

# Higher level Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland:

## Background Quality Report

### Theme: Children, Education & Skills

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<p><b>Introduction</b></p>	<p><b>Context for the quality report</b></p> <p>Youth Training Statistics &amp; Research Branch (YTSRB), a Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) branch within the Department for the Economy (DfE), is responsible for the production and publication of the Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLA) in Northern Ireland (NI) statistical bulletin.</p> <p><a href="#">Higher Level Apprenticeship in Northern Ireland</a> was published for the first time in February 2019 and reported on the Academic year 2017/18. The bulletin provides a range of analysis regarding the HLA programme delivered in the Northern Ireland Further Education (FE) Sector. The bulletin published in February 2020 has been extended to include data from the College of Agriculture, Food &amp; Rural Enterprise (CAFRE).</p> <p>The statistics presented in the HLA bulletin cover key statistical information on the HLA programme. Data have been provided on numbers participating; on key personal characteristics of participants (such as gender and age) and outcomes gained by participants where data is available. This publication will continue to evolve over time as more data are collected and connections with other Higher education Institutes becomes more established.</p> <p>Data are currently available for the academic years 2017/18 – 2018/19.</p> <p>The Statistical bulletin is published on the <a href="#">DfE website</a> along with other Higher and further education and training statistics.</p> <p>The report includes meaningful commentary supported by tables, charts, a map and an infographic.</p> <p>A pilot phase HLA provision was delivered between November 2012 and June 2015 and reports on the academic period 2015/16 and 2016/17, the statistics covering the HLA pilot phase, can be accessed through the <a href="#">Higher Level Apprenticeship Pilot in Northern Ireland</a>. Note this is an independent pilot study and data within this cannot be compared to any other publication.</p>
<p><b>Relevance</b></p>	<p><b>The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.</b></p> <p>The scope of the Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) programme can be found in the policy publication ‘<a href="#">Securing our Success - The Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships</a>’ (published June 2014), which states the Department are seeking to commence apprenticeships from level 3 upwards, with a major commitment to Higher Level Apprenticeships.</p> <p>Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLAs) currently offer qualifications from Level 4 to Level 7 (Masters degree). The majority are at Level 5 (Foundation degree or equivalent).</p> <p>DfE is responsible for the policy, strategic development and financing of the statutory FE sector. Analysis of data trends against key strategic priorities remains a</p>

	<p>crucial component of policy development within DfE. The analysis within this report is particularly relevant in the context of the <a href="#">Draft Programme for Government (2016-2021)</a> commitment to improve the skills profile of the populations.</p> <p>Key customers within government use the data to monitor performance of the programme, to inform related policy and to respond to assembly and ad-hoc queries.</p> <p>Statisticians within YTSRB will ensure the statistical bulletin remains relevant through user engagement meetings with key stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>Accuracy and Reliability</b></p>	<p><b>The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.</b></p> <p>The information presented in this bulletin is derived from the statistical returns listed below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An extract of the Consolidated Data Return (CDR) - this contains data from the live administrative database 'Northern Ireland College Information System' (NICIS) collated by data from the six Further Education colleges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belfast metropolitan College (BMC)</li> <li>• Northern Regional College (NRC)</li> <li>• North West Regional College (NWRC)</li> <li>• South Eastern Regional College (SERC)</li> <li>• Southern Regional College (SRC)</li> <li>• South West College (SWC)</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p>This is representative of participant enrolments within an academic year at the time of the data extraction. The administrative system has in-built validation checks to minimise user error; data can also be interrogated to assess quality and cross check information. Further validation checks are carried out by Analytical Services Division (ASD) on receipt of the extract.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. CAFRE data return – this is an extract of data provided directly from the CAFRE administrative database. Numbers are relatively small and data can be validated with CAFRE administrators.</li> </ol> <p>Over time as more information becomes available, it is possible figures may be revised to improve quality and accuracy. Users will be informed of any revisions to the data.</p>
<p><b>Timeliness and Punctuality</b></p>	<p><b>Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.</b></p> <p>Publication takes place strictly in accordance with published release dates as pre-announced on the DfE <a href="#">publication schedule</a> and <a href="#">GOV.UK</a> statistics release calendar, which are updated regularly in accordance with the release practices protocol of the <a href="#">Code of Practice</a> for Statistics.</p> <p>Data in the HLA bulletin includes information on participants enrolled in the Higher Level Apprenticeships programme during the academic years 2017/18 and 2018/19.</p>

