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2024-25

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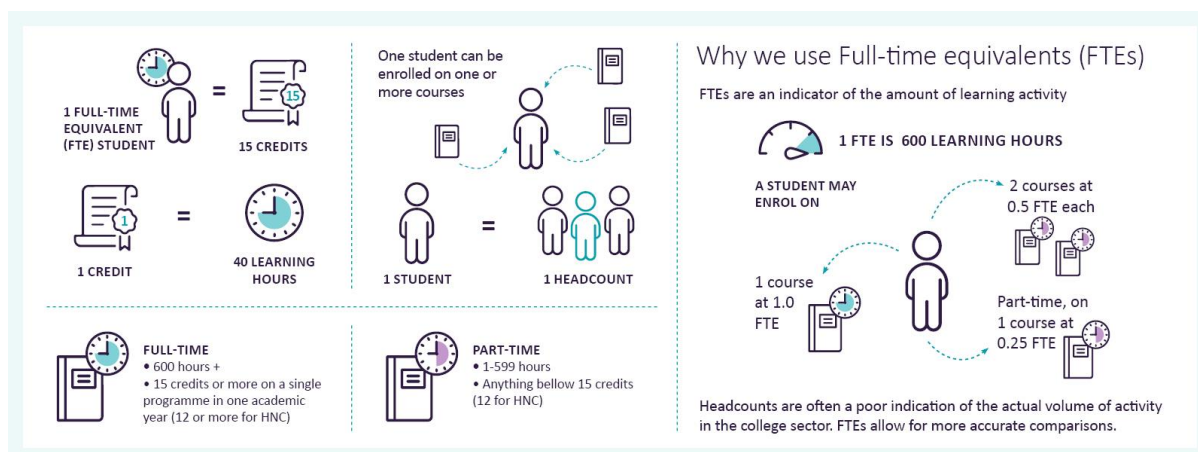
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Summary:	This document provides context and methodological information pertaining to the College Statistics 2024-25 publication and background tables.
FAO:	Principals and Directors of Scotland's colleges, students, parents, guardians and the general public.
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Report Context and Definitions

1. The College Statistics Report is published annually by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and provides an overview of student activity in the college sector over the last ten years, from 2015-16 to 2024-25¹. Except where noted otherwise, all data reported in this publication has been sourced from the SFC's Further Education Statistical (FES) return as provided by all Scottish colleges and has been collated and quality assured by SFC². The publication reports on student numbers in the form of headcounts, course enrolments, credits and Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) as measures of college student activity³.
2. Colleges offer a wide range of courses and study options across many levels of study to accommodate a diverse range of students. College students can study for Higher National Certificates (HNCs, which normally take one year to complete full-time) or Higher National Diplomas (HNDs, which normally take two years)⁴, Access Courses, Degree courses, Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programmes, National Qualifications, Professional Qualifications and Scottish Vocational Qualifications, among others. Colleges also award qualifications from awarding bodies outside the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) such as the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT) and City and Guilds. Courses vary from full-time programmes lasting a year or more to part-time courses lasting one hour, with a breadth of provision including day release courses as part of employment arrangements; day release courses for school pupils and school leavers; block

¹ SFC produces a range of other statistical reports in areas such as widening access, college staffing, and attainment. The full suite of SFC statistical publications can be found at [Statistical publication schedule \(sfc.ac.uk\)](https://www.sfc.ac.uk/statistical-publication-schedule)

² Notes and guidance on how colleges submit data to SFC via the FES return can be found in the FES Guidance 2024-25, available at [FES Guidance notes 2024-25 \(sfc.ac.uk\)](https://www.sfc.ac.uk/fes-guidance-notes-2024-25)

³ The Credit-based system of funding college activity was introduced in 2015-16. The change to the Credit based model was discussed in detail in College Statistics 2016-17. More information can be found in Annex A of this report. This change should provide additional context and explanation around a possible break in trends.

⁴ HNCs and HNDs are awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and are at level 7 and 8 respectively on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, which can be viewed here: [Interactive Framework | Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(scqf.org.uk\)](https://www.scqf.org.uk/interactive-framework)

release courses for apprentices; assessments of work-based learning; and distance learning opportunities.

