

Unique Learner Number

Guidance for FE Colleges in Northern Ireland



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Introduction

The Unique Learner Number (ULN) is a 10 digit randomised number used in education in Northern Ireland, England and Wales. The number is generated for learners from the age of 14, and is used in schools, colleges, and training institutions. The number is principally used for examination entries.

The Personal Learning Record (PLR) is an electronic record of all learning and achievements. When a learner's ULN is used for examination entries, it will match the information and achievements from different Awarding Organisations into the PLR. This includes qualifications in formal educational environment, such as school or college, as well as qualifications taken outside of these environments, such as sports coaching or music qualifications.¹

Taken together, the ULN and PLR are intended to make the storing, personal access and sharing of educational achievements easier and quicker, allowing learners to share their information electronically, and streamline applications for further study, training, and employment.

ULNs have been operational in Further Education colleges in Northern Ireland since 2011/2012. Introduced by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), now the Department for the Economy (DfE), ULNs were generated for all registered learners in the FE sector to comply with funding requirements established by the Department, support recognition of learner achievement and support progression into further education, training, and employment.

In 2015, the Department of Education (DE) mandated that all school learners from Year 11 onwards should have a ULN for qualification entry purposes. Therefore, from September 2017 onwards, it is anticipated that all learners, aged 14+, will have a ULN.

¹ Further information on the ULN and PLR use in Northern Ireland can be found on CCEA Regulation's website - www.ccea.org.uk/regulation/guidance/unique_learner_number, and for their use nationally, via the Learning Records Service - www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-records-service-the-plr-for-learners-and-parents

Generating the ULN

ULNs are generated by the Learning Records Service (LRS). As a registered learning provider with the LRS, each FE College is responsible for making an application to generate ULNs for its learners. Applications are made through the online LRS portal using a batch application process. ULNs are generated on the basis of the uniqueness of the personal information contained in the data submitted. Following a review of the data, either the LRS generates a ULN for a learner or challenges the data submitted for the learner and does not create a ULN.

These challenges are recorded as Exceptions, and are returned to the FE College to be reviewed. Each exception is returned with an 'Exception Code. The main codes are;

Return Code	Description
RC006	Insufficient Information to create a new ULN
RC007	Possible Matches (up to 10) identified
RC008	Too Many Matches (over 10) identified
RC009	No ULN Matches – Serious errors identified in the application
RC010	Null Values included in the application
RC011	Incorrect Format data used in application

All exceptions returned to the FE Colleges are recorded on an 'Exception List' on the LRS portal. Each exception has to be reviewed individually and resolved manually by the requesting institution.

The following guidance and troubleshooting information aims to address queries raised by FE Colleges around creating data for ULN applications, dealing with exceptions and other issues. It should be read in conjunction with the LRS Managing Exceptions Guide available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lrs-batch-load-documents-for-schools-and-providers>

Collecting Learner Data

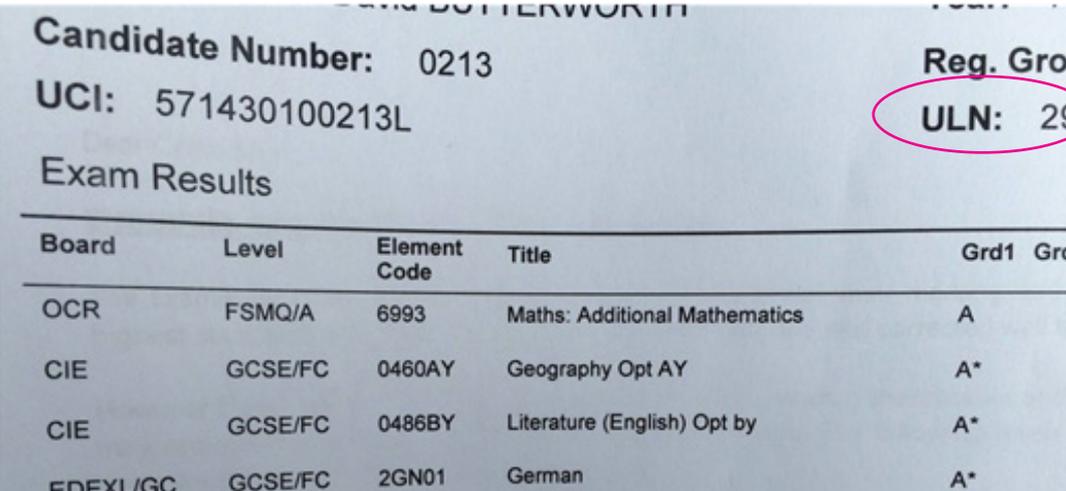
The quality of the data supplied when making an application for ULNs will have a significant impact on the number of exceptions that are returned following an application, and the ability to resolve any exception queries efficiently. ULNs are generated on the basis of 5 unique identifiers that are used to check each individual application made against the database of all registered learners in the LRS database to ensure that there are no possible matches in the database for the learner in your institution. If 3 of the 5 unique identifiers determine a potential match with someone in the database, who has a ULN, the application will be returned to you for review. **It is therefore important that the quality of the information you provide for each ULN application is as accurate as possible.**

