

# From High Skill Migration to Cosmopolitan Service Class? Irish Migration Policy in a European Context

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## Abstract

*European countries are increasingly trying to develop policies to attract skilled migrants even as they are trying to restrict the entry of unskilled labour. Skilled migrants are increasingly diverse in terms of who they are, how they move and why they move. Rather than discussing skilled migration it may be more relevant to discuss the growing cosmopolitanism of the service class. Crucially for policy-makers, there is growing evidence that issues of culture and lifestyle are increasingly important for these people. Against this background the second part of the paper examines the European situation in more detail. The 'service class' – the professionals and managers – has become more 'cosmopolitan' (in the simple sense that they are likely to be born outside the country where they currently work). The UK and Ireland appear to be the most extreme cases of this development. The third part of the paper examines the specific case of Ireland. It shows the importance of skilled labour immigration during the – now ended – Irish economic boom, but also shows how mobility across Ireland is perhaps a better description of what happened. The final section of the paper turns to questions of policy. A typology of policy measures is proposed, differentiating between both between 'hard' and 'soft' policy measures and between 'focused' and 'contextual' measures. It is argued that contextual policies – those that are not explicitly targeted at migrants – are increasingly important. Furthermore, soft and focused policy can be especially important for skilled immigrants.*

**Keywords:** High skill migration, Service class mobility, Cosmopolitanism, Policy measures

## 1. Introduction

According to many commentators, there is now a 'Global War for Talent' – which Europe is losing. European countries are increasingly trying to develop policies to attract skilled migrants even as they are trying to restrict the entry of unskilled labour. Underlying this discussion is a very simplistic understanding of the global movements of skilled labour. Skilled migrants are increasingly diverse in terms of who they are, how they move and why they move. Policies that focus just on the legal regulation of migration and on financial incentives are accordingly inadequate.

The first part of the paper shows the increasing diversity of such mobility. This is partly a question of *who* moves, but also a question of the increasing diversity of movement itself – the extent to which this mobility does *not* involve the traditional migration where the migrant leaves one country to permanently reside in another. Crucially for policy-makers, there is growing evidence that issues of culture and lifestyle are increasingly important for skilled migrants.

Against this background the second part of the paper examines the European situation in more detail. I argue that the ‘service class’ – the professionals and managers – have become more ‘cosmopolitan’ (in the simple sense that they are likely to be born outside the country where they currently work). However, there are major differences between European countries here.

The third part of the paper examines the specific case of Ireland. It shows the importance of skilled labour immigration during the – now ended – Irish economic boom, but also shows how mobility across Ireland is perhaps a better description of what happened.

The final section of the paper turns to questions of policy. A typology of policy measures is proposed, differentiating between both between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ policy measures and between ‘focused’ and ‘contextual’ measures. It is argued that contextual policies – those that are not explicitly targeted at migrants – are increasingly important. Furthermore, soft and focused policy can be especially important for skilled immigrants.

## 2. From High Skill Migration to Service Class Mobility

If ‘highly skilled’ is restricted purely to science and technology workers, one starting point for classification would be the standard statistical Science and Technology (S&T) classifications developed within the Frascati and Canberra Manuals which classify S&T workers by qualification, activity, sector and occupation (Mahroum, 2000). Thus using the Canberra Manual the OECD defines ‘Human Resources in Science and Technology’ (HRST) as those who either have a third level qualification in S&T and/or are employed in an area where such qualifications are normally required’. Even here there are complications. Khadria (2001) notes that many IT professionals are not necessarily employed in the IT sector; he sees this as part of a wider movement away from specific to ‘generic’ skills amongst skilled migrants.

However, it is quite clear that the ‘mobile highly skilled’ include more than those involved directly in S&T. One obvious wider definition would include those with professional qualifications such as medical practitioners. This is compatible with the usual assumption that highly skilled migrants have clearly defined qualifications for which there is an immediately identifiable demand<sup>1</sup>. However, this excludes not only skilled building craft workers – who usually have more transportable qualifications and better pay than many university graduates – but also many other skilled occupations (e.g. musicians and artists) where formal qualifications are hardly decisive. Equally, such a definition can even exclude many managers and entrepreneurs. In practice, discussion of the ‘mobile highly skilled’ refers to specific *occupations*: university students, health workers (nurses as well as doctors), information-technology (IT) specialists, researchers, business executives and managers, and intra-company transfers (OECD, 2002: 2). Nonetheless, these occupations have very different motivations for leaving their home country and very different plans for their future careers.

Increasingly researchers are seeing migration as one aspect of a broader phenomenon of ‘mobility’ (for an early statement, see Salt, 1997; more recently Kolb et al, 2004: 158) This applies in particular to skilled migration, which can no longer be discussed in terms of the permanent movement of the single residence of a person from country A to country B. This situation is in fact an extreme case of a more general process whereby people – and particularly skilled people – move around the globe to work. In this context, the boundary line

<sup>1</sup> Thus the qualification is linked to a specific occupation or sector, unlike most third level qualifications in arts or social sciences

between permanent residence, temporary residence and short-term visiting is increasingly difficult to draw.

Furthermore, many of these temporary migrants may well take up some form of residence in their country of destination, while frequent business travel makes it unclear whether a temporary migrant is in fact an 'immigrant'. In some multi-national companies, a foreign posting is part of the career path of the aspirant executive (Peixoto, 2001). Some commentators argue that this is being partially replaced by 'expatriation', in which managers frequently visit the foreign subsidiary, often staying a few days, but essentially remaining at home. Certainly there is a consensus that easier (and cheaper) air travel is making the traditional 'expatriate' posting less common (e.g. Beaverstock, 2005)

An ongoing study of the Irish software industry (Wickham and Vecchi, 2008) identifies many different forms of business travel. While sales executives may function as 'explorers', travelling to many different destinations but always returning to base, there are also executives who commute between several different subsidiaries, often spending time in an apartment rented by the company or even owning several 'homes' in different countries. In the same industry, project work means that Irish engineers will spend at least several weeks working on the client's site in a city such as London or Frankfurt. Multiple residency and/or long periods away from home are therefore becoming a feature of the highly qualified.

