

Education system

Ireland

described and compared with
the Dutch system

This document contains information on the education system of Ireland. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from Ireland for the purpose of admission to Dutch higher education.

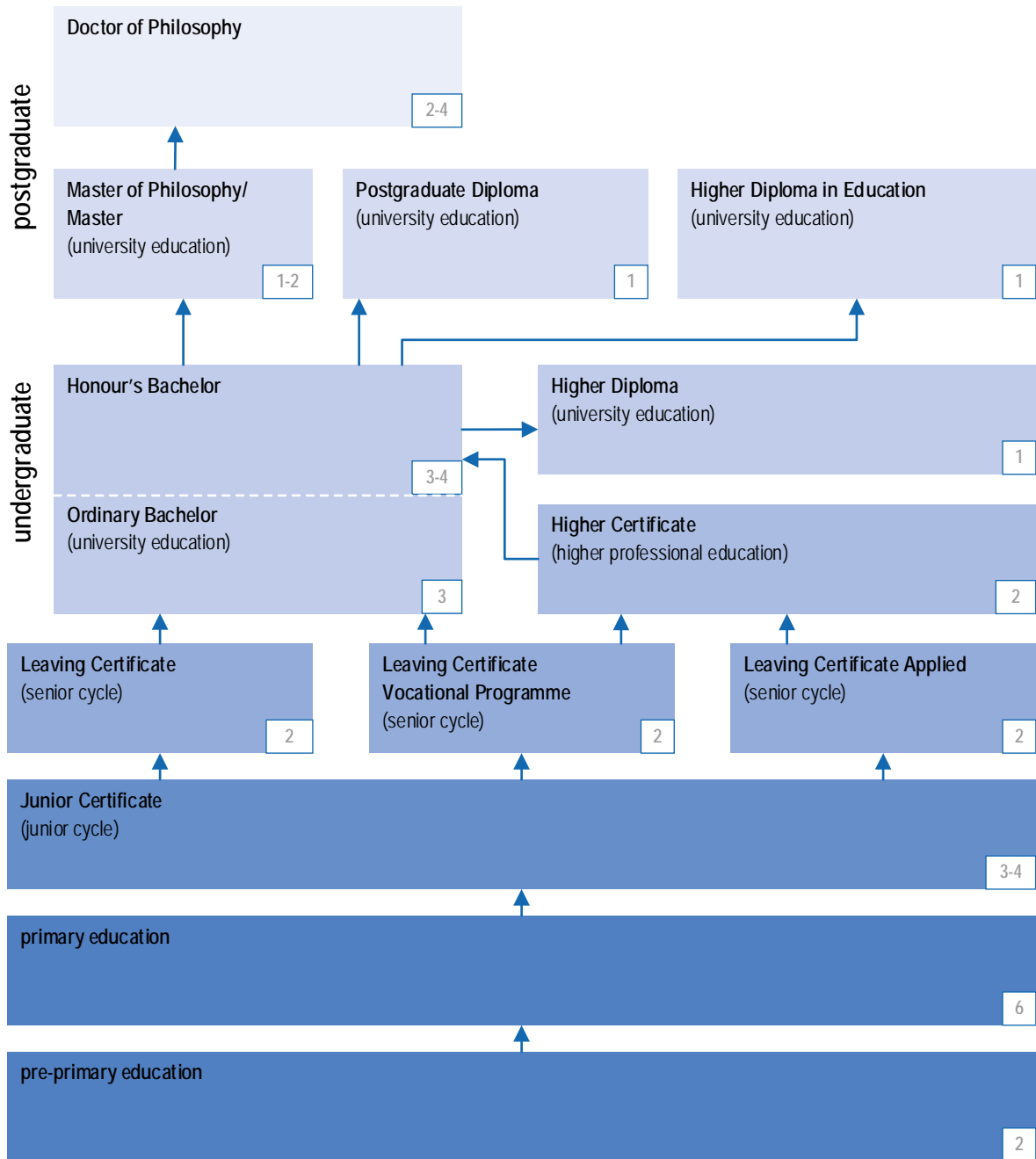
Disclaimer

We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.



