



**An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna**  
Department of  
Education and Skills

# Retention rates of pupils in second-level schools

## Entry cohort 2012



## Contents

Introduction .....	1
<i>Executive summary</i> .....	1
Retention rates at educational milestones .....	3
Retention rates over time .....	4
Gender gap in retention rates.....	5
Retention rates by school type .....	6
Retention rates by DEIS status.....	8
<i>Equality of opportunity gap</i> .....	9
Retention rates by county.....	10
International Comparisons.....	11
Appendix A: Methodology and Technical Notes .....	12

## Introduction

The 2012 retention rates to the Leaving Certificate are a measure of the percentage of pupils who entered first year of post-primary schools in 2012 and who sat the Leaving Certificate exam in 2017 or 2018.

The progression of pupils through the education system was measured by analysing the Department's Post-Primary Online Database (P-POD) along with data on official participation in the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate state exams provided by the State Examinations Commission (SEC). The starting cohort was also adjusted for emigrants, deaths and those still in school in September 2018. Pupils who leave state-aided schools and continue their education in non-aided providers of education are captured through their participation as external candidates in official exams (as provided by the SEC).

These retention rates do not address participation in important educational pathways outside the official school system, such as Youthreach and apprenticeship training. Pupils leaving school to undertake these programmes are regarded as early school leavers for the purposes of this report. If participation in these alternative routes, as measured by the completion of NFQ levels of 4, 5 and 6 were included, alternative measures of retention could be compiled.

## Executive summary

- In 2012, there was 60,029 enrolments in the first year of the Junior Cycle programme in second-level schools. This was adjusted for emigration and deaths (754) and for pupils remaining in school for the 2018/2018 academic year (416) giving an adjusted cohort of 58,859 pupils.
- Of these, 91.5 per cent sat the Leaving Certificate exam in 2017 or 2018, while 97.6 per cent sat the Junior Certificate exam in 2015 or 2016.
- This retention rate to the Leaving Certificate of 91.5 per cent was a fall of 0.1 percentage points on 2011, when it stood at 91.6 per cent. The retention rate for males decreased by 0.3 percentage points from 90.2 per cent to 89.9 per cent, while for females it remained unchanged at 93.1 per cent.
- The gender gap between males and females stood at 3.2 percentage points, up slightly from 2.9 percentage points for the 2011 cohort.

- Voluntary secondary schools continued to have the highest retention rate with 93.2 per cent of pupils sitting their Leaving Certificate; community and comprehensive schools had a rate of 90.7 per cent, while vocational schools stood at 88.5 per cent.
- Schools participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme saw their retention rate fall to 84.7 per cent, down from 85.0 per cent in 2011, and giving a gap in retention between DEIS and non-DEIS schools of 8.7 percentage points, up marginally on the same measure in 2011, when it stood at 8.5 percentage points.

## Retention rates at educational milestones

The progression of the 2012 cohort through the education system is presented in Tables 1a and 1b. Of the adjusted (58,859) starting cohort, 57,438 sat their Junior Certificate, a loss of 1,421 pupils giving a retention rate to the Junior Certificate of 97.6 per cent.

Between the Junior Certificate and the start of the Senior Cycle a further 963 pupils failed to return to school, giving a retention rate of 95.9 per cent for fifth year. Between fifth and sixth year a further 1,901 pupils failed to return, and of the 54,574 pupils who did enter sixth year a further 738 failed to sit their Leaving Certificate in either 2017 or 2018.

When examined by gender the data shows 1,019 more boys than girls failed to stay until their Leaving Certificate. For both genders, the highest number of early school leavers occurred between Senior Cycle Years 1 and 2 (fifth and sixth year) with losses of 1,034 boys and 867 girls.

Table 1a Retention rates, by milestones, by gender, 2012 Cohort

Milestone	Cohort progression			Retention rates (%)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Entry Cohort	28,874	29,985	58,859	100	100.0	100
Junior Cycle Year 2	28,690	29,722	58,412	99.4	99.1	99.2
Junior Cycle Year 3	28,525	29,490	58,015	98.8	98.3	98.6
Junior Certificate	28,276	29,162	57,438	97.9	97.3	97.6
Senior Cycle Year 1	27,857	28,618	56,475	96.5	95.4	95.9
Senior Cycle Year 2	26,990	27,584	54,574	93.5	92.0	92.7
Leaving Certificate	26,872	26,964	53,836	93.1	89.9	91.5

