



Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey 2020-21



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

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Summary: To inform stakeholders of the publication of the college 2020-21 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey outcomes.

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

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Contents

List of Tables	4
Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic considerations.....	5
Executive Summary 2020-21 figures.....	6
Purpose.....	8
Introduction	8
SSES Analysis of Full-time Further Education students.....	9
SES Analysis of Full-time Higher Education students	11
Appendix A: Full-time survey response and satisfaction rates by college.....	16
Appendix B: Publication Metadata.....	17
Appendix C: Glossary	18

List of Tables

Table 1: Full-time FE student satisfaction with their overall college experience 2020-21	10
Table 2: Full-time FE student satisfaction trend	10
Table 3: Summary of student satisfaction results for full-time further education students at colleges 2020-21.....	11
Table 4: Full-time HE student satisfaction with their overall college experience 2020-21	12
Table 5: Full-time HE student satisfaction trend.....	12
Table 6: Summary of student satisfaction results for full-time HE students at colleges 2020-21	13
Table 7: Student satisfaction comparisons for full-time and part-time FE and HE students 2020-21	14

Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic considerations

1. 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 2019-20 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES) was cancelled due to fieldwork coinciding with the COVID-19 lockdown period. Although the COVID-19 pandemic continued throughout the academic year 2020-21, it was deemed important to capture the experiences of students during these exceptional circumstances.
2. To enable the capturing of different experiences of students, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the wider use of blended learning approaches, the SSES was broadened to include three additional statements. This development work was led by Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs) and NUS Scotland towards the end of 2020.

The three additional statements are:

- Any change in my course or teaching has been communicated well.
 - The online learning materials for my course have helped me learn.
 - I feel that I am part of the college community.
3. These will allow for the evaluation of not just the immediate and short-term impact, but also the potentially longer-term effects on students' learning experiences.
 4. During the COVID-19 pandemic colleges did act quickly to move provision online where possible and took steps to address digital poverty. SFC worked closely with colleges to support students to complete successfully and to ensure students did not lose out as a result of the difficult circumstances surrounding their studies.
 5. The 2020-21 results will have been impacted by the COVID pandemic and therefore it is difficult to compare these results with earlier years. Nonetheless it is important to understand the impact COVID may have had on the student experience and we have therefore included some results for earlier years to help us consider the results in context and learn from the experience.

Executive Summary 2020-21 figures

6. The student satisfaction survey for 2020-21 was carried out over an eight week period between 8 March and 30 April 2021. This academic year was again impacted by COVID with more on line learning than face to face teaching during this survey period.
7. Colleges worked within the lockdown restrictions to prioritise on site learning for those students how who had to develop or demonstrate practical skills such as construction, engineering or hairdressing. Practical innovations were also brought in to help ensure the best student experience; these included sending prosthetic hands to beauty students to help deliver experience of painting nails when such up close experiences weren't available in college or salon settings. The 2020-21 academic year was not a typical year but college students and staff did what they could to make the best of the learning opportunities during lockdown and to make up for lost learning when restrictions eased.
8. We included in the 2020-21 survey three additional statements to enable the capturing of different experiences of students, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of these statements was whether the student felt part of the college community and over 80% of full-time FE students either strongly agreed or agreed.
9. Almost nine out of 10 full-time FE students were satisfied with their college experience (88.6%) and for full-time HE students just over 80% were satisfied with their college experience.
10. Satisfaction rates were higher for part-time students standing at 92.2% for Further Education and 84.4% for Higher Education.
11. It is important to understand the impact COVID may have had on the student experience to help us consider the results in context and learn from the situation. Satisfaction rates were higher in 2018-19 when the survey was last carried out (FTFE +4.4%, FTHE +6.5%, PTFE +2.7%, PTHE +4.8%) but are still very high in 2020-21 with 85.9% of all students reporting they were satisfied with their course experience.
12. 98,650 full-time and part-time college students were surveyed, with the following response rates:
 - 28,943 full-time students a 43.2% response rate.
 - 5,766 part-time students an 18.2% response rate.

Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey 2020-21



98,650
students surveyed



34,709
students had their say

RESPONSE RATE BY STUDENT TYPE



COLLEGE HE STUDENTS

Full-time 42.3%

Part-time 18.4%



COLLEGE FE STUDENTS

Full-time 44.0%

Part-time 18.1%



HIGHER EDUCATION
COLLEGE STUDENTS

'OVERALL, I AM SATISFIED WITH MY COLLEGE EXPERIENCE'

FULL-TIME

Strongly Agree 25.8%

Agree 54.5%

Disagree 15.8%

Strongly Disagree 4.0%

Overall
80.3%



PART-TIME

Strongly Agree 33.4%

Agree 50.9%

Disagree 11.9%

Strongly Disagree 3.7%

Overall
84.4%



'OVERALL, I AM SATISFIED WITH MY COLLEGE EXPERIENCE'

FULL-TIME

Strongly Agree 34.4%

Agree 54.2%

Disagree 9.2%

Strongly Disagree 2.2%

Overall
88.6%



PART-TIME

Strongly Agree 41.9%

Agree 50.3%

Disagree 6.4%

Strongly Disagree 1.4%

Overall
92.2%



FURTHER EDUCATION
COLLEGE STUDENTS

Purpose

13. The SSES provides a means to evaluate and enhance college provision in Scotland through a national approach to monitoring student satisfaction and engagement. Over time, this will provide a consistent basis for college regions to evidence impact and improvement within their outcome agreements. With sparqs support it is envisaged that it will help to strengthen the role of Students' Associations in representation and advocacy and will contribute to public accountability.
14. The survey asks students to rate their satisfaction ('strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree') on 13 statements.
 - The overall satisfaction figure is the key outcome agreement measure for student satisfaction and is based on the combined figure for 'strongly agree' and 'agree' for the statement '*overall, I am satisfied with my college experience*'.
 - For the engagement statement '*the college students' association influences change for the better*' students have the option of providing a 'don't know' response. However our calculations to derive the levels of satisfaction exclude those 'don't know' responses.

Introduction

15. SFC has been working with the college sector to conduct a 'Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey' (SSES) since 2015-16. This publication is based on the college SSES returns and covers the academic years 2018-19 and 2020-21.
16. In 2014 with the support of the college sector and other key agencies, work commenced to develop a national Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey that would collect and report on summary satisfaction and engagement data from colleges.
17. This included the setting up of a Working Group; a sector consultation; the development, informal testing and cognitive testing of an initial set of survey statements; and the surveying of full-time college students by 16 volunteer colleges. The first [Student Satisfaction and Engagement publication from 2015-16](#) provides a timeline and detail of the development stages.
18. Following feedback received from the pilot survey and after further sector consultation a set of ten statements was developed. As detailed above from 2020-21 this has been increased to 13 statements: eleven statements relate to

satisfaction and one statement to engagement with the Students' Association.

19. The [National Student Survey](#)¹ NSS does not include the surveying of students in Scotland's colleges apart from HE level students at The University of Highlands and Islands (UHI) partner colleges and Scotland's Rural College therefore these students are not reported in the SSES.
20. SFC and sparqs will continue to work with the college sector to ensure greater consistency and to improve response rates and procedural accuracy across colleges, and where possible use the information to improve the educational experience for future years.
21. The chosen survey period is six weeks within an eight week window between March and April, and as this is later in the academic year students will be providing an informed response after much of their learning has been completed. However, it is important to note that the majority of students who withdraw from their studies will have done so by this point and therefore less likely to take part in the survey. This will vary by college dependant on the timing and management of student withdrawals.
22. Further information on the survey method, coverage and timing is available in separate guidance - [College Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey Guidance 2020-21](#)

SSES Analysis of Full-time Further Education students

23. Overall, 76% of all full-time FE student enrolments starting in the academic year 2020-21 were surveyed during this period from 26 colleges. The other 24% of FE full-time students will have completed their studies prior to the survey period or withdrawn.
24. Response rates remain variable at a college level ranging from 14% to 71%. At a sector level, the response rate was 44% (16,368 students), a reduction of 8.5 percentage points (pp) from 2018-19.
25. Table 1 below provides the responses to the following statement: *'Overall, I am satisfied with my college experience.'*

¹ The National Student Survey (NSS) gathers students' opinions on the quality of their courses. The NSS has been capturing mainly final-year undergraduate students' feedback on their course experience. The purpose of this is to contribute to public accountability, help inform the choices of prospective students and provide data that assists institutions in enhancing the student experience.

Table 1: