

## **The Development of an Irish Census-based Social Class Scale\***

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*Abstract:* This paper outlines the reasons for, and steps taken, to develop an Irish census-based social class scale. The willing participation of the Central Statistics Office in reorganising its occupational categories to devise this scale marks an innovative contribution to social research. The resulting classification has a validity in an Irish context beyond that of alternative scales and should be an asset to researchers in facilitating a more comprehensive and revealing analysis of census occupational data than has hitherto been feasible. The scale is based on the neo-Weberian concept of class and has six categories.

### I INTRODUCTION

Since 1951 the Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) has employed a socio-economic group classification as part of its data output series. This classification is a nominal grouping of occupations comprising 11 categories plus a residual one, as follows:

- 0 Farmers, farmers' relatives and farm managers
- 1 Other agricultural occupations and fishermen
- 2 Higher professional
- 3 Lower professional
- 4 "Self-employed, employs others" and managers
- 5 Salaried employees

\*The authors wish to acknowledge the critical role of the other members of the working party whose contribution to the development of the scale we represent in this paper. We are all indebted to the CSO for ensuring the realisation of our objective, particularly to Paddy McDonald for his painstaking care and co-operation. Thanks are also due to the two anonymous referees for their helpful advice and suggestions.

- 6 Intermediate non-manual
- 7 Other non-manual workers
- 8 Skilled manual workers
- 9 Semi-skilled manual workers
- X Unskilled manual workers
- Y Unspecified

A socio-economic group (SEG) is defined as containing occupations "considered generally similar as regards the level of skill or educational attainment required" (CSO, 1986, Vol. 7).

At each full census of population relevant questions regarding occupation and employment status obtain information required for this classification. The socio-economic group of each gainfully occupied person in Ireland is determined by his/her occupation, or, in some cases, by a combination of occupation and employment status. A retired person is classified to the socio-economic group of his/her former occupation while other non-gainfully occupied persons, e.g., students, are classified to the socio-economic group of the person on whom they are deemed dependent. Census output by SEG is subsequently available for each district electoral division (DED) and DED aggregations, such as, counties, health board areas and for the country as a whole. The SEG scale has been a useful discriminator of socio-economic differences in many areas of research, e.g., in providing treated mental illness statistics (see O'Hare and Walsh, 1987; O'Hare and Walsh, 1988). It has also been used extensively in Irish educational research (see Stationery Office, *Investment in Education*, 1966; Sheehan, 1974; Geary and Henry, 1979; O'Sullivan, 1980; Clancy, 1988).

However, the undoubted weakness of this classification, particularly in areas of social inequity research, is its lack of a ranking procedure. A relevant illustration of this is the grouping of all farmers in one category irrespective of farm size or income accruing from the farm. Yet despite this lack of scale ordinality the SEG approach has considerable strengths, notably the availability of a detailed set of occupational codes in the CSO's "Classification of Occupations" manual and census-based measures which output from the scale provides. As a consequence the SEG scale appeared an appropriate instrument to appraise critically with the objective of developing a census-based social class scale. This clearly did not entail devising new theoretical conceptions or developing an ideal class schema from scratch. Rather, the objective was to move towards an operational concept of class consistent within the limits imposed by the range of information available from the census procedure.

This paper will first briefly describe the concept of social class employed in Ireland to date. It will then outline the organisational procedures developed for liaison with the CSO, the concept of social class that informs the theoretical

underpinning of the scale and the various steps taken in developing a six point social class scale or schema. The limitations and advantages of this scale, now officially utilised by the CSO to output social class data, will be noted.

## II THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CLASS EMPLOYED IN IRELAND

There has been an ongoing debate in sociology regarding the operationalisation of social class, seen as a central concept in the discipline. While it is possible to approach the problem of class categorisation from a number of perspectives, social class defined in occupational terms had dominated empirical social research in Britain. Likewise social research in Ireland has generally used occupation to indicate social and economic differences within society, or measure the variations of prestige or status across social groupings.

A number of occupational classifications have been widely used in Ireland. These include the British Registrar General's Scale, the Market Research Scale, the Hall-Jones Prestige Scale, the Irish Occupational Index and the Irish Socio-Economic Group (SEG) Classification, already referred to. These scales have been reviewed in some detail by O'Hare (1982) and more recently by Hayes (1987). It is therefore unnecessary to undertake another review here other than note those occupational classifications which purport to measure class, as distinct from status, and to assess their limitations, strengths and possible contribution in the construction of an Irish census-based social class scale.

