

Flexible learning pathways- exploring from the perspective of Ministries

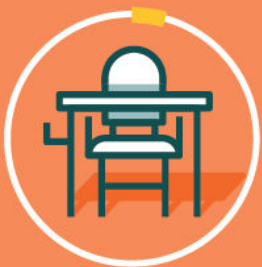
Key Commitment 2: National legislation and procedures compliant with
the LRC- Case study, Ireland.

TPG B June 2026



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

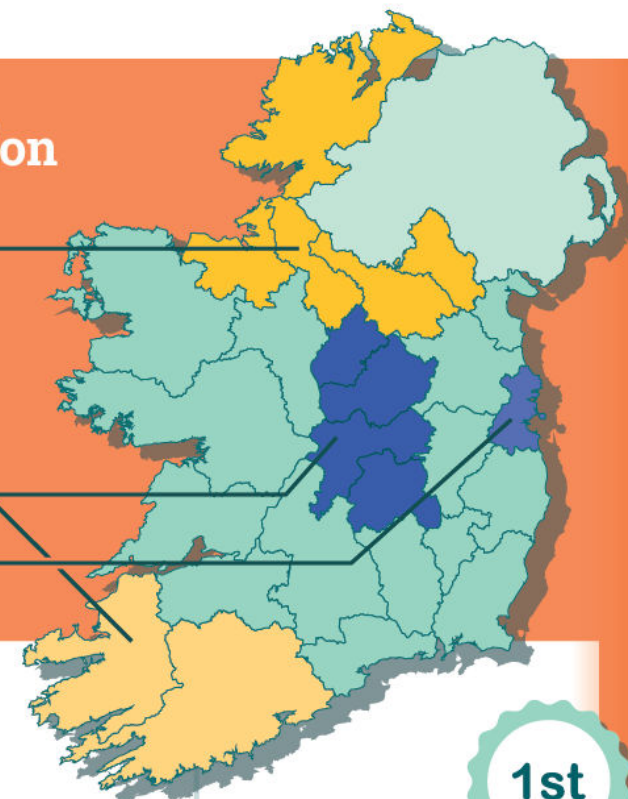
6% Border

1% South-West

Secondary education only

35% Midlands

23% Dublin



2023

Percentage of persons with third level education

35%

EU-27 average



55%

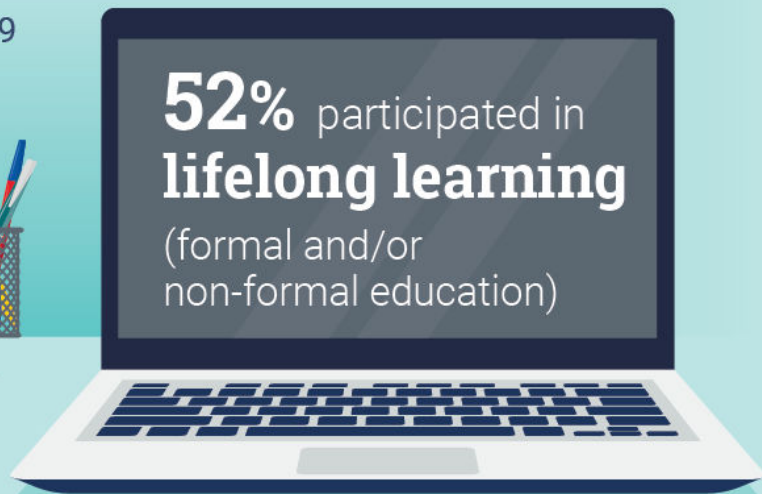
Ireland





Adult Education Survey 2022

of adults aged 25-69

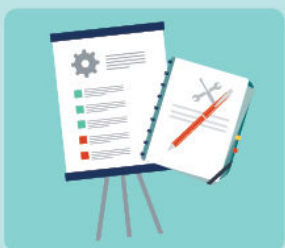


10%
participated in
formal
education¹

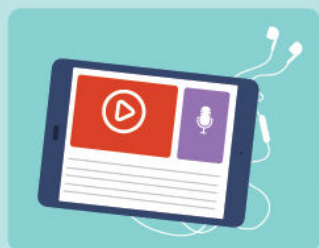


¹ in the last year

48%
participated in
non-formal
education¹



54%
participated in at
least one informal
learning activity¹



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



