



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

### AGENDA

**29th Meeting, 2018 (Session 5)**

**Wednesday 28 November 2018**

The Committee will meet at 10.00 am in the David Livingstone Room (CR6).

1. **Decision on taking business in private:** The Committee will decide whether to take agenda item 3 in private.
2. **School support staff data:** The Committee will take evidence from—
  - Alasdair Anthony, Statistician, Head of School, Staff and Pupil Census Statistics Team,
  - Roger Halliday, Chief Statistician and Data Officer,
  - Laura Meikle, Head of Support and Wellbeing Unit, Learning Directorate, and
  - Mick Wilson, Acting Deputy Director, Education Analysis, Scottish Government.
3. **Review of evidence:** The Committee will consider the evidence it heard earlier.

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The papers for this meeting are as follows—

**Agenda Item 2**

SPICe briefing paper

ES/S5/18/29/1

Submission pack

ES/S5/18/29/2

## **Education and Skills Committee School Census**

**Wednesday 28 November 2018**

The Committee agreed to explore changes to how supplementary data from the annual staff census is presented.

The Committee will take evidence from officials involved in the processing of statistics:

- Roger Halliday, Chief Statistician and Data Officer; and
- Alasdair Anthony, Statistician, Head of School, Staff and Pupil Census Statistics Team;
- Mick Wilson, Acting Deputy Director, Education Analysis.

Statisticians are not in a position to answer questions on the specifics of datasets in the 2018 census due to pre-release restrictions.

Questions on wider Government work related to the statistics on additional support needs school staff can be directed to a Scottish Government policy official on the panel:

- Laura Meikle, Head of Support and Wellbeing Unit, Learning Directorate.

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

The staff census is an annual survey of local authorities regarding staffing all publicly funded schools in Scotland.

The census asks local authorities to report on the number and characteristics of its teaching and education staff on a single day in mid-September. This year the day was 18 September 2018. At the same time and for the same day, the Scottish Government seeks information from local authorities through its school / pupil census. The staff census is released along with the school / pupil census, a survey on early learning and childcare provision and the school estate. These data collections are drawn together in the annual [Summary statistics for schools in Scotland publication](#).

The staff census is published in two tranches. The main release is normally published in December following the census and supplementary data, including details of support staff, normally published in the following March.<sup>1</sup>

The census is part of a range of statistics designated and badged by the Scottish Government as a [National Statistic](#). The census is therefore subject to compliance assessments by the Office for Statistics Regulation. In 2018, the supplementary tables were published later than normal, in July.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Scottish Government's [Forthcoming Publications](#)

## Data collected and presented

The staff census covers the teaching staff in Scotland. Data is collected by local authorities (and grant-maintained schools) and submitted to the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government's submission explains—

“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.”

The Scottish Government noted that the data undergoes a number of quality assurance and validation processes and is signed off by the Director of Education (or equivalent) at the local authority.<sup>2</sup>

The staff census presents data on the teaching workforce at a national and local authority level broken down by a number of characteristics, including:

- Sector (Primary, Secondary, Special schools and centrally employed by the local authority);
- Mode of working (FT/PT) and supply;
- Grade;
- Personal details – age, gender, ethnicity, national identity;
- Main subject taught;
- Contact time and teachers not currently in schools;
- Teachers undertaking chartered teacher and headship training programmes;
- The eligibility to teach in a Roman Catholic school; and
- The capability to teach in Gaelic medium.

Data on staff who are not teachers had routinely been added to the staff census data a few months after the data on teachers had been published. This year, the data was published separately in July. This release included fewer categories of support staff and introduced a new category of Pupil Support Assistant which brought together two categories which had previously been reported separately, “Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistants” and “classroom assistants”. Categories not published were available on request, although this service did not explicitly include access to data on “Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistants” and “classroom assistants”.

