

School Leavers  
Survey Procedural  
Guidance

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## **School Leavers Survey (SLS)**

### ***Description***

The SLS is an annual exercise to collect and validate the qualifications and destinations of Northern Ireland school leavers. The data are at individual pupil level and also contain pupil characteristics such as their ethnicity, religion or free school meal eligibility. The data are collected to inform PSA Targets and to monitor Departmental policies such as 'Every school a good school' or 'Literacy and Numeracy Strategy'. With the dataset being at pupil level and the home postcode of each pupil recorded, spatial analysis can be undertaken on the qualifications and destinations of NI school leavers. We survey our customers annually to determine how we can better improve the service and data that we currently provide.

### ***Staffing***

The process is currently completed by 1 Assistant Statistician with regular assistance provided by the administration team once the validation exercise has commenced. The relevant Deputy Principal is updated at regular intervals.

### ***Timescales***

A data request is emailed to each post primary school in November asking them to run their Leavers' return and address any of the errors the report identifies. A Leavers' return cannot be submitted until a Census return has been forwarded to the Department. Reminder emails are sent to those schools who fail to meet the deadline. Once all the returns are made the data are extracted and aggregated into one database. It is at this point that validations are run and the individual schools are contacted with queries for them to investigate.

This exercise continues until these queries have been resolved and the database is then closed before the end of March. The database is then interrogated to produce the information used to populate the tables in the press release.

### ***Publication Details***

The statistical press release is published in May of each year on the Statistics and Research part of the DE website. In accordance with Protocol 2 of the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Official Statistics, the following individuals were granted 24 hour pre – release access:

*Minister for Education*

*Permanent Secretary, Department of Education*

*Permanent Secretary, Department for Employment and Learning*

*Deputy Secretaries, Department of Education*

*Chief Inspector, Education and Training Inspectorate*

*Director, Planning and Performance Management, Department of Education*

*Director, Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards, Department of Education*

*Principal Information Officer, Press Office, Department of Education  
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## **Process**

### ***Step One***

The data are requested by email from each post primary school. Included in the request are guidance notes to ensure the data are recorded correctly and a request for any examination results that are achieved by a pupil that are not contained on the electronic return. Contact information is also provided that will allow a school to contact the Department with any questions when formulating the return.

### ***Step Two***

Schools submit their returns and the completed returns are downloaded from WebXchange and stored on our restricted access network. Each return is split into an I and an le file. The I file holds the characteristics of each pupil while the le files hold the exam results for each pupil. The data are then converted from CSV format to SPSS and aggregated to ELB level before being combined to create a NI Database. The result of this process would be an exam file and a leaver characteristics file.

### ***Step Three***

At this point a list is established to determine if any new EDI exams have been introduced, if so, we must amend our syntax to include these. Syntax is run on the exam level data file to separate single and double awards at GCSE, VCE's and AS Levels. These are then aggregated and the I and le files are merged to create one database and syntax is then run which generates a report detailing potential errors in the dataset. The syntax matches qualifications against age, destination code etc.

### ***Step Four***

Schools are asked to submit a separate return that lists those qualifications that are not able to be included in their electronic return. These entries are made manually.

### ***Step Five***

Each school is then contacted with any queries identified by the syntax validation. Subsequently we would always validate all those pupils leaving without any GCSEs because this is one of our primary performance targets. The schools then check their records and contact the Department with amendments. These amendments are faxed for audit purposes and the school is instructed to amend their system to reflect these amendments.

### ***Step Six***

The database is amended to reflect these changes and is eventually closed once all queries have been addressed. Provisional comparisons are made with the previous year's dataset in an attempt to identify any areas of concern. Some final validations are run to ensure there are no outstanding issues.

## ***Step Seven***

The database is closed and syntax is run to produce the tables for the statistical press release.

## ***Recent Improvements***

We continually strive to improve the quality and scope of the data we produce for our customers. In recent years, we have added variables such as Traveller accommodation type, day care destination, GCSE English and maths, and children in care, in direct response to customer needs.

The statistical press release of 200708, for the first time, included qualifications data based on the residential district council of the pupil. This allowed spatial comparisons to be made throughout Northern Ireland.

## Appendix A

### School Leavers Variables

Data are at individual pupil level:

School Reference Number

School Name

Date of Birth

Admission Number

Gender

Year Group

Ethnicity of Pupil

Free school meal entitled

English First Language

Religion of Pupil

Date of Arrival

Dayboard

Unique Pupil Reference Number

English as an Additional Language

In Care

Fee Payer

Disabled

Pupil Residential Postcode

Date of Leaving

SEN Stage

Special Unit

SEN Type 1

SEN Type 2

SEN Type 3

SEN Type 4

SEN Type 5

SEN Type 6

Destination

School Type – Grammar/Non Grammar

School Management Type

Education & Library Board

GCSE English A\*-C

GCSE maths A\*-C

5 GCSEs A\*-C including English and maths

5 GCSEs A\*-G including English and maths

2 A Levels

5 GCSEs A\*-C

5 GCSEs A\*-G

No GCSEs

Religion of School

GCSE English A\*-G

GCSE maths A\*-G

Council of Pupil Residence

Ward of Pupil Residence  
Super Output Area of Pupil Residence  
Parliamentary Constituency of Pupil Residence  
Settlement of Pupil Residence  
Neighbourhood Renewal Area  
Urban or Rural  
Health Board of Pupil Residence  
MDM Rank by Super Output Area of Pupil Residence