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

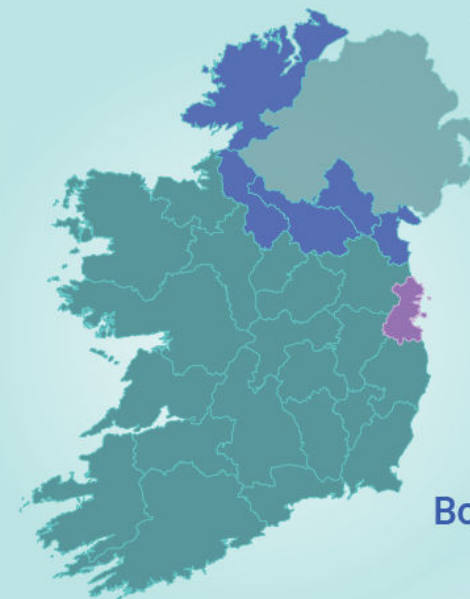


by Region

Highest:
59%
Dublin

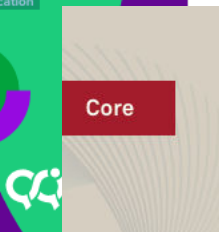
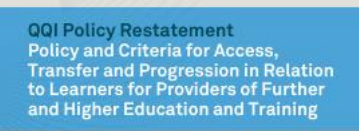
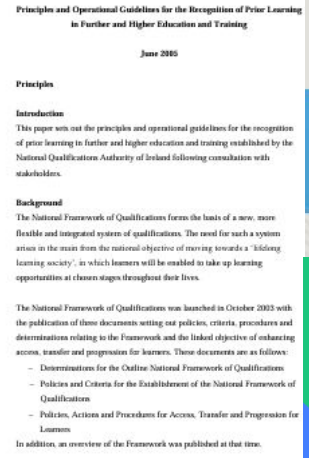
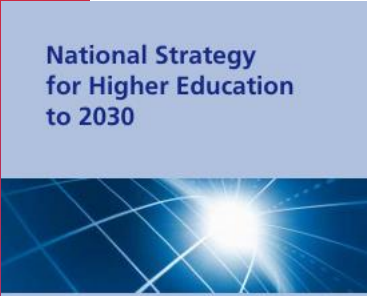
compared with

Lowest:
40%
Border area



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







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

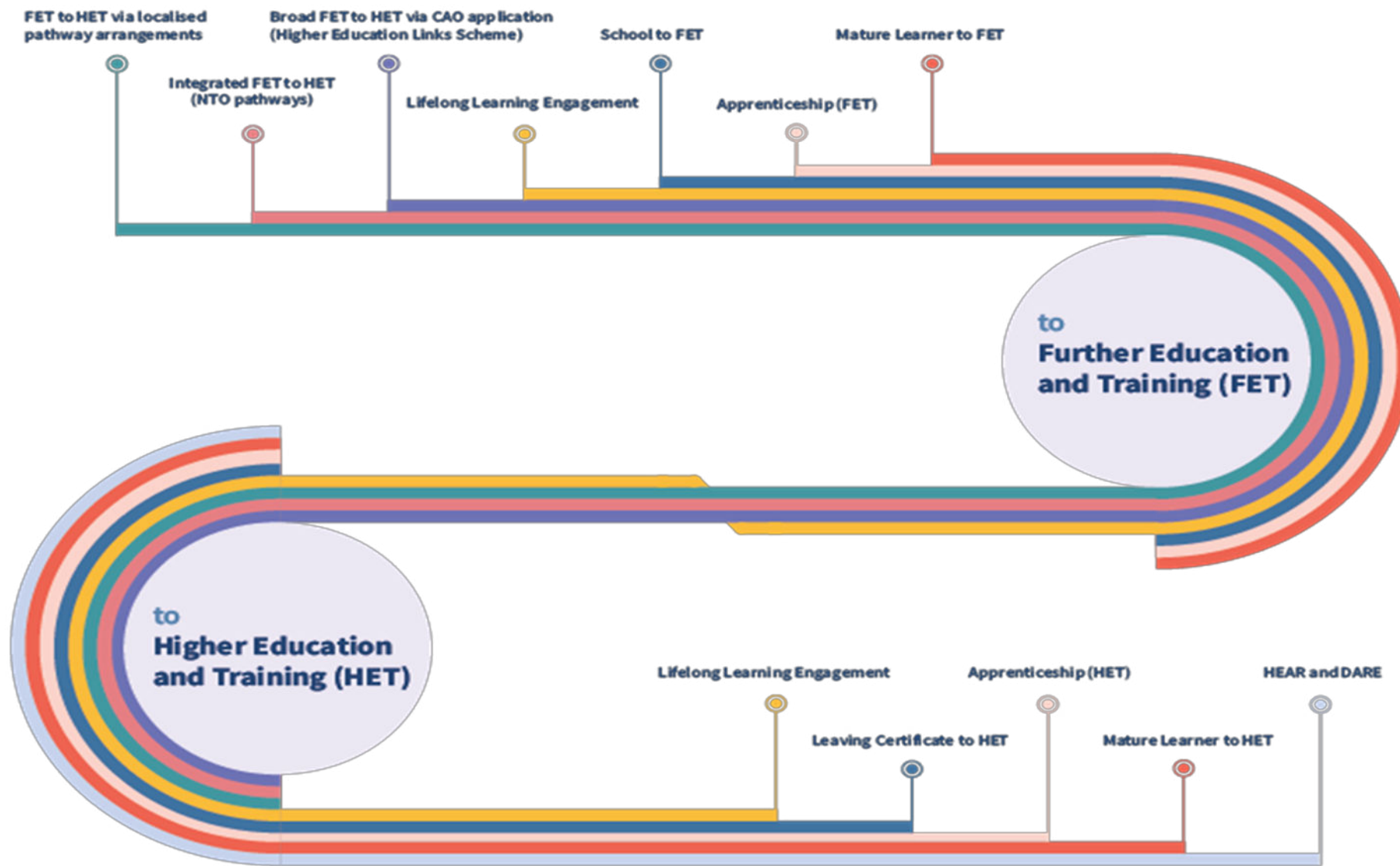
- Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 – Ireland's Future
- National Access Plan, a strategic action plan for equity of access, participation, and success in higher education 2022 to '28.
- National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030
- Creating Futures, VET Strategy 2026 to 2030.
- QQI Statutory 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

