QQI - an integrated Quality Assurance and Qualifications agency for tertiary education in Ireland

Dr. Padraig Walsh, Chief Executive Officer, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

Presentation to MAB 30th Anniversary Conference,
Budapest, Hungary, 11th July 2024

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Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) established 2012

- Formed by a merger of 4 legacy agencies:

  - **FETAC** (Further Education and Training Awards Council) – responsible for external quality assurance, programme validation and certification in Vocational Education and Training
  - **HETAC** (Higher Education and Training Awards Council – responsible for external quality assurance, programme validation and certification in Higher Education – public Institutes of Technology (Universities of Applied Sciences) and private higher education providers
  - **IUQB** (Irish Universities Quality Board) – responsible for external institutional-level quality assurance of public universities
  - **NQAI** (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland) – responsible for the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ) and NARIC Ireland

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QQI functions (84 staff - annual budget of €12m)

- External quality assurance of public universities and private higher education providers
- Programme validation and certification of private higher education providers
- External quality assurance, programme validation and certification of public Education and Training Boards (further education and training – FET/VET)
- External quality assurance, programme validation and certification of private FET providers

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QQI functions (84 staff - annual budget of €12m)

- Maintenance and promotion of the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ)
- NARIC Ireland – provide recognition ‘advice’ for Irish and overseas qualifications
- National Europass Centre
- Awarding (from 2024) of International Education Mark (*TrustedEd Ireland*) to private English Language Education providers and higher education providers
- Responsible for monitoring academic integrity – guarding against contract cheating

Presentation

1. Quality Assurance at QQI

2. Qualifications at QQI

Quality Assurance at QQI

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Summary of Irish Higher Education

Population of Ireland - 5.1m in 2023

- 7 public universities (c. 145,000 students in 2023)
- 5 Technological universities (c. 91,500 students)
- 1 private medical and health sciences university (c. 5,000 students)
- 2 Institutes of Technology (c. 7,000 students)
- 3 teacher training/arts colleges (c. 8,000 students)
- c. 25 small private higher education colleges (c. 25,000 students)

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Ireland – tertiary attainment

OECD – Education at a glance 2023

- In Ireland, the level of tertiary attainment among 25-64 year-olds is one of the highest among OECD and partner countries with available data. (54.4 %, rank 3/46, 2022)
- In Ireland, the level of tertiary attainment among 25-34 year-olds is one of the highest among OECD and partner countries with available data. (63.3 %, rank 4/45, 2022)
- In Ireland, the share of 25-34 year-olds who attained a bachelor's or equivalent tertiary education degree is one of the highest among countries with available data. (36 %, rank 4/44, 2022)
- In Ireland, the share of 25-34 year-olds who attained a doctoral or equivalent tertiary education degree is one of the highest among countries with available data. (1.5 %, rank 4/35, 2022)

QQI QA functions in HE and FET

- Public universities (7) are self-accrediting: QQI is responsible for periodic institutional quality review
- Public technological universities (5) are self-accrediting: QQI is responsible for periodic institutional quality review
- Public institutes of technology (2) are self-accrediting: QQI is responsible for periodic institutional quality review
- Private higher education providers (c. 25) do not have their own awarding powers: QQI is responsible for programme validation and certification and periodic institutional quality review

- Public Education and Training Boards (16) (further education and training – FET/VET) do not have their own awarding powers: QQI is responsible for programme validation and certification and periodic institutional quality review
- Private FET/VET (c. 170) providers do not have their own awarding powers: QQI is responsible for programme validation and certification and periodic institutional quality review

HE institutional quality review cycles

Cycle1 (EUA-IEP) 2004-05: IUQB commissioned EUA IEP to undertake quality reviews of the 7 public universities

Cycle 2 (IRIU) 2009-12: IUQB undertook Institutional review of the 7 public universities

Cycle 2: 2008-12: HETAC undertook institutional review of 13 institutes of technology and c. 20 private HE providers

Cycle 3: (CINNTE) 2017-24: QQI undertook/are undertaking institutional reviews of the 7 public universities, 1 private Medical University, 1 National University, 6 institutes of technology, 5 technological universities and the 4 largest private HE providers

CINNTE cycle

Institutional quality review of *RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences*

Published in March 2024

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QQI monitoring

- QQI undertakes institutional review of self-accrediting universities every 7 years or so

- To compensate for this infrequency, QQI undertakes additional monitoring of universities via:

  - Annual Quality Reporting (two–part report – compliance and enhancement, published on QQI website)

  - Bi-annual Quality Dialogue Meetings (QQI visits the universities and meets with senior management every two years)

