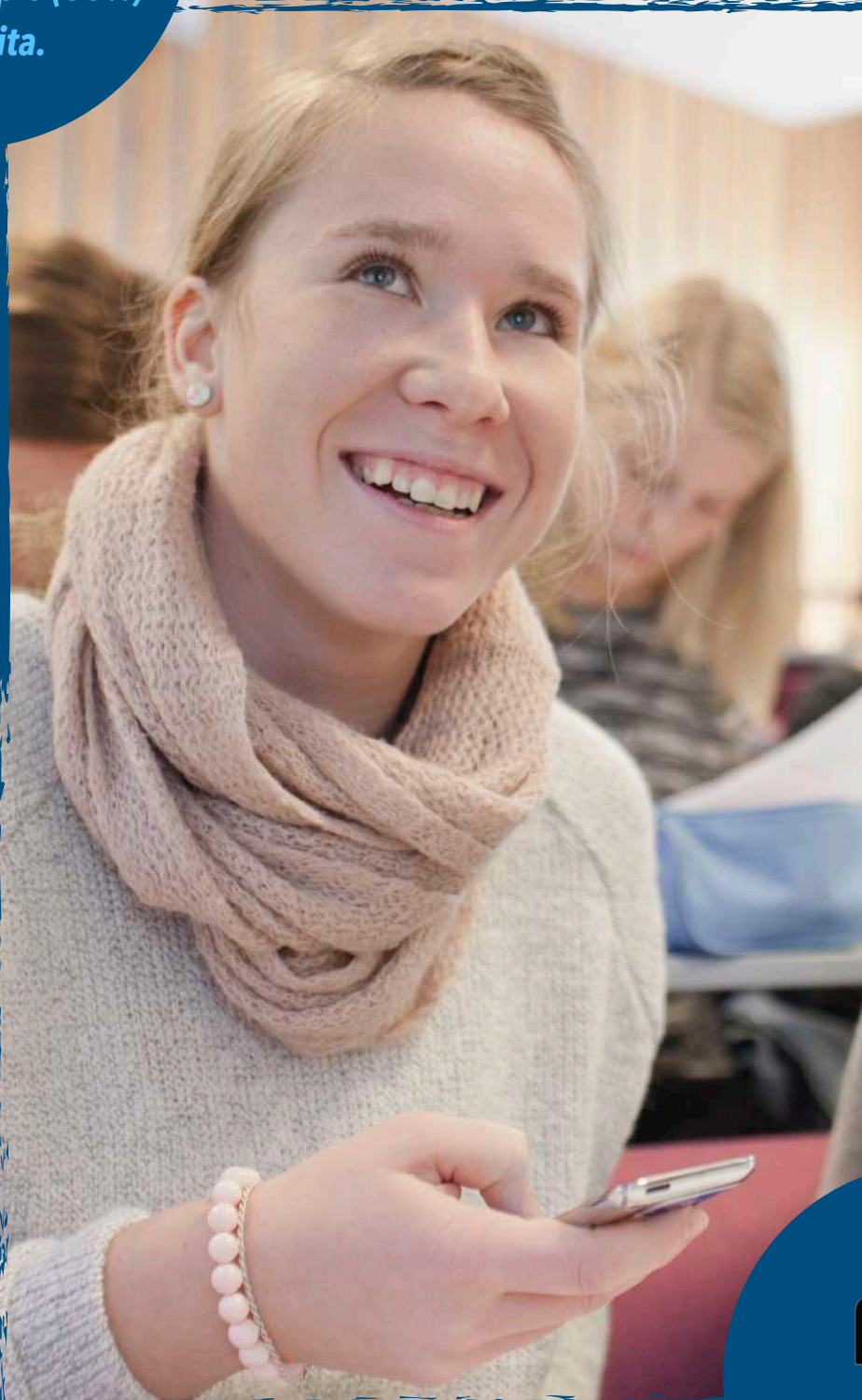


Ireland is the country in Europe with the highest proportion of highly educated people (50%) per capita.

