

# QQI awards and related provision

Looking back over the past 10 years



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## **QQI awards and related provision**

*Responding to the changing needs of learners and the labour force – our role 2012-2021*

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**The data analysed in this report are derived primarily from the QQI certification management system (QBS).**

QBS is an online platform that allows education and training providers to submit certification data to QQI. QQI certifies learners in FET (NFQ awards only) and in some HE private providers.

We look back at this certification data over the past 10 years to reveal the trends and shifts in the demand for QQI awards and the related provision of programmes (i.e. courses, apprenticeships, traineeships etc.). We analyse how provision has evolved over the decade and how some shifts in the demand for QQI awards are being driven by the needs of learners, policy and the labour market.

We found that the demand for QQI awards is being affected by

- » the **evolution of transition rates from** post-primary into FET vs HE;
- » the need for **upskilling or retraining** for continuing professional development; and
- » the introduction of **innovative types of programmes**, such as new apprenticeships or new Springboard programmes.

The factors above are not exhaustive; there may be others too.

The report was prepared as part of QQI's celebration of its tenth anniversary.

The analysis focuses on QQI awards achieved by learners between 2012 and 2021, and includes the following:

## Section 1

Key facts  
and figures  
for tertiary  
education

## Section 2

QQI data &  
provision  
2012-2021

## Section 3

Academic  
outcomes &  
trends  
2012-2021

## Section 4

Drivers of  
demand for QQI  
awards  
2012-2021

## **Disclaimers on the numbers in this report**

When reporting the numbers of learners certified, learners who achieved more than one award in a particular year are counted just once in each award class. The analysis of QQI minor awards for a given year does not include some of the components that were achieved in that year to qualify for the linked major award earned in that year. QQI is currently reviewing this approach so that the reporting of minor awards is clearer.

QQI is the only body currently awarding FET qualifications that are included in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). QQI awards, however, account for a relatively small fraction of the HE awards made each year and included in the NFQ.

Please note that QQI does not typically collect information on learners at the point of enrolment on programmes; its data relate mainly to QQI awards achieved by learners.

Visit our website for further statistics on QQI certification at: [Our Data | Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(qqi.ie\)](#)

**SECTION 1 -****Key facts and figures: transition from secondary to tertiary education**

The potential supply to tertiary education from **post-primary** in Ireland has grown sustainably year on year between 2012 and 2021: the number of pupils in post-primary has increased by an average 2.1 per cent and the number **of students taking Leaving Certificate (LC)** by an average of 1.1 per cent.

Despite the increase in the number of post-primary pupils, the latest report of the Department of Education, '[Education Indicators for Ireland](#)', shows a fall in the proportion of these transitioning to tertiary education, particularly to FET: the number of pupils transitioning to FET decreased annually by 2.1% on average between 2012 and 2019 (the last year for which we have complete transition data). The transition rate fell in each year except 2016.

**Table1 - Key facts and figures: the supply to tertiary education from post primary education, 2012 - 2020**

Year	No. of pupils in post-primary	No. of pupils taking LC	TRANSITION RATE FROM POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION			
			TO FET	%change	TO HE	%change
2012	322,519	114,614	28.1%			
2013	326,628	115,399	27.6%	▼1.8%		
2014	339,207	117,317	26.5%	▼4.1%	67.7%	
2015	345,550	117,452	26.3%	▼0.8%	64.0%	▼5.5%
2016	352,257	117,663	27.3%	▲4.1%	64.4%	▲0.6%
2017	357,408	118,182	26.3%	▼3.7%	63.6%	▼1.2%
2018	362,899	121,274	25.9%	▼1.7%	63.4%	▼0.3%
2019	371,450	123,411	24.2%	▼6.5%	62.1%	▼2.1%
2020	379,184	125,529			66.1%	▲6.4%
Average:			26.5%	▼2.1%	64.5%	▼0.3%

\* Source: provided by the DoE, Statistics unit. Years with blank values were not provided. Number of pupils in post-primary and number of students taking LC, LCVP and LCA from Department of Education at: [gov.ie - Education statistics \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie - Education statistics (www.gov.ie))  
Overall averages are based on a simple average of the % change figures.

See Appendix 1 for further information on how transition rates were calculated by DoE. It shows, for example, that a proportion of post-primary pupils do not transition directly to HE from post-primary.

Table 1 shows a modest decrease of 0.3% in the transition rate from post-primary to HE over 2012-2020. This contrasts with the increasing number of **new entrants into HE** (full-time 1st year undergraduates, HEA institutions), growing at an average 1.3 per cent annually over this period.

**Table 2 - Number of new entrants into HE (full time 1st year undergraduates, HEA institutions), 2012-2020**

Year	No. new entrants HE	%change
2012	41,646	
2013	41,840	▲0.5%
2014	42,393	▲1.3%
2015	43,460	▲2.5%
2016	43,569	▲0.3%
2017	44,124	▲1.3%
2018	42,794	▼3.0%
2019	43,580	▲1.8%
2020	46,195	▲6.0%

\* Source: No. of new entrants into HE from HEA at [Statistics | Higher Education Authority \(hea.ie\)](https://www.hea.ie/statistics)

## SECTION 2 – QQI certification: Key data and Provision

This section provides a range of QQI certification data for the years 2012 to 2021. Specifically, data is provided on the overall numbers of awards made; number of learners by sector, gender, age and region; and type and changes in provision (e.g. public vs private).