USP of the Ministry

National need
Evidence informed
Mobilising tools, transparency

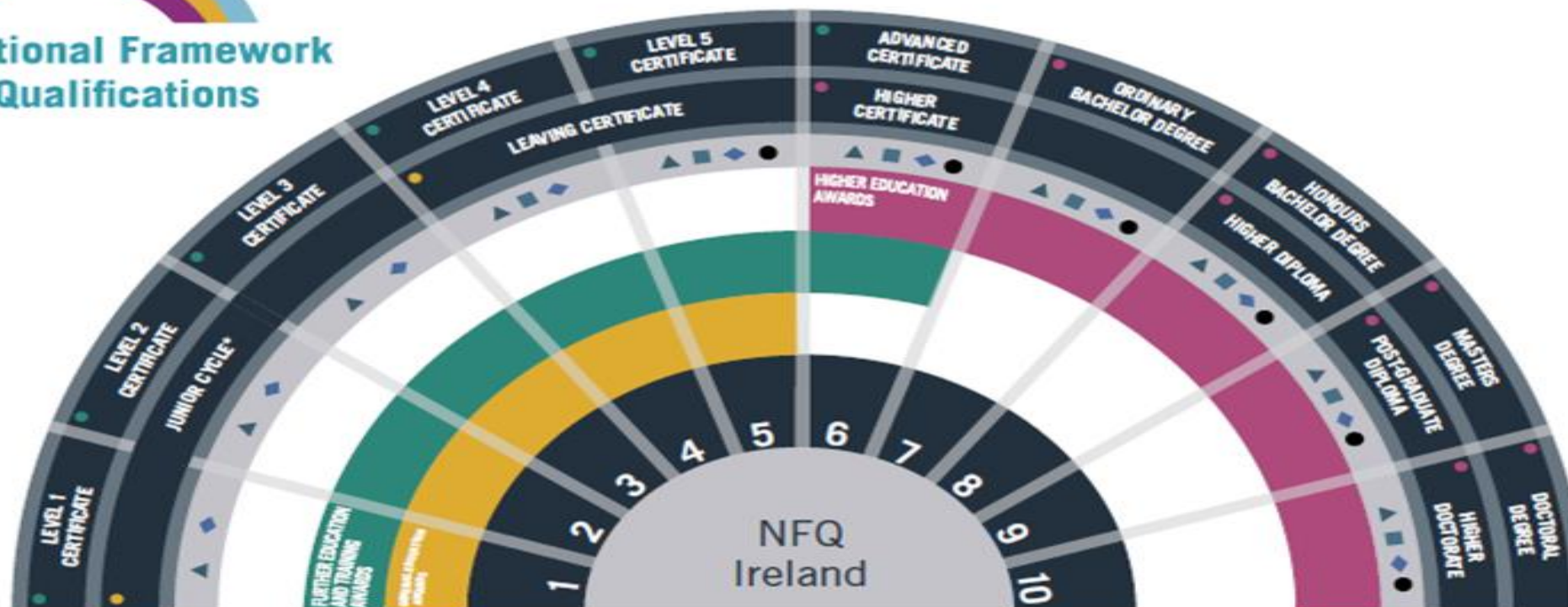
Sectoral Strategies
National Framework of Qualifications
Award types and pathways
Credit systems
Validation/RPL







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



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

Higher Education

Levels 6/7 and 8

Honours degrees, ordinary degrees, diplomas and higher certificates

Further Education and Training

Levels 5 and 6

Full-time accredited programmes, including Post Leaving Certificate courses (PLCs), that include a substantial work experience component. Many of which offer an access route to further third-level studies.

