



College Statistics 2020-21



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

SFC STATISTICS

Issue Date: 25 January 2022

Reference: SFC/ST/01/2022

College Statistics 2020-21

Issue date: 25 January 2022

Reference: SFC/ST/01/2022

Summary: This publication provides an overview of college sector statistics from 2011-12 to 2020-21.

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

Further Information: **Contact:** Rebecca Ryce and Darren Meek
Job title: Policy/Analysis Officers
Directorate: Policy, Insight and Analytics
Email: rryce@sfc.ac.uk, dmeek@sfc.ac.uk

This is an official statistics publication.

All official statistics should comply with the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice to Official Statistics, which promotes the production and dissemination of official statistics that inform decision-making. Find out more about the Code of Practice for Official Statistics at www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoinachaidh na h-Alba

Scottish Funding Council
Apex 2
97 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5HD
T 0131 313 6500
F 0131 313 6501
www.sfc.ac.uk

Contents

Executive Summary	4
Section 1: Introduction	8
Report Context	8
Section 2: Trends in Student Numbers and Activity.....	11
Key Findings	11
2.1 Full-time equivalents (FTEs).....	12
2.2 Student numbers (headcounts and enrolments)	13
2.3 Qualifications and programme types	16
Section 3: Student Characteristics – age and gender.....	21
Key Findings	21
3.1 By Age.....	21
3.2 By Gender.....	23
Further Information.....	25
Annexes	26
Annex A: Notable Changes in External Factors Affecting the College Sector	26
Annex B: College Outcome Agreements	27
Annex C: Methodology for calculating the count of and participation rate of 18-19 year olds in Scotland.....	28
Annex D: The proportion of 18-19 year-olds in the Scottish population who attended college full-time, from 2011-2012 to 2020-21	29
Annex E: Changes to Full-Time Equivalents over the past seven years.....	30
Annex F: Further Information on College Students	32
What are non-recognised qualifications?	33
Characteristics of students enrolling on non-recognised qualifications.....	33
Metadata	36

Executive Summary

1. Scottish Government set the college sector a target of 116,269 FTEs in return for the public funding received in 2020-21. Scotland's colleges exceeded this target by 1,645 FTEs in 2020-21, delivering 117,914 FTEs. This shows the resilience in the sector and its ability to deliver courses in the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Scotland's colleges also enroll students who self-fund or are funded via other sources (such as the European Social Fund or Skills Development Scotland), and overall have delivered 128,559 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) places in 2020-21. Although overall headcount and enrolment figures decreased this year by 10.8% and 8.1% respectively, the number of FTEs (all funding sources) increased from the 2019-20 total of 127,683. This reflects an increase in the number studying for higher level and longer-duration courses and qualifications such as HNCs and HNDs and a corresponding decrease in enrolments to short courses (under 10 hours in duration) and non-recognised qualifications compared with the pre-pandemic period. This indicates a change in focus of provision rather than a decrease in teaching activity.

What are non-recognised qualifications?

- 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.
- Non-vocational courses which are often self-funded and typically delivered as weekend or evening courses.
- Bespoke training courses such as those developed under the Flexible Workforce Development Fund. This initiative allows employers to access funding to address priority skills gaps and invest in their workforce through training and personal development. These programmes can be delivered in partnership with the local college, the Open University in Scotland or an independent training provider.

3. 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 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.

4. Demographics are another factor to consider when considering student headcount. In recent years there has been a significant drop in young people in the Scottish population and colleges will have a shrinking pool of 18-24 year olds from which to recruit until 2025. However, participation rates are slightly up – 21.5% of young people participated on a full-time college course, a 0.6 percentage point increase on the 2019-20 figure. This shows robust demand for participation in the sector. UCAS statistics¹ show that applications and acceptances to university entry from Scottish domiciled applicants increased between 2019-20 and 2020-21; the entry rate of Scottish domiciled 18 year-olds also rose. Finally, fewer young people left school at the end of 4th and 5th year in 2019-20, further impacting the prime college age cohort².
5. The main findings from this year's report are:
 - The college sector continued to exceed the Scottish Government's FTE target, delivering 117,914 FTEs against a target of 116,269 in 2020-21. That's 1,645 FTE over target.
 - The total number of 18-19 year-olds in the Scottish population has decreased 15.8% over the last decade and decreased by 3% from 2019-20 to 2020-21 alone. Studying at college is just one of the options available to 18-19 year-olds, with many choosing to go into work or university. UCAS³ statistics show that applications and acceptances to university entry from Scottish domiciled applicants increased between 2019-20 and 2020-21; the entry rate of Scottish domiciled 18 year-olds also rose. Despite these trends, the participation rate for 18-19 year-olds in the Scottish population attending college full-time has risen. In 2020-21, more than one fifth (21.5%) of 18-19 year olds in the Scottish population attended college full-time. This is up from 20.9% in 2019-20. In addition, the proportion of all school leavers noted as attending a further education establishment also rose from 27.3% to 28.1% showing robust demand for the sector.
 - At Further Education (FE) level, full-time FTEs (all funding sources) decreased 5.8% in 2020-21 but part-time FTEs have increased (up 3.4%) over the same timeframe. The increase in part-time FTEs was driven by increased delivery to SQA National Progression Awards and free-standing National Units.

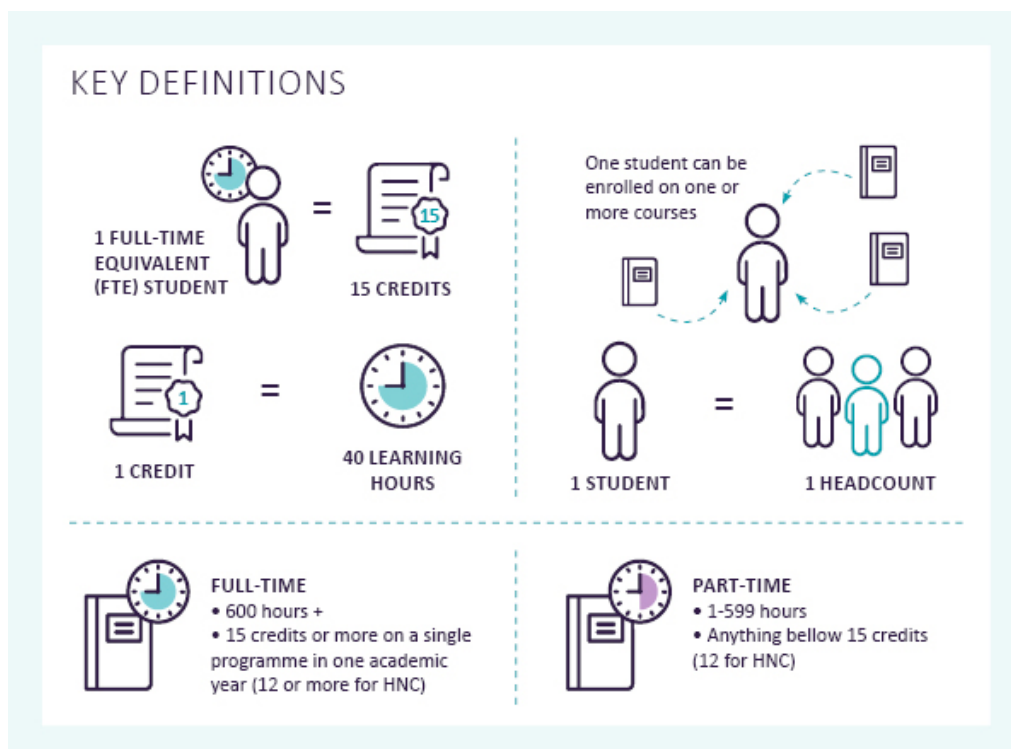
¹ UCAS Undergraduate Statistics: <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports>

² Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations, No. 3: 2021 Edition - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-attainment-initial-leaver-destinations-no-3-2021-edition/pages/4/>

³ UCAS Undergraduate Application Statistics: <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports>

Meanwhile the reduction in full-time FTEs was primarily driven by reduced delivery of Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications.