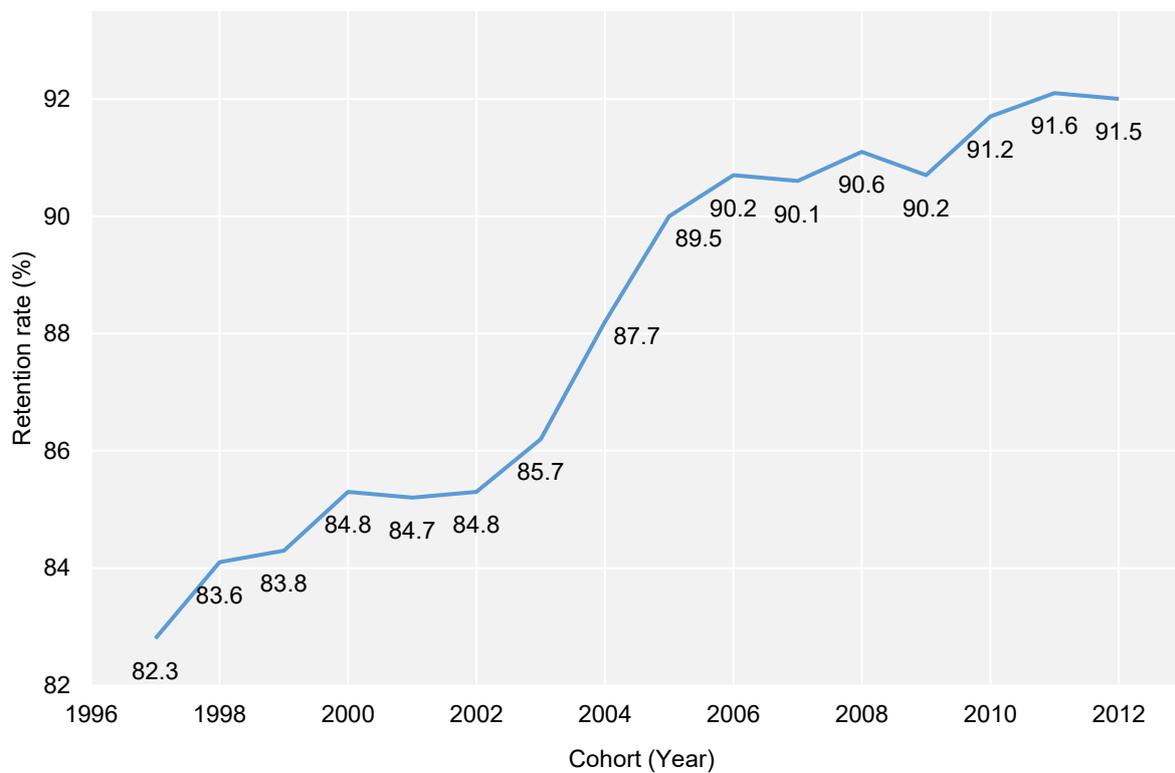
Table 1b Early school leavers, Retention rates, by milestones, by gender, 2012 Cohort

Milestone	Cohort progression			Retention rates (%)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Junior Cycle Year 2	184	263	447	0.6	0.9	0.8
Junior Cycle Year 3	165	232	397	1.2	1.7	1.4
Junior Certificate	249	328	577	2.1	2.7	2.4
Senior Cycle Year 1	419	544	963	3.5	4.6	4.1
Senior Cycle Year 2	867	1,034	1,901	6.5	8.0	7.3
Leaving Certificate	118	620	738	6.9	10.1	8.5

## Retention rates over time

Figure 1 presents retention rate over time. The 1997 entry cohort had a retention rate of 82.3 per cent. Retention rates increased steadily reaching a high of 91.6 per cent for the 2011 cohort, before falling marginally to 91.5 for this most recent cohort, who sat their Leaving Certificate in 2017 or 2018. As illustrated in Figure 1, rates rose most sharply for those who entered post-primary schools between 2002 and 2007 and have been rising generally since.

