Flexible learning pathways- exploring from the perspective of Ministries

Key Commitment 2: National legislation and procedures compliant with the LRC- Case study, Ireland.

TPG B June 2026

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An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh
Central Statistics Office

Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2024

Highest level of education attained by persons aged 25 – 64 years

3%
Primary only or no formal education

27%
Secondary education only

13%
Post leaving certificate

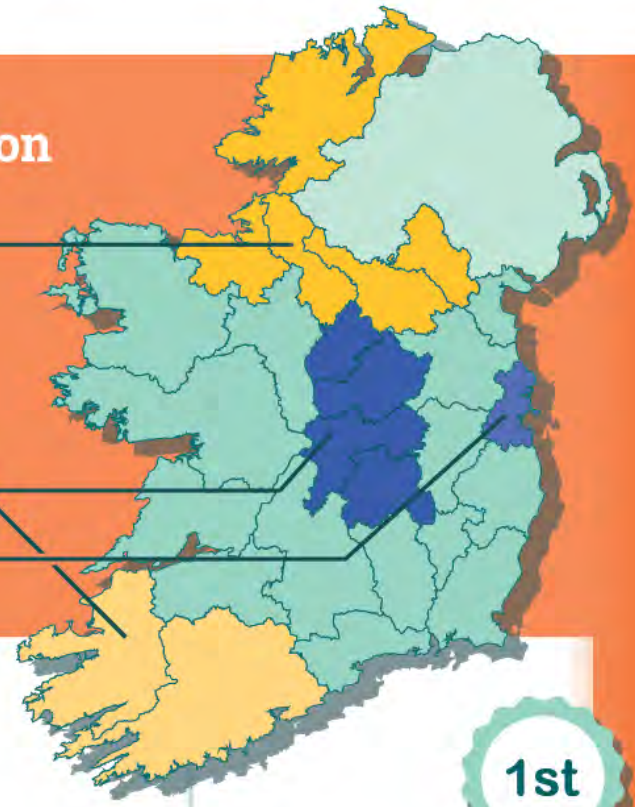
56%
Third level education

Primary only or no formal education

6% Border
1% South-West

Secondary education only

35% Midlands
23% Dublin



2023

Percentage of persons with third level education

35% EU-27 average

55% Ireland

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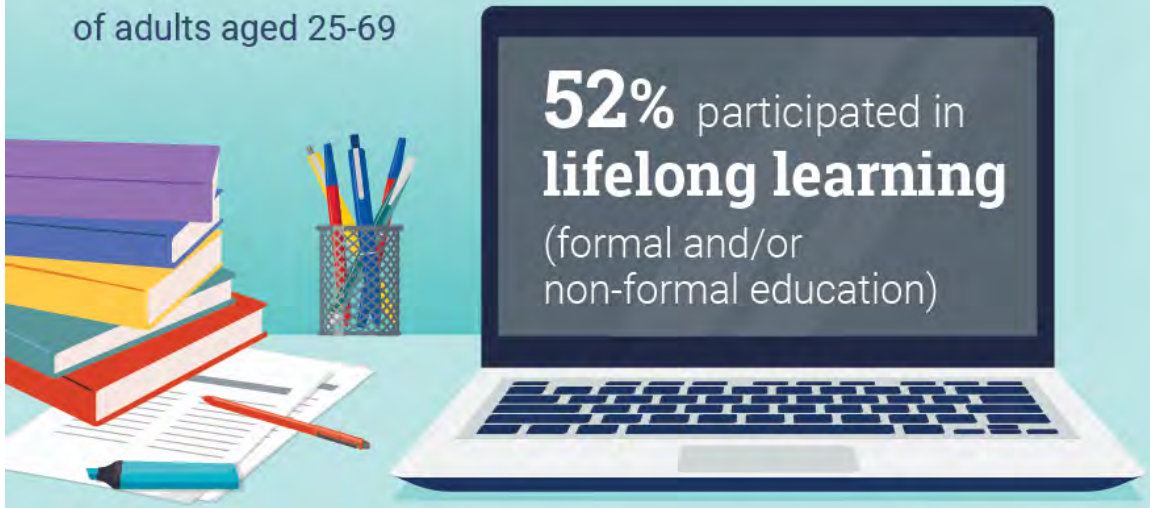
An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh
Central Statistics Office

Adult Education Survey 2022

of adults aged 25-69



52% participated in **lifelong learning** (formal and/or non-formal education)

10% participated in **formal education**[1]

48% participated in **non-formal education**[1]

54% participated in at least one **informal learning activity**[1]

[1] in the last year

Participation in Lifelong Learning of adults aged 25-69:

by Employment Status

62% of **Employed persons** participated in lifelong learning compared with **35%** of **Unemployed persons**

by Region

Highest: 59% Dublin

compared with

Lowest: 40% Border area

64% of **25-34 year olds** participated in lifelong learning

35% of **55-69 year olds** participated in lifelong learning

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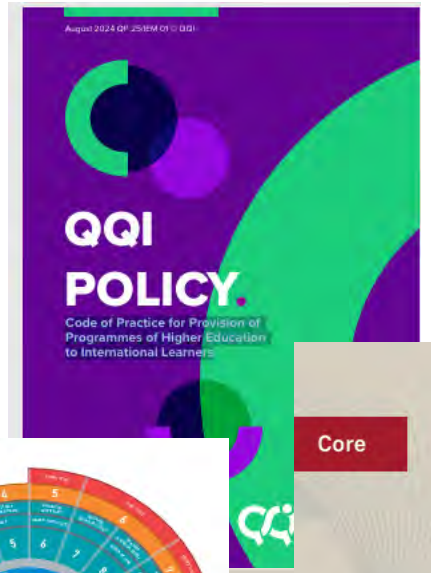