- At Higher Education (HE) level both full-time FTEs (6.8%) and part-time (9.4%) FTEs (all funding sources) increased in 2020-21 compared with the previous year. This is primarily due to an increase in provision of HNC/D courses.
- While FTE provision (all funding sources) rose by 0.7% in 2020-21, the total student headcount and number of enrolments decreased by 10.8% and 8.1% respectively from the previous year. These falls are largely driven by a reduction in enrolments on non-recognised qualifications and on courses under 10 hours in duration, down 15.3% and 63.2% respectively since 2019-20. This reduction in enrolments to shorter courses reflects the challenges of the COVID-19 lockdowns during the 2020-21 session which prevented students from attending courses with a practical element and made it more difficult for learners to attend in-person access or self-funded non-vocational courses.



KEY STATISTICS



277,620
enrolments to courses



117,914 FTEs*
(1,645 above target)



1 IN 5 (21.5%)
of 18 to 19-year-olds in the
Scottish population attended
college full-time in 2020-21



213,135
student headcount. Students
may enrol on multiple courses

*Full-time equivalent (FTE), funded through the government purse

Section 1: Introduction

Report Context

6. 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 2011-12 to 2020-21.⁴ 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 SFC.⁵ This publication reports on student numbers in the form of headcounts, course enrolments, credits and Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) as measures of college student activity.⁶
7. 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)⁷, 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 release courses for apprentices; assessments of work-based learning; and distance learning opportunities.
8. 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

⁴ 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 <https://www.sfc.ac.uk/publications-statistics/statistical-publications/statistics-schedule/statistical-publication-schedule.aspx>.

⁵ Notes and guidance on how colleges submit data to SFC via the FES return can be found in the FES Guidance 2020-21, available at <https://www.sfc.ac.uk/publications-statistics/guidance/2020/SFCGD032020.aspx>.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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: <https://scqf.org.uk/interactive-framework/>.

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, for example through the Flexible Workforce Development Fund⁸. This initiative allows employers to access funding to address priority skills gaps and invest in their workforce through training and personal development. These programmes can be delivered in partnership with the local college, the Open University in Scotland or an independent training provider.

9. 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.

There are broadly 5 groups benefitting from non-recognised qualifications:

- School pupils, including primary school pupils or early phase secondary school pupils being introduced to STEM programmes, or those in the early phase of secondary school being introduced to vocational opportunities available when they progress to the senior phase of secondary school.
- Those in employment using the college facilities for courses relating to their employment, for instance sitting an assessment in a vocational engineering or construction qualification. Many such enrolments are STEM-related.
- Those participating in courses primarily funded by industry or commerce such as first aid, managing difficult conversations or other courses contributing to employee continued personal development.
- Those with Additional Support Needs, including disabilities, health concerns, those with complexity of need and those from difficult family circumstances. In the case of such students, their participation in such courses will have a social benefit. There are also those on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) modules, bridging courses or personal/family care courses.
- Others – enabling courses which help prepare learners for university applications or careers in the armed forces, emergency services, health and social care or many other career routes. Non-recognised qualifications also act as a route back to vocational learning for those with minimal or no qualifications.

⁸ Flexible Workforce Development Fund: <https://www.sfc.ac.uk/funding/college-funding/flexible-workforce-development/flexible-workforce-development-fund.aspx>

10. The courses described in paragraphs 8 and 9 are all categorised as 'non-recognised qualifications' in this report. For more information on non-recognised qualifications and the cohorts of students benefitting from them, see Annex G.
11. 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. Definitions of the different measurements used throughout this report can be found in the 'Key Definitions' box on page 6 and the 'Why we use Full-time Equivalents' box on page 14.
12. Background tables containing data for all the charts, tables and annexes found in this report can be downloaded from the SFC website. The SFC also offers an Open Data Portal for querying and extracting additional college student data via the [Infact Database](#). This provides an interface which allows users to query college data by the number of enrolments, credits, headcounts and FTEs across a range of variables and time frames with some data going back to 1998-99.⁹
13. 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 2020-21, which is due to be published in Spring 2022. Previous Widening Access Reports are available on the [SFC website](#). Other college metrics are addressed in reports such as the College Performance Indicators and College Leaver Destinations (CLD). More information on SFC's statistics publication schedule can be found [online](#).

⁹ See the Further Information section towards the end of this report for noteworthy differences between data presented here and data in the Infact database.

Section 2: Trends in Student Numbers and Activity

Key Findings

Overall, Scotland's colleges have delivered 128,559 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) places in 2020-21 via all funding sources. Although overall headcount and enrolment figures decreased this year by 10.8% and 8.1% respectively, the number of FTEs (all funding sources) increased from the 2019-20 total of 127,683.

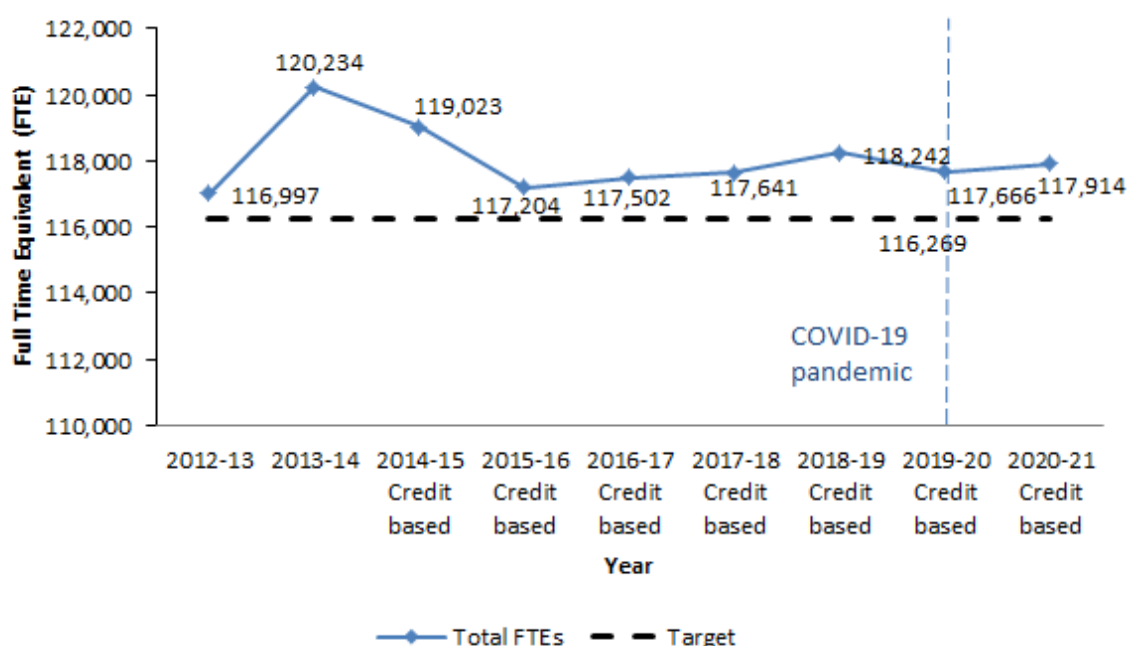
- Scottish Government set the college sector a target of 116,269 FTEs in return for the public funding received in 2020-21. Scotland's colleges exceeded this target by 1,645 FTEs in 2020-21, delivering 117,914 FTEs.
- The total student headcount and total number of enrolments have decreased since last year. Student headcount and enrolments have fallen by 10.8% and 8.1% respectively since 2019-20. However, FTEs have increased by 1,564 over the same period which indicates a change in focus of provision rather than a reduction in teaching activity.
- Enrolments on non-recognised qualifications have decreased by 15.3% since 2019-20. Enrolments on courses under 10 hours in duration decreased by 63.2% over the same period. This is likely because COVID-19 lockdowns during the 2020-21 session prevented students from attending campuses and dissuading people from joining self-funded courses.
- In 2020-21 28.9% of all learning activity (FTEs) took place in subject areas relating to health and care services.
- At Further Education (FE) level, full-time FTEs (all funding sources) decreased 5.8% to 50,087 in 2020-21 but part-time FTEs increased (up 3.4% to 38,033) over the same timeframe. At Higher Education (HE) level both full-time FTEs (6.8% to 35,246) and part-time (9.4% to 5,193) FTEs increased by in 2020-21 versus the prior year.

