



An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

# Retention rates of pupils in second-level schools

## Entry cohort 2011



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## Introduction

The 2011 retention rates to the Leaving Certificate are a measure of the percentage of pupils who entered first year of secondary school in 2011 and who sat the Leaving Certificate exam in 2016 or 2017.

The progression of pupils through the education system was measured by analysing the Department's Post-Primary Online Database (P-POD) along with data on official participation in the Junior and Leaving Certificate state exams provided by the State Examinations Commission (SEC). The starting cohort was also adjusted for emigrants, deaths and those still in school in September 2017. Pupils who leave state-aided schools and continue their education in non-aided providers of education are captured through their participation as external candidates in official exams (as provided by the SEC).

These retention rates do not address participation in important educational pathways outside the official school system, such as Youthreach and apprenticeship training. Pupils leaving school to undertake these programmes are regarded as Early School Leavers for the purposes of this report. If participation in these alternative routes, as measured by the completion of NFQ levels of 4, 5 and 6 were included, alternative measures of retention could be compiled.

## Executive summary

- In 2011, there was 60,293 enrolments in the first year of the junior cycle programme in second-level schools. This was adjusted for emigration and deaths (726) and for pupils remaining in school for the 2017/2018 academic year (413) giving an adjusted cohort of 59,641 pupils.
- Of these 91.6 per cent sat the Leaving Certificate Exam in 2016 or 2017, while 97.5 per cent sat the Junior Certificate Exams in 2014 or 2015.
- This retention rate to the Leaving Certificate of 91.6 per cent was an increase of 0.4 percentage points on 2010, when it stood at 91.2 per cent. The retention rate for males increased by 0.5 percentage points from 89.7 per cent to 90.2 per cent, while for females this increased from 92.7 per cent to 93.1 per cent, a rise of 0.4 percentage points.
- The gender gap between males and females stood at 2.9 percentage points, down slightly from 3.0 percentage points for the 2010 cohort.

- Voluntary secondary schools continued to have the highest retention rate with 93.4 per cent of pupils sitting their Leaving Certificate; Community and Comprehensive schools had a rate of 91.1 per cent, while Vocational schools stood at 88.4 per cent.
- Schools participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme saw their retention rate rise to 85.0 per cent, up from 84.4 per cent in 2010, and giving a gap in retention between DEIS and non-DEIS schools of 8.5 percentage points, the same as 2010.

## Retention rates at educational milestones

The progression of the 2011 cohort through the education system is presented in Tables 1a and 1b. Of the (adjusted) starting cohort of 59,641 pupils; 58,175 sat their Junior Certificate, a loss of 1,466 pupils, giving a retention rate to the Junior Certificate of 97.5 per cent.

Between the Junior Certificate and the start of Senior Cycle a further 1,047 pupils failed to return to school, giving a retention rate of 95.8 per cent for 5th year. Between 5th and 6th year a further 1,907 pupils failed to return, and of the 55,221 pupils who did enter 6th year a further 579 failed to sit their leaving cert in either 2016 or 2017.

When examined by gender the data shows 1,090 more boys than girls failed to stay until their Leaving Certificate. For both genders, the highest number of early school leavers occurred between Senior Cycle Years 1 and 2 (5th and 6th year) with losses of 1,071 boys and 836 girls.

Table 1a Retention rates, by milestone, by gender, 2011 cohort

Milestone	Cohort progression			Retention rates (%)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Entry cohort	28,931	30,710	59,641	100	100	100
Junior Cycle Year 2	28,710	30,437	59,147	99.2	99.1	99.2
Junior Cycle Year 3	28,535	30,184	58,719	98.6	98.3	98.5
Junior Certificate	28,270	29,905	58,175	97.7	97.4	97.5
Senior Cycle Year 1	27,798	29,330	57,128	96.1	95.5	95.8
Senior Cycle Year 2	26,962	28,259	55,221	93.2	92.0	92.6
Leaving Certificate	26,941	27,701	54,642	93.1	90.2	91.6