Apprenticeships

Levels 5-10

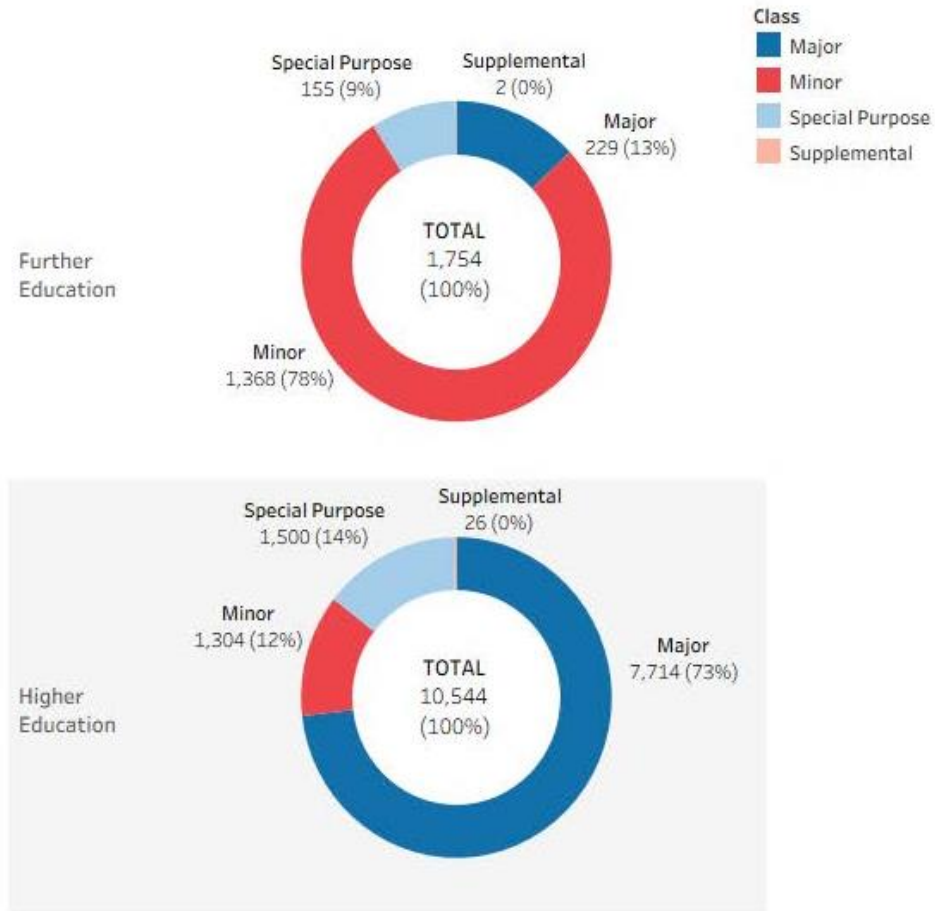
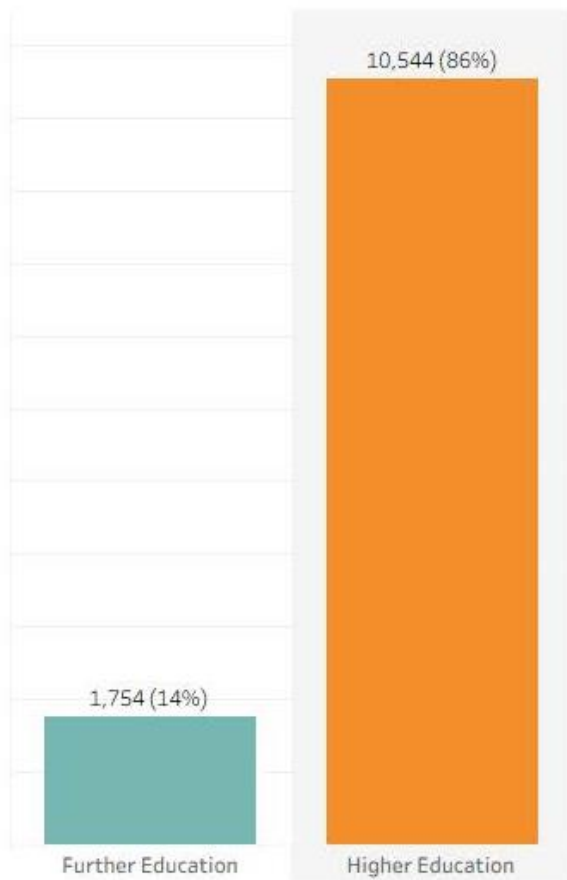
Apprenticeship is an accredited programme of structured education and training which formally combines and alternates learning in the workplace with learning in an education or training centre.

You can apply for higher education courses via CAO by clicking on 'Apply' and following the instructions in the CAO Handbook and the

