



College Statistics 2020-21: Executive Summary



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

SFC STATISTICS

Issue Date: 25 January 2022

Reference: SFC/ST/01/2022

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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.

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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.
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.

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.

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

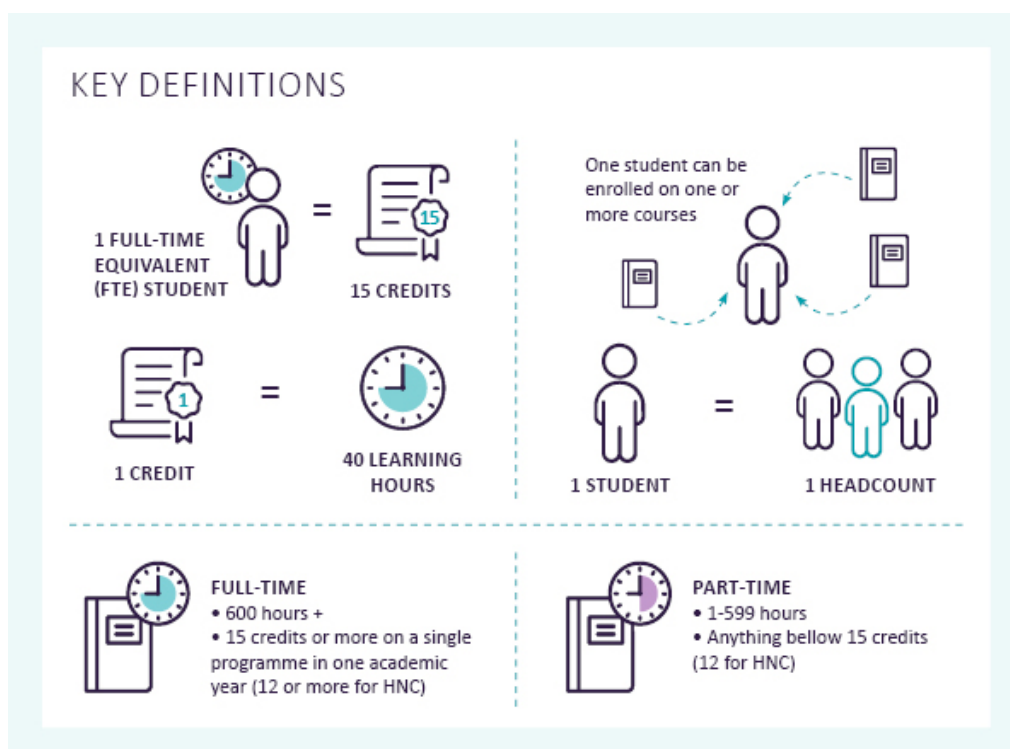
¹ UCAS Undergraduate Statistics: <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports>

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>

to SQA National Progression Awards and free-standing National Units. 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