

# **An Analysis of CAO First Preference Applications 2014**

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# An Analysis of CAO First Preference Applications 1 Feb 2014

## 1. Overall Applications

The following short paper outlines changes in CAO first preference applications by sector, level and discipline from 1 February 2010 to 2014. First preference applications give us a good early indication of students discipline preferences for the upcoming academic year (2014/15). They allow us to identify changing trends in discipline choice.

**Table 1: Overall number of CAO Applicants<sup>1</sup> 2000 – 2014 (1 Feb)**

Year	Number of Applicants	Change over previous year	% Change over previous year
2000	60,321		
2001	62,849	2,528	4.2%
2002	62,294	-555	-0.9%
2003	62,802	508	0.8%
2004	60,174	-2,628	-4.2%
2005	60,126	-48	-0.1%
2006	59,485	-641	-1.1%
2007	61,961	2,476	4.2%
2008	63,868	1,907	3.1%
2009	67,634	3,766	5.9%
2010	71,843	4,209	6.2%
2011	71,466	-377	-0.5%
2012	71,648	182	0.3%
2013	71,151	-497	-0.7%
2014	73,091	+1,940	+2.7%

Source: CAO

- Table 1 shows an increase (+2.7%) in applicants in 2014, following a slight decline in 2013. This represents 1,940 more CAO applications. This is the first significant increase in applications since 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> Applicants can make an application to both the Level 8 and Level 7/6 lists. Therefore an applicant may have a first preference choice on both lists and will be offered their highest preference from both lists. It is also the case that a student may only make an application to one list.

## 2. Level 8 First Preference Applications 2010 – 2014

Table 2 outlines the changes in first preference level 8 applications in the various sectors of the higher education system.

**Table 2: Sectoral Changes in Level 8 First Preference Applications 2010 - 2014**

	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Colleges of Education</b>	3,747	6.0	3,593	5.8	3,189	5.1	2,891	4.8	3,127	5.0
<b>Institutes of Technology</b>	18,075	29.1	18,014	29.3	18,582	30.0	18,244	30.0	18,605	29.8
<b>Universities</b>	38,047	61.3	37,639	61.2	38,150	61.6	37,670	62.0	38,742	62.3
<b>Others</b>	2,213	3.6	2,222	3.6	1,925	3.1	1,934	3.2	1,867	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>62,082</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>61,468</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>61,846</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60,739</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>62,341</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: CAO

- First preference applications to level 8 courses increased by 2.6% from 2013 to 2014, an increase of 1,602 applications.
- Applications to the Universities, Institutes of Technology and the Colleges of Education all increased while overall proportions of applications remained stable. However, applications to Other Colleges declined slightly in 2014 with their share of all first preference applications declining from 3.2% in 2013 to 2.9% in 2014.
- First preferences to Universities make up 62.3% of all level 8 first preference applications; Institutes of Technology make up 29.8%, Colleges of Education 5.0% and Other Colleges 2.9%.

Tables 3a and 3b review trends in first preference applications by discipline over previous years.

