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## A Reply

Adele Bergin, Seamus McGuinness

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## A REPLY

### Adele Bergin and Seamus McGuinness

We thank Professor John FitzGerald for his response and would like to take the opportunity to make the following brief observations in reply.

We do not believe that it is clear that Northern Ireland's health system provides superior universal access relative to the Republic of Ireland. While universal access is present in principal it is not obvious that it is present in practice. There are substantial variations in the performance of the NHS in NI relative to other regions. The Nuffield Trust in 2019 showed that 'a person in Northern Ireland is at least 48 times as likely as a person in Wales to wait more than a year for care. This despite Wales being the otherwise worst performer in the UK...'<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, as pointed out by Seamus McGuinness and Adele Bergin,<sup>2</sup> in 2019, 27% of patients in NI had to wait over a week for a GP appointment, with such delays leading to the emergence of private GP practices in NI that offer immediate access for an out-of-pocket payment.

The paper reports on the most recent data for equivalised household disposable income from the OECD for 2017, which we argue is a reliable living standard metric, and this points to a difference of 12% in favour of RoI. Professor FitzGerald points to similar data from Eurostat which show a smaller gap in favour of RoI. While the data from both international organisations convey

<sup>1</sup> Mark Dayan and Deirdre Heenan, 'Change or collapse: lessons from the drive to reform health and social care in Northern Ireland', Nuffield Trust, London, 10 September 2019, available at: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/research/change-or-collapse-lessons-from-the-drive-to-reform-health-and-social-care-in-northern-ireland> (13 October 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Seamus McGuinness and Adele Bergin, 'The political economy of a Northern Ireland border poll', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 4 (44) (2020), 781–812.

Author's email: [Adele.Bergin@esri.ie](mailto:Adele.Bergin@esri.ie)  
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a broadly consistent picture, one of the points we make in the paper is that there is a need for greater coordination between the statistical authorities in RoI and NI to produce comparable and timely statistics.

Changes in life expectancy over time are driven by complex interactions of economic, social, institutional and health factors and while it is difficult to unpick the role of each in shaping changes in mortality, we agree that one factor in the superior performance in RoI in recent years is likely to be the higher level of educational attainment.

We acknowledge that both jurisdictions face challenges in meeting greenhouse gas emission reduction targets over the medium to long term and this is an interesting area for future work.

Read ‘Who is Better off?’

by Adele Bergin and Seamus McGuinness,

<https://doi.org/10.3318/ISIA.2021.32b.12>

and the response by John FitzGerald,

‘Thoughts on Quality of Life, North and South’,

<https://doi.org/10.3318/ISIA.2021.32b.13>