The personal information for each learner in your institution is collected at Registration. When you are collecting this information it is important to remember:

1. **Applicants must register using their legal forename and surname.** The use and verification of legal names for learners is important, as all qualification entries must be made using a candidate's legal forename and surname.
2. **Some Applicants will already have a ULN;**

School Leavers

From September 2016, all school-based learners from the age of 14 will have a ULN. For these learners, their ULN will be included on the 'Candidate Statement of Results' they received from their school. The Statement is generic and generated through C2k for each learner. The ULN is recorded in the top left hand corner of the document as indicated below:



Board	Level	Element Code	Title	Grd1	Grd2
OCR	FSMQ/A	6993	Maths: Additional Mathematics	A	
CIE	GCSE/FC	0460AY	Geography Opt AY	A*	
CIE	GCSE/FC	0486BY	Literature (English) Opt by	A*	
EDEXL/GC	GCSE/FC	2GN01	German	A*	

Registration staff already require sight of the Candidate Statement of Results in order to confirm the learner's qualification achievements. You should therefore collect the ULN of learners as part this process, and manually key it into the College MIS with the learner's other personal details.

ULN included on an Application Form

In some instances, an application may include a 10-digit number in the ULN field. FE College staff, if possible, should initially confirm this number when reviewing the learner's qualification achievements (see School leavers 1).

If confirmation is not possible during registration, FE staff should continue to use the ULN provided by the applicant. When processing examination entries, all Awarding Organisations send ULNs to the LRS for verification. If the ULN supplied by the learner is inaccurate, it will be identified by the LRS, and the Awarding Organisation will contact the FE College to check the ULN, and if needed, manually create a ULN for the learner before the examination entry is made. Therefore, there is never an instance whereby an inaccurate ULN can be used for examination entries.

FE College staff should therefore only apply for ULNs for those registered learners who do not have one. When generating the .csv file for batch applications through the LRS Portal, any learner with a completed ULN field should not be included in the application.

3. Guidance Note on Application forms

It is advisable that all application forms – online, paper based, and School Links – should include a field to capture the ULN. Included in this section of the form, there should be a 'guidance note' for all applicants. Suggested wording (contingent on the nature of the application) may include:

The Unique Learner Number (ULN) is a unique identifier used within education and training for examination entries. More information about the ULN can be found here: www.ccea.org.uk/regulation/guidance/unique_learner_number

All post-primary school learners, aged 14+ from September 2015 onwards, will have a ULN. You can find the ULN on your 'Candidate Statement of Results' that you received on results day. If you cannot find your ULN, you should contact your school directly who should be able to confirm this for you.

If you have taken any qualifications at a FE College from 2010 onwards, you will have received a ULN. If you cannot locate your ULN, you should contact the FE College you were registered with, who should be able to confirm your ULN for you.

If you do not fit into either of these categories, the FE College will generate a ULN for you and share this with you. If you have any questions around this process, please do not hesitate to ask any member of staff during your registration process.

4. Dealing with School based Learners

Further to the DE mandating for all post-primary schools to generate ULNs for their learners aged 14+, and subsequent DfE guidance, FE College administration staff must not generate ULNs for any School Links learners. The learners' post primary school is the home institution with the responsibility for generating their ULN.

School Links learners are not required and therefore should not be recorded on DfE Quarterly Returns. ULNs are only required by the FE College for examination entry purposes.

While School Links application forms are completed by each student, post primary school staff are responsible for reviewing the personal details (legal forename, surname, gender, date of birth, address and ULN) for accuracy. FE College staff should only process those applications that have been reviewed and verified for accuracy by the post primary school. If School Links applications are made online using the generic application form, the FE College should confirm the accuracy of the details with the post primary school directly, using the most appropriate and efficient means available.

ULNs are generated by post-primary school staff during the Autumn term, between September and December of each academic year. It is therefore possible that, for learners in Year 11, a ULN has not been generated at the time of the School Links application. The ULN field will be blank and picked up at a later stage in either examinations/unit entries or cash in.

Issues for consideration when making examination entries

Points to consider;