This section focuses on trends across college provision from 2011-12 to 2020-21.

2.1 Full-time equivalents (FTEs)

14. Since 2012-13, the Scottish Government has set a national target for the college sector to deliver 116,269 FTE student places each year. Figure A below provides an overview of the activity that has been counted against this target since it was introduced. These figures include Foundation Apprenticeship provision which amounted to 2,190 FTEs in 2020-21. Not all FTEs are counted towards the 116k target. Many non-recognised qualifications aren't counted towards this target but are still delivered using the college facilities. In addition to that, continuous professional development courses funded by employers are often delivered using college facilities. The main source of funding is often industry or commerce. Some examples include first aid courses, managing difficult conversations for line managers or mental health in the workplace courses.

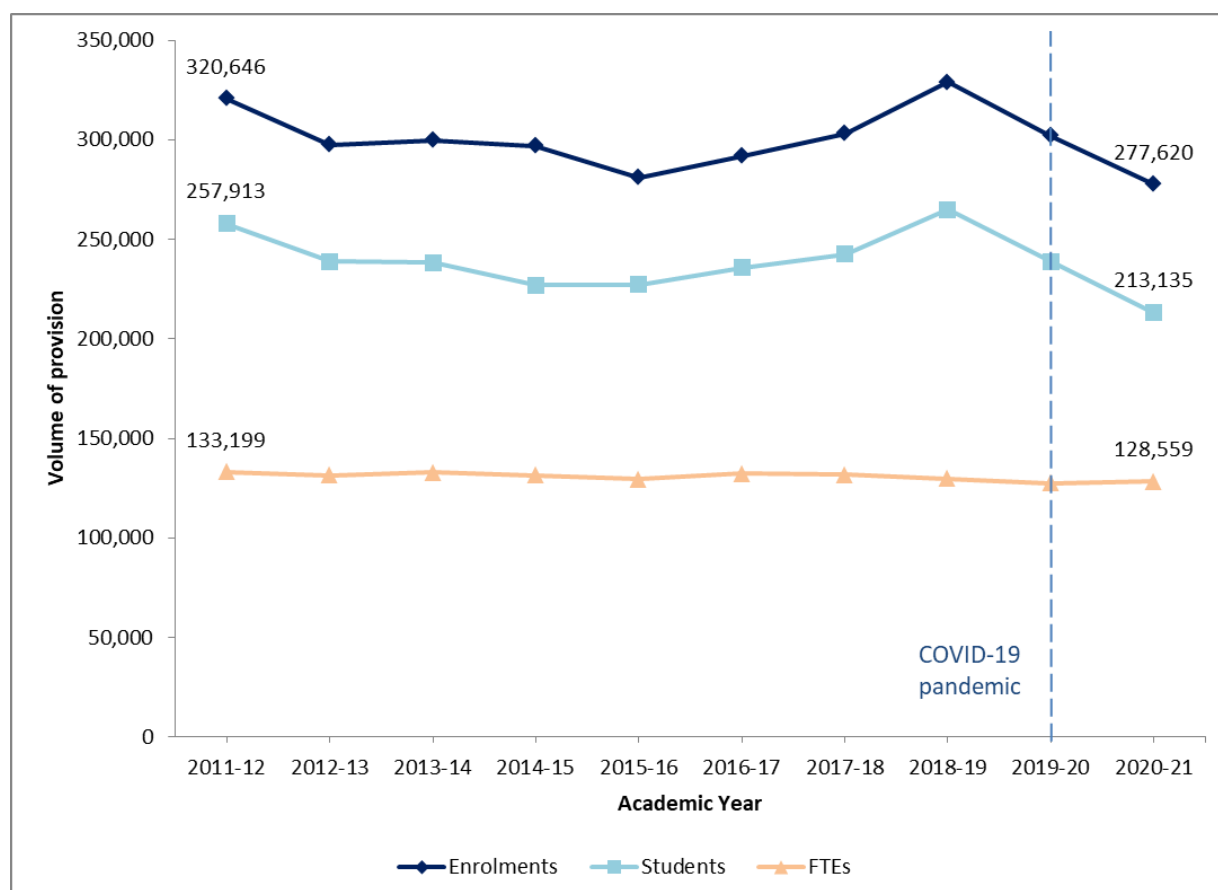
Figure A: How many FTEs have been delivered against the Scottish Government – funded target, 2012-13 to 2020-21?



15. The sector exceeded the 116,269 target by 1,645 FTEs in 2020-21, delivering 117,914 FTEs.
16. There have however been some technical changes to how FTEs have been counted over this period and these are described in Annex E.

2.2 Student numbers (headcounts and enrolments)

Figure B: How has the number of students, enrolments, and FTEs (all funding sources) changed in the last 10 years?

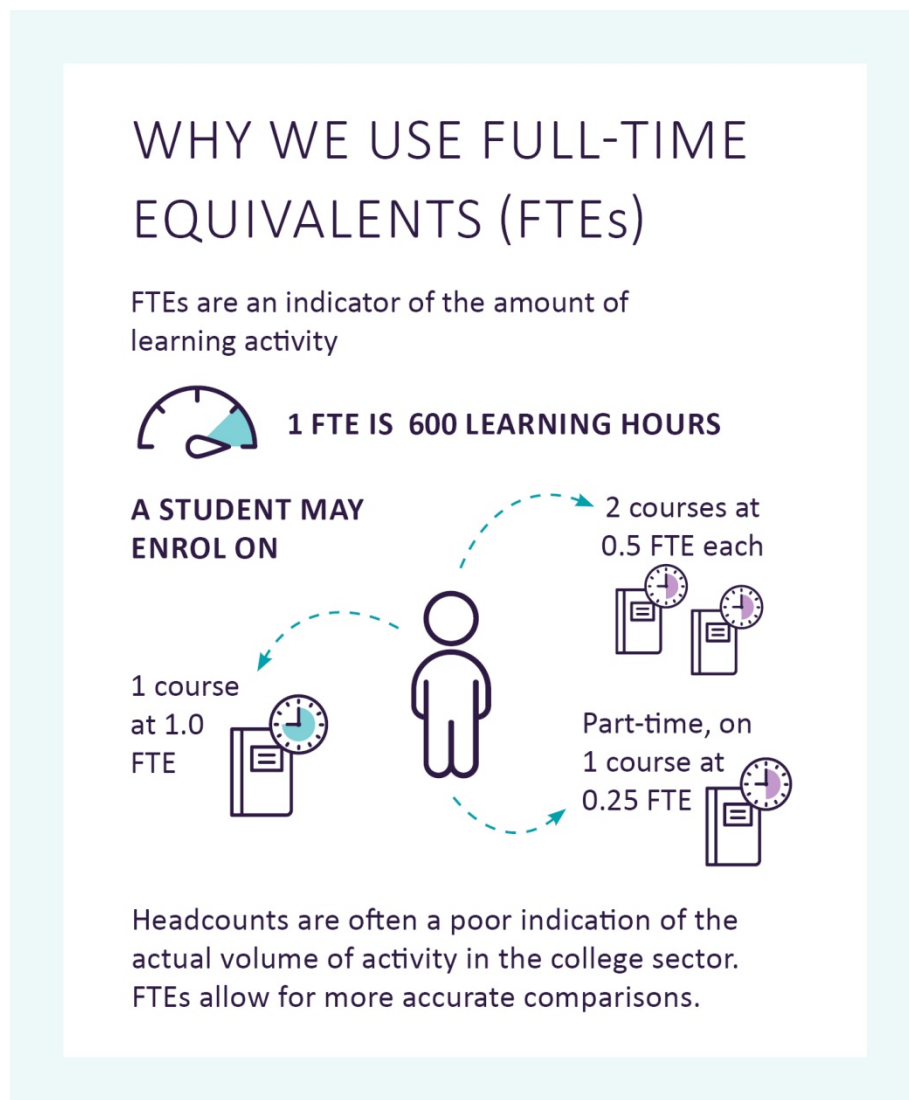


17. Student numbers are presented as enrolments, headcounts and FTEs in Figure B. One headcount is equal to one student, however a student can be enrolled on multiple courses within one academic year, therefore we expect the number of enrolments to be higher than the number of students.
18. Figure B shows a ten-year time series for the number of college students, enrolments, and FTEs between 2011-12 and 2020-21. Over the last ten years the number of FTEs has remained relatively stable while student headcounts started increasing from 2015-16 onwards, before decreasing after a peak in 2018-19. Changes over time reflect student choice at the time, as well as other external factors, which will make full or part-time provision more attractive in a given year. For further information on key external factors influencing trends, see Annex F.¹⁰ Headcount and enrolments fell again between 2019-20 and

¹⁰ Improvements were made to the student data collection effective from 2019-20 to collect full-student details for more students. This enables us to identify individual students more robustly now. A more detailed explanation can be found on p. 6 of our FES data collection 2019-20 guidance.

