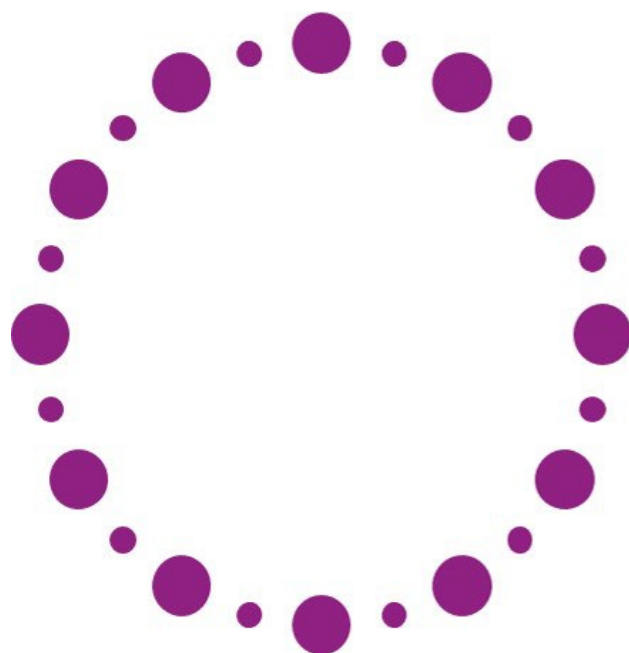


census
2021



Main statistics for Northern Ireland
Statistical bulletin
Qualifications

21 March 2023



Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Key points.....	4
3. Highest level of qualification	5
3.1. Highest level of qualification – Census 2021	5
3.2. Highest level of qualification – Change over time	6
3.3. Highest level of qualifications by Local Government District – Census 2021	8
4. Associated outputs	10
5. Further information	10
5.1. Quality of the results.....	10
5.2. Confidentiality	10
5.3. Comparability with previous censuses.....	11
5.4. Supporting material	11
5.5. More details	11
5.6. Copyright	12

1. Introduction

On 21 March 2023, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) released further results from Census 2021, which was held on 21 March 2021. The statistics released provide a profile of the Northern Ireland population covering:

- **household relationships:** household composition, living arrangements, marital and civil partnership status
- **sexual orientation**
- **labour market:** economic status (e.g. in employment, unemployed, economically inactive), hours worked, industry and occupation
- **qualifications:** highest level of qualifications gained
- **place of work or study:** distance to place of work or study and method of travel
- **communal establishments:** establishments providing supervision of residential accommodation (e.g. student halls of residence, hospitals, care homes)
- **migration:** address one year before the census, and year of arrival for those born outside Northern Ireland

The information covers Northern Ireland and the 11 Local Government Districts (LGDs).

This report relates to **qualifications**. For display purposes, figures are appropriately rounded but full figures are available in the [Census 2021 tables](#) on the NISRA website.

2. Key points

The key points relating to the **qualifications** topic are as follows:

- Around 1 in 3 adults (32.1%, or 486,300 people aged 16 and over) indicated that their highest level of qualification was degree/NVQ 4 or above (Level 4 and above), while just under one-quarter (23.8%, or 360,600) had no qualifications.
- The highest level of qualifications of our population has changed over the decade between Census 2011 and Census 2021, with the percentage of people with no qualifications falling (from 29.1% in 2011 to 23.8% in 2021) and the percentage of people with degree level or above increasing markedly (from 23.6% to 32.1%).
- The percentage of people aged 16 and over with no qualifications ranged from 17.9% in Lisburn & Castlereagh to 28.4% in Derry City & Strabane, with the percentage having degree level or above qualifications ranging from 28.8% in Mid & East Antrim to 39.2% in Lisburn & Castlereagh.

