

# Making Sense of Qualifications

VIEWS OF RECRUITMENT  
PROFESSIONALS IN IRELAND

2019

FULL REPORT



**QQI**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann



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## 1. Introduction

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Since skills are the global currency of 21<sup>st</sup> century economies<sup>1</sup>, relevant skills, knowledge and competence development are an important goal of national education systems.

Increased global competition, digitalisation, automation and innovation increase demand for Lifelong Learning (LLL), learning-to-learn and preparedness (to get a job and to do the job) and other skills (specific and transferable) necessary for effective participation in the labour market, particularly in the context of dynamic and competitive economies and a rapidly changing society.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is Ireland's national authority for quality assurance and qualifications in post-secondary education and training. We are required to engage with labour market actors in the performance of our statutory functions. We develop and recognise qualifications, taking account of skills intelligence, employer and employee interests and changes in the nature of work and work practices. One aspect of the working relationship that is not well understood is the role of qualifications in recruitment practice in Ireland. In collaboration with the recruitment industry, QQI has undertaken a study to reveal insights from recruitment professionals into the role of qualifications in skills matching.

The study and its findings are part of our commitment to enhance the effectiveness and quality of our service to support employer engagement. The study has the following aims:

- To foster strategic engagement with the recruitment sector in Ireland;
- To promote use of the NFQ and EQF in the specification, assessment and recognition of qualifications in recruitment practice;
- To provide practical support to recruiters.

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## 2. Background and Context

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Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 aims to make Ireland a better place to live and work by *inter alia* equipping people for employment through high quality and relevant education and training<sup>2</sup>. Thus, industry engagement in education and training is an imperative to create a well aligned and responsive system that will facilitate the better matching of skills with employment opportunities<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> SOLAS. 2018. *Supporting working lives and enterprise growth in Ireland. 2018-2021 Further Education and Training Policy Framework for Skills Development of People in Employment*. SOLAS Background Paper, June 2018.

<sup>2</sup> DES. 2016. *Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025*.

[https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub\\_national\\_skills\\_strategy\\_2025.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Bainbridge, S. 2018. *Excellence and Inclusivity: A Skills Agenda for Europe*. Cedefop. Paper presented at the 5th International Conference on Employer Engagement in Education and Training: 2018, Social Mobility, industrial and skills strategies, post-Brexit: What role can employer engagement and technical education play? 5th-6th July 2018, BEIS Conference Centre, London Westminster.

<https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/london-conference-on-employer-engagement-in-education-and-training-2016/presentations/>

## 2.1 Education, NFQ and Skills Matching

The learning outcomes approach promoted by the NFQ and EQF introduces a common language enabling policymakers to better match the supply of skills from the education and training system with current and future demand for qualified workers.

In 2014, QQI launched *A Strategic Approach to Employer Engagement* aimed at promoting quality and innovation across further and higher education in training<sup>4</sup> jointly with employers. Yet the 2015 National Employment Survey<sup>5</sup>, commissioned by HEA, SOLAS and QQI, amongst many useful findings indicates that despite relatively high levels of engagement between industry and higher education institutions, there is still a need for better communication to allow for greater and more effective collaboration. In terms of practical use and awareness of the NFQ, a high percentage of employers are aware of the NFQ, yet only a little over one third had referred to it during their recruitment process.

Similarly, findings from the 2017 Policy Impact Assessment of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications<sup>6</sup> clearly indicated that engagement with the industry needed to be strengthened.



Qualitative data also points to a perceived lack of depth of understanding among both students and employers regarding the NFQ levels.

A closer look at stakeholder views on the impact of the NFQ on skills matching shows that while in terms of skills policy development the NFQ has played a constructive role, allowing for better, more informed policy formation, the actual impact of the NFQ on skills matching is our weakest point in comparison with NFQ impact on other areas (see Infographic [Policy Impact Assessment of the NFQ at a glance](#)).

## 2.2 Education, Skills Mismatch and Skills Utilisation

It is important that the education system understand the needs and expectations of industry. Occupational/skills mismatch in Europe is prevalent (Cedefop 2010)<sup>7</sup>. Existing studies examining occupational/skills mismatch from an aggregate country level perspective, explain cross-countries variation through various lenses (overeducation, overskilling, undereducation, underskilling, skills gaps and skills shortages) stimulating current policy debates on skills mismatch.

Generally, overeducation/overskilling occurs when the education level (skills level) of the employee is higher than the one required by the job (Flisi *et al.* 2017). Education mismatch can be measured in terms of years of education or educational (ISCED) level attained and required, while skills mismatch is a broad term that generally refers to a misalignment between the skills level possessed by the employee and those required to do the job (Ibid; McGuinness *et al.* 2017)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> QQI. 2014. *Education and Employers: A Strategic Approach to Employer Engagement*. <https://www.qqi.ie/News/Pages/QQI-publishes-strategy-for-employer-engagement.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> HEA, SOLAS, QQI. 2015. *National Employment Survey. Employers' views on Irish Further and Higher Education and Training Outcomes*. <http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Employer-Survey.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Indecon. 2017. *Policy Impact Assessment of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications*. <https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Reviewing-the-NFQ.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> Cedefop. 2010. *The Skill Matching Challenge: Analysing Skills Mismatch and Policy Implications*. Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union.

<sup>8</sup> McGuinness, S., Pouliakas, S., K. and Redmond, P. 2017. How Useful is the Concept of Skills Mismatch? International Labour Organisation, Geneva. Paper prepared as a background note for the International Conference on Jobs and Skills Mismatch, 11-12 May 2017, Geneva. [https://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS\\_552798/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS_552798/lang--en/index.htm)



The PIAAC (2008-2013) survey<sup>9</sup> assessed skills in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments and according to Flisi et al. (2017), it offers a unique opportunity to measure an individual's competences and occupational mismatch based on education-related variables (overeducation) and on the level of proficiency in specific skills (overskilling)<sup>10</sup>. Their findings indicate that Southern European countries and Ireland are characterised by more general education and having a high percentage of overeducated workforce but not being simultaneously overskilled (skills mismatch), showing the need for education to be better aligned with the needs of the world of work so that people are equipped with adequate level of skills for the labour market (Ibid.)

In a similar vein, Redmond and Whelan (2017) examined educational attainment and skills utilisation in the Irish labour market and drew comparisons between Ireland and the other 27 EU Member States by utilising the 2014 European Skills and Jobs Survey (ESJS) carried out by Cedefop. The authors concluded that while Ireland has the third highest percentage of foreign-born workers with tertiary education in the EU (accounting for 57 per cent), it has a relatively high degree of skills under-utilisation (measured by the rates of both overskilling and overeducation) in comparison to other EU Member States<sup>11</sup>. Their paper also points to the strong reliance of the Irish economy on a highly-skilled migrant labour supply from other countries. From this angle, the interrelationship between the Irish and UK economies and trade cannot be underestimated.

In the last few years the Irish economy has experienced steady economic growth (CSO 2017; OECD 2016)<sup>12</sup> but the implications of Brexit are looming. There appears to be a consensus in existing literature that regardless of the nature of Brexit, it will have a negative effect on the UK economy thus exposing Ireland to the effects of the UK's departure from the EU (Bergin *et al.* 2016)<sup>13</sup>.

### 2.3 Emerging Challenges

QQI, as an awarding body, acts to ensure that standards of knowledge, skill and competence are achieved before an award is made to a learner. Confidence in this process is essential in order for recruiters to identify the skill levels of applicants and assess their suitability for roles. At the same time, working and learning contexts are becoming increasingly international, digitalised (E-learning, open badges, micro-credentials<sup>14</sup>) and modern technology dependent, which is transforming the way people live and work. For example, in the enterprise context, of over 5000 training and education programmes delivered by Skillnet Network in 2017, over 50% were non-formal and offered some kind of industry-

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Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS\\_552798/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS_552798/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

<http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/aboutpiaac.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Flisi, S., Goglio, V., Meroni, E.C., Rodrigues, M., and Vera-Toscano, E. 2017. Measuring Occupational Mismatch: Overeducation and Overskill in Europe. Evidence from PIAAC. *Social Indicators Research*, Vol 131, Issue 3, pp 1211–49.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11205-016-1292-7>

<sup>11</sup> Redmon, P. and Whelan, A. 2017. Educational Attainment and Skill Utilisation in the Irish Labour market: an EU Comparison, ESRI, *Quarterly Economic Commentary*, Winter 2017. <https://www.esri.ie/pubs/QEC2017WIN.pdf#page=120>

<sup>12</sup> Central Statistic Office. 2017. *Quarterly National Household Survey, Q1 2017*. Dublin: CSO.