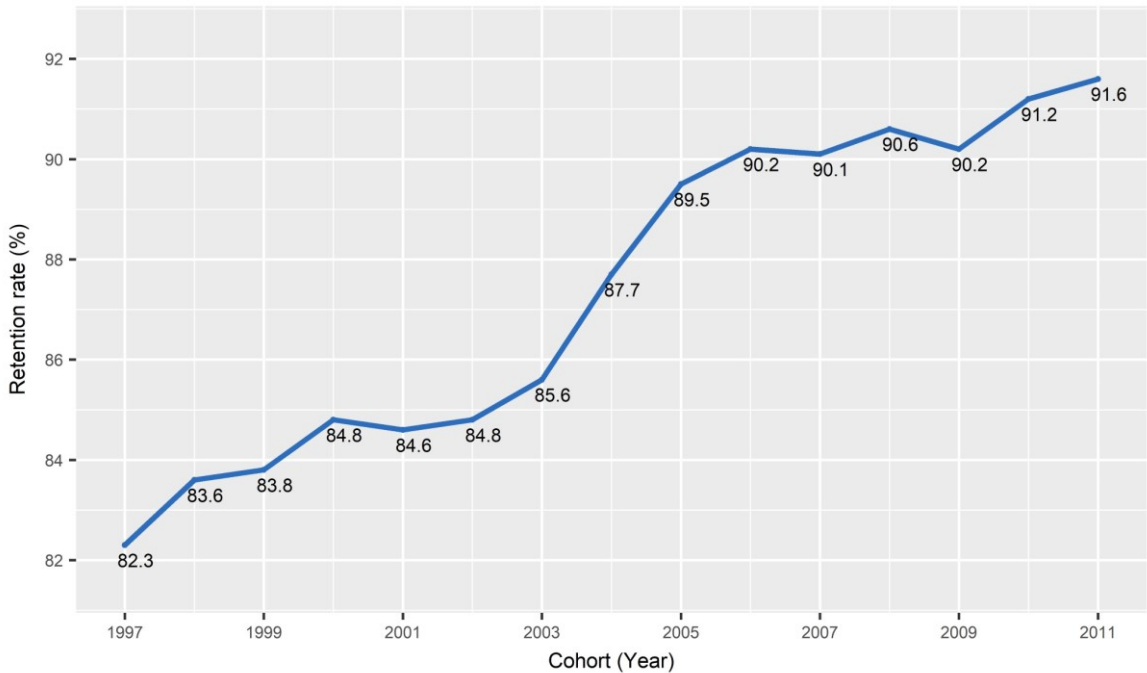
Table 1b Early school leavers, by milestones, by gender, 2011 cohort

Milestone	Cohort progression			Retention rates (%)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Junior Cycle Year 2	221	273	494	0.8	0.9	0.8
Junior Cycle Year 3	175	253	428	1.4	1.7	1.5
Junior Certificate	265	279	544	2.3	2.6	2.5
Senior Cycle Year 1	472	575	1,047	3.9	4.5	4.2
Senior Cycle Year 2	836	1,071	1,907	6.8	8.0	7.4
Leaving Certificate	21	558	579	6.9	9.8	8.4

### Retention rates over time

Figure 1 presents retention rate over time. The 1997 entry cohort had a retention rate of 82.3 per cent. Retention rates have increased steadily since to reach a new high of 91.6 per cent for the 2011 cohort. This cohort sat their Leaving Certificate in 2016 or 2017. As illustrated in Figure 1 rates rose most sharply for those who entered secondary school between 2002 and 2007 and have been rising steadily since.