The sheer diversity of groups covered by the term 'high skill migration' makes it implausible that all high skill migrants are motivated by similar concerns. A senior manager in an elite financial services company will hardly decide to move for the same reason as a specialist scientific researcher. In itself this is nothing new. The novelty of the current situation lies in the greater diversity of the high skilled migrants and the growing importance of more diverse and apparently non-economic motivations even for core high skill migrant groups.

In recent decades a period abroad has become part of the normal transition to adulthood and full labour market participation for the 'service class' (see below) of the developed countries. Study abroad is now a routine part of university for many students, so students now comprise an important part of overall migratory flows (Findlay et al, 2006). Within Europe, the EU's Socrates programme is only part of a broader process of the internationalisation of higher education for students (Teichler, 1998; Teichler, 2004). This is accompanied by the growing popularity of 'gap years' and 'career breaks' for those who have recently completed higher education. For young Europeans, Australians and New Zealanders, there is now 'emigration as walkabout' (King and Shuttleworth, 1995). Growing numbers of young adults choose to live in a foreign city, attracted not so much by job opportunities but by the possibility of a different life style. What matters is not the level of wages, but the 'quality of the conversation' (e.g. Scott, 2006). This is 'lifestyle emigration'.

While such people are not normally those whom labour market planners have in mind when they calculate labour market flows, their economic significance is only now beginning to be appreciated. A relatively simple example: the rapid growth of the Irish call centre industry in the 1990s occurred in part because of the large number of young people with language skills in Dublin. This had nothing to do with the Irish education system (not even its most enthusiastic admirers could hardly claim that fluency in European languages was one of its great achievements), and everything to do with the fact that many people were 'temporarily'

living in Dublin, attracted by the city's new cool image. This has now created a situation where the workforce in such call centres is reported to be often 80 percent non-Irish.

A more significant case of the importance of lifestyle emigration is shown by the success of the cultural and artistic 'industries' in cities such as London and New York. As has been recognised for some time, such industries are major economic drivers in their own right (e.g. Corrib, 2007; UK Department for Culture, 2007) but also ensure the cultural facilities which make these global cities attractive destinations for more mundane but high earning immigrants. The vibrancy of a city's cultural sector depends in turn on the city attracting a relatively large semi-bohemian immigrant population with different skills, values and experiences. Lifestyle immigration is thus a key resource for a city's cultural industries.

An extreme case of non-economic motivation is provided by what could be called 'oppositional emigration'. In the 1960s and 1970s many young Americans emigrated because of opposition to the Vietnam War; today many young Poles have emigrated because of what they see as the repressive political culture of their society. And here of course the Irish experience is iconic. Generations of soon-to-be-famous authors, and generations of never famous ordinary people (especially women), left Ireland because they rejected what that saw as the domination of a conservative and puritanical Catholic church (Daly, 2006).

Such considerations lead naturally to the 'creative class' thesis of Richard Florida. For Florida (2004) economic growth now depends on what he terms 'the creative class'. Florida argues that 'creativity' is no longer just about artistic work, but is the common core of management, research and technological innovation. For Florida about 30% of all American jobs can be defined in this way, with a 'super creative core' of about 12% of those in 'Science and engineering, computers and mathematics, education, and the arts, design and entertainment, [i.e.] people who work in directly creative activity' (Florida, 2004: 74). Florida's 'creative class' is strikingly similar to the 'symbolic analysts' discovered by Reich (1993) at the onset of the expansion of global communications and information technology in the early 1990s. Reich argued that these networked professionals could work anywhere: their networks were virtual rather than spatial, plugging into their network required a modem, not an office. For both authors, whereas people used to move to jobs, now jobs move to people. Florida is adamant that while of course economic growth generates wealth which can be used for cultural facilities, what actually matters is the converse: cultural facilities (in the very broadest sense of the term) generate economic growth. The cultural facilities that matter are not the 'big ticket' facilities (concert halls, opera houses etc) but a vibrant street life and a good music scene (Florida: 2004: 259). Because the creative class values creativity and diversity, its members move to places where these exist. Once there, they then create jobs. As is well known, Florida suggests that one measure of such tolerance and diversity is his 'Gay Index', a measure of proxies for the number of homosexuals in the population, which at city level correlates strongly with measures of high tech success. The argument is not that gays are particularly predisposed to high tech innovation, but that high tech innovation occurs most in centres where diversity is tolerated:

*'The trick for cities, then, is to figure out how to make this mobile talent want to come – and ideally stay.'* (Florida, 2005: 166)

Florida has recently lauded Dublin as an example of a city which, like Austin in Texas, attracted high tech firms and talent. Like Austin, Dublin then leveraged that investment with its own talent, attracted emigrants to return and then invested in cultural amenities. Like

Austin, Dublin thus became more open and tolerant and so kick-started a virtuous creative cycle (Florida, 2005: 176). On this basis Dublin is now able to attract new immigrant members of the 'creative class', ensuring continued and broader economic growth. Indeed, according to Florida between 1995 and 2002 Ireland had the fastest growth of its creative class of any OECD country (2005: 137).

This review of recent research has shown that the blanket term 'skilled labour migration' covers not just a multitude of occupations, but of very different forms of movement. In fact the traditional 'immigrant' moving from his or her country of birth to permanent residence in another country is very much a limiting case. While the development literature has certainly drawn attention to the growth of 'circular migration', it is important to realise that this too is only a part of the growing diversity of forms of movement between different countries. It is therefore useful to consider migration as only aspect of a more general phenomenon of *mobility*. Furthermore, this mobility of skilled and educated migrants, even when it is ostensibly concerned with employment, can decreasingly be understood purely in terms of conventional economic rationality. Life style issues are obviously important for young people's mobility and of course decisive for retirement migrants. However, non-economic motivations also apply to those who have 'normal' jobs and who are at the stage of their life-cycle when they are fully involved in the labour market (Hadler, 2006).

### 3. High Skill Migration and European Social Structure

The mass immigration to Western Europe during the long post-World War II boom involved flows of immigrants from specific sending countries to specific receiving countries (e.g. from the West Indies to the UK, from Turkey to Germany). Within this, skilled labour played a relatively small part and was certainly not a policy issue. Today flows of unskilled immigrants to Western Europe are much more diverse both in origin and destination. Crucially for our concerns, there are now also extensive flows of skilled migrants both to and within Europe. However, as we shall now see, in terms of skilled migrants the experience of the UK and Ireland is actually very different to the rest of the EU.