3. Highest level of qualification

3.1. Highest level of qualification – Census 2021

In Census 2021, people aged 16 years and over were asked to record any qualifications they had achieved. This included academic qualifications, vocational qualifications, apprenticeships, and professional qualifications. People were also asked to include equivalent qualifications gained anywhere outside Northern Ireland. The information was used to calculate the highest level of qualification that an individual had attained, and is categorised into the groups shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Highest level of qualification group detail (Census 2021)

Highest level of qualification group	Description
No qualifications	No qualifications
Level 1	1 to 4 GCSEs, O levels, CSEs (any grades); 1 AS Level; NVQ level 1; or equivalent
Level 2	5 or more GCSEs (A*-C or 9-4), O levels (passes) CSEs (grade 1); 1 A level, 2-3 AS Levels; NVQ level 2, BTEC General, City and Guilds Craft; or equivalent
Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship
Level 3	2 or more A Levels, 4 or more AS Levels; NVQ Level 3, BTEC National, OND, ONC, City and Guilds Advanced Craft; or equivalent
Level 4 and above	Degree (BA, BSc), foundation degree, NVQ Level 4 and above, HND, HNC, professional qualifications (teaching or nursing, for example), or equivalent
Other qualifications	Other qualifications, equivalent unknown

Table 2 shows that of the 1,514,700 people aged 16 and over in Census 2021, just under one-third (32.1%, or 486,300) indicated that their highest level of qualification was Level 4 and above, and just under one-quarter (23.8%, or 360,600) indicated that they had no qualifications.

Table 2: Highest level of qualification (Census 2021)

Highest level of qualification	Population	Percent
No qualifications	360,600	23.8%
Level 1	89,400	5.9%
Level 2	206,200	13.6%
Apprenticeship	96,400	6.4%
Level 3	242,000	16.0%
Level 4 and above	486,300	32.1%
Other qualifications	33,900	2.2%
All people aged 16 and over	1,514,700	100.0%

3.2. Highest level of qualification – Change over time

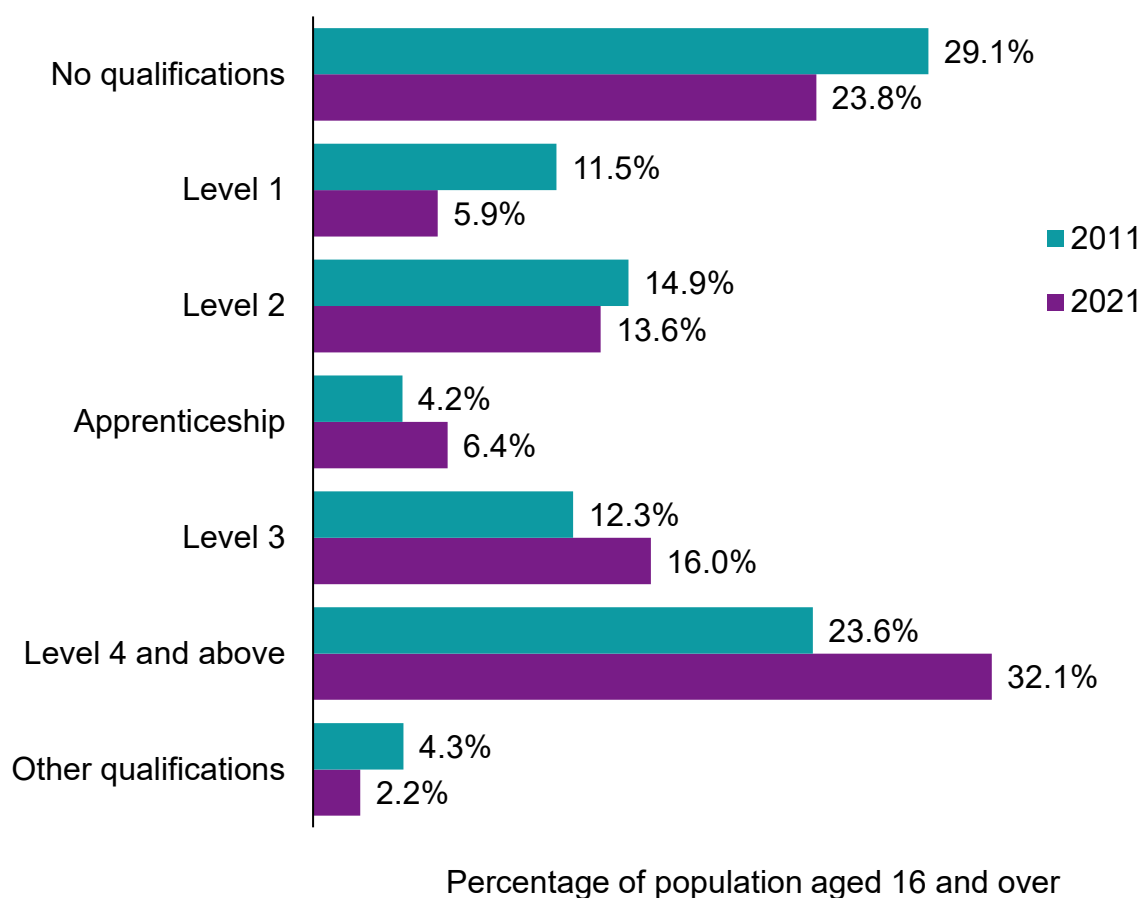
The structure and content of the qualifications questions have been refined between Census 2011 and Census 2021. Despite this, broad comparisons can still be made using the highest level of qualification classification.

