

# Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS)

## Progression Routes into Higher Education

The Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS) gives learners the opportunity to use their QQI Level 5 or 6 major awards to apply, through the CAO, for a place in the first year of a higher education programme.

Programmes leading to Level 5 and Level 6 Major Awards are available through providers who have programmes validated with QQI. Please view the Provider and Programmes Directory in [QSearch](#) for details of providers offering programmes of education and training. ***Please note, application to participate in the programme is made directly to the provider.***

Linked awards, special requirements and available higher education programmes are published by the admissions office of the individual higher education institution and on [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie).

## Rules for Eligibility to the Scheme

Level 5 and Level 6 Major Awards are made up of a number of Minor Awards known as components. Different combinations of components lead to different Major Awards.

Each component has a credit value, typically between 15 and 30. A Major Award needs 120 credits, made up by combining components. For example: 8 components of 15 credits each = 120 credits.

- Progression requires a full Level 5 or Level 6 Major Award, with at least 120 credits. In some instances, progression is on the basis of specific Level 5 or 6 Major Awards.
- Components (Minor Awards), or achievement of less than 120 credits, will not suffice for progression under the HELS
- The applicant is responsible for ensuring that their college/provider applies to QQI for Major Award status on their behalf, prior to application to the CAO

Applicants MUST check both the individual Higher Education institution and the CAO websites to ensure they meet any special or essential requirements specified such as:

- A specific Major Award.
- A specific grade in specific components.
- Additional Award requirements such as mathematics.
- That all credits used for scoring purposes are achieved in one 'single sitting'

## What does 'single sitting' mean?

Whilst Major Award may be achieved over more than one year, it is important to note that some higher education institutions require that your 120 credits are achieved within a 'single sitting' between 1 August and 31 July of any certification year. Check the CAO and individual college websites for specific requirements.

## The Scoring System for FET awards

Once all of the above requirements have been met, a learner can apply for a place on the linked higher education programme. The best score for each applicant is calculated and the results are forwarded to the CAO in July of each year.

You can calculate your score using the free online points calculator at [www.careersportal.ie/ggi/](http://www.careersportal.ie/ggi/), which is based on the following scoring system:

Each level 5 and level 6 components are scored:

- 3.25 for a Distinction
- 2.16 for a Merit
- 1.08 for a Pass

This number is then multiplied by the individual component credit value to a maximum of 120 credits (a total of 390 points).

It may be easiest to multiply the individual component credit value by 3 for Distinction, 2 for Merit and 1 for Pass, multiplying by 13 and dividing by 12.

See the links to the scoring examples below for more information.

## Using Legacy FETAC (NCVA) Certificates

If you are using a previously linked Award that is not part of the Common Awards System (CAS) with a credit value of less than 15, multiply the credit value by 15. For example, a component might have a credit value of 1, therefore  $1 \times 15 = 15$ . Then use the same procedure outlined above to calculate your score, and adjusted to Points.

See the links to the scoring examples below for more information.