



Scottish Funding Council  
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba



## Higher Education Students and Qualifiers at Scottish Institutions 2019-20

**SFC Statistics**

Issue Date: 30 March 2021

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Issue date: 30 March 2021

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Summary: This release contains information on HE provision and attainment in higher education institutions (HEIs) and colleges in Scotland from 2010-11 to 2019-20

FAO: Principals and Chairs of Scotland's colleges and universities, students, parents, guardians and the general public.

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The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.



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## **Adverse Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic**

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in March 2020 by the World Health Organisation, part way through the 2019-20 academic year. The pandemic did not have any notable impact on student enrolment figures for 2019-20, however it did impact on students who were studying at the time and their ability to complete their qualification as planned. Numerous issues impacted students' ability to complete their qualification, such as:

- Students may have been medically affected by the pandemic either directly or via their families and/or dependants.
- Students who have childcare or caring responsibilities were also impacted by the pandemic, and this may have made it more difficult for these students to complete their course as originally intended.
- Colleges and HEIs did act quickly to move provision online where possible, however, students on courses containing a practical element or a work placement may not have been able to complete their course as intended, and therefore had to defer receiving their qualification to the following academic year.
- The entire student population was also affected by the 'softer' impacts of the pandemic on their education, such as losing access to peer support and in-person lecturer support. While institutions took steps to address digital poverty, supported by additional funding, in the immediate aftermath of lockdown some students did not have readily-available access to the necessary equipment to immediately start learning online.

In spite of the challenges faced by the two sectors and their students, 101,090 students successfully achieved a Higher Education (HE) qualification in 2019-20 from Scotland's colleges and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Other students who may initially have expected to graduate in 2019-20 but were impacted by the pandemic are instead expected to obtain their awards in future years.

**For the reasons outlined above, this publication does not make direct comparisons between 2019-20 qualifier figures and previous years due to the vastly different circumstances these students were faced with.**

In this report, qualifier data for 2019-20 is separated in tables by a grey row indicating a break in the time series and is represented in charts by a dashed line.

The data on HE qualifiers and deferrals in the college sector is the latest we have available at the time of publication. SFC will release the [College Performance Indicators](#) 2019-20 report in 2021 which will provide further information on qualifiers from Scotland's colleges.

## Executive Summary

- There were 307,215 students in higher education in Scotland in 2019-20, the highest number on record. This is an increase of 4,555 (1.5%) from 2018-19 and is primarily as a result of an increase in students at HEIs. The largest increase in students was at Taught Postgraduate level, which grew 9.7% between 2018-19 and 2019-20. See Table A.
- In 2019-20, females made up 58.1% of all HE students. This gap between females and males has been increasing since 2010-11, when females made up 55.6% of all HE students. At HEIs females account for 59.2% of students, whilst at colleges, females account for 51.9% of students. See Table B.
- In 2019-20, entrants to HE programmes at colleges accounted for 24.0% of all HE entrants in Scotland (as opposed to HEIs). See Table D.
- In 2019-20, there were 111,845 new entrants to HEIs, an increase of 5,075 (4.8%) since 2018-19. Meanwhile, there were 35,315 new entrants to colleges, 1,830 fewer (-4.9%) compared to 2018-19. See Table D.
- The number of Scottish-domiciled HE entrants at colleges and HEIs is almost unchanged from the previous year, with 35 fewer entrants (0.0% change) compared to 2018-19. See Table F.
- There were 75,705 qualifiers from HEIs and 25,385 from colleges, making a total of 101,090 HE qualifiers for 2019-20, despite the direct impact the Coronavirus pandemic had on the higher education sector in Scotland and the inability for students to successfully complete the practical element of their courses. See Table G.
- Of all HE qualifiers, 69.1% achieved graduate-level qualifications (First Degree or above) in 2019-20, up 1.3 percentage points (pp) from the previous cycle. See Table G.

## Higher Education Students and Qualifiers 2019-20

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**69.1%**  
of all qualifiers  
achieved graduate  
level\* qualifications in  
2019-20

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**307,215\***  
total HE students



+1.5% since 2018-19

**147,160\***  
entrants to HE courses



+2.3% since 2018-19

\* first degree level and above

\* the highest number on record