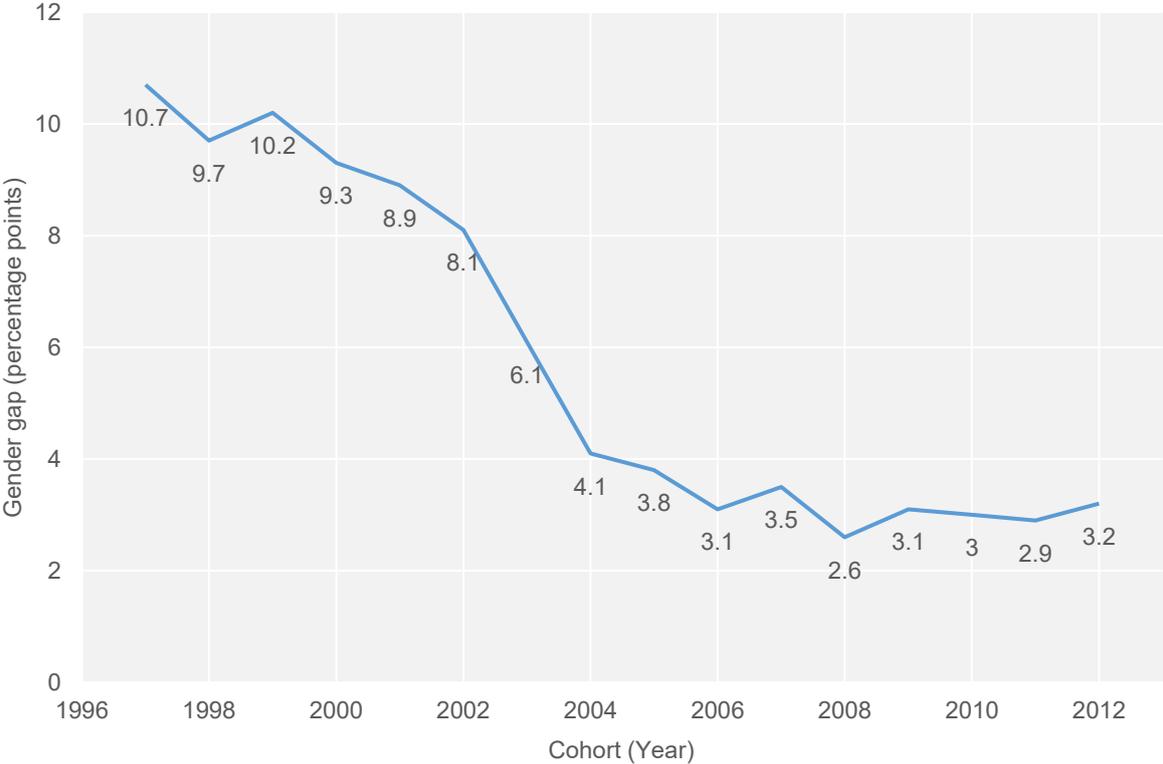
Figure 1 Retention rates, entry cohort 1997-2012



### Gender gap in retention rates

The retention rate for males in the 2012 cohort stood at 89.9 per cent, with females at 93.1 per cent, a gender gap of 3.2 percentage points. The gap in retention between males and females, as illustrated in Figure 2, narrowed steadily between 1997 and 2011. This was most noticeable between 1999 and 2006, before generally stabilising thereafter.

Figure 2 Gender gap in retention rates, entry cohort 1997-2012



## Retention rates by school type

The post-primary education sector in Ireland comprises of three main school types. The largest group, voluntary secondary schools, accounted for 32,800 of the 58,859 pupils in 2012 cohort. These schools are privately owned and managed, can be fee paying or non-fee paying and provide both academic and practical subjects.

The second group, community and comprehensive schools, have boards of management largely representative of local interests. They typically provide a wide range of both academic and vocational subjects and accounted for 9,903 pupils in the 2012 cohort.

Vocational schools were managed by sub-committees of local Education and Training Boards and historically focussed on technical education, but today provide academic and practical subjects as well as often offering adult education. They accounted for 16,156 pupils in the 2012 cohort.

Table 2 shows the cohorts by school type, gender and retention rates. The retention rates for secondary schools stood at 93.2 per cent for the 2012 cohort, the highest of the three school types, 1.7 percentage points above the national average. The rate for females was 94.2 per cent and 92.1 per cent for males, a gap of 2.1 percentage points.