**Table 3a: Level 8 First Preference Application by Discipline**  
**2010 – 2014**

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>Engineering</b>	2,594 (4.2%)	2,674 (4.3%)	2,774 (4.5%)	2,926 (4.8%)	3,215 (5.1%)
<b>Construction</b>	1,824 (2.9%)	1,379 (2.2%)	1,188 (1.9%)	1,040 (1.7%)	1,166 (1.9%)
<b>Computing</b>	2,920 (4.7%)	3,288 (5.4%)	3,931 (6.4%)	3,904 (6.4%)	4,311 (6.9%)
<b>Science</b>	4,194 (6.8%)	4,029 (6.6%)	4,337 (7.0%)	4,570 (7.5%)	4,916 (7.9%)
<b>Total Technology</b>	<b>11,532 (18.6%)</b>	<b>11,370 (17.7%)</b>	<b>12,230 (19.8%)</b>	<b>12,440 (20.5%)</b>	<b>13,608 (21.8%)</b>
<b>Agriculture and Veterinary</b>	1,431 (2.3%)	1,665 (2.7%)	1,862 (3.0%)	1,848 (3.0%)	1,881 (3.0%)
<b>Nursing</b>	5,541 (8.9%)	5,585 (9.1%)	5,775 (9.3%)	5,807 (9.6%)	5,490 (8.8%)
<b>Medicine</b>	3,755 (6.0%)	3,591 (5.8%)	3,719 (6.0%)	3,480 (5.7%)	3,276 (5.3%)
<b>Dentistry</b>	347 (0.6%)	298 (0.5%)	295 (0.5%)	287 (0.5%)	282 (0.45%)
<b>Other Healthcare</b>	3,583 (5.8%)	4,068 (6.6%)	4,217 (6.8%)	4,415 (7.3%)	4,561 (7.3%)
<b>Arts and Humanities</b>	15,851 (25.5%)	15,395 (25.0%)	14,688 (23.7%)	14,424 (23.7%)	14,651 (23.5%)
<b>Education</b>	6,608 (10.6%)	6,652 (10.8%)	6,081 (9.8%)	5,558 (9.2%)	5,468 (8.8%)
<b>Business and Law</b>	9,216 (14.8%)	8,547 (13.9%)	8,509 (13.8%)	8,461 (13.9%)	9,368 (15.0%)
<b>Social Services</b>	2,311 (3.7%)	2,367 (3.9%)	2,375 (3.8%)	2,033 (3.3%)	1,931 (3.1%)
<b>Services</b>	1,907 (3.1%)	1,930 (3.1%)	2,095 (3.4%)	1,986 (3.3%)	1,825 (2.9%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>62,082 (100%)</b>	<b>61,468 (100%)</b>	<b>61,846 (100%)</b>	<b>60,739 (100%)</b>	<b>62,341 (100%)</b>

Source: CAO

**Table 3b: Level 8 First Preference Application by Discipline  
One year and five year Change**

	2010	2013	2014	% of applications	1 year change	5 Year Change
Engineering	2,594	2,926	3,215	5.1%	9.8%	23.9%
Construction	1,824	1,040	1,166	1.9%	12.1%	-36.1%
Computing	2,920	3,904	4,311	6.9%	10.4%	47.6%
Science	4,194	4,570	4,916	7.9%	7.6%	17.2%
<i>Total Technology</i>	<i>11,532</i>	<i>12,440</i>	<i>13,608</i>	<i>21.8%</i>	<i>9.4%</i>	<i>18.0%</i>
Agriculture and Veterinary	1,431	1,848	1,881	3.0%	1.8%	31.4%
Nursing	5,541	5,807	5,490	8.8%	-5.5%	-0.9%
Medicine	3,755	3,480	3,276	5.3%	-5.9%	-12.8%
Dentistry	347	287	282	0.45%	-1.7%	-18.7%
Other						
Healthcare	3,583	4,415	4,561	7.3%	3.3%	27.3%
Arts and Humanities	15,851	14,424	14,651	23.5%	1.5%	-7.6%
Education	6,608	5,558	5,468	8.8%	-1.6%	-17.3%
Business and Law	9,216	8,461	9,368	15.0%	10.7%	1.6%
Social Services	2,311	2,033	1,931	3.1%	-5.0%	-16.4%
Services	1,907	1,986	1,825	2.9%	-8.1%	-4.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>62,082</b>	<b>60,739</b>	<b>62,341</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>

- First preference applications to Technology courses continue to show an increase in total proportion of discipline choices. These have increased from 19.8% in 2012 to 20.5% in 2013 and 21.8% in 2014. In numerical terms, the number of students studying Technology courses increased from 12,440 in 2013 to 13,608 in 2014, an increase of 9.4%.
- First preference applications to Science courses in 2014 increased by 7.6% from 4,570 in 2013 to 4,916 in 2014, now comprising 7.9% of all first preference level 8 applications.
- Engineering increased again in 2014 to 3,215 from 2,926 in 2013. These now make up 5.1% of all first preference level 8 applications.
- First preference applications to Computing courses increased in 2014 with 4,311 applications. They now constitute 6.9% of all level 8 first preference applications.