Table 3 shows the numbers of people aged 16 and over by highest level of qualification in Census 2021 compared with Census 2011. In general terms, the number of people aged 16 and over with higher level qualifications has increased between Census 2011 and Census 2021, and the number of people with no qualifications and lower level qualifications has decreased over the same time period. This change is also evident when looking at the population percentages (see Figure 1).

Table 3: Highest level of qualification (2011 and 2021 Censuses)

Highest level of qualification	Census 2011	Census 2021	Change
No qualifications	416,900	360,600	-56,200
Level 1	164,800	89,400	-75,400
Level 2	213,600	206,200	-7,400
Apprenticeship	60,500	96,400	+35,900
Level 3	176,100	242,000	+65,900
Level 4 and above	338,500	486,300	+147,800
Other qualifications	61,200	33,900	-27,300
All people aged 16 and over	1,431,500	1,514,700	+83,200

Figure 1: Percentage of people aged 16 and over by highest level of qualification (2011 and 2021 Censuses)

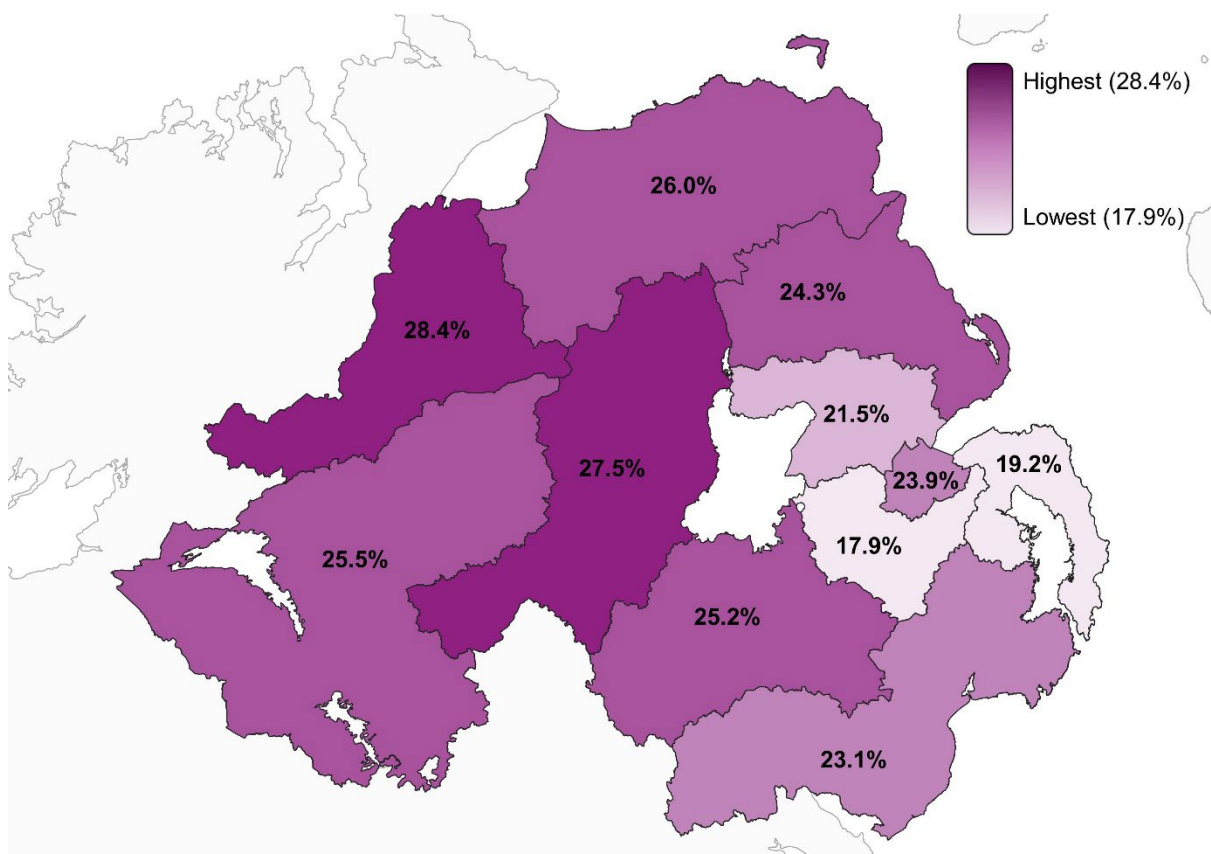


3.3. Highest level of qualifications by Local Government District – Census 2021

The highest level of qualification statistics varies across the Local Government Districts (LGDs) in Northern Ireland. To illustrate this, the following section focusses on the percentage of LGD populations aged 16 and over with no qualifications and those with a highest level of qualification of Level 4 and above.

Figure 2 maps the percentage of people aged 16 and over with no qualifications for each LGD and shows that it ranged from a low of 17.9% in Lisburn & Castlereagh to 28.4% in Derry & Strabane. Seven of the 11 LGDs had levels of this statistic above the Northern Ireland average of 23.8%.

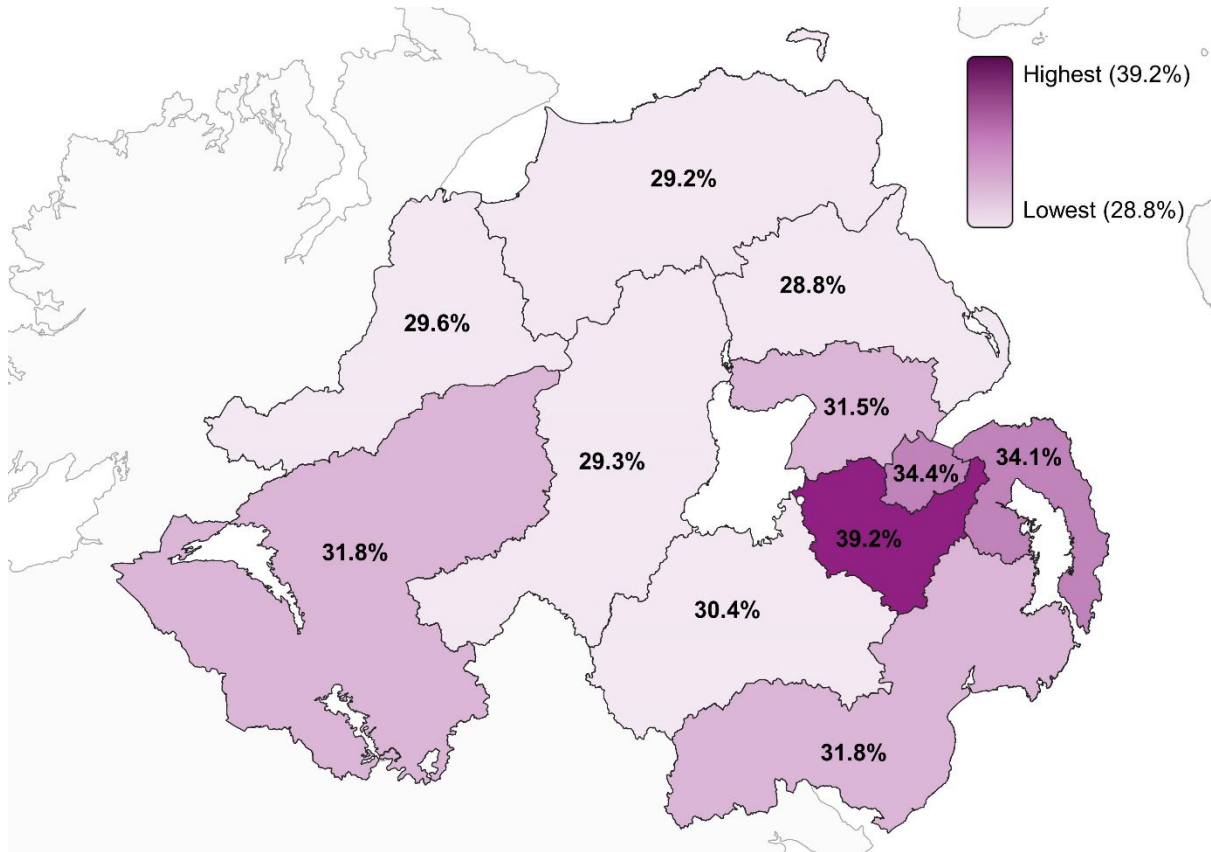
Figure 2: Percentage of population aged 16 and over with no qualifications by LGD (Census 2021)