The Market Research Scale and the Irish SEG classifications can be regarded as socio-economic groupings and not social class categories because of the lack of ordinality in the scaling of occupations and in particular the grouping of all farmers in one category. The British Registrar General's social class should be seen "as an arbitrary and crude, but well used measure of social inequality" in Britain, while keeping in mind that "no evidence has been offered by OPCS to validate RG social class as a measure of occupational skill or of social standing" (Brewer, 1986, pp. 138-139). The Hall-Jones Prestige Scale and the Irish Occupational Index are primarily prestige or status scales with occupations ordered in terms of their value within a given community/society.

The Hope-Goldthorpe Scale (1974) provides a measure of occupational prestige in the sense of the "general desirability of occupations". The categories of this scale which were derived by combining information on occupation and employment status provide the constituent elements for the creation of Goldthorpe's class schema. This schema does not assume, as prestige measures do, that occupations are ordered along a social continuum and the classes are not regarded as having a consistently hierarchical form (Marshall, 1990).

The class schema attempts to bring together within each category those

occupations whose incumbents share similar market and work situations. Hence class categories are made up of occupations whose incumbents are broadly comparable in their "sources and levels of income and other conditions of employment, in their degree of economic security and in their chances of economic advancement; and on the other hand, in their location within the system of authority and control governing the processes of production in which they are engaged" (Goldthorpe, 1987, p. 40).

To highlight the shortcomings of most of the occupational scales used in Ireland the following broad headings will be used to assess scale limitations:

- (i) intrinsic difficulties with some of the classifications;
- (ii) absence of an accompanying comprehensive occupational coding guide, and
- (iii) lack of census data relevant to the Irish demographic structure.

(i) In recent years there has been increasing criticism of occupational status or prestige scales. Central to this criticism is the question of what prestige scales actually measure. Goldthorpe and Hope (1972, p. 24) argue that "the demanding conditions required for an occupational prestige hierarchy are likely to prevail only locally, transiently or imperfectly in a modern society". Whelan (1980, p. 55) asserts that a concentration on occupational "status" is, in general, unproductive, and that the description of occupational classifications — such as the Hall-Jones Scale — as occupational prestige scales, is seriously misleading.

A further intrinsic deficiency in most of the scales, e.g., the British Registrar General's Scale, the Hall-Jones Scale and the Irish SEG is the allocation of all farmers to the same class without any recognition of their heterogeneity, or of their relative importance in the Irish context. On the same point an inappropriate combination of occupations can sometimes be contained in the same occupational unit as is the case in some categories of the Irish SEG Classification.

(ii) The British Registrar General's Scale and the Irish SEG are the only two occupational scales that have available classifications of occupations with a comprehensive list of codes. Only with easy availability of such classifications together with accompanying coding guide-lines, can occupations from a study or research project be reliably allocated to a class position. This standard occupational index also ensures comparability in data findings between studies and over time periods. It must be acknowledged, though, that currently an unsatisfactory situation exists between male and female codes, whereby women tend to be concentrated in a relatively small group of occupational

categories. In the absence of sufficient differentiation a situation arises whereby men and women allocated to the same occupational group are typically experiencing rather different market and work situations.

(iii) A social class scale that is census-based ensures that the same theoretical and empirical criteria of class are used to gather information for research purposes as that devised for the social class groupings of the national census data. This has considerable advantages for all types of large scale research. When studies are carried out in defined census areas then a denominator for social class is available which permits the rating of information and comparability of findings with other studies which use similar procedures.

Many of the scales used to date in Ireland have been British, or modified from initial British usage and, as such, do not correspond to the social class categories now available from Irish census information.

The above assessment we believe justifies the development of a social class scale using as the constituent elements the Irish census occupational categories. It appeared a worthwhile endeavour to iron out some of the major limitations of Irish occupational data by attempting an ordinal grading of occupations. The encouraging aspects of this proposed undertaking were the availability of (i) census output for an important range of variables which could be cross-referenced with social class data, and (ii) the detailed codes which would ensure reliable coding. Furthermore recent social research in Ireland has been refining concepts of social class, particularly in the area of social inequity: whereas the definitions of class used are not strictly identical, central to all such usages of the concept is the notion of relatively discrete social categories comprised of individuals whose market situation is such as to involve them in the use of similar resources to generate incomes and who share similar work situations and backgrounds.