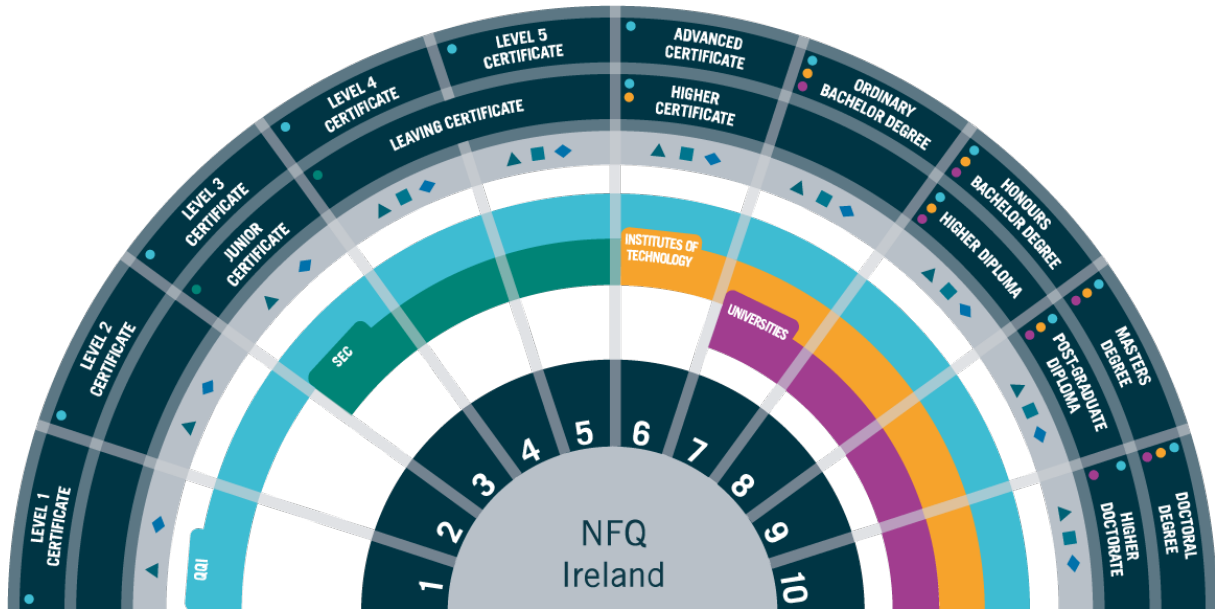
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■ Education system Ireland



0 Duration of education

National Framework of Qualifications



Source: [Irish National Framework of Qualifications \(NFQ\)](#)

Evaluation chart

The left-hand column in the table below lists the most common foreign qualifications with corresponding levels in the national qualifications framework. The other columns show the Dutch equivalent along with the comparable levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

Degree or qualification and NQF level	EQF level	Dutch equivalent and NLQF level	EQF level		
<i>Junior Certificate + transition year 3 + 1 years)</i>	3	2	VMBO-T diploma	2	2
<i>Leaving Certificate Applied</i>	4/5	3/4	HAVO diploma for the general education component	4	4
<i>Leaving Certificate (at least 6 exam subjects of which at least 2 subjects at higher level with a result of A, B or C)</i>	4/5	3/4	VWO diploma	4+	4
<i>Leaving Certificate (at least 6 exam subjects of which at least 2 subjects at higher level with a result of H1-H4)</i>	4/5	3/4	VWO diploma	4+	4
<i>Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme</i>	4/5	3/4	VWO diploma	4+	4
<i>Higher Certificate</i>	6	5	at least 2 years of HBO	5	5
<i>Bachelor's (Ordinary) degree</i>	7	6	HBO or WO bachelor's degree	6	6
<i>Bachelor's (Honours) degree</i>	8	6	HBO or WO bachelor's degree	6	6
<i>Master's degree</i>	9	7	HBO or WO master's degree	7	7
<i>Master of Philosophy</i>	9	7	WO master's degree	7	7

NB

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.