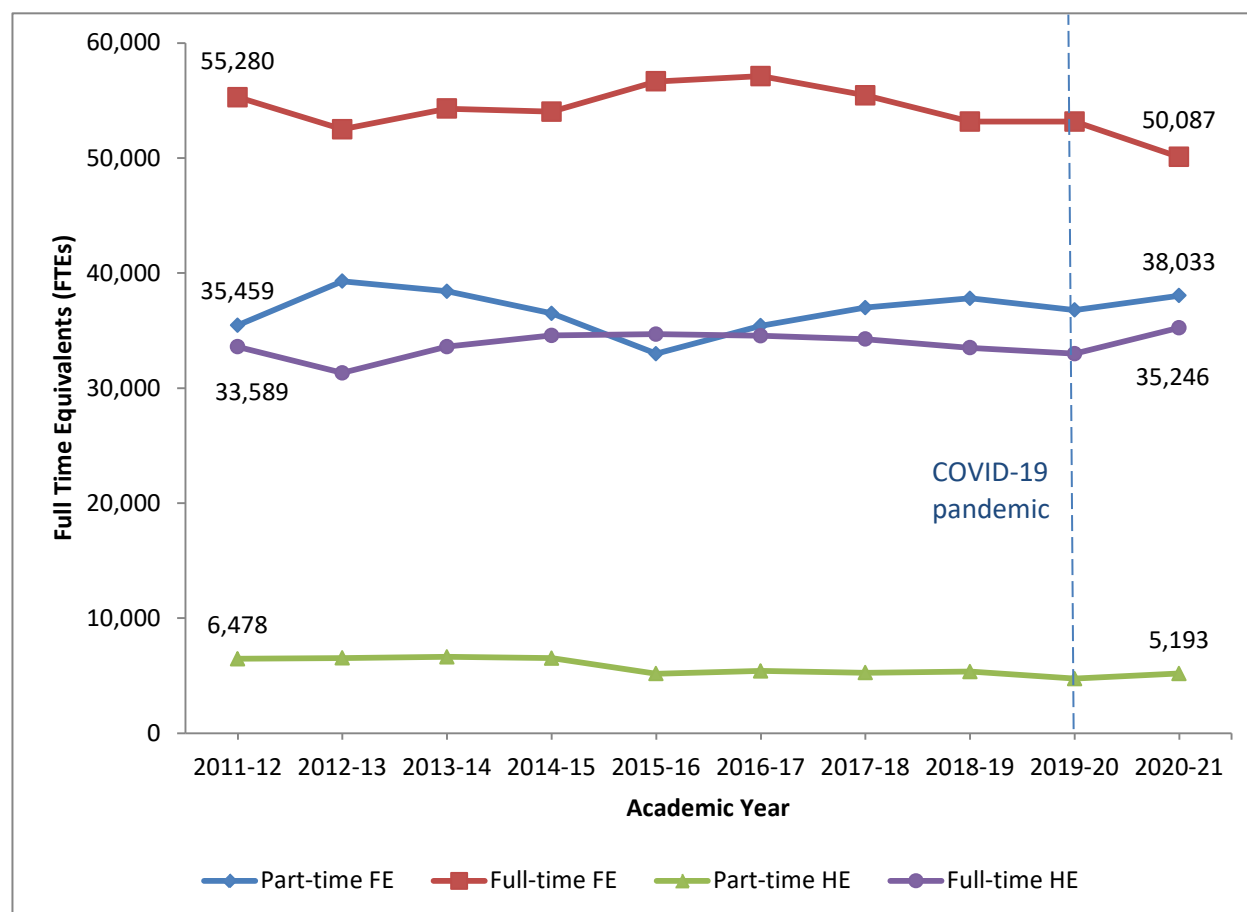
2020-21 by 10.8% and 8.1% respectively. These falls are largely driven by a reduction in enrolments on non-recognised qualifications and on courses under 10 hours in duration, down 15.3% and 63.2% respectively since 2019-20. This reduction in enrolment to shorter courses reflects the challenges of the COVID-19 lockdowns during the 2020-21 session which prevented students from attending courses with a practical element and made it more difficult for learners to attend in-person access or self-funded non-vocational courses.

19. The declines seen from 2011-12 to 2012-13 are partially due to a change in SFC funding policy that is discussed in Annex F. For example, funded places were reduced for young school pupils in 2011-12 but these pupils still had a full-time place in education.



20. Figure C below shows the distribution of all FTEs delivered across college provisions by mode and level of study. This includes FTEs not funded from the government purse. In total 128,559 FTEs were delivered in 2020-21, a 0.7% increase from 2019-20 (127,683).

Figure C: How has the Number of FTEs by Mode and Level of Study changed in the last 10 years?



21. As can be seen from Figure C, full-time FE has consistently accounted for the largest share of FTEs, indicating the prominence of full-time FE above other modes and levels of study. Likewise part-time FE has consistently accounted for the second highest number of FTEs, apart from in 2015-16 where it briefly dipped below full-time HE and then recovered. Full-time FTEs at HE level have risen slightly over the last ten years. The amount of learning activity (FTEs) occurring in part-time HE is much lower than that of all other modes and levels of study. It has been steadily declining over the past ten years, but has seen an increase this year (up 9.4% on 2019-20 but down 19.8% on 2011-12).
22. While FE remains the prominent level of study, the college sector plays an important role in delivering HE activity in Scotland. In 2020-21, 31.5% of all FTEs delivered were for HE programmes, up 1.4% percentage points from 2011-12. Throughout the last ten years the college sector in Scotland has tended to

deliver around 30% of its activity towards HE programmes.¹¹

23. At FE level, full-time FTEs have fallen by 5.8% since 2019-20 whilst part-time FTEs have increased by 3.4%. At HE level, full-time FTEs increased by 6.8% and part-time FTEs have increased by 9.4% since 2019-20. Full-time HE FTEs peaked in 2020-21.

2.3 Qualifications and programme types

24. The fact that headcount and enrolments have fallen but FTEs have increased can be explained by looking at the change in enrolments for different types of programme. As figure D shows, between 2019-20 and 2020-21 enrolments on non-recognised qualification (NRQ) programmes have fallen significantly; this reduction has driven the overall reduction in enrolments. However, NRQ programmes are mostly short courses so each enrolment represents a small FTE. Therefore, a large fall in enrolments here has only a small impact on the overall FTE figure. Conversely, HNC programmes have seen the biggest increase in enrolments between 2019-20 and 2020-21. As HNCs are year-long programmes, each enrolment here represents a large FTE (i.e. 1 full-time enrolment is 1 FTE, 1 part-time enrolment is typically 0.5 FTE). Therefore, an increase in enrolments in this type of programme has a large impact on the overall FTE figure.

¹¹ See Background Tables to see the percentage of FTEs for HE programmes each year since 2011-12.

