

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

Theme: Labour Market

21st October 2021

Background

The purpose of this paper is to provide further detail on the methodology used by NISRA from October 2021 onwards for assigning highest qualifications to National Qualification Framework (NQF) levels, following a review of the methodology during 2021.

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 NQF 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 = 85) 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 2020, the overall percentage of respondents unable to be classified was 3.5%.

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 NQF levels.

There is currently a review of the education section of the LFS questionnaire. The methodology to derive highest qualification levels will be kept under review, which may result in amendments following its conclusion.

Table 1: Highest qualification levels from LFS and NQF 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 • NVQ level 1 or equivalent • Foundation Welsh Baccalaureate • GNVQ, GSVQ foundation level • Foundation (14-19) diploma • Level 1 Diploma • Scottish National Level 4 • Up to 4 O levels, GCSE grade A*-C, CSE grade 1 or equivalent • CSE below grade 1, GCSE below grade C • BTEC, SCOTVEC First or General certificate • SCOTVEC modules • RSA other • Scottish Nationals Level 3 • Scottish Nationals below Level 3 • City and Guilds foundation/part 1 • Level 1 Certificate • Level 2 Award • YT, YTP certificate • Key skills qualification • Basic skills qualification • Entry level qualification • Entry level Diploma • Entry level Certificate • Level 1 Award • Entry level Award • 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 SCE higher or equivalent • Trade apprenticeship (50%) • NVQ level 2 or equivalent • Intermediate Welsh Baccalaureate • GNVQ/GSVQ intermediate • RSA diploma • City and Guilds Craft/Part 2 • BTEC, SCOTVEC First or General Diploma • Higher (14 to 19) Diploma • Level 2 Diploma • Level 2 Certificate • Scottish National Level 5 • 5 or more O levels, GCSE grade A*-C or equivalent • Level 3 Award • Other qualifications (35%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NVQ level 3 • Advanced/Progression (14 to 19) Diploma • Level 3 Diploma • Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate • International Baccalaureate • Scottish Baccalaureate • GNVQ/GSVQ Advanced • 2+ A levels, 4+ AS levels or equivalent • RSA advanced diploma • OND, ONC, BTEC, SCOTVEC national etc. • City and Guilds Advanced Craft/Part 1 • Scottish 6 Year Certificate/CSYS (67%) • 3 or more SCE higher or equivalent • Access qualifications • Trade apprenticeship (50%) • Other qualifications (10%) • Level 3 Certificate • Level 4 Award 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation degree • NVQ Level 4 • Level 5 diploma • Level 5 certificate • HNC/HND/BTEC higher etc • RSA higher diploma • Other higher education below degree • Level 4 Diploma • Level 4 Certificate • Level 5 Award 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher degree • NVQ Level 5 • Level 8 Diploma • Level 8 Certificate • Level 7 Diploma • Level 7 Certificate • Level 8 Award • First Degree • Other degree • Level 6 Diploma • Level 6 Certificate • Level 7 Award • Diploma in higher education • Level 6 Award • Teaching (further education, secondary education, primary education, foundation stage, not stated) • Nursing etc

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