

Policy on Access to Research Microdata Files

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is committed to supporting the re-use of data collected for analytical and policy-making purposes in a secure, efficient, and transparent way, in line with the Public Service Data Strategy 2019-2023¹ and the National Statistics Board Strategic Priorities for Official Statistics –2021-2026². We are also at all times committed to ensuring that the integrity and confidentiality of individual data subjects' (i.e., Student/Graduate data) microdata is maintained.

Three classifications of data are used, each of which has associated arrangements in relation to access and security.

1. **Source Tier** – This is the 'raw' microdata which includes identifying variables, including data subject identifiers (PPSN, Student ID, Name and Address)
2. **Analysis Tier** – This is like the source tier microdata but pseudonymised through the removal of names and other unique identifiers.
3. **Published data** – Aggregated statistical data with statistical disclosure controls (SDC).

Source Tier Access Arrangements

Access to Source Tier microdata is only available to a limited number of authorised HEA staff trained in Statistics and data protection protocols.

Analysis Tier Access Arrangements

Access to Analysis Tier microdata files can be made available to Government Departments, State Agencies or other third parties (for example, researchers engaged in policy analysis, or consultants working on behalf of one of the aforementioned organisation types) subject to our Access Criteria. While Analysis Tier data does not contain direct identifiers, there is still a risk of disclosure through indirect identification, and access to Analysis Tier data is therefore strictly controlled by the HEA.

¹ Government of Ireland (2019) *Public Service Data Strategy 2019-2023*

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1d6bc7-public-service-data-strategy-2019-2023/> Accessed 24.02.23

² National Statistics Board (2021) *Quality Information for All – Numbers Matter – National Statistics Board Strategic Priorities for Official Statistics*

https://www.nsb.ie/media/nsbie/pdfdocs/NSB_Statement_of_Strategy_2021_2026.pdf Accessed 24.02.23

Analysis Tier Access Criteria

Access shall only be provided for research purposes only. Researchers and their organisations must have a proven track record in data analysis or research.

- Access to Analysis Tier microdata will not be granted to media or related organisations: Other non-confidential statistical products, are publicly available to facilitate media re-use.
- Researchers must submit a clear and specific research proposal, acceptable to the Statistics Unit managers, and the Data Protection Officer in the HEA. The analysis/research undertaken must comply or be consistent with the specific purpose for which the access was granted.
- Researchers are required to sign an Approved Researcher Agreement, which requires that researchers use the data only for the purposes outlined in the submitted research proposal, and that they do not disclose any information relating to a student or graduate that comes to their knowledge through their use of HEA microdata.
- Researchers are provided with Analysis Tier microdata which has a selection of variables that has been tailored to their research proposal in line with data minimisation best practices.
- Researchers must abide by the Statistical Disclosure Controls (SDCs) prescribed by the Data and Evaluation Unit to protect the confidentiality of individuals. The HEA Statistics Unit will review the aggregates produced to check that they are non-confidential in nature.
- The HEA has the right to perform any statistical disclosure control that it deems appropriate to any output which is based on the research carried out using HEA RMFs.
- The HEA reserves the right to monitor the implementation by researchers of their Confidentiality Agreement, up to and including audits by the HEA, access logging and recording of hot desk sessions.

Published Data Access Arrangements

The reports and statistics produced by the HEA using the SRS data and Graduate Outcomes Survey data are available free of charge to all users of the HEA's website. Aggregated data may also be provided to data users in response to custom data requests. In line with Government policy the HEA is committed to publishing open data so that its outputs are accessible to and reusable by the widest possible audience. For further details on the dissemination of published data see our Dissemination Policy.

Requesting Access to Research Microdata Files

Please email statistics@hea.ie to request an RMF Application Form.