### III ORGANISATIONAL PROCEDURES FOR DEVELOPING A SCALE

The publication of a paper (O'Hare, 1982) highlighting the limitations of existing social class/prestige scales used for research and indicating the need for an Irish census-based social class scale laid the ground work for the development of this scale. Informal contact with the CSO was encouraging and when its interest was formally expressed in terms of a willingness to consider the re-grouping of occupational units to produce a scale, provided this objective had broadly based support among Irish researchers, work commenced on devising such a scale.

The first step was to set up a working party representative of research

interests in areas of social class. Contact initiated in 1982 by the Medico-Social Research Board (MSRB), with The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and An Foras Talúntais (AFT) proved fruitful and relevant personnel in both research organisations were responsive to the idea of developing a census-based scale. Later the working group was expanded to include representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Social Science at University College Dublin, the Health Education Bureau and St. Vincent's Hospital, Elm Park, Dublin, all of whom had an important and relevant contribution to make towards the scale development. (See Appendix A for details of the working party.)

A statistician from the CSO agreed to act as consultant to the working party to ensure good communications with the census authorities.

In broad terms the objective of the working party was to employ an operational definition of social class which would allow for the hierarchical ordering of CSO occupational data to provide a social class scale.

Our emphasis on hierarchical ordering obviously distances us to some extent from the position adopted by Goldthorpe in relation to his class schema. In part this arises because, as will become clear, it was not possible for us to identify a separate *petit bourgeois* category in our suggested class schema. It is also true, though, that while we are sympathetic to the main thrust of Goldthorpe's critique of the use of synthetic scales we hold the view that the limits which he wishes to place on the use of terms "upwards" and "downwards" appear *a priori* to be unduly restrictive (Breen and Whelan, 1985). Whether or not we have succeeded in achieving a hierarchical ordering of categories can only be determined by subsequent use of the schema.<sup>1</sup>

The following section deals with the concepts underlying the development of the scale.

#### IV THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL PROCEDURES

##### *The Concept of Social Class*

The theoretical perspective underlying the development of the Irish social class scale derives from a neo-Weberian conception of class. Following Goldthorpe (1983, p. 467) class analysis is viewed as beginning with a structure of positions associated with a specific historical form of the social division of labour, which is usually seen as being constituted in two ways:

1. More generally, we might note that the restrictions imposed on us by the objective of developing a census-based class schema rule out a number of options available to those constructing class schemas from scratch.

- by basic employment relationships which differentiate employers, self-employed, and
- by varying employment functions and conditions which differentiate employees.

Weber (1968, p. 302) defined economic classes as the categories that govern the distribution of life chances among the population. Life chances may be defined as the relative opportunity people have of sharing in the socially created economic or cultural “goods” which typically exist in any given society (Giddens, 1973, pp. 130-131). Three basic ways are seen in any given society through which economic rewards accrue: from the individual possession of

- property
- credentials and skills
- manual labour power.

For Weber economic classes are composed of people who have a common set of goods, services, or skills for market exchange. Rottman and O’Connell (1982, pp. 68-69) note how a changing class structure alters both the probability and the relative advantage of possessing different forms of economic resources. Thus, in Ireland in the early 1950s, life chances were crucially influenced by the prospect of inheriting the family business but by the 1970s wage bargaining, on the basis of skills and credentials, had become the dominant factor.

If “class situation” is identified with “market situation” it is possible to distinguish a multiplicity of different classes. However, the creation of social classes is the product of a dual process, both economic and social. Economic classes are created through impersonal processes but other factors intervene in the emergence of distinct social categories.

#### *Identification of Class as Structured Forms*

One of the crucial links is what has been described as “work situation”. While market refers to sources and levels of income, degree of economic security and changes of economic advancement, work situation refers to location within the system of authority and control governing the process of production, and hence degree of autonomy in performing work tasks and roles, and opportunities available to exercise discretion. Thus work situation implies involvement in distinct socio-technical environments (Lockwood, 1958; Giddens, 1973; Goldthorpe, 1982).

Broadly speaking then the concept of social class used in this article is of relatively discrete groupings whose incumbents possess similar capacities for the generation of income through their occupations. Ultimately, analysis using this classification will be required to go beyond the identification of classes

in terms of comparability of exchange resources and work situation to the identification of classes as structured forms (Giddens, 1973, p. 165). Thus, as with any set of "empty places", the empirical question remains as to what extent classes with a shared awareness and acceptance of a common style of life among members emerge and mobility between classes comes into effect (Whelan and Whelan, 1984).<sup>2</sup>

The foregoing theoretical framework will determine how occupation, and in some cases, employment status are used in the allocation of social class categories.