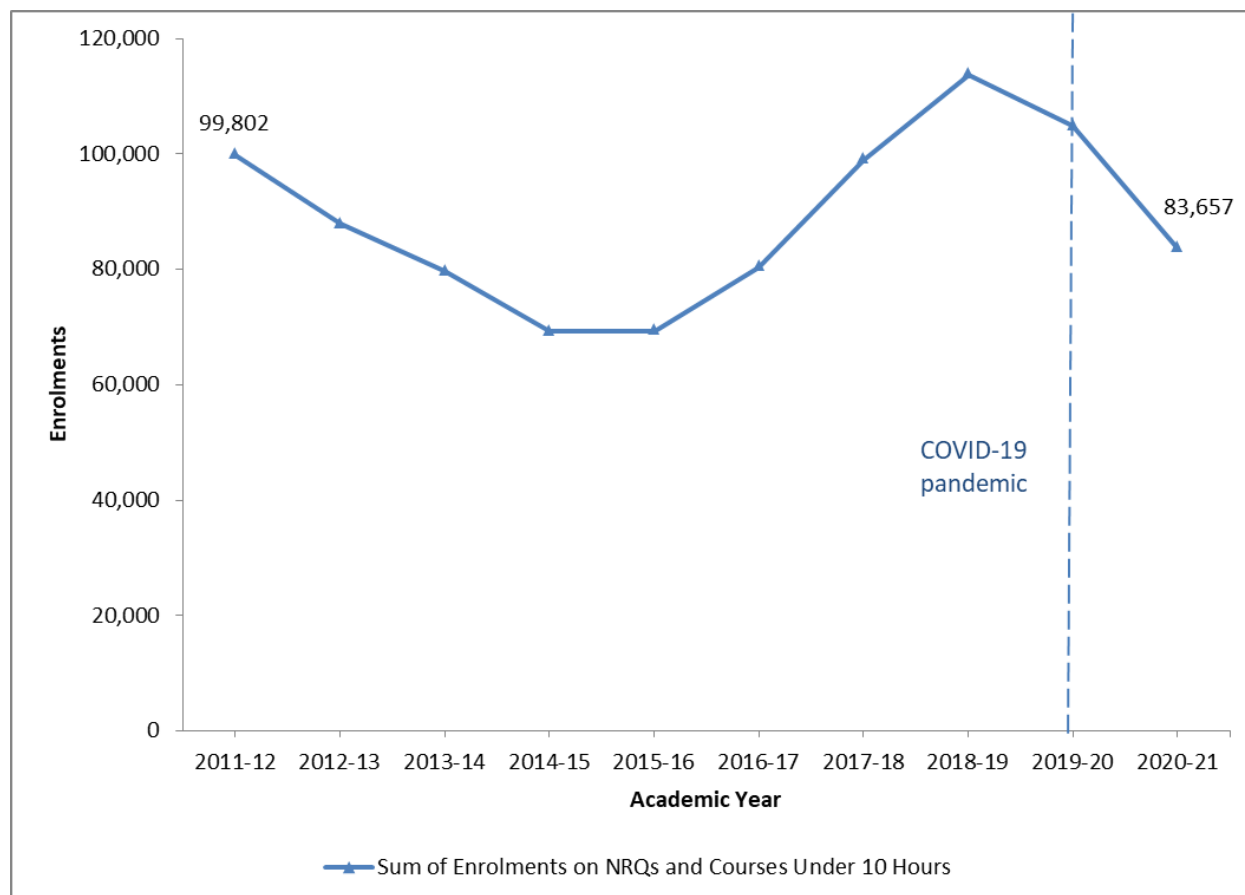
Figure D: How have enrolments on different qualification programmes changed between 2019-20 and 2020-21?

Table shows top 5 increases and top 5 decreases only; changes for all qualifications can be viewed in the background tables.

Qualification	2019-20	2020-21	Change between 2019-20 and 2020-21
Top 5 decreases			
NRQ programme	101,255	81,075	-20,180
Other non-advanced accredited qualification	41,623	37,488	-4,135
SQA Skills for Work Award	5,417	3,406	-2,011
National Certificate Award (accredited group award)	12,975	11,076	-1,899
Scottish Vocational Qualification or National Vocational Qualification (non-advanced)	17,106	16,079	-1,027
Top 5 increases			
Higher National Diploma or equivalent	17,105	17,870	765
SQA National Progression Award	4,655	5,680	1,025
Non-advanced units only	23,467	24,804	1,337
HN units only	3,516	4,966	1,450
Higher National Certificate or equivalent	17,553	19,241	1,688

Figure E: How have enrolments on courses under 10 Hours and on a Non-Recognised Qualification changed in the last 10 years?

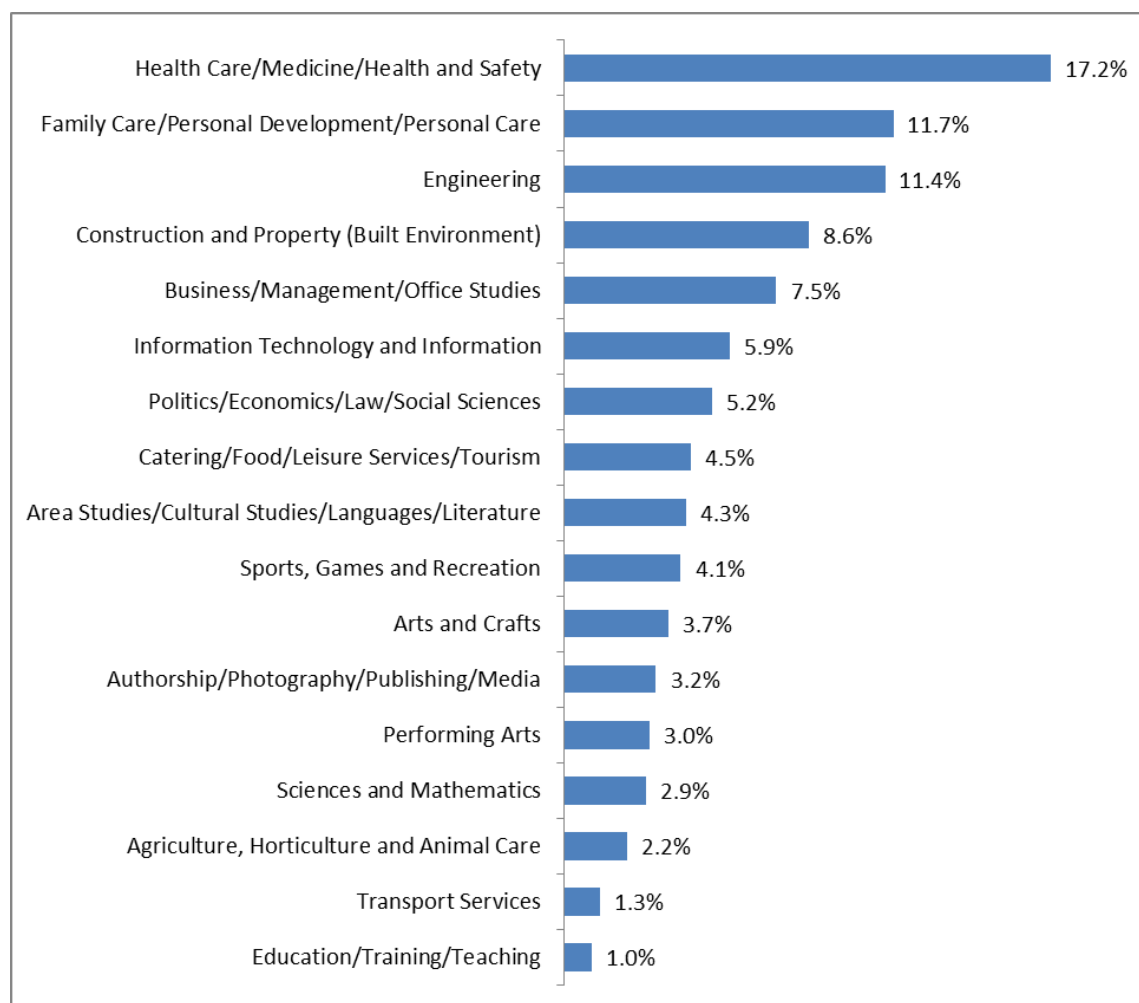
Note: where an enrolment is both to a non-recognised qualification and under 10 hours in duration it is counted only as an enrolment to 'Courses Under 10 Hours in Duration'.



