



**An
Phríomh-Oifig
Staidrimh**

Central
Statistics
Office

Standard SIMS Lite Report: QQI Certification Data



Summary Quality Report

For

QQI Certification Data

This documentation applies to the reporting period:

February 2015 – February 2026

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2. Introduction



QQI certification data outputs are grounded in QQI's (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) statutory role as Ireland's national awarding body, responsible for maintaining standards in education and training and awarding qualifications within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The underlying data originate from QQI's certification processes, which generate detailed microdata on learner achievements across providers, award types, and NFQ levels. These data are validated through structured quality assurance processes and integrated into QQI's analytical environment (ALDa), ensuring that outputs are based on accurate, verified administrative records. The production of these outputs is further underpinned by QQI's Open Data Policy, which commits to the principles of relevance, accuracy, transparency, and accessibility, aligned with the Irish Statistical System Code of Practice (ISSCoP)

3. Contact

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4. Metadata Update

4.1. Metadata last update

February 2026

5. Statistical Presentation

5.1. Data Description

QQI certification data outputs are structured, aggregate statistical datasets that provide an overview of learner achievements across further education and training (FET) and much of the private or independent higher education (HE) sector. The disseminated data are primarily quantitative and are presented through key variables including award type and class, NFQ level, field of learning, provider type, and learner characteristics such as age profile and gender, as well as the grade achieved.

5.2. Classification System

Volume Measures - counts of awards and/or learners, typically presented in aggregate form and subject to statistical disclosure control measures.

QQI certification data outputs are disseminated using a number of standard classifications and analytical breakdowns:

National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level - Classification of awards by level (e.g. Levels 1–10) within the Irish NFQ.

Public information: <https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/the-qualifications-system/national-framework-of-qualifications>

Award class and type - Classification of awards (e.g. Major, Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental).

Grade Achieved - Classification of learner performance (e.g. Pass, Merit, Distinction, or equivalent higher education classifications where applicable).

ISCED Broad Field of Learning - Classification of awards by subject area or discipline (aligned with internationally recognised field classifications such as ISCED Fields of Education and Training).



Provider Sector - Classification of awarding providers, including:

- Further Education and Training (FET) providers
- Private/independent Higher Education (HE) providers

Provider Type - The categorisation used by QQI to classify organisations that deliver programmes leading to QQI awards.

- This classification groups providers according to their organisational nature, governance structure and sector, rather than by programme or award level.
- Currently there are 8: Community / Comprehensive School, Community / Voluntary Sector Organisation, Education & Training Boards, Private Provider, Public Service Agency, Sectoral Representative Body, Solas/Teagasc/BIM, Technological Sector Public HEI

Learner Characteristics, including:

- **Age profile** - QQI 10-year learner age group, assigns each learner to a 10-year interval, starting at <20, 20-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55+
- **Gender** – female, male

Credit Value / Award Size - Classification by the credit associated with awards.

5.3. Sector Coverage

QQI certification data primarily cover the education and training sector, with outputs spanning:

- Further Education and Training (FET), including Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and other FET provision.
- Private and independent Higher Education (HE). QQI-awarded provision outside the publicly funded university sector.

5.4. Statistical Concepts and definitions

The QQI certification data outputs are based on a set of derived statistical variables describing learner achievements, awards, and provision, sourced from QQI certification systems, i.e. QBS and QHub.

These variables originate from validated certification data submitted by providers and processed through QQI systems.

Variables are derived from administrative certification records rather than statistical surveys, meaning definitions are driven by operational processes rather than harmonised ESS variable frameworks.

QQI certification statistics are based on a combination of administrative variables (e.g. award type, NFQ level, learner characteristics) and derived analytical variables (e.g. age bands and certification counts), primarily categorical and discrete in nature, with some differences from ESS standards arising from the use of the national NFQ framework, QQI-specific award classifications, and administrative data structures.

Main statistical variables:

Derived variable

- Certification volume measures: number of awards and number of learners (award holders). Type: Quantitative (discrete counts).

Award classifications

- Award class, type and grading systems are specific to QQI and do not have direct ESS equivalents, reflecting the operational design of Ireland's qualifications system.
- Award class (e.g. Major, Minor, Special Purpose). Type: Categorical (nominal).
- Award type (e.g. Advanced Certificate, Certificate, Doctoral Degree, Higher Certificate, Higher Diploma, Honours Bachelor Degree, Masters Degree, Minor Award, Ordinary Bachelor Degree,



Postgraduate Diploma, Special Purpose Award, Supplemental Award). Type: Categorical (nominal).