## CATEGORIES OF SUPPORT STAFF

### THEME 1: Additional support needs

#### Previous work by the Committee

There have been continuing high levels of interest around the provision for children with additional support needs for many years, including from this Committee. Context for this is the increase in the recorded incidence of children with additional support needs. The Education and Skills Committee undertook a short inquiry into ASN in 2017. The [report](#)

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<sup>2</sup> A more detailed explanation of validation processes can be found here: <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/collectionprocess>

published in May 2017 cited a 153% increase since 2010. Evidence to the Committee pointed to staffing levels being an issue:

“A strong theme of evidence from parents and teachers however was the gap between the experience envisaged of inclusive education and the experience of the children they supported in practice. Again, the lack of resources, specifically staff, was regularly cited as the issue in evidence. Of the 143 parents who shared their experiences the vast majority mentioned resources of some form and 87 specifically mentioned a lack of staff and its impact on their children.”(paragraph 47)

A number of recommendations from the Committee’s report require accurate baseline data including on support staff with a specialism, including training, on working with children with additional support needs. (see the recommendations in Annexe A). The Government’s response is available here:

[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S5\\_Education/General%20Documents/20170726InResponseFromScottishGovernmentToASLReport1.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S5_Education/General%20Documents/20170726InResponseFromScottishGovernmentToASLReport1.pdf).

In addition to quantitative information the Committee recommended a qualitative review should be commissioned by the Scottish Government which “should place emphasis on the direct experiences of parents (and by extension the children themselves), teachers and support staff in schools.” The Cabinet Secretary updated the Committee on this research in his [letter dated 30 October](#) stating that publication of the research has been ‘paused’ pending discussions on [Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved](#).

#### **“Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistants” and “classroom assistants”**

The two categories, “Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistants” and “classroom assistants”, had previously been reported separately in the supplementary release of the staff census were this year collated into a single category of Pupil Support Assistant..

A request for data sought information on the number of “additional support needs auxiliary or care assistants” and “classroom assistants” was treated as a [request under freedom of information legislation](#). There does not appear to be a set timescale for response to a request for data. FOI legislation requires written responses within 20 working days. This data is not included in the list of categories available on request from the Scottish Government.

In responding to the request, the Scottish Government stated—

“There is now greater standardisation of terms and definitions between schools and local authorities. There has also been a review of support staff categories in consultation with local authority education representatives and Scottish Government officials with responsibility for support and wellbeing in schools. This resulted in a new category termed “Pupil support assistant”. This category combines the previous “Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistant” and “Classroom assistant” categories and better reflects policy and provision in schools.”

A caveat to the data provided in the FOI response explains further that “in some local authorities the distinction between [the categories of “Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistant” and “Classroom assistant”] is arbitrary. People doing the same job in different authorities may be recorded in either category.”

This issue was highlighted by Ross Greer on [5 September 2018](#) during an evidence session with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. The Cabinet Secretary indicated that this was a decision by Scottish Government statisticians and stated—

“On quality assurance, there have been issues in assuring that data was of a standard that could be published by our statisticians. They have had to wrestle with that data-quality issue and to interrogate quite significantly some of the data that emerged. They have taken the view that, in trying to provide the broadest assessment of employment and the characteristics of the workforce, it is better to present the information in that fashion.” (Col 44)

[The Committee wrote to the Cabinet Secretary](#) seeking further information on this issue. The Cabinet Secretary’s [response](#) states, in relation to the decision making process:

“Following consultation with local authority education representatives and Scottish Government officials with responsibility for support and wellbeing in schools, Scottish Government statisticians took the decision to present the data using a new category labelled pupil support staff. This new category is simply a combination of the previously reported - and still collected - Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistant and Classroom assistant categories but better represents the terminology and practice of support provision in schools...

“I can also confirm that I have no role in influencing the decisions I outlined in Committee as being the responsibility of statisticians. 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.”

More details on the [Code of Practice](#) referred to by the Cabinet Secretary is provided in Annex B. In terms of methods the Code explains—

“Producers of statistics and data should provide users with advance notice about changes to methods, explaining why the changes are being made. A consistent time series should be produced, with back series provided where possible. Users should be made aware of the nature and extent of the change.” (p26)

In its submission to the Committee, the Scottish Government quantified the variation in how staff were categorised across different local authorities. It said “one local authority reported 863 FTE classroom assistants and zero ASN auxiliaries while another reported 702 ASN auxiliaries and zero classroom assistants” The submission continued--

“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.”