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Analysis of Quality Assurance at QQI

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QQI research and innovation

- QQI established a separate Research and Innovation Division (RID) in 2021 (with 3 full-time staff)

- QQI commissions, for example, an annual synoptic overview of the AQRs of the public higher education institutions and publishes this as part of our *QQI insights* reports

ENQA co-ordinated targeted review of QQI against the ESG:

selected theme: thematic analysis

June 2024

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QQI Insights publication

Quality in Irish Higher Education Institutions

An analysis of the annual quality reports from 23 Irish public and private higher education institutions, including a series of case studies

2023

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Conventional analysis of QQI external QA processes

Thematic analysis of the first 7 institutional review reports of the CINNTE cycle 2018-20

Published in 2021

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Qualifications at QQI

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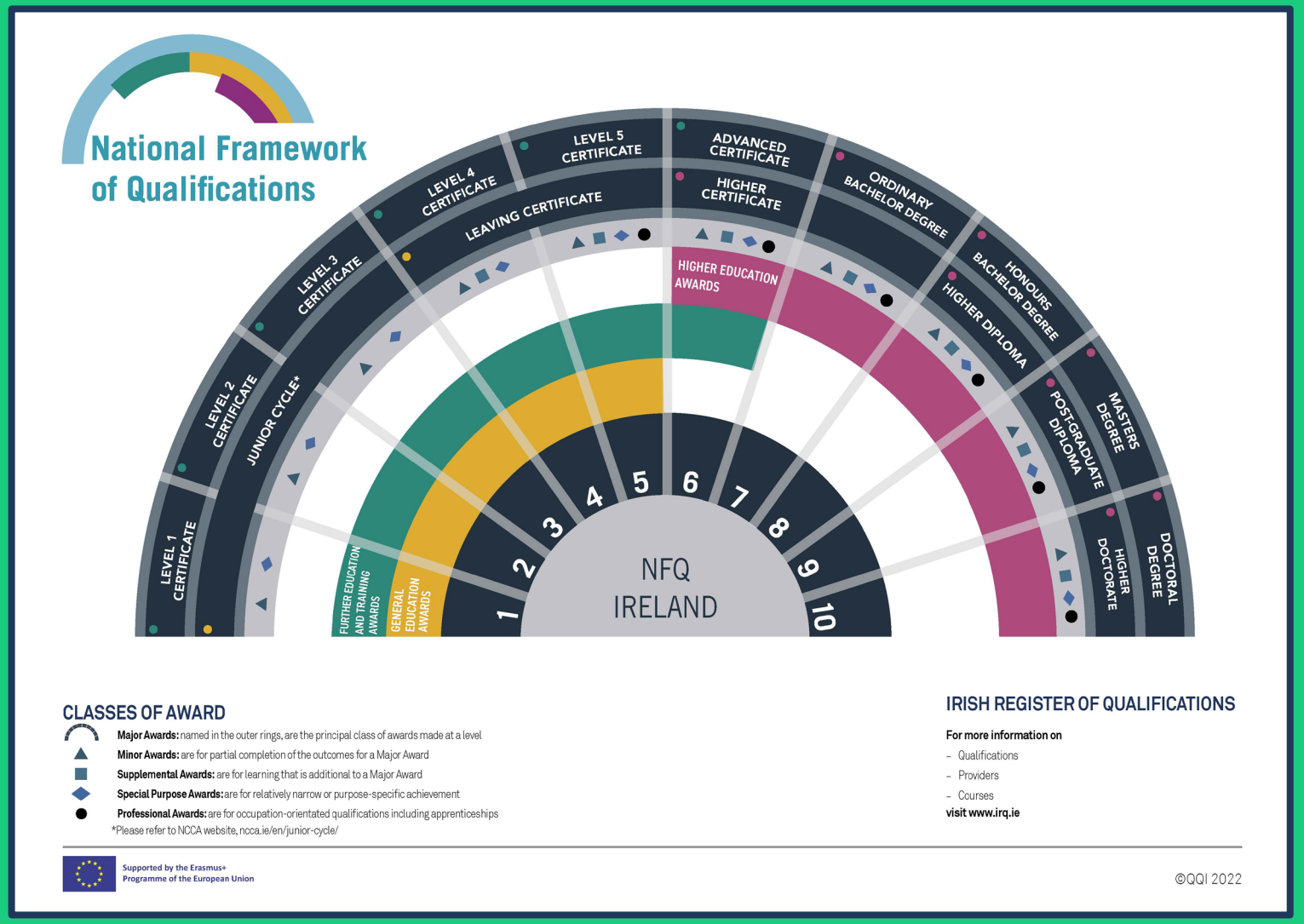
Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

