Standard Report on Methods and Quality (v1)

For the Annual Census of Part-time Education in Community, Comprehensive and Vocational Schools & Annual Census of students enrolled in Full and Part-Time Education in (Leaving Cert/Business/Secretarial) in Private (Non-Aided) Colleges and in Agricultural Colleges

This documentation applies to the reporting period: <2007 onwards>

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Table of Contents

1 Overview

2 General Information
   2.1 Statistical Category
   2.2 Area of Activity
   2.3 Organisational Unit Responsible, Persons to Contact
   2.4 Objectives and Purpose; History
   2.5 Periodicity
   2.6 Client
   2.7 Users
   2.8 Legal basis

3 Statistical Concepts, Methods
   3.1 Subject of the Statistics
   3.2 Units of Observation/Collection Units/Units of Presentation
   3.3 Data Sources
   3.4 Reporting Unit/Respondents
   3.5 Type of Survey/Process
   3.6 Characteristics of the Sample/Process
      3.6.1 Population and Sampling Frame
      3.6.2 Sampling Design
   3.7 Survey Technique/Data Transfer
   3.8 Questionnaire (including explanations)
   3.9 Participation in the Survey
   3.10 Characteristics of the Survey/Process and its Results
   3.11 Classifications used
   3.12 Regional Breakdown of Results

4 Production of the Statistics, Data Processing, Quality Assurance
   4.1 Data Capture
   4.2 Coding
   4.3 Data Editing
   4.4 Imputation (for Non-Response or Incomplete Data Sets)
   4.5 Grossing and Weighting
   4.6 Computation of Outputs, Estimation Methods Used
   4.7 Other Quality Assurance Techniques Used

5 Quality
   5.1 Relevance
   5.2 Accuracy and Reliability
      5.2.1. Sampling Effects, Representativity
      5.2.2. Non-Sampling Effects
         5.2.2.1 Quality of the Data Sources used
         5.2.2.2 Register Coverage
         5.2.2.3 Non-response (Unit and Item)
         5.2.2.4 Measurement Errors
         5.2.2.5 Processing Errors
         5.2.2.6 Model-related Effects
   5.3 Timeliness and Punctuality
      5.3.1 Provisional Results
      5.3.2 Final Results
   5.4 Coherence
   5.5 Comparability
   5.6 Accessibility and Clarity
      5.6.1 Assistance to Users, Special Analyses
      5.6.2 Revisions
      5.6.3 Publications
         5.6.3.1 Releases, Regular Publications
         5.6.3.2 Statistical Reports
         5.6.3.3 Internet
         5.6.4 Confidentiality
1 Overview
The annual Census of Part-time Education in Community, Comprehensive and Vocational Schools collects data in respect of students enrolled in part-time courses. This Census is carried out every September for the purpose of compiling statistics on adult education and further education in Ireland. The Census covers aided Community and Comprehensive Schools as well as Vocational Schools.

The annual Census of Education (Leaving Cert/Business/Secretarial) in Private (Non-Aided) Colleges and in Agricultural Colleges collects data in respect of students enrolled in both full and part-time course in Private (Non-Aided) Second Level Colleges and colleges aided by other Departments.

2 General Information

2.1 Statistical Category
Compilation based on annual census

2.2 Area of Activity
Educational Statistics

2.3 Organisational Unit Responsible, Persons to Contact
Statistics Section, Department of Education and Science
Tel. +353 (1) 8892260, email: statistics@education.gov.ie

2.4 Objectives and Purpose; History
The purpose of these data collections is to provide statistics in regard to institutions and individuals not covered in the main Department of Education and Science statistical collections. Typically, information from these data collections is used in statistical releases as well as returns to the International Organisations. The data are not used for the purposes of determining payments to schools and other education institutions.

The current data collections have been in place since at least the 1980s.

2.5 Periodicity
Statistics on second-level education are published annually. Statistics to 2005/2006 are available in the Department’s Annual Statistical Report. In 2009 the annual reports moved from paper reports to electronic report, available in PC-Axis format on the “Statistics” area of the Department’s website. This data will be updated annually. The most up to date enrolment figures and other basic information are available on request from Statistics section the September after the census takes place. This, in the case of Part-time Education is carried out on a “back year” basis so for example in 2008 schools were asked for enrolment figures from the 2007-2008 school year.
2.6 Client
The Annual Census data is primarily collected for use by the Department of Education for statistical purposes.

2.7 Users
- Other Department of Education and Science sections.
- Policy-makers
- Researchers
- The general public

2.8 Legal basis
The legal basis for this data collection is currently under review

3 Statistical Concepts, Methods

3.1 Subject of the Statistics
Information on second level school pupils attending aided schools in Ireland and fee-paying students in second-level colleges, as well as students in colleges aided by other Departments, i.e., the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Defence.

3.2 Units of Observation/Collection Units/Units of Presentation
Information is collected mainly relating to field of study and grouped by individual year of age. No individual information on pupils is collected, data are returned in summary form.

3.3 Data Sources
Community, Comprehensive and Vocational schools in Ireland which are aided by the Department of Education and colleges aided by other departments. There is also some coverage of private (non-aided) commercial colleges.

3.4 Reporting Unit/Respondents
Principals and/or other school staff, such as the school secretary. Schools and Vocational Education Committees may employ an Adult Education Officer who will collate the returns.