Higher Education Qualifications

Explained



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Design and use of Qualifications and Learning Outcome Descriptions.



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The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications Explained

Higher education qualifications primarily correspond to levels 6–8 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). They vary by country, but they generally correspond to recognized levels within frameworks like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) or national systems. These qualifications represent different levels of achievement and specialization in academic or professional fields.

Qualification Frameworks

A qualifications framework is a tool for classifying qualifications based on criteria for specific levels of learning achieved. Its purpose is to integrate and coordinate national or international qualification subsystems, enhancing the transparency, accessibility, progression, and quality of qualifications in alignment with labor market needs and societal expectations.

Qualification levels are structured based on what an individual knows, can perform, and is capable of achieving through a learning process. The outcomes of this process are often categorized into "knowledge," "skills," and "general competencies". These three categories are described and compared through learning outcome descriptions. They could be understood as follows:

- **Knowledge** - An understanding of theories, facts, principles, procedures and practices within specific subject areas or professions.
- **Skills** - The ability to apply knowledge and use know how to solve (repeating) problems or to complete tasks that occurs often, including cognitive, practical, creative, and communication skills.
- **General Competence** - The ability to independently use knowledge and skills across various situations, including both professional and personal development.

The learning outcome descriptions (LOs) mentioned above, are statements describing what a learner knows, understands, and can do upon completing a learning process, expressed in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences. They may be structured like this:



Learning Outcomes

- The description of **content** of the course contains informational materials transforming the curriculum into short and focused content descriptions.
- The **General Learning Outcomes** (GLO) descriptions are transforming the description of the content into brief, clear and specific measurable statements addressing knowledge, skills and general competences.
- The **Specific Learning Outcomes** (SLO) transforms the GLO into the operational level, by specifying knowledge, skills and general competences.



Irish women are at the top of the EU, with almost six in ten having completed higher education.

A qualification is the formal result of an assessment and validation process, granted when an authorized body confirms that an individual has met specified learning outcomes according to established standards. In the higher education fields in Europe, a majority of universities and higher education institution apply undergraduate- and postgraduate level qualifications as follows:

- EQF Level 6 - The **Bachelor's Degree** (Undergraduate Level) qualification: This is typically the first level of higher education, providing foundational knowledge and skills in a few specific fields. The duration is usually 3 years and is equivalent to 180 ECTS.
- EQF Level 7: The **Master's Degree** (Postgraduate Level) qualification: It builds on the bachelor's level with advanced knowledge, skills and competences, often focusing on specialized areas within a field. The duration is typically 2 years of full-time study beyond a bachelor's degree. It is equivalent to 120 ECTS.

These two higher education qualifications provide a structured pathway for academic and professional advancement, with increasing levels of expertise and specialization as students progress through each level and year of study.

University studies are often focused towards and provide a theoretical education, lacking work-based training practices. The term "general competence" refers to a students ability to apply knowledge and skills effectively and responsibly in a range of situations, beyond specific tasks or technical skills. It involves understanding the broader context of one's actions, making informed decisions, and adapting to new challenges. Descriptions of general competence often includes qualities such as the ability to work and make decisions without constant guidance, thus enhancing independence, and understanding the impact

of one's actions on others and taking accountability for outcomes resulting in increased responsibility. It includes recognizing and acting in accordance with social and ethical standards, respecting cultural differences, and promoting fairness and inclusivity in the fields of ethical and social awareness, and being flexible and able to adjust to changing environments, situations, or roles thus promoting adaptability. Furthermore, general competence involves to apply knowledge creatively and critically to solve more complex problems, which includes critical thinking during the problem solving processes. Last, but not least, working effectively with others, sharing ideas clearly, and understanding multiple perspectives, helps promoting and supporting improved collaboration and communication process during the students studies.

Thus, in higher education, general competence is a key learning outcome because it equips students with the (theoretical) qualities needed for success in both personal and professional life, helping them adapt to various roles and responsibilities in society.