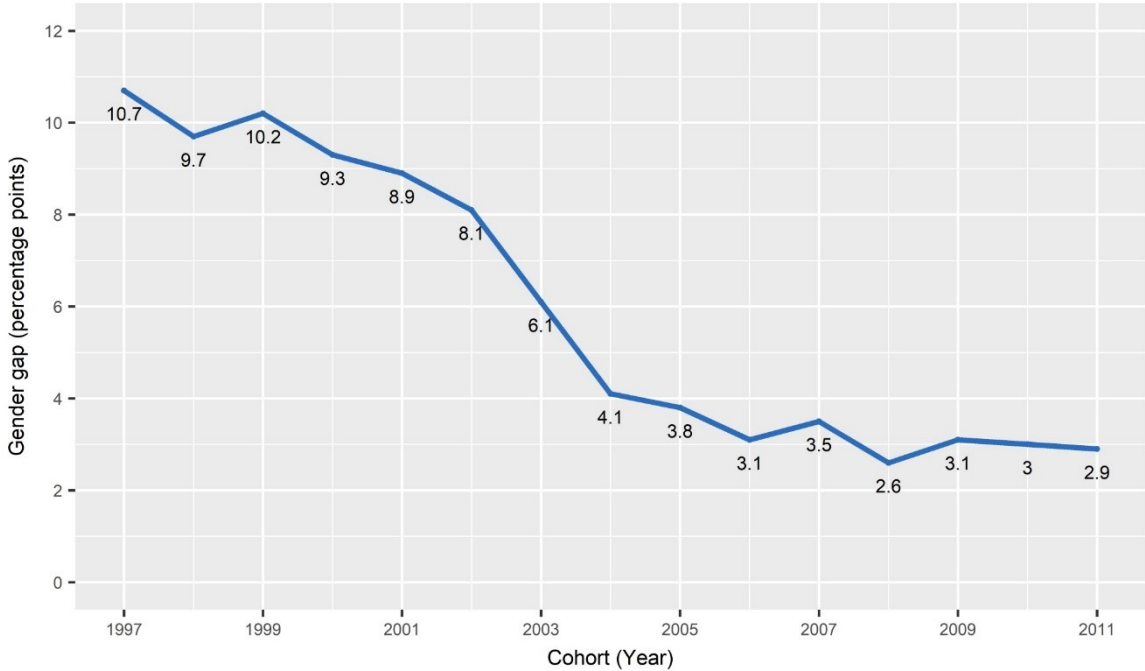
Figure 1 Retention rates, entry cohort 1997-2011



### Gender gap in retention rates

The retention rate for males in the 2011 cohort stood at 90.2 per cent, with females at 93.1 per cent, a gap of 2.9 percentage points. The gap in retention between males and females as illustrated in Figure 2 has narrowed steadily since 1999, most noticeably between 1999 and 2006.

Figure 2 Gender gap in retention rates, entry cohort 1997-2011





## Retention rates by school type

The Post-Primary education sector in Ireland comprises three main school types. The largest group, Voluntary secondary schools, accounted for 33,241 of the 59,641 pupils in 2011; these schools are privately owned and managed, can be fee paying or non-fee paying and provide both academic and practical subjects.

The second group, Community and Comprehensive schools, have boards of management largely representative of local interests, they typically provide a wide range of both academic and vocational subjects and accounted for 10,232 pupils in the 2011 cohort.

Vocational schools are managed by sub-committees of local Education and Training Boards and historically focussed on technical education, but today provide academic and practical subjects as well as often offering adult education. They accounted for 16,185 pupils in the 2011 cohort.

Table 2 shows cohorts by school type, gender and retention rates. The retention rates for Secondary schools stood at 93.4 per cent for the 2011 cohort, the highest of the three school types with 1.8 percentage points above the national average. The rate for females was 94.1 per cent and for 92.6 per cent for males, a gap of 1.4 percentage points.

The retention rates for Community and Comprehensive schools stood at 91.1 per cent, 0.6 percentage points below the national average. The rate for females was 93.4 per cent and for boys 89.1 per cent, a gap of 4.3 percentage points.

Vocational schools had the lowest retention rate to the Leaving Certificate at 88.4 per cent, some 3.2 percentage points below the national average. The rate for girls was 90.7 per cent, while for boys it stood at 86.6 per cent, a gap of 4.2 percentage points.

The difference in retention for males between Secondary and Vocational schools was 6.1 percentage points.

