

Background Notes for SQA Examination Attainment and Staying on Rates

1. Sources and Definitions

1.1 Sources

Data on National Qualifications were obtained from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). They do not take into account confirmed corrections to certification post August 2009.

School roll figures were obtained from the Scottish Government School Census as at September in the relevant year. Pupils entering or leaving the school after Census date may affect the percentages given for examination attainment. Roll figures include pupils in mainstream classes and in integrated SEN units.

Most of the Candidate Stage data (i.e. S4, S5, S6) presented here were obtained from schools' management information systems. Stage was otherwise estimated to within approximately 0.5% chance of error.

1.2 Definitions

National and education authority averages do not include independent or special schools. Education authority averages include education authority secondary schools only, whereas national averages include all publicly funded secondary schools.

For Standard Grade, only awards at 1-6 are included. Candidates are awarded a grade dependant on their performance against set criteria and there are 3 levels of award - credit (grades 1&2), general (grades 3&4) and foundation (grades 5&6). A '7' is awarded where a candidate completes/passes the course but not at a level of performance required to gain one of the other 6 grades.

The figures represent cumulative attainment by the end of each stage. For example, figures showing attainment by the end of S4 may include the results of Standard Grade or Intermediate courses completed by the same pupils when they were in S3.

In order to record the attainment of an entire year group, attainment in S5 and S6 is reported as a percentage of the relevant S4 roll. For example, attainment in S5 in 2008/09 is calculated as a percentage of the S4 roll in September 2007. S6 attainment is calculated from the S4 roll in September 2006.

The S5 staying on rates are calculated as the estimated January roll in S5 divided by the previous year's S4 roll as at September. The estimated January roll in S5 is calculated by subtracting the number of first term leavers in S5 from the September S5 roll. The S6 staying on rate is calculated by dividing the September S6 roll by the S4 roll two years before.

3. Notes

Examination results are an important indicator of performance, but not one that gives the full picture of education. These results should be considered alongside other indicators of pupils' progress, such as the quality of the learning experience and the ethos of the school.

Sometimes differences in the patterns of results from year to year may be due to fluctuations in pupils' abilities in different year groups rather than to any underlying trend in school performance. Furthermore, examination results for 2008/09 are pre-appeals whereas results for 2006/07 and 2007/08 are post-appeals. In past years, the post-appeal figures were generally no more than one percentage point higher than the equivalent pre-appeal figure.

Some schools make provision for pupils with additional support needs either within their mainstream roll or in integrated units. This can have a significant impact on attainment patterns. However, the overall effect is heavily dependent on the number of pupils and the nature of their additional support needs.

Staying on rates affect the potential of a year group to gain awards in S5 and S6; therefore, a low staying on rate may be part of the explanation for a low percentage of awards at these stages.

For more information on exam attainment in Scottish schools please see the National Statistics Publication "SQA Examination Results in Scottish Schools: 2008/09" at the link below.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/09/17165819/0>