### *Operational Use of the Concept of Social Class*

The general basis for the assignment of social class is similar to that used in the CSO allocation of socio-economic group classification, i.e., persons gainfully occupied will be assigned to a social class category on the basis of their present occupation and employment status. Unemployed persons and retired persons will be classified to the social class category corresponding to their former occupation; other persons to the social class category of the person on whom they are deemed to be dependent. However, following the reasoning outlined in the theoretical section above the use made of these general procedures for social class purposes differs from that for socio-economic group classification. This system of allocation involves operating as far as is possible, with the individual as the unit of analysis and moving to the family or household only when this proves insufficient.

For the development of a social class scale the objective of the working party was to group census occupational units into discrete ordinal class groupings on the basis of their market and work situations.

The scale to be finally adopted was a six point one as follows:

Social Class 1	Higher professional and higher managerial; proprietors and farmers owning 200 or more acres
Social Class 2	Lower professional and lower managerial; proprietors and farmers owning 100-199 acres
Social Class 3	Other non-manual and farmers owning 50-99 acres
Social Class 4	Skilled manual and farmers owning 30-49 acres
Social Class 5	Semi-skilled manual and farmers owning less than 30 acres
Social Class 6	Unskilled manual

2. It will be noted that this definition contains no reference to "prestige" either in the sense of perceptions of the general desirability of occupations or in the stronger sense of an occupational prestige hierarchy involving deference and derogation (Goldthorpe and Hope, 1972, p. 24).



Cases with missing values, or information not known were assigned to a separate "unknown" category.

The ensuing discussion provides information on the scale development and on how problems of grouping occupations according to our agreed criteria were resolved.

## V IRISH SOCIAL CLASS SCALE DEVELOPMENT

### *Preliminary Work*

Before occupations could be validly combined and placed on various points of a hierarchical scale considerable detail concerning their market and work situations was first required. Between 1971 and 1981 the number of CSO broad occupational units increased from 144 to 198, with approximately 7,350 separate occupations identified. These additional units were largely reflective of a growth of specific occupations but also of a more appropriate grouping of certain occupations.

The working group commenced by seeking requisite information for the occupational units newly introduced in the 1981 Census, such as, Valuation Surveyors, Physical Scientists, and Technologists. In particular, the salary scale and job specifications as they applied in the public service, were sought for the technician occupations like Physical Science Technicians, and Life Science Technician.

Of great help in assessing the market situation for the range of occupations, was the analysis of a sample of the 1973 CSO Household Budget Survey data (N = 6,096) which provided information on disposable income for the various occupational units, excluding farmers. In addition, a report on *The Distribution of Income in the Republic of Ireland: A Study in Social Class and Family-cycle Inequalities* by Rottman, Hannan *et al.* (1982) provided useful guidelines regarding income level for various occupational units. Furthermore, Whelan's work (1980, p.126) confirmed the importance of maintaining a distinction between manual and non-manual categories for social class purposes, by showing that whereas skilled manual workers' average gross weekly earnings were somewhat higher than those of routine non-manual workers the distribution of fringe benefits favoured the non-manual group. Using these objective measures of "economic" standing, as well as census detail on, e.g., supervisory and inspectoral occupations which allowed for distinctions on the basis of work situation, the working party commenced the first draft of the six-point social class scale.

The most problematic task confronting the working party was the categorisation of occupations.

*Problems of Categorisation*

Four main problem areas were identified:

- (i) the inappropriate combination of occupations within some units, e.g., in Turf Workers, which contained both skilled and unskilled occupations, and in Fishermen which had a mixture of non-manual, skilled and unskilled occupations;
- (ii) the need to stratify the farming group;
- (iii) the absence of detail concerning the size of the enterprise for the four proprietor CSO groups, i.e. (a) self-employed, employing others, viz: Proprietor of filling station or garage; (b) Publicans, wine merchant, off-licence proprietor, etc.; (c) Other proprietors in wholesale or retail trade, and (d) Working proprietors in catering/lodging services, not elsewhere specified (NES). This lack of detail, it was felt, would lead to an undesirable grouping of large and small-type proprietors/employers. Similarly, managers of large or small enterprises could not be segregated;
- (iv) the important need to identify further proprietor groups through the use of employment status within the CSO range of occupational units.