Table 2 Retention rates, by milestones, by school type, by gender, 2012 cohort

School type	Gender	Entry cohort	Leaving Certificate	Early school leavers	Retention rate (%)
Secondary	Female	17,067	16,076	991	94.2
	Male	15,733	14,489	1,244	92.1
	Total	32,800	30,565	2,235	93.2
Community & Comprehensive	Female	4,601	4,277	324	93.0
	Male	5,302	4,702	600	88.7
	Total	9,903	8,979	924	90.7
Vocational	Female	7,206	6,519	687	90.5
	Male	8,950	7,773	1,177	86.8
	Total	16,156	14,292	1,864	88.5

The retention rates for community and comprehensive schools stood at 90.7 per cent, 0.8 percentage points below the national average. The rate for females was 93.0 per cent and for boys 88.7 per cent, a gap of 4.3 percentage points.

Vocational schools had the lowest retention rate to the Leaving Certificate at 88.5 per cent, some 3.0 percentage points below the national average. The rate for girls was 90.5 per cent, while for boys it stood at 86.8 per cent, a gap of 3.7 percentage points.

The difference in retention for males between secondary and vocational schools was 5.3 percentage points.

## Retention rates by DEIS status

The DEIS programme is an action plan for educational inclusion aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and youths from disadvantaged communities throughout their schooling. DEIS provides integrated school supports bringing together a collection of interventions for individual and clustered schools with concentrated levels of educational disadvantaged.

Table 3 shows the retention rate to the Leaving Certificate of DEIS schools for the 2012 cohort was 84.7 per cent, while for non-DEIS schools was 93.4 per cent, a gap of 8.7 percentage points. The comparable results for 2011 were 85.0 per cent for DEIS, and 93.5 per cent for non-DEIS with a gap of 8.5 percentage points.

When looked at by school milestones, the data shows the largest loss of pupils from the educational system appears between fifth and sixth year. When 632 pupils in DEIS schools and 1,269 pupils in non-DEIS schools failed to return.

Table 3 Retention rates, by milestones, by DEIS status, 2012 cohort

Milestone	DEIS		Non-DEIS		All Schools	
	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)
Entry cohort	12,797	100.0	46,062	100.0	58,859	100.0
Junior Cycle Year 2	12,673	99.0	45,739	99.3	58,412	99.2
Junior Cycle Year 3	12,523	97.9	45,492	98.8	58,015	98.6
Junior Certificate	12,294	96.1	45,144	98.0	57,438	97.6
Senior Cycle Year 1	12,014	93.9	44,461	96.5	56,475	95.9
Senior Cycle Year 2	11,382	88.9	43,192	93.8	54,574	92.7
Leaving Certificate	10,837	84.7	42,999	93.4	53,836	91.5

Table 4 presents the DEIS analysis by gender and shows that retention for males in DEIS schools stood at 82.5 per cent for the 2012 cohort. This rate was last seen twenty years ago for all pupils. While males in DEIS schools accounted for 12.2 per cent of the 58,859 starting cohort, they accounted for 25.1 per cent of early school leavers.

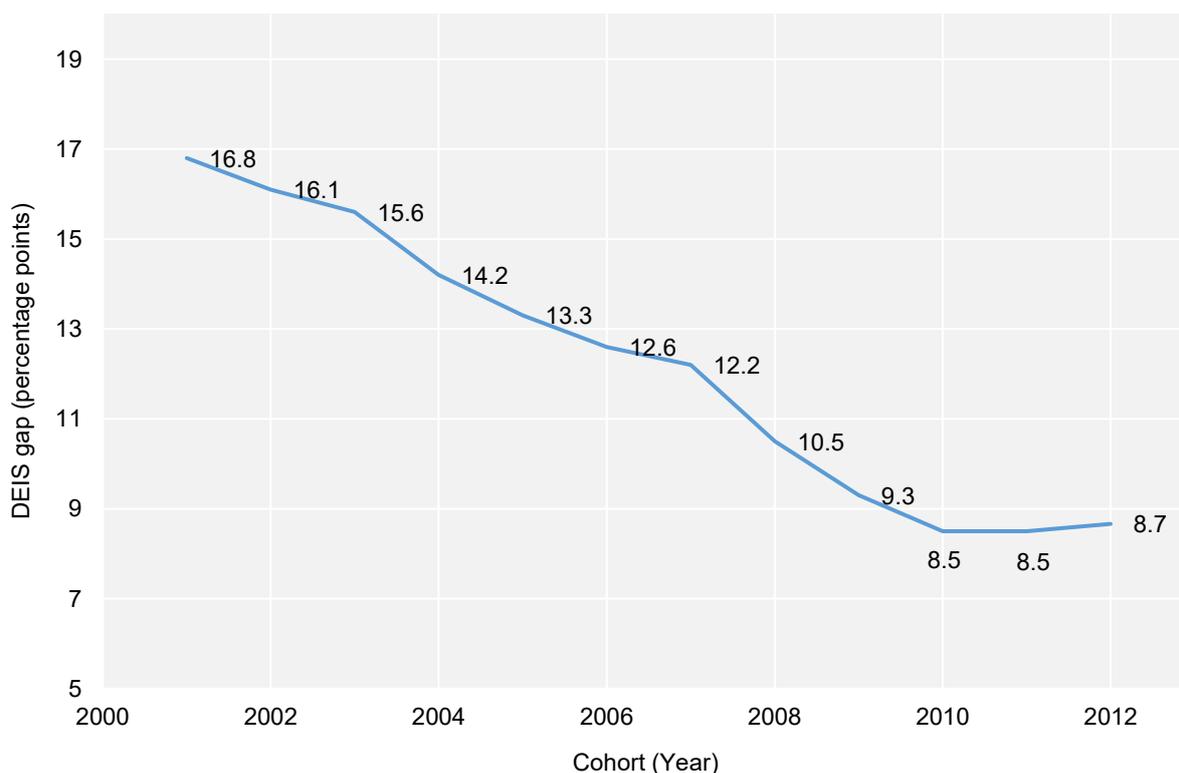
Table 4 Retention rates, by milestones, by DEIS status, by gender, 2012 cohort