- Grade achieved: FET: Distinction, Exemption, Merit, Pass, Successful, Unclassified. HE: 1st Class Honours, 2nd Class Honours, 2nd Class Honours Grade 1, 2nd Class Honours Grade 2, Distinction, Merit, Merit Grade 1, Merit Grade 2, Pass, Recommended, Unclassified. Type: Categorical (ordinal).
- Award credit value. It is a numeric measure of learning volume or effort, i.e. the amount of learning associated with an award. In QQI context, credit forms part of the formal description of awards alongside NFQ level and award type. Type: Numerical (discrete).
- ISCED Broad Field of Learning. Type: Categorical (nominal, grouping subject or disciplinary area)
- Award NFQ level. Type: Categorical (ordinal, reflecting progression across the National Qualifications Framework). Type: Categorical (ordinal, where progression reflects qualification levels).
- Provider and provider type. Type: Categorical (nominal).

Learner characteristics

- Gender. Type: Categorical (nominal).
- Age (recorded, disseminated as age bands), derived variable (constructed for statistical outputs), grouped into categorical (ordinal). Type: Categorical (ordinal, derived from continuous age).

5.5. Statistical Unit

The main unit of observation is the learner (individual person) who has achieved a QQI award. These individuals are referred to as “QQI award holders”. Data are collected at learner level through QQI certification systems. In statistical outputs, learner-level data are aggregated and anonymised (e.g. by age group, gender, or award characteristics).

The main unit of analysis or certification statistical outputs is however the 'Award' (qualification) – event/unit of achievement, representing the certification of learning outcomes achieved by a learner. QQI certification database contains information on each award made by QQI. Awards are characterised by variables such as NFQ level, award type, class, credit value, and field of learning. This can be considered an event-based or object unit, where each record represents a certification outcome rather than a 'person'.

5.6. Statistical Population

The target population for QQI certification statistics comprises: all learners (persons) who achieve a QQI award within a given reference period, together with the associated awards, programmes, and providers that define QQI certification activity across the FET and private/independent HE provisions where QQI acts as the awarding body.

These individuals, referred to as QQI award holders, represent the full “universe” of persons for whom certification outcomes are recorded.

5.7. Reference Area

QQI certification data relate to Ireland as a whole, reflecting QQI's statutory role as a national awarding body responsible for certification across the State.

5.8. Time Coverage

- 2015 to 2025

Note that any issues concerning comparability over time are discussed in S.15.

6. Unit of Measure

The main unit of measurement is number (count) rounded to the nearest 5, used for:



- Number of awards (certifications granted)
- Number of learners (QQI award holders)

Unit: Number of persons / number of awards.

Magnitude: Typically presented as absolute counts rounded to the nearest 5, and where appropriate aggregated

7. Reference Period

QQI certification data primarily refer to the date of certification within defined certification cycles, with statistical outputs typically aggregated to calendar-year reference periods.

8. Institutional Mandate

8.1. Legal Acts and other agreements

QQI certifies learners under the statutory authority of the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#), and its certification statistics are published in the public interest.

8.2. Data Sharing

QQI certification data are shared with other data-producing agencies through a combination of formal agreements, established procedures, and national statistical coordination frameworks, ensuring secure, consistent, and appropriate use of data. QQI has established formal data-sharing agreements with key public bodies (e.g. SOLAS, CSO, and Government Departments)

9. Confidentiality

9.1. Confidentiality – policy

The confidentiality of QQI certification data is protected through a combination of national legislation, statistical standards, and formal internal policies and procedures, which ensure that no individual or organisation can be identified in published outputs or shared data.

The QQI Open Data Policy on Certification Data sets out the organisation's approach to balancing transparency and accessibility with the protection of confidential information. It establishes that while QQI is committed to making data openly available, all data released must comply with data protection, confidentiality, and statistical standards. The policy operates in conjunction with [QQI's Data Protection Policy and Privacy Statements](#), ensuring that all handling of certification data complies with relevant legislation and ethical standards for the protection of personal data.

9.2. Confidentiality – data treatment

1. For Aggregate outputs

QQI definition of a confidential cell and cell suppression: a cell is considered confidential where the value is based on a small number of observations, such that an individual (QQI award holder/learner) could be identified. In practice, QQI rounds aggregate output to the nearest five or applies a minimum threshold rule (e.g. ≤ 5 observations) below which cells are treated as confidential. These are applied systematically prior to share, publication or data release.

