

Progression Opportunities into Higher Education

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The Higher Education Links Scheme (HELs) systematically links named Further Education and Training (FET) awards at levels 5 and 6 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to a variety of 3rd level courses in participating higher education institutions.

This scheme operated mainly in former VEC sectors since the 1990s, and is now used more widely including across Education and Training Boards (ETB), and other further education and training (FET) provision. Awards currently offered in FET that are part of the HELs were designed within a common awards system (CAS) as part of the work of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (now dissolved).

Almost 20% of all applicants to higher education through the Central Applications Office (CAO) have a named NFQ level 5 or 6 FET award. Both the range of opportunities for learners and the numbers applying to higher education programmes grow each year.

This leaflet outlines the general arrangements for progression through the HELs on the basis of FET level 5 and 6 awards into the first year of programmes in higher education.

Application for admission to higher education programmes is made through the CAO. Places are offered by the CAO on the basis of a transparent scoring system that takes account of the quality of the learner's achievement.

The scoring system is outlined below, and relates to entry to higher education for September 2017.

The scoring system is consistently applied. However, individual programmes within higher education institutions may have specific entry requirements that help assure successful participation on entry. For this reason, in all instances, applicants should check the specific requirements of the programme of interest on the websites of the higher education institutions and the CAO, and should confirm that the programme they are following will enable them achieve the necessary requirements.

It is also important for programme providers to ensure, where progression to higher education is an outcome of their programme, that the programme is structured so as to enable course participants to meet the necessary requirements for eligibility.

The National Framework of Qualifications: Understanding Linked Awards

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other coherently. Qualifications are organised within the NFQ based on their level of knowledge, skill and competence, at one of ten levels (1-10). All qualifications in the NFQ are quality assured and therefore are recognised at home and abroad.

National Framework of Qualifications

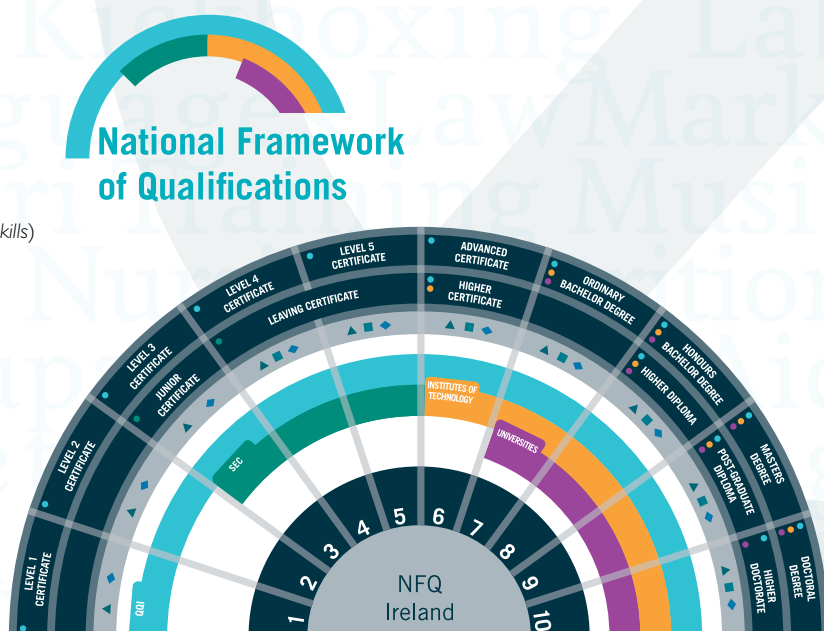
AWARDING BODIES

- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) makes awards in further and higher education and training
- SEC - State Examinations Commission (Department of Education and Skills)
- Institutes of Technology
- Universities

AWARDS IN THE FRAMEWORK

These are four classes of award in the National Framework of Qualifications:

- 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



A key purpose of the NFQ is to enable access and progression opportunities within education and training.

There are many types and sizes of qualifications included in the NFQ i.e. major, special purpose and supplemental awards.

A **major award** reflects a significant volume of learning and can be achieved for example, through successful completion of a further education and training (FET) programme. Major awards create opportunities for progression.

The framework also provides for credit accumulation systems. Major awards leading to progression opportunities in higher education and training are typically made up of minor awards, known also as components. Minor awards have specific credit values. A minimum of 120 credits, typically including some specified minor awards, is required in order to achieve a major award at levels 5 and 6.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is responsible for maintaining the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and makes awards on that framework. See www.nfq.ie to find out more.

Within further education and training, most FET awards made by QQI are part of a common awards system (CAS). Many CAS awards at levels 5 and 6 provide links to the first year of programmes in higher education; in some instances, these links have existed since the 1990s, based on predecessor awards. As these legacy award migrated to CAS, the link for both the former and 'new' award was maintained. The specific attainment requirements of a linked award are set by the relevant higher education institution.

What are the Features of Linked Awards Associated with Further Education and Training?

Linked awards that are currently offered in further education and training are CAS awards. The standards and requirements are published in awards specifications which are easily located in the QQI awards directory.

Awards are 'outcomes based', stating what learners will be able to do on achievement of the award.