3.5 Type of Survey/Process
Currently a paper based postal census. From 2009 the process will be based on email returns.
3.6 Characteristics of the Sample/Process

3.6.1 Population and Sampling Frame

All relevant schools

3.6.2 Sampling/Census Design

Census

3.7 Survey Technique/Data Transfer

Forms are completed by school staff. Up until and including 2008 forms were returned by post to Statistics section. A manual process of checking and entering data into Excel spreadsheets, for inclusion in the Annual General Report, was undertaken by staff in the section. From 2009 onwards the survey forms will be returned electronically (although schools will still have the option of returning forms by post upon request). This process is under development phase at the moment and will result in automated editing procedures.

3.8 Questionnaire (including explanations)

Principals are asked to fill in a variety of data tables including tables on enrolments, students’ years of birth, entrants, teachers and level of education following the National Framework of Qualifications. A covering letter (a circular letter in the case of Vocational Schools) is sent to the schools giving general instructions on the completion of the census forms. More detailed guidelines are attached to the forms.

A link to the questionnaires follows below:
http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=17216&ecategory=48643&language=EN

3.9 Participation in the Survey

Mandatory for schools aided by the Department of Education and Science. Voluntary for non-aided schools.

3.10 Characteristics of the Survey/Process and its Results

The main data tables resulting from the census are:

1) Enrolments in Other Second Level/Further Education courses, Adult Education, Apprenticeship Training and Junior and Leaving Cert courses (all Part-time).

2) Total enrolment figures in Part-time courses by county.

3) Additional data from the census is published on an ad-hoc basis.

The main statistics resulting from the census are:
3.11 Classifications used

Courses offered may be classified at Levels 1 to 10 according to the National Framework of Qualifications which is maintained by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). For more details see www.nqai.ie.

3.12 Regional Breakdown of Results

Enrolment figures available broken down by administrative county only at present. The Department is currently implementing a Geographical Information System as a separate project which in the future will allow for more detailed geographic analysis of census data.
4 Production of the Statistics, Data Processing, Quality Assurance

4.1 Data Capture
Data is collected in paper form. The information is manually checked and then keyed into a purpose-built database, where it is validated before being transferred to other systems for administrative purposes. From 2009 data will be collected in electronic form.

4.2 Coding

4.3 Data Editing
Once data is input it may be edited a number of times as cross checks are completed and errors are discovered and corrected by schools and by staff in Statistics section

4.4 Imputation (for Non-Response or Incomplete Data Sets)
No imputation. Schools aided by the Department of Education are contacted until they have made a complete return.

4.5 Grossing and Weighting
No grossing or weighting.

4.6 Computation of Outputs, Estimation Methods Used
Results are aggregated – no estimation used.

4.7 Other Quality Assurance Techniques Used
Cross checks and various validation programs are run in order to ensure the integrity of the data and to ensure that there is complete coherence between all the different breakdowns of the data.

5 Quality

5.1 Relevance
Data is very relevant internally for various administrative and statistical purposes as described in Section 2.6. It is also relevant to any research on education.

5.2 Accuracy and Reliability

5.2.1. Sampling Effect & Representivity
Not a sample
5.2.2 Non-Sampling Effects

5.2.2.1 Quality of the Data Sources used

The sources of the data are school staff and it is assumed that the information they supply is correct.

5.2.2.2 Register Coverage

Coverage extends to all secondary schools in Ireland which are aided by the Department of Education and Science. The list of non-aided second level colleges in use currently is not complete as it does not cover all the colleges in the country. Staff are working at present on expanding the list.

5.2.2.3 Non-response (Unit and Item)

Not applicable. All aided schools are required to complete the form.

5.2.2.4 Measurement Errors

The questionnaires use terms which are commonly used and understood by the schools themselves thus ensuring against any interpretation errors.

5.2.2.5 Processing Errors

Any processing and/or clerical errors are generally discovered and corrected at a later stage as the computerised data is cross checked and validated.

5.2.2.6 Model-related Effects

Not applicable

5.3 Timeliness & Punctuality

5.3.1 Provisional Results

Not applicable

5.3.2 Final Results

Final results generally become available in August/September of the year following the census.

5.4 Coherence

This census is the main source of data on part-time education in Ireland. It is difficult to compare the data directly therefore with another source.

5.5 Comparability

As the classifications are locally created, this data is not comparable internationally. However some of the data is used when completing annual statistics questionnaires for the international organisations, and are used to aid in calculating indicators which are internationally comparable such as enrolment rates by age.
5.6 Accessibility and Clarity

5.6.1 Assistance to Users, Special Analyses
Queries about educational statistics from both internal and external customers are responded to via email by staff in Statistics section.

5.6.2 Revisions
Generally there are no revisions.

5.6.3 Publications

5.6.3.1 Releases, Regular Publications
The results of the census do not feature in a stand-alone publication; however the resultant data appears in other publications by the Department.

5.6.3.2 Statistical Reports

5.6.3.3 Internet
Education Statistics Database at
http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=17216&ecategory=47118&language=EN

5.6.4 Confidentiality
Not applicable as the information is in summary form only.
6 Additional documentation and publications

The Education Statistics database on the Statistics section of the Department of Education and Science provides comprehensive data on participation in education in Ireland. PDF versions of the Department’s Annual Statistical Reports from 1996/1997 to 2005/2006 can also be found in this area.

Information can also be found on StatCentral at the following link –

www.statcentral.ie/viewstat.asp?id=39