The absolute and relative importance of high skilled immigrants varies between countries. Firstly, there is a higher overall level of high skill immigration to countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia than to nearly all European countries. Thus in Australia, Canada and the USA immigrants account for 25 percent, 20 percent and 10 percent respectively of all skilled employment; in most European countries the proportions are far lower. Secondly, in Europe not only is the overall level of immigration lower, but the immigrants are more likely to enter low skill jobs. Only in the UK – and now Ireland – is the share of immigrants in high skill jobs similar to their overall share of employment. (OECD, 2002).<sup>2</sup>

Immigrants are notoriously difficult to count or even to define. An obvious problem is the number of illegal immigrants. However, until recently the main conceptual problem lay in the conflation in both popular and statistical terms between 'non-citizen' and 'member of ethnic minority'. Cross-cutting these definitions have to be added the increasingly complex categories of residential status, ranging from asylum seeker to permanent legal residency, the relationship between this status and access to social welfare rights, and the different

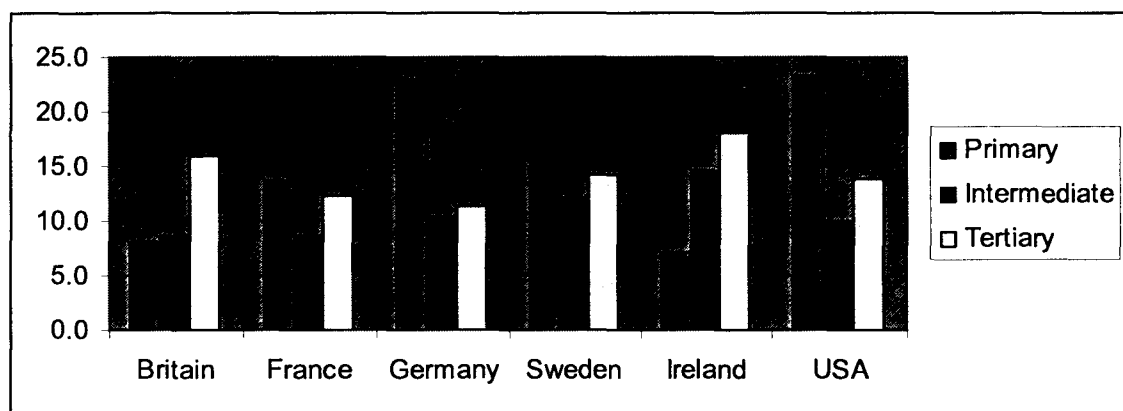
<sup>2</sup> Exact comparisons are difficult: the Australian, Canadian and US figures are for *foreign born*, the European figures for *non-nationals* (OECD, 2002: 4).

citizenship status (national citizen, citizen of the EU, etc). One new source is the OECD 'Expatriates database' (Dumont and Lemaître, 2005). Using published census results from OECD members from around the year 2000, this lists for each country the total number of those born outside the country ('immigrants'), subdivided by country of birth, current citizenship and level of education. While there are obvious limitations, in particular in relation to current occupation, this does allow some crude cross-national comparisons using standardised terms. In particular, differentiating immigrants by education suggests that the professional and managerial occupations, the group often termed by sociologists the 'service class', are now becoming particularly cosmopolitan.

This is clear when we consider only those moving within the EU. Intra-EU migrants are now disproportionately likely to have had a third level education compared to the 'natives' of the country to which they move. There are however important differences between countries. At one extreme, in the UK one third of EU non-nationals have third level qualifications, while in Germany it is only 14 percent (Recchi, 2008).

Such differences are part of a broader pattern. Figure 1 uses the OECD analysis of national census results to show the proportion of those with foreign birthplaces in the different educational groups. Over 15 percent of graduates in both the UK and (especially) Ireland were born abroad. By contrast, in France and (especially) Germany the service class is significantly more 'national' in origin.

**Figure: 1 Foreign-born as Percentage of Each Educational Category**



*Source: Derived from Dumont and Lemaître (2005), Table A4.*

In the UK this is especially true of London. The financial services industry in London and the South East of England now employs significant numbers of French immigrants, many in professional and managerial occupations. With a French population of over 200,000, French London is now as big as Lille or Rouen (Smith, 2007). The London Immigration study shows that not only is 30.5% of the city's population foreign-born, but migrants from high wage countries are disproportionately likely to be in the top quintile of annual earnings compared to the non-migrant population (Gordon et al, 2007: 51).

Furthermore, those currently in the country will not necessarily stay. In London in particular it appears that some high skill occupations are being continually replenished by immigrants, who then leave again after a few years. Here data from the London Immigration study is suggestive. Of migrants from rich wage countries who had lived in the UK for up to

three years, fully 35% were in the top wage quintile; by contrast of those from the same countries who lived in the UK for more than three years, this applied to only 28 percent.<sup>3</sup>

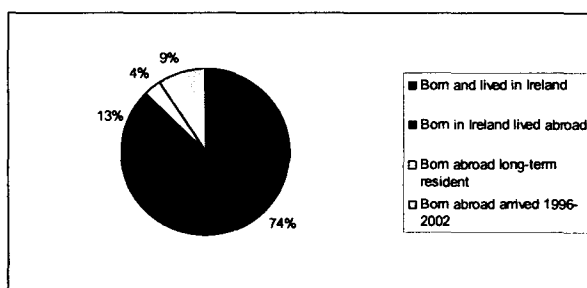
The level of outward migration *from* rich countries is partly shaped by the economic cycle, as evidenced by the high rates of skilled emigration from Ireland in the 1980s or the outflow from France in recent years. Just as many skilled Irish returned in the 1990s, doubtless many French emigrants would return 'home' if there were more job opportunities in France today. However, contemporary emigration from rich countries also contains a strong element of 'brain circulation'. Thus the London Immigration study locates a strong correlation between the outflow of rich country nationals from the UK and the level of immigration from such countries in the previous year, suggesting that many are short term immigrants. Emigration from the UK to other rich countries has not been affected by declining unemployment, and while retirement emigration is clearly significant, it would seem that emigration for employment is also important. All of this means that within rich countries – such as Ireland – significant numbers of people have lived and worked outside the country, and furthermore this is particularly the case for those with qualifications.