Other methods applied:



- aggregation - grouping categories (e.g. combining age bands, fields of learning, or provider types) to increase cell sizes
- data minimisation - limiting the level of detail provided in outputs (e.g. reducing granularity in tables or visualisations)
- restricted publication of totals- avoiding publication of totals or margins where these could enable derivation of suppressed values

2. For micro-level outputs (restricted access data)

Access to microdata is strictly controlled and subject to the procedures set out in the QQI Open Data Policy and Research Microdata Access arrangements. These are the protection measures:

- Pseudonymisation: removal or masking of direct identifiers (e.g. PPSN, name, date of birth) prior to any sharing.
- Controlled access: access granted only for approved research purposes through a formal application process; and approval by QQI (e.g. Data Liaison Officer / Open Data Officer).
- Data Use Agreements (DUA): researchers must sign legally binding agreements restricting and secure data handling requirements (e.g. data must be stored on secure, access-controlled systems, data must not be transferred outside EU and/or authorised environments, data must be destroyed securely after project completion.
- Output checking: all outputs derived from microdata must be reviewed to ensure no disclosure risk prior to release

10. Release Policy

10.1. Release Calendar

QQI has established regular and predictable dissemination timelines, as set out in the Open Data Policy on Certification Data:

- Certification data are updated periodically following certification cycles. QQI normally certifies awards six times per year (February, April, June, August, October, December).
- Statistical outputs are typically released on a biannual basis (on August and February of each year) following QQI main certification periods.

Certification data up to the end of Q2 are updated before 31 July (as many providers of QQI awards operate programmes on an academic year basis, June is normally the largest certification period for QQI awards). Certification data up to the end of Q4 are updated before 31 January of the following year, providing annual data on a calendar year basis.

Where there is a delay in releasing new data, this will be flagged on our website

10.2. Release calendar access

The Statistical Work Plan of the National Statistical System is available [here](#).

11. Frequency of Dissemination

QQI has established regular and predictable dissemination timelines, as outlined in the Open Data Policy on Certification Data.

Certification data are updated periodically following defined certification cycles, with QQI typically conferring awards six times per year (February, April, June, August, October, December).

Statistical outputs are generally released on a biannual basis (February and August), aligned with the main certification periods. Specifically, certification data up to the end of Q2 are updated by 31 July, reflecting the academic cycle in which June represents the largest certification period. Data up to the end



of Q4 are updated by 31 January of the following year, providing final annual figures on a calendar-year basis.

12. Quality Management

12.1. Quality Assurance

QQI applies a range of quality assurance procedures across the statistical production process for certification data. Certification data undergo rigorous multi-stage validation, including checks by the Certification and ICT units, with issues corrected through provider engagement before final approval. Data are only approved and locked once all validation rules are satisfied.

Quality assurance is further supported through the ALDa analytical dataset, which integrates validated data in a structured environment designed for consistent analysis and reporting, supported by documented guidance and controlled access procedures.

Ongoing monitoring includes regular data quality checks, periodic audits, and compliance with data protection and governance requirements, while providers are supported through training and guidance on data submission.

12.2. User Needs

The main users of QQI certification statistics are:

- Primary users (high importance): Government departments and public agencies (e.g. CSO, HEA, SOLAS) and QQI internal functions, which rely on the data for policy, monitoring, and statistical reporting; and education and training providers and researchers, who use the data for benchmarking, planning, and analytical purposes.
- General users (medium importance): General public, learners, and media, who access published outputs for information and transparency.

The main uses of QQI certification statistics include:

- Supporting policy development and monitoring of the education and training system.
- Providing evidence for planning and decision-making by public bodies and providers.
- Enabling statistical analysis and research on certification trends and learner outcomes.
- Supporting public information and transparency through accessible outputs such as dashboards and reports.

QQI provides a range of outputs, including:

- Interactive dashboards and downloadable datasets (via PxStat).
- Annual summary statistical reports.
- Analytical publications (QQI Data Series and Insights).

These outputs broadly meet user needs in terms of accessibility and analytical content. However, some constraints in level of detail due to confidentiality requirements.

12.3. Data Completeness

QQI certification statistics broadly meet the content requirements set out in national legislation, the ISSCoP, and internal policies, including the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 and the QQI Open Data Policy related to certification.



The statistical outputs cover key dimensions of certification activity (e.g. award type, NFQ level, grade, learner characteristics, and provider information), ensuring that outputs are relevant, coherent, and aligned with QQI's statutory functions as an awarding body.