(i) Regarding the first point the working party identified 24 occupational units which members believed, after considerable discussion and enquiry, should be disaggregated and specified occupations within the group allocated to another class or classes. The CSO indicated that in deciding on the feasibility of splitting occupational units into new and smaller units it was important from its point of view to keep in mind that:

- the individual occupations listed under each existing occupational unit do not constitute an exhaustive and comprehensive list of all possible occupational descriptions relevant to this unit, and
- when a unit is split, it is important that a clear and easily identifiable distinction should emerge between the newly created subgroups.

Following lengthy group discussion and dialogue with the CSO; together with a test run on 1981 data of proposed changes to three occupational units, agreement was reached to re-allocate occupations within 14 occupational units. (See Appendix B for details of these changes.)

Proposed changes for the disaggregation of ten other occupational units were not made. Some of the reasons related to a lack of validity in the proposed disaggregation or that units were too small to be further reduced.

(ii) The problem of stratifying farmers posed particular challenges. Size of farm varies widely ranging from the near-subsistence holdings of below 30 acres

to the commercial farms of over 200 acres. Even within the same size category the data from National Farm Surveys (Heavey *et al.*, various years) show that there are substantial variations in economic returns, depending on such factors as soil type, regional location, farming system and whether or not the farm is operated on a full-time or part-time basis. It was first considered that the Poor Law Valuation system and the individual farm valuation figures took these variations into account. However, available information (Frawley, 1972-73, pp. 101-106) had concluded that there was no relationship between Poor Law Valuation and soil type and that anomalies in the valuation system gave rise to inequities in the administration of social welfare and local taxation. This was confirmed during the working party's deliberations when the High Court ruled that the valuation system, as then operated, was not an acceptable basis for assessing the means of farmers.

There was the added problem that, with the general commercialisation of agriculture, there was a widening gap between the incomes of smaller and larger farmers. Since the 1950s, family farm incomes had grown at a faster rate on the larger farms (Commins *et al.*, 1978; Commins, 1986). Initially, the working party made some limited attempts to classify farmers according to farm size and soil type. This approach was abandoned as it did not seem operationally feasible for most enquiries to associate individual farm locations with soil type. However, family farm income data for full-time farms of different size categories were available for 1979, 1980 and 1981 (Heavey *et al.*, various years) and these were supplemented by information on farmers derived from a study by NicGhiolla Phádraig (1980). In addition, when the returns for the Household Budget Survey of 1980 became available comparisons were made between the farm size categories of the farm population and the other socio-economic groups. Broad degrees of correspondence were observable between the household incomes of different acreage categories and those of certain socio-economic groups.

The outcome of these considerations and data comparisons was a decision to classify farmers into five groups on the basis of their ownership of farms of different sizes as follows:

- 1 200 or more acres
- 2 100 – 199 acres
- 3 50 – 99 acres
- 4 30 – 49 acres
- 5 under 30 acres

Each of these five farmer groupings was combined with the most appropriate class on the scale. In some cases, available information suggested that the level of income of farmers was lower than that of the groups with which they

were merged. However, the linking of farmers with other groups had to take cognisance of the capital asset ownership among farmers.

(iii) In the context of the third problem of categorisation it should be noted that the census practice has been to identify the four broad proprietor occupational units: Proprietor of Filling Station or Garage; Publican, Wine Merchant, Off-licence Proprietor; Other Proprietors in Wholesale, or Retail Trade and Working Proprietors in Catering/Lodging Services (NES). Those proprietors who are self-employed, employing others are allocated a different SEG classification from those who are self-employed, not employing others. The CSO continues to identify these four groups for reasons of historical continuity. The definition of proprietor used is that of ownership of business, rather than premises (which could be leased). The CSO accepts that proprietor/employer are interchangeable terms in the retail trade.

A question regarding ownership is not asked on the census form but details returned for principal occupation, together with information on employment status, make such distinctions possible. The classification of occupations used by the CSO to code census data has an asterisk beside those occupations relating to the four proprietor groups. Coders are directed to allocate occupation \* to SEG 4 if self-employed with employees, and to SEG 6 if self-employed, without employees. A similar type coding was envisaged for social class purposes.

While employment status for the four broad proprietor units usually differentiated between various work situations the indiscriminate combination of persons from both small and large enterprises would interfere with the ordinality of the proposed scale.