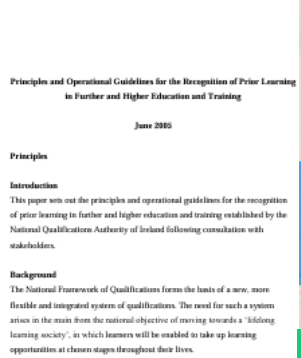

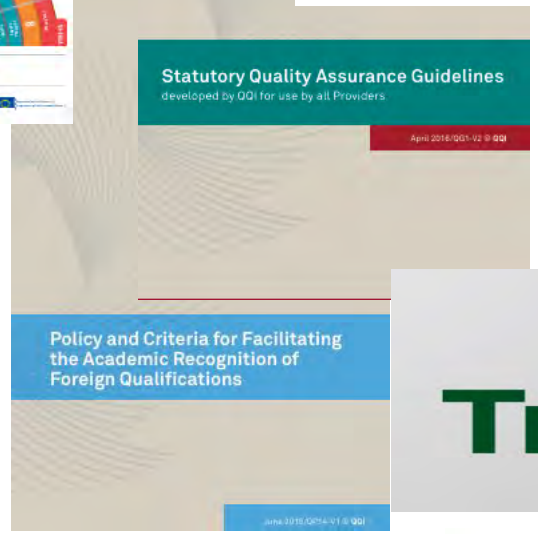

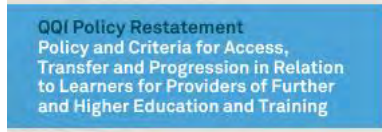

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Policy response- intersection with LRC in legislation

Government policy- access, inclusion, quality in VET and HE- personal, societal and economic good.

- Funding measures for Institutions and for individuals (enhanced targeted for critical skills areas)
- Expansion of part time courses and qualifications
- Clarification and streamlining of information and application systems for VET and HE, including apprenticeship
- Grow apprenticeships- critical skills, green, construction
- Support groundbreaking research that bridges academia, industry & government.

Global Citizen 2030

- Talent and innovation at the heart of Ireland's global footprint.
- A first-choice destination for international learners, researchers, and innovators.
- Global citizens in multinational, multicultural, and diverse workplaces.
- Enhanced influence in European education and research.
- A new level of north-south and east-west collaboration. (IE,, N.I, GB).
- Thought leadership in international education, research, innovation, and science policy.

Legislation

(i) *liaise with awarding bodies* outside the State for the purposes of *facilitating the recognition in the State of awards* of those bodies, and (ii) *facilitate the recognition outside the State of awards made in the State*.

Context- QA, NFQ- integrated system

Secondary

- Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 – Ireland's Future
- National Access Plan, a strategic action plan for equity of access, participation, and success in higher education 2022 to '28.
- National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030
- Creating Futures, VET Strategy 2026 to 2030.
- QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (LRC, European Council Recommendations)
- QQI Policy and Criteria Facilitating the academic recognition of foreign qualifications
- TrustEd Ireland: includes a Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners

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USP of the Ministry

National need
Evidence informed
Mobilising tools, transparency

Sectoral Strategies
National Framework of Qualifications
Award types and pathways
Credit systems
Validation/RPL

bologna process
EUROPEAN Higher Education Area

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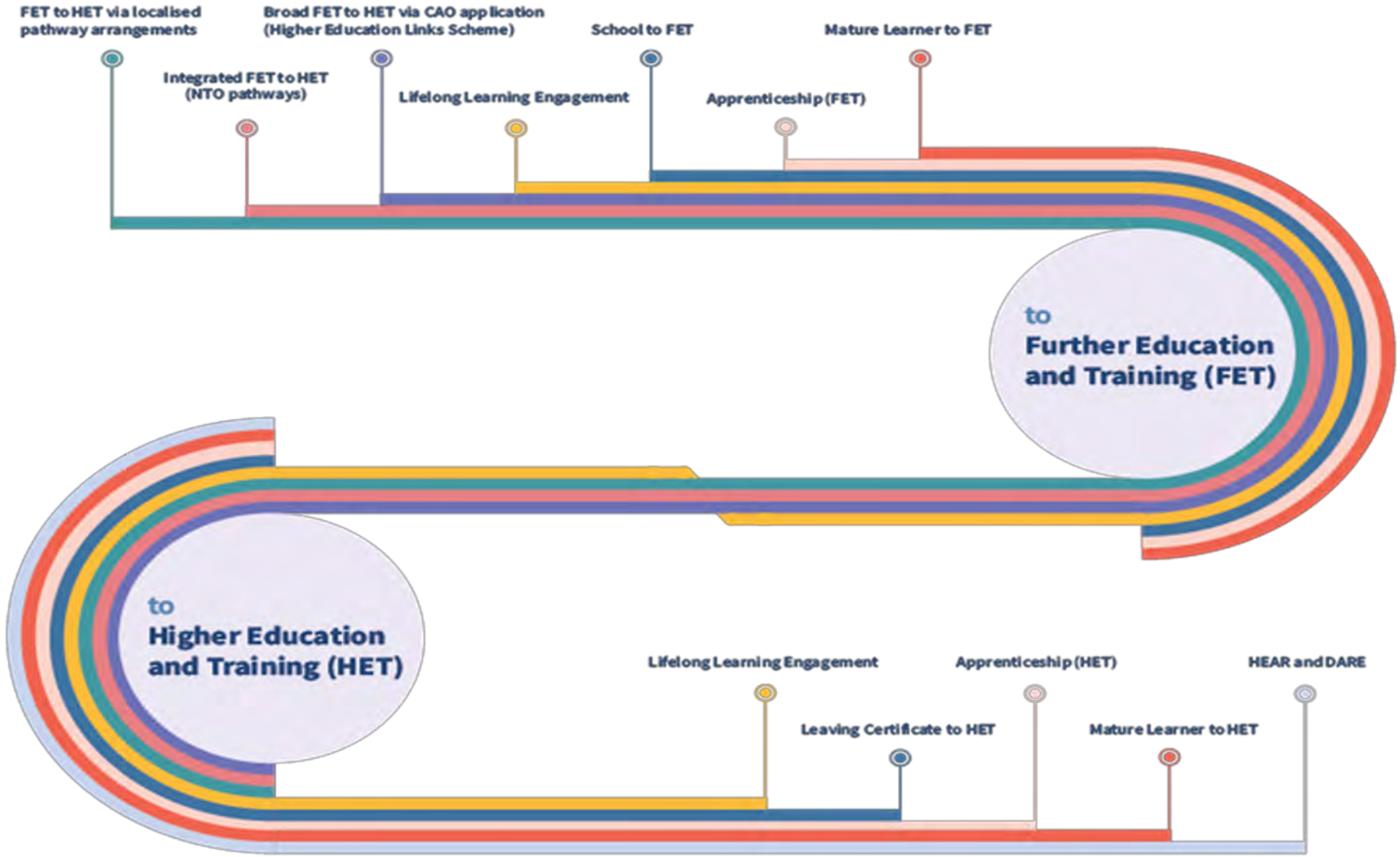