Education system Ireland

- NFQ = Irish National Framework of Qualifications. NLOF = Dutch Qualifications Framework. EQF = European Qualifications Framework.
- The EQF/[NLOF level](#) is not so much a reflection of study load or content; rather, it is an indication of a person's knowledge and skills after having completed a certain programme of study.
- Information about Dutch equivalent qualifications can be found on our website: [the Dutch education system](#).
- [The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market \(SBB\)](#), evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.

■ Introduction

The Republic of Ireland gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1921, and left the Commonwealth in 1948. The population of the Republic is over 4.7 million.

Education is divided into 4 sectors: primary education, post primary education, further education and training and higher education. The first 2 of these sectors are governed by the 1998 Education Act. The latter 2 have their own legislation.

General responsibility for education and inspection thereof is in the hands of the Department of Education and Skills, the Irish Ministry of Education. This department is responsible for matters such as the curriculum and examinations for primary and secondary schools. However, local boards can allow participation in decision-making in the education system, and education at private schools may be partly funded by the church. At post primary level provision is organised by 16 Education and Training Boards and independent voluntary and community secondary schools.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established in November 2012, replacing the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and incorporating the functions of the Irish Universities Quality Board.

QQI is responsible for promoting the enhancement of quality in Ireland's further and higher education and training, quality assures providers, makes awards and supports and promotes a qualifications system that benefits learners and other stakeholders. QQI is responsible for the [National Framework of Qualifications](#), and for the recognition of foreign qualifications under NARIC Ireland.

Research oriented education is coordinated by the Higher Education Authority on behalf of the Department of Education and Science. However, universities are autonomous and set their own curricula, and are also authorised to award academic degrees.

Compulsory education for pupils in the Republic of Ireland begins at the age of 6 and lasts until the age of 16 or until students have completed 3 years of secondary education. The language of education in primary and secondary education is either Irish or English, and English in tertiary education.

The academic year runs from September until June.

■ Primary and secondary education

Primary education is compulsory for children aged 6-12, but available from the age of 4. Secondary education is for ages 12 to 17/18.

Secondary education consists of a junior cycle and a senior cycle. At the end of compulsory education (at age 16), pupils take examinations for the *Junior Certificate*. At some schools, the junior cycle lasts 3 years, at others 4 years. Once school is no longer compulsory, pupils can continue on to the *Leaving Certificate*. Depending on the school, the senior cycle lasts 2 or 3 years after the *Junior Certificate*. Many schools have a transition year between the junior and senior cycles.

Both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations are national. The Leaving Certificate examinations can be taken at two levels: ordinary level and higher level. Examination results are given in letters, from A to D. Most pupils take exams in 6 or 7 general subjects.

In terms of level, the *Junior Certificate* (NFQ level 3 / EQF level 2) + transition year is comparable to a VMBO-T diploma.
See the full description of [NFQ levels](#).

In terms of level, the *Leaving Certificate* (NFQ level 4/5 / EQF level 3/4) is comparable to a VWO diploma provided that exams were taken in at least 6 subjects of which at least 2 subjects at higher level with a result of A, B or C.
See the full description of [NFQ levels](#).

From 2017 onwards, an 8-point grading scale will be used for the Leaving Certificate. The requirements for a comparison of the *Leaving Certificate* are adjusted accordingly:

In terms of level, the *Leaving Certificate* (NFQ level 4/5 / EQF level 3/4) is comparable to a VWO diploma provided that exams were taken in at least 6 subjects of which at least 2 subjects at higher level with a result of H1-H4.
See the full description of [NFQ levels](#).

Education leading up to the *Leaving Certificate* is general in nature. In addition to the general *Leaving Certificate*, there are also 2 variants with a vocational component: the *Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme* (LCVP) and the *Leaving Certificate Applied* (LCA). The LCVP has a curriculum which is approximately five-sixths general education, supplemented by vocational education in 3 Vocational Modules. In the LCVP pupils take exams in these modules plus 5 general subjects. The LCVP fulfils the same requirements as the *Leaving Certificate* in terms of entry into third-level education, and therefore also provides entry into university.