In addition, QQI provides methodology documentation, quality statement, and dissemination policies, which support transparency and compliance via the QQI Open Data Policy on certification data

13. Accuracy and reliability

Information relating to the reliability of QQI certification statistics is addressed under the concept of Data Revision (see relevant section in the QQI Open Data policy on certification data). This includes the policies and procedures governing the updating of data following certification cycles, as well as the management of revisions to previously published statistics.

Revisions arise primarily due to the incorporation of updated certification data following validation processes or late submissions from providers. QQI applies defined procedures to ensure that revisions are clearly identified, documented, and communicated to users, in line with the dissemination and revisions policy set out in the QQI Open Data Policy.

13.1. Overall accuracy

QQI certification statistics are based on administrative data (stored and curated into 'ALDa database' ready to use for statistical analysis) and therefore are not subject to sampling error. However, they may be affected by a range of systematic and non-sampling errors arising in data collection, processing, and dissemination.

13.2. Non-sampling Error

QQI certification statistics are based on administrative data (stored and curated into 'ALDa database' ready to use for statistical analysis)

13.2.1. Measurement error

QQI certification statistics are based on administrative data (stored and curated into 'ALDa database' ready to use for statistical analysis) and therefore are not subject to sampling error. However, they may be affected by a range of systematic and non-sampling errors arising in data collection, processing, and dissemination.

Main sources of error are at:

- Data entry level. Errors may arise from incorrect or incomplete data submitted by providers (e.g. learner details, award classifications). These are mitigated through validation checks and provider follow-up procedures. Delays in data submission or late updates following certification cycles, which are corrected through data revisions
- Processing and transformation errors, and reporting errors. Errors may arise during data integration and transformation (e.g. within ALDa), although these are mitigated by controlled processing and validation procedures.
- Disclosure control effects. The application of statistical disclosure control (e.g. suppression or aggregation) may reduce the level of detail available and slightly affect the precision of published estimates.

Overall, the risk of error and bias is low to moderate: initial releases may slightly underestimate certification volumes due to late submissions and minor distortions may occur in detailed breakdowns due to aggregation or suppression. Impacts are generally small and do not materially affect national-level trends or key indicators. Effects are more likely at disaggregated levels (e.g. small groups or specific providers).



QQI applies several controls to minimise errors:

- Multi-stage data validation and verification prior to certification and analysis.
- Provider engagement and resubmission processes to correct identified issues.
- Controlled data processing within ALDa, ensuring consistent transformation and integration
- Statistical disclosure control, applied systematically to protect confidentiality while maintaining data integrity.

These measures ensure that outputs are based on validated and high-quality administrative data.

13.2.2. Item Non-Response Rate

QQI certification statistics are based on administrative data.

14. Timeliness and punctuality

14.1. Timeliness

The time lag in QQI certification statistics reflects the period between the award of certification (event) and the availability of validated statistical outputs.

Certification data are available shortly after each certification cycle, which takes place six times per year. For statistical dissemination, data are typically published on a biannual basis: in February and August of each year

This results in a time lag of approximately 1–2 months between the end of the main certification periods (June and December) and the publication of validated outputs.

The time lag arises primarily due to the need to ensure data quality and completeness, including:

- Validation and verification processes applied to certification data.
- Correction and resubmission cycles with providers where issues are identified.
- Integration and processing of data within the analytical dataset (ALDa).
- Application of quality assurance and disclosure control checks prior to publication.

14.2. Punctuality

QQI does not currently operate a formal advance release calendar with pre-announced publication dates; therefore, the TP3 indicator (percentage of releases delivered on time against a published schedule) is not applicable at present. Instead, QQI operates under defined and predictable dissemination timelines linked to certification cycles, with data typically released in February and August following the main certification periods. These timelines are outlined in the QQI Open Data Policy and related documentation.

15. Coherence & Comparability

15.1. Comparability – Geographical

Comparability across regions in QQI certification statistics is limited due to the structure and scope of the data. The main comparability issue is that the QQI certification data is based on provider location rather than learner residence. Regional breakdowns are typically linked to the location of the provider or centre, rather than where learners live. This can distort regional comparisons, particularly where learners attend providers outside their home region.

The availability of QQI-validated programmes varies across regions, reflecting differences in provider presence and programme offerings, rather than underlying differences in learner demand or outcomes.



15.2. Comparability over time

QQI certification statistics are generally comparable over time, as they are based on consistent administrative data collection and processing through QQI systems. Core variables (e.g. NFQ level, award type, learner characteristics) and definitions remain stable, supporting time-series analysis of trends and outcomes.