Pathways to Further and Higher Education and Training in Ireland, 2023

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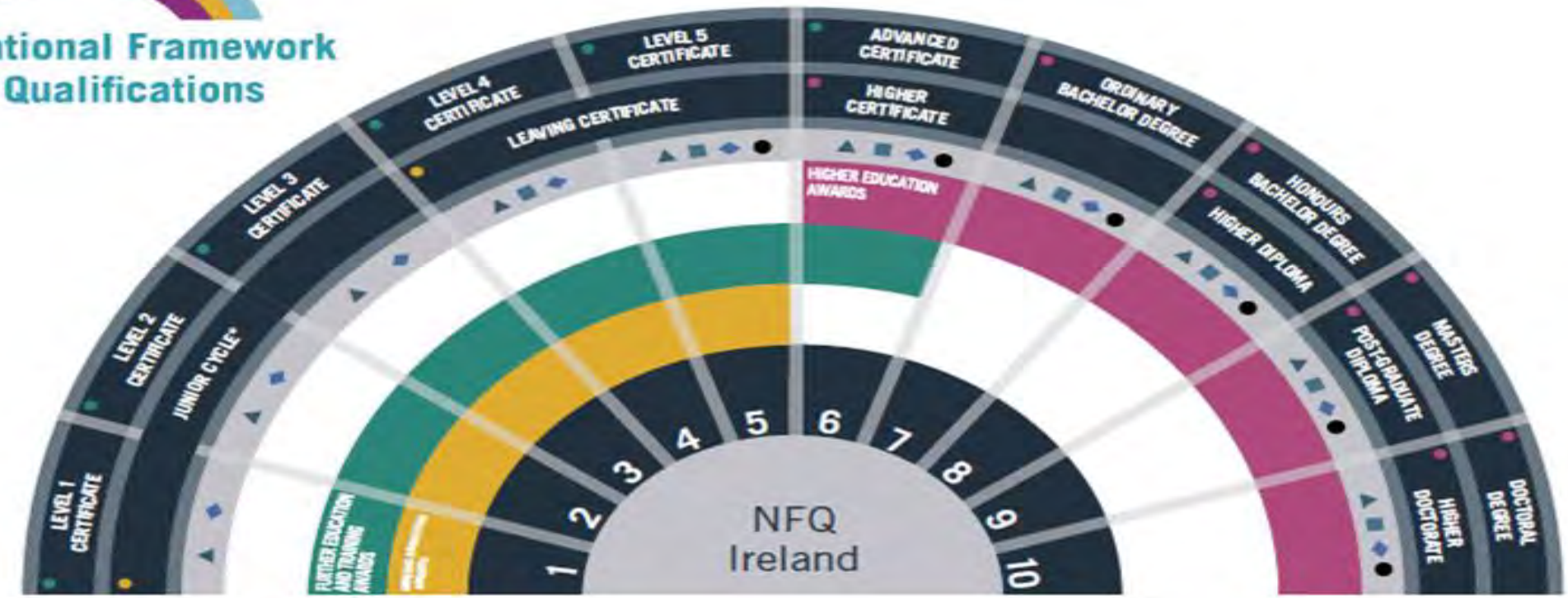
bologna process

EUROPEAN
Higher Education Area

National Framework of Qualifications



CLASSES OF AWARD

Major Awards: named in the outer rings, are the principal class of awards made at a level
Minor Awards: are for partial completion of the outcomes for a Major Award
Supplemental Awards: are for learning that is additional to a Major Award
Special Purpose Awards: are for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievement
Professional Awards: are for occupation-orientated qualifications including apprenticeships

* Please refer to NCCA website, ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/

IRISH REGISTER OF QUALIFICATIONS

For more information on
- Qualifications
- Providers
- Courses

visit www.irq.ie

Supported by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

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Progression to HE 'access qualifications', (& FET, Apprenticeship)

Major award, single sitting, competitive Central Application Office (www.cao.ie)