#### 4. The Irish Example: Towards a Cosmopolitan Irish Service Class

As we have already seen there is evidence of a growing cosmopolitanism of managers and professionals – the so-called service class – within *some* advanced societies. In Ireland today this means not only that many immigrants are skilled, but also that many qualified Irish people emigrate. Furthermore, a period living abroad has become a normal experience for those Irish managers and professionals who currently live in the country.

Rather than simply dividing the population into 'natives' and 'immigrants' or 'Irish nationals' and 'non-nationals', it is useful to categorise the population currently in Ireland in terms of its mobility history (Wickham, 2007). Using the micro-data from the 2002 Census the population can be classified into four groups: (a) 'Born and lived in Ireland' (b) 'Born in Ireland lived abroad' (c) 'Born abroad long term resident [in Ireland]' (d) 'Born abroad arrived 1996-2002'. The first group have resided all their lives within Ireland and are classified as 'immobile'; the other three groups are classified as 'mobile'. Figure 2 shows each group as a percentage of the total adult population. It shows that nearly three quarters of the adult population in 2002 were 'immobile', in that they were born in Ireland and had lived here all their lives. However, another 13% of the population had lived abroad in the past, 4% had been born abroad but were now long term residents in Ireland, and 9% were recent arrivals.

Figure 2: Experience of Mobility, Ireland 2002



Source: Census of Ireland 2002 (micro-data)

<sup>3</sup> This is still a higher share of well paid jobs than the 20 percent taken by non-migrants.

To understand the impact of mobility on the occupational structure, we need to examine the *composition* of the different occupational or educational groups in terms of their mobility experience. Table 1 examines the major 'socio-economic groups' defined by the census (this particular classification is especially appropriate because it identifies 'managers and professionals' as a distinct group). It shows that 'Managers and professionals' were more mobile than other groups. Whereas 74 percent of the entire population had lived all their lives in Ireland, this applied to only 67 percent living all their lives in Ireland. Every third member of the Irish service class, in other words, has lived abroad.

**Table 1: Occupational Groups and Experience of Mobility, Ireland 2002**  
SEG Major Groups \*Residential History Cross tabulation

% within SEG major groups

		Residential history				Total
		Born and lived in Ireland	Born in Ireland lived abroad	Born abroad long-term resident	Born abroad arrived 1996-2002	
SEG major groups	Managers and professionals	66.8%	17.2%	5.8%	10.2%	100.0%
	Non-manual	77.4%	9.6%	4.8%	8.3%	100.0%
	Skilled manual	80.7%	8.6%	3.1%	7.6%	100.0%
	Other manual	79.0%	9.1%	3.3%	8.7%	100.0%
	Own account	71.9%	15.9%	2.5%	9.7%	100.0%
	Farmers	91.2%	5.7%	.5%	2.6%	100.0%
	Agric workers	79.7%	4.6%	5.1%	10.6%	100.0%
	All others	70.1%	11.6%	4.5%	13.8%	100.0%
Total		74.4%	12.3%	4.4%	8.9%	100.0%

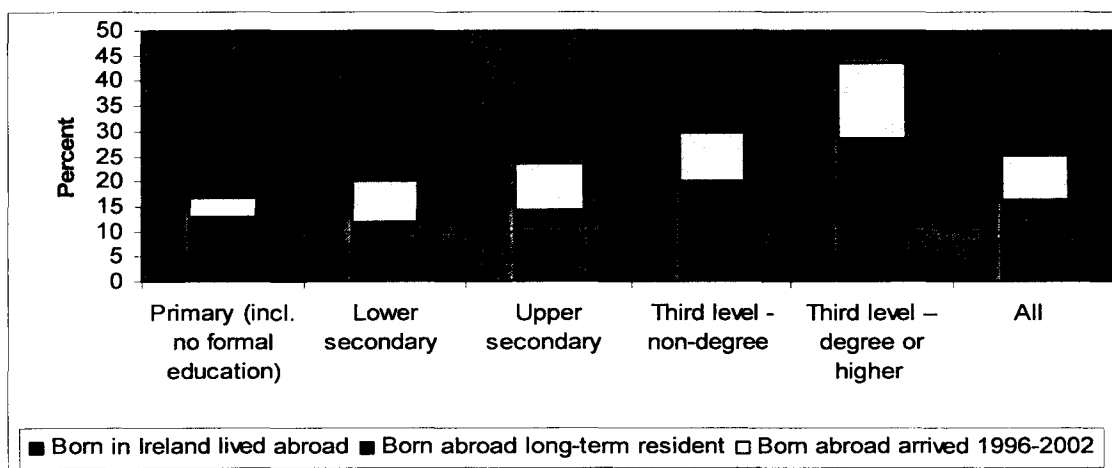
Source: Census of Ireland 2002 (micro-data)

Figure 3, given on the next page, continues this analysis, focusing on education. Here there is a straightforward gradient: the lower the qualification, the lower the proportion of the group that has been in some way mobile. Thus amongst those with only primary education, 17 percent have lived all their lives in Ireland, whereas at the other extreme this applies to only just under half (43 percent) of all those with some form of third level degree.

At least until the last few years, immigrants have tended to have higher qualifications than the indigenous population: according to the same source in 2002 14 percent of Irish nationals had at least a third level degree, as compared to fully 34 percent of non-Irish citizens. However it is equally important to notice that those with educational qualifications are particularly likely to *leave* Ireland, even if only temporarily. According to the OECD migration database<sup>4</sup>, Ireland has the highest proportion of the stock of its graduates living overseas (see also EGFSN, 2005:112 footnote 72). Importantly, this is not simply a historical hangover of the mass emigration of the 1980s. The class of 2005 graduated when graduate unemployment was virtually non-existent, but nonetheless one in twelve of all honours graduates were working overseas a year later. Indeed, as Table 2 shows, the more highly qualified graduates were particularly likely to emigrate – nearly one in five of all PhD graduates from 2005 were working overseas.

<sup>4</sup> OECD, Database on Immigrants in OECD Countries (DIOC).