- QQI is responsible for the maintenance, promotion, further development and implementation of the NFQ
- All public tertiary (HE and VET) education institutions are required to have their qualifications included in the NFQ
- The NFQ, from its inception, has contained **Major awards** – Bachelor, Master's, Doctoral degrees but also contains smaller awards termed **Minor, Supplemental and Special-Purpose Awards**

10-level Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) – established 2003

One of the first frameworks to be established



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Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

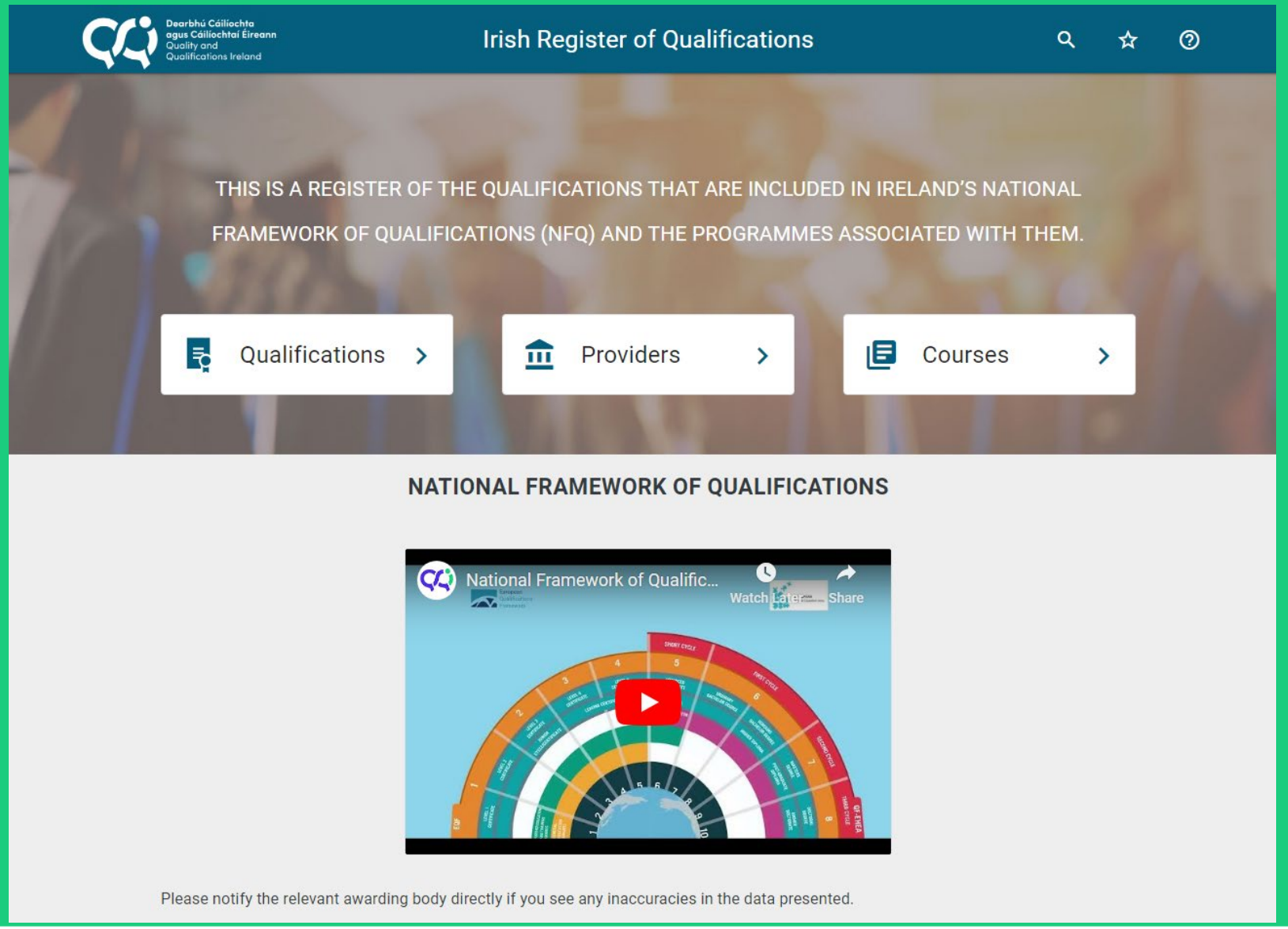
- All **Minor awards** are single modules which can be completed and certified individually. All minor awards are linked to a major award and can be stacked towards gaining a major award.
- **Supplemental awards** are awards that recognise learning concerned with updating, upskilling or continuing education and training
- **Special Purpose awards** are developed for specific areas of learning that have a narrow scope
- Minor, supplemental and special purpose awards therefore already share characteristics of what are now termed **micro-credentials**

Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ.ie)

- All programmes (major and non-major) that lead to awards in the NFQ are included in the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) which is maintained by QQI
- The IRQ is searchable so that, for instance, all NFQ higher education awards of ≤30 ECTS credits (the domain of ‘micro-credentials’) can be viewed in the IRQ

The Irish Register of Qualifications

www.IRQ.ie



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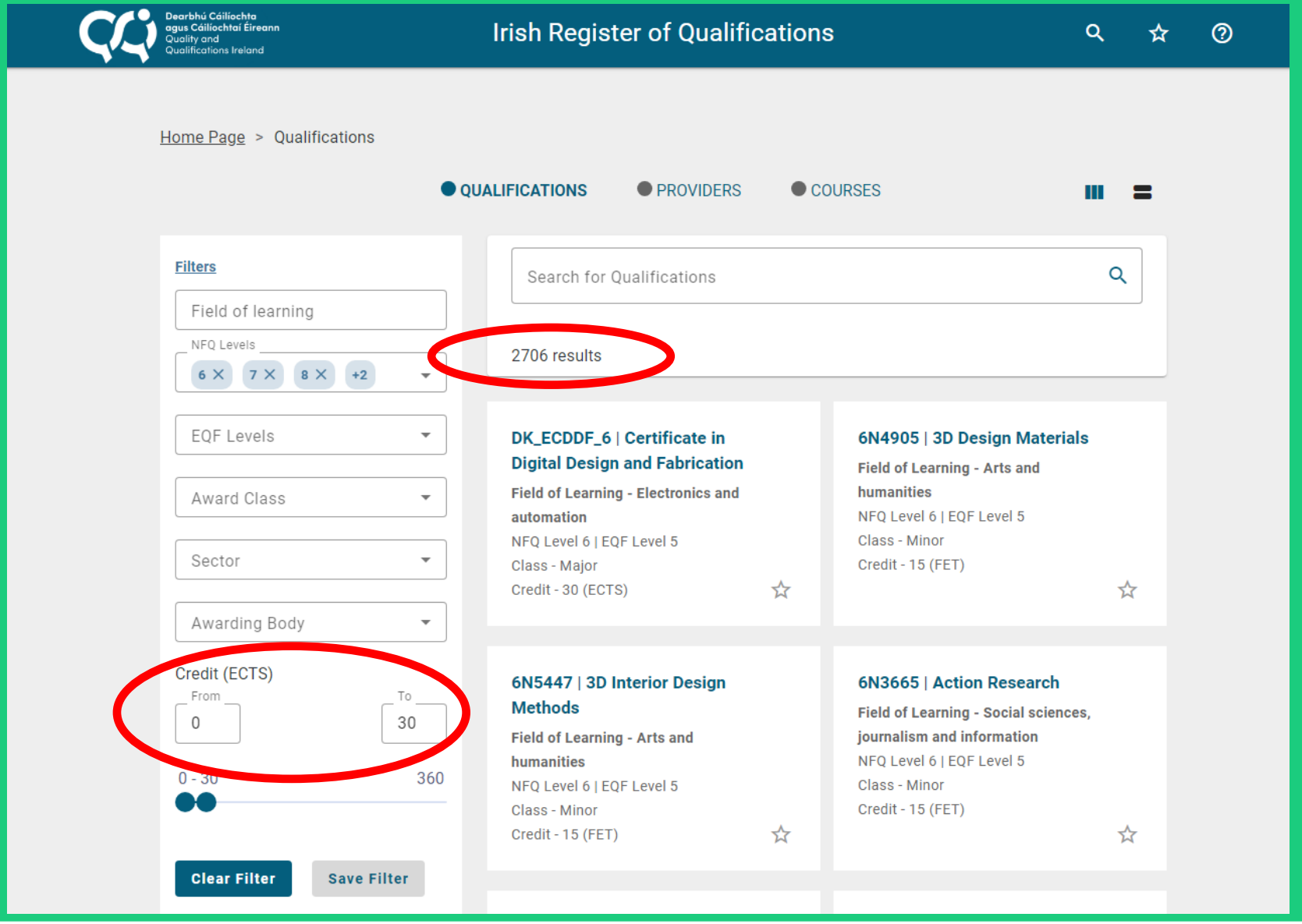
Micro-credentials in the NFQ