Instead of suggesting that a census question on the number of employees should be used to discriminate between large and small employers/managers it was felt that this information could perhaps be acquired independently by analysing the size of Irish industrial enterprises. This approach would also go a long way towards solving the fourth problem of categorisation identified, i.e., the employment status position. A member of the working party explored the possibility of utilising existing register sources, such as Thom's Directory, The Levy Grant Register maintained by AnCO (The Industrial Training Authority, now under FÁS) and The Undertakings' Register, set up by Pakenham-Walsh in Trinity College, Dublin. While the idea was a good one no progress was made, as any such involvement also required the approval of the CSO. While the CSO was conscious of the advantages of developing a register of enterprises both for their own purposes and for social class usage it was not considered feasible to develop such a register in association with the 1986 Census.

Accordingly the working party had to abandon its objective of improving the ordinality of the scale through the use of extra detail on the size of enterprise. It should be emphasised, however, that the majority of large employers see themselves as Managers and Company Secretaries and as such will be allocated to Social Class 1 of the scale. Furthermore, the number of employers and managers comprised only 5.1 per cent of the total SEG population in 1971 and 6.8 per cent in 1981. Nevertheless, it could be said that as a group they have an economic and sociological importance well in excess of their numbers. With this in mind it was decided to allocate all self-employed proprietors, with employees – so described by the CSO – to Social Class 1 of the scale and all self-employed groups without employees to Social Class 2.

(iv) As seen above the use of employment status effects a useful distinction between the self-employed with or without employees, so permitting a grading of occupational positions on a social class scale. The working party identified a number of occupational units for which the distinction was desirable. Some of these were Builders and Contractors; Interior Decorating Consultants and Designers; Printers; Other Wood and Wooden Furniture Makers; Masons and Stone Cutters; and Barbers, Hairdressers and Beauty Consultants. Under the existing CSO arrangement all persons engaged in such occupations are similarly coded.

Following discussion the only unit to be differentiated on the basis of self-employed with employees and self-employed without employees, was that of Builders and Contractors. The same difficulty emerged as stated earlier, that is, the lack of information concerning the size and scale of these enterprises which was crucial in distinguishing between the *bourgeois* and the *petit bourgeois* groupings. The other option of allocating all self-employed, without employees to a separate class as in the Goldthorpe scale – based on the distinctive life chances of this artisan group in the UK – was not adopted. The numbers here did not justify such a decision and would, in our opinion, result in a too restrictive class category.

In early 1986 detailed submissions along the lines outlined in this section, and agreed to by the CSO consultant statistician, were submitted by the working party to the CSO. These submissions proposed to classify the 198 Irish occupational units and the disaggregated farming group into six mutually exclusive social classes. This classification provided a realistic basis for the hierarchical positioning of occupations within classes based on a prior theoretical position, and on the scrutiny of all available empirical research material.

See note on the interim stage of the scale development (Appendix C), which

shows an expected gradient in disposable income for each of the six classes – excluding data on farmers.

Social class output from the 1986 Census has been available on a county by county basis from the CSO since the end of 1988 in its Local Population Reports – 2nd series, and for the country as a whole in the Summary Population Report – 2nd series since November 1989. The census volume with occupational, SEG and social class information is due for publication shortly.

The CSO provides on request a copy of the Classification of Occupations used to code occupations at the 1986 Census. This classification includes notes on coding, and the alphabetical index for classifying occupations to the SEG and to the Social Class Scale devised by the working party.

## VI CONCLUSIONS

Despite the considerable gains for health and social research in having an Irish census-based social class scale certain limitations must be noted in this scale.

### *Limitations*

The main purpose of this exercise was not to construct a “new” social class scale, rather to facilitate a usage of census occupational data. It is hoped that the majority of Irish social researchers will find this superior to what hitherto has been available. The CSO already use this classification scheme in providing social class data.

While every care was taken to define the concepts used, to describe the procedures adopted and to rank order the occupational units according to stated criteria certain shortcomings exist in the scale affecting its ordinality. The principal limitation is the lack of distinction, albeit in a small proportion of cases (6.8 per cent of the population in 1981, 6.7 per cent in 1986), between employers and managers of large and small enterprises. Should the CSO decide to develop a comprehensive industrial register of Irish firms and companies it would then be possible to differentiate between large and small employers and managers by collecting details for the number of employees for each company employer. Large employers could be defined as those employing 25 or more employees and small employers as those employing less. The cross referencing of these data with census occupational information would be necessary.

Two further problems relate more to societal trends rather than to the scale *per se*; they are the coding of married women’s occupations (Leete and Fox, 1977) and consideration of the long-term unemployed.