	<p>There is a time lag between the end of the academic year 2018/19 and DfE receiving the CDR data extract. DfE receive the CDR file in October each year. This time lag enables NICIS to complete validation checks and process the information.</p> <p>The bulletin is then published in February on the same date as the <a href="#">Apprenticeships NI</a> publication. YTSRB will review publication dates on consultation with users.</p>
<p><b>Accessibility and Clarity</b></p>	<p><b>Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.</b></p> <p>All published information is available free of charge via the <a href="#">DfE website</a> or in hard copy on request and is also available on the <a href="#">GOV.UK</a> Statistics Release Calendar. Additional information is published alongside the HLA publication including a suite of headline tables in Excel and ODS formats – an HLA press release, Statistics Bulletin and other Excel tables including detailed breakdowns where possible.</p> <p>User information and supporting commentary on the key findings are included in the bulletin to help users to understand and make the best possible use of the data.</p> <p>The report contains contact details of the responsible statistician who can be contacted for further information.</p>
<p><b>Coherence and Comparability</b></p>	<p><b>Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.</b></p> <p><b>Coherence:</b>  HLA data currently incorporates data from two sources:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The information provided by FE colleges presented in this statistical bulletin has been derived from the Consolidated Data Return (CDR), which came into operation for the 2013/14 academic year and is provided through FE colleges.</li> <li>2. CAFRE Administration System.</li> </ol> <p>In order for the HLA data to remain coherent across the two sources information is reported and collated during the same time periods.</p> <p><b>Comparability:</b>  The Bulletin provides data by academic year since the Higher Level Apprenticeship programmes were introduced in 2017/18, in Northern Ireland. This enables comparisons to be made over time. There are also comparisons within the bulletin for participants on the HLA programme at Local Government District.</p>
<p><b>Trade-offs between Output Quality Components</b></p>	<p><b>Trade-offs are the extent to which different aspects of quality are balanced against each other.</b></p> <p>Timeliness vs Accuracy  The main trade-off is timeliness, against accuracy and or/detail.  The aim has been to publish the full range of HLA results to meet customer needs as quickly as possible, but ensuring that the quality of the product is maintained.</p>

<b>Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions</b>	<p><b>The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products</b></p> <p>The most common way of obtaining user feedback in relation to the HLA publication is informally, through comments or queries addressed directly to YTSRB via telephone, email and social media. YTSRB also held meetings with policy makers. All requests for information will be monitored and comments taken on board and the publication can be updated accordingly to reflect this information.</p> <p>Users are encouraged to provide feedback on Statistical Bulletins; the Bulletin provides details on how to contact the responsible statistician.</p> <p>The publication is subject to review and user consultations will be carried out in future to ensure users’ needs are met.</p>
<b>Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden</b>	<p><b>The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output</b></p> <p>In producing these statistics, the main data source is administrative data from the Colleges Information Systems. The HLA extracts of data are derived by the CDR file which contains data on all FE colleges and is provided to DfE on a scheduled timetable. This therefore reduces the burden on the colleges and no additional HLA extracts are required for publication purposes.</p>
<b>Confidentiality, Transparency and Security</b>	<p><b>The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.</b></p> <p>All data is handled, stored and accessed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).</p> <p>DfE adheres to the principles and protocols laid out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and comply with pre-release access arrangements.</p>