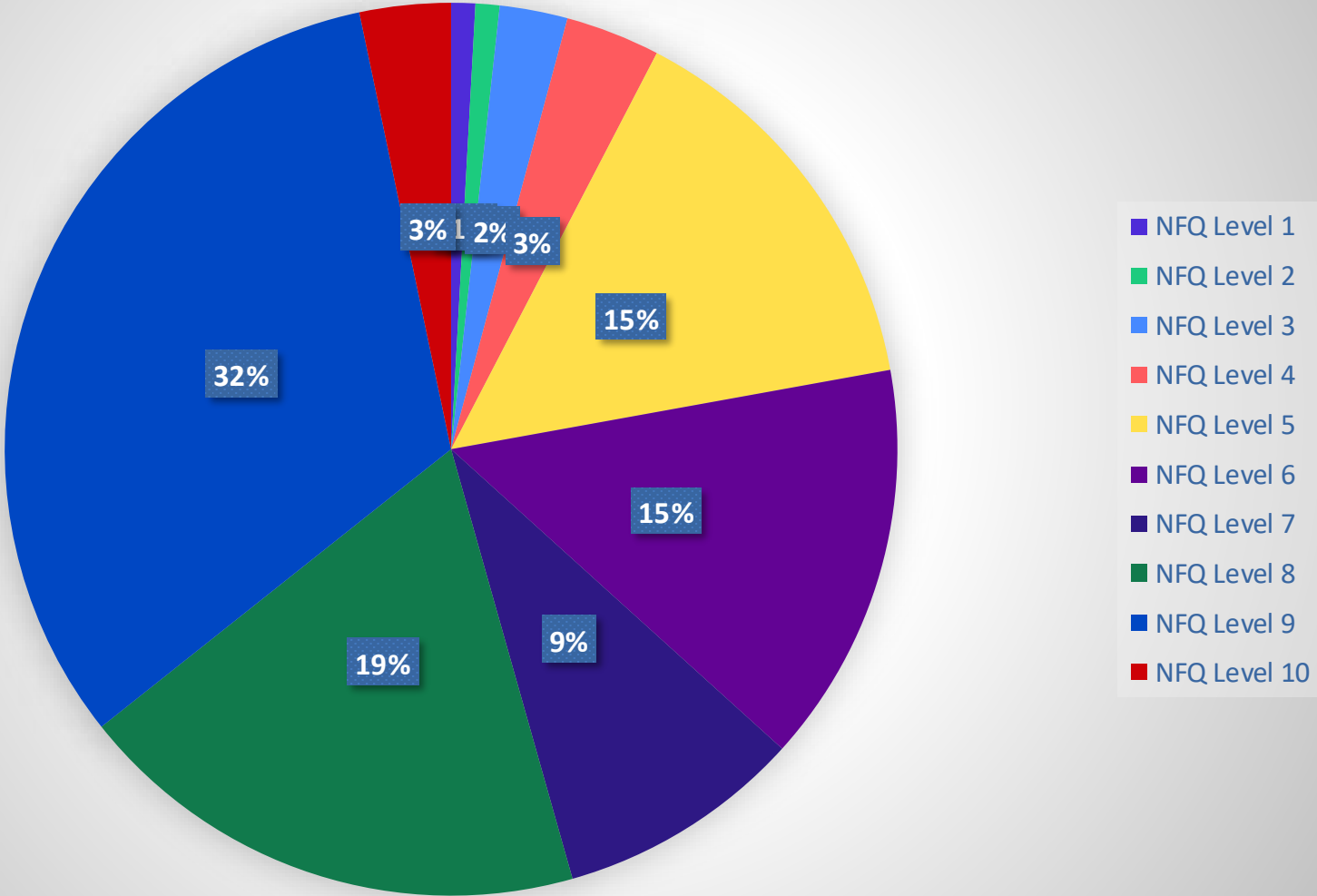


Co-funded by
the European Union

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



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

Small volume qualifications

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

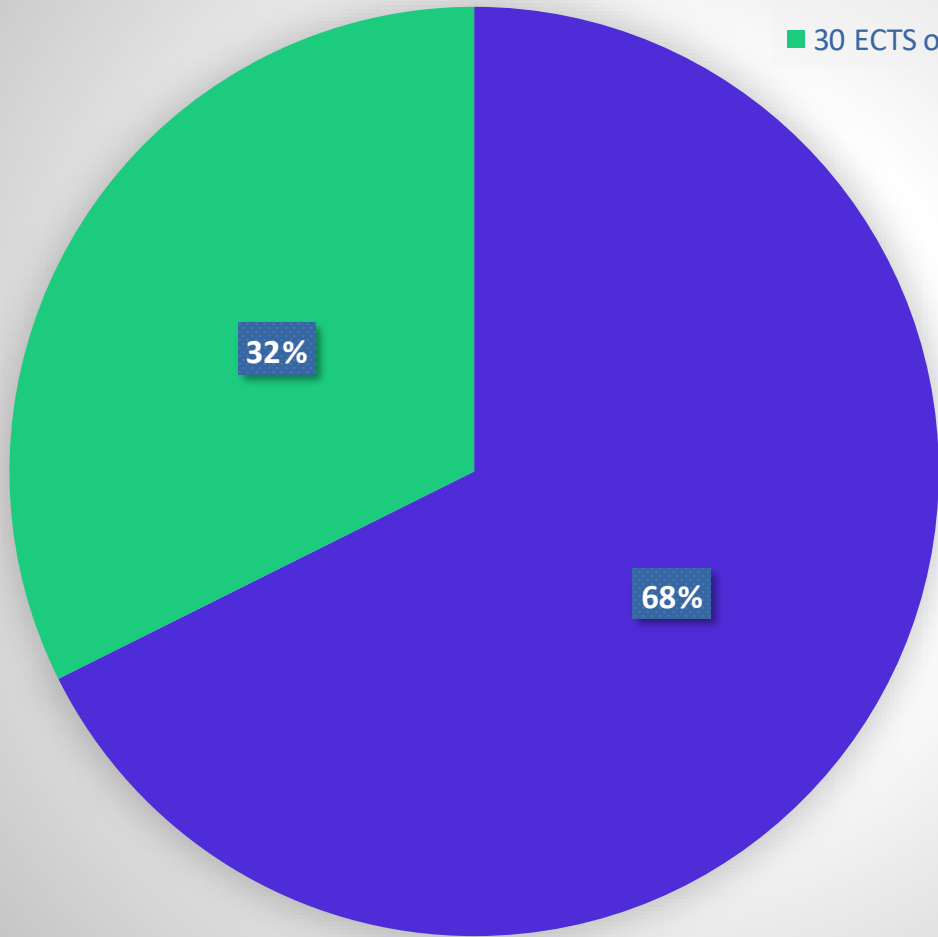
Generally skills and employment focused-upskill/reskill