3. In addition to the above, the college sector also delivers a substantial volume of introductory and pre-access courses that do not lead to qualifications recognised by assessors. These are designed to give a grounding in a vocational subject or act as a route back in to vocational learning for people with no or very few qualifications. They also provide bespoke training for employers.
4. Additionally, the sector delivers non-vocational courses which are often self-funded by learners and typically delivered as weekend or evening courses. Many learners enrol on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) modules, bridging courses - i.e. courses which support transition/progression to a more substantive college course as part of the learner journey, or to an employment opportunity - or on personal or family care courses. Such students often come from disadvantaged backgrounds and participation in these courses will have a social benefit.
5. For more information on non-recognised qualifications and the cohorts of students benefiting from them, see Annex E.
6. SFC funds colleges for the delivery of Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) based on the volume of activity delivered in credits, with one credit equivalent to 40 hours of learning. One FTE then is equivalent to 15 credits or 600 hours of learning.
7. Background tables containing data for all the charts, tables and annexes found in this release can be downloaded from the SFC website.
8. This report explores the trends relating to selected student characteristics such as age and gender, whilst others, such as ethnicity and disability, have been omitted. These will be included in the Report on Widening Access 2024-25, which is due to be published later in 2025. Previous Widening Access Reports are available on the SFC website. Other college metrics are addressed in reports such as the College Student Outcomes and College Leaver Destinations (CLD). More information on SFC's statistics publication schedule can be found online.
9. A publication detailing College Student Outcomes for 2024-25 is due to be published on the SFC website in summer 2026. Student numbers presented in this report may differ from those contained in other publications as the reports are prepared for different purposes. For example, the College Student Outcomes publication excludes students who begin courses in January and finish in December of the same year as results will not be available for these students until the course ends. However, in this report, activity relating to these students is counted.
10. The SFC Report on Widening Access presents further statistics on widening access in the college and university sectors whilst SFC Higher Education Student and Qualifiers covers HE activity delivered in Scotland by universities and colleges.
11. The reporting period was impacted by the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic which presented a unique and significant external shock to the further and higher education system in Scotland. Colleges pivoted rapidly to move learning online from March 2020, but these unprecedented circumstances presented colleges with particular challenges, notably the ability to deliver practical and work-based learning. Those challenges notwithstanding, colleges adapted quickly, taking swift action to protect staff and students' wellbeing and contribute to the national effort to tackle the virus and support vulnerable communities. The measures put in place to protect staff and students in 2020-21 were stricter and longer lasting than was experienced in 2019-20

and severely limited colleges' ability to deliver learning and teaching activities and student support services on campus.

12. Demographics are a crucial factor to note when considering student headcount. In recent years there has been a significant drop in young people in the Scottish population. However, the pool of 18–24-year-olds in the Scottish population that colleges can recruit from is now growing and is expected to grow until the beginning of the next decade. Figures relating to this are shown in the accompanying background tables, where more information is also provided on participation rates for 18-to-19-year-olds. College participation rates for 18-to-19-year-olds fell slightly to 18.6% in 2024-25, though is still above the reporting period's low of 17.8% seen in 2022-23. This is due to a small decrease in the number of 18-to-19-year-olds studying at college and an increase in the number of 18-to-19-year-olds in the population. There are multiple factors that may contribute to this data point. Firstly, the number of young (18-years old and under) Scottish domiciled students accepted to Scottish higher education institutions through the UCAS system rose to a new high in the 2024 application cycle⁵. Figures published from the Scottish Government also showed that there was an increase in the number of school-leavers that went into Further Education, but a decrease in the number that went into Higher Education after the 2023-24 school year⁶.
13. Colleges continued to implement a more standard teaching model compared to what was employed in the two sessions more heavily impacted by the pandemic. Colleges are facing a tight fiscal environment, and students are being impacted by a reduction in the availability of funding.

⁵ [UCAS Undergraduate end of cycle data resources 2025 | UCAS](#)

⁶ [Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations, No. 7: 2025 edition - gov.scot](#)

