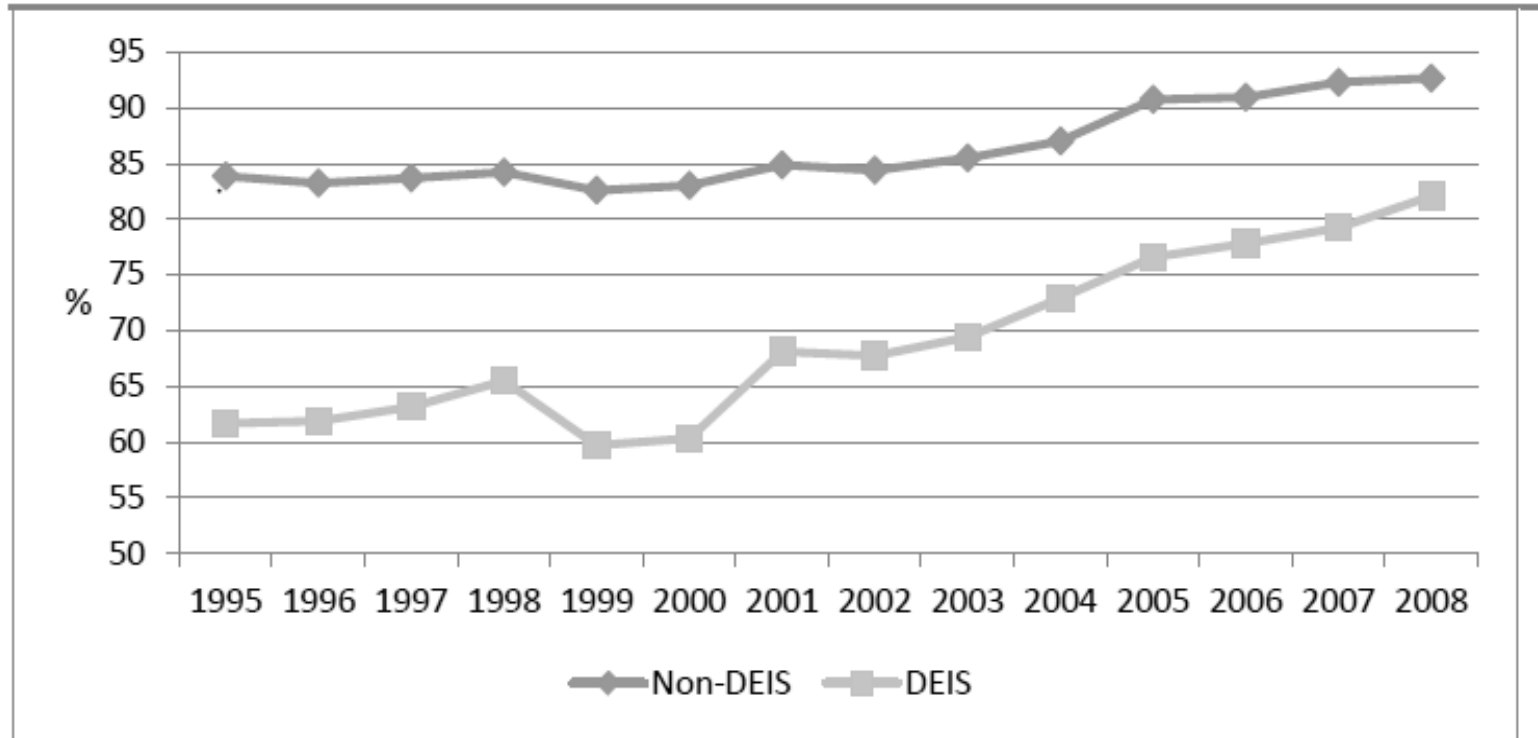
## Figure 5: Average Percentage Retention to Junior Certificate for the 1995-2007 Cohorts in DEIS and Non-DEIS Schools



Source: Weir et al. (2014); DES (2015).



## Figure 6: Average Percentage Retention to Leaving Certificate for the 1995-2007 Cohorts in DEIS and Non-DEIS schools



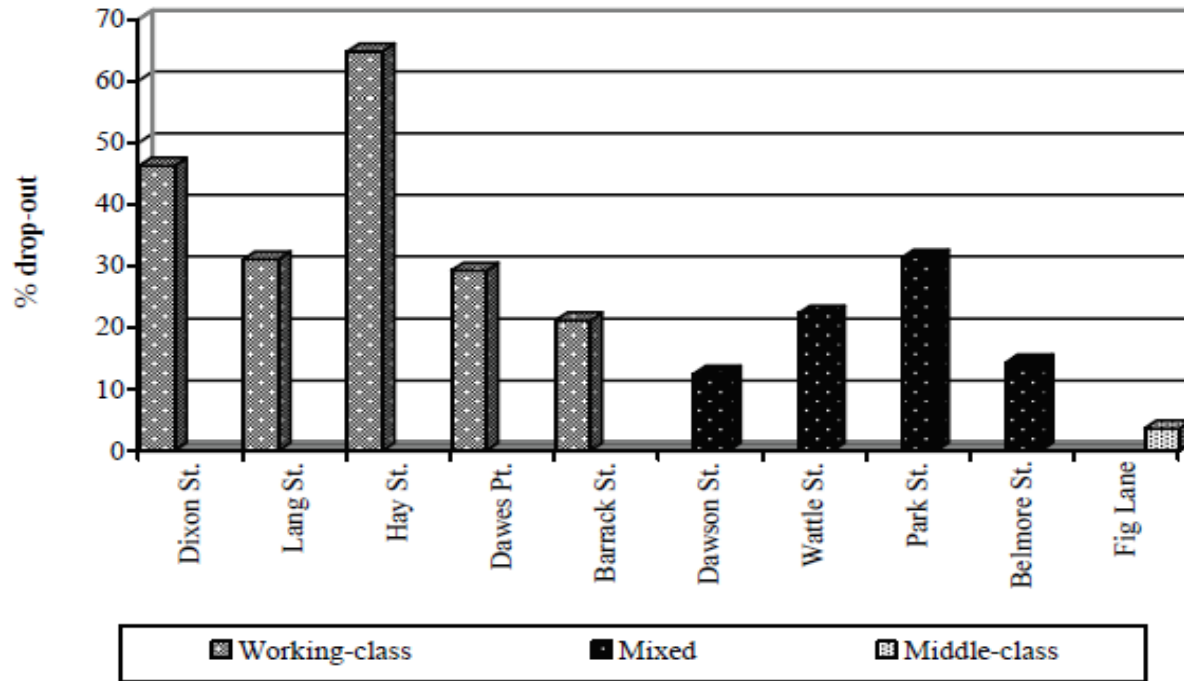
Source: Weir et al. (2014); DES (2015).