Major awards include a balance of knowledge, skill and competence in both generic and vocational skills, helping to ensure continued success in learning. Minor awards are

currently the building blocks of linked CAS awards. Awards use a system of credits to facilitate the continued recognition of learning. Major awards at levels 5 and 6 have an overall specific minimum credit value of 120 credits. Credit is currently accumulated through the achievement of minor awards, which typically, though not always, have a credit value of 15. The credit value of each minor award is set out in the award specification. The scoring system within the CAO process takes account of the credit value of the minor award.

Achievement of a minimum 120 credits and of a major award is a requirement for progression through CAO. Awards at levels 4, 5 and 6 are graded Distinction, Merit or Pass, giving comprehensive feedback on achievement. The grade achieved in individual minor awards is also taken into account in the scoring system for the CAO process.

Linked awards that are currently offered in FET programmes have an award code beginning with 5M or 6M (for example 5M2102 Business Studies).

Progression opportunities associated with craft awards are typically determined on a case by case basis within individual Institutes of Technology.

HELS Requirements and Process

The Higher Education Links Scheme provides systematic progression opportunities through the CAO for applicants holding named FET awards at level 5 and 6 to the first year of higher education programmes. Application is through the CAO.

The scoring system applies to all NFQ level 5 and 6 major awards listed on the CAO and higher education institutions websites.

Applicants submit their third level applications to the CAO by 1 February annually (1 May for late applications, consult the CAO handbook www.cao.ie). In July, QQI issues the FET results directly to the CAO.



Application Requirements

- Candidates are eligible to apply for this progression route only on the basis of achieving a linked major award, which typically requires 120 credits. Scoring is on the basis of credits. Component awards or achievement of less than 120 credits do not provide eligibility
- It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that his/her further education and training provider applies to QQI for a major award prior to application to the CAO
- A major award may be achieved over more than one year. However, some institutions require that the 120 credits used for scoring must be achieved in a 'single sitting', over one certification year, i.e. between 1 August and 31 July. Programme providers and applicants should refer to the individual institutions requirements in this regard
- In addition, some programmes in higher education require achievement of specified component awards, or additional awards such as mathematics or a language. Programme providers and applicants are advised to confirm details of any specific requirements with the CAO and the Admissions Office of the individual institutions

Once eligibility is established through achievement of the major award in the required timeframe (single sitting or otherwise), results are then scored on the basis of the best achievement in component awards to a credit value of 120.

The transcript for major awards lists the award code, title, grade and date of achievement for individual components required for the major award, and for any components achieved in any other certification period. QQI forwards all results achieved by applicants to the CAO.

Scoring system

Once all of the above requirements have been met, the following system is then used to calculate the score.

Each level 5 and level 6 component is scored:

- 3.25 for a Distinction
- 2.16 for a Merit
- 1.08 for a Pass

This number is then multiplied by the individual component credit value to a maximum of 120 credits (a total of 390 points).

It may be easiest to multiply the individual component credit value by 3 for Distinction, 2 for Merit, and 1 for Pass, multiplying by 13 and dividing by 12. Visit the HELS page on the QQI website for more information and useful examples of this scoring system in practice. Alternatively use the free online points calculator at www.careersportal.ie/qqi/

Which Higher Education Institutes Use the Scheme?

Universities, Institutes of Technology and some independent Higher Education Institutions offer places through HELS, but in slightly different ways. Universities only offer places from a reserved quota for FET award holders. Institutes of Technology generally accept applications based on any CAS or legacy NFQ level 5 and 6 award, in open competition with Leaving Certificate candidates. However they may also offer places through reserve quotas for QQI applicants only, for example, to some Nursing Degree programmes. Within institutions, some provide access to a wide range of programmes based on *any* CAS level 5 or 6 major award (achievement of 120 credits), while for other programmes there are *specified* major awards.

For details of participating institutions please view www.cao.ie



Treatment of Legacy Awards

Legacy awards are those which precede the introduction of the CAS and which were previously linked i.e. conferred eligibility for application to programmes in higher education institutions. Most, but not all, legacy awards were replaced by awards that are part of CAS. For example, the CAS award 5M2208 Design replaces ADESX Design. Both give eligibility for entry.

Some learners present with pre-CAS awards that were never associated with the HELS, awarded by a range of former awarding bodies. There is no mechanism through HELS for scoring such awards.

In most cases, applicants with legacy, other major awards, and other achievements are eligible to apply to higher education through mature student applicant routes. However, holders of legacy awards may also apply through the CAO to the first year of programmes on the basis of former links through HELS, availing of systematic progression opportunities. Linked legacy awards are named on www.cao.ie.

The scoring system applies to all NFQ level 5 and 6 major awards listed on the CAO and higher education institutions websites, including those previously linked.

Carrying Credit

Many learners have achieved minor awards working towards a major award over an extended period of time.

Existing relevant minor awards (which are not part of CAS) are recognised by QQI for the purposes of achieving a CAS major award for a period of up to five years from the date of certification. FET Providers manage that process for learners through granting exemptions. Minor awards recognised for exemptions that are eligible for scoring within HELS must have been part of previously linked legacy awards. Read "Progression to Higher Education Courses - Linked Awards" on the HELS page of QQI.ie or visit www.cao.ie.