The submission also states that it consulted with local authorities and relevant Scottish Government officials in coming to its decision to combine the ‘Additional Support Needs Auxiliary or Care Assistant’ and ‘Classroom Assistant’ categories into a new category of Pupil Support Assistant.

The problem of a variation of how ASN pupils, staff and teachers are reported has been raised with the Committee previously in March 2017. During the Committee's 2017 inquiry [the SSTA stated](#)—

“Detailed Census data relating to the field of ASN has been available since 2010. In order to ensure that a clearer national picture of ASN provision is made available it would be useful if the nomenclature used to describe the variety of staffing roles within additional support needs was used consistently across all authorities. This increased clarity and consistency of nomenclature would also reduce the likelihood of misreporting which can be identified when one compares the data obtained by the SSTA with the data contained within Census statistics. For example, information provided to the SSTA indicates that on Census Day 2016, 92 ASN teachers were working within the secondary sector of Dumfries and Galloway. By contrast, the actual Census figures returned by the same Local Authority record that 38 ASN teachers were employed on the same day. That is, a discrepancy of 54 teachers.”  
(p4)

The Convenor of the SSTA ASN Advisory Committee, had submitted FOI requests to all local authorities in order to obtain information about ASN staffing levels and compared this with census data. The SSTA inquiry response includes summary tables of FOI and census information. It also stated—

“To what extent classroom assistants may or may not support pupils with additional support needs is unclear. This is because in some secondary schools in addition to supporting pupils, classroom assistants also support teachers in the preparation of resources e.g. for cookery & other practical type lessons, and in the photocopying of materials as well as in other activities ...

“While it is recognised that local authorities differ in the ways in which they make provision for children and young people with additional support needs, at the same time it is difficult to consider the appropriateness or otherwise of ASN staffing levels across local authorities ...

“Whilst we understand that there are often good reasons for differences in the way in which provision is organised *geographically*, it strikes us that there are no good reasons for differences in nomenclature or in definition of job role/tasks nor, importantly in the assessment of pupils with an ASN.”

#### **Members may wish to explore:**

- **What the ‘corrections and improvements’ were to the quality of the data that had been submitted by local authorities as part of the census process;**
- **When consulting Scottish Government officials on combining two categories into one—**
  - **whether alternative approaches were available, for example if Government officials had been averse to the change being made;**
  - **whether, given the variability of reporting, the need to address the loss of transparency and a lessening of detailed information on ASN trained staff was discussed; and**

- whether any minutes of these discussions are available.
- **Whether there is scope to standardise the understanding of different classroom roles across local authorities to enable robust and differentiated data to be collected and published. What advice is given to local authorities to ensure consistency of reporting?**
- **Before the issues with local authority data were identified, whether statisticians or other Government officials were aware of the concerns of the SSTA, or others, on census statistics?** (This includes on the variation in reporting of classroom assistants and ASN auxiliaries by local authorities and the difference between figures generated through FOI and census publication)
- **Whether statisticians provided users with advance notice about changes to methods, explaining why the changes are being made (in accordance with the Code of Practice).**
- **Whether a consistent time series on the new category of Pupil Support Assistant will be produced allowing users to easily compare previous census data from 2017 with data from previous years (as the Code of Practice advises)**
- **Whether processes are triggered by statisticians when changes in category could lead to a loss of publicly available detail and therefore transparency (for example when information on staffing levels of those specifically trained to support children with ASN is not available). Options for might include—**
  - **Taking steps to ensure more consistency in job titles at local authority level;**
  - **Undertaking other work separate to the census to establish staffing levels to inform Government decision making and policy scrutiny processes.**

## **THEME 2: Other categories of support staff**

The supplementary data for the 2016 survey included 21 separate categories for support staff in schools.<sup>3</sup> There were also 10 categories for local authority centrally employed staff.<sup>4</sup> Some categories of staff are collected for both centrally employed and school staff. Supplementary data was previously added to the original tables published in December.