Annex A: Notable Changes affecting the College Sector

Date	Change	Impact on trends presented in this report
2008-09	Colleges directed to prioritise more substantial courses designed to improve employment prospects.	Reduction in number of students enrolled on very short programmes of study unlikely to lead to employment or higher level of study.
2011-12	Decision to focus school / college courses towards the senior phase of high school.	Reduction in college activity targets of 5%, but students affected continue to have a full-time place at school.
2012-13	Introduction of College Outcome Agreement. Transfer of funded learning hours from SFC to SDS.	Reduction in SFC funded learning hours delivered to those aged 16 to 24, with this activity being commissioned by the SDS Employability Fund (equivalent to 586 FTEs in 2016-17).
2015-16	WSUMs replaced with Credits and removal of full-time tariffs.	Hours of learning reduce under the Credit system as a result of improvements that removed funding considerations and created a purer measure of activity.
2015-16	Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) established.	This could impact the college sector's ability to recruit for HE courses from the most deprived areas as Scotland's universities have been asked to increase their own recruitment from that cohort.
2019-20 and 2020-21	COVID-19 pandemic	Enrolments to courses from March 2020 (i.e. academic year 2019-20) were impacted. This continued into the 2020-21 session. The 2021-22 session saw a return to face-to-face teaching in many places, although some online learning continued.
2023-24	Change to the funding qualifying date for students on courses lasting more than 20 weeks.	From 2023-24 onwards, some full-time students that previously would have not qualified for funding are now meeting the new criteria. This means that a college could be <i>recruiting</i> the same FTE in 2023-24 as they did in 2022-23, but more students were eligible for funding and are included in 2023-24 figures in this publication.

Annex B: Methodology for calculating the count of and participation rate of 18–19-year-olds in Scotland

14. The Scottish population of young adults (particularly of 18- and 19-year-olds) is inflated due to the influx of non-Scottish domiciled students undertaking college and university education in Scotland. Therefore, in order to calculate a more representative participation rate of the proportion of 18- and 19-year-olds undertaking college courses who would be residing in Scotland regardless of their education path, population values for younger people have to be aged forward. This is demonstrated in the table below.

Methodology for aging the population as part of the participation rate calculation

Age	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
16	58,420	59,720	62,440
17	55,485	58,420	59,720
18	56,665	55,485	58,420
19	57,220	56,665	55,485

Source: National Records of Scotland, 2024 Mid-year population estimates.

Annex C: The proportion of 18–19-year-olds in the Scottish population who attended college full-time, from 2014-2015 to 2023-24

15. The number Aged 18-19 in the Scottish Population is calculated by ageing forward the population values for younger people in previous years. This is explained and demonstrated in Annex B. The participation rate is the Aged 18-19 Full-Time Student Population divided by the number Aged 18-19 in the Scottish Population.

Annex D: Further Information on College Students

16. Some aspects of the college sector have not been covered in this report, such as various student characteristics and trends surrounding learning hours. Student characteristics will be addressed, with more relevance and detail, in other reports such as the Report on Widening Access which is scheduled to be published later in 2026. Previous years' reports can be found on SFC's Statistics Publication Schedule.

Annex E: Further Information on Non-Recognised Qualifications in the College sector

What are non-recognised qualifications?

17. In Scotland's colleges in 2024-25, there were a total of 259,320 enrolments. 85,430 (32.9%) were to courses leading to 'non-recognised' qualifications.
18. Whilst non-recognised qualifications account for just under a third of all college enrolments, they account for just 8.5% of hours of learning delivered by the college sector that year (measured in Full-time Equivalent places). This indicates that these courses are typically short part-time in nature, and they average around 69 hours in duration. Many are shorter still, less than 10 hours in duration in many cases.
19. Non-recognised courses are an important part of the learner journey for many students. Non-vocational leisure courses which are often self-funded and typically delivered as weekend or evening courses; or Introductory and pre-access courses that do not lead to qualifications recognised by assessors.
20. These are designed to give a grounding in a vocational subject or act as a route back into vocational learning for people with no or very few qualifications.

Characteristics of students enrolling on non-recognised qualifications

21. The students enrolled on courses leading to non-recognised qualifications can be broken down into five broad groups:

School Pupils

22. School pupils frequently enrol on non-recognised qualifications, in particular STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) programmes - some examples are introduction to STEM courses for primary school pupils or those in the early phase of secondary school which are delivered by the local college in response to the aspirations of the Scottish Government STEM Strategy.
23. There are also introductory programmes to make early phase secondary pupils aware of the vocational opportunities available when they reach the senior phase of secondary school (S4 or later), again delivered by the college.

Additional Support Needs (ASN) programmes

24. Students with Additional Support Needs (ASN) can include those with disabilities or health concerns, those with difficult family circumstances, e.g. looked after children; those who are enrolled on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) modules.