[https://pdf.cso.ie/www/pdf/20170523085100\\_Quarterly\\_National\\_household\\_Survey\\_Quarter\\_1\\_2017\\_full.pdf](https://pdf.cso.ie/www/pdf/20170523085100_Quarterly_National_household_Survey_Quarter_1_2017_full.pdf)

OECD. 2016. *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators, A Country profile for Ireland*. OECD Publishing: Paris.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/International-Statistical-Reports/Education-at-a-Glance-OECD-Indicators-2016-Briefing-Note.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Bergin, A., Garcia-Rodriguez, A., McInerney, N., Morgenroth, E. and Smith, D. 2016. *Modelling the Medium to Long Term Potential Macroeconomic Impact of Brexit on Ireland*. ESRI Working Paper, No 548. Dublin: ESRI.

<https://www.esri.ie/pubs/WP548.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Open badges are known as visual, digital emblem displaying the accomplishment of various achievements sharable across the web. Micro-credentials also known as digital badges represent and communicate accomplishment, skill, achievement or interest earned in many learning environments.



specific micro-credentials<sup>15</sup> while over 30% of trainees had a formal highest educational attainment of NFQ level 8 prior to the training<sup>16</sup>.

It is argued that micro-credentials and open badges bring together the world of education and training and the world of work, filling a gap between stated and desired outcomes within traditional qualifications and degrees (macro-credentials) and the skills, knowledge and competences sought by employers (see Ifenthaler *et al.* 2016)<sup>17</sup>. And while digitalisation creates new challenges and opportunities, transforming both educational and training systems (e.g., digital badges, open data, digital credentialing sources) and employment, by changing the skills requirements and profoundly altering the current ways that work is organised in our society<sup>18</sup>, it should not be forgotten that efficient and fair recognition of skills and qualifications is imperative, so that the labour market can respond flexibly to industrial change and economic restructuring<sup>19</sup>. Not surprisingly then, a range of supporting actions aimed at improving the quality and relevance of skills formation, making skills and qualifications more visible and comparable and advancing skills intelligence to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness, take prominent position on the Skills Agenda for Europe<sup>20</sup> (See also the annual Employment and Social Developments in Europe review 2018<sup>21</sup> and new Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning 2018<sup>22</sup>).

From the perspective of sustaining a good skills base for rapidly growing knowledge economies and addressing inefficiencies in the labour market due to skill deficits, public policy has a particularly important role to play in increasing the supply of skills by fostering the adult education/training necessary to redress low levels of foundation skills (Desjardins and Rubenson 2011). Education and training stakes are undeniably high. Responding to the skills demands of a digital, fast-paced economy is crucial to prevent disconnection and avoid the widening gap between the world of work and the world of education (see Keevy and Chakroun 2018)<sup>23</sup>.

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### 3. Methodology and Response Characteristics

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<sup>15</sup> Flynn, D. 2018 *Trends and Foresight*, Skillnet Ireland. Paper presented at the National Trends and Foresight Seminar: How will 'non-formal' qualifications be regarded in Ireland in 2020-25? 27<sup>th</sup> March 2018, DIT, Dublin.

<sup>16</sup> Skillnet Ireland. 2017. *Driving Ireland's Competitiveness through Innovative Learning*. Annual Report 2017.

<https://www.skillnetireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/SNI-Annual-Report-2017-low-res-single-pages.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Ifenthaler, D., Bellin-Mularski, N. and Mah, D. (Eds.). *Foundation of Digital Badges and Micro-credentials: Demonstrating and Recognising Knowledge and Competencies*. Switzerland: Springer.

<sup>18</sup> European Commission. 2017. [Concept Paper on Digitisation, Employability and Inclusiveness – The Role of Europe](#) See also the Eurofound Foundation Seminar Series 2016 on the Impact of Digitalisation on Work.

<sup>19</sup> Ecorys. 2016. Final Report on Obstacles to Recognition of Skills and Qualifications for a Comprehensive Account of the Effectiveness of Skills Recognition Practices in Europe.

<https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/156689fd-e922-11e6-ad7c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

<sup>20</sup> The [New Skills Agenda for Europe](#) aims to make better use of the skills that are available; equip people with the new skills that are needed - to help them find quality jobs and improve their life chances.

<sup>21</sup> European Commission. 2018. *Employment and Social Developments in Europe*. Annual Review 2018.

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8110>

<sup>22</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&rid=7](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&rid=7)

<sup>23</sup> Keevy, J. and Chakroun, B. (2018) *Digitalisation of Credentials. Implications for the Recognition of Learning*. UNESCO Draft Report for Peer Review – March 2018.

Having acknowledged that the key challenge for research and policy is to make sure that supply and demand for new skills and competences are matched<sup>24</sup> to suit the needs of the labour market, we aimed to support industry and form a better understanding of the use of the NFQ, EQF and the role of qualifications in recruitment by asking recruiters about the challenges faced by them in this area.

The process of initial data collection was informed by consultations with targeted representative bodies, which provided valuable insights and advice.

A ‘*Making Sense of Qualifications*’ survey questionnaire passed through several consultation stages ending in approval by the QQI Programme Board. A link to the survey was circulated by key gatekeepers to relevant recruiters during a 10-week data collection period in the last quarter of 2018.

In total, 92 individual responses were received. Brief response characteristics are outlined below in Table 1. The number of responses generated a rich body of data and is largely attributed to the efforts of lead bodies in the recruitment industry who promoted the survey to the target audience.

Table 1 Response characteristics

Organisation		
Classification		%
Type	Public	34%
	Private	76%
Ownership	Indigenous	54%
	International/Multinational	36%
Size	Fewer than 50 people	41%
	Between 51 and 250 people	21%
	251 people and above	37%

In summary, the survey questionnaire covered the following six themes:

- Qualifications – Challenges
- The Role of Qualifications in Recruitment
- The NFQ and the EQF in Recruitment
- Skills Recruited
- Topics of Particular Interest and Communication
- Future Collaboration

Finally, the survey design was fully compliant with GDPR requirements.

<sup>24</sup> European Commission [Learning and Skills for the Digital Era](#)

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## 4. Findings

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The *'Making Sense of Qualifications'* survey provides some interesting insights into the views of recruiters<sup>25</sup> on the role of qualifications in employment. Since we wished to gain a better understanding of the needs of recruiters in the context of the use and role of qualifications in the labour market in general and recruitment in particular, the first set of questions pertained to recognition of qualifications and the role of qualifications in recruitment.

### 4.1 Qualifications – Challenges

Effective recruitment and staff development means matching relevant skills and qualifications with the demands of work. It is our understanding that making sense of the range and variety of qualifications such as academic, industry-specific, professional, international etc. can sometimes be challenging for recruiters. As shown in Fig. 1 below, a majority of respondents (58%) stated that the evaluation of qualifications can 'sometimes' be difficult.

Figure 1



Understandably, we wanted to know what aspects of qualifications evaluation are challenging and to what extent it is difficult to source people with the right qualifications (See Fig. 2 and 3 below respectively) when attempting to match relevant skills with employment opportunities.

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<sup>25</sup> For the purposes of this survey, a respondent is someone who can be a recruiter/recruiter representative

Figure 2

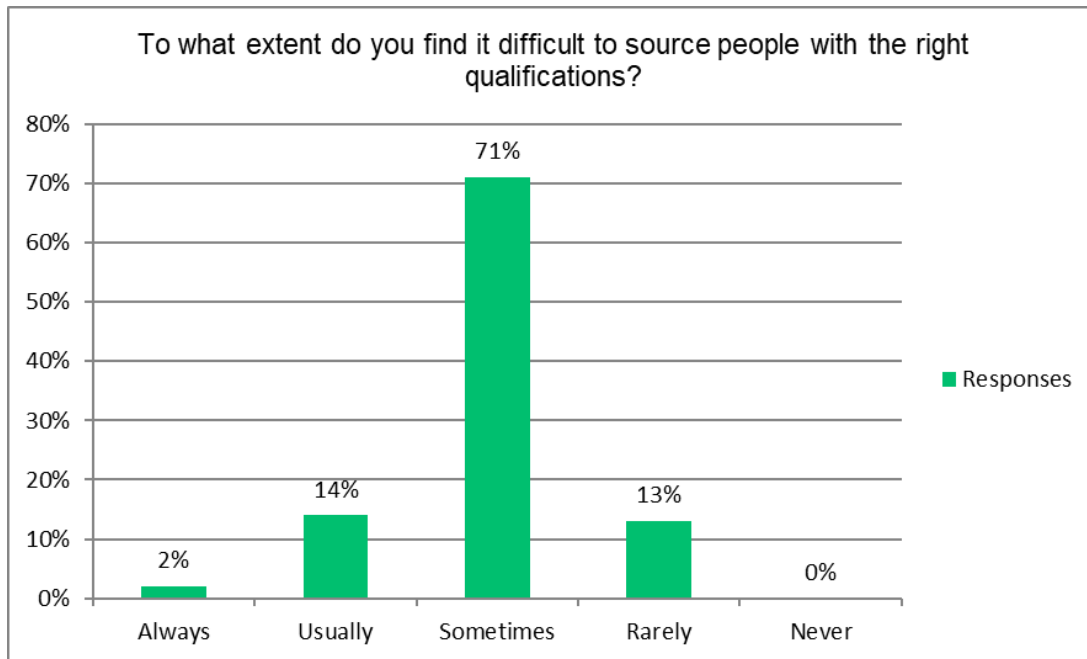


Fig. 2 above reveals that evaluating foreign qualifications is the most challenging (74%) in the qualifications evaluation process. Verifying qualifications was identified as the second biggest challenge (40%) followed by evaluation of professional qualifications (29%) and industrial certification (28%).