**Figure: 3 Educational Qualifications and Experience of Mobility, Ireland 2002**

Height of each bar indicates percentage of each educational group lived abroad  
 Source: Census of Ireland 2002 (micro-data)

**Table 2: Graduate Emigration Ireland 2005**

	Employed overseas (%)
Bachelor (Level 7)	2.9
Honours Bachelor Degree (Level 8)	8.3
Postgraduate Diploma (Level 9)	3.5
Taught Masters (Level 9)	13.1
Research Masters (Level 9)	12.2
PhD (Level 10)	19.2

Source: Derived from HEA (2006: Section 3).

The usual data sources only allow us to know about the careers of people who are actually in the country at the moment. However, it does seem highly likely that many of those who have arrived in Ireland are likely to leave again. One reason for the birth of the Celtic Tiger is often cited as the return to Ireland of electronic engineers and software workers who emigrated to the United States in the 1980s (O'Riain, 2004). Such movement is part of a wider phenomenon in which tertiary education leads to a career path in which a period spent abroad is normal. Indeed, it has long been conventional wisdom that those with ambition leave, even if only to return at a higher grade or better salary than those who merely stayed at home. For accountancy graduates this was shown by Hanlon (1994). Gash and O'Connell (2000) demonstrated that returning graduates in general were able to gain an 'emigration premium' over those who had never emigrated.

The extent of graduate emigration (and return immigration) varies by type of degree. Examining all those with a third level degree currently in Ireland, Chart 3 above shows that in 2002 20 percent had been born in Ireland but had lived abroad. Further analysis of the same data shows that this rose to fully 41.6 percent of all with 'Medical and related' qualifications. Amongst those least likely to have lived abroad were those with degrees in 'Education' (17.4 percent lived abroad) and 'Agriculture/forestry' (15.3 percent). More surprisingly, those with degrees in 'Computing and information technology' were also quite immobile (only 16.1

percent had lived abroad), and this remains true even when controlling for age, suggesting that the pattern of return emigration identified by O Riain is in fact restricted to a small (and possibly elite) sub-group of IT graduates.

5. Irish Immigration Policy – The Importance of Soft Measures

If non-economic issues are important in the decision to move, then clearly attracting skilled immigrants involves far more than the conventional concerns of migration policy. A useful analytical framework would distinguish firstly between two different policy *modes*. ‘Hard’ policy is directly implemented by government through law and administrative regulation; in legal terminology it is ‘justifiable’. By contrast, ‘soft’ policy works by incentives and exhortation. Within Europe the difference between ‘hard law’ and ‘soft law’ has become institutionalised in various areas of social policy (de la Porte and Pochet, 2004) and relates to the difference in political theory between ‘regulation’ and ‘governance’ (Jessop, 1994). A second difference is the *breadth* of policy. Most of what is conventionally understood as ‘immigration policy’ concerns, not surprisingly, actual or potential immigrants alone. The regulation of movement across national borders is an obvious example. However, migration is not just the result of such decisions. Migration depends on the economic situation of the host country, but potentially almost any area of government policy impacts on migrants, making the country more or less attractive to them. Chart 4 maps out these different possibilities and this section of paper now reviews Irish policy in these terms.

Figure 4: Areas of Migration Policy

		Breadth	
		Focused	Contextual
Mode	Hard	Border control: visas, work permits... Access to citizenship Access to social rights and social services Taxation exemptions <div>Qualification recognition</div>	Labour market regulation and Employment Protection Legislation (EPL) Taxation Equal opportunities and anti-discrimination legislation and enforcement
	Soft	National image (‘national brand’)	Ethnic diversity and tolerance Employment quality Quality of life

5.1 ‘Hard’ and Focused Migration Policy

The upper left hand cell of Chart 4 comprises those policy areas which are *hard* (in that they rely on state laws and regulations) and *focused* (in that are concerned exclusively with actual or potential immigrants. What is normally understood as immigration policy falls into this cell.

5.1.1 Immigration control and access to employment

Migration controls are the clearest case of ‘hard’ migration policy. Countries wishing to attract high skilled migrants define entry conditions that will admit skilled immigrants. Schemes

differ in terms of how immigrants are categorised and under what conditions they are admitted.

For Ireland the defining feature is that the country is a member of the European Union. In theory within the EU any citizen of any member state is entitled to seek employment in another member state: this particular freedom of movement is one of the Union's 'four freedoms'. In practice this right has always been differentially enforced even within the 'old' EU15. Partly this occurred by states defining large areas of state employment as part of their national civil service and hence only opens to their own citizens; partly it occurred through sundry bureaucratic obstacles which were especially onerous for non-nationals. With EU enlargement in 2005 10 new member states joined the Union. Ireland, along with the UK and Sweden, opened its labour market immediately to citizens of the new member states.<sup>5</sup> The remaining 'old' member states were only allowed to delay this for a few years, and with the exception of Germany and Austria all have now removed these restrictions. However, when Bulgaria and Rumania joined in 2007 all the old member states imposed temporary restrictions on the freedom of movement of these countries' citizens.

In Ireland the Employment Permits Acts of 2003 and 2006 are designed to ensure that Ireland can attract skilled labour from outside the EU, with a so-called 'Green Card'. This is available without any labour market testing to anyone with employment paying more than €60,000 per annum. Such permits are also available to a range of occupations with salaries below this level but above €30,000. In fact, the list of occupations and sectors included here is so broad that it would appear that anyone in professional or managerial employment should be able to obtain a Green Card. If an occupation does not enable an immigrant to obtain a Green Card, then a Work Permit may be available if the salary is more than €30,000, but the list of 'ineligible occupations' covers most routine white collar, personal service and manual jobs. The Green Card also gives spouses of holders the right to enter Ireland and take up employment<sup>6</sup>. This system therefore effectively opens the Irish labour market to almost all skilled labour from outside the EU.

Immigrants have also been able to enter Ireland through the *Intra Company Transfer* scheme. Current regulations allow such permits for 'senior management, key personnel or trainees' earning over €40,000 p.a. This facilitates the multi-national companies who have been central to Ireland's economic growth for over fifty years. In fact, the Irish subsidiaries of American headquartered companies tend to either begin with Irish managers or have Irish managers very soon after start-up, so that this is relatively unimportant.