- Construction increased their first preference applications in 2014. This is the first increase since the recession. First preference applications now make up 1.9% of all level 8 applications.
- Business and Law applications show an increase in 2014 with 15% of all applications compared to 14% in 2013.
- Overall first preference applications to Healthcare professions (Medicine, Dentistry and Nursing) are down in 2013 with Other Healthcare applications remaining static in terms of the proportion of all applications.
- While Arts and Humanities applications remain strong, with the highest proportion of first preferences at 23.5% its share did show a very slight decline in 2014.
- Disciplines with the largest increase in first preference applications since 2010 are: Computing, Agriculture and Vet, Other Healthcare and Engineering.
- Disciplines with the greatest decrease in first preference applications since 2010 are: Construction, Dentistry, Education and Social Services.

### 3. Level 7/6 First Preference Applications 2010 – 2014

Table 4 outlines the changes in first preference level 7/6 applications in the various sectors of the higher education system.

**Table 4: Sectoral Changes in Level 7/6 First Preference Applications 2010 - 2014**

	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Institutes of Technology</b>	38,622	93.2	38,521	93.0	37,622	93.7	34,936	93.4	34,846	93.3
<b>Universities</b>	792	2	733	1.8	774	1.9	693	1.9	710	1.9
<b>Others</b>	2,024	4.8	2,162	5.2	1,772	4.4	1,770	4.8	1,777	4.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>41,438</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>41,416</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>40,168</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>37,399</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>37,333</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: CAO*

- Table 4 shows the number of first preference applications to level 7/6 courses has stabilised in 2014 dropping by only 66 applications.
- The Institute of Technology sector remains the sector attracting the bulk of the applicants (93.3%) for level 7/6 courses.



Tables 5a and 5b outline changes in first preference level 7/6 applications by discipline from 2010 – 2014.

**Table 5a: Level 7/6 First Preference Applications by Discipline**  
**2010-2014**

Discipline	Level 6 & 7 1st Preference Applications				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Engineering	4,401 (10.6%)	4,197 (10.1%)	3,894 (9.7%)	3,828 (10.2%)	3,954 (10.6%)
Construction	2,280 (5.5%)	1,614 (3.9%)	1,425 (3.5%)	1,221 (3.3%)	1,216 (3.3%)
Computing	2,967 (7.2%)	3,153 (7.6%)	3,659 (9.1%)	3,509 (9.4%)	3,577 (9.6%)
Science	4,111 (9.9%)	4,343 (10.5%)	4,518 (11.2%)	4,317 (11.5%)	4,682 (12.5%)
<b>Total Technology</b>	<b>13,759 (33.2%)</b>	<b>13,307 (32.1%)</b>	<b>13,496 (33.5%)</b>	<b>12,875 (34.4%)</b>	<b>13,429 (35.9%)</b>
Agriculture and Veterinary	1,696 (4.1%)	2,105 (5.1%)	2,144 (5.3%)	2,082 (5.5%)	2,060 (5.5%)
Other Healthcare	2,257 (5.4%)	2,560 (6.2%)	2,775 (6.9%)	2,826 (7.6%)	3,183 (8.5%)
Arts and Humanities	3,697 (8.9%)	4,103 (9.9%)	3,965 (9.9%)	3,489 (9.3%)	3,263 (8.7%)
Education	1,256 (3.0%)	1,437 (3.5%)	1,327 (3.3%)	1,474 (3.9%)	1,540 (4.1%)
Business and Law	7,977 (19.3%)	7,075 (17.1%)	6,411 (16.0%)	5,949 (15.9%)	6,125 (16.4%)
Social Services	4,765 (11.5%)	4,451 (10.7%)	3,895 (9.7%)	3,158 (8.4%)	2,829 (7.6%)
Services	6,031 (14.6%)	6,378 (15.4%)	6,155 (15.3%)	5,546 (14.8%)	4,904 (13.1%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>41,438 (100%)</b>	<b>41,416 (100%)</b>	<b>40,168 (100%)</b>	<b>37,399 (100%)</b>	<b>37,333 (100%)</b>