- All qualifications in the NFQ have a level associated with them
- This allows the learner to understand how the learning in a micro-credential compares to a Bachelor degree at Level 8 in the 10-level NFQ
- The volume of learning, say 10 ECTS credits, allows the learner to compare that with a 4-year Bachelor degree which is 240 ECTS
- All qualifications in the NFQ (including micro-credentials) must undergo quality assurance procedures according to the ESG (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area)



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Qualifications Recognition at QQI

The NARIC Ireland database has over 1700 qualifications from more than 160 countries and allows a student to download a comparability statement that compares their academic qualification to an Irish qualifications of a similar major award type and level on the Irish NFQ.

A comparability statement only provides advice and is not a legal document.

Decisions on recognising a qualification for employment or educational purposes are made by the individual employer or education provider admissions staff.

For professional qualifications, decisions on recognition are made by the appropriate Irish professional statutory regulatory body authority for the relevant profession.

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Analysis of Qualifications at QQI

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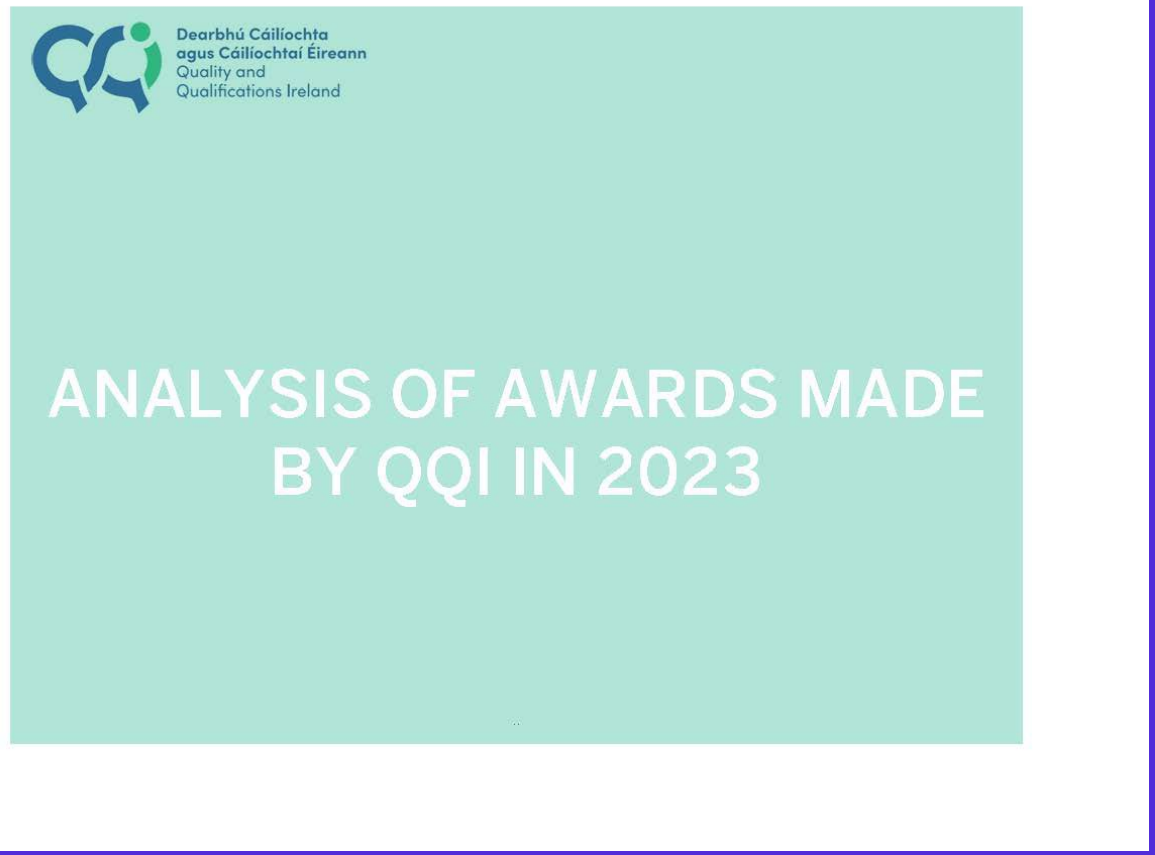
QQI Certification Data and Analysis for 2023