Table 2 Retention rates, by milestones, by school type, by gender, 2011 cohort

School type	Gender	Entry Cohort	Leaving Certificate	Early school leavers	Retention Rate (%)
Secondary	Female	17,136	16,116	1,020	94.0
	Male	16,088	14,904	1,184	92.6
	Total	33,224	31,020	2,204	93.4
Community & Comprehensive	Female	4,690	4,380	310	93.4
	Male	5,542	4,937	605	89.1
	Total	10,232	9,317	915	91.1
Vocational	Female	7,105	6,445	660	90.7
	Male	9,080	7,860	1,220	86.6
	Total	16,185	14,305	1,880	88.4

## Retention rates by DEIS status

The *DEIS* is an action plan for educational inclusion aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and youths from disadvantaged communities throughout their schooling. DEIS provides an integrated school support programme bringing together a collection of interventions for individual and clustered schools with concentrated levels of educational disadvantaged.

The retention rate to the Leaving Certificate (Table 3) of DEIS schools for the 2011 cohort stood at 85.0 per cent, while for non-DEIS schools was 93.5 per cent, a gap of 8.5 percentage points. The comparable results for 2010 were 84.4 per cent for DEIS, and 92.9 per cent for non-DEIS with a gap of 8.5 percentage points.

When looked at by school milestones the data shows the largest loss of pupils from the educational system appears between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year when 594 pupils in DEIS schools and 1,313 pupils in non-DEIS schools failed to return.

Table 3 Retention rates, by milestones, by DEIS status, 2011 cohort

Milestone	DEIS		Non-DEIS		All Schools	
	Pupils	Retention Rate (%)	Pupils	Retention Rate (%)	Pupils	Retention Rate (%)
Entry cohort	12,882	100	46,759	100	59,641	100
Junior Cycle Year 2	12,719	98.7	46,428	99.3	59,147	99.2
Junior Cycle Year 3	12,563	97.5	46,156	98.7	58,719	98.5
Junior Certificate	12,380	96.1	45,795	97.9	58,175	97.5
Senior Cycle Year 1	12,065	93.7	45,063	96.4	57,128	95.8
Senior Cycle Year 2	11,471	89.0	43,750	93.6	55,221	92.6
Leaving Certificate	10,945	85.0	43,697	93.5	54,642	91.6

Table 4 presents the DEIS analysis by gender and shows that retention for males in DEIS schools stood at 82.6 per cent for the 2011 cohort. This was a rate last seen twenty years ago for all pupils. While males in DEIS schools accounted for 12.3 per cent of the 59,641 starting cohort, they accounted for 25.5 per cent of early school leavers.

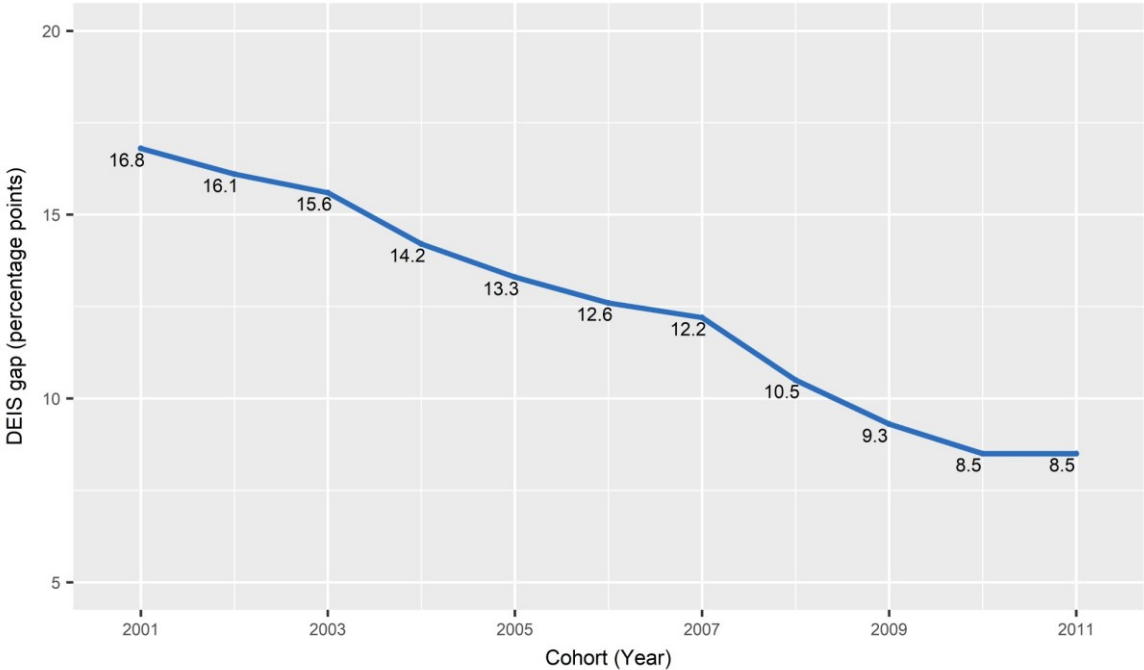
Table 4 Retention rates, by milestones, by DEIS status, by gender, 2011 cohort