The LCA is even more oriented towards vocational education than the LCVP. Approximately one-third of the curriculum comprises general subjects; the rest is vocational education. Although the LCA does not provide direct entry to university, it does lead on to preparatory programmes at technical colleges which in turn may allow students to gain admission to related study programmes at universities.

In terms of level, the *Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme* (LCVP) (NFQ level 4/5 / EQF level 3/4) is comparable to a VWO diploma. See the full description of [NFQ levels](#).

In terms of level, the *Leaving Certificate Applied* (LCA) (NFQ level 4/5 / EQF level 3/4) is comparable to a HAVO diploma for the general education component. See the full description of [NFQ levels](#).

■ Admission to higher education

One year prior to admission to third-level institutions (for both degree and non-degree programmes), students must apply to the Central Applications Office (CAO). The Central Applications Office processes applications for access to undergraduate courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). A points scale is operated by the CAO for applications and a new revised system is to be introduced from 2017. The third-level institutions then select candidates who have been accepted by the CAO.

To be admitted to university, students must satisfy the general minimum requirements of the universities. In the case of the Trinity College, Dublin, this means a *Leaving Certificate* with 6 subjects, 3 of which must be completed at higher level with at least a C grade or H4.

Other universities demand a *Leaving Certificate* with 6 subjects, with at least 2 completed at higher level with a C grade. Universities also determine which subjects and which results are required for each specialisation.

Admission to non-degree programmes (e.g. those leading to a *Higher Certificate* from QQI or Institutes of Technology) requires a *Leaving Certificate* with 5 or 6 subjects. Examinations at higher level are generally not required.

■ Higher education

Higher education is provided by 7 universities, 14 institutes of technology and a large number of smaller, mostly specialist institutions, such as the 7 colleges of education. There are also private higher education providers offering programmes in Ireland.

All of these institutions can provide both research oriented and higher professional education, however universities concentrate primarily on research oriented education. Regardless of the type of study, higher level education can be divided into degree programmes and non-degree programmes, i.e. programmes that culminate in an academic title, or in a different qualification. The degrees are the *Bachelor*, *Master* and PhD; the non-degrees are certificates and diplomas.

Universities are authorised to award academic degrees in their own right, as is the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). The 13 Institutes of Technology have 'delegated authority' from QQI and award qualifications up to level 9 on the Irish NFO. The [Technical and Higher Education Association](#) (THEA) is the national representative body for these institutions.

The structure of higher education is the same as in the United Kingdom, but with a few differences of course. As in the United Kingdom, higher education is divided into an undergraduate and a postgraduate stage. Undergraduate education is the initial stage and leads to the first degree, in most cases a *Bachelor*.

Postgraduate programmes lead to a higher degree or to a postgraduate diploma or certificate. Higher degrees include the master's degree, the *Master of Philosophy*, and the PhD degrees. A well-known example of a postgraduate diploma course is the 1-year teacher-training programme for the *Higher Diploma in Education*.

■ University education

The oldest universities are the University of Dublin, usually referred to as Trinity College, founded in 1592, and the National University of Ireland (NUI), established in 1908. The University of Limerick and Dublin City University were founded as National Institutes of Higher Education in 1972 and 1980 respectively, but were awarded university status in 1989, including the appurtenant authorisation to award academic degrees.

The NUI is a constituent university and essentially comprises 4 universities – called the 'constituent colleges'. These are located in 4 cities: the National University of Ireland, Galway; Maynooth University (formerly St. Patrick's College, Maynooth); University College Cork (UCC); and University College Dublin (UCD).

Irish universities are also responsible for a number of recognised colleges – these are educational institutions that operate independently, but are not authorised to award academic degrees themselves. Examples include colleges of education (teacher-training institutes), art academies, hotel management schools and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

Bachelor

Bachelor's programmes last 3 or 4 years. There is a distinction between ordinary and honours degrees. Ordinary bachelor's degrees have less stringent admission requirements and less demanding examinations than honours programmes. Both kinds can include the general degree category, i.e. a bachelor's programme made up of 2 or more major subjects. However, students in most honours degree programmes take only one major.