The respondents were also asked about difficulties with sourcing people with the right qualifications (See Fig. 3 below). 71% of recruiters indicated that sometimes it is difficult to find people with the right qualifications, which would be consistent with issues highlighted in Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 which pinpointed the need to bridge demand and supply and facilitate better matching of skills with employment opportunities.



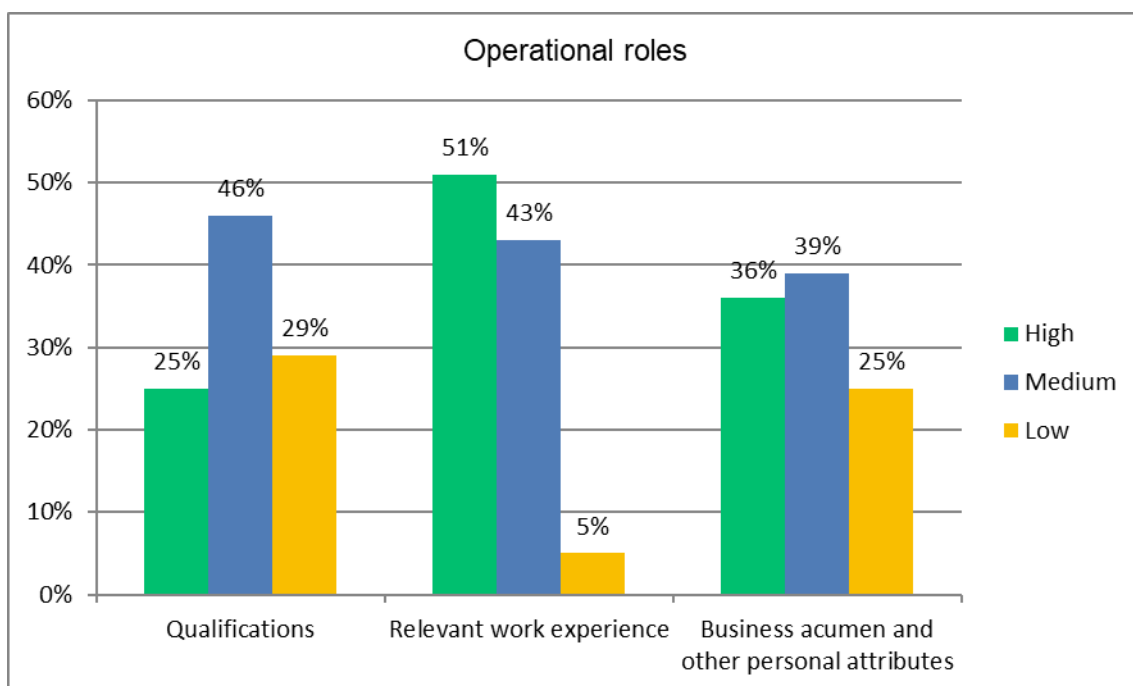
Figure 3

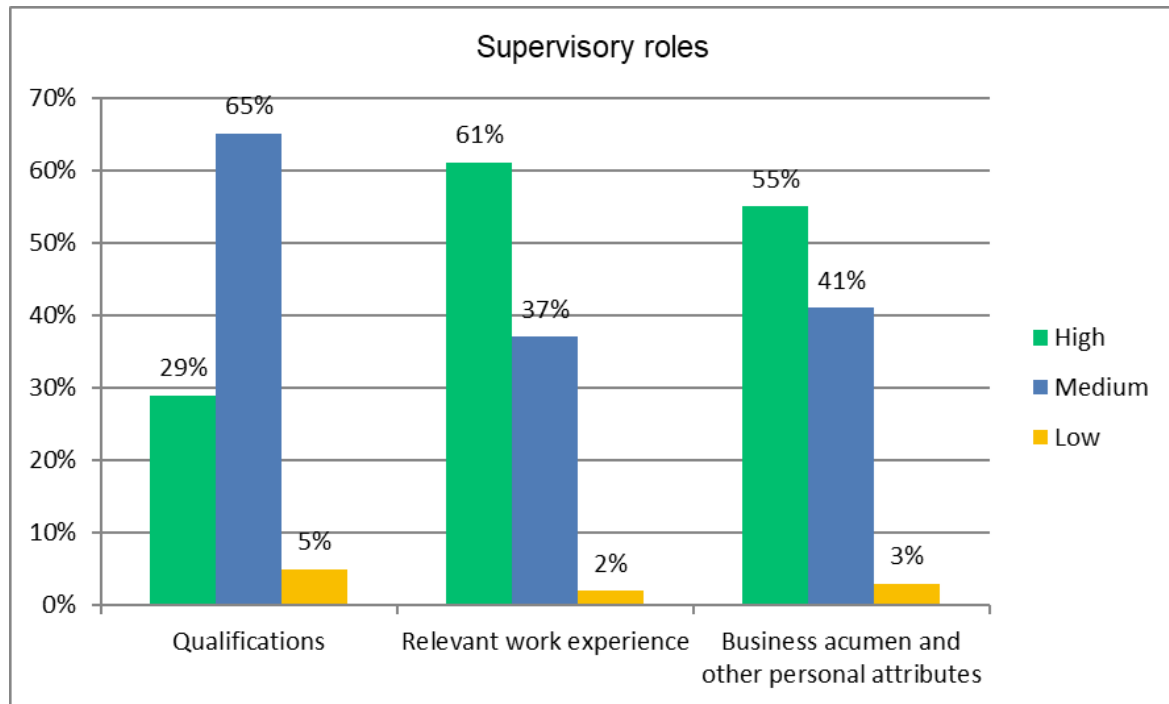
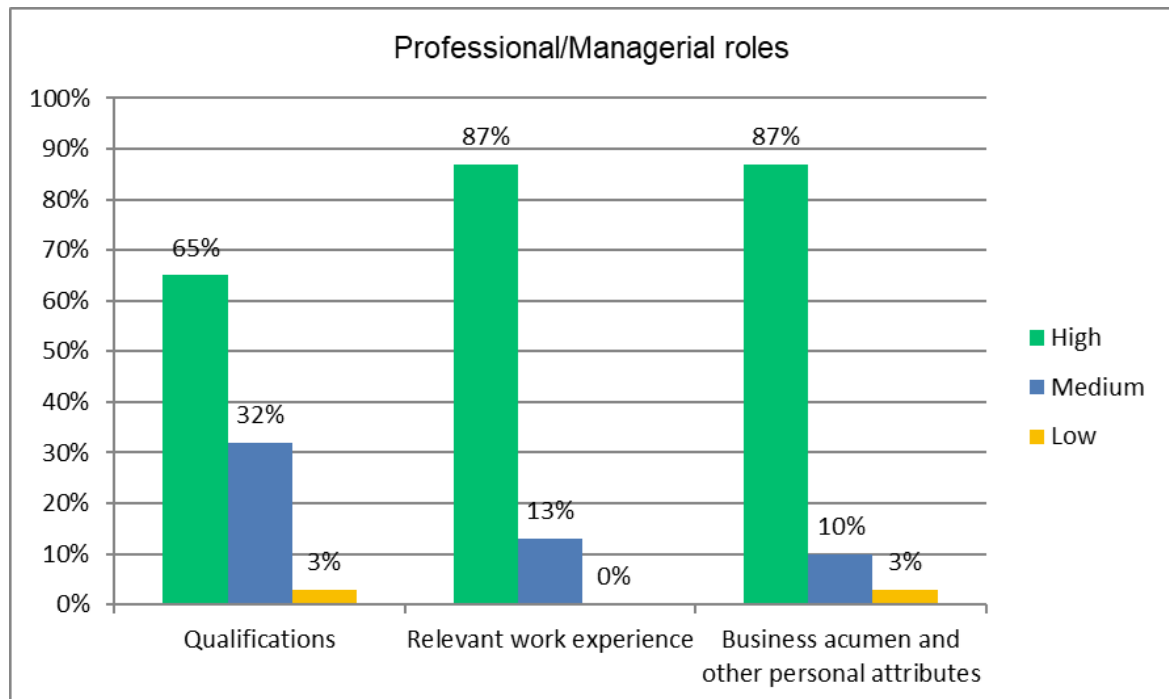


#### 4.2 The Role of Qualifications in Recruitment

Recruitment is a process of attracting and sourcing candidates with the right qualifications and skills to fill existing positions. Recruiting across different occupational roles poses additional challenges as apart from the right qualifications other personal attributes such as business acumen or relevant work experience matter a lot. Respondents' views on the importance of these factors, while recruiting for different occupational roles, is summarised in Figs. 4, 5 and 6 below.