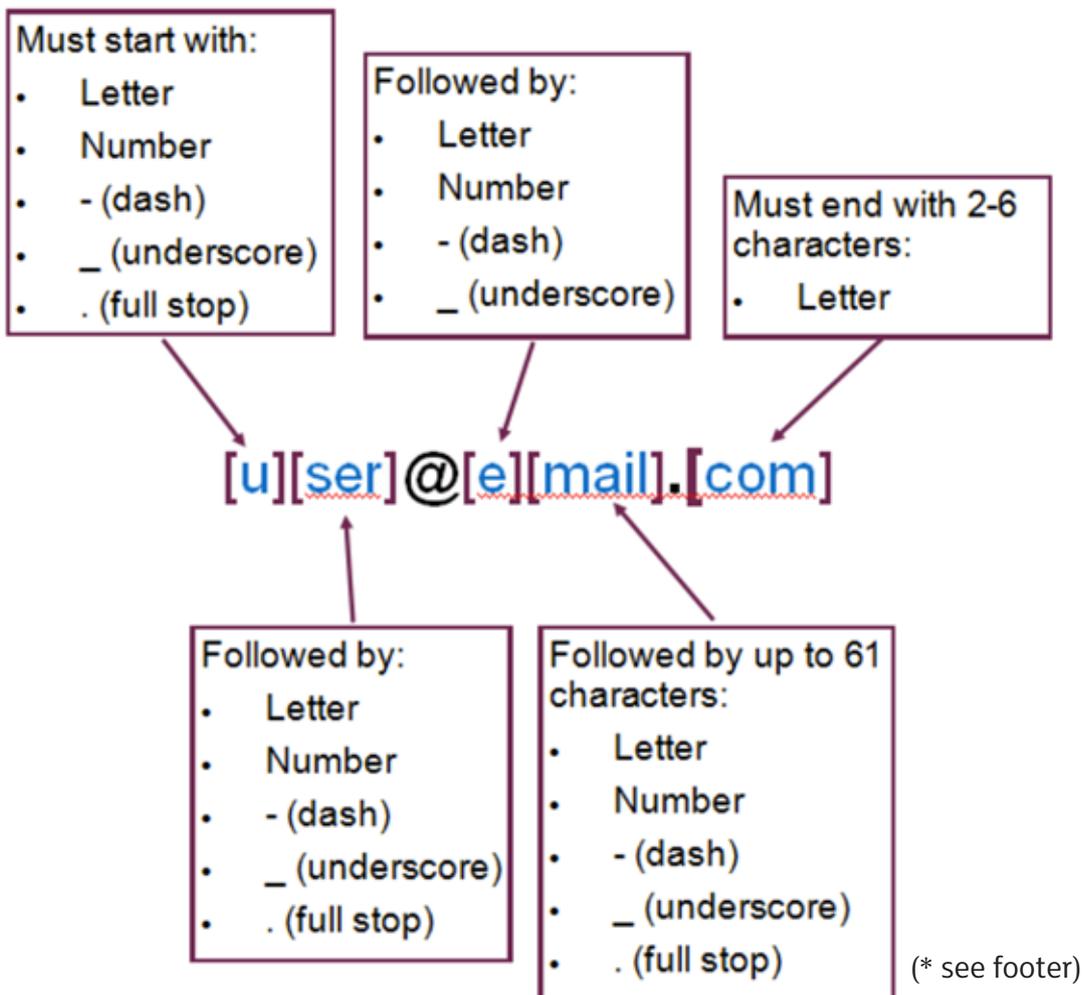
1. **ULNs for Schools Links pupils** - The significant majority of examination entries are required by Awarding Organisations around the end of February of any academic year. If you do not have a ULN for a learner from their application form, you should contact the learner's post primary school directly during January to confirm the ULN. In instances where you are required to make an examination entry before the school has generated a ULN for a learner through the generic process, you should contact the post primary school directly with a list of only the learners that are required for pre-December examination entry. It is the school's responsibility to manually generate ULNs for these learners and confirm these with you when created. You should not manually generate ULNs for these learners.
2. **Learners from the Republic of Ireland** - As learners from the Republic of Ireland do not have a UK postcode, the process for generating ULNs is slightly different. Currently, you should use the ZZ99 9ZZ postcode, although this may lead to difficulties in dealing with exceptions while the LRS consider alternative arrangements.
3. **For Prison based Learners** - as the use of the Prison Based postcode could identify sensitivities around a person's learning pathway, the college postcode should be used while the LRS consider alternative arrangements.
4. **Use of names using a different language** - All ULN applications must be made using a learner's legal name, in the language recorded on the official documentation presented during the registration process regardless of preferences.
5. **For a student presents with only one name** - All ULN applications must be made using a learner's legal name as recorded on the official documentation presented during the registration process. If a learner has legally only one name (i.e. only a 'forename'), the ULN application should register the one name in both the forename and surname fields of the .csv file.
6. **For a learner who is transitioning gender** – All ULN applications must be made using a learner's legal name and sex at the time of application; this may require the learner to produce a gender recognition certificate. The application can include Male, Female or not specified at this time.

Processing ULN Exceptions

Following the guidance information above, the volume of exceptions should be significantly reduced. For other exceptions commonly returned, the following guidance should help:

1. RC011 exceptions citing Invalid Nationality – LRS are working on this
2. RC011 exceptions citing Invalid Emails – what can I do?

The LRS Portal only accepts emails within specific formatting parameters:



If the email you have supplied does not correspond with the above formatting requirements, you should use a different email if one has been supplied, or resolve the exception manually without using the learner's email.

Further advice and guidance can be found at;

http://ccea.org.uk/regulation/guidance/unique_learner_number

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-records-service-the-plr-for-learners-and-parents>

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