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**Chart 3 – QQI certification at a glance – 2012-2021, Inputs & Provision**

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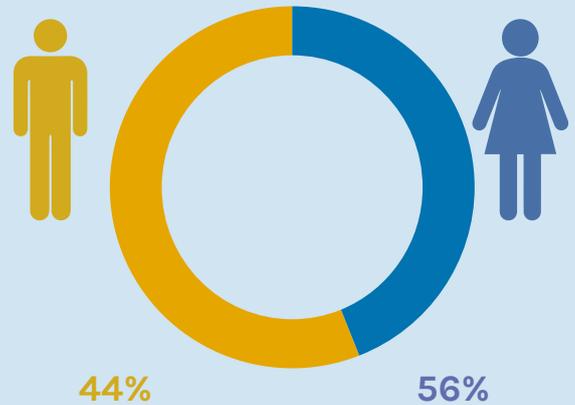
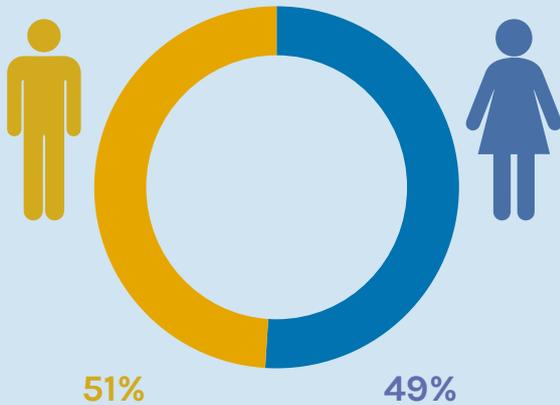
\*Learners were counted uniquely, i.e. some may have achieved multiple awards in the same year or different years, but are counted only once

# KEY DATA: 2012-2021

## QQI LEARNER PROFILE

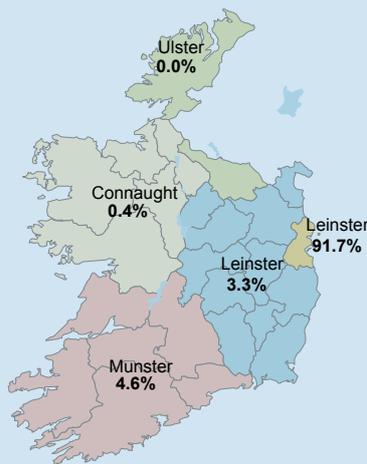
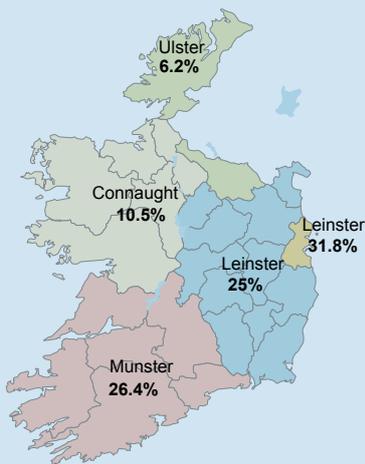
FET

FET



## WHERE THEY STUDIED

## AGE GROUP

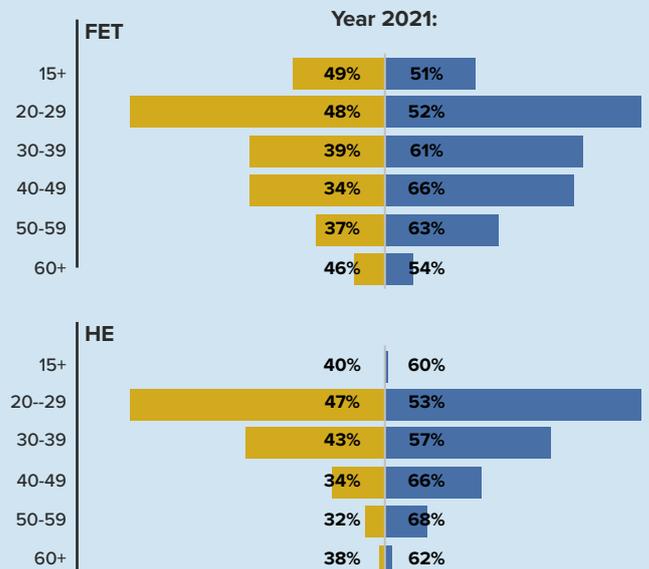


	FET	HE
15+	10.7%	0.2%
20-29	29.8%	48.8%
30-39	21.7%	29.3%
40-49	19.5%	14.7%
40-59	13.3%	6.0%
60+	4.9%	0.9%

\*This analysis is based on providers' headquarter location.