Published March 2024



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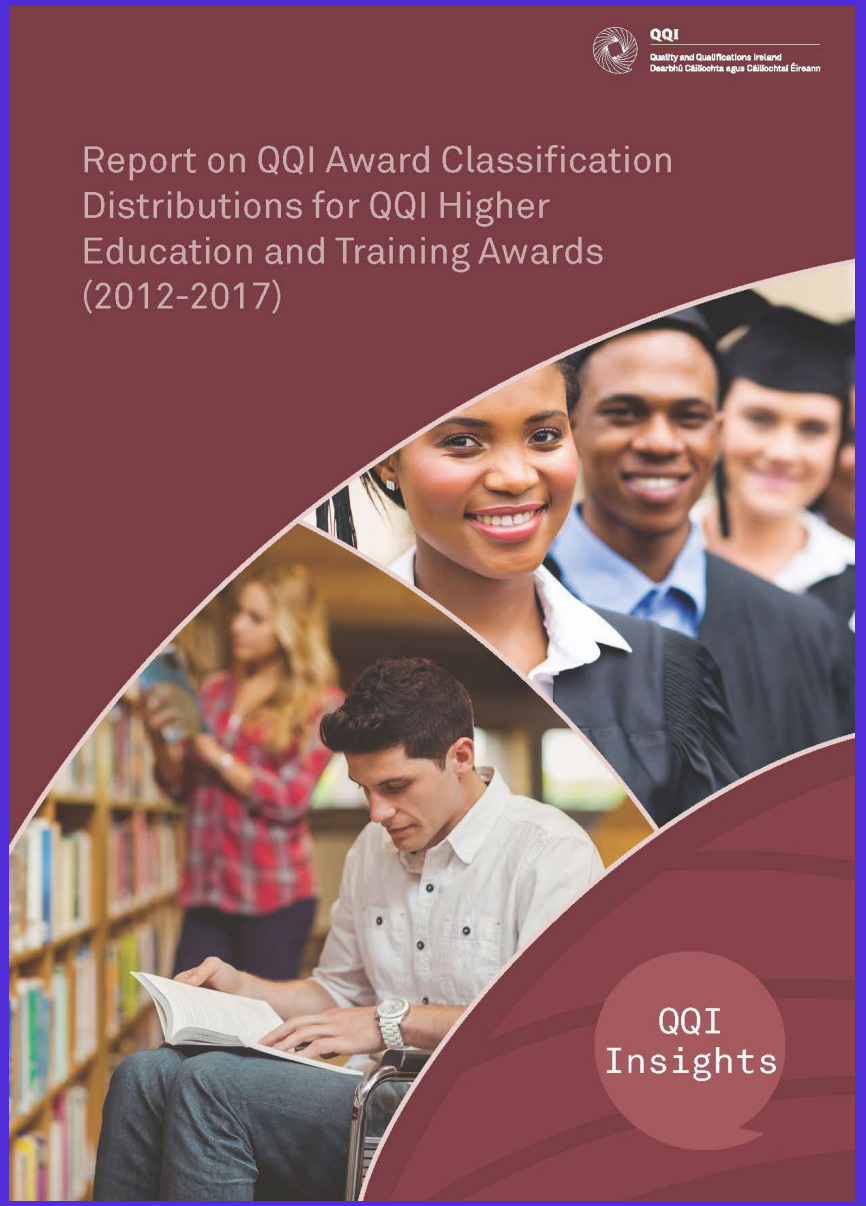
QQI Insights publication

Report on QQI Award Classification Distributions for QQI higher education awards (2012-2017)

2019



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Academic Integrity at QQI

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National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN)

The National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) is a peer-driven network, established in November 2019 by QQI.

The Network is focused on actively supporting higher education institutions to:

- effectively engage with the challenges presented by academic misconduct
- embed a culture of academic integrity among providers
- develop national resources and tools for providers to address the challenges presented by academic misconduct.