Some changes have occurred that may affect comparability at a detailed level, but do not constitute a formal break in series:

- Improvements in data capture within the analytical dataset (ALDa), relating to coverage and structure, which may lead to small increases in counts or improved consistency over time.
- Changes in reporting coverage, e.g., improvements in how certain awards (e.g. minor/component awards contributing to major awards) are included in reporting may affect year-on-year comparisons at detailed levels.
- Ongoing refinement of classifications of programmes (e.g. adjustments to classification or coding practices (e.g. field of learning groupings) may affect comparability for specific breakdowns; or of providers (adjustment to provider type classification and/or consolidation processes).

15.2.1. Length of Comparable Time series

QQI certification statistics do not currently have a formally defined break in series. As such, time series can be considered broadly consistent over time, subject to incremental improvements in data capture and processing. The underlying certification data are available on a consistent basis from approximately 2014 onwards, corresponding to the establishment of QQI and the availability of harmonised certification data in QQI systems (and subsequently in ALDa).

16. Revisions

16.1. Data Revision Policy

QQI operates a defined data revision policy as part of its Open Data Policy on Certification Data. Revisions arise primarily from the nature of certification data as an administrative dataset, where updates may occur following validation processes or the receipt of late or corrected data from providers.

Revisions are governed by principles of transparency, consistency, and user communication, and are applied to ensure that published statistics reflect the most accurate and complete information available.

Details on our Revisions policy are found in the following document:

16.2. Data Revision Practice

Revisions to QQI certification statistics are limited and largely confined to planned updates, arising from the nature of certification data as an administrative dataset. Data are updated following each certification period and incorporated into subsequent biannual releases.

Revisions mainly reflect the inclusion of late or corrected data submissions from providers and the completion of validation processes. Corrections are included in the next scheduled release.

17. Statistical processing

17.1. Source Type

QQI certification statistics are primarily based on administrative data from the QBS and QHub systems, which capture learner, award, programme, and provider information; these data are integrated and transformed within the ALDa analytical dataset to produce validated and structured inputs for statistical aggregates.



QQI certification statistics are derived from administrative records generated through certification processes. Data from operational systems are combined and structured in an analytical dataset (ALDa) for statistical analysis and dissemination.

1. QBS (QQI Business System) is the main source of certification data, capturing all award-related transactions submitted by providers. Source type: Administrative database. It's the core system for processing certification and recording learner achievements. Key data items: QQI learner records (e.g. age, gender, identifiers), award information (award code, type, class, NFQ level, grade achieved), programme and provider information.
2. QHub (QQI provider engagement system). Source type: Administrative interface / data input system. Key data items: programme details and provider and centre information. QHub acts as an interface for data collection, feeding validated data into QBS.
3. ALDa (Achievement by Learners Dataset). Source type: Derived analytical dataset (multi-source integration). Its primary purpose is to curate and integrate validated certification data for statistical analysis and reporting. ALDa combines data extracted from QBS and QHub into a structured dataset for statistical use, including derived variables and anonymised views for analysis.

17.2. Data Collection

Systematic process of gathering data for official statistics. Reporting for this concept is broken down into the following sub-concepts.

17.2.1. Data Capture

QQI certification statistics are based on administrative data from QBS (certification records) and QHub (programme/provider data), which are extracted and integrated into ALDa for analysis.

Data are submitted by providers via QHub/QBS, then transferred by IT through an extract–transform–load (ETL) process into MS SQL Server (ALDa).

Data capture is subject to validation checks and audits at each certification cycle, with issues corrected through provider engagement.

Main IT tools include QBS, QHub, MS SQL Server (ALDa), Tableau and Power BI.

17.3. Data Validation

Source data are validated through multi-stage checks, including Certification Unit audits, IT validation, and R&I validation prior to analysis.

ALDa outputs are validated through year-on-year reconciliation with CSO reports, with anomalies logged and corrected.

Aggregate outputs (dashboards, reports, datasets) are reviewed before publication and refreshed following each ALDa update.

17.4. Data Compilation

Data from QBS and QHub are combined within ALDa using ETL processes. [QQI FET Data | Meeting]

Derived variables include age bands, linked award/programme/provider data, and anonymised identifiers, with unnecessary fields removed for analysis.

Aggregates are produced from ALDa to generate statistics by year, provider, NFQ level, award type, learner characteristics, and field of learning.



17.5. Adjustment

No specific macro-level adjustment procedures are applied. Data quality is addressed through validation, revision processes, and statistical disclosure control, rather than adjustment of estimates.