Legacy minor awards are converted to the scoring system applied to CAS awards (in other words credit values of less than 5 are multiplied by 15). For example, G20001 Communications (with a credit value of 1), with a Distinction grade (scored 3.25) is scored as $(1 \times 15) \times 3.25 = 48.75$

See the HELS page on the QQI website for more information and useful examples of this scoring system in practice.

Alternatively use the free online points calculator at www.careersportal.ie/qqi/

Links to Nursing Degree Programmes

The following level 5 certificates are among those that generally (though not always) enable links to Nursing Degree programmes:

- Nursing Studies (5M4349 / DCHSN)
- Healthcare Support (5M4339 / DHSXX)
- Community and Health Services (5M4468 / DCHSX)
- Community Care (5M2786 / DCHCC)

In all cases, applicants must have achieved distinction grades including in the following:

- Anatomy and Physiology (5N0749 / D20001)
- Introduction to Nursing (5N4325 / D20012)
- Human Growth and Development (5N1279 / D20032) or Biology (5N2746 / C20006)

For details please contact the Admissions Office of the individual higher education institutions or visit www.cao.ie or www.nmbi.ie/Home.

Applicants must check information on the CAO and on the higher education provider's website. The basis for application to different higher education institutions Nursing Degree programmes is sometimes specific to one award and/or to specific attainment in specified awards.

Note: Whilst FET applicants may meet the requirements outlined above and be eligible to apply for a Nursing Degree programme, due to the very small number of places available*, a random selection system is operated by the CAO similar to that for Leaving Certificate applicants. For details, consult the CAO handbook on www.cao.ie.

Advanced Entry

New progression routes continue to emerge for level 5 Certificate and level 6 Advanced Certificate holders.

Some awards formerly made by FÁS, Teagasc and Fáilte Ireland which are placed on the National Framework of Qualifications, can enable progression to 3rd level courses outside of the HELS. Applicants are always advised to check with the Admission Officers and with the web information of both CAO and the relevant higher education institution.

*CAO publish the [limited number of places](#) for Nursing programmes available to FET applicants in the different institutions

However, a number of level 6 awards (Advanced Certificates) also provide enhanced progression into year two of higher education programmes where the higher programme is in a similar discipline. This mechanism is known as 'advanced entry'. In some cases, a candidate with a level 6 award may be offered exemptions from elements of programmes within the first year. This is at the discretion of the higher education institution.

Application for advanced entry is not made through the Links Scheme.

Application processes vary, reflecting the organic nature of the development of arrangements between further and higher education providers. Applications are made through the CAO, or by direct application to the institution by the candidate, or through using a 'local link' which may be a specific arrangement between a further education and training provider and a higher education institution.

The Advanced Certificate (Craft) is not part of the common awards system and therefore is not part of HELS.

FAQ

Does the Advanced Certificate - Craft have progression links?

Holders of the Advanced Certificate - Craft can progress to courses at levels 6, 7 and 8 in some higher education institutions via specifically named awards. Some higher education institutions offer access to levels 6, 7 and 8 courses via any Advanced Certificate - Craft and do not specify a named craft. In addition to the Advanced Certificate - Craft, some institutions may have additional requirements, such as an interview and/ or preparatory progression programmes depending on the planned progression route.

Do Level 6 major awards give advanced entry in some instances?

Yes. Some programmes leading to level 6 Advanced Certificates give eligibility to apply for advanced entry to second year of programmes in higher education. Application for advanced entry is made directly to the higher education institution and/or through the CAO. Check the website of the relevant higher education institution and www.cao.ie for information.

Do legacy awards that are not FETAC or NCVA awards give access to higher education through CAO?

The HELS only provides for systematic links through CAO for QQI FET awards at levels 5 and 6, and former linked FETAC or NCVA major awards. However, higher education institutions will consider the overall achievement of any applicant as part of mature student application processes.

Essentially the revised scoring maintains the existing relationships between awards. For more information please read the document "New Common Points Scale for Entry into Higher Education from 2017" available on www.transition.ie.

Note: It is the responsibility of Applicants to confirm all progression opportunities and details of course entry requirements, including any additional requirements, with the Admission Office of individual institutions and on the on the CAO website www.cao.ie.

Glossary

CAO	Central Applications Office
CAS	Common Awards System introduced by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (now dissolved)
Component	Component, or minor awards are an award type reflecting achievement of a coherent set of learning outcomes, typically small in volume
FET	Further Education and Training
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HELS	Higher Education Links Scheme
Legacy	Legacy awards are those which precede the introduction of the CAS and, in this context, which were previously linked (i.e. conferred eligibility for application) to programmes in higher education institutions
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
Major	Major awards are an award type in the NFQ, reflecting substantial learning achievement
Minor	Minor awards are components of major awards within CAS, and are also known as components
Single Sitting	Used by higher education institutions to describe achievement within one certification year, i.e. between 1 August and 31 July