Milestone	DEIS				Non-DEIS			
	Female		Male		Female		Male	
	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)
Entry cohort	5,579	100	7,218	100	23,295	100.0	22,767	100.0
Junior Cycle Year 2	5,538	99.3	7,135	98.9	23,152	99.4	22,587	99.2
Junior Cycle Year 3	5,483	98.3	7,040	97.5	23,042	98.9	22,450	98.6
Junior Certificate	5,388	96.6	6,906	95.7	22,888	98.3	22,256	97.8
Senior Cycle Year 1	5,306	95.1	6,708	92.9	22,551	96.8	21,910	96.2
Senior Cycle Year 2	5,066	90.8	6,316	87.5	21,924	94.1	21,268	93.4
Leaving Certificate	4,880	87.5	5,957	82.5	21,992	94.4	21,007	92.3

### Equality of opportunity gap

The equality of opportunity gap in retention rates between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, referred to as the DEIS gap, fell steadily between the 2001 and 2011 cohorts from 16.8 per cent to 8.5. This year's results shows a marginal increase in the gap to 8.7 for the 2012 cohort (Figure 3).

Figure 3 DEIS gap, by retention rate, entry cohort 2001-2012



## Retention rates by county

When examined by county the results shows the highest retention rate to the Leaving Certificate was in Kerry at 93.8 per cent, followed by Sligo (93.5%) and Mayo (93.5%). The lowest rate was found in Longford at 86.9 per cent. Note that as the total cohort in some counties was small the retention rate is liable to fluctuate based on small changes from year to year.

Table 5 Retention rates, by county, 2012 cohort

Administrative county	Pupils	Retention rate (%)
Carlow	887	87.9
Cavan	876	90.8
Clare	1,495	92.6
Cork City	1,900	89.7
Cork	4,603	93.0
Donegal	2,234	91.7
Dublin City	5,231	89.0
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	2,394	93.1
Fingal	3,409	91.4
Galway City	927	90.2
Galway	2,294	93.0
Kerry	1,863	93.8
Kildare	3,066	91.3
Kilkenny	1,192	92.6
Laois	930	91.7
Leitrim	487	92.2
Limerick City and County	2,599	92.1
Longford	633	86.9
Louth	1,921	91.1
Mayo	1,751	93.5
Meath	2,405	93.4
Monaghan	831	90.7
Offaly	1,004	90.1
Roscommon	582	91.1
Sligo	775	93.5
South Dublin	3,575	88.4
Tipperary	2,297	92.8
Waterford City and County	1,447	93.2
Westmeath	1,446	92.0
Wexford	2,086	92.0
Wicklow	1,719	89.3

## International Comparisons

Table 6 presents results on the level of education for persons aged 20 to 24, by gender, for selected countries in the EU as derived from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) Labour Force Survey for 2018. The data shows for the EU as a whole that 83.5 per cent of people were educated to at least upper secondary, while in Ireland the comparable figure was 94.4 per cent, the second highest in the EU.