Milestone	DEIS				Non-DEIS			
	Female		Male		Female		Male	
	Pupils	Retention Rate (%)	Pupils	Retention Rate (%)	Pupils	Retention Rate (%)	Pupils	Retention Rate (%)
Entry cohort	5,547	100	7,335	100	23,384	100	23,375	100
Junior Cycle Year 2	5,492	99.0	7,227	98.5	23,218	99.3	23,210	99.3
Junior Cycle Year 3	5,447	98.2	7,116	97.0	23,088	98.7	23,068	98.7
Junior Certificate	5,356	96.6	7,024	95.8	22,914	98.0	22,881	97.9
Senior Cycle Year 1	5,266	94.9	6,799	92.7	22,532	96.4	22,531	96.4
Senior Cycle Year 2	5,049	91.0	6,422	87.6	21,913	93.7	21,837	93.4
Leaving Certificate	4,885	88.1	6,060	82.6	22,056	94.3	21,641	92.6

Equality of opportunity gap

The gap in retention rates between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, referred to as the Equality of Opportunity gap, has fallen steadily since the 2001 cohort, from 16.8 per cent then to 8.5 percentage points for the 2010 cohort. While there has been considerable progress in narrowing the gap since the 2007 cohort, the 2011 gap has remained level with the 2010 gap at 8.5 percentage points.

Figure 3 DEIS gap, by retention rate, entry cohort 2001-2011



## Retention rates by county

When examined by county the results show the highest retention rate to the Leaving Certificate was in Sligo at 93.7 per cent, followed by Kerry (93.2%) and Tipperary (93.3%). The lowest rate was found in Longford at 87.3 per cent. Note that as the total cohort in some counties was small the retention rate is liable to fluctuate based on small changes from year to year.

Table 5 Retention rates, by county, 2011 cohort

Administrative County	Pupils	Retention Rate (%)
Carlow	897	90.6
Cavan	959	92.3
Clare	1,411	91.6
Cork City	1,851	90.8
Cork	4,833	92.7
Donegal	2,384	93.0
Dublin City	5,299	90.3
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	2,386	92.8
Fingal	3,401	92.6
Galway City	932	90.0
Galway	2,282	93.1
Kerry	1,932	93.3
Kildare	3,001	92.2
Kilkenny	1,166	93.1
Laois	801	90.9
Leitrim	485	89.5
Limerick City and County	2,664	91.6
Longford	655	87.3
Louth	2,058	90.4
Mayo	1,668	92.3
Meath	2,412	91.9
Monaghan	888	91.3
Offaly	1,208	90.8
Roscommon	584	92.0
Sligo	786	93.8
South Dublin	3,635	89.2
Tipperary	2,283	93.3
Waterford City and County	1,511	92.9
Westmeath	1,382	89.4
Wexford	2,095	90.7
Wicklow	1,792	90.4

## International Comparisons

Table 6.1 presents results on level of education for persons aged 20 to 24, by gender, for selected countries in the EU as derived from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) *Labour Force Survey* for 2017. The data showed for the EU as a whole that 83.3 per cent of people were educated to at least upper secondary, while in Ireland the comparable figure was 94.4 per cent, the second highest in the EU.