Source: CAO

**Table 5b: Level 7/6 First Preference Applications by Discipline**  
**One year and five year Change**

	2010	2013	2014	% of applications	1 year change	5 Year Change
Engineering	4,401	3,828	3,954	10.6%	3.3%	-10.1%
Construction	2,280	1,221	1,216	3.3%	-0.4%	-46.7%
Computing	2,967	3,509	3,577	9.6%	1.9%	20.6%
Science	4,111	4,317	4,682	12.5%	8.4%	13.8%
<i>Total Technology</i>	<i>13,759</i>	<i>12,875</i>	<i>13,429</i>	<i>35.9%</i>	<i>4.3%</i>	<i>-2.3%</i>
Agriculture and Veterinary	1,696	2,082	2,060	5.5%	-1.1%	21.4%
Other Healthcare	2,257	2,826	3,183	8.5%	12.6%	41.0%
Arts and Humanities	3,697	3,489	3,263	8.7%	-6.5%	-11.7%
Education	1,256	1,474	1,540	4.1%	4.5%	22.6%
Business and Law	7,977	5,949	6,125	16.4%	2.9%	-23.2%
Social Services	4,765	3,158	2,829	7.6%	-10.4%	-40.6%
Services	6,031	5,546	4,904	13.1%	-11.5%	-18.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>41,438</b>	<b>37,399</b>	<b>37,333</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>-0.2%</b>	<b>-9.9%</b>

- First preference applications to Technology disciplines increased in number from 12,875 in 2013 to 13,429 in 2014, an increase of 4.3%. Technology applications make up an increasing proportion of all first preference applications, at 35.9% in 2014 compared with 34.4% in 2013.
- There was a significant increase in Science first preference applications in 2014. The number of first preference applications increased by 8.4% from 2013 and now makes up 12.5% of all applications.
- The proportion of level 7/6 first preference applications to Healthcare courses has increased by 12.6% in 2014 to 7.6% of all applications.
- The number of Engineering level 7/6 first preference applications increased by 3.3% in 2014. Engineering now makes up 10.6% of all applications at level 7/6.
- Construction applications remained stable in 2014 following almost 10 years of declining numbers. Their share of all first preference applications is now 3.3%.
- Computing again shows a slight increase in applications, increasing by 1.9% from 2013.
- The proportion of level 7/6 first preference applications to Services and Social Services courses declined by 11.5% and 10.4% respectively from 2013.

- Business and Law first preference applications have increased slightly by 2.9% from 2013 to 2014 while their share of all applications increased from 16% to 16.4%.
- Disciplines with the largest increase in first preference applications since 2010 are: Other Healthcare, Education, Agriculture and Veterinary and Computing.
- Disciplines with the greatest decrease in first preference applications since 2010 are: Construction, Social Services, Business and Law and Services.

#### **4. Applicants from Britain and Northern Ireland 2013**

- The number of applications from Britain to Irish Institutions decreased from 1,159 in 2013 to 1,062 in 2014, a decline of 8.3%.
- Applications from Northern Ireland showed a decline of 10.7% from 1,223 in 2013 to 1,091 in 2014.
- Overall applications from Britain and Northern Ireland make up 2.9% of all applications in 2014, down from 3.3% in 2013.

