

NI Labour Force Survey: Methodology for assigning highest qualification to levels

Theme: Labour Market

Date: November 2023

Background

The purpose of this paper is to provide further detail on the methodology used by NISRA from November 2023 onwards for assigning highest qualifications to Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) levels, following a review of the LFS education section in January 2022.

An overview of the levels used in analysis and their broad equivalences are:

- No qualifications
- Below Level 2: O-level, GCSE grade A*-C - less than 5
- Level 2: O-level, GCSE grade A*-C - 5 or more
- Level 3: A-level - more than 1
- Levels 4 to 5 Foundation degree, HNC/HND/BTEC higher
- Levels 6 and above: First degree or higher

Table 1 provides an overview of the highest qualifications from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the detail of the levels that they have been assigned to for the purposes of statistical analysis.

This methodology will be kept under review, subject to improvements that may enhance accuracy of estimates in highest qualification level held.

LFS variables

Highest qualification level held has largely been derived using the HIQUAL15 variable on the LFS, but the following variables have also been used to assign qualifications across levels depending on number held, for example.

- DEGREE7 – to split first and foundation degree between levels
- NUMOL5 – to determine the number of O Level/ GCSE A*-C or equivalent obtained
- NUMAL – to determine the number of A Levels held
- NUMAS – to determine the number of AS Levels held
- HST – to determine the number of SCE higher obtained

Apportionment

Other variables (as detailed above) from the LFS have been used to assign highest qualification levels to RQF levels as far as possible, but the following qualifications have been split across levels as detailed below:

- Trade apprenticeships – 50% Level 2, 50% Level 3
- Other qualifications – 55% Below Level 2, 35% Level 2 and 10% Level 3
- Scottish CSYS - 33% Level 2, 67% Level 3

Unknown highest qualification levels

Those respondents who were categorised as 'don't know' within the highest qualification variable (HIQUAL = 74) have been excluded. For the additional five variables used in the analysis (specified above), the don't know responses have also been excluded. For January to December 2022, the overall percentage of respondents unable to be classified was 2.2%.

Comparability

Figures produced by NISRA may differ slightly to other highest qualification levels statistical publications, either due to differing sources, age analysed or slight differences in methodologies for assigning highest qualifications to RQF levels.

Table 1: Highest qualification levels from LFS and RQF Levels assigned for statistical analysis (Below Level 2 to Level 6 and above)

Below Level 2 (equivalent to :O-level, GCSE grade A*-C - less than 5)	Level 2 (equivalent to: O-level, GCSE grade A*-C - 5 or more)	Level 3 (equivalent to: A Level – more than one)	Levels 4 to 5 (equivalent to: Foundation degree, HNC/HND/BTEC higher)	Level 6 and above (equivalent to: First degree or higher)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One AS Level or equivalent • Up to four O-level, GCSE grade A*-C or equivalent • RQF Level 1 Qualifications • SVQ Level 1 • Foundation Welsh Bac • GNVQ/GSVQ Foundation Level • RSA/OCR/ Cambridge Technical Level 1 • Scottish National Level 4 • GCSE < Grade C, CSE < Grade 1 and equivalents • SCOTVEC National Certificate modules • National Scottish Intermediate 1 • 14-19 Diploma • YT/YTP Certificate • Scottish National Level 3 • Scottish National < Level 3 • Basic Skills Qualifications • National Scottish Access Level • Entry Level Qualifications • Key/Core/ Essential/ functional Skills • Other RSA/OCR/Cambridge Technicals • Other qualifications (55%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 A level, or 2/3 AS levels, or equivalent • Scottish 6 Year Certificate CSYS (33%) • 1 or 2 National Scottish higher or equivalent • Trade apprenticeship (50%) • RQF level 2 qualifications • SVQ level 2 • Intermediate Apprenticeship • Intermediate Welsh Bac • National Scott Intermediate 2 • GNVQ/GSVQ Intermediate • RSA/OCR/ Cambridge Technical level 2 • Higher Diploma 14-19 • Scottish National level 5 • 5 or more O levels, GCSE grade A*-C or equivalent • Other qualifications (35%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RQF level 3 qualifications • SVQ level 3 SCQF level 7 • OND/ONC National • Advanced or Progression Diploma 14-19 • Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate • International Baccalaureate • Scottish Baccalaureate • GNVQ/GSVQ Advanced • 2 or more A levels or equivalent • RSA/OCR/Techni level 3 • Advanced Apprenticeship • Foundation Apprenticeship • Scottish 6th year certificate (67%) • 3 or more National Scottish Highers • Access Qualifications • 4 or more AS levels or equivalent • Trade Apprenticeship (50%) • Other qualifications (10%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation degree • Other Degree • RQF level 5 qualifications • Diploma in Higher Education • HNC/HND Higher • Teaching further education • Teaching secondary education • Teaching primary education • Teaching foundation stage • Teaching level not stated • Nursing etc • RSA/OCR/Cambridge technical Level 4 • Other higher education below degree level • SVQ level 4 • RQF level 4 qualifications • Higher Apprenticeship • Modern, Technical, & Professional Apprenticeship • Advanced Higher Scotland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher degree • RQF level 8 qualifications • NVQ level 5 old • SVQ level 5 SQF level 11 • RQF level 7 qualifications • Degree Apprenticeship • Graduate Apprenticeship • First degree • RQF level 6 qualifications

Please note: these levels are presented in analysis alongside the proportion with 'No qualifications'