

## **The Sample Studies**

This package contains six sample studies, which concentrate on one place – Dunlavin, a village in west Wicklow. This approach will add continuity to the project and by using Dunlavin as a template, students should be able to apply similar methods to their own areas and produce relevant studies. Such works would make ideal research studies for the students as laid down in the guidelines for the new leaving certificate history exam. Material from one census may be used to create a snapshot of a particular area at a particular time, while combining material from a number of census years may allow us to build up patterns and to identify changes in a place over a longer period. Both of these approaches will be represented in the sample studies. Another approach may involve a comparison and/or contrast of two or more places during the same time. This approach will not be represented here, although teachers and students may wish to utilise it and adapt it to their own needs.

The first sample study involves a comparison/contrast between the 1841 census figures and the 1851 census figures. The object here is to show the effects of the Great Famine at local level. Poverty levels may be judged by the class of houses and by the percentage of labourers in an area. The best approach probably involves examining individual townland figures. For the purposes of this sample study, data from six townlands is used to show population changes. Apart from actual numbers, other indicators of population change can be found in the numbers of uninhabited houses and houses under construction. The findings will be diagrammatically shown by means of simple tables. The findings can also be compared to national and county trends. Such a study is a simple but effective way to examine the effects of famine in a small locality. Of course, the percentage of population change would vary within

other studies – there were larger population decreases in some areas than others and some urban studies might even show an increase in the 1851 figures, but the student would explain that this was an effect of rural depopulation during the period 1845-51. Whatever the findings, the data contained in the 1841 and 1851 census returns provides an excellent source for a sample of a research study. This research study could be adapted to the needs of ordinary level students by omitting the six sample townlands and focussing on the overall figures.

The second sample study is taken from the late nineteenth century. Information for the censuses of 1881, 1891 and 1901 will be utilised. This is a study of population change over time and involves the construction of population pyramids using the census returns. Students who are taking Geography as a subject for the leaving certificate will be very familiar with population pyramids and how they work. The population is first divided into males and females and then subdivided into five-year age groupings. These pyramids show the structure of the local population and are an excellent indicator of a changing demographical situation. Trends in birth rates and death rates may be identified and migratory trends noted. Once again, these may be compared to national trends and the study may show how the continuing population decrease during this period impacted on a local area. Again, exceptions to this trend may surface in individual studies, but as long as the student can suggest a reason, such exceptions are perfectly all right, and not without inherent interest. The construction of population pyramids from census data provides another example of how the census material may be used to present an excellent research study.

Sample study number three will be taken from the same three census years – i.e. 1881, 1891 and 1901. However, in this case the pattern of building over this period will be examined. A trend of decline would be expected here to be in line with the national situation. Graphing the number and types of buildings over these years can test this hypothesis. Another aspect of this study is that it portrays the impact of a previously known event on the building patterns in an area. In this case, the known event is the arrival of the railway within Dunlavin village. The study helps us to understand how building in the area responded in the wake of the new reality of a railway town. Similar studies could be carried out by students on other railway towns, or on towns where transport had improved by the building of a canal or port facilities. Such studies would make for valid research and interesting research studies.

The census returns contain much information regarding many aspects of life. Two of these aspects are religion and education, and the fourth sample study will combine both of these into a single work. This study is based on only two sources and would be an ideal option for ordinary level students who wish to use primary sources for their research studies. This study looks at the literacy rates of both Catholic and Protestant children between 1881 and 1901. These figures will be further broken down to show the literacy rates of both males and females. Findings will be graphed on simple pie charts. Therefore this study shows some of the reality of religious – or sectarian – history, as well as portraying an aspect of women’s history in a local area. Late nineteenth century Catholicism and women’s history are integral parts of the new syllabus, and similar studies could be carried out for any locality, thus providing fruitful material for a leaving certificate research study. This study is particularly suitable for ordinary level students.

The censuses of 1901 and 1911 are even more detailed than the late nineteenth century censuses and both forms A (individual returns of family members, visitors, boarders, servants etc.) and forms B (house by house returns for urban streets and rural townlands etc.) provide a wealth of information for aspiring leaving certificate students who wish to base their research study on the census. The fifth sample research study will concentrate on the 1901 census. The study will examine the form B returns for one row of houses along a single street and will use form A detail from a sample of six of these houses. The study will determine how the buildings were used and how many rooms they contained. The form A information relates, among other things, to age, religion and occupations of the people, so a comprehensive picture of a part of a community can be built up. Such a portrayal of the people who inhabited a particular place in 1901 (or 1911) would make a fascinating research study for leaving certificate students, who could conduct such a study for any part of the country and who might even include a section on continuity and change in the locality by using their local knowledge of the area as it is today.

The sixth sample study is similar to the previous one, but is not as comprehensive. This study is aimed specifically at the ordinary level leaving certificate student. It involves using the information on only one household and combines both forms (A and B) from either 1901 or 1911. By concentrating on this information, the student can present a sourced literary picture of a particular household on the census night in question. The student can interpret the tabulated information on the forms to write about the family who filled it out. Needless to say, the larger the household was, the more information the student can glean from the form. However, very large household returns, such as those filled in within large hotels should be avoided! Such an

approach would suit weaker students, and might become very meaningful to them if they were to work on a form belonging to some of their own ancestors. A variation on this research study involves examining one form B and interpreting information about a street or rural area. This would result in a research topic similar to number five above, but without the extra detail of any sample form A information. Once again, weaker students may enjoy doing such a research topic about their own area in either 1901 or 1911.

The six sample studies outlined above should provide a varied cross section of the type of research studies that are possible to undertake from working with census information. Of course, the proposals are far from exhaustive and both teachers and students should feel free to ‘mix and match’, or to pursue totally different options regarding the use of census data as primary source material for research studies. Each sample study follows the prescribed leaving certificate format.

1. The studies all have a specific title.
2. There is an outline plan, in which the proposed study is defined and justified and in which the aims, approach and sources are identified.
3. The evaluation of sources section discusses the sources consulted and identifies their strengths and weaknesses. The sources themselves are listed fully at the end of the extended essay of each research topic.
4. The extended essay is the principal part of the work, in which the student uses and analyses the relevant information – and in some cases tabulates or graphs the information – to present the findings and draw conclusions in a clear and concise manner. The essay contains an introduction, main body and conclusion.