Figure 4



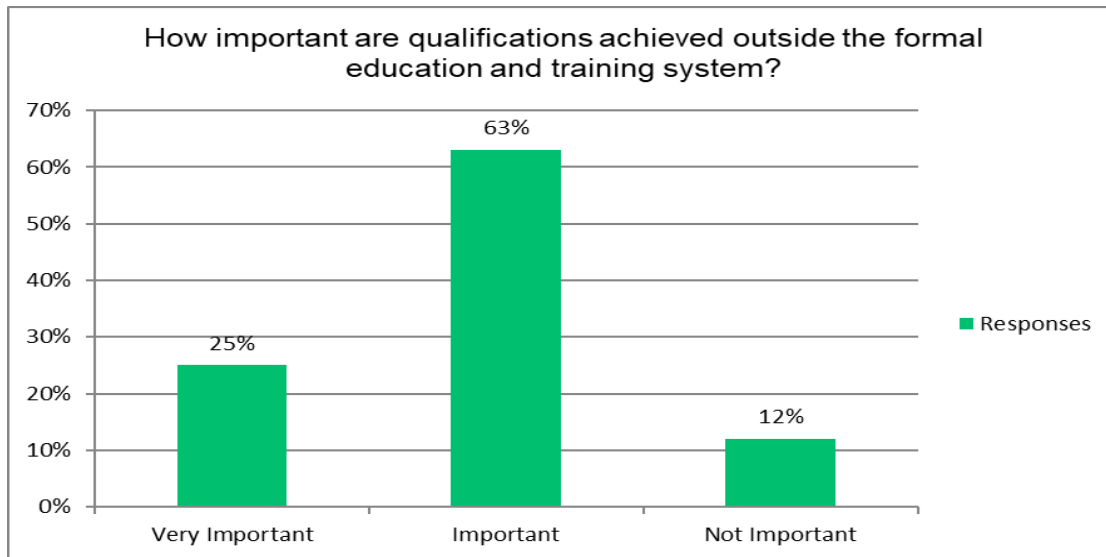
**Figure 5****Figure 6**

As shown above, the role and importance of qualifications in recruitment fluctuates depending on the role and the actual requirements of the job. For operational roles, relevant work experience was ranked highest among respondents (Fig. 4). For supervisory roles (Fig. 5), relevant work experience followed by business acumen and other personal attributes appear to be more important than qualifications. And

not surprisingly, as shown in Fig 6., relevant work experience and business acumen together with other personal attributes are of higher importance than qualifications when recruiting for professional and managerial roles. Yet, all three figures show an interesting dynamic in recruiters’ perception of the importance of qualifications in recruitment.

Qualifications outside the formal education and training system, such as professional qualifications, industry certification, international qualifications, have their own currency in the labour market. How important are they? The breakdown of the recruiters’ responses to this question is provided below:

Figure 7



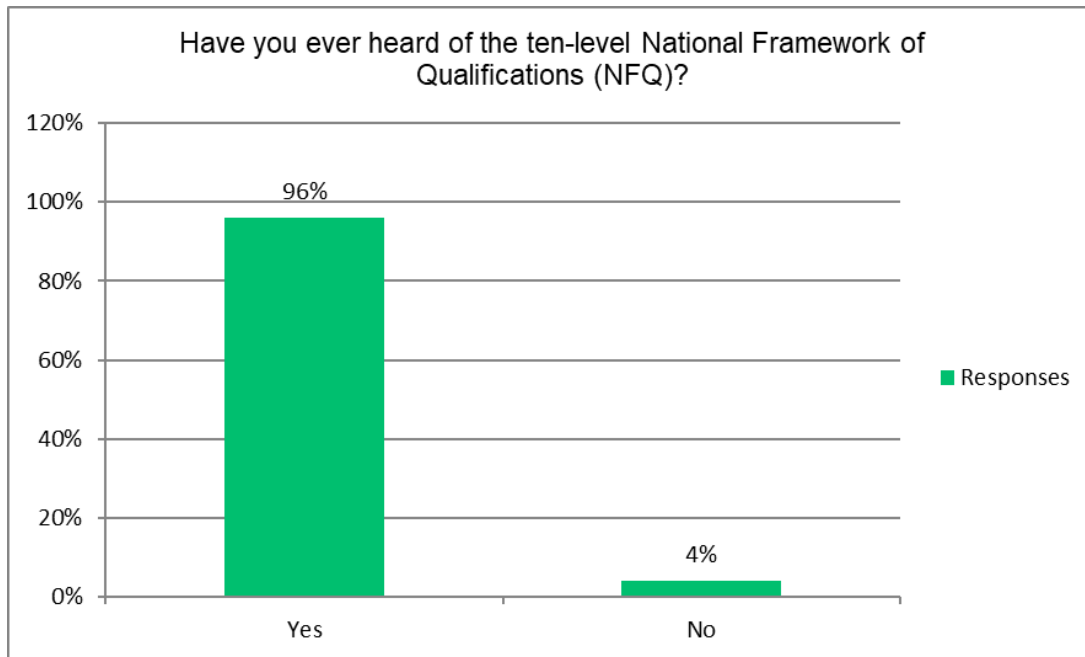
Generally speaking, qualifications obtained outside the formal education and training system form an important part of the knowledge, skills and competence sought by recruiters in Ireland, which corresponds with Fig. 12 revealing that holders of professional qualifications – equivalent to NFQ level 8 or above – are typically recruited alongside holders of formal qualifications at level 8 on the NFQ.

#### 4.3 The NFQ and the EQF in Recruitment

Another objective of this project was to assess recruiters’ awareness and use of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF).

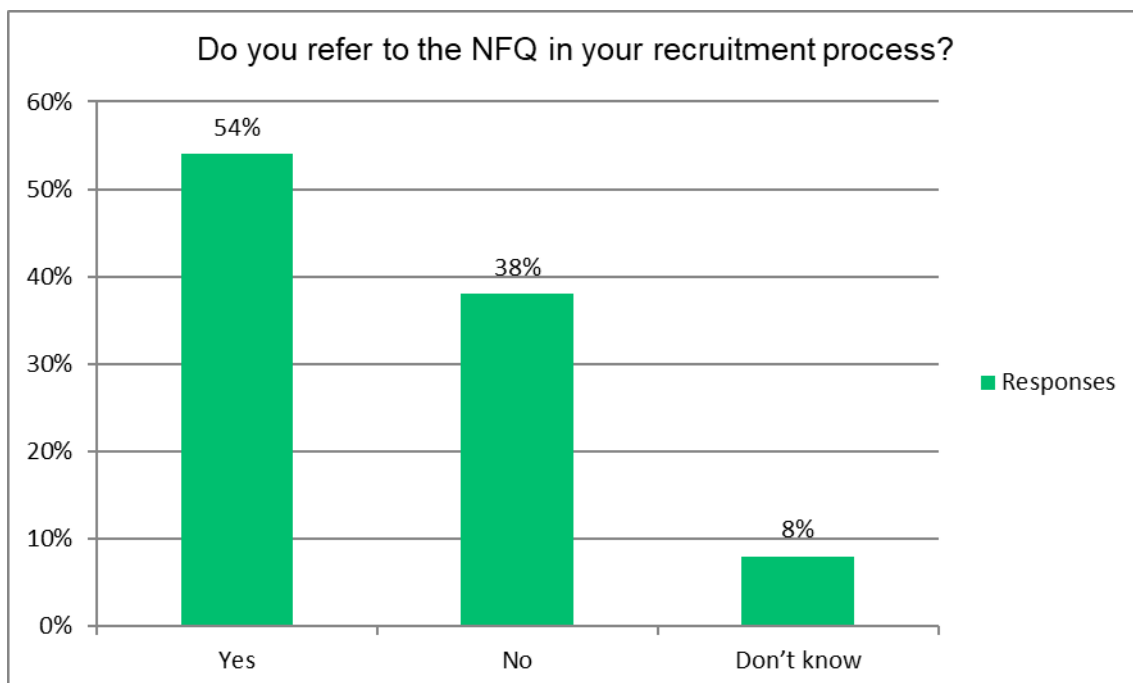
When survey respondents were asked if they had ever heard of the National Framework of Qualifications, 96% of respondents indicated that they had (See Fig. 8 below). This finding is consistent with the Omnibus longitudinal survey on NFQ public awareness levels commissioned by QQI and carried out from 2014-2017.

