

Contextual Information for Using Higher Level Apprenticeship Statistics

The scope of the Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) programme can be found in the policy publication "[Securing our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships](#)" (published June 2014), which states that the ambition of the Department is that Northern Ireland's system of apprenticeships will be of a gold standard and will form a key part of a new skills landscape. This system will offer a spectrum of support from entry level up to level 8 (equivalent to a Doctorate), facilitate lifelong learning and allow participants to move in and out of professional education and training at their own pace. The complementary and connected Youth Training Strategy will, among other outcomes, provide opportunities for young people to progress into apprenticeships. The first HLA pilot phase commenced in the academic year 2012/13 and were delivered across a limited number of Further Education (FE) Colleges and private training organisations. From 2015/16 onwards this pilot HLA provision was refined and has been delivered across FE Colleges and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In September 2017, steady state HLA provision at levels 4 and 5 was launched, delivered through the 6 FE Colleges and CAFRE, with steady state provision at level 6 and above launching in September 2018.

FE colleges are the main providers of further education and training in Northern Ireland (NI). The sector plays a central role in raising literacy and numeracy levels and in up-skilling and re-skilling the population through a broad range of courses leading to qualifications, particularly at [Regulated Qualification Framework](#) (RQF), levels 2 and 3 and equivalents. Higher Education (at level 4 and above) is also delivered across the FE colleges.

Higher education institution (HEI) is a term from the [Further and Higher Education Act 1992](#). According to the Act, it means any provider which is one or more of the following: a UK university; a higher education corporation; a designated institution.

Higher education (HE) is defined in the [Further Education \(NI\) Order 1997](#) as courses leading to qualifications at level four and above on the qualifications frameworks. Degrees are awarded by bodies that have degree awarding powers granted by Royal Charter or under legislation; these bodies are known as recognised bodies and listed in Northern Ireland in the [Education \(Recognised Bodies\) Order \(NI\) 2018](#). Bodies that deliver HE courses that lead to a degree must be listed in the [Education \(Listed Bodies\) Order \(NI\) 2018](#). A higher education institution in Northern Ireland is one that is publicly funded by the Department for the Economy (DfE) under the [Education and Libraries \(NI\) Order 1993](#).

While there is no legal definition of the HE sector, it is usually taken to refer to the five HEIs named in the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1993, plus the six further education colleges who also deliver HE courses. More broadly, the [College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise](#) is also funded by the [Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#) to deliver HE courses, and a small number of private providers deliver HE in Northern Ireland, but are not in receipt of grant funding.

Please be aware that contextual information about Northern Ireland, the FE and HE services provided is available to read while using statistics from this publication. This includes information on the current and future population, structures within the FE system, and the vision for FE services as well as targets. This information is available at the following links:

[Contextual information regarding Northern Ireland](#)

[Contextual information regarding FE sector](#)

[Contextual information regarding HE sector](#)

The Register of Regulated Qualifications (RRQ)

The Office of Qualifications, Assessment and Examinations (OFQUAL) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) ensure qualifications and examinations offered by awarding organisations are of an appropriate quality and standard. OFQUAL regulates GCSEs and A levels in England, and a wide range of vocational/professional and technical qualifications in England. CCEA regulates GCSE, A Levels, vocational/professional and technical qualifications, including Essential Skills in Northern Ireland. The qualifications verified by OFQUAL and CCEA reside on a register of regulated qualifications (RRQ).

OFQUAL is independent of Government ministers and reports directly to Parliament in Westminster. CCEA is a non-departmental public body reporting to the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland.

Links to both organisations' websites can be found below:

<http://ofqual.gov.uk/>

<http://www.ccea.org.uk/>

The [Regulated Qualifications Framework \(RQF\)](#) is to help people understand all qualifications and how they relate to each other. Its intention is to improve consistency around how awarding organisations describe the size and challenge, or demand, of the qualifications they offer.

The [European Qualifications Framework \(EQF\)](#) provides a way to compare the level of qualifications across different countries and systems in Europe, making them easy to understand.

Higher education qualifications

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is responsible for the Framework of Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) which covers higher education qualifications from level 4 to level 8. For more information on the FHEQ you should contact the QAA:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk>

In this analysis the terms 'regulated enrolments' or 'regulated courses' are used as short hand to indicate those enrolments on courses which have the potential for individuals to obtain a regulated qualification at the end of it.

Comparing levels of qualifications

Each regulated qualification has a level between entry level and level 8. Entry level is lower than Level 1. Qualifications at the same level are a similar level of demand or difficulty. The content and size of qualifications at the same level may be quite different.

For further information on comparing qualifications across the UK, Ireland and overseas please refer to the link below:

<http://ofqual.gov.uk/help-and-advice/comparing-qualifications/>