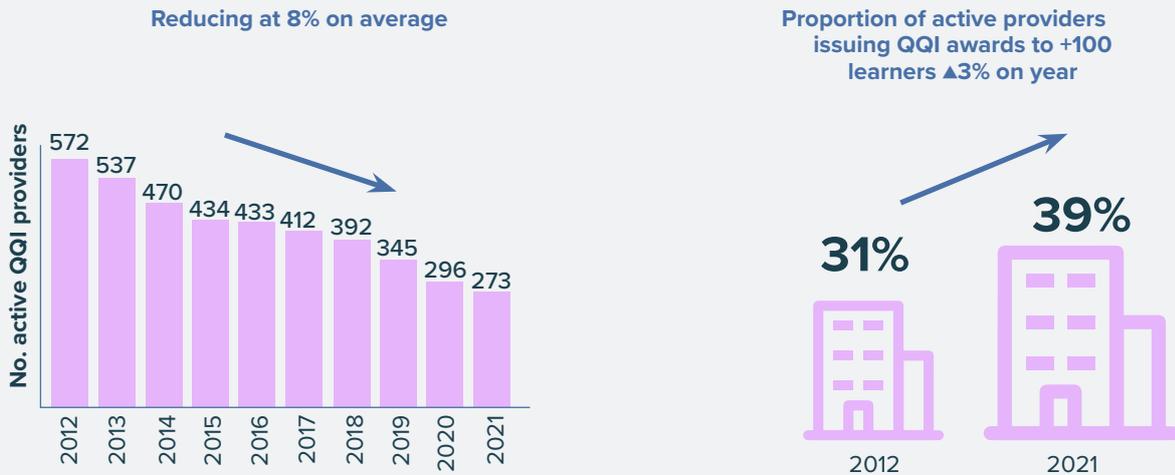
## AGE GROUPS TRENDS

	15+	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
2012	10%	31%	23%	20%	12%	4%
2013	10%	31%	22%	19%	13%	4%
2014	11%	32%	21%	18%	13%	5%
2015	10%	30%	22%	19%	14%	5%
2016	9%	28%	22%	20%	15%	6%
2017	10%	29%	22%	20%	14%	5%
2018	10%	29%	22%	20%	13%	5%
2019	10%	29%	22%	19%	13%	6%
2020	10%	32%	22%	19%	12%	5%
2021	11%	34%	22%	19%	11%	4%



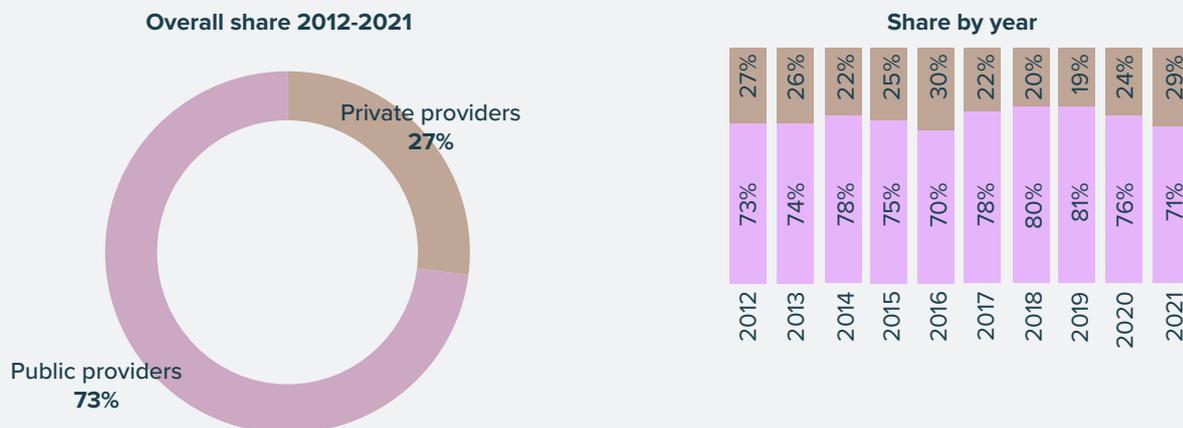
**QQI providers – overall trends**

Since 2012, the total number of active providers issuing QQI awards has been decreasing, but the remaining providers are becoming larger: in 2021 two in five issued QQI awards for 100 or more learners, an increase of 8 percentage points on 2012.



The share of QQI awards achieved by learners who attended private provision was at its highest in 2016 and 2021: almost a quarter of QQI awards were issued by private providers.

**Share QQI awards achieved by learners, type of provision**



**How provision has evolved 2012 - 2021**

**Provision type - Share of QQI awards achieved by learners, NFQ level & class of award 2012 vs 2021**

	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: #800040; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Public providers <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: #8B4513; margin-left: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Private providers											
	Major				Minor				Special Purpose			
	2012		2021		2012		2021		2012		2021	
<b>Level 1</b>	100%		99%	1%	100%		99%	1%				
<b>Level 2</b>	100%		97%	3%	99%	1%	98%	2%				
<b>Level 3</b>	99%	1%	94%	6%	94%	6%	86%	14%			100%	
<b>Level 4</b>	96%	4%	97%	3%	72%	28%	69%	31%	81%	19%	43%	57%
<b>Level 5</b>	91%	9%	91%	9%	69%	31%	77%	23%	100%	0%	95%	5%
<b>Level 6</b>	82%	18%	83%	17%	45%	55%	51%	49%	20%	80%	37%	63%
<b>Level 7</b>	2%	98%		100%		100%		100%	14%	86%		100%
<b>Level 8</b>		100%		100%		100%		100%	47%	53%		100%
<b>Level 9</b>	16%	84%		100%		100%		100%		100%		100%
<b>Level 10</b>	93%	7%	100%									
<b>TOTAL</b>	82%	18%	67%	33%	70%	30%	72%	28%	75%	25%	65%	35%

Private provision-share ▲ from 18% to 33% for Major awards, mainly NFQ levels 1 to 3 and 7 & 9 between 2012 and 2021

The overall provision-share for Minor awards didn't change much between 2012 and 2021. Private share ▲ at levels 1 to 4; ▼ at levels 5 & 6

Private provision-share ▲ from 25% to 35% for Special Purpose awards: ▲ at levels 4, 5, 7 & 8. But ▼ at level 6 from 80% in 2012 to 63% in 2021

### **SECTION 3 – QQI certification: Academic outcomes & Trends**

This section provides data on the academic outcomes for QQI graduates between 2012 and 2021. The data provided below includes information on the number of graduates by year, sector (FET or HE), award class, the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level of the award and the field of learning.