UK Industry

25. These are programmes where the main source of finance is industry or commerce. Much of the funding will come from the employer. These courses are delivered to meet the needs of apprenticeship levy-payers that, whilst vocational, may not immediately lead to a recognised qualification.
26. Examples of provision here include first aid courses, managing difficult conversations for new line managers and mental health in the workplace programme, and there are many other diverse examples of employees taking a module to contribute towards their personal development in their career that does not lead to a recognised qualification.

Employed

27. Those in employment often use college facilities for courses relating to their employment. For example, they might attend to sit an assessment in a vocational qualification they were undertaking in engineering or construction, and much of the enrolments to non-recognised qualifications by this cohort are of that nature.

Other

28. There is a large STEM element to the remaining students not in the above four groups, with STEM subjects accounting for around a fifth of activity delivered to this cohort. Much of the activity delivered to this cohort included introductory sessions of various types - for example, 'introduction to STEM and construction'.
29. Aside from that, there is also a wide range of 'enabling' courses, as learners studying other qualifications can receive help in preparing their university UCAS applications, applying for the armed forces, the emergency services, health & social care careers and many other routes - these courses are supporting learners by giving them a grounding in a vocational subject on the road into employment or further study (i.e. a recognised qualification) as part of the learner journey. They also act as a route back into vocational learning for those with minimal or no qualifications.

Annex F: Rounding and Suppression used in the College Statistics Report

30. Rounding and suppression rules have been applied to all statistics which have been derived from the FES return to prevent against the identification of individual students. The rules implemented were as follows:
- All numbers are rounded to the nearest multiple of 5.
 - Any number greater than 0 but lower than 7.5 is rounded to 5.
 - Actual 0 values are reported as blank.
 - Halves are always rounded upwards (e.g. 12.5 is rounded to 15).
 - Percentages based on fewer than 22.5 individuals are suppressed.
 - Year-on-year changes based on fewer than 22.5 individuals are suppressed.

Metadata

Metadata Indicator	Description
Publication Title	College Statistics 2024-25
Description	Reports on up to ten academic years of data on college student numbers in the form of headcounts, course enrolments, credits and Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs) as measures of college student activity in Scotland.
Theme	Further and Higher Education provision at Scotland's colleges.
Topic	Student information
Format	Website-based reports, PDFs and Excel Tables
Data Source(s)	The majority of data reported in this publication is collected and quality assured by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as part of the Further Education Statistical (FES) return. More information on the FES data collection process can be found on the SFC website. Population data used to calculate the age 18-19 full-time college participation rate is sourced from National Records Scotland Mid-Year Population Estimates. The population projections for people in Scotland aged 18-24 are taken from National Records of Scotland Projected Population of Scotland (2022-based)
Date that data are acquired	College statistics FES return: December 2025
Release date	04/02/2026
Timeframe of data and timeliness	Trend data are presented as a time series continuation from the 2015-2016 academic year (AY) to the 2024-25 AY. Data is also presented for the 2015-2016 AY vs. the 2024-25 AY to allow for comparison between the two years. Data is also presented for the 2015-2016 AY vs. the 2019-20 AY vs. the 2024-25 AY to allow for comparison across the three years
Continuity of data	Data from Scottish colleges continues to exclude those students who were not eligible for funding.
Revisions relevant to this publication	On the 20/04/2026 a correction was made to paragraph 9 in the report where the proportion of FE enrolments that were female was incorrectly stated as 48.3% rather than 48.7% as shown in background table 11.
Relevance and key uses of these statistics	SFC collects data on provision at colleges in Scotland through the Further Education Statistics (FES) data collection.
Accuracy	The guidance issued by SFC for the submission of the Scottish college records is on the SFC website.
Comparability	n/a

Accessibility	SFC has a style guideline which sets out options to make all publications as accessible to potential readers as possible. More information relating to accessibility of the website .
Coherence and clarity	This statistical publication is pre-announced and then published on the SFC website. It is accompanied by more detailed tables available in Excel format on the website only which is a freely available resource.
Value type and unity of measurement	Number, percentage, percentage points.
Disclosure	Rounding and suppression rules have been applied to all statistics derived from the FES return to prevent against the identification of individual students. Totals, year-on-year changes and percentages are calculated from unrounded figures. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
Official Statistics designation	Official Statistics
UK Statistics Authority Assessment	This publication has not been assessed by the UK Statistics Authority. However other Scottish Funding Council publications were assessed as part of the Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics undertaken in 2013 by UK Statistics Authority, as part of Assessment Report 255.
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