

Report from the ACCS Data Protection Advisor 2020/2021

The focus for the past year was to be very much around on-site school visits.

The very week after my last annual report, at Convention 2020, my plans to attend personally at as many schools as possible were pushed out due to COVID-19 and the ensuing lockdowns. That said, a number of school visits did manage to take place, and that was the main focus of the ongoing work over the past 12 months.

Schools Visits

In all, a total of 14 schools were visited since March 2020. Schools in 4 of the 5 regions were visited. Unfortunately, scheduled visits to my own home region of Connacht fell victim to lockdowns and had to be postponed, in some cases more than once.

On site visits consisted of all or some of the following:

- Data Protection Compliance Audits
- Staff Training
- Meetings with Management Teams
- Meeting with Admin Teams
- Meetings with Care Teams

Schools feedback was that they most benefitted from advice and guidance on site in relation to data retention and data security.

All schools made me feel very welcome and it was an absolute pleasure to get out and meet so many, to put faces to names and to see schools in action.

It is regrettable that many scheduled school visits had to be postponed, often not once but twice, due to ongoing lockdowns, but it is my hope to fulfil all those engagements before the end of the school year.

Any other schools who would like to receive a visit, please just let me know and we can try and schedule an appointment.

Training, Induction and Area Information Meetings

I presented at several virtual training sessions and on webinars over the course of the year, including at Induction for Principals and Deputy Principals and at our Area Information Meetings in September. Many of the presentations had a new focus this year in the context of remote teaching and working from home.

Remote Working and Data Protection

The move to remote working, particularly for teachers and students, has been particularly challenging. With it, as with any change in practice, comes compliance concerns. I wrote and provided guidance and support on the data security concerns around this move to remote working as well as spoke about same in the online meetings and presentations.

Data Protection Matters

I individually supported 54 different schools. The chart below highlights the range of queries which made their way to the Data Protection Advisor throughout the year.

The most matters dealt with were in the following areas:



4%	Admissions
3%	Data Retention
24%	SARs
1%	Biometrics
7%	Data Sharing
2%	Students Photos
6%	CCTV
31%	Onsite Visits
1%	Training
8%	Data Breach
31%	PME Inspections

Subject Access Requests (SARs)

Throughout the year, the queries in relation to SARs were a constant feature and formed 20% of the queries received and dealt with.

SARs are common from students (or their parents for under 18s), both present and past, and from staff members both present and past. They are unfortunately usually in the context of a grievance.

PME Inspections

Due to lockdowns, and with the requirement for social distancing, colleges and universities were requesting to carry out their inspections of PME students online rather than in person. This sparked queries in relation to privacy and data protection and accounted for over a quarter of the total queries received.

Onsite Visits

The other main theme of the year was the onsite visits, the preparations for and the follow-up on same. These accounted for 26% of the contact with schools throughout the year.

Hilary Treacy,
ACCS Data Protection Advisor.