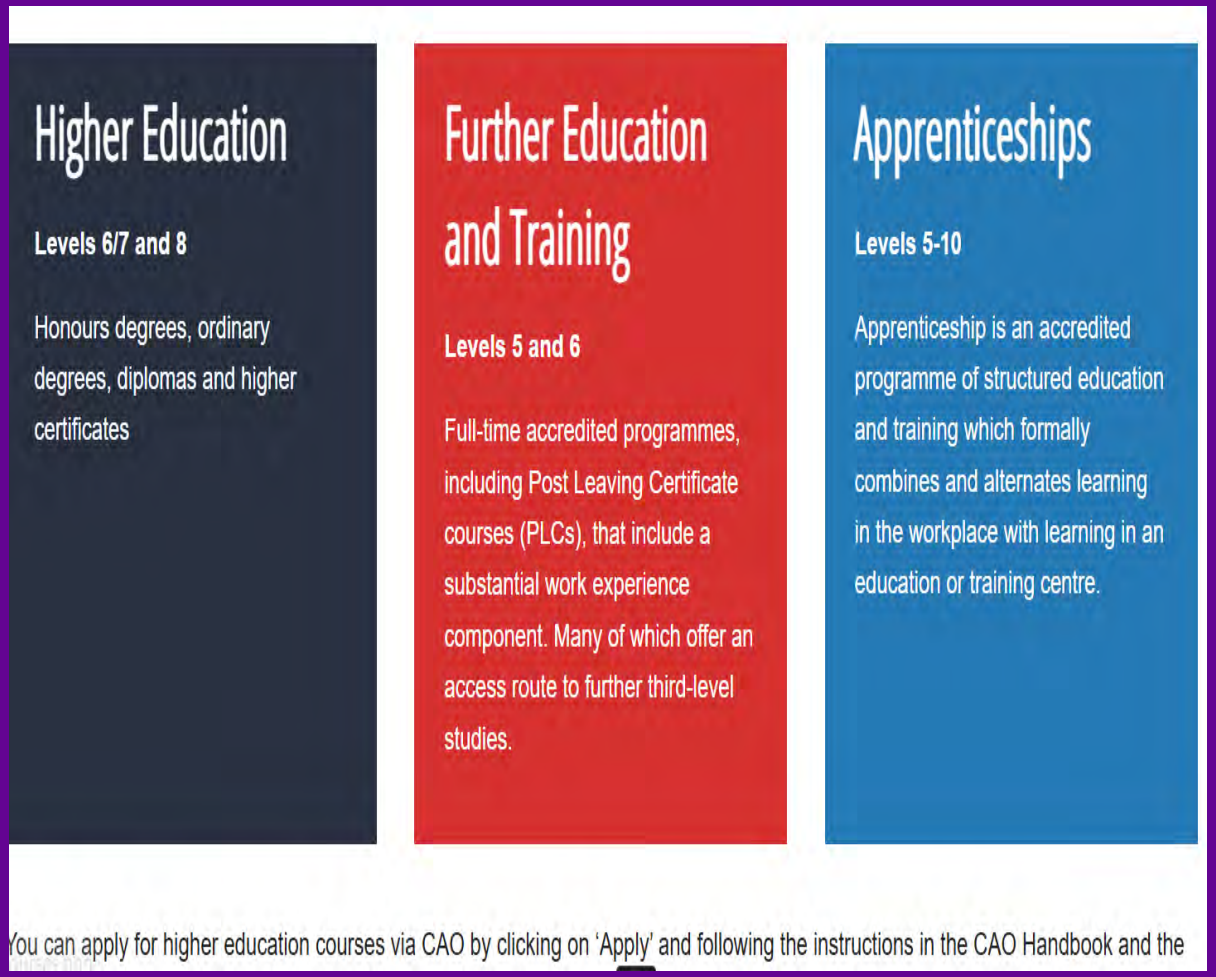
- **Upper secondary school**

  Leaving Certificate (LC (E), LCVP)
  Entry requirements criteria for
  EU/EFTA/UK Applicants (TAR)

- **VET (IE)**
  QQI Level 5 / 6 Certificate (Higher Education Links Scheme) (5,485 eligible 2025)
  Grading information: From further education and training (FET) to higher education (HE): Performance of CAO candidates with QQI FET awards | Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Separately, 78 New **articulated Tertiary Degree Programmes (**National Tertiary Office)

- Guarantee access to the HEI, initial access within FET (ETB)
- Typically include embedded awards