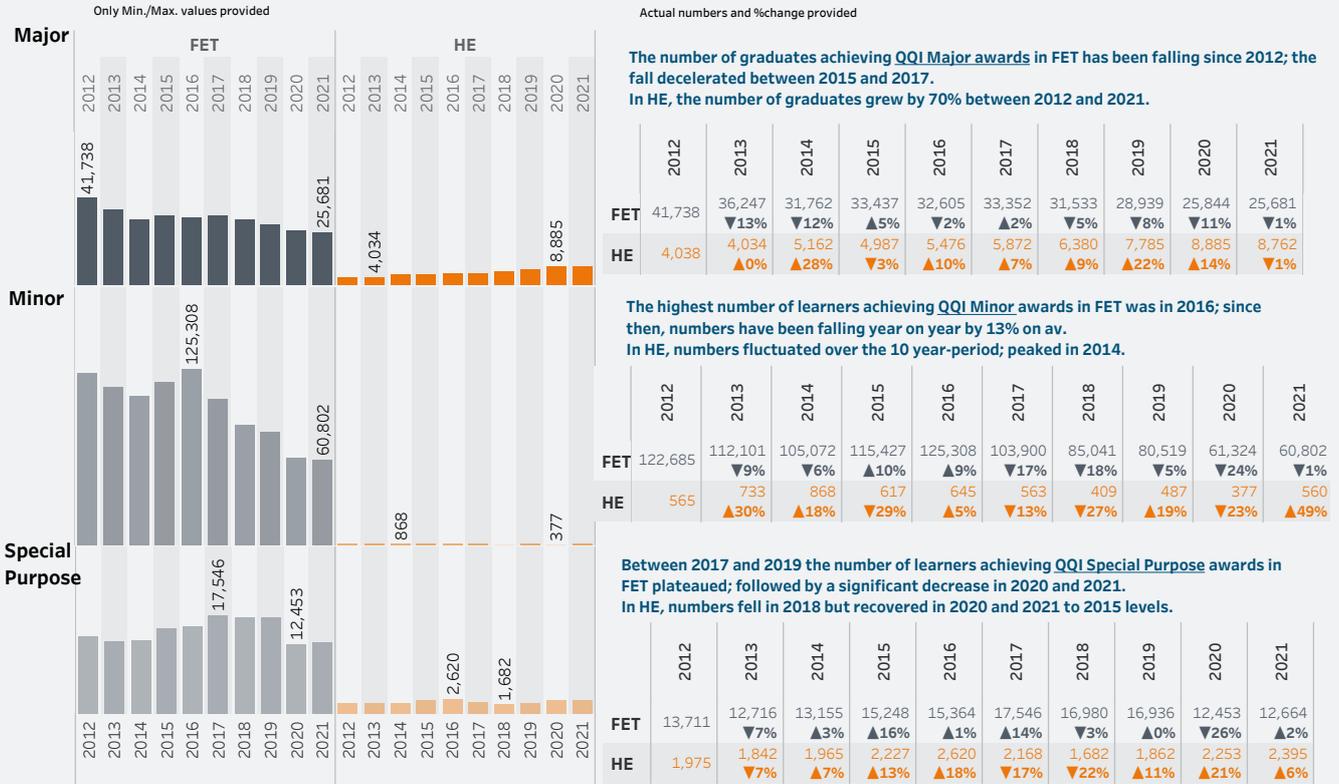
The range of data provided in the tables and charts below show a consistent decrease in the number of graduates in FET for most classes and levels of awards in recent years since 2012. This fall in demand for FET awards contrasts with a rise in the number of QQI HE awards made since 2012, growing in 2021 to higher than levels pre-COVID-19.

Data suggests three distinct periods in the general demand for FET awards:

- » A smooth downward trend from 2012 to 2015;
- » followed by a stable period from 2016 to 2018;
- » followed by a significant decrease between 2019 and 2021; likely due to COVID-related restrictions. Numbers from 2021 suggest that FET had not yet recovered from the changes brought about by COVID-19.

Section 4 shows how the need for upskilling or retraining to maintain skills for occupations and the introduction of innovative types of programmes, such as apprenticeships, shaped some of these trends.