As earlier noted (see p. 142) a social class is accorded where possible on

the basis of the individual's occupation. This approach has the advantage of avoiding charges of intellectual sexism arising out of classifying married women in employment on the basis of their husbands' occupations. It also provides a more accurate reflection of the current distribution of occupations. However, there are significant disadvantages in allocating married women to a class category on the basis of their own occupations. This would appear to be particularly true where the respondent decides whether the appropriate status classification for her is "at work" or "home" (i.e., domestic duties) and no further information is available on hours of work. Existing evidence suggests that working wives' conditions of employment, where they differ from their husbands', will be of a less favourable kind due to the typically discontinuous, limited nature of wives' employment (Goldthorpe, 1983, p. 479). A whole range of life chances which vary with class appear to have their impact on women to a large extent via their husband's occupational position (Goldthorpe, 1983, p. 468). Certainly it would seem advisable for many purposes to break down social class analysis by sex and marital status.

We accept the view that "social classes comprise neither families nor individuals but individuals in families . . . therefore the study of class is properly conducted at different levels of analysis" (Marshall *et al.*, 1988). It is hoped, therefore, that researchers employing the scale with survey data will, where appropriate information is available, take the opportunity to explore such issues by moving between different levels of analysis.

With the long-term unemployed the question arises as to whether a type of under-class analysis should be used, or whether the risk of such unemployment should be seen as an increasingly important aspect of the market situations of the classes already identified. The issue is not whether social analysis should take account of unemployment status and length of unemployment but whether it should be handled through inclusion in a social class scale or through the use of additional variables. From a social class perspective, the evidence most relevant to such a decision would relate to the transmission of unemployment across generations and the extent to which social closure can be seen to operate in relation to such a hard core of the unemployed.

### *Advantages*

The value and potential of this census-based classification for Irish researchers are re-stated here.

The co-operation of the CSO in modifying its coding structure to meet with the scale requirements was a major contribution to health, educational and social research, and also indicated a generous response to collaboration with the social research community. The accompanying "Classification of Occupations", available from the CSO permits easy standardised coding of occupations to social class categories. Furthermore, the availability of social class

data in official census publications — from national to District Electoral Division level — makes it possible to relate the social class distribution from a survey to the social classification in the area in which the survey was conducted. This has the advantage of providing a context for such information and a basis for comparison with other rated data. No other social class scale used by researchers in Ireland can provide the above-mentioned important facilities.

It should also be noted that the stratification of farmers which ensured their realistic positioning on a social class scale was a much needed procedure in a specifically Irish situation.

Preliminary assessments from a wide range of users of the Social Class Scale have been very encouraging with little critical comment concerning either the scale or the classification of occupations. The validation of this scale was considered outside the scope of this paper. An interesting future exercise should address this question by cross-classifying the Irish census-based scale with the existing socio-economic groups and also with the British Goldthorpe classes.

It would be clearly possible, for researchers, to take advantage of possibilities afforded by the social class scale of placing their results in a broader context, e.g., to explore the advantages of modifications relating to employment status, size of organisation and unit of analysis. Attention could also be directed to the collection of good quality occupational data in areas of birth and death registration which would enable social class analysis to be undertaken, and add considerably to our understanding of the patterns of health and illness among the different Irish social classes.



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## APPENDIX A

*Composition of the Working Party*

An Foras Talúntais (now under Teagasc)	—	Mr P. Commins
Department of Epidemiology St Vincent's Hospital	—	Dr N. Hickey
Department of Health	—	Mr M. Moran
The Economic and Social Research Institute	—	Dr C.T. Whelan Prof. D.F. Hannan (up to January 1984)
The Health Education Bureau	—	Mr A. O'Connor Dr D. O'Byrne (up to May 1984)
The Social Science Department University College Dublin	—	Dr M. Nic Ghiolla Phádraig
The Medico-Social Research Board (now under the Health Research Board)	—	Ms A. O'Hare, convenor.