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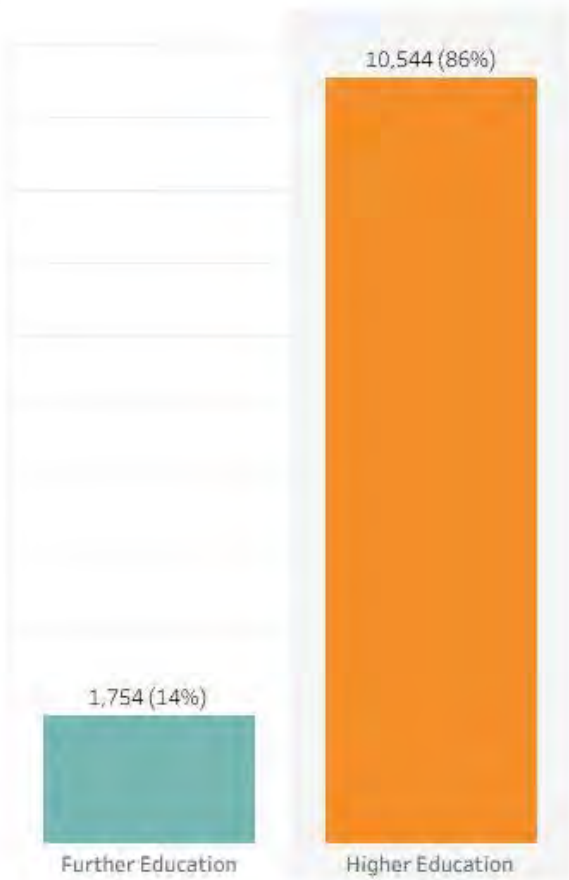
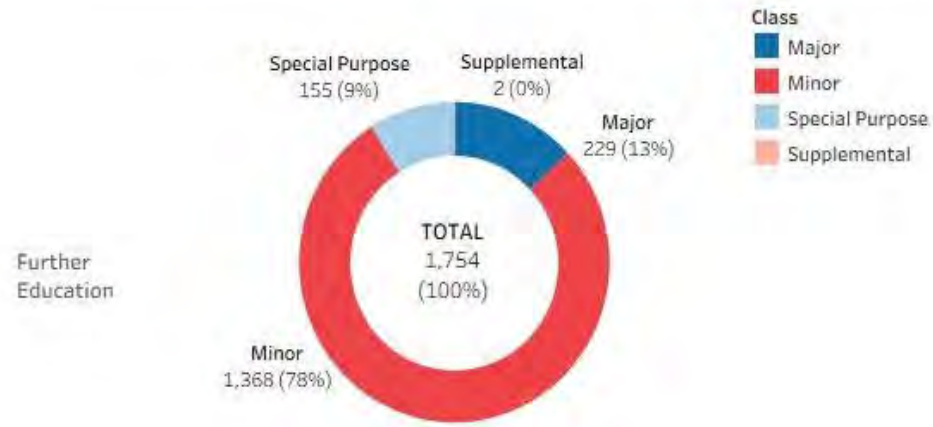
Total number and proportions of qualifications listed on the IRQ by sector and class





[Irish Register of Qualification]

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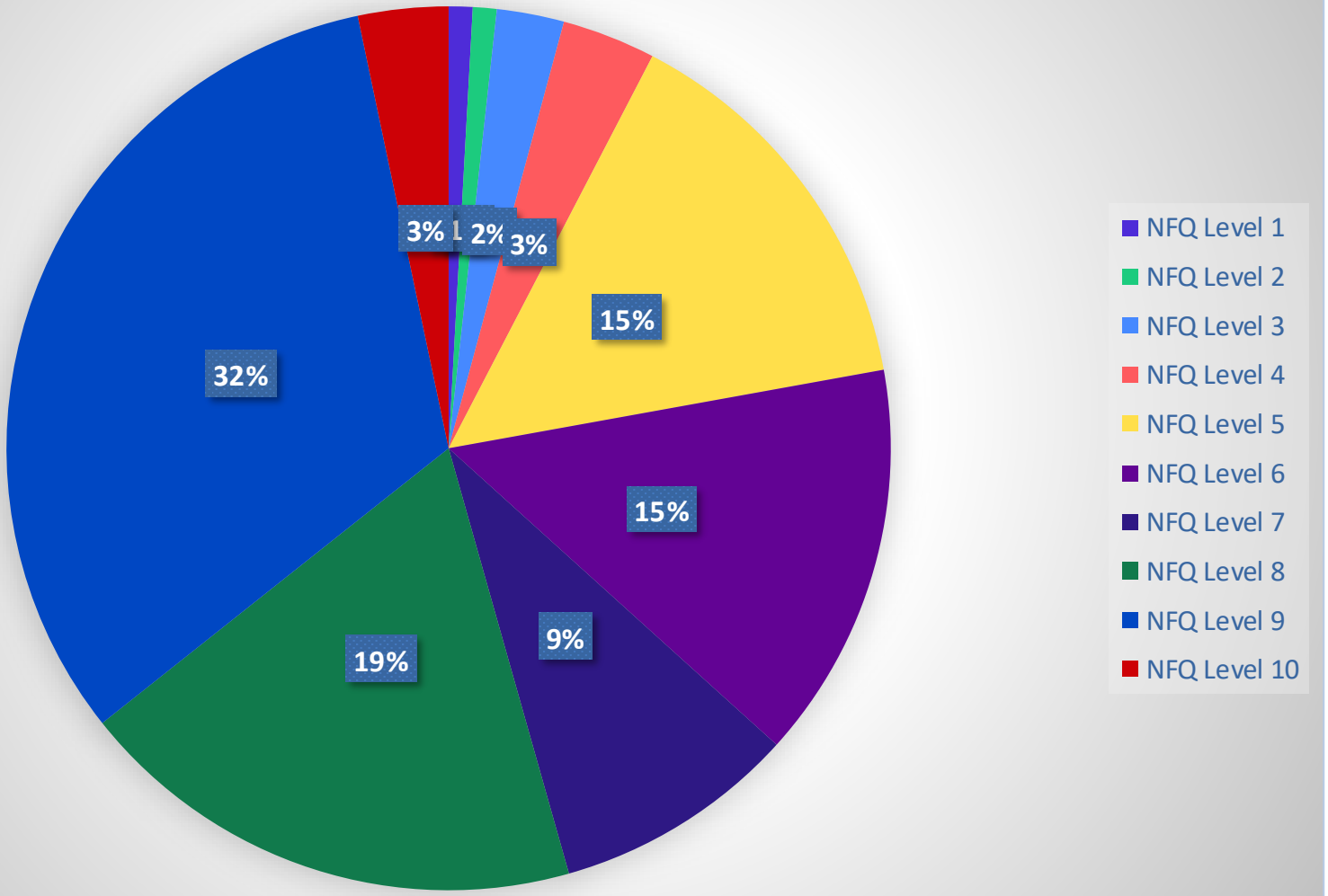
Programmes leading to NFQ awards



- Total qualifications per NFQ Level:

NFQ Level	Total
1	31
2	32
3	144
4	151
5	731
6	1693
7	1347
8	2910
9	4752
10	507

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Small volume qualifications

Wide variety of short programmes – micro-credentials and micro-qualifications

Generally skills and employment focused- upskill/reskill

May / may not be stackable; access, recognition and ‘expectation’ challenges

‘Right touch, right time’- responsiveness, coherence and quality, sustainability

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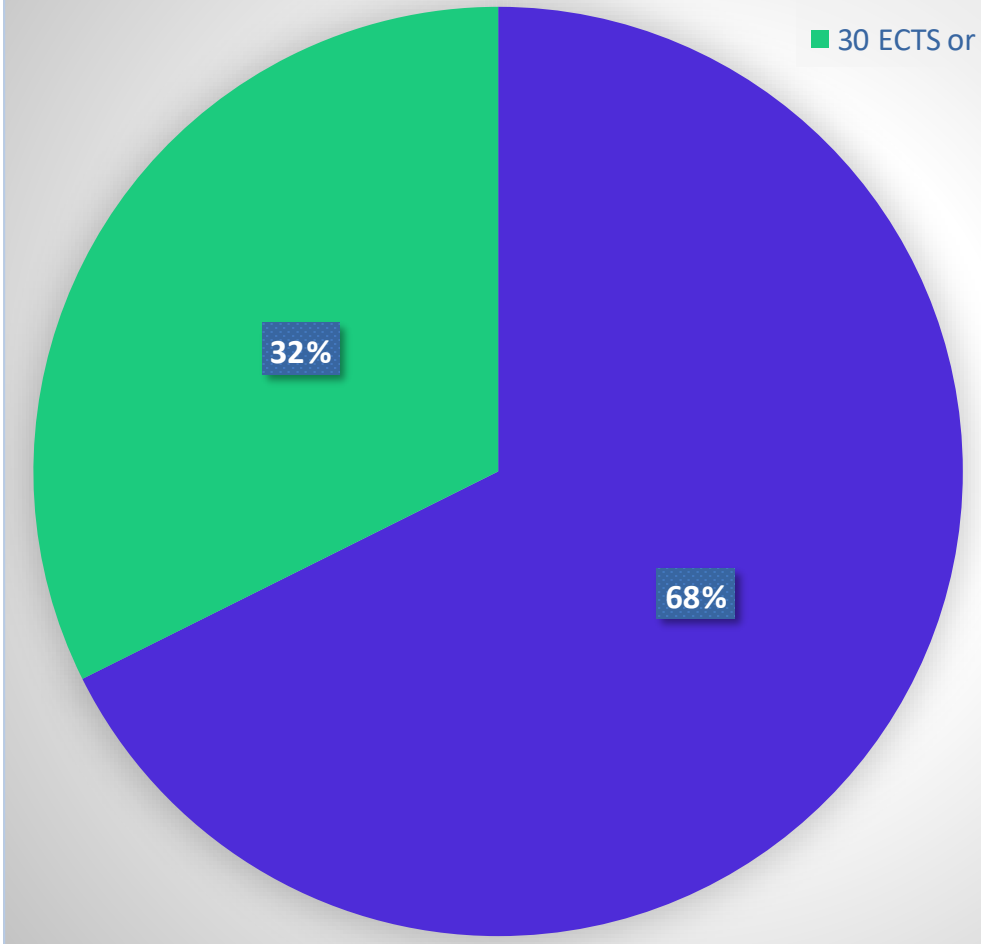
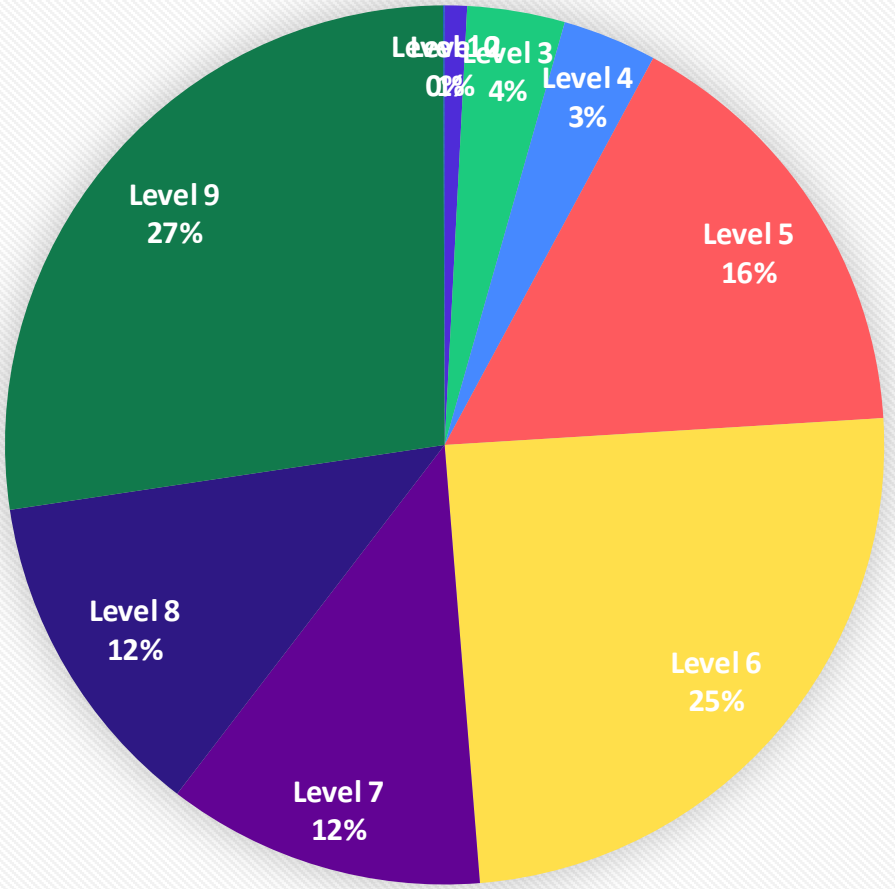
Qualifications