Overall - number of QQI awards achieved by learners, Class of award 2012-2021

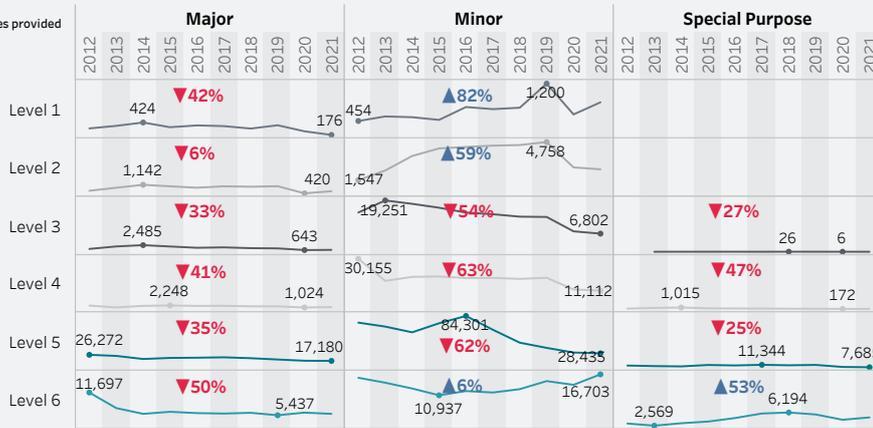


Overall - number of QQI awards achieved by learners, NFQ levels 2012-2021

Only Min./Max. values provided

FET

%change  
2012-2021



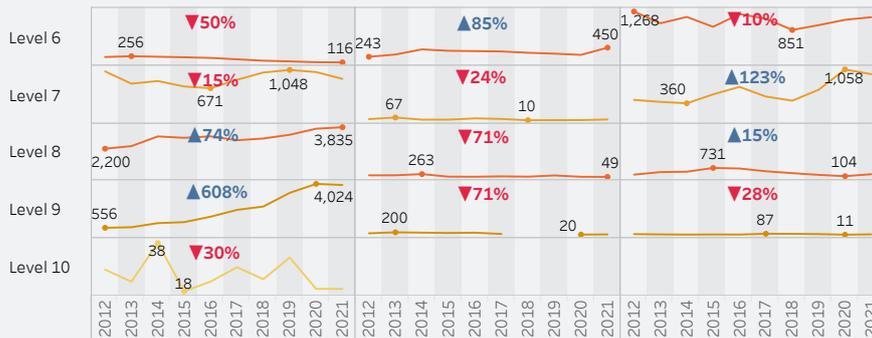
QQI awards in FET decreased between 2012 and 2021 for all class and NFQ level, except for Minor awards levels 1, 2 and 6; and for Special awards at level 6.

Number of learners achieving QQI Major awards at level 6 and Minor awards at levels 4 and 5 decreased the most in the ten years period.

Further information on some of the reasons behind the drop in the number of QQI awards at levels 5 and 6 in Section 4.

HE

%change  
2012-2021

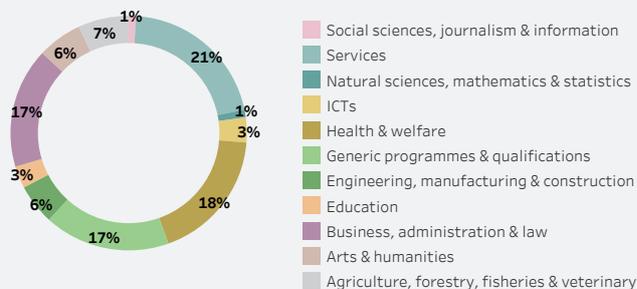


Between 2012 and 2021, the number of learners achieving QQI awards in HE has increased at levels 8 and 9 for Major awards, at level 6 for Minor awards and levels 7 and 8 for Special Purpose awards. The increases are significant, particularly for Major awards at level 9 and Special Purpose at level 7.

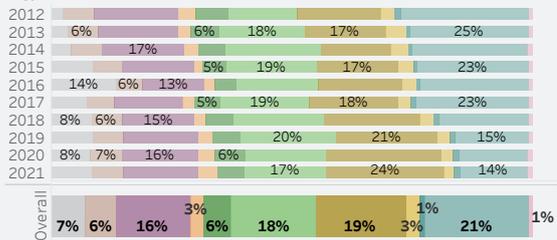
For the rest of awards, numbers decreased between 2012 and 2021. The decrease is particularly large for Major awards at level 6 and Minor awards at levels 8 and 9.

Only Min./Max values provided

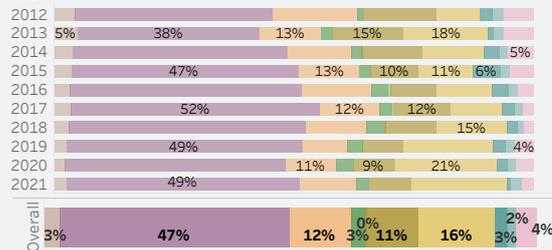
Overall - number of QQI awards achieved by learners, Field of learning 2012-2021



**FET**



**HE**



## **SECTION 4 – Drivers of demand for QQI awards – workforce development & outcomes 2012-2021**

This section provides an analysis of how the demand for QQI awards may be driven by a need to develop the workforce through upskilling or retraining. The analysis reveals the agility and capacity of the tertiary education system (specifically providers relying on QQI as their awarding body) to respond rapidly to the needs of occupations.

Through historical analysis of relevant policies that demanded workforce development, we found that QQI qualifications are relevant not only for the initial vocational educational training of school leavers but also for those already in the workforce who find themselves unqualified or underqualified for evolved occupational requirements. Once the required level of skill is achieved in the labour force, the demand for the relevant QQI awards decreases rapidly.