In terms of those with high levels of qualifications, Figure 3 maps the percentage of people aged 16 and over in each LGD with Level 4 or above qualifications and shows that it ranged from a low of 28.8% in Mid & East Antrim to a high of 39.2% in Lisburn & Castlereagh. Just three of the 11 LGDs had levels of this statistic above

the Northern Ireland average of 32.1%, namely Lisburn & Castlereagh (39.2%), Belfast (34.4%) and Ards & North Down (34.1%).

Figure 3: Percentage of population aged 16 and over with highest level of qualification of Level 4 and above by LGD (Census 2021)



4. Associated outputs

[Census 2021 outputs on qualifications](#) are available to download from the NISRA website, they include MS-G01 Highest level of qualifications.

5. Further information

Census statistics are produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency free from political influence. In May 2022, following a full assessment, the United Kingdom Statistics Authority designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#) and the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). National Statistics status means that the statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

The census plays a fundamental role in the provision of official statistics – census data are used to inform key policies, plan key services and allocate public funds.

5.1. Quality of the results

The census data collection operation was supported by an independent [coverage survey](#). The coverage survey along with administrative data and information from the field operation were combined to allow statistical estimates to be made of the small percentage of people who did not make a return. The statistical estimates discussed here, as with all Census 2021 outputs, reflect the full population of Northern Ireland.

Further information on accuracy, coverage and imputation is provided on the NISRA website in the [Census 2021 quality assurance report \(PDF 275 KB\)](#).

5.2. Confidentiality

Census Office has taken steps to ensure that the confidentiality of respondents is fully protected. All published results from the census have been subject to statistical processes to ensure that individuals cannot be identified. For more information, please refer to the [statistical disclosure control methodology](#). These processes may result in very marginally different results between tables for the same statistic.

5.3. Comparability with previous censuses

The census is designed to provide the most accurate possible picture of the population on the day the census is taken. Whilst this report contains a small number of historical tables that give comparisons at the Northern Ireland level of some key demographic statistics, users should be aware that comparisons may be affected by other differences, in particular, between the census questionnaires, impacts of issues of the day, etc.

As the last three censuses (2001, 2011 and 2021) were all adjusted for under-enumeration and reflect the Northern Ireland population on census day, this supports comparisons between those censuses.

5.4. Supporting material

A number of [supporting documents](#) are available on the census pages of the NISRA website. These documents describe the census methodology in more detail, the quality assurance processes applied, the paper questionnaire used in the census, and a full list of definitions and output classifications.

5.5. More details

Further information on the statistics provided in this publication can be obtained from Census Customer Services at:

Telephone:	028 9025 5156
Email:	census@nisra.gov.uk
Responsible Statistician:	Dr David Marshall

This report was made possible by the co-operation of the public in responding to the census, the commitment of the census field and headquarters staff, and the assistance of many other people and organisations throughout all aspects of the census. The Registrar General for Northern Ireland, who is responsible for the planning, conduct and reporting of the census, would like to thank all of those who contributed to the census.

5.6. Copyright

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