

## School support staff data

### Introduction

1. This paper sets out the Scottish Government's approach to the annual collection and processing of school support staff data. It sets out the context in which these data are collected, and describes the process which is in place for quality assurance.
2. This paper then sets out the issues with, and processes for addressing, specific categories of support staff data in the 2017 data collection. It also describes the information taken into account when making decisions on whether to make changes to the presentation of those data.

### The Code of Practice for Statistics

3. The Scottish Government is an Official Statistics producer, and as such the collection, processing and publication of data is subject to the Code of Practice for Statistics<sup>1</sup>. The Code provides us with the detailed practices we must commit to when producing and releasing official statistics.
4. The Code ensures that our published statistics serve the public. By complying with the Code, it gives users of our statistics and the general public confidence that our published statistics are of public value, are high quality and are produced by people and an organisation that are worthy of trust.
5. The Code frames our approach to producing statistics:
  - We are ethical and honest in using any data
  - We have a strong culture of professional analysis
  - We respect evidence
  - We are open and transparent about the strengths and limitations of our statistics
  - We communicate statistics accurately, clearly and impartially
  - We are committed to engaging publicly to understand user needs.

### School staff and pupil census data

6. The annual school staff and pupil census collections encompass the pupil census, the teacher census, the non-teaching school staff census, the primary class data collection, the school establishment collection and, every two years, the attendance & absence census and the school exclusions collection.
7. Data is collected on over 2,500 schools, nearly 700,000 pupils, 70,000 teachers and over 20,000 support staff from 32 local authorities and 8 grant-aided schools. Together this amounts to tens of millions of data points that are collected, quality assured and analysed. The result is the proactive publication of upwards of 100,000 individual statistics published across the staff and pupil census every year. In addition, over 100 bespoke datasets are released in response to user

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6. <sup>1</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

requests annually. These data collections therefore represent a huge operation across the school education system.

8. The pupil and teacher censuses are record-level collections. This means that data is collected on each individual. The non-teaching school staff census is an aggregate level collection. This means data is collected on the count of full time equivalent staff in 29 categories employed in schools and those employed centrally by local authorities.
9. There are two primary routes for the publication of school staff and pupil statistics. The headline statistics for schools, teachers and pupils are published in the *Summary Statistics for Schools* bulletin which tends to be released in mid-December each year. Over the subsequent months, supplementary statistics on schools, pupils, classes, teachers and support staff are published in a series of background online data sets.
10. The data used in the production of these statistics are subject to various quality assurance arrangements that are proportionate to the nature of the anticipated quality issues and the influence of the statistics. Much of the data is gathered by schools and recorded on their management information systems. This information is used in the day-to-day delivery of education and operation of schools and so is subject to checks and quality controls to ensure it is fit for purpose. The data is also used and analysed on a continuous basis centrally by local authorities where further checks and quality assurance is carried out.
11. During the annual census data collection process, the required data are extracted from the management information systems using bespoke software and securely delivered to the Scottish Government. The initial processing of the data includes automated validation of the data fields to ensure completeness and use of appropriate data types. The data are then assessed by statisticians using a range of quality assurance techniques.
12. Any anomalies identified through this process are queried and resolved with our network of local authority education data specialists. On completion of the quality assurance process, local authority Directors of Education (or equivalent) are required to formally confirm the accuracy of their school staff and pupil census data, ahead of publication.
13. There is great demand from users for the census statistics to be released in a timely manner. The census takes place in mid-September, the data is then collated and quality assured by schools and local authorities until end of October, further quality assurance is then carried out by Scottish Government statisticians during November, after which the headline statistics are produced and prepared for publication in early to mid-December. Supplementary statistics and background data are prepared and released in the subsequent months.

### **Quality assurance and publication of 2017 school support staff statistics**

14. During the normal quality assurance process of school support staff statistics by Scottish Government statisticians in December 2017, some anomalies were discovered in the data relating to some categories of school support staff. Around

the same time, one local authority raised concerns about the accuracy of the data they had submitted on their library staff.