Small Qualifications



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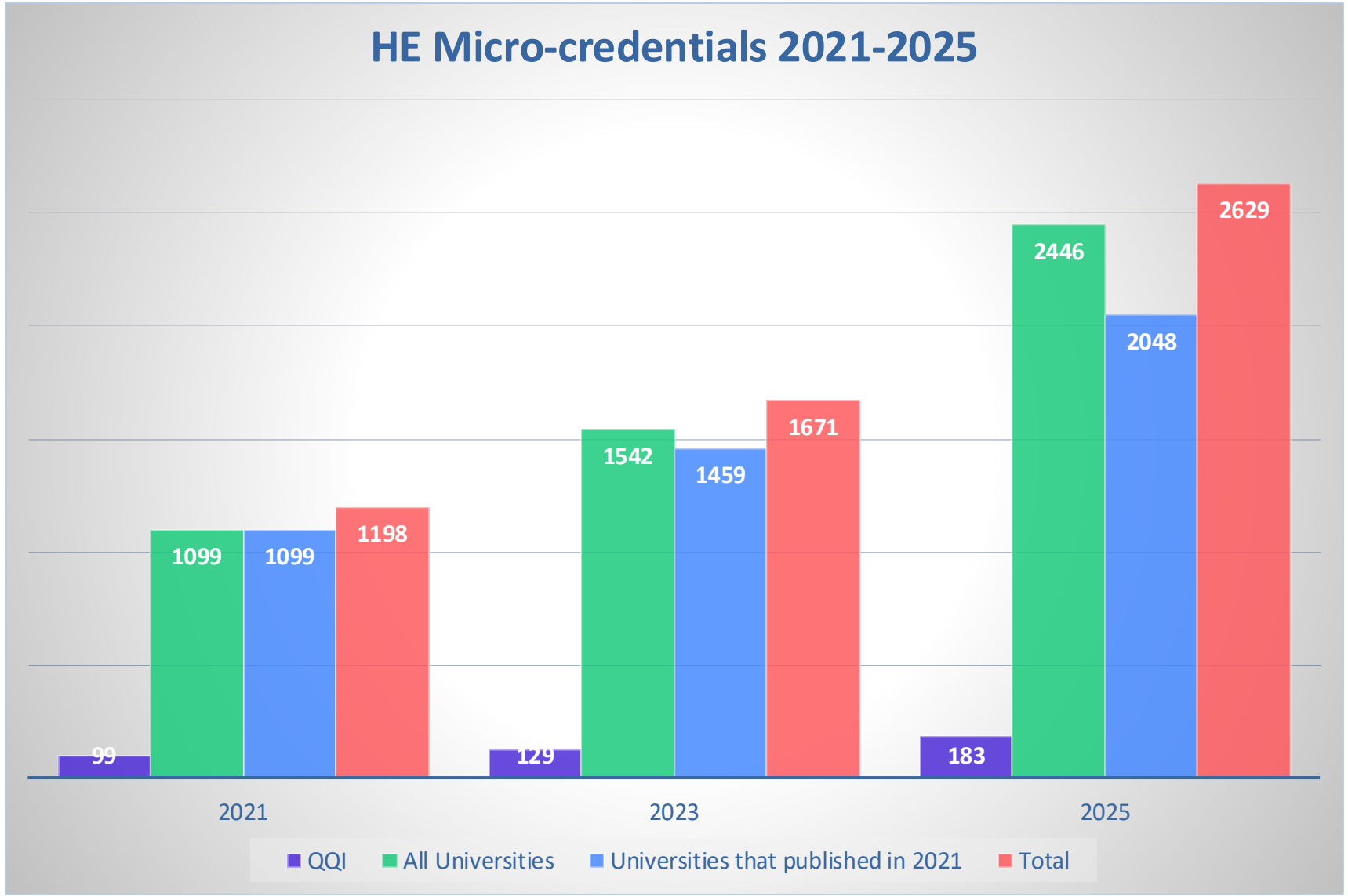

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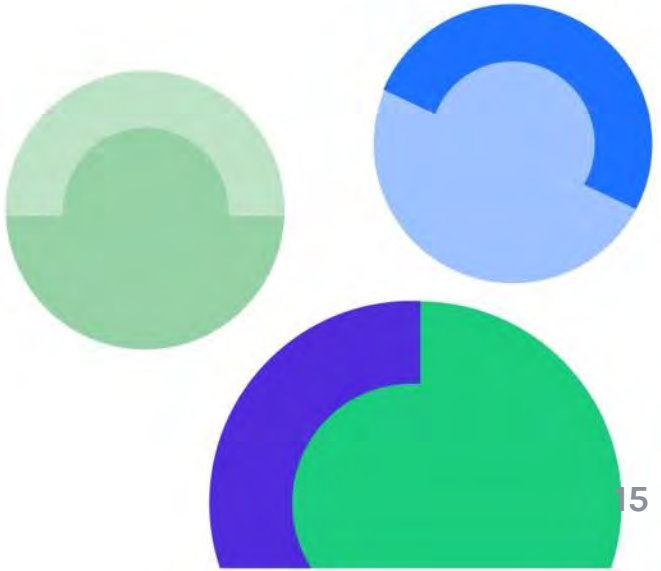
Credit, accumulation and transfer

