

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. 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.

Needs of Users

The pupil level data collected throughout this process is also used by policy branches within DE and by other users across the education service, most notably by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs). The primary reason for this data collection exercise is to create a statistical base to inform a wide range of policy areas, including: Literacy and Numeracy strategies, school improvement programmes, benchmarking, and relevant Departmental Public Service Agreements (PSAs). The data are also used to respond to Assembly questions and are used in the Department's accountability and performance management process. However the data are widely used outside of government by researchers and parents.

Statutory Provisions

Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 Article 37 provides that ELBs and schools shall make such reports and returns and give such information to the Department as the Department may reasonably require for the purposes of its functions under any statutory provision.

The statutory provisions providing the duties of the Department are contained in the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989. Article 3 places a duty on the Department to promote the education of the people of Northern Ireland and secure the effective execution by ELBs and other bodies of the Department's policy in relation to the provision of the education service.

In addition the Department has duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief or racial group and between persons with or without a disability.

Compliance with the Data Protection Act

Processing carried out by the Department complies with the conditions in Schedules 2 and 3 of the Data Protection Act.

Processing complies with conditions 5(b) (it is necessary for the exercise of any functions conferred on any person by or under any enactment) and 5(c) (the

processing is necessary for the exercise of any functions of a Government Department) in relation to Schedule 2 of the Data Protection Act.

Processing of sensitive personal data complies with condition 7(b) and (c) (it is necessary for similar purposes as in Schedule 2) and condition 9(1) (the processing of sensitive personal data in regard to ethnic origin is necessary for the purpose of identifying or keeping under review in regard to equality of opportunity) in relation to Schedule 3 of the Data Protection Act.

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.

Response Burden

The Department collects School Leaver Information from each post primary school. The information is held on the management information system of the school however the destination of each pupil must be sourced and entered manually onto the system. To discover the burden placed on schools when completing a school leaver's return a random sample was conducted.

The results yielded an average cost to the school of £308.03 with the average time taken to complete the return being 6 hours 42 minutes. The results from each school varied considerably and reasons for this could be such factors as the size or type of each school or the rank of the member of staff completing the return.

The establishment of the new eSchools data warehouse, which allows for increased validation of school data sets against ELB data, should have the effect of reducing the burden on school in making their return, as instances where data have been recorded incorrectly will have been identified on an ongoing basis, throughout the year.

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

Special Adviser to the Minister for 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