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

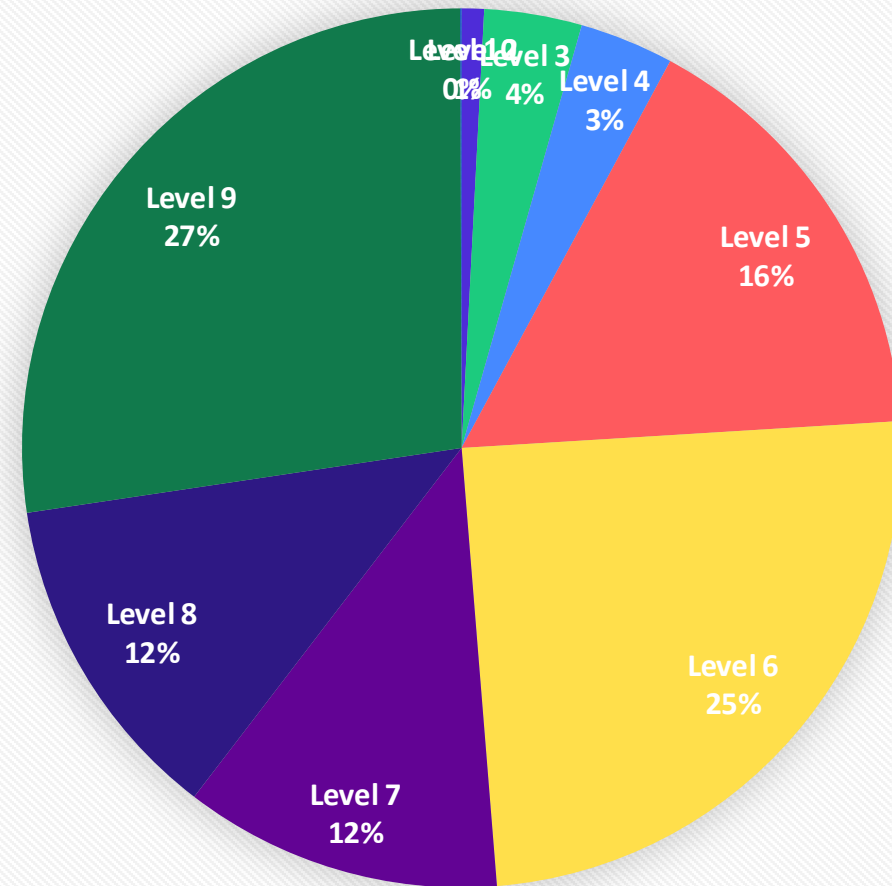
‘Right touch, right time’- responsiveness, coherence and quality, sustainability