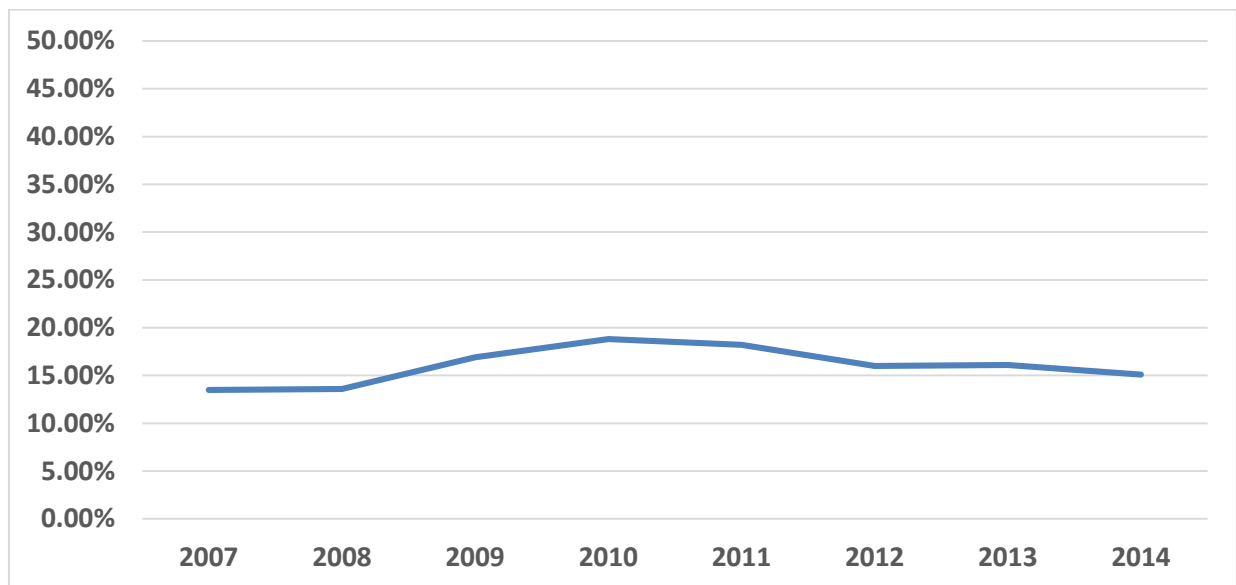
## 5. Mature (23+) CAO Applicants

Table 6 outlines the proportion of CAO Applicants that are mature (23 on or before 1 January on year of application).

**Table 6: Mature Applicants 2007-2014**

Year	Proportion of CAO Applications that are made by Mature Students
2007	13.5%
2008	13.6%
2009	16.9%
2010	18.8%
2011	18.2%
2012	16.0%
2013	16.1%
2014	15.1%

**Figure 1: Mature Applicants to CAO (23+) 2007-2014**



- The number of mature applicants applying to higher education institutions through the CAO system has declined overall in the last four years from 18.8% in 2010 to 15.1% in 2014. This is possibly due to the increase in Labour Market Activation courses that have entry routes outside the CAO.

## 6. Second and Third Preference Applications

**Table 7: Level 8 Second and Third Preference Application by Discipline 2014**

Discipline	1st Preference applications	2nd Preference applications	3rd Preference applications
Engineering	3,215 (5%)	2,876 (5%)	2,565 (5%)
Construction	1,166 (2%)	1,049 (2%)	922 (2%)
Computing	4,311 (7%)	3,852 (7%)	3,314 (7%)
Science	4,916 (8%)	4,923 (9%)	4,709 (10%)
<b>Total Technology</b>	<b>13,608 (22%)</b>	<b>12,700 (24%)</b>	<b>11,510 (24%)</b>
Agriculture and Veterinary	1,881 (3%)	842 (2%)	620 (1%)
Nursing	5,490 (9%)	5,302 (10%)	4,922 (10%)
Medicine	3,276 (5%)	3,016 (6%)	2,672 (6%)
Dentistry	282 (0.45%)	178 (0%)	48 (0%)
Other Healthcare	4,561 (7%)	3,668 (7%)	3,149 (7%)
Arts and Humanities	14,651 (24%)	12,574 (23%)	11,152 (23%)
Education	5,468 (9%)	4,342 (8%)	3,550 (7%)
Business and Law	9,368 (15%)	8,589 (16%)	7,760 (16%)
Social Services	1,931 (3%)	1,588 (3%)	1,330 (3%)
Services	1,825 (3%)	1,231 (2%)	1,114 (2%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>62,341 (100%)</b>	<b>54,030 (100%)</b>	<b>47,827 (100%)</b>

- At level 8, there were 54,030 second preferences and 47,827 third preferences made in 2014, compared with 62,341 first preferences. 86.6% of first preference applicants make a second preference application and 76.7% make a third preference application.
- Science is the only discipline where the number of second preference applications exceeded the first preference applications.
- Five disciplines showed increases in their share of all second preference applications compared to first preference these are: Science (8%-9%), Nursing (9%-10%), Medicine (5%-6%) and Business and Law (15%-16%).

