

## **Survey Methodology – School Leavers Survey 2007**

For the first time, the School Leavers' Survey was undertaken through a multi-mode survey approach. This represented an important departure from the traditional sole reliance on face-to-face interviewing. The School Leavers' Survey is seen as a particularly appropriate area to take advantage of new communications technologies, particularly on-line access and e-mail. Appropriate use of these technologies has the potential to enhance communication with respondents, ease response burden, increase response rates, accelerate the pace of fieldwork, and reduce data entry and processing costs. In this context, school leavers were offered a number of modes of response to the survey in 2007: online completion, self-completion and postal return, completion over the phone and face-to-face interview. As expected, young people who left school prior to Leaving Cert level were less likely to respond to the initial web phase of the survey. Subsequent rounds adopting the postal, phone and in person completion allowed for correction of any non-response bias across groups and ensured the target sample was achieved in terms of overall numbers and gender and educational composition.

It is interesting to note that response mode varied quite considerably across gender, educational level and socio-economic groups, as well as across post-school pathway groups, emphasising the importance of adopting a multi-mode methodology to ensure representativeness and minimise sampling bias. The following looks at response mode by gender, educational level and parental socio-economic group, to illustrate the strengths of the methodology adopted in the current study.

Young people who left school prior to completion of second-level are considerably less likely to complete the survey online, with many completing the survey in the later face-to-face interview phase. While overall a higher proportion of females completed the survey online, among those who completed second-level males were more likely than females to have participated in the online phase.

Wide variations in response mode are also apparent across socio-economic groups. Young people from professional and employer/manager backgrounds are considerably more likely to participate in the web survey, while those from unemployed backgrounds were less likely to self-complete (either through the online survey or postal survey) and participated largely through face-to-face interviews.

These findings illustrate the disadvantage of relying on web completion (or self-completion more generally) in surveys of young adults: even among this group where

we would expect a greater familiarity with modern information technology, the response pattern was strongly differentiated by academic achievement and social class. The results point to the importance of multiple modes in achieving a representative sample.

**Table 1.1: Response Mode by Second-Level Educational Attainment**

Response Mode	No Qualifications	Junior Cert	Leaving Certificate	Total
Web	13.7	23.6	56.1	44.4
Postal	13.1	10.6	14.7	13.6
Phone	14.9	24.0	17.6	19.0
In Person	58.3	41.8	11.6	23.1

**Table 1.2: Response Mode by Second-Level Educational Attainment and Gender**

Response Mode	No Qualifications		Junior Cert		Leaving Certificate		Total	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Web	15.2	11.4	20.4	31.7	58.7	53.9	41.6	47.5
Postal	13.3	12.9	10.3	11.3	12.4	16.7	11.8	15.6
Phone	16.2	12.9	26.3	18.3	19.5	16.1	21.4	16.2
In Person	55.2	62.9	43.0	38.7	9.4	13.3	25.2	20.7

**Table 1.3: Response Mode by Parental Socio-Economic Group (Dominance Measure)**

Response Mode	Farmer	Professional	Employer/Manager	Non-Manual	Skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled Manual	Unemployd	Unknown	Total
Web	35.0	64.1	51.7	40.9	36.5	15.3	47.0	44.4
Postal	22.3	10.8	15.0	12.2	16.1	12.6	11.2	13.6
Phone	27.4	13.3	19.8	19.3	21.4	17.1	18.7	19.0
In Person	15.3	11.8	13.5	27.6	26.0	55.0	23.1	23.1

## APPENDIX A

### SAMPLE DESIGN, WEIGHTING AND SAMPLING ERRORS

#### *Sample Design*

Each Annual School Leavers Survey is based on a national stratified random sample of school leavers, who are interviewed approximately one year to 18 months after leaving school. A school leaver is defined as someone who left full-time education in an official secondary, vocational, community or comprehensive school in the course of the previous academic year, i.e., the period September of t-3 to August of t-2 where t is the year the survey is being carried out. The present survey, conducted in 2007, covers those who left the second level system between September 2004 and August 2005. Most of these would have left school in June 2005.

As in 2006, the 2007 was selected as a stratified (by programme and gender) random sample of school leavers from a database provided for this purpose by the Department of Education and Science<sup>1</sup>.

Stratification was based on programme code and programme year and gender. As in previous years, the non-Leaving Cert group was oversampled to provide a higher number of cases for analysis of their early labour market experiences.