Finally, the *Third Level Graduate Scheme* allows non-EEA graduates of Irish third level institutions to remain in Ireland to take up employment for six months; the assumption being that during that time they will find employment qualifying them for a Green Card or Work Permit.

In international terms the Irish use of income limits for skilled immigration contrasts with an increasing use by other countries of various forms of points schemes. In these systems potential immigrants are admitted if they are able to collect enough 'points' based on their qualifications, education, age, etc. The system was pioneered by Australia and Canada and is the basis for the new UK system. It seems that the Irish use of income criteria was chosen

<sup>5</sup> In the UK citizens of the A8 member states are required to register under the Worker Registration Scheme as soon as they start work.

<sup>6</sup> Information at <http://www.entemp.ie/labour/workpermits/guidelines.htm>

simply on grounds of administrative simplicity; although it is often argued that points based systems tend to ensure that many 'skilled' immigrants end up in jobs below their qualification level.

The US Green Card scheme is so well known that it has now given its name to skilled immigrant policies around the world. The Green Card provides the holder with the right of permanent residence in the USA and is thus one step short of citizenship. Unlike the Irish 'Green Card', it is not linked solely to employment, and actual entry to the USA for employment is controlled by a series of different work visas. The new UK points-based system prioritises highly skilled workers, while in Germany the immigration law of 2005 allows high skilled immigrants immediate permanent residence. It replaces the so-called 'Green Card' scheme which was restricted to IT workers and was a failure even in these narrow terms. Given the plethora of different national schemes within the EU and even within the Schengen states, the European Commission proposed a common EU 'Blue Card' in October 2007. The proposal would standardise entry procedures and even more importantly ensure that skilled immigrants would have access to a common European labour market. Again, compared to the US the proposed Blue Card is restrictive, since it would not give the right to permanent residency. However, even though it would depend on an initial job offer, it would be attached to the individual migrant and not to the job.

Most EU states are now making entry easier for skilled immigrants from outside the Union. According to the Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), of all EU states Ireland probably offers some of the easiest access to employment for skilled immigrants, but some of the most difficult access for unskilled (non-EU) immigrants (Niessen *et al*, 2007: 95).

### 5.1.2 Access to Citizenship

It was argued above that skilled migrants today are (overall) relatively transient, moving *between* countries rather than *from* one country *to* another. One consequence might appear to be that access to national citizenship has become less important. If migrants intend to move on anyway, why should citizenship matter? This attitude appears to be implicit in new Irish legislation, which, while making entry to Ireland easy for skilled migrants from outside the EU, essentially offers a path to permanent residency rather than to citizenship as such. In practice access to citizenship is even further restricted, given that there is now a two year delay in processing applications. Nonetheless MIPEX ranks Ireland equal fifth out of 28 countries in terms of ease of access to nationality (Niessen *et al*, 2007: 18).

The contrast with the USA is instructive. The simple fact is that the United States offers immigrants the chance to become 'American'. American policy assumes that citizenship is the normal endpoint of migration. American policy has the inherent optimism that immigrants *want* to join American society. Irish policy by contrast merely promises to be nice to temporary – if well paid – hired hands.

An immigration policy – like that of the United States – which treats immigrants as potential members of the national community is presumably more welcoming than a policy – like that of most European countries – which treats immigrants, however welcome their skills may be, as always inherently *different*. To offer citizenship to immigrants is to offer them full membership of the society. This is a fundamentally welcoming stance and must make a destination attractive, even to those who do not (at the moment) intend to become permanent residents.

### 5.1.3 Access to Social Rights

Ever since Marshall's seminal work, sociological discussion has stressed the multi-dimensional nature of citizenship. In Europe the 'social' dimension of citizenship – the rights to education, health, social welfare etc. – defines the welfare state. Indeed the extent of these rights is one of the key differences between Europe and the USA. Furthermore, within the EU employment rights (protection against dismissal, rights to information etc.) are also more advanced than in the USA. In all EU member states legal residents tend to have the same social rights as citizens, all legally employed workers tend to have the same rights as citizens. Indeed, if member states wish to restrict access to such rights, they have to do so in ways that do not discriminate between EU citizens. Since 2004 in Ireland access to much social welfare depends upon fulfilling the 'Habitual Residence Condition' (Cousins, 2007). In practice this means having lived in Ireland for more than two years, and this created difficulties for Irish citizens who had been living in the USA and were now returning to Ireland.

On the border between hard and soft focused policy is the formal certification of knowledge and experience through qualifications (e.g. medicine, law, engineering). While government plays an important role, much depends on professional associations and educational institutions and individual employers. Although in general immigrants in Ireland are employed below their qualification level (Barrett et al, 2006), our research has also shown that during the boom many employers were willing to take on trust immigrants' qualifications without extensive documentation.

## 5.2. Hard and Contextual Policy

What makes a country attractive – or unattractive – to high skilled migrants is not just its formal immigration policy. A wide range of policy areas also have implications for migration.

### 5.2.1 Taxation

Clearly the level of remuneration skilled immigrants can expect is important. There is some limited economic evidence that high skill immigrants are more attracted to countries with relatively unequal income distributions (Minns 2005; also Reich, 1993) and/or low levels of personal taxation (Liebig and Sousa-Poza, 2005). This would appear to be an argument for a less redistributive tax system in general, and it certainly could be argued that the low levels of personal taxation in Ireland attracted immigrants during the boom (hard contextual policy). Perhaps because of this particular *contextual* policy, there was never any discussion in Ireland of a *focused* policy of specific tax benefits for skilled immigrants (e.g. various forms of tax exemptions for initial earnings).

### 5.2.2 Equal Opportunities

Since the 1970s legislation against discrimination in employment on the grounds of gender has been part of the EU *acquis communautaire* or inherited body of European legislation which all new member states must accept. More recently EU anti-discrimination legislation has been broadened to tackle discrimination on the basis of ethnic or racial origin. In some member states, especially the UK, such anti-discrimination legislation dates back to the 1960s. Equally, some states, with again probably the UK in the lead, have not only legislation but government funded agencies to monitor and enforce legislation. Although such policies are primarily concerned with established ethnic minorities rather than newly arrived immigrants, it is

plausible that effective anti-discrimination legislation contributes to a better environment for immigrants as a whole.