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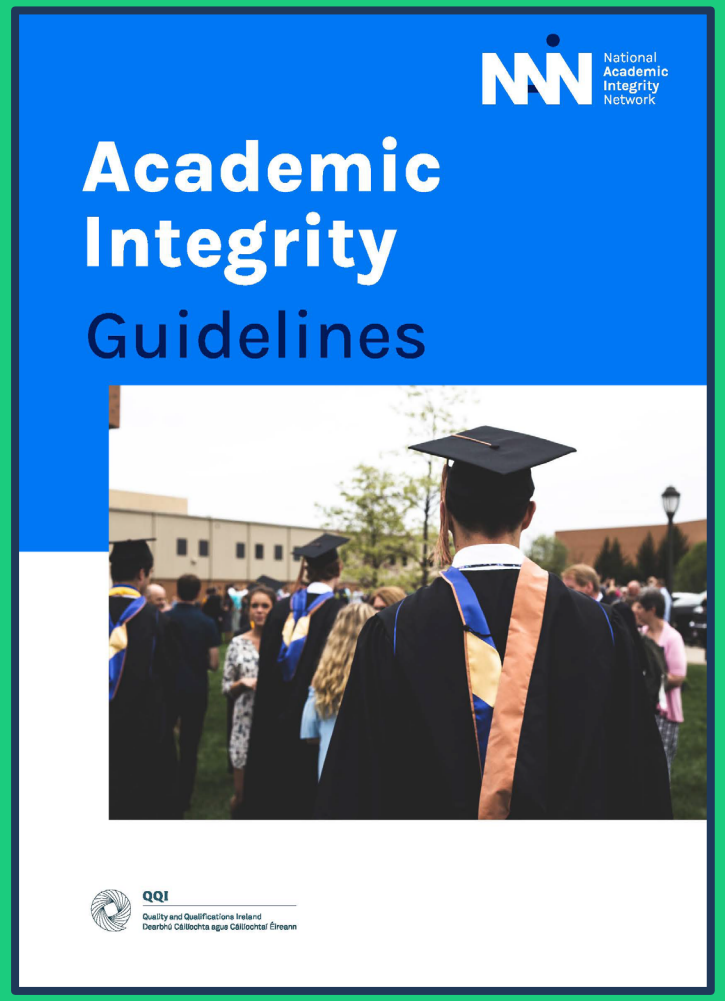
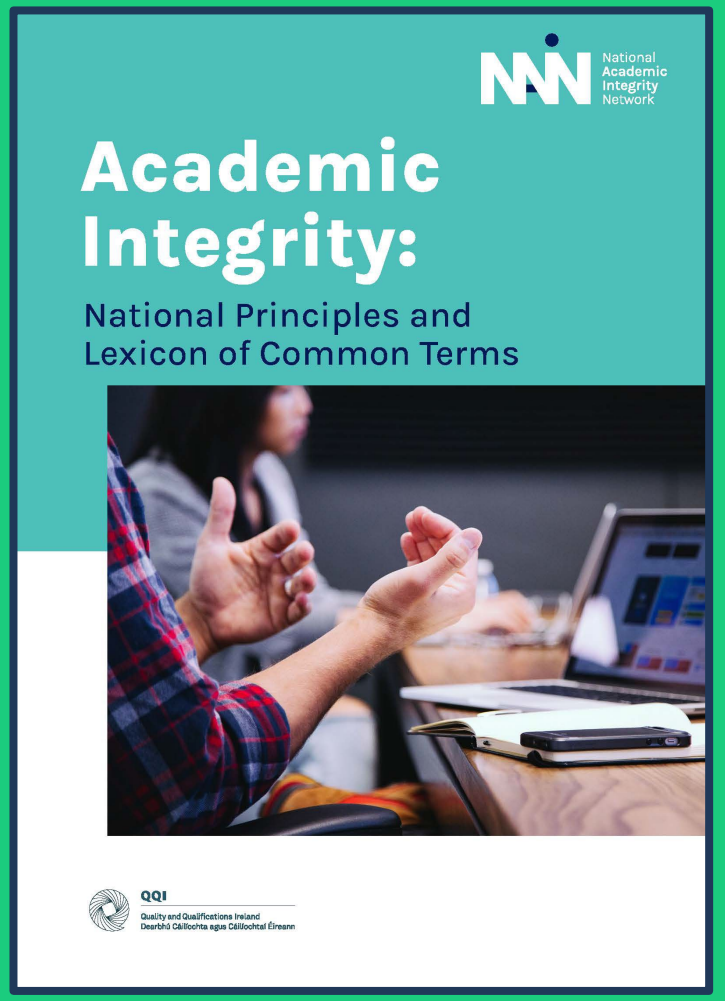
NAIN resources