## CASE STUDY 1 – EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION

### IN CONTEXT

**New regulations were published:** June 2016.

They were preceded by the 2013 amendment to the Child Care (Amendment) Act where the need for qualified staff in the occupation was foreseen as an essential requirement

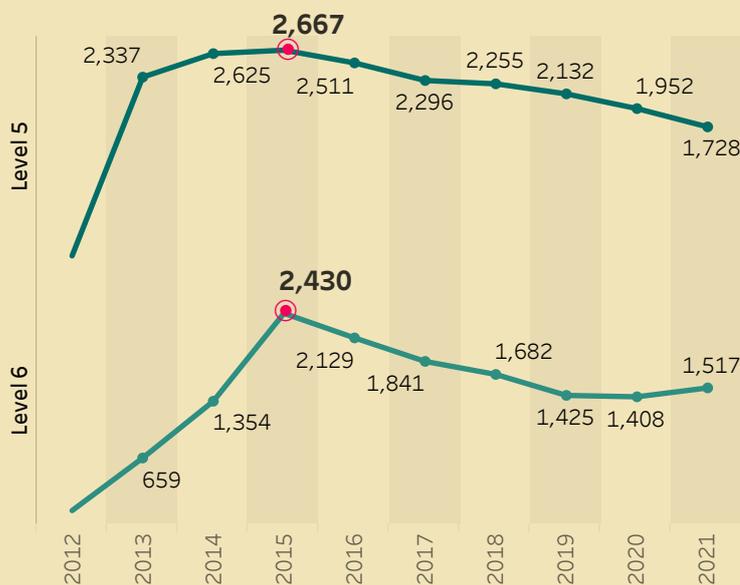
**New requirements came into operation** during 2016 and 2017 for ECCE staff

The revised [Child Care Act 1991 \(Early Years Services\) Regulations 2016](#) stated that from 31 December 2016 all staff working directly with children must hold a minimum qualification of a Major award in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) at level 5 and at level 6 for room leaders.

QQI certified over **5,000 ECCE Major awards** at levels 5 and 6 in 2015.

Numbers decreased from this peak, signalling saturation of demand and suggesting progress qualifying the workforce at these levels.

**Number of QQI Major awards made in Early Childhood Care and Education at levels 5 and 6, 2012-2021**



## CASE STUDY 2 – HEALTH CARE ASSISTANTS

### IN CONTEXT

#### Policy was initiated:

In 2016 the Department of Health and the HSE established a working group to conduct a comprehensive review of the role and function of the HCA in the health service

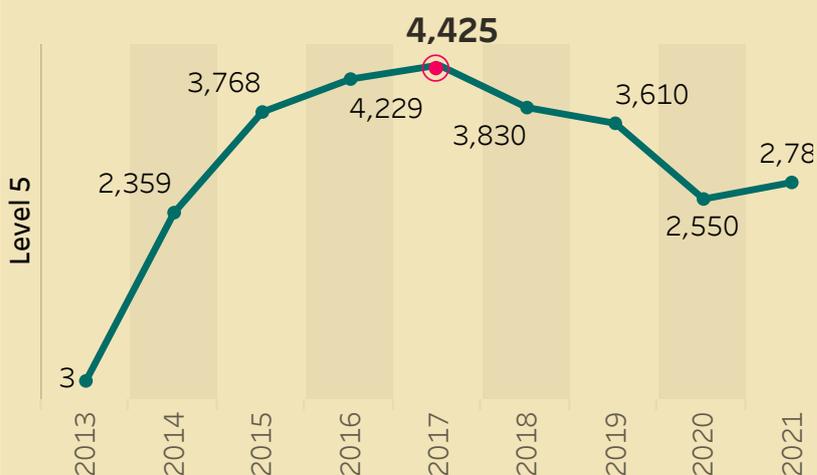
**Recommendations made by the working group in operation:** between 2016 and 2018

The [Working Group on the Review of Role and Function of Health Care Assistants \(HCA\)](#) in 2016 proposed that a QQI level 5 HCA be the minimum required qualification for entry to the role and called on staff working for the HSE to complete the qualification.

The HCA relevant qualifications identified by the W/G were QQI Major awards at level 5: Health Service Skills and Healthcare Support.

QQI certification of **HCA awards** peaked in 2017 when **4,425** were made. By 2020, numbers had stabilised to 2014 levels, signalling that most HSE staff who needed the qualification had achieved it. The Centres of Nursing and Midwifery Education played an important role in the delivery of the training. By 2020, they had ceased delivering HCA programmes.

**Number of QQI Major awards made in Health Service Skills and Healthcare Support at level 5, 2012-2021**



**CASE STUDY 3 – OCCUPATIONAL FIRST AID – CREDIT VALUE: 5**

IN CONTEXT

**New regulations were published** in Sept 2007. The Occupational First Aid Regulations were published in 1993 and amended in 2007

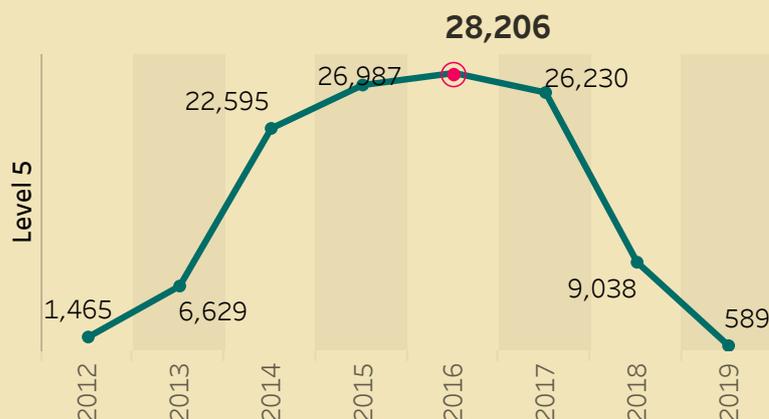
**Policy came into operation: HSA introduced the FETAC/QQI Minor award 5N1207** in Sept. 2008 as the standard for OFA training

[The Occupational First Aid Regulations Safety, Health and Welfare at Work General Applications Regulations S.I. No. 299 of 2007](#) imposed a mandatory requirement on employers to have a sufficient number of Occupational First Aiders (OFA) trained and deployed in the workplace. The OFA Certificate was valid for two years.

