



Scottish Centre *for*
Social Research

Scottish School
Leavers Survey
(SSLS)

AQMeN Data Collection seminar
12th May 2010

Scotland's leading independent social research institute



Overview of talk

Background to SSLS
Sampling
Survey design
Survey implementation
Questionnaire design
Data collection
Data management

Background

History (ancient)

- Started in 1971 – focusing on S6 leavers qualified for HE
- 1977-1985: biennial surveys covering all types of leavers
- 1985 onwards: added a follow-up survey (longitudinal) to the cross-sectional design

History (modern)

- 1997: redesigned and cross-sectional element dropped
- Focus shifts to specific year cohorts rather than leavers
- Cohort sampled in 4th year of secondary school and followed up when aged: 16-17; 18-19; 21-22; 23-24.
- Today's talk focuses on cohort sampled in **97/98** school year

Survey purpose

Survey's recent aims were to:

- describe the experiences of young people at school
- describe young people's experience of the labour market
- measure the effectiveness of new policy initiatives
- chart the destination of early school leavers
- examine gender and class differences in attainment
- measure attitudes towards career guidance
- understand more about those not in education, employment or training ("NEET" group)

Sampling

- 20% of pupils in 4th year of secondary school in the academic year 1998-98
- Pupils whose birthday fell on one of six particular days of the month
- 2 stages of sampling:
 - 1 – SQA provided list of S4 pupils with relevant birth-dates (includes all those entered for at least one examination or who received at least one qualification admin by them in S4.
 - 2 – List sorted by school. school sent list of selected pupils. Schools asked to add to list any non-sqa S4 pupils (e.g GCSE) with relevant birthdates.
 - Schools with no selected pupils contacted for details of any relevant pupils
 - SEN pupils at mainstream schools included. SEN pupils at SEN schools excluded



Data collection & questionnaire design issues

- Data collection via postal self-completion
- Increasing use of telephone interviews
- Consistency with the questionnaire used with previous cohorts of primary importance
- Cognitive interviewing used to test questions & layout / presentation
- Questionnaire changes focussed on:
 - Increasing clarity
 - Improving utility of information gathered
 - Reflecting current policy



Administering the survey

1. Telephone checking process
2. First mailout:
 - questionnaire
 - cover letter
 - survey leaflet with results from previous sweeps
 - pre-paid return envelope
3. 1st reminder – postcard reminder 2 weeks after initial mail out
4. 2nd reminder – 2 weeks later a reminder later, copy of the questionnaire and envelope
5. Telephone call to encourage return of questionnaire or complete over the phone.



Data processing and quality issues

- Number of clerical and computer edits
- Completeness of response
- Adherence to question routing
- Plausibility checks
- Number of iterations before data was 'clean'
- SOC and SIC of respondent's job (if applicable)
- SOC, SIC and ES of parents' current/most recent job
- Data was keyed (double entry)

Response rates for 1999 cohort

Year	Age	Response (%)
1999	16/17	66
2001	18/19	72
2004	21/22	61
2006	23/24	67



Maximising response

Numerous steps taken:

- cognitive testing of questionnaire
- postcode checking
- address and telephone checking prior to mailing
- information leaflet & website for respondents
- reminder strategy & telephone interviewing

Adjusting for known biases

Data weighted at each sweep using:

- Demographic info from SQA and school
- Sample characteristics from previous sweeps (after 1st sweep)
- Logistic regression for response to latest wave (included measures from 1st 3 waves)

Key variables associated with increased propensity to respond at final sweep:

- no children at sweep 3
- employed or studying
- staying with parents at sweep 1
- 3 or more higher grades
- not working more than 40 hours per week

Further details in technical reports



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