Qualifications

- Greater than 30 ECTS
- 30 ECTS or less



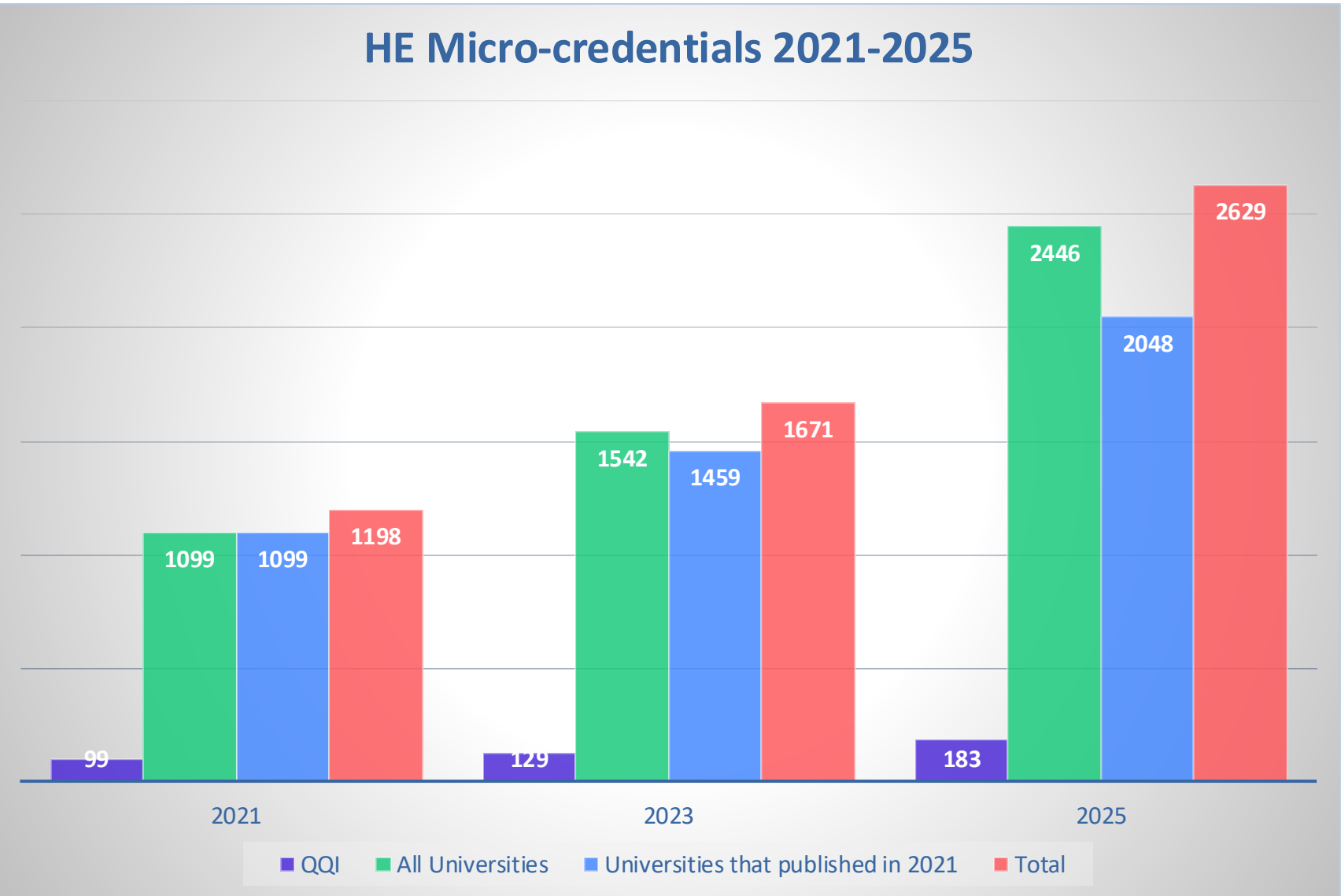
Small Qualifications



- Level 2
- Level 3
- Level 4
- Level 5
- Level 6
- Level 7
- Level 8
- Level 9
- Level 10



HE Micro-credentials 2021-2025

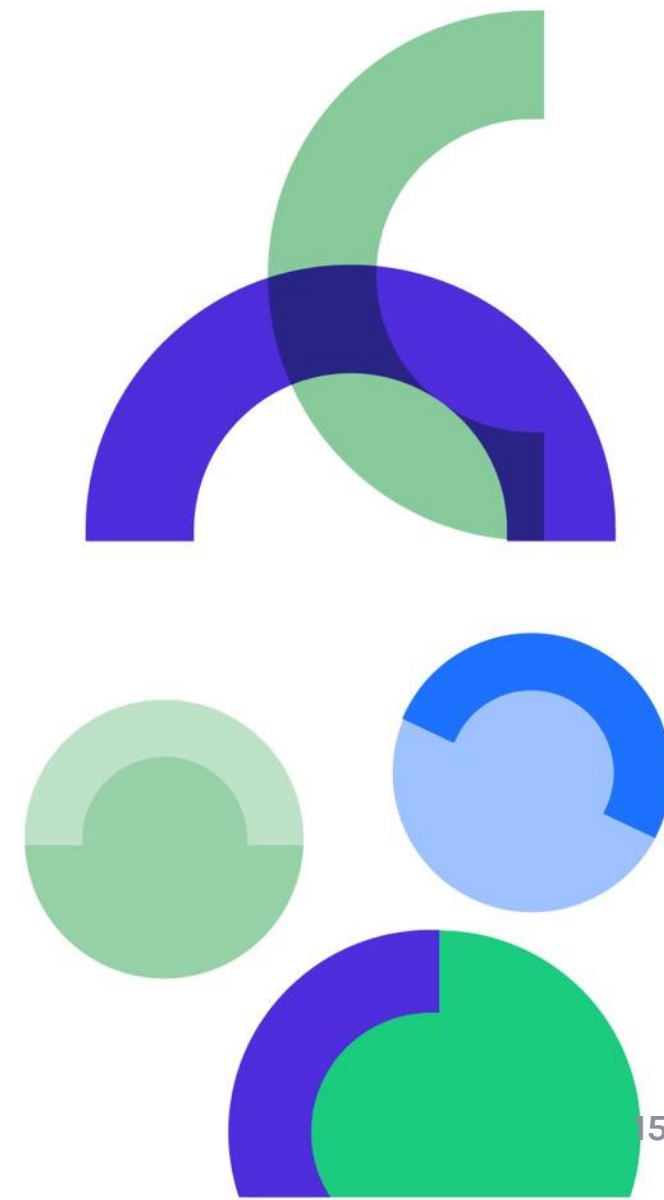


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Credit, accumulation and transfer