In Ireland the Employment Equality Agency was set up in 1977 to enforce equality legislation of the 1970s concerned with women. In 1999 the Agency was subsumed into a new Equality Authority with the broader remit of combating all forms of discrimination covered by new EU directives. These have both broadened the grounds of discrimination from gender to include *inter alia* race and also the areas of discrimination from just employment to all areas of public life. Such relatively effective anti-discrimination legislation has probably contributed to making the country relatively welcoming to skilled immigrants. Nonetheless, on the MIPEX ranking Ireland scores only in the middle range of EU countries on the effectiveness of anti-discrimination policy (Niessen et al, 2007: 18).

### 5.2.3 Labour Market Regulation

Labour market flexibility has been extensively discussed for over twenty years. Whereas there is controversy as to whether high employment protection reduces overall employment, there is consensus that employment protection tends to generate insider-outsider or segmented labour markets. In countries with high employment protection, firms will tend to recruit skilled labour from within their own internal labour markets. This in turn has implications for skilled immigration. In Germany, where the internal labour market is important, firms are less likely to recruit skilled foreigners than are firms in the UK (Winkelman, 2002). Overall countries with high levels of employment protection as measured by the OECD EPL index tend to have low levels of skilled immigration: Chart 1 above showed that France and Germany have low levels of skilled immigration: they score 2.8 and 2.6 respectively on the OECD EPL index, whereas the UK and the USA, with far higher levels of skilled immigration, score 0.9 and 0.7 respectively (OECD, 1999: 66)<sup>7</sup>. The relative flexibility of the Irish labour market (EPL score of 1.2) has contributed to Ireland being able to attract and retain skilled labour during the boom. Labour market regulation is contextual since it is not directly aimed at immigrants, and is hard policy because it depends in the first instance on legislation. However, labour market regulation also involves non-governmental actors, most obviously employers and trade unions, as well as informal norms (Regini, 2000). To this extent labour market regulation has obvious 'soft' components.

### 5.3. Contextual and Soft Policy

It is clear that income per se is only factor that motivates skilled immigrants, especially when they are moving between countries of broadly comparable GDP. Questions of the quality of work and the quality of life are important, and these are largely shaped by diffuse or *soft* policies that have no particular focus on immigrants.

#### 5.3.1 Quality of Employment

Some jobs have always been attractive not because of their immediate pay, but because they provide training and/or realistic chances of promotion. This issue takes new forms where migrants see their careers within a European or even global labour market: a job in Ireland may be attractive precisely because it enables the holder to improve his/her position within

<sup>7</sup> EPL scores are for 'Version 2' of the OECD EPL index and for the late 1990s.

such a labour market. At its most basic, Ireland is attractive to immigrants because a job here enables them to subsequently demonstrate English language competence (Wickham et al, 2009). This enables them to access the 'global' Anglophone labour market (the USA, Australia, etc.). Equally, employment with a well-known multi-national company and/or employment in an industry where the country has a reputation for skilled work is itself an important addition to an employee's CV. In the Irish IT sector for example immigrants from India often see employment in Ireland as a stepping stone to employment in a US MNC elsewhere in the world.

Quality of employment includes not only access to promotion and training, but also that cluster of factors long studied under the rubric of 'work satisfaction'. For skilled immigrants a crucial issue is likely to be the degree of autonomy they are offered. A study of Scottish graduates working in Ireland reports that many were initially attracted by the possibility of employment which they considered commensurate with their qualifications, but once in Ireland found the actual work experience attractive (Boyle, 2006). Equally, our own research has found that some Polish immigrants value the relatively informal and non-hierarchical atmosphere of Irish workplaces (Krings et al, 2009). By contrast, immigrants from India working in the IT sector were sometimes scathing about the training possibilities they were offered (Wickham and Bruff, 2008).

It is plausible that skilled migrants are attracted and retained by companies which set out to encourage tolerance and diversity in the workplace. 'Managing for Diversity' is therefore not just a question of the management of existing ethnic minorities, it is also relevant for *new* immigrants. Such policies can have a wide impact. Today, electronic communication ensures that many migrants form part of transnational networks linked by an interweaving of ethnic and occupation identities. If a company gains a reputation as a good place for migrants to work, this will spread literally round the globe.

### 5.3.2 Quality of Life

Questions of the quality of working life lead to questions of the quality of life as a whole. Here the signs for Ireland are rather more ambiguous. Quite apart from astonishment at the cost of living, especially housing, the immigrants interviewed by Boyle (2006) identified transport and health as major problems.

There are well established attempts to measure the 'quality of life' of a country, such as the Human Development Index (HDI). However, it is unlikely that a measure such as the HDI directly captures all the issues of concern to skilled migrants. Arguments such as Florida's do suggest that cultural facilities are relevant, but ultimately a tolerant and stimulating environment is more important, if more difficult to measure. Different indices do generate different positions: in 2005 Ireland came top of the Economist's Quality of Life index (in 2008 it was in fourth place), but has never reached that position on the HDI index where in 2008 it stood at fifth place. A relatively new phenomenon is the development of indices aimed explicitly at specific mobile groups. Thus Mercer Human Resource Consultancy produces an index of quality of life in cities across the world aimed largely at expatriate managers. 'International Living' produces a Quality of Life index of countries for Americans planning to live abroad (the Quality of Life index from International Living). Significantly, on these indices which give greater weight to cultural and lifestyle factors, Ireland does not score particularly highly.

It is probable that 'quality of life' or 'cultural facilities' will have different meanings for different groups in terms of income, age, family situation etc. Boyle's young professional Scots were attracted to Dublin by the *craic* [conversation] in the pubs, but it is unlikely that this will be so important to a middle-aged American facilities manager.

### 5.3.3 Social Cohesion

Social policy even more broadly conceived can also influence immigration decisions and in ways that contradict other policy areas. The arguments above suggested that skilled immigration would be facilitated by a low tax (and hence high inequality) environment. This would seem to be supported by the fact that the 'creative class' clusters in areas of income inequality. Indeed Florida's 'creativity index' correlates closely with more straightforward indices of income inequality (Florida, 2005: 190).