Table 6 Percentage of persons aged 20 to 24 with at least upper-secondary education in EU Member States, classified by gender, 2017

Geography	Upper-Secondary Education (%)		
	Female	Male	Total
EU (28 countries)	85.9	80.9	83.3
EU (27 countries)	85.8	80.7	83.2
Euro area (19 countries)	84.9	78.9	81.8
Euro area (18 countries)	84.8	78.8	81.7
Germany	80.0	75.3	77.5
Croatia	96.7	95.9	96.3
Ireland	95.5	92.9	94.2
Spain	77.2	66.4	71.7
France	89.5	86.1	87.8
Italy	85.7	78.3	81.8
Latvia	92.0	82.7	87.3
Lithuania	93.1	89.6	91.3
Netherlands	86.1	77.7	81.9
Austria	90.2	84.7	87.4
Poland	92.6	88.6	90.6
Portugal	83.4	73.7	78.5
Finland	88.5	86.1	87.3
Sweden	86.0	85.3	85.6
United Kingdom	87.9	83.4	85.6
Iceland	71.7	58.5	64.6
Norway	82.5	74.0	78.2

Data sourced from *Eurostat*.

## Appendix A: Methodology and Technical Notes

### Method

The recorded progression of pupils through educational milestones was carried out through an examination of the P-POD. These milestones were further validated by the SEC records of official participation of the Junior and Leaving Certificate State exams. This provided a collective continuity of progression for a pupil through the State-aided schooling system.

Individual data for pupils were supplied by schools using a unique pupil identifier (UPI). The UPI remains consistent through amalgamations, closures or movement between schools. Recently, with the co-operation of the schools, the Department has used the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) to identify and record the majority of second-level pupils.

The first year entrants to the Junior Cycle recorded on the 30th September 2011 (known as the School Census) became the raw cohort for the academic year of 2011/12. The raw cohort was adjusted for deaths, emigration and pupils still remaining within the schooling system by 2017 to become the entry cohort. This information was recorded by individual schools onto P-POD retrospectively. Progression to the next year of the Junior Cycle was confirmed through the School Census 2012/13 using the UPI or PPSN. This was repeated for each year recording progression of a pupil until 2017.

The SEC provided records of pupil participation in State exams. This information was cross referenced to assess a pupil's progression through school cycles with associated milestone exams. Pupils from the entry cohort that were not present on P-POD before the final year of senior cycle or did not sit the Leaving Certificate were considered early school leavers.

### Schools

Pupils were assigned to the first school they registered in; their retention to the Leaving Certificate was associated with that school type, and DEIS status, regardless of any subsequent moves by the pupil.

If schools amalgamated during the period of analysis, from 2011 to 2017, their pupils were assigned to the newly created school. Similarly where a school closed and was amalgamated with an existing school, pupils were assigned to the new school.

## Pupils

A cohort of 413 pupils from the 2011 entry cohort were still in schooling at the end of the retention analysis period. Generally, these were pupils who had completed the junior cycle and transition year and also repeated at least one academic year. These pupils had not completed their second-level education by the end of the 2016/2017 academic year and were excluded from the adjusted cohort.

The raw cohort was also adjusted to exclude pupils who emigrated or deceased during the period of analysis. This information was provided from P-POD maintained directly by school administrators.

Pupils who entered after 2011, either from non-state aided schools, through immigration, or for some other reason, were not included in the adjusted entry cohort.

Pupils who repeated first year of 2011 entry cohort were excluded from the analysis but will be included in the next entry cohort (2012).

## Administrative city and county councils

In 2014, the City and County Councils in Limerick were amalgamated to form Limerick City and County Council, the City and County Councils in Waterford were amalgamated to form Waterford City and County Council, and the County Councils of North Tipperary and South Tipperary were amalgamated to form Tipperary County Council. This breaks the time series for these administrative county councils since 2014.