25. 2019-20 saw a levelling off of the year-on year increase in enrolments on NRQs that had been ongoing since their lowest point in 2014-15, and 2020-21 saw a sharp decline. This is likely to be an impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Enrolments on NRQs reduced by 15.3% from 2019-20 to 2020-21. The year 2020-21 also saw a continuation of the reduction of enrolments on courses under 10 hours in duration, with a 63.2% decrease between 2019-20 and 2020-21.
26. The introduction of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund (piloted in 2017-18 and continued through to 2020-21) has led to colleges delivering courses for employers who are apprenticeship levy payers that, whilst vocational, do not necessarily lead to recognised qualifications but are much valued by the employers in addressing priority skills gaps and training needs.

Figure F: What do college students study (by % of all FTEs)?

Percentages <1.0% have been suppressed.



Percentages <1.0% have been suppressed:

Sales, Marketing and Retailing, 0.9%

Humanities, 0.4%

Manufacturing/Production, 0.3%

Services to Industry and Commerce, 0.3%

Environment Protection/Energy/Cleansing/Security, 0.2%

Oil/Mining/Plastics/Chemicals, 0.2%

27. Figure F above shows the percentage of all FTEs by subject area, providing a snapshot of where the greatest proportion of learning activity takes place. Health Care/Medicine/Health and Safety has the greatest share of all FTEs in 2020-21 at 17.2%.¹²
28. We can also see from Figure F that over a quarter (28.9%) of all learning activity takes place in subject areas relating to health and care services. While colleges continue to offer a diverse range of subject areas for students, the sector delivers a sizeable proportion of its overall provision to support the health and care sectors.

¹² See Background Tables to compare the number of proportion of FTEs by subject area for 2011-12 and 2020-21.

Section 3: Student Characteristics – age and gender

Key Findings

- The participation rate for 18-19 year-olds attending college full-time has increased slightly from 2019-20 (20.9%) to 2020-21 (21.5%).
- The total number of 18-19 year-olds in the Scottish population has decreased by 15.8% over the last decade, and decreased by 3% from 2019-20 to 2020-21 alone. However, the number of 18-19 year-olds attending college full-time has decreased by only 38 since last year (0.2%), hence the increased participation rate.
- The gap between male and females has decreased in 2020-21 with the male/female enrolment ratio now standing at 48.6%/51.4%.

29. This section includes a high-level summary of student characteristics in relation to age and gender. These measurements for student activity are used for comparability over time. SFC publishes more detailed information on a broader range of student characteristics in the Report on Widening Access, which is next due to be published in spring 2022. Last year's publication can be found on the SFC website.
30. Information on the proportion of college activity delivered to other protected characteristic groups can be found in Annex B. Notably, the proportion of college teaching activity delivered to students with care-experience (+4.8 percentage points), of Black and Minority Ethnic ethnicity (+1.6 percentage points) and with a declared disability (+5.5 percentage points) have all increased between 2016-17 and 2020-21

3.1 By Age

31. College delivery to students aged under 16, 16-19, 20-24, and 25 and over are key metrics included in SFC's national priority measures.¹³ The [Young Person's Guarantee](#) outlines the Scottish Government's commitment to connect every 16 to 24 year-old in Scotland to an opportunity; this could be a job, apprenticeship, further or higher education, training programme or volunteering. The age profiles of college students vary by mode of study as discussed below.
32. Background table 8 shows that in 2020-21 every single year of age from 16 to 23 has a greater number of enrolments for men than for women. However, for

¹³ This is discussed in [Guidance for the development of College Outcome Agreements: 2019-20 to 2021-22.](#)

ages 24 and over, we tend to see more female enrolments than male. Ten year trend data is available in the background table.

Figure G: What proportion of Scotland's 18- and 19-year-old population attends college full-time?

Academic Year	Aged 18-19 Full-Time Student Population (headcount)	Aged 18-19 in the Scottish Population	Aged 18-19 Participation Rate	Percentage point change year-on-year
2011-12	26,448	129,508	20.4%	
2012-13	27,253	127,358	21.4%	1.0%
2013-14	27,417	125,248	21.9%	0.5%
2014-15	27,153	123,401	22.0%	0.1%
2015-16	26,793	123,190	21.7%	-0.3%
2016-17	27,099	121,595	22.3%	0.5%
2017-18	25,824	118,594	21.8%	-0.5%
2018-19	23,848	115,623	20.6%	-1.1%
2019-20	23,493	112,457	20.9%	0.3%
2020-21	23,455	109,064	21.5%	0.6%

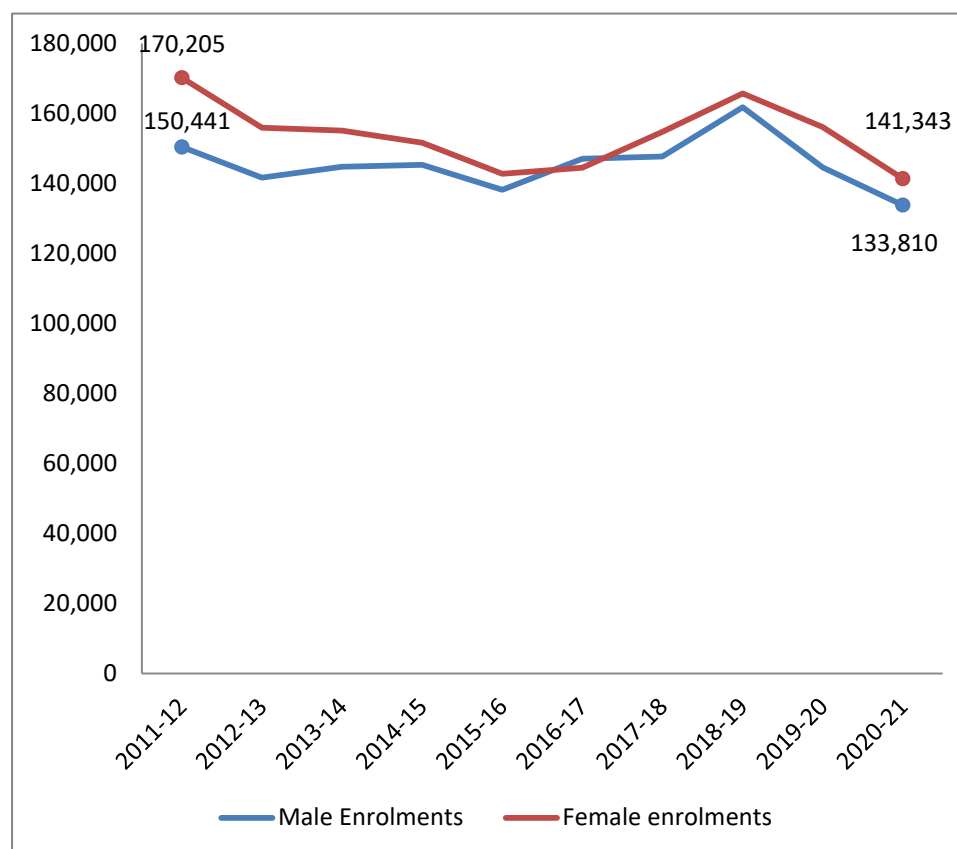
33. Figure G above shows the participation rate of 18–19 year-old Scottish people in full-time college education; this is the number of 18–19 year-old Scottish full-time students as a percentage of the number of 18-19 year-olds in the Scottish population.
34. Over the last ten years the number of 18-19 year-olds in Scotland has decreased by 15.8% and decreased by 3% from 2019-20 to 2020-21 alone (see Annex D). This presents a challenge to the college sector to maintain student numbers in light of a decreasing population in this age group, and as such the number of 18-19 year-olds in full-time college education has decreased over the last decade. However, the participation rate has remained reasonably steady across this time, and has seen growth in the last three years.
35. The methodology is demonstrated and explained further in Annex C at the end of this report and in the Background Tables¹⁴.
36. For a more complete picture of participation (both full-time and part-time) including employment, equalities measures and local authority areas, see the Skills Development Scotland publication [*Annual Participation Measure for 16-19 year olds in Scotland 2020*](#).