Supplementary data for support staff collected in the 2017 census was published in a separate release under the title “Support staff”. It was published in July 2018 which is later than supplementary data had previously been published (normally around March). The

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<sup>3</sup> Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistant; Admin & clerical; Behaviour Support; Bursar; Business Manager; Classroom assistant; Foreign language assistant; Home-school link worker; Laboratory assistant; Library staff; Music instructor; Nursery Nurse; Office manager; Other APT&C; Other childcare worker (qualified); Other childcare worker (unqualified); Other instructor; School nurse or other medical; Sports coach/coordinator; Swimming pool manager/operator; and Technician.

<sup>4</sup> Education centre; Educational Psychologist; Peripatetic Music Instructor; Foreign language assistant; Home-school link worker; Business Manager; Education Welfare Officer; Outdoor centre; Quality Improvement Officer; and Other.

number of categories published was reduced to five for schools<sup>5</sup> and three for centrally employed staff<sup>6</sup> (again with overlap between the two). The following explanation was provided by the Scottish Government when the data was published in the new form—

“Additional quality assurance has been carried out on school support staff data for 2017. This means that the statistics are not directly comparable with previous years. This is because we have brought processing and quality assurance of the statistics on school support staff for 2017 into line with procedures for National Statistics on pupils and teachers.

“Data for years prior to 2017 were published as part of the [Teacher Census Supplementary Data](#).

“Data for some categories of staff were not subject to additional quality assurance and are no longer published. They are held as management information and are available on request, please contact [school.stats@gov.scot](mailto:school.stats@gov.scot).”

All additional categories available were published under on 31 August 2018 in a [response handled under Freedom of Information](#).

The submission from the Scottish Government states:

“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.

“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.”

The data published in the [FOI release the Scottish Government referred to](#) is not caveated as strongly as the release which provided data on the categories of “Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistant” and “Classroom assistant” which warned that about the distinction between those categories is arbitrary. The Scottish Government’s submission does not provide examples of how reporting on these categories suffers from the significant variation seen in the types of roles now included under Pupil Support Assistant. The submission also does not mention any consultation on the changes in reporting other than in relation to the new category of Pupil Support Assistant.

### **Members may wish to explore:**

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<sup>5</sup> Pupil Support Assistant; Behaviour Support; Home-school link worker; School nurse or other medical; and Library staff.

<sup>6</sup> Educational Psychologist; Home-school link worker; and School nurse or other medical.

- **What led to data on other categories of support staff not being routinely published and what consultation took place in advance of this decision;**
- **Why information on support staff such as music instructors and laboratory assistants and technicians are now categorised as ‘background data to official statistics’;**
- **Why the number of categories published has reduced from 21 to 5 in relation to school staff, with categories that are not now published being ‘management information available on request’;**
- **Whether consideration has been given to setting a standard response time for requests for this management information;**
- **Why responses for this management information have been treated as freedom of information requests, rather than as routine requests;**
- **Whether there is scope to publish these categories information caveated with limitations to the accuracy of the data (since the information can be made publicly available and is of public interest);**
- **The extent to which other statistics, such as data on the number and categories of teachers supporting pupils with ASN suffer from the same variation in reporting by local authorities.**

**Ned Sharratt  
SPICe Research  
22 November 2018**

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## **ANNEXE A: EXTRACTS OF COMMITTEE INQUIRY REPORT '[HOW IS ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING WORKING IN PRACTICE?](#)'**

Recommendation 4: Looking more broadly at additional support for learning, the evidence points at a number of ways in which resources are not currently sufficient to support those with additional support needs in mainstream schools. The most notable factors are the reduction in the number of specialist staff in classrooms, the reduction in specialist support services and the reduction in special school places.

Recommendation 7: The Scottish Government must assess the extent to which the policy to mainstream and the associated communications to education authorities are leading to mainstreaming in practice. The Scottish Government must also assess the extent to which a lack of resources is impacting on mainstreaming in practice and more generally on the provision of additional support for learning in mainstream education.