- 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





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

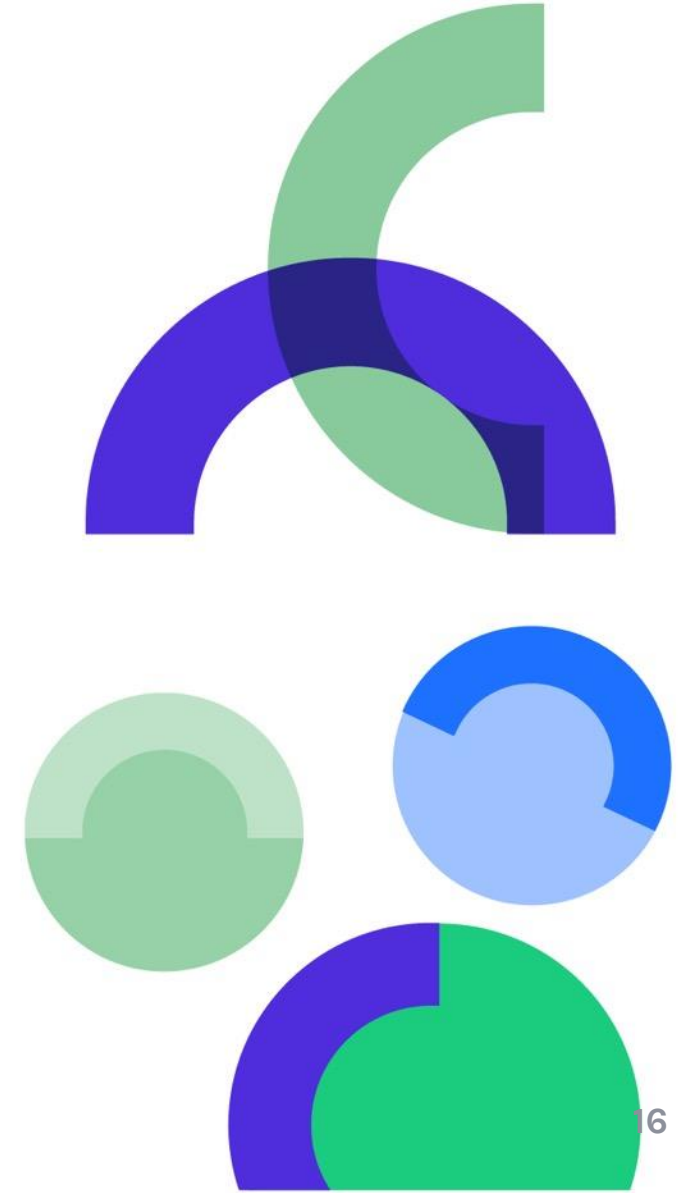
Policy is under review- 'Building a culture of recognition'- the relationship of recognition with RPL, refreshing policy criteria and guidelines for RPL

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

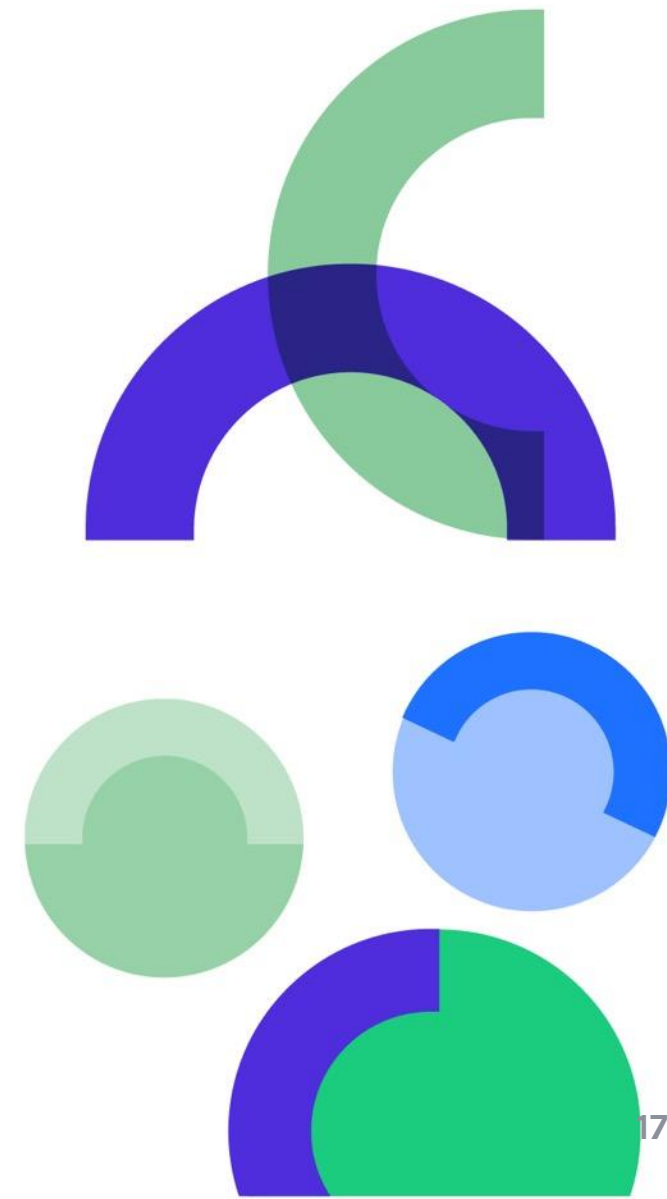




Flexible pathways: Validation/ RPL

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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