Table 6 Percentage of persons aged 20 to 24 with at least upper secondary education in EU Member States, classified by gender, 2018

Geography	Upper secondary education (%)		
	Female	Male	Total
EU (28 countries)	86.1	81.0	83.5
Euro area (19 countries)	85.1	79.0	82.0
Germany	80.3	74.9	77.4
Ireland	95.2	93.7	94.4
Greece	95.5	92.2	93.9
Spain	77.9	67.7	72.7
France	90.8	85.3	88.1
Croatia	95.9	96.6	96.2
Italy	84.1	78.5	81.1
Latvia	93.1	83.8	88.3
Lithuania	94.4	90.0	92.1
Netherlands	85.6	79.4	82.5
Austria	90.3	85.7	88.0
Poland	92.8	89.6	91.2
Portugal	85.2	76.6	80.8
Romania	81.7	81.6	81.7
Slovenia	93.7	89.5	91.5
Slovakia	89.1	89.7	89.4
Finland	88.2	86.5	87.4
Sweden	86.7	82.5	84.5
United Kingdom	88.2	83.6	85.9
Iceland	70.8	53.9	61.7
Norway	85.7	74.8	80.1

[Data sourced from Eurostat.](#)

## Appendix A: Methodology and Technical Notes

### Method

The recorded progression of pupils through educational milestones was carried out through an examination of the P-POD. These milestones were further validated by the State Examinations Commission records of official participation of the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate state exams. This provided a collective continuity of progression for a pupil through the state-aided schooling system.

Individual data for pupils were supplied by schools using a unique pupil identifier (UPI). The UPI remains consistent through amalgamations, closures or movement between schools. Recently, with the co-operation of the schools, the Department has used the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) to identify and record the majority of second-level pupils.

The first year entrants to the Junior Cycle recorded on the 30th September 2012 (known as the School Census) became the raw cohort for the academic year of 2012/13. The raw cohort was adjusted for deaths, emigration and pupils still remaining within the schooling system by 2018 to become the entry cohort. This information was recorded by individual schools onto P-POD retrospectively. Progression to the next year of the Junior Cycle was confirmed through the School Census 2012/13 using the UPI or PPSN. This was repeated for each year recording the progression of a pupil until 2018. Throughout the progression of milestones, a total of 6,788 pupils missed a milestone but 1,765 returned at a later milestone to continue within the schooling system to the Leaving Certificate exam.

The SEC provided records of pupil participation in the state exams. This information was cross referenced to assess a pupil's progression through school cycles with associated milestone exams. Pupils from the entry cohort that were not present on P-POD before the final year of senior cycle or did not sit the Leaving Certificate were considered early school leavers.

### Schools

Pupils were assigned to the first school they registered in; their retention to the Leaving Certificate was associated with that school type regardless of any subsequent moves by the pupil.

If schools amalgamated during the period of analysis, from 2012 to 2018, their pupils were assigned to the newly created school. Similarly where a school closed and was amalgamated with an existing school, pupils were assigned to the new school.

## Pupils

A cohort of 416 pupils from the 2012 entry cohort were still in schooling at the end of the retention analysis period. Generally, these were pupils who had completed the Junior Cycle, Transition Year and also repeated at least one academic year. These pupils had not completed their second-level education by the end of the 2017/2018 academic year and were excluded from the adjusted cohort.

The raw cohort was also adjusted to exclude pupils who emigrated or deceased during the period of analysis. This information was available from the P-POD maintained directly by school administrators.

Pupils who entered after 2012, either from non-state aided schools, through immigration, or for some other reason, were not included in the adjusted entry cohort.

Pupils who repeated first year of 2012 entry cohort were excluded from the analysis but will be included in the next entry cohort (2013).

## Administrative city and county councils

In 2014, the City and County Councils in Limerick were amalgamated to form Limerick City and County Council, the City and County Councils in Waterford were amalgamated to form Waterford City and County Council, and the County Councils of North Tipperary and South Tipperary were amalgamated to form Tipperary County Council. This breaks the time series for these administrative county councils since 2014.

## DEIS

The DEIS programme was introduced to selected schools in the 2006/07 academic year. Previous retention reports have used the current DEIS school designation retrospectively as a benchmark for pupils since the 2001\* entry cohort. Subsequently, the DEIS school designation was applied to pupils relating to the current DEIS school status in their final year.

\*[https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/retention/stat\\_retention\\_rates\\_second\\_level\\_1991\\_2004.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/retention/stat_retention_rates_second_level_1991_2004.pdf)