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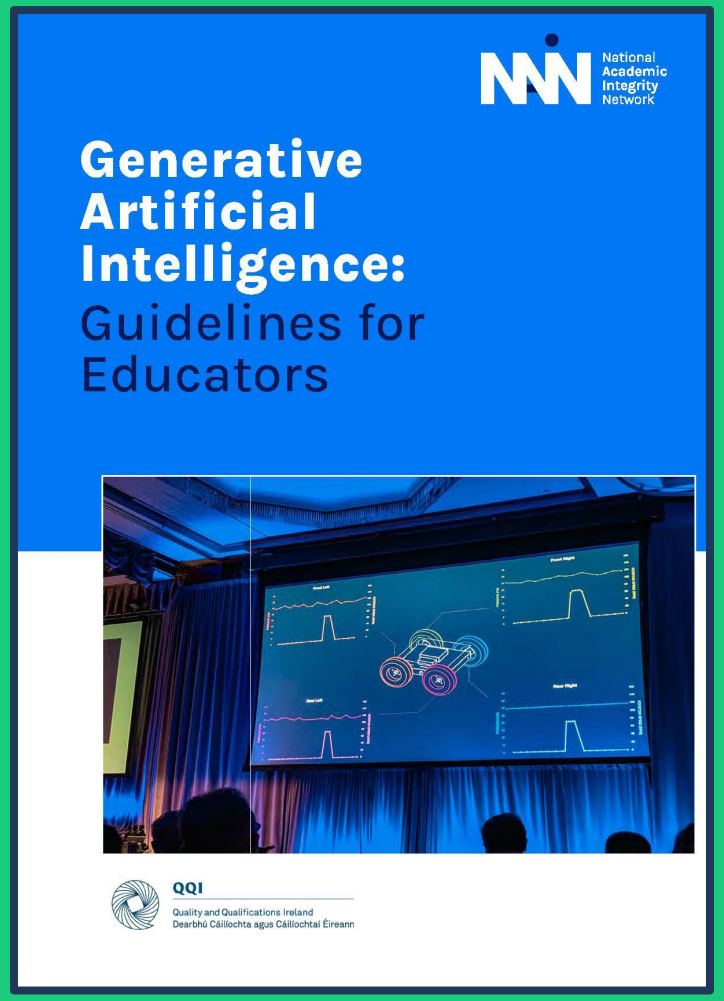
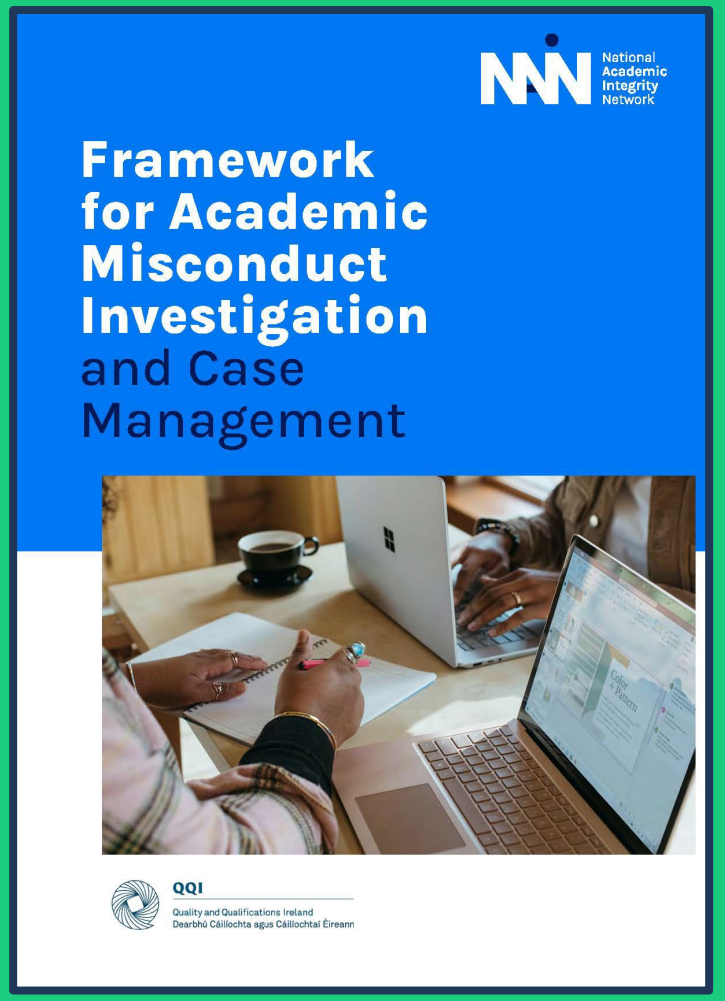
NAIN resources





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Global Academic Integrity Network GAIN

The Global Academic Integrity Network is a consortium of education quality and integrity agencies worldwide joining forces to fight the rise of commercial academic cheating services targeting students.

Founded by QQI and Australia's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), the network aims to tackle commercial cheating operations, protecting students, qualifications and the integrity of national education systems.

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Thank You