Bachelor's programmes last 4 years at Trinity College and 3 or 4 years at the NUI, depending on the specialisation. Bachelor's programmes in medicine, veterinary science, dentistry and architecture last 5 or 6 years.

In terms of level, the *Bachelor's (Ordinary) degree* (NFQ level 7 / EQF level 6) is comparable to an HBO or WO bachelor's degree, depending on the type of study programme. See the full description of [NFQ levels](#).

In terms of level, the *Bachelor's (Honours) degree* (NFQ level 8 / EQF level 6) is comparable to an HBO or WO bachelor's degree, depending on the type of study programme. See the full description of [NFQ levels](#).

Master

The 2 main types of master's programmes are the taught masters and research masters. A taught master's programme is mainly based on teaching and examinations, whereas in a research master the emphasis is on acquiring research skills, a research project and a thesis. The 2 types are considered to represent the same level of academic achievement. For both types, the specialization or educational sector is included in the name of the degree as well as its abbreviation, such as in the *Master of Arts* (M.A.), *Master of Science* (M.Sc.) or *Master of Engineering* (M.Eng.).

Master's programmes usually lasts 12 months, sometimes 2 years, and follow a bachelor's programme. One exception is the degree of *Master in Arts* (M.A.) at Trinity College, which does not require any additional study or examinations, but is awarded after a certain period of time to those who have obtained a Bachelor's (Honours) degree from the same university.

In terms of level, the *master's degree* NQF (level 9 / EQF level 7) is comparable to an HBO or WO master's degree, depending on the type of the study programme. See the full description of [NQF levels](#).

Master of Philosophy

A different type of master's degree is the *Master of Philosophy* (M.Phil.). This is a research programme involving little to no coursework, usually of 2 years, although some 1-year programmes do occur. The M.Phil. is often used as a stepping stone to the doctorate, the *Doctor of Philosophy* programme (PhD). In that case the M.Phil. research and thesis are used as the basis for the doctoral thesis.

In terms of level, the *Master of Philosophy* NQF (level 9 / EQF level 7) is comparable to a WO master's degree. See the full description of [NQF levels](#).

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

After a bachelor's or master's degree, students may be admitted to the *Doctor of Philosophy* programme (PhD, sometimes written D.Phil.). This degree is awarded following a period of at least 2 years of study and research after a master's degree, and the completion of a doctoral thesis.

Postgraduate and Higher Diplomas

Universities offer a wide range of non-degree programmes following a bachelor's programme. All these programmes are therefore part of postgraduate education. Normally, postgraduate programmes build on the final level of a

bachelor's, leading to a higher level. Higher Diploma programmes are an exception to this. Here, too, the entry requirement is a bachelor's degree, but the programme is composed of parts of different bachelor's programmes. In fact, this is therefore undergraduate education that is offered as postgraduate education. The level of Higher Diplomas is seen as equivalent to that of a bachelor's degree.

■ Higher professional education

Higher professional education in Ireland is provided by Institutes of Technology (IT), teacher-training colleges and a number of specialist colleges, but also by universities. Courses at Institutes of Technology cover a very wide range, from secondary professional education to degree programmes.

Within higher professional education, a distinction can be made between degree programmes and non-degree programmes. This last category includes the certificates from QQI (formerly HETAC). The most well-known third-level QQI qualification is the *Higher Certificate*, which generally requires 2 years of full-time study. Those in possession of a *Higher Certificate* are generally exempted from the first year, or the first 2 years, of a bachelor's programme.

The admission requirements for a *Higher Certificate* course are not as high as for a bachelor's programme, as there are no clear requirements regarding the number of higher levels and grades required.

In terms of level, the *Higher Certificate* (NFQ level 6 / EQF level 5) is comparable to at least 2 years of higher professional education (HBO).
See the full description of [NFQ levels](#).