Rows 1 and 2 of Table A1 below show the estimated numbers of leavers in each stratum and the size of the target field sample selected. Only those under age 25 are included, as this is the group to which the present report refers<sup>2</sup>.

#### *Fieldwork and Response*

A multi-mode approach was taken to the fieldwork in 2007, an innovation to the survey which has been conducted by face-to-face interview in earlier years. The 2007 survey was offered students the option to complete by web, by post, by telephone or through face-to-face contact with an interviewer. As noted in Chapter XX, young people who left school prior to Leaving Cert level were less likely to respond to the initial web phase of the survey. Subsequent rounds adopting the postal, phone and in person completion allowed for correction of any non-response bias across groups and ensured the target sample was achieved in terms of overall numbers and gender and educational composition.

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to 2006, a two stage, random stratified design was used, with selection of schools at the first stage and pupils from the selected schools in the second stage. The schools were then requested to provide the contact details for the selected students.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from PLC leavers, very few students are over age 25. .

For the telephone and face-to-face phases, trained interviewers, who were fully instructed on the survey, attempted to contact and interview those school leavers who has not self-completed by web or post.

Table A1 shows the details of response to the survey. The first row shows the numbers of school leavers who left at each stage. It excluded those over 25 (mainly PLC leavers), those with an address while at school that was outside Ireland and an estimated number of 'ineligible' leavers. These are cases where, on contact, it emerged the student was still in school, had left school outside the reference period (i.e. before September 2004 or after August 2005) or was deceased.

The second row shows the total field sample and the third row shows the number of these who were 'ineligible'. It is clear that the 'ineligible' students were mainly concentrated in those leaving before the leaving cert year.

Overall, the response rate achieved was 54 per cent, a substantial increase over the 46 per cent achieved in the 2006 survey. The response rate varied from 81 per cent among Leaving Cert students to 20 per cent among those who left before the Junior Cert. The low response rate in the latter category is mainly due to the large numbers of leavers and their families who had left the area and left no forwarding address (36 per cent).

The fifth row of Table A1 shows the sampling fraction in each stratum, i.e., the proportion of pupils sampled in each sub-group<sup>3</sup>. This varies from 82 per cent of leavers with no qualifications to 3 per cent of those leaving with the Leaving Certificate. All the tables in the report have been re-weighted taking account of these sampling fractions to give unbiased estimates of the relevant population percentages, averages and totals.

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<sup>3</sup> This is the proportion selected for the field sample, after those ineligible were identified and excluded.

Table A1: Estimated Numbers of Leavers under Age 25 in Various Categories and Details of Sample

	Stratum (Stage Left)					Total
	Before Junior Cert year	Junior Cert Program year	LC program, year 1	LC program, year 2	PLC program	
No. in Population*	688	2,018	4,778	42,390	12,813	62,687
Total Field Sample	995	1008	724	1183	754	4,665
Not eligible**	434	245	90	65	94	928
Eligible Field Sample	562	763	634	1118	660	3,737
Sampling fraction	82%	38%	13%	3%	5%	6%
Achieved Sample	111	326	289	907	392	2,025
Response Rate	20%	43%	46%	81%	59%	54%
<b>Of those completed, percent completed by each mode</b>						
Web self-completion	18%	23%	17%	66%	40%	44%
Postal self-completion	14%	15%	6%	15%	15%	14%
Telephone interview	10%	20%	30%	13%	27%	19%
Face-to-face interview	59%	42%	48%	6%	19%	23%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Excludes those over age 25, VTOS students and students whose home address while at school was outside Ireland.

Note that the stratum refers to the programme and year in which the person left school: the examination might not have been taken

\* Number in population adjusted using estimates from survey of numbers of leavers ineligible (still in school etc)

\*\* Ineligible = still in school, moved to another school, left school outside reference period, deceased.

The final panel of Table A1 show the response achieved by each method. Overall, 44 per cent of the completed sample used the first mode offered, self-completion on the web, ranging from about one fifth of those leaving in the Junior Cert year or earlier to two thirds of those leaving in the Leaving Cert year. About one respondent in seven completed the survey by post, the second mode offered. Just under one fifth completed by telephone and almost one quarter completed in a face-to-face interview. In the telephone and face-to-face phases, a special emphasis was placed on reaching early leavers, as their response by web and post was very low. Thus, almost three in five of those completing the survey among those leaving before the Junior Cert year and over two in five of those leaving in the Junior Cert year completed through face-to-face interview.