From 1 Sept. 2017, the Health & Safety Authority (HSA) ceased recognising the OFA as meeting the needs of occupational first aid. In 2020, QQI ceased making the award.

Annually between 2014 and 2017, QQI certified on average **26,000 Minor awards** for OFA. In 2018, the figure fell to 9,038 and in 2019 to 589 before it was discontinued.

**Number of QQI Minor awards made in Occupational First Aid at level 5, 2012-2021**



**CASE STUDY 4 – PROFESSIONAL USER OF PESTICIDES**  
– CREDIT VALUE: 5

**IN CONTEXT**

**Policy was published:**

Nov 2015, as an update to Directive 2009/128/EC on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides for European Community action to achieve a sustainable use of pesticides

**Policy came into operation:**

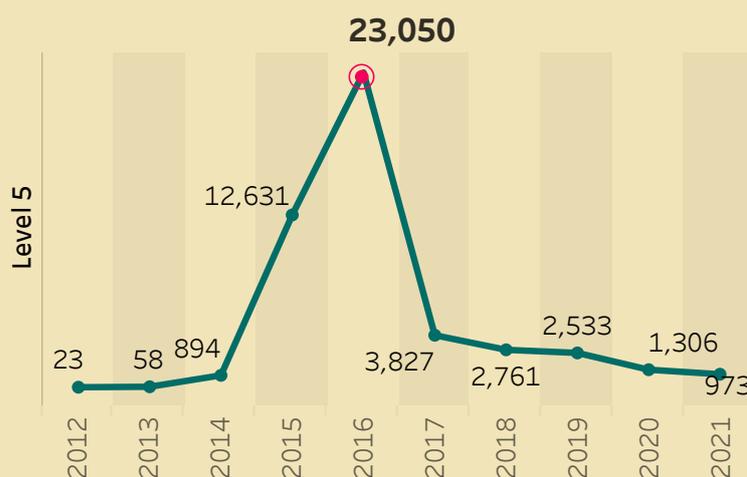
All professional users must be registered by 26th Nov. 2015. From this date, only completers of courses that meet the standard of training can register

New legislation implemented on 26th November 2015 requires pesticides users to have undertaken appropriate training and to register for the [DAFM Register of Professional Users of Pesticides](#). Only users on this Register may apply professional grade pesticides in Ireland.

The recognised standard of training for professional users of pesticides are QQI Minor awards Boom Sprayer Pesticide and Handheld Pesticide Application.

QQI certified almost **36,000 of these Minor awards** between 2015 and 2016 to enable candidates to register for the DAFM Register of Professional Users of Pesticides.

**Number of QQI Minor awards made in Boom Sprayer Pesticide and Handheld Pesticide Application at level 5, 2012-2021**



## CASE STUDY 5 – PROFESSIONAL MASTER OF EDUCATION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

### IN CONTEXT

**Policy was published:** In July 2016, the Professional Master of Education in Primary and Post-Primary Education legal requirement was introduced

**Policy came into operation:** from 2016 onwards

The Teaching Council introduced in 2016 [the Professional Master of Education – for Primary and Post-primary Education](#) as the minimum legal requirement for those wishing to work as registered teachers. Teachers who are registered under the 2009 Regulations were not affected by the introduction of the Registration Regulations 2016.

QQI certification of these awards is growing since introduced in 2016. By 2021, QQI certified almost **1,000 of these awards** (an increase of 160% since first introduced in 2016)

**Number of QQI Major awards made in Professional Master of Education in Primary and Post-Primary Education at level 9, 2012-2021**



### **New kinds of programmes: Consortia-led apprenticeships and Springboard**

In this section we outline the consortia-led apprenticeships and Springboard initiatives, where the number of QQI awards made has been on an upward trajectory each year since introduced.

## APPRENTICESHIPS – EXPANDING THE ‘EARN AS YOU LEARN’ MODEL

### IN CONTEXT

In 2013 a comprehensive review of the system of apprenticeships was published, which resulted in an [implementation plan](#), followed by the [‘Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020’](#)

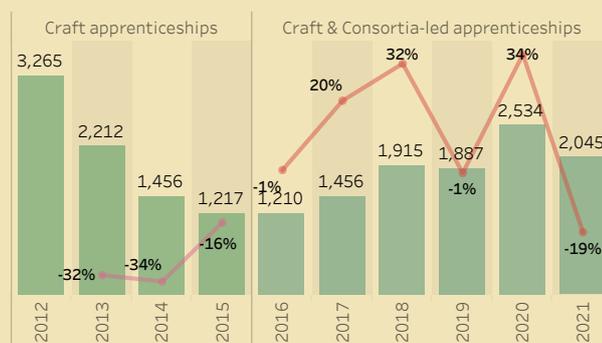
**After 2016** new formal requirements for approval of an employer’s suitability to train apprentices and for registration of apprentices were established. SOLAS is responsible for delivering on these requirements

Ireland has a long history of providing craft apprenticeships. Before 2016, most of these were focused on the construction, manufacturing and motor industries. Generally, they took four years to complete, after which a QQI Advanced Certificate (NFQ level 6) was achieved.

Consortia-led apprenticeships were first introduced in 2016. They are at least two years long and lead to awards at NFQ levels 5 to 10 and cover a wide range of industries.