15. As a consequence, Scottish Government statisticians took the decision to extend the breadth and depth of their normal quality assurance process for school support staff. This work was carried out in conjunction with local authorities and focussed on those staff with roles related to providing assistance to pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN) and library staff. These processes showed that the reported number of school support staff in each category varied considerably between local authorities. For example, one local authority reported 863 FTE classroom assistants and zero ASN auxiliaries while another reported 702 ASN auxiliaries and zero classroom assistants. Overall, six authorities had no or very few staff reported as classroom assistants while a further six had no or very few staff reported as Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistants. This work resulted in a number of corrections and improvements to the quality of the data that had been submitted by local authorities as part of the census process.
16. During this work it became apparent that in some local authorities the terminology used to describe support staff no longer matched the categories of support staff that had previously been used in the census for some years. For instance, in some authorities there are no roles termed 'ASN support' or 'Classroom Assistant' and instead the term 'Pupil Support Assistant' is used to describe a role that encompasses this type of work. Examples of the feedback on this from Local Authorities include:
  - "Since August 2012, we have had a generic 'Pupil Support Assistant' post", this was reported as ASN auxiliary or care assistant
  - "...schools now solely employing Pupil Support Assistants"
  - "generic job title of Support for Learning Assistant (SfLA)...could be involved in Behaviour Support, support for individual pupils, or more general classroom support, depending on the needs of the schools at any given time"
  - "[We] do not have Classroom Assistant posts, we have Pupil Support Assistants recorded as ASN auxiliaries"
  - "the recording of [ASN related] staff does differ from school to school"
17. Therefore, local authorities were consulted on the proposal to combine the 'Additional Support Needs Auxiliary or Care Assistant' and 'Classroom Assistant' categories into a new category of Pupil Support Assistant.
18. Scottish Government officials with responsibility for support and wellbeing in schools were also consulted on the proposal to use the new category of Pupil Support Assistant in the publication of statistics on school support staff. These officials offered their support for the proposal as it reflected feedback from key stakeholders on the current practice within schools and education authorities.
19. Following this consultation, Scottish Government statisticians took the decision to proceed with including a new category labelled *Pupil Support Assistant* in the presentation of statistics on school support staff. This new category was a simple combination of the previously reported – and still collected – 'Additional Support Needs Auxiliary or Care Assistant' and 'Classroom Assistant' categories. The introduction of this new category was judged to better represent the terminology

and practice of support provision in schools, and enabled more reliable comparisons across Local Authorities.

20. The improved quality statistics on school support staff were published on the Scottish Government website alongside the other school education supplementary statistics on 31 July 2018. This was slightly later than in previous years, in accordance with the accepted practice to release official statistics as soon as they are considered ready. These statistics comprise the following six categories of school support staff:

- Pupil Support Assistant (the combined Additional Support Needs Auxiliary or Care Assistant and Classroom Assistant categories)
- Behaviour Support Staff
- School Nurses
- Home-school Link Workers
- Educational Psychologists
- Library Staff

21. Data on all the remaining categories of school support staff continue to be collected, and are available on request, as advertised on the Scottish Government website alongside the published school support staff statistics. This includes data on 'Music Instructors', 'Laboratory Assistants', and 'Technicians'. This approach is common practice for making background data to official statistics available. This data was subsequently published at local authority level on the Scottish Government website as part of the response to a Freedom of Information request. Therefore, all the data that has been previously published by the Scottish Government on school support staff continues to be publicly available for the 2017 edition of the data.

22. The arrangements to facilitate access to school support staff data on request were introduced as a temporary measure while Scottish Government statisticians consider the most appropriate method of providing access to these data. None of the quality assurance and publication processes outlined above have altered the scope of the data collected – this remains unchanged.

## **In conclusion**

23. The decisions outlined above relating to the collection, quality assurance and publication of the school support staff statistics are the responsibility of statisticians who act in consultation with data providers and users. This is in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics which states "The collection, access, use and sharing of statistics and data should be ethical and for the public good. Those producing and releasing statistics should be free from conflicts of interest, including political and commercial pressures, that may influence the production, release and sharing of the statistics and data."

24. Considering all of the information and contributions outlined above, the use of the Pupil Support Assistant category in the published statistics was judged to provide a better representation of the pupil support practices and provision across the 32 local authorities than the continued use of distinct Additional Support Needs Auxiliary or Care Assistant and Classroom Assistant categories. Consequently,

the data new published provides a more reliable picture across Scotland of the volume of support staff in schools.

**Learning Directorate**  
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