¹⁴ <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates>

3.2 By Gender

37. Figure H below shows the number of enrolments by male/female gender split from 2011-12 to 2020-21.

Figure H: Enrolments to Scotland's Colleges by gender, 2011-12 to 2020-21



38. From Figure H above we can see that the gap between male and female enrolments steadily closed from 2010-11 to 2016-17, where males had the majority of enrolments over females (50.4% and 49.6% respectively) for the first and only time in the decade shown.¹⁵ Since then, enrolments for males and females had continued to grow; this trend ended as of 2019-20 due to an overall decrease in enrolments. As of 2020-21, 48.6% of enrolments were from males and 51.4% were from females.

39. Figures I and J below show the male/female gender split of enrolments by level of study. The year 2020-21 has seen a sharp increase in HE enrolments since 2019-20 with a 5.1% increase for males and an 8.0% increase for females, as shown in Figure I.

40. FE (also under Figure J below) enrolments have fallen for both males and

¹⁵ Excludes enrolments by students with 'other' or 'unknown' gender. See Background Tables for the male/female percentage ratio for each year.

females since 2019-20 with a 9.7% decrease for males and a 12.7% decrease for females.

Figure I: How has the gender split of male and female enrolments to Higher Education courses changed in the last 10 years?

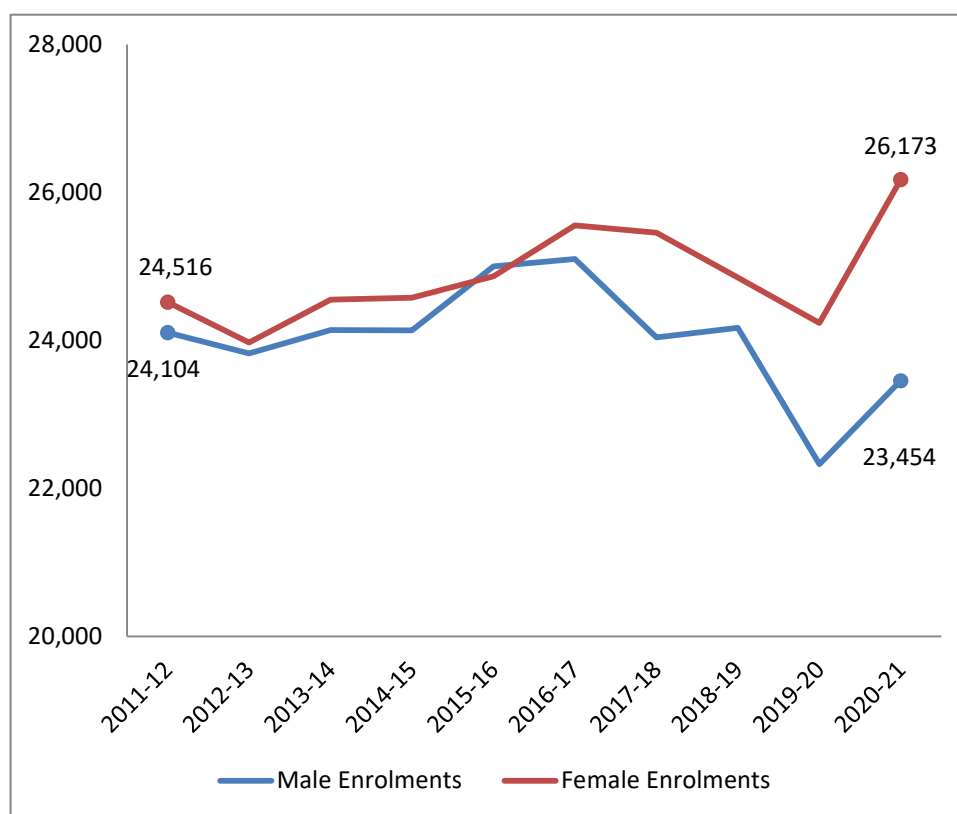
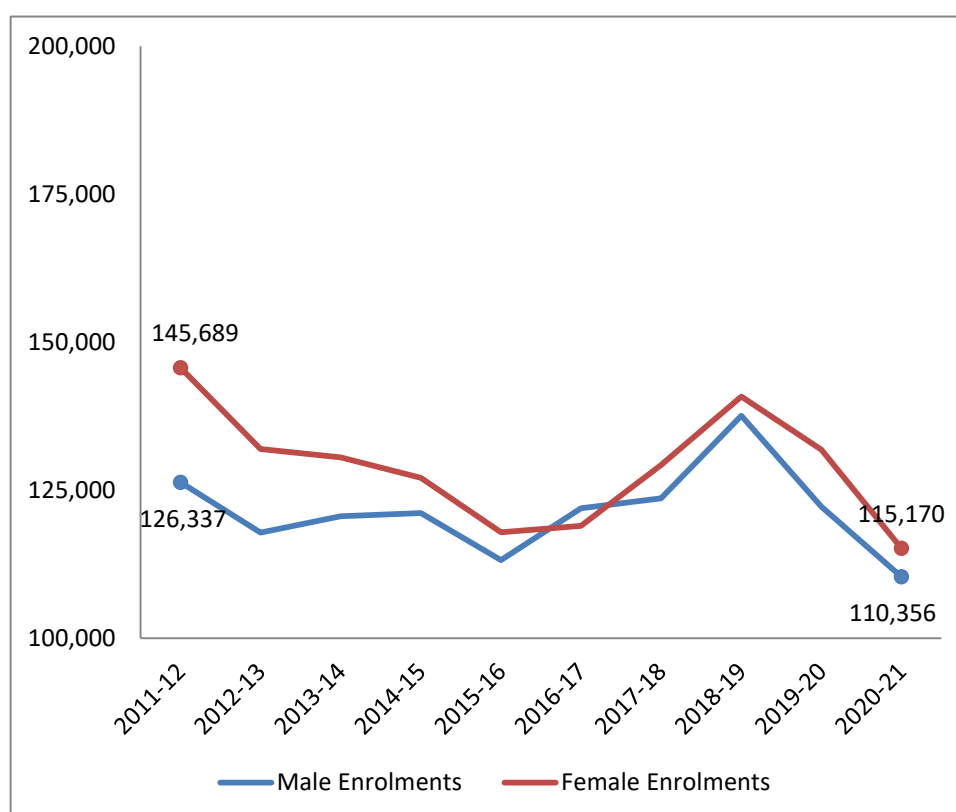


Figure J: How has the gender split of male and female enrolments to Further Education courses changed in the last 10 years?



Further Information

41. The [Infact](#) Database, SFC Open Data Portal, allows for more detailed analysis of provision within Scotland's colleges. Please note that figures may differ from those presented here. Some FTE figures may differ because Infact also includes FTE figures for students not funded by SFC. Please also note that headcount figures may differ, as this report will count a student once irrespective of how many colleges they attended, whereas Infact will count them at each college.
42. All data shown in this report are available in background tables provided on the SFC website.
43. A publication detailing College Performance Indicators for 2020-21 is due to be published on the SFC website in spring 2022. 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 Performance Indicators 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.
44. 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.

Annexes

Annex A: Notable Changes in External Factors Affecting the College Sector

Date	Change	Impact on the 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.

Annex B: College Outcome Agreements

45. As part of the Outcome Agreement process, SFC introduced a basket of measures to be used to help measure and assess the impact of the Outcome Agreements across a range of key priority areas.