Registrations for apprenticeships experienced a very rapid reduction following the financial crisis in 2008. Many apprentices were made redundant too. This led to a collapse in the numbers of **QQI awards made to apprentices**. This trend was reversed after the introduction of the Action Plan in 2016, and numbers **steadily increased** the following years – although the Covid-19 restrictions in 2020-2021 had a negative effect on numbers in 2021.

**Number of QQI Major awards achieved by apprentices, 2012-2021**



## SPRINGBOARD – UPSKILLING INITIATIVE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

### IN CONTEXT

Springboard+ began in 2011 as part of the Government's Jobs Initiative to address the unemployment crisis faced by Ireland at that time

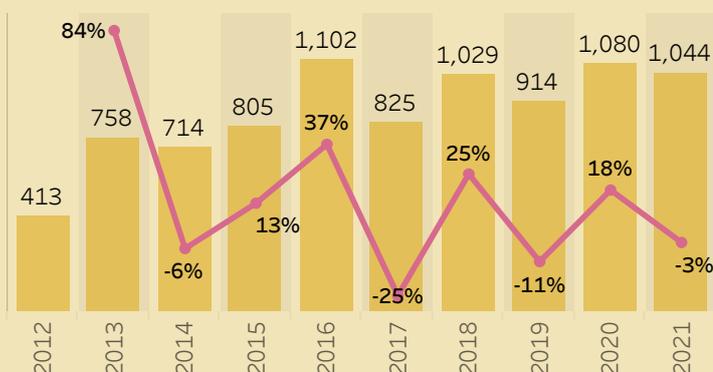
The Springboard initiative initially targeted unemployed people with a previous history of employment. In recent years, as unemployment has declined, the focus has changed to include more people in employment and those returning to the workforce

Springboard HE programmes complement core State-funded education. They are free and heavily subsidised, and provide upskilling and reskilling HE opportunities in areas of identified skill needs.

Springboard programmes are offered at levels 6 to 9 on the NFQ, by public and private HE providers. Most of the courses are part-time and last for one year or less (minor and special purpose awards), but there is an increasing number of full-time courses, mainly in the ICT field of learning.

On average, each year between 2012-2021, one in ten of all Springboard award achievers attended a QQI HE private provider (see information on total numbers at <https://springboardcourses.ie/>). The number of these QQI learners increased by 155% between 2012 and 2021.

**Number of QQI Major awards achieved by Springboard participants, 2012-2021**

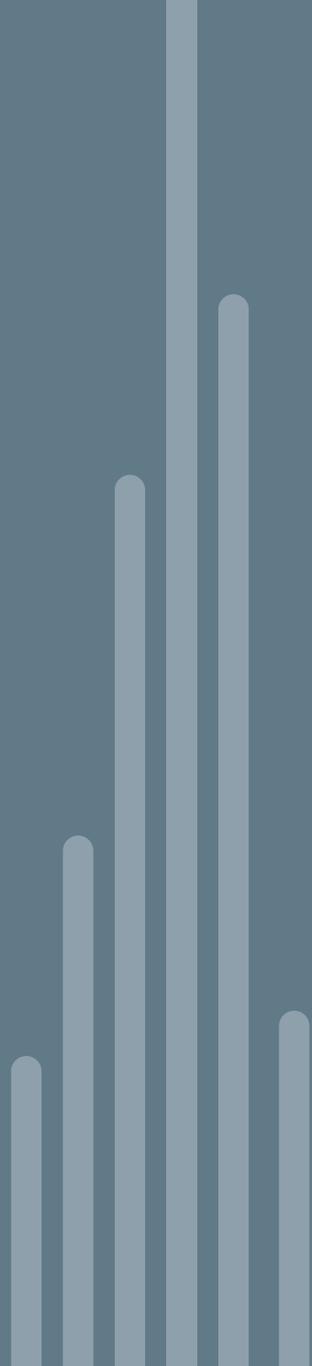


## Appendix 1 – Breakdown transitions rate from post-primary to HE, five-year period (only HEA institutions are included in the analysis).

Information provided by the Department of Education.

The rate of transfer of non-mature students from second to third level was calculated by matching PPSN numbers of post-primary pupils to HEA Student Records System entrants. The exercise was conducted to estimate the proportion of final year second level students who transfer to third level in the ensuing 5 years. It is interesting that a significant number take a year or more to transition to HE. We don't know what they do in this time. Some may spend time in FET. Some may take a year or more out of the education system to pursue other interests.

PPOD enrolment year	HEA2014	PPOD enrolment year	HEA2015	PPOD enrolment year	HEA2016	PPOD enrolment year	HEA2017	PPOD enrolment year	HEA2018	PPOD enrolment year	HEA2019	PPOD enrolment year	HEA2020
2013	49.10	2014	49.56	2015	49.57	2016	48.88	2017	49.31	2018	47.72	2019	51.88
2012	11.63	2013	9.32	2014	9.90	2015	10.20	2016	9.84	2017	10.08	2018	9.92
2011	3.81	2012	2.94	2013	2.85	2014	2.69	2015	2.50	2016	2.60	2017	2.58
2010	1.91	2011	1.35	2012	1.39	2013	1.14	2014	1.08	2015	1.03	2016	1.11
2009	1.21	2010	0.82	2011	0.68	2012	0.68	2013	0.62	2014	0.67	2015	0.59
<b>Total 5 years</b>	<b>67.66</b>		<b>64.00</b>		<b>64.39</b>		<b>63.59</b>		<b>63.35</b>		<b>62.09</b>		<b>66.09</b>



 **DATA**  
SERIES