- Central to Access, transfer and progression policy. Essential to the functioning of the NFQ.
  - Providers with awarding powers are responsible to develop and implement a system of credit, credit transfer and credit accumulation in line with ATP policy
  - HE uses ECTS, VET- FET credits (2:1 ratio to ECTS)
  - Credit transfer- from one major award to another at the same level
  - Credit accumulation- most often non-major awards- accumulated smaller volumes of learning, usually also at the same NFQ Level but not always, towards a larger qualification
  - Credit can be awarded for RPL/validation as exemptions
- Periods of learning overseas- typically results in the award of credit as per the learning agreement
- Joint Degrees, TNE, University Alliances support coherent credit transfer and mutual recognition
- There is no separate national policy addressing the transfer of ECTS achieved overseas; institutional recognition and validation policies apply according to the purpose for which the recognition of learning and associated ECTS are sought



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Flexible pathways: Validation/ RPL

Ministry- overarching actions

- Legislative base: Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (amended); Education and Training Boards Act 2013
- Ministry / Government funding:

  Unique project across 14 publicly funded HEIs to develop RPL practice, and procedures, targeting RPL in industry settings in line with future skills needs for society and the economy. Progress traced through the National Skills Strategy.

  Within FET, RPL is funded within existing Education and Training Board budget

Synergy- national authorities, Ministry

- Linked to access, transfer and progression, credit, awards and quality assurance policies.

  Policies take account of 2012 Recommendation and EU Guidelines

  Policy is under review- 'Building a culture of recognition'- the relationship of recognition with RPL, refreshing policy criteria and guidelines for RPL

  Provides for RPL for access, exemptions, awards

- Vehicles for progress

  In FET, the 'Skills to Advance' initiative- direct link to industry engagement; also RPL to support inclusion- built into Strategy

  In HE, the National Skills Strategy – targeted industry engagement, built into HE Strategy

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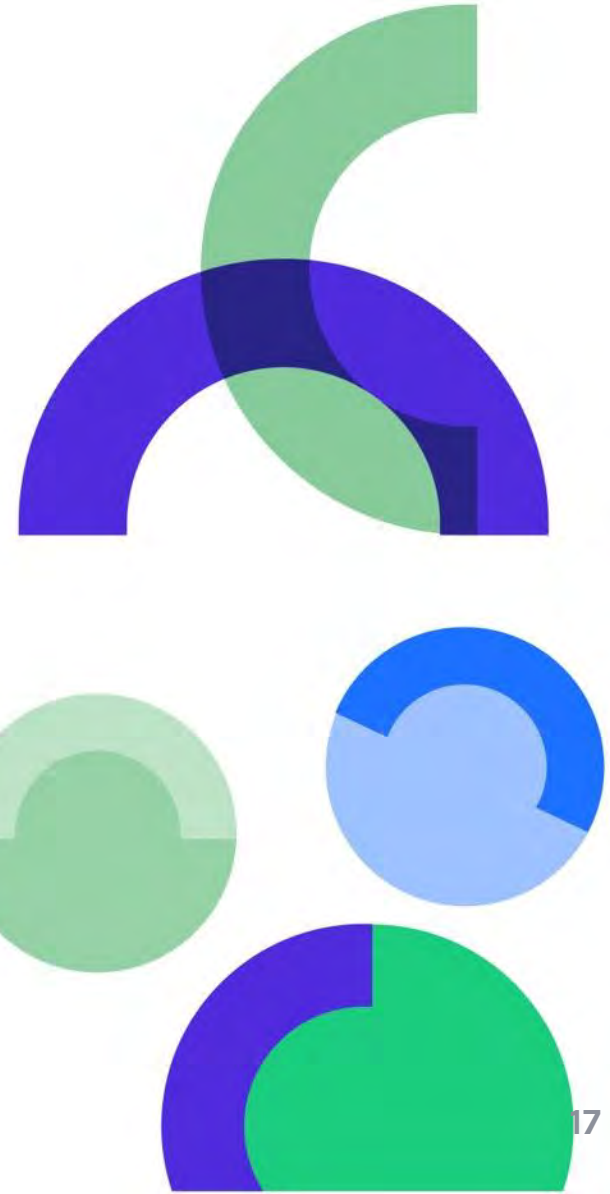
Flexible pathways: Validation/ RPL

National (Recognition) Authorities- practice close to demand

- Purposes in practice include
  - Career progression
  - Career pivot- elements of qualifications support redirection
  - Engagement with FET/HE
  - Personal development- often with regard to social and community contexts

- Evidence may include-
  - Prior certified learning, partial qualifications
  - MCs
  - digital badges, non-formal learning that is not part of the NFQ,
  - informal/ experiential learning (volunteering, professional, caring and life wide experience)
- 5 steps (HE project) Information, Identification, Documentation, Assessment, Certification; access to career guidance is recommended- FET V HE- different structures
- Active community of practice- RPL Practitioner Network Ireland- inclusive, cross sectoral, Steering group based on 2012 Recommendation. Up to 2 F2F events annually, webinars. Sectoral networks are also in place- in HE and VET ((25) RPL Practitioner Network Ireland: Posts | LinkedIn; RPL Practitioners Network Ireland; Home | Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL))
- Challenges- practice close to demand.
  - Learning outcomes- RPL friendly
  - Diversity of modes needed where verification is complex



Realising ambition, supporting national progress

- Data integration, qualitative analysis, cost benefit analysis - evidence of effectiveness of policy approaches and interventions
- Coordination mechanisms, supporting integrated actions and information flows for system efficiency
- Roadmap for implementation- an opportunity to refresh commitment to LRC, building on IEM Codes and work of NARIC Ireland with stakeholders

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