At the same time, Florida argues that the growing income inequality of the USA has made it a less attractive place to live. Most obviously, extremes of inequality are usually associated with high levels of crime and personal danger, the most notorious example being South Africa. Unequal societies, or more precisely, highly individualistic or 'non-cohesive' societies, have few public spaces, while their citizens share few common facilities.<sup>8</sup> To the extent that high skilled individuals find this unattractive, they will avoid such countries – or even leave them.

In other words, income inequality can attract high skilled immigrants because it gives them greater rewards, but it can also repel immigrants because of its implications for their quality of life. This contradiction highlights the need to disaggregate the category 'high skilled migrants'. However, there is evidence that for some migrants, quality of life includes societal issues as well as simply what they are able to directly purchase. Research on immigrants to Ireland working in the IT sector (Wickham and Bruff, 2008) shows that some of these immigrants find the USA unattractive because it lacks what they see as the 'normal' facilities of a welfare state. Measured by this standard, Ireland's 'European' commitment to basic welfare provision for its citizens makes it attractive.

### 5.3.4 Tolerance, Diversity and International Reputation

A country's international reputation is one of the most important factors affecting its ability to attract skilled migrants. Such a 'brand image' can be affected by issues that in fact have very little to do with skilled immigrants as such. At the most general level, it has probably helped that in Ireland the 'respectable' media has tended to celebrate immigration rather than to treat it as essentially a social problem. Decisions such as the pragmatic opening of the labour market to citizens of the new member states in 2004 also have an important international symbolic value. Conversely, the defeat of the Lisbon Treaty referendum received much publicity abroad. Although the Treaty has nothing to do with skilled migration, its defeat has probably made Ireland seem suddenly much less welcoming to foreigners than in the past.

Empirical research can gauge the extent to which in reality a country tolerates or even encourages diversity. Building on his original work on American cities, Florida makes comparisons between countries in terms of a 'Global Tolerance Index' based on measures of

<sup>8</sup> This argument implies an analytical distinction between 'cohesion' and simple inequality. Members of a *cohesive* society share a notion of mutual responsibility to each other, and this is in principle compatible with extensive economic inequality.



secularism and self-expression (Florida, 2005: 150). Ireland is not included in these countries, but Ireland is included in his separate but rather similar 'Euro-tolerance index'. Here Ireland scored sensationally badly, coming lower than all other European countries in the study apart from Portugal (Florida and Tinagli, 2004: 26).

To date at least most other evidence contradicts this finding. If it were true, it would undermine Florida's entire argument, given that he both claims that Ireland has one of Europe's fastest growing 'creative classes' and that tolerance is a necessary condition for growth of this same creative class. In fact, Ireland's low tolerance score is actually misleading: the 'Euro-tolerance index' is a composite of three scales: attitudes to immigrants and strangers, secular values, self-expression. Ireland scores higher (i.e. has more welcoming attitudes) on the first than many countries, including the UK; Ireland's low score on the composite index is purely the result of continuing religious beliefs which dramatically lower the score on the 'values' dimension. In line with this image of Ireland as in fact a relatively tolerant society, recent Eurobarometer results show the Irish population as being the most likely in the entire EU to believe the country's 'cultural life' was enriched by immigrants; Irish people were also the second highest in the EU in terms of their interaction with people of different ethnic origins (Downes, 2008). Detailed analysis of the 2003 European Social Survey also shows that compared to the rest of the Union the Irish population is relatively welcoming to immigrants (Hughes *et al*, 2007).

Once a country acquires a reputation for hostility to immigrants it is remarkably difficult to shake it off. Germany is well known for only grudging acceptance of its long established Turkish minority. This hostility to a (mostly low skilled) minority is the background for the infamous slogan 'Kinder statt Inder' (children instead of Indians) coined by the German CDU politician Jürgen Rüttgers in 2000. Rüttgers was commenting on the German government's new 'Green Card' system launched to tackle the shortage of IT specialists. Rüttgers may well have been trying to raise the relative merits of education and immigration as strategies to tackle skill shortages, but his highly publicised remarks have contributed to an even lower level of skilled immigration to Germany.

Until the recent (2004) enlargement, part of the definition of an EU citizen was that she or he could seek employment in any member state. This already means that skilled EU citizens who are members of ethnic minorities are beginning to move towards the more tolerant countries. For example, journalistic reports suggest that skilled French nationals of Maghrebi extraction now find London more congenial than Paris.

While national attitudes to ethnic diversity might seem far removed from the normal concerns of skilled migration policy, countries are increasingly trying to manage how this very 'soft' area is seen. London now markets itself as a destination for skilled workers on the basis of its reputation (whether deserved or not) for ethnic tolerance and diversity. This diversity is a theme of the Scottish Executive 'Fresh Talent' policy which proudly announces that:

*Scotland is a multicultural society...In 2001, it was reported that 2 percent of Scotland's population was from a non-white, minority ethnic group.*

Cultural diversity thus becomes part of the national image, or in marketing terms, the national brand - it is managed and sold to potential migrants. As this happens, cultural diversity shifts from a contextual issue to a crucial component of focused and explicitly targeted soft policy. Here of course hard policy can undermine soft policy. While the new

Irish 'Green Card' system is relatively straightforward compared to the previous work permits regime, applicants apparently experience unexpected demands for proof of formal qualifications; there have been cases of what have been experienced as racist behaviour by immigration officials. Since migrants communicate and travel, their experience of the host country's migration controls has major implications for the country's image or 'brand'.

## 6. Conclusion

During the boom years Ireland became renowned for its high levels of immigration. One component of this change was the rising number of skilled immigrants. This paper has suggested that Ireland was attractive to skilled immigrants not simply because of its economic growth, but because of other aspects of policy. Policy was categorised on two dimensions: *hard* versus *soft*, and *focused* versus *contextual*. Especially important here was probably the *hard* and *contextual* policy of a relatively flexible labour market as well as achievements in the *soft* and *focused* area of diversity and tolerance.

Two final caveats are important. Firstly, the paper has discussed national policy, but much of the experience of skilled immigrants is shaped other actors: by government below and above the national level (cities and the EU) as well as by employers themselves. Secondly, in the last few years Ireland has moved from being the European showcase for a neo-liberal growth model to being the EU's economic disaster zone. Immigration, including skilled immigration, has slowed and emigration, including return migration is rising. It remains to be seen whether the conditions that favoured skilled immigrations will continue in this new and very different context.

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