46. The table below shows the 2016-17 to 2020-21 figures for some measures.

Selected National Performance Measures, 2016-17 to 2020-21

Measure	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Credits delivered	1,762,032	1,778,466	1,753,330	1,749,069	1,730,508
Proportion of Credits delivered to learners Under 16	2.7%	3.3%	4.0%	3.9%	3.0%
Proportion of Credits delivered to learners aged 16-19	46.6%	45.2%	43.4%	44.4%	44.1%
Proportion of Credits delivered to learners aged 20-24	21.5%	21.1%	21.1%	20.5%	21.7%
Proportion of Credits delivered to learners aged 25 and over	29.2%	30.4%	31.5%	31.1%	31.2%
Proportion of Credits to Female learners	51.3%	51.5%	51.5%	51.4%	52.3%
Proportion of Credits to Male learners	48.6%	48.5%	48.0%	48.1%	47.0%
Proportion of Credits delivered to learners from the 10% most deprived areas	17.2%	16.5%	16.6%	16.5%	16.3%
Proportion of Credits to learners from a care experienced background	1.6%	2.0%	3.7%	5.9%	6.4%
Proportion of Credits to BME learners	6.4%	7.0%	7.3%	8.1%	8.0%
Proportion of Credits to Disabled learners	17.1%	18.8%	21.8%	22.1%	22.6%

47. Further information on Outcome Agreements can be found on the [SFC website](#).

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

48. 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. To calculate the population of 18 and 19 year-olds in Scotland in 2020-21, the population of 16 and 17 year-olds in 2018-19 has been aged forward by two years so that they are calculated as 17 and 18 year olds in 2019-20 and 18 and 19 year-olds in 2020-21. This ageing forward method is applied to 17, 18 and 19 year-olds so that they are based on previous 16 year-old populations aged forward appropriately. For example, the number of 18 year-olds in 2018-19 is the number of 16 year-olds in 2016-17 aged forward two years. The population of 16 year-olds is taken from National Record of Scotland's actual count of 16 year-olds in that year.

Calculated count			
Age	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
16	53,470	54,052	55,890
17	55,594	53,470	54,052
18	56,863	55,594	53,470
19	58,760	56,863	55,594

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

Annex D: The proportion of 18-19 year-olds in the Scottish population who attended college full-time, from 2011-2012 to 2020-21

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 C. The participation rate is the Aged 18-19 Full-Time Student Population divided by the number Aged 18-19 in the Scottish Population.

Annex E: Changes to Full-Time Equivalents over the past seven years

Academic Year	Core FTEs (inc FAs) Delivered	Employability Fund, FWDF	SRUC FTEs	Associate Students [^]	Total FTEs	Target	Delivery Over Target
2012-13	112,916	3,483	598		116,997	116,269	728
2013-14	119,022	614	598		120,234	116,269	3,965
2014-15	118,407	671	598		119,676	116,269	3,407
2014-15 Credit based	117,754	671	598		119,023	116,269	2,754
2015-16 Credit based	115,856	750	598	1,576	117,204	116,269	935
2016-17 Credit based	116,318	586	598	1,485	117,502	116,269	1,233
2017-18 Credit based	116,355	688	598	1,507	117,641	116,269	1,372
2018-19 Credit based	115,061	1,080	598	1,503	118,242	116,269	1,973
2019-20 Credit based	114,497	1,046	598	1,525	117,666	116,269	1,397
2020-21 Credit Based	114,387	1,373	598	1,556	117,914	116,269	1,645

49. The college sector has always provided a good deal of additional learning support to students enrolled on mainstream programmes who require additional learning to keep up with their peer group. In 2015-16 colleges received £50m to provide this additional support under what was then Extended Learning Support (now the Access and Inclusion Fund), and this contributed 3,000 FTEs towards the 116,269 target. At that time the claims for additional learning were subject to external audit and individuals who received that support were identified in the student record. From 2017-18 these students are no longer flagged and the audit does not require the same level of testing for this group. The £50m premium now stands at £51m and students continue to receive the required support but are monitored through the college outcome agreement process via an access and inclusion strategy. Since the audit arrangements have changed and the students in receipt of the support are no longer flagged, SFC took the decision to stop counting FTEs for this

additional learning for new students. In 2017-18 this meant the FTEs claimed under the Access and Inclusion Fund (previously Extended Learning Support) were reduced from 3,000 to 1,500. In 2018-19 the claim has been reduced again to 750 for those students continuing their studies from previous years. From 2019-20 no FTEs will be claimed for this group.

50. SFC continues to count 598 FTEs towards the 116k target for HE places delivered by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) that were transferred from the college to university sector after the target was set. Foundation Apprenticeships are also counted towards this target.
51. SFC announced in its 2018-19 funding letter to our Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that we would continue with the Associate Student Scheme for 2018-19 onwards. The Associate Student Scheme is designed to provide additional articulation pathways from college to a HEI. Colleges are delivering around 1,500 places each year as part of this scheme but they were not counted towards the 116k target during the pilot phase. Now that the pilot has ended and this successful scheme is continuing, the decision has been taken to count these associate students' places towards the 116k target. In 2020-21 there were 1,556 FTEs enrolled on these associate student programmes being taught at college.
52. The Employability Fund ended in 2016-17 and was replaced by the 'Flexible Workforce Development Fund' from 2017-18.

Annex F: Further Information on College Students

53. 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 in Spring 2022. Previous years' reports can be found on SFC's Statistics Publication Schedule.
54. In the meantime, trends for protected characteristics in the college sector can be explored using the Infact Database.

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

What are non-recognised qualifications?

55. In Scotland's colleges in 2020-21, there were a total of 277,620 enrolments. 81,075 (29.2%) were to courses leading to 'non-recognised' qualifications.
56. Whilst non-recognised qualifications account for a third of all college enrolments, they account for just 5.9% 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 less than 38 hours in duration. Many are shorter still, less than 10 hours in duration in many cases.
57. 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.
58. 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. Many Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF) courses also fall under this category. This initiative allows employers to access funding to address priority skills gaps and invest in their workforce through training and personal development. These programmes can be delivered in partnership with the local college, the Open University in Scotland or an independent training provider.

Characteristics of students enrolling on non-recognised qualifications

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

School Pupils

60. 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.
61. 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

- 62. 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.
- 63. There is a sizeable widening participation element in this cohort - almost half of activity is delivered to those from the 20% most deprived areas. Around 6% of these students are care-experienced, and a third are aged 25 or over. Over half of activity was delivered to those with a declared disability with many of that cohort declaring multiple disabilities.
- 64. Many learners in this cohort enrol on ESOL modules, bridging courses - i.e. 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.
- 65. Such students often come from difficult backgrounds and it could be argued that their participation in such courses will have a social benefit, albeit the social return on investment is difficult to calculate quickly. In other words, there is an opportunity cost to these individuals and perhaps the community for these individuals not experiencing these opportunities provided by the college sector. Many such students are over 25, from the 20% most deprived areas and with multiple disabilities, so there is a real complexity of need in many cases.

UK Industry

- 66. These are programmes where the main source of finance is industry or commerce. Much of the funding will come from the employer, or via the Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF). Via the FWDF, employers can access funding to address priority skills gaps. These courses are delivered to meet the needs of apprenticeship levy-payers that, whilst vocational, may not immediately lead to a recognised qualification.
- 67. 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

- 68. 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. Around a third are STEM-related.

Other

69. There is a large STEM element to the remaining students not in the above four groups, with STEM subjects accounting for around a third delivered to this cohort. Much of the activity delivered to this cohort included introductory sessions of various types - for example, 'introduction to remote learning' courses an obvious pre-requisite for studying remotely on other courses during the COVID-19 pandemic.
70. 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 in to vocational learning for those with minimal or no qualifications.

Metadata

Metadata Indicator	Description
Publication Title	College Statistics 2020-21
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 Equivalents (FTEs) as measures of college student activity in Scotland.
Theme	Further and Higher Education provision at Scotland's colleges.
Topic	Student information
Format	PDF 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 (2018-based) .
Date that data are acquired	College statistics FES return: November 2021
Release date	25/01/2022
Frequency	Annual
Timeframe of data and timeliness	Trend data are presented as a time series continuation from the 2011-2012 academic year (AY) to the 2020-21 AY. Data is also presented for the 2011-2012 AY vs. the 2020-21 AY to allow for comparison between the two years. Data is also presented for the 2011-2012 AY vs. the 2016-17 AY vs. the 2020-21 AY to allow for comparison across the three years.
Continuity of data	Data from Scottish colleges continues to exclude those students who do not complete the first 25% of their course (the point at which they become eligible for funding).
Revisions statement	No revisions to the 2019-20 edition of this report.
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	Values less than 5 have been suppressed to prevent against the identification of individual students. Totals are summed from unrounded figures. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Figures and percentages in the charts are calculated using suppressed figures where the count is less than 5.
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.
Last published	26/01/2021
Next published	January 2023 - exact date to be confirmed.
Date of first publication	The Scottish Funding Council first published the College Statistics publication 2007.
Help email	datarequests@sfc.ac.uk
Date form completed	07/01/2022