Figure 8



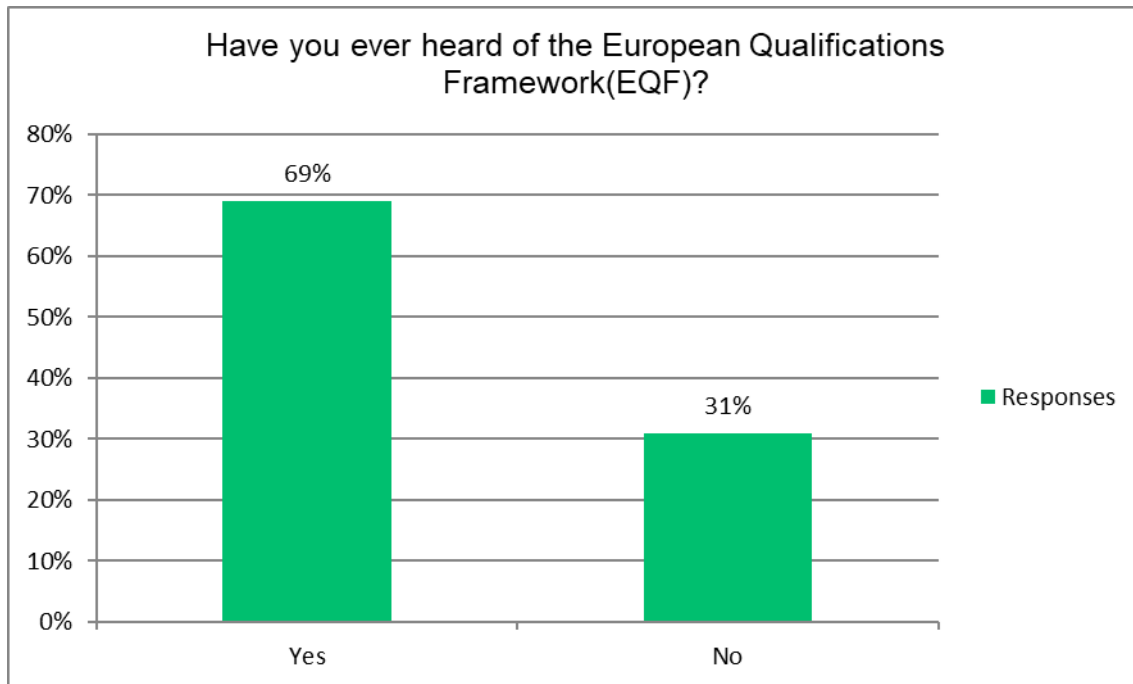
When recruiters were asked if they refer to qualifications in the NFQ during recruitment, 54% reported using the NFQ in their recruitment process (See Fig. 9 below).

Figure 9



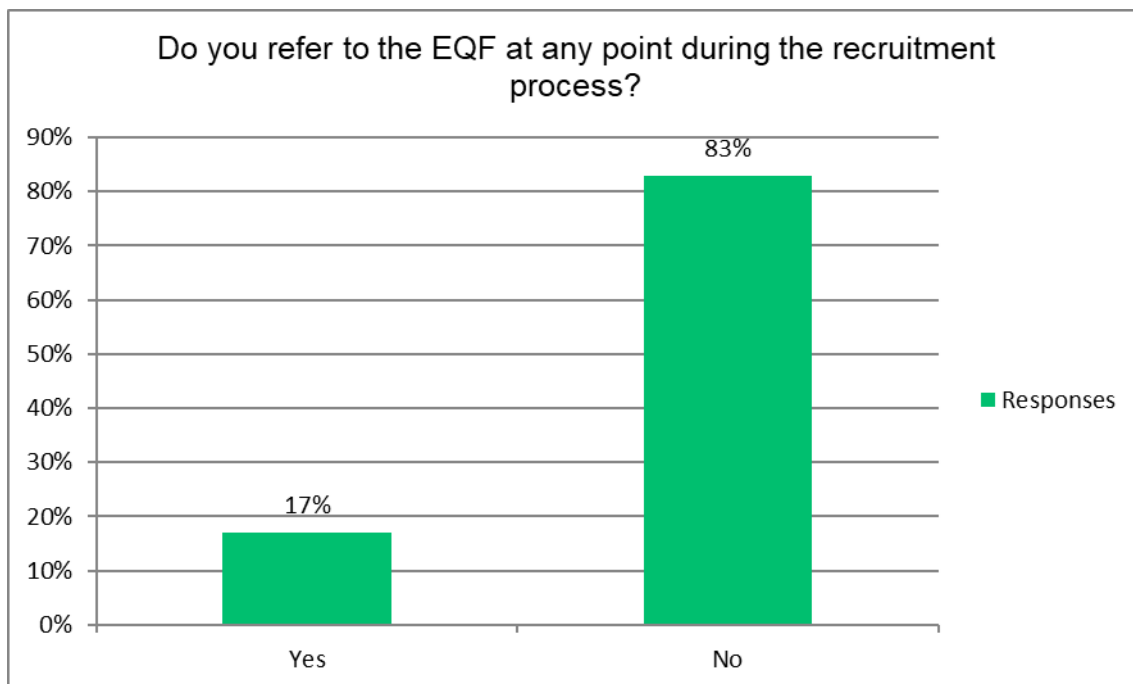
In terms of awareness of the EQF, perhaps surprisingly, 69% of respondents reported being aware of the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (Fig. 10 below). By international standards, this level of awareness would be considered very high.

Figure 10



17% of respondents reported referring to the EQF during the recruitment process (See Fig. 11 below). This is a positive finding and suggests that the EQF is beginning to gain traction as a device for supporting European mobility and recognition of skills and qualifications.

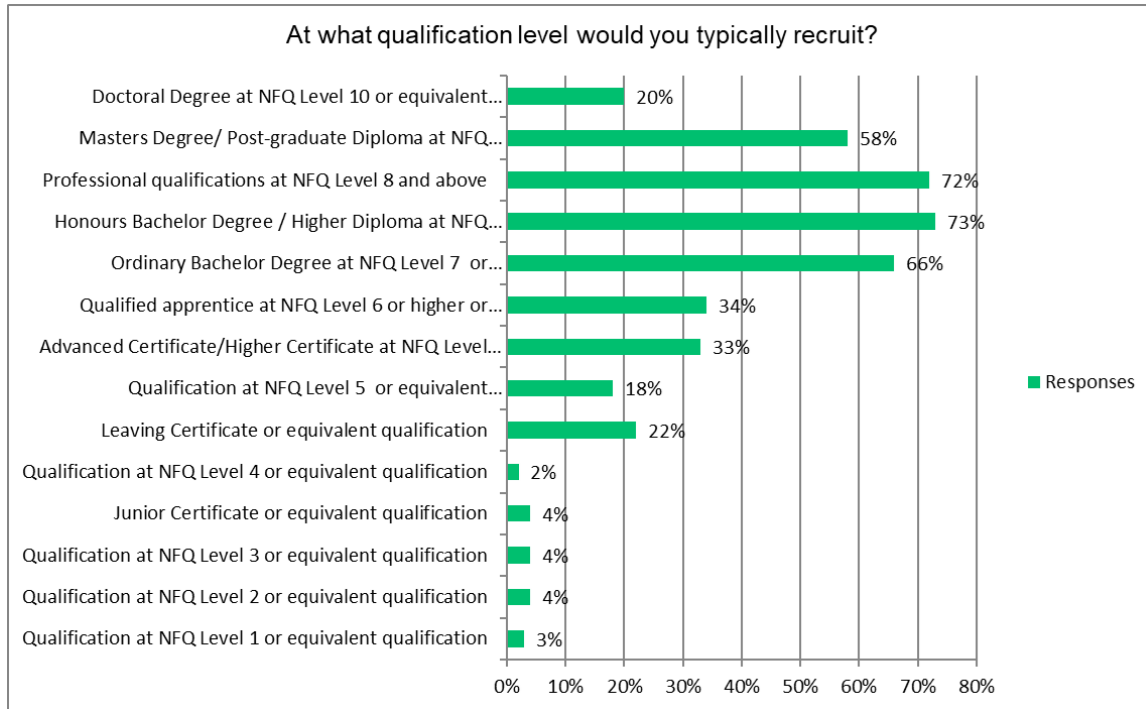
Figure 11



Naturally we were also interested in what level on the NFQ recruiters typically recruit their talent. As presented in Fig. 12 below, holders of qualifications at level 8 on the NFQ (73%) and holders of professional qualifications, equivalent to NFQ level 8 or above (72%), topped the list. This finding should

be interpreted with some caution, no generalised inference is drawn here about the most desirable level of qualification for employment. The spread of qualification levels that respondents in this study recruit for is interesting.