**Table 8: Level 7/6 Second and Third Preference Application by Discipline 2014**

Discipline	1st Preference applications	2nd Preference applications	3rd Preference applications
Engineering	3,954 (10.6%)	3,224 (11.5%)	2,454 (11.7%)
Construction	1,216 (3.3%)	1,046 (3.7%)	928 (4.4%)
Computing	3,577 (9.6%)	2,793 (10.0%)	2,135 (10.2%)
Science	4,682 (12.5%)	3,784 (13.5%)	2,914 (13.9%)
<b>Total Technology</b>	<b>13,429 (36.0%)</b>	<b>10,847 (38.7%)</b>	<b>8,431 (40.1%)</b>
Agriculture and Veterinary	2,060 (5.5%)	1,272 (4.5%)	899 (4.3%)
Other Healthcare	3,183 (8.5%)	1,925 (6.9%)	1,283 (6.1%)
Arts and Humanities	3,263 (8.7%)	1,976 (7.0%)	1,387 (6.6%)
Education	1,540 (4.1%)	965 (3.4%)	615 (2.9%)
Business and Law	6,125 (16.4%)	4,993 (17.8%)	3,855 (18.4%)
Social Services	2,829 (7.6%)	1,970 (7.0%)	1,218 (5.8%)
Services	4,904 (13.1%)	4,097 (14.6%)	3,320 (15.8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>37,333 (100.0%)</b>	<b>28,045 (100.0%)</b>	<b>21,008 (100.0%)</b>

- At level 7/6, there were 28,045 second preferences and 21,008 third preferences made in 2014, compared with 37,333 first preferences. 75% of first preference applicants make a second preference application while 56.2% make a third preference application.
- Six discipline areas increased their share of second preference applications compared to first preference. These are: Engineering (10.6%-11.5%), Construction (3.3%-3.7%), Computing (9.6%-10.0%), Science (12.5%-13.5%), Business and Law (16.4%-17.8%) and Services (13.1%-14.6%).

## Key Points 2014

CAO applicants increased in 2014 by 2.7% to 73,091, an increase of 1,940 applicants from 2013. This is the first significant increase in applicants since 2010.

First preference applications to level 8 courses increased by 2.6% to 62,341, an increase of 1,602 applications.

First preference applications to level 7/6 course stabilised in 2014 following a period of decline. There were 37,333 applications made in 2014.

Engineering, Science and Computing continued to increase their shares of first preference applications at both level 8 and level 7/6.

Construction is showing slight increases at level 8 and stabilising at Level 7/6.

Business and Law is also showing signs of improvement at both levels following a stable period in applications.

Healthcare professions showed declines at level 8 in particular Nursing and Medicine.

The number of applications from the UK to Irish institutions declined again in 2014 from 1,159 in 2013 to 1,062 in 2013, a decrease of 8.3%. Applications from Northern Ireland also declined from 1,223 in 2013 to 1,091, a decline of 10.7%. Overall applications from the UK and Northern Ireland make up 2.9% of all applications in 2013, the same percentage as in 2012.

Mature applications continued to decline in 2014. Mature applicants now make up 15.1% of all applicants.

**The composition of the various disciplines is as follows:**

**Construction:** Civil Engineering, Construction studies, Architecture, Estate Agency, Valuation, Planning.

**Engineering:** Electrical, Electronic, Food, Agriculture, Mechanical, Chemical, Computing and Process engineering and all other engineering including Energy.

**Computing:** Computer Science, Information Technology, Software Development, Programming, Computer Games Development, Business Information Systems

**Science (non-healthcare):** Biology, Biotechnology, Chemistry, Pharmaceutical Science, Physics, Astronomy, Mathematics, Forensics, Analytical Science.

**Healthcare:** Therapies, Biomedical Science, Radiography.

**Arts and Humanities:** Languages, Social Sciences, Arts, Cultural Studies etc.

**Business and Law:** Finance, Business Studies, Marketing, Law.

**Services:** Tourism, Hotel and Catering, Culinary, Bar Management, Event Management, Health and Safety.