There used to be *National Diploma* programmes as well, which took 3 years of full-time study and which gave exemption of an additional year of a bachelor's programme. *National Diploma* programmes have been merged with the ordinary bachelor's programmes.

Teacher training

The two most well-known types of teacher training are the *Bachelor of Education* and the *Higher Diploma in Education*. The first is an undergraduate course lasting 3 to 4 years; the second is a 1-year postgraduate programme. Both bestow a full teaching qualification, both for primary and secondary education. The Teaching Council of Ireland is the relevant competent authority in Ireland for the teaching profession.

■ Assessment systems

Student performance in both post-primary and higher education is usually indicated by letters ranging from A to F. These grades are often each subdivided into three, i.e. A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3 etc. A is the highest grade, and A to C represent good satisfactory grades. For the ordinary levels of the Leaving Certificate, a D is also a pass.

From 2017 onwards, a new 8-points grading scale is used in secondary education (senior cycle):

CURRENT (PRE-2017) LEAVING CERTIFICATE GRADING SCALE	NEW LEAVING CERTIFICATE GRADING SCALE
A1	H1 / O1
A2	H2 / O2
B1	
B2	H3 / O3
B3	
C1	H4 / O4
C2	
C3	H5 / O5
D1	
D2	H6 / O6
D3	
E	

Source: [New Leaving Certificate Grading Scale and Revised Common Points Scale](#)

Bachelor's (Honours) degrees are also given a class:

Classification	Meaning
First class	Good-Very good
Upper second	Quite satisfactory-Good
Lower second	Satisfactory-Quite satisfactory
Third	Just satisfactory

Irish universities have introduced both the grading system and the credit system of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). More information on ECTS is available in the [ECTS User's Guide](#) issued by the European Commission.

More information about the value of foreign grades can be found on our [website](#) (Dutch only).

■ Bologna process

Information on the current situation can be found on the official [website](#) of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

■ Qualification frameworks

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was launched in 2003 and incorporates a 10-level structure, from secondary education to the doctorate. The NFQ has also been referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). QQI is responsible for monitoring the qualifications framework and providing information.

More information can be found on the [website](#) of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), also NARIC Ireland.

■ Quality assurance and accreditation

QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) is a state agency established by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 with a board appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. Its functions include those previously carried out by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC); the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC); the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI).

QQI is also an awarding body and set standards for awards made in the NFQ. QQI validates education and training programmes and make awards in the further and higher education and training sector including in the Education and Training Boards.

The universities in their own right and institutes of technology under delegated authority from QQI largely make their own awards.

A list of recognised institutions of higher education is available on the [website](#) of the Department of Education and Skills. See also [Overview of higher education institutions](#).

There are accreditation bodies for individual disciplines, such as engineering, for which the Institution of Engineers of Ireland carries out the accreditation of technical programmes. Further information is available on the Engineers Ireland [website](#).

■ International treaties

Ireland signed and ratified the Lisbon Convention in 1997.

■ Composition of file

Upon completion of a third-level education programme, the diploma is often awarded along with an overview of subjects taken and the course/exam results obtained.

■ Diploma Supplement

The international Diploma Supplement is yet in standard use at Irish institutions of higher education. However, along with the diploma they generally issue an overview of subjects taken by the student and the course/exam results obtained. More information on the Diploma Supplement is available on the [website](#) of the European Commission.

■ Overview of higher education institutions

- [Website](#) of the Higher Education Authority, including an overview of higher education institutions.
- [Website](#) of the Department of Education and Skills, including a list with providers of higher education.

■ Useful websites

- [Website](#) of the Department of Education and Skills.
- [Website](#) of the Central Applications Office, which processes applications for access to undergraduate courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions.
- [Website](#) of the Higher Education Authority.
- [Website](#) of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), also NARIC Ireland.
- [Website](#) of the Further Education and Training Authority.
- [Website](#) of Education and Training Boards Ireland.
- [Website](#) of Engineers Ireland.