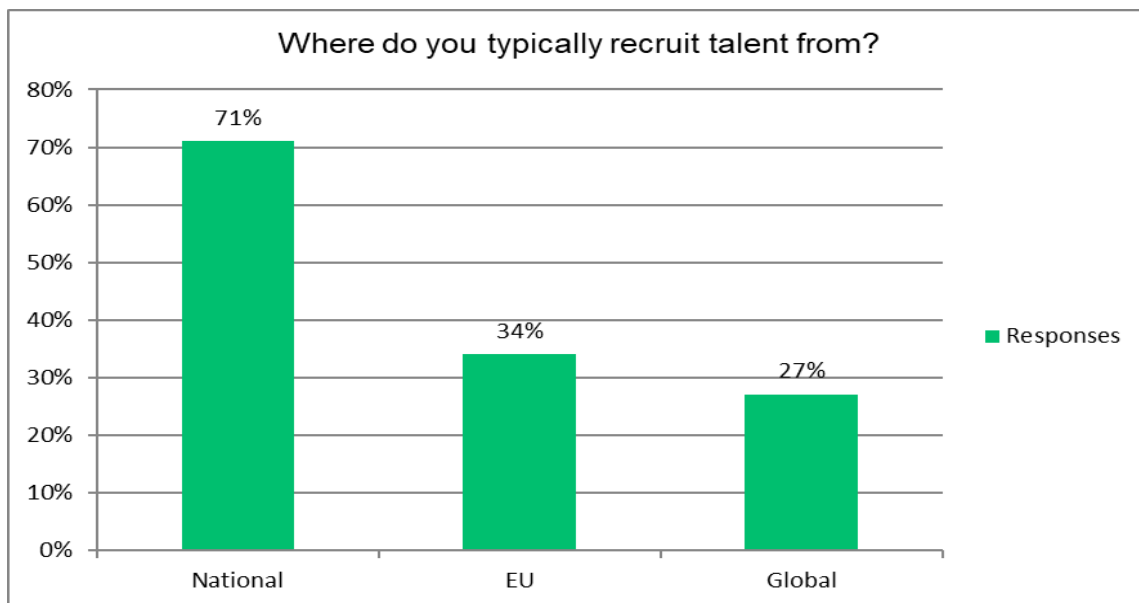
Figure 12



#### 4.4 Skills Recruited

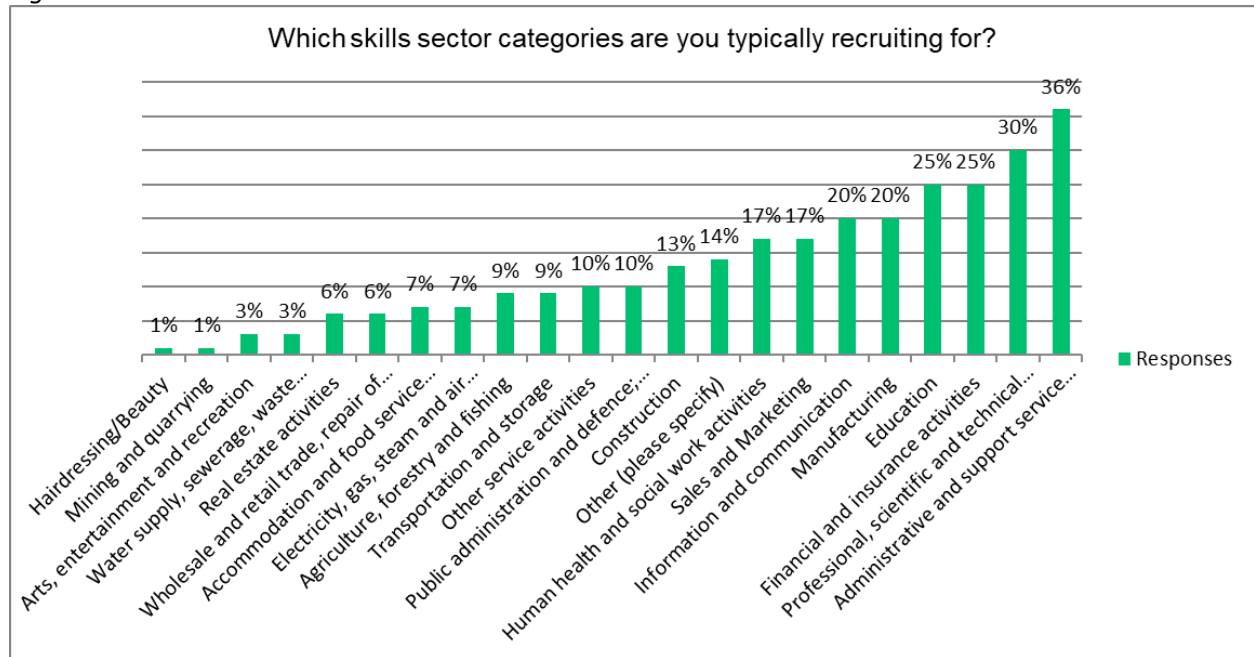
All recruiters were also asked about the geographic origins of candidates and as shown in Fig. 13 below, Ireland topped the list (71%), followed by the EU (34%) and global sourcing (27%).

Figure 13



Understandably, it was important to find out about the different skill/occupational categories<sup>26</sup> that the study respondents were recruiting for. Fig. 14 below shows a profile of a wide spread of skills categories based on multiple responses.

Figure 14

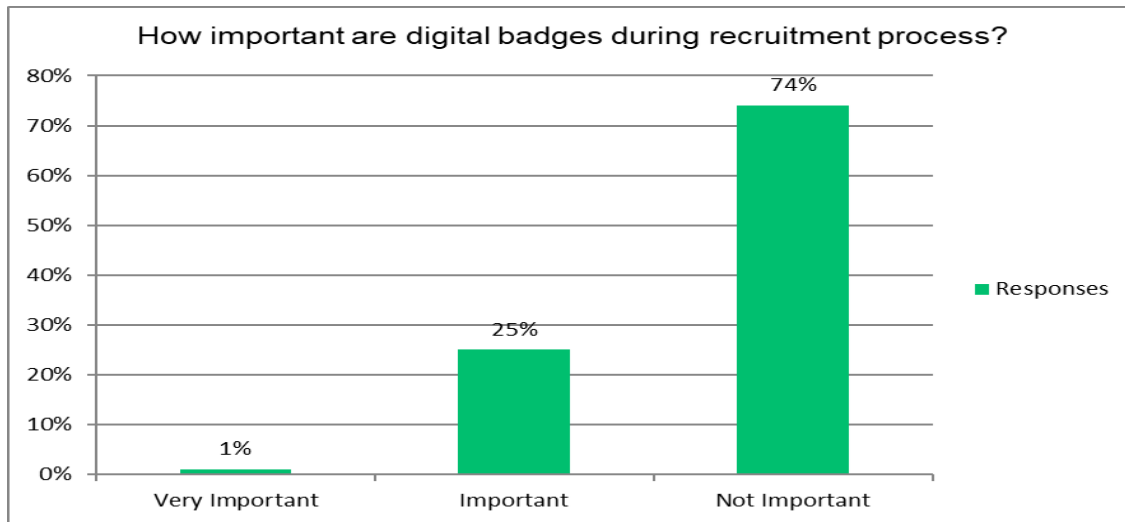


#### 4.5 Topics of Particular Interest and Communication

An emerging new form of qualifications is digital badges (also known as shareable micro-credentials) that represent and communicate accomplishment, skills, achievement or interest in many learning environments. How important are digital badges during the recruitment process in the Irish context? The results are shown in Fig. 15 below:

