

LESSON 7: REVEALING INCOME DISTRIBUTION IN IRELAND – THE H.E.A.P.

Lesson aim:

- ↘ To show how income and occupation is distributed in Ireland.
- ↘ Using real world examples, students will understand the value society places on certain occupations.
- ↘ To explore with students the composition of Irish society in terms of household types.

Learning objectives:

At the end of this lesson students will be able to:

- ↘ understand the overall shape of Irish society based on occupation, household and income;
- ↘ explore where particular groups in society reside in terms of their occupation and income;
- ↘ assess what groups are considered marginalised (explanations in next section), identify where they might be represented on the chart and consider their position in light of definitions of poverty and wealth; and
- ↘ outline the composition of the Irish workforce.

Lesson outline:

In-class activity: An introduction to the chart

Unfold the chart and place it in a position that is easily accessible for students to see. Explain the background and how the chart works in detail (see Handout 5 on chart).

Class activity: Occupational categories

Divide the class in small working groups and ask them to work on the following:

- ↘ Using the H.E.A.P. chart, identify two different jobs at < €25,000; €35,000 – €60,000; €100,000; €150,000; > €200,000.

- ↘ Calculate approximately the number of households at each level. As income increases what happens to the numbers of households? If you looked for a salary of €1,000,000 what do you think would happen to the numbers of households? Why do you think this is?
- ↘ Discuss the type of differences there might be between occupations at €20k to €25k and €100k to €150k in terms of:
 - type of role; availability of jobs at those levels;
 - responsibilities; skills; education required; level of qualifications; and
 - what do students think about the difference between the occupations? Do they justify the salary differential? Please explain.

Group activity: Income distribution

(NOTE: This exercise is adapted from 'Lesson 10: What is wealth and who owns how much of it' from the website 'Teaching economics as if people mattered' on www.teachingeconomics.org.)

Instructions for this exercise can be found in the teachers' handout at the back of this resource.

Individual and class discussion: Basic analysis of the chart

Based on the ten occupations contained on the chart ask students to answer the following:

- ↘ List the kind of jobs that would fit into each occupational category.
- ↘ Choose two jobs from each category and identify the range of salaries for those jobs. (Places to check this include a trade union for that industry, an industry association or a company.)

(NOTE: This exercise may be more appropriate to give to students as a mini homework project where they can conduct research outside the classroom.)

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Individual activity: Locating occupations in relation to income

Ask students to choose an occupation they would like to pursue when they leave school. Then ask students to consider the annual salary for such an occupation and where they think these occupations might lie on the chart.

Ensure each student has the opportunity to examine the chart to find the lowest and highest point for the occupation they chose.

When each student has completed the exercise, ask them to consider the following questions:

- Were you able to find the occupation on the chart? Did it occur in a number of locations or was it confined to a particular area? Where was it mainly concentrated? Did this surprise you? Explain.
- Ask a number of students what occupation did they choose and where did they find it on the chart?
- What did you learn from this exercise? Was it of interest to you? Explain. Was it higher or lower than you expected? Did this surprise you? Why?
- What was the most interesting element of this activity? What did you not know before doing this exercise? Was there anything that you hadn't considered before?

General discussion:

Ask students:

- Why are some occupations paid more/less than others?
- Why are some occupations grouped together? What does that show?
- Why do some occupations appear on the bottom and also at the top?

Class activity: Locating types of households

Ask students to work in groups and find the highest salary point for:

- single female headed households;
- single male headed households;
- single female headed households with children;
- single male headed households with children (NOTE: This category will not be found in the chart as the numbers in which it occurs in society are too low to be represented by any icons. Use this fact to discuss why they are not represented. Ask students what they think about this? Are they surprised?); and
- couple households.

Then ask each group to write a brief report on their findings, which should cover at least the following:

- The occupation and positioning of households (is there a broad range of occupations for female headed households).
- Compare each of the groups in terms of occupations and positioning on the chart
- Were they surprised with what they found? Why?
- Were there any occupations which are represented at all levels on the chart?
- Do they think what they found to be fair? Explain.
- What conclusions can be drawn from this exercise?

Ask each student then to consider where their own household might be placed and what implications this might have for their own lives. The students should not be asked to reveal where their own household might be located due to the sensitive nature of such an exercise, but it is important that they consider this for their own understanding of where it is placed in relation to others more and less fortunate than themselves.

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OPTIONAL: Teachers may wish to discuss the last exercise in a general way rather than specifically asking students to divulge their own personal family information.

Individual student project: Living on a budget

The aim of this exercise is to get students to think about how occupation and income can influence people's lives and the opportunities that may be available to some and not to others.

Teachers should provide each student with a different household type, occupation and income, which will ensure that all types and categories are considered by the class as a whole.

The following instructions should be given to students for each household that they were given. The student should work out the type of household budget for a household with that occupation and that income (refer to budget exercise).

Individual student exercise: Plotting national wages

Ask students to complete Worksheet 5. This exercise can be completed at any point during the module as it covers information from a number of sections.

Student activity: Individual project

The theme of the project for students to undertake is based on the learning in this module: to identify the steps government should take to help alleviate some of the difficulties students have identified for families living in Ireland and how inequality in wider society can be reduced and eventually eliminated.

Students should be encouraged to interview family and friends to find out what difficulties they may be experiencing or know that others are experiencing in balancing their household budgets and ensuring that their families obtain the best opportunities they can afford. They should then put together some recommendations on what government could do to help such households.