## Caution

- ‘Increases in retention rates cannot be ascribed as a direct outcome of the introduction of the DEIS programme as retention rates have also increased in non-DEIS schools in this time frame. Moreover, it is likely that other factors may have influenced retention rates, particularly the collapse in the construction industry and employment in general due to the economic recession from 2008 onwards’ (Smyth et al, 2015: 45).



## Figure 7: Variation across schools in early school leaving



Source: Post-Primary Longitudinal Study data.

- Longitudinal case study of 12 schools.
- Considerable variation in early school leaving rates between schools, including schools with high concentrations of disadvantage (Byrne and Smyth 2010).





## Student experiences that are associated with early school leaving (1/2)

Longitudinal study of young people revealed:

- Rates are higher among those who **did not have any of their friends** from primary level in the transition to second level [focus on school policy regarding settling in to school]
- Curricular continuity and tracking: drop out rates higher for those who experience **lack of challenge** in the transition from primary to secondary, particularly among those in **lower stream classes**.
- Drop out is preceded by **negative teacher-student interaction** and **misbehaviour, truancy** and **absenteeism**.
- **Being bullied** is also associated with drop-out: **negative student-student interaction**
- **More negative perceptions of teachers and schools**



## Student experiences that are associated with early school leaving (2/2)

Longitudinal study of young people also revealed:

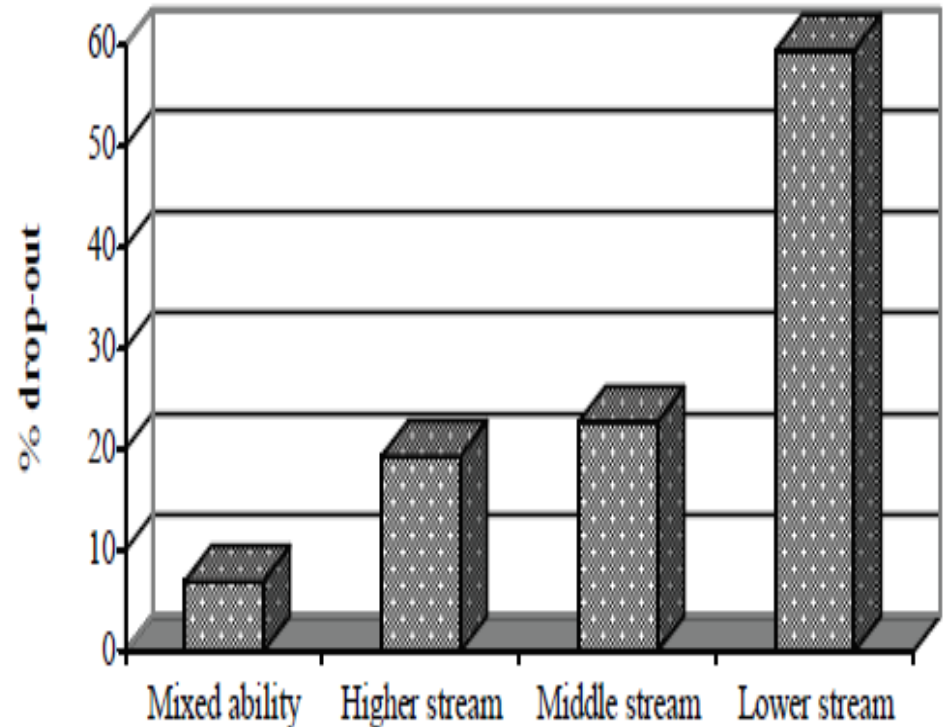
- **Negative academic self-image** in first year is associated with early school leaving **unable to cope with schoolwork**, as is **lower educational aspirations**
- No significant findings regarding parental involvement, but those who **never or hardly ever discussed how they were getting on in school** and those who **rarely sat down together as a family to have dinner** were more likely to drop out of school
- **Working part-time during junior cycle** was associated with early school leaving.



# School Organisation aspect that is associated with early school leaving

## Ability Grouping

- Considerable variation in early school leaving rates according to ability grouping (Byrne and Smyth 2010).



Source: Post-Primary Longitudinal Study data.

## **Future Policy Directions**

### Revised DEIS Action Plan 2017

- **Improve retention rates** from 82.7 per cent to 90.2 per cent by 2025
- **Literacy and numeracy** targets
- Focus on **student wellbeing**
- **Progression to FE and HE** (non-manual and semi-unskilled manual backgrounds)
- Increase **access to teacher education, improve parental engagement and community linkages**

## References (1/2)

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