The Committee recommended that the Scottish Government review guidance on mainstreaming and assess how “resource limitations” are impacting on a range of processes which support children with ASN. The report states:

Recommendation 11 (extract) “Resource limitations that are impacting on these processes include:

- the number of trained ASN teachers and ASN assistants,.”<sup>7</sup>

Recommendation 18 states:

“Inclusive education for those with additional support needs is “based on the premise that there is benefit to all children when the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs is properly prepared, well supported and takes place in mainstream schools within a positive ethos”. The Committee would therefore welcome further analysis from the Scottish Government on how the education and ultimately the attainment of pupils in general is being impacted upon by insufficient resources being provided to support children with additional support needs. This should include any correlation between the reduction in specialist ASN staff in certain education authorities and overall attainment.”

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<sup>7</sup> Education and Skills Committee (2017) [How is Additional Support for Learning working in practice?](#) (paras 87 & 89)

## **ANNEXE B: NATIONAL STATISTICS AND THE CODE OF PRACTICE**

The UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) accredits the Scottish Government's statistics on schools and pupils as national statistics. The most recent [assessment of these statistics was published in November 2013](#).

The 2013 assessment noted that “designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the Code of Practice.” The assessment did not refer to the categorisation of classroom assistants in its recommendations to the Scottish Government.

The UKSA produced a new [Code of Practice in February 2018](#). This Code is structured around three “pillars”, Trustworthiness, Quality and Value. The Code states that producers of statistics should show compliance with the Code through a commitment to transparency, coherence (i.e. explaining data, its context, and how it can be used with other data), accountability, and having a public focus. Transparency is said to be “at the core” of the Code's practices. In the Code, transparency means—

“Explaining what judgements producers have made about the data, methods, and their strengths and limitations, as well as what the statistics tell us about the world. These explanations are as important as the numbers themselves.”

### **Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness pillar covers the integrity, independence, openness and professional capacity of statisticians.

### **Quality**

Within the Quality pillar, the Code states—

“Quality requires skilled professional judgement about collecting, preparing, analysing and publishing statistics and data in ways that meet the needs of people who want to use the statistics.”

In relation to suitable data sources, the Code states—

“Statistics should be based on data sources in which the definitions and concepts are good approximations to what the statistics aim to measure ... The causes of any limitations identified in data sources should be addressed. Any actions taken to address these limitations should be explained to users, as should any restrictions or constraints which may mean actions are not possible ... Source data should be coherent across different levels of aggregation, consistent over time, and comparable between geographical areas, whenever possible.” (p24 & 25)

In terms of methods the Code explains—

“Producers of statistics and data should provide users with advance notice about changes to methods, explaining why the changes are being made. A consistent time series should be produced, with back series provided where possible. Users should be made aware of the nature and extent of the change.” (p26)

In terms of quality assurance, the Code states—

“Statistics should be produced to a level of quality that meets users’ needs. The strengths and limitations of the statistics and data should be considered in relation to different uses, and clearly explained alongside the statistics.

“Quality assurance arrangements should be proportionate to the nature of the quality issues and the importance of the statistics in serving the public good. Statistics producers should be transparent about the quality assurance approach taken throughout the preparation of the statistics. The risk and impact of quality issues on statistics and data should be minimised to an acceptable level for the intended uses.” (p26)

## **Value**

The Code explains “value means that the statistics and data are useful, easy to access, remain relevant, and support understanding of important issues.” It continues—

“Users of statistics and data should be at the centre of statistical production; their needs should be understood, their views sought and acted on, and their use of statistics supported.” (P28)

This pillar includes directions on accessibility, clarity, improvement, and efficiency and proportionality. Under the sub-section on efficiency and proportionality, the code says that producers of statistics should be mindful of the burden on those that collect data.

## **Education and Skills Committee**

**29th Meeting, 2018 (Session 5), Wednesday, 28 November 2018**

### **School support staff data**

This paper contains the submission from the Scottish Government in relation to the availability of information on school staff collected as part of the school staff census.

- [Scottish Government](#)

This paper also links to correspondence from the Committee to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills regarding the statistics on school support staff.

- [Letter from the Committee, 13 September 2018](#)
- [Letter from the Cabinet Secretary, 31 October 2018](#)

## Scottish Government submission

### 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  
November 2018**