## APPENDIX B

*Re-allocation of occupations in certain occupational units 1981 and 1986,  
indicating occupational codes and social class (SC) codes.*

1981	1986
201 — Farmers (SC1-5)	201 — Farmers (Horse, Pig or Poultry) (SC2) are now identified separately from other farmers
207 — Jobbing Gardeners, Groundsmen and Gardeners' Labourers (SC6)	208 — Gardeners: skilled (SC4) 209 — Groundsmen, Gardeners: unskilled and Gardeners' Labourers (SC6)

210 – Foresters and Forestry Labourers (SC4)	212 – Foresters and Skilled Forestry (Workers) (SC4)
	213 – Forestry Labourers and Workers (SC5)
211 – Fishermen (SC4) <sup>3</sup>	214 – Fishery Board Agents and Inspectors (SC3)
	215 – Fishermen, Etc. (SC4)
213 – Turf Workers (SC5)	217 – Bog Labourers (SC6)
	218 – Other Turf Workers (SC5)
222 – Fitters and Mechanics (SC4)	227 – Bicycle Repairers and Mechanics (SC5)
	228 – Fitters and Other Mechanics (SC4)
223 – Vehicle Builders and Assemblers (SC4)	229 – Assemblers of Vehicles, Motor Cycles and Bicycles (SC5)
	230 – Other Vehicle Builders and Skilled Workers in Motor Vehicle and Cycle Assembly (SC4)
245 – Boot and Shoe Makers (factory) (SC4)	252 – Boot and Shoe Makers (factory): semi-skilled (SC5)
	253 – Boot and Shoe Makers (factory): skilled (SC4)
258 – Millers (SC4)	266 – Millworkers: semi-skilled (SC5)
	267 – Millworkers: skilled (SC4)
270 – Printing Press Operators (SC4)	278 – Printers (So Described) (SC4)
	279 – Printing Machine Minders and Feeders (SC5)
300 – Sailors (SC5)	310 – Sailors: skilled (SC4)
	311 – Other Sailors (SC5)

3. The Working Party's proposal to allocate a further unskilled category to this group was rejected by the CSO on the basis that it would only contain seaweed gatherers and the numbers in this group did not warrant the creation of a special category. Accordingly they are included with the skilled occupations in Social Class 4.

328 – Insurance Brokers and Financial Agents (SC2)	338 – Insurance Agents (SC2)
	339 – Insurance Brokers and Finan- cial Agents; Higher Profes- sional (SC1)
348 – Hospital Porters and Attendants (SC5)	360 – Dental Nurses (SC3)
	361 – Hospital and Ward Orderlies: Hospital Porters and Atten- dants (SC5)
350 – Other Service Workers (SC3)	363 – Proprietors in Other Service Industries (SC2)
	364 – Other Service Workers (SC3)

## APPENDIX C

### *A Note on the Provisional Social Class Scale*

At the end of 1983 the working party, in collaboration with the CSO statistician, presented details of the occupational units within each of the six categories of the provisional social class scale to the CSO to ensure availability of social class output from the 1981 census. The same criteria of market and work situations determined the ordering of the 198 broad occupational units within the scale. Farmers were stratified as in the final specifications and the Builders and Contractors group was differentiated in terms of self-employed, with employees, self-employed, without employees. The disaggregation of certain occupational units was not carried out for the 1981 Census. The ordering of the occupational units within the six classes represented the final decisions based on the deliberations of the working party on four earlier drafts.

The disposable income data from the 1973 Household Budget Survey subsample, relating to the various occupational units (excluding Farmers) showed a gradient in the expected direction from a mean of £62.3 per week for Social

Class 1; £48.2 for Social Class 2; £40.8 for Social Class 3; £37.6 for Social Class 4; £33.7 for Social Class 5 and £32.2 for Social Class 6. Research data, already referred to, were used to facilitate decisions made concerning the ordinality of Farmer occupation.<sup>4</sup>

Sixty copies of the working party's classification of the CSO list of occupations for use with 1981 census output were distributed to research organisations, libraries in universities and other third-level colleges and to Government departments and Health Boards. This classification contained a coding guide, the list of CSO occupational units within each social class and an alphabetical list of all occupations with accompanying Occupational, Socio-Economic Group and Social Class codes. By late 1988 an additional 100 copies were made available on request. Due to the limited supply of copies many persons or organisations were referred to the availability of a copy in their local area or asked to use the library copy in the Health Research Board.

Social class data were available from the CSO for census areas, such as, District Electoral Divisions, counties, and the country as a whole by basic socio-demographic variables like sex, age, marital status and highest attained educational level.

4. While the HBS data show little in the way of income differences between Class 5 and Class 6, it was decided to keep these classes separate because of the change in the level of unemployment since 1973. Analysis based on ESRI survey work of life styles and poverty during 1987 confirms that those in Class 6 have a particularly high risk of unemployment and income differences between these groups appear to be greater than in 1973.