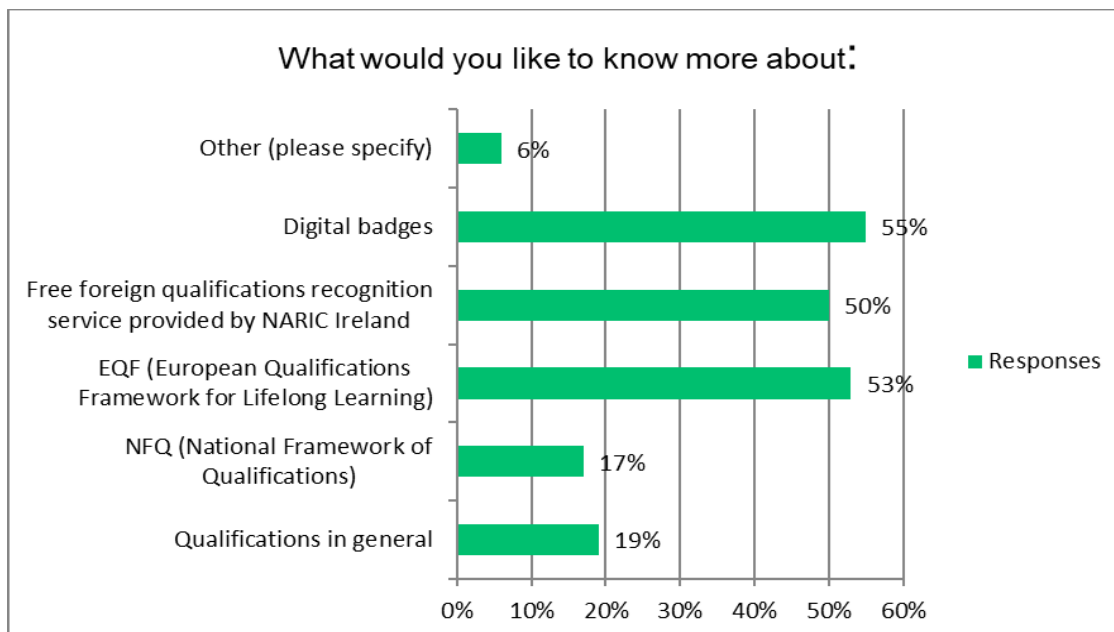
<sup>26</sup> European Industrial Activity Classification (NACE Rev.2)  
<https://www.cso.ie/px/u/NACECoder/NACEItems/searchnace.asp>

Figure 15



A large majority of recruiters (74%) stated that digital badges are not important to them. However, our respondents expressed a keen interest in learning more about them (See Fig. 16 below) by placing digital badges at the top of the list of topics of interest (55%). The second area of interest was the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (53%) followed by the foreign qualifications recognition service provided by NARIC Ireland (50%), which accords with Fig. 2, where respondents found evaluating foreign qualifications to be the most challenging aspect of recruiting.

Figure 16

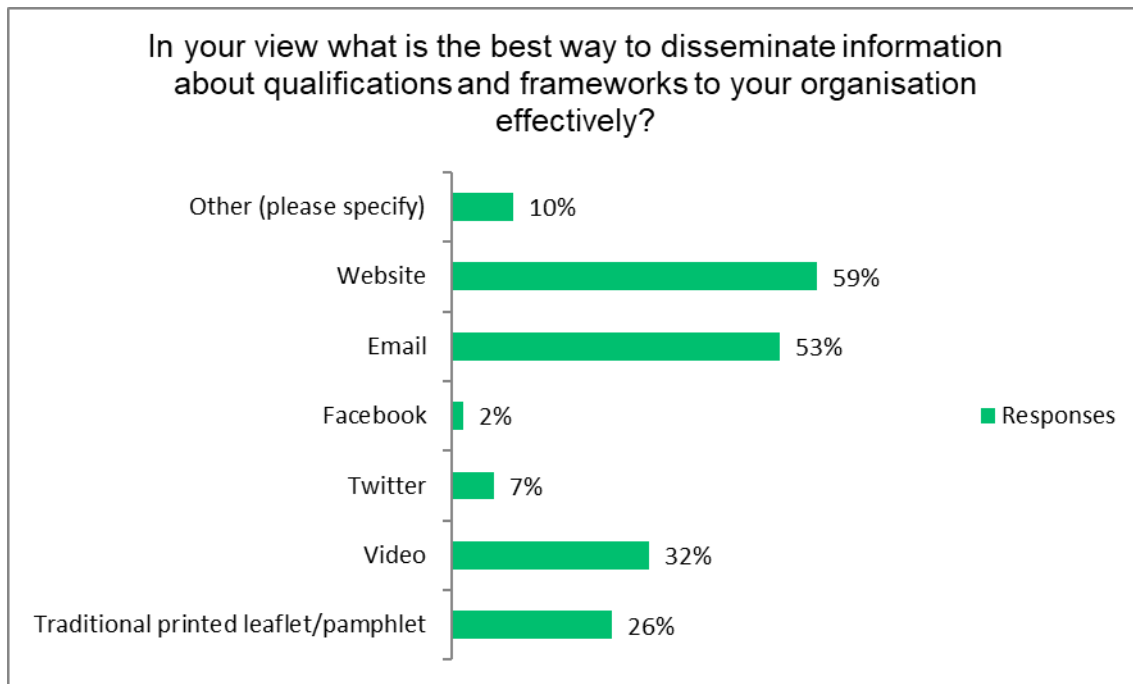


Learning more about qualifications in general and the National Framework of Qualifications is still of high interest, scoring 19% and 17% respectively. In the category 'other', referencing of qualifications was mentioned as another area of interest to recruiters.



The survey also gathered recruiters’ views on preferred channels of communication about qualifications frameworks. Fig. 17 below shows the breakdown of the recruiters’ responses to this question.

Figure 17



QQI website topped the list (59%), while traditional email is still perceived as an effective form of communication (53%). Video was listed as the third preferable option to disseminate information about qualifications and qualifications frameworks effectively (32%). Traditional printed leaflets/pamphlets still have their own currency (26%), however comments in the category ‘other’ clearly indicate that digital leaflets/pamphlets would be more suitable than printed ones.

#### 4.6 Future Collaboration and Engagement

This section provides an overview of recruiters’ views on collaboration opportunities between QQI and the industry.

All respondents were asked how QQI could improve its collaboration with recruiters. The main concerns that emerged were the need for more information on the EQF, qualification recognition, effective communication and engagement with the industry. A summary of the most frequently occurring open-ended responses is provided in Table 2 below.



Table 2

<b>Selected views of survey respondents on how QQI could improve collaboration with recruiters</b>
<i>Annual/Bi annual meetings/seminars.</i>
<i>Arrange information evening/presentation to explain about qualifications as they related to QQI, NFQ and EQF.</i>
<i>Briefings, events, visibility.</i>
<i>Communication on provision of foreign qualifications equivalents.</i>
<i>Educate on how qualifications from outside of Ireland equate to the NFQ.</i>
<i>Email updates, stakeholder meetings, webinars.</i>
<i>Help explain the framework in simple English - focusing on both the Irish and European framework, as with the increasingly tight jobs market many hires are coming from outside of Ireland.</i>
<i>I think a clearer list that captures all the various course titles in a comprehensive manner would be useful - there seems to be a lot of inconsistency around course titling.</i>
<i>Inclusion of a one-pager FAQ/updates for changes and developments would be useful.</i>
<i>Increase engagement with business organisations.</i>
<i>Meetings face to face with organisations.</i>
<i>More communications.</i>
<i>Promote services through industry bodies.</i>
<i>Provide information on overseas qualifications.</i>
<i>Provide more information on the EQF.</i>
<i>Regular effective communication and engagement.</i>
<i>This survey is a great way of reaching out. More interaction with agencies through the NRF or creating a mailing list for agencies to receive information directly from you.</i>
<i>Use Skillnets to collaborate and disseminate.</i>
<i>More effective and concise communications explaining what QQI means. L&amp;D professionals generally have a good understanding, however others do not.</i>
<i>Have an outreach officer or equivalent whose role is specifically to support organisations around the professional development of staff and upskilling the key people.</i>

Understanding qualifications and educational and training systems outside Ireland and understanding the types of awards included in the NFQ were concerns that emerged from another set of open-ended responses to issues and challenges facing recruiters (see Table 3 below).



Table 3

<b>Selected views of survey respondents on various qualification issues/challenges facing recruiters</b>
<i>Recognition of European qualifications is relatively straightforward; the difficulty arises when dealing with professional qualifications and certifications from further afield (e.g. Australia).</i>
<i>It can sometime be difficult to access information about FETAC awards and what people are actually qualified to do.</i>
<i>Lack of understanding by public. Many consider a special purpose or minor awards to meet major award requirements.</i>
<i>Lithuanian 3rd level system and college types.</i>
<i>The Leaving Certificate is mapped to both Level 4 and 5 with no concrete delineation between the two. This has a significant impact on deciding eligibility of candidates who are obligated to have a certain standard of Leaving Certificate (i.e. Executive Officers in the Civil Service).</i>
<i>The currency of QQI compound awards at levels 5 and 6 is an issue as there are generally only 3/4 core modules and the mix of component awards is not always explicit when evaluating a compound award.</i>
<i>Understanding qualifications e.g. Same 15 credit module offered by 5 different providers but called something different by each one. It would be more transparent if providers had to publicise the training programme by using the module name as per NFQ.</i>
<i>Clients can be concerned about the validity of qualifications and dismiss same if not validated.</i>
<i>Getting verification of a pilot's licence from foreign aviation authorities.</i>
<i>Finding candidates with the right international language skills.</i>

Tables 2 and 3 above report a selection of responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire which formed part of the survey. It is clear that industry expects a much higher level of engagement with regular updates, meetings, seminar and events to facilitate more effective communication and consequently greater collaboration.



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## 5. Summary of Findings and Conclusions

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The findings presented in this report should be interpreted with care as the number of responses was only 92, yet it is hoped that they represent many of the issues and challenges surrounding the role of qualifications and qualifications frameworks in recruitment.

### Qualifications – Challenges

- Evaluating foreign qualifications is the most challenging (74%) aspect of the qualifications evaluation process. Verifying qualifications was identified as the second biggest challenge (40%), followed by evaluation of professional qualifications (29%) and industrial certification (28%).
- 71% of recruiters indicated that it is difficult sometimes to find people with the right qualifications.

### The Role of Qualifications in Recruitment

- The role and importance of qualifications in recruitment fluctuates depending on the role and the actual requirements of the job. Still, regardless of the role, relevant work experience and/or business acumen together with other personal attributes appears to be of higher importance than qualification(s) per se;
- Qualifications outside the formal education and training system form an important part of the knowledge, skills and competence sought by recruiters in Ireland (63%);
- 25% of recruiters indicated that digital badges are important when recruiting.

### The NFQ and the EQF in Recruitment

- 96% respondents indicated that they had heard of the NFQ;
- 54% admitted using the NFQ in the recruitment process;
- 69% reported being aware of the EQF;
- 17% reported referring to EQF during recruitment process;

At what level on the NFQ do recruiters typically recruit for talent?

- Holders of qualifications at level 8 on the NFQ (73%) and holders of professional qualifications (equivalent to NFQ level 8 or above (72%)) topped the list.



## Skills Recruited

Accommodation and food service activities	7%
Administrative and support service activities	36%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	9%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	3%
Construction	13%
Education	25%
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	7%
Financial and insurance activities	25%
Hairdressing/Beauty	1%
Human health and social work activities	17%
Information and communication	20%
Manufacturing	20%
Mining and quarrying	1%
Other (please specify)	14%
Other service activities	10%
Professional, scientific and technical activities	30%
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	10%
Real estate activities	6%
Sales and marketing	17%
Transportation and storage	9%
Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	3%
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	6%

Where typically do recruiters recruit their talent from?

- Ireland (71%);
- EU (34%);
- Global (27%).

## Communication and Information Dissemination

To disseminate information about qualifications and qualifications frameworks effectively we should use:

- QQI website (59%);
- Email (53%);
- Video (32%);
- Traditional leaflets/pamphlets preferably in digital form (26%).

**Topics of Particular Interests**

- Digital badges (55%);
- EQF (53%);
- Foreign qualifications recognition service provided by NARIC Ireland (50%).

**Future Collaboration**

- Annual/Bi annual meetings/briefings, seminars and other events;
- More information/presentations on qualifications in the context of the NFQ and the EQF;
- More information on recognition of foreign qualifications and NARIC database and country profiles;
- More information on getting assistance with recognition of professional qualifications.

The survey findings certainly give us a better understanding of the recruiters' needs in terms of the role of qualifications in recruitment. It is evident that we need to continue promoting the NFQ and EQF but also information services offered by NARIC Ireland.

In terms of providing practical support to recruiters, we are now much clearer about what is expected from QQI and how we can meet these expectations. The findings will help us to calibrate our work and services in order to meet the needs of the industry.



\* 1. Based on your experience, do you find evaluating qualifications difficult when recruiting?

Always

Rarely

Usually

Never

Sometimes

\* 2. In evaluating qualifications what aspects do you find most challenging? [Tick all that applies]

Verifying qualifications

Evaluating professional qualifications

Understanding Irish qualifications

Evaluating industrial/company certification

Evaluating foreign qualifications

Other (please specify)



\* 3. To what extent do you find it difficult to source people with the right qualifications?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

\* 4. In terms of importance, what matters when recruiting across different occupational roles?

	Operational roles	Supervisory roles	Professional/Managerial roles
Qualifications	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Relevant work experience	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Business acumen and other personal attributes	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

\* 5. Have you ever heard of the ten-level National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)?

- Yes
- No

6. Do you refer to qualifications in NFQ terms in your recruitment process?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know





7. At what level would you typically recruit? [Tick all that applies]

- Qualification at NFQ Level 1 or equivalent qualification
- Qualification at NFQ Level 2 or equivalent qualification
- Qualification at NFQ Level 3 or equivalent qualification
- Junior Certificate or equivalent qualification
- Qualification at NFQ Level 4 or equivalent qualification
- Leaving Certificate or equivalent qualification
- Qualification at NFQ Level 5 or equivalent qualification
- Advanced Certificate/Higher Certificate at NFQ Level 6 or equivalent qualification
- Qualified apprentice at NFQ Level 6 or higher or equivalent qualification
- Ordinary Bachelor Degree at NFQ Level 7 or equivalent qualification
- Honours Bachelor Degree / Higher Diploma at NFQ Level 8 or equivalent qualification
- Professional qualifications at NFQ Level 8 and above
- Masters Degree/ Post-graduate Diploma at NFQ Level 9 or equivalent qualification
- Doctoral Degree at NFQ Level 10 or equivalent qualification

\* 8. Where do you typically recruit talent from?

- National
- EU
- Global

\* 9. How important are qualifications achieved outside the formal education and training system (e.g., Professional qualifications, Industry certification) for your organisation?

- Very Important
- Important
- Not Important

\* 10. How important are digital badges during recruitment process? [Digital badges also known as shareable micro-credentials that represent and communicate accomplishment, skills, achievement or interest in many learning environments]

- Very Important
- Important
- Not Important



\* 11. Have you ever heard of the European Qualifications Framework(EQF)?

The EQF is an overarching 8-level framework that links the qualifications frameworks of different European countries together

Yes

No

\* 12. Do you refer to the EQF at any point during the recruitment process?

Yes

No

\* 13. What would you like to know more about:

Qualifications in general

NFQ (National Framework of Qualifications)

EQF (European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning)

Other (please specify)

Free foreign qualifications recognition service provided by NARIC Ireland

Digital badges

\* 14. In your view what is the best way to disseminate information about qualifications and frameworks to your organisation effectively?

Traditional printed leaflet/pamphlet

Video

Twitter

Other (please specify)

Facebook

Email

Website

15. What could QQI do better to improve collaboration with organisations like yours?

16. Are there any other qualification issues or challenges facing you as a recruiter?



\* 17. Please indicate the ownership and scope of your organisation

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public  | <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private | <input type="checkbox"/> International/Multinational |

\* 18. Please indicate the total size of your workforce

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Under 50 people           | <input type="radio"/> 251 people and above |
| <input type="radio"/> Between 51 and 250 people |  |

\* 19. Which skills sector categories you are typically recruiting to?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accommodation and food service activities           | <input type="checkbox"/> Mining and quarrying   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administrative and support service activities       | <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture, forestry and fishing                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Real estate activities   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arts, entertainment and recreation                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other service activities   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction  | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional, scientific and technical activities                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education   | <input type="checkbox"/> Public administration and defence; compulsory social security        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply | <input type="checkbox"/> Sales and Marketing  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial and insurance activities                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation and storage   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Human health and social work activities             | <input type="checkbox"/> Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hairdressing/Beauty                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information and communication                       |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)                              |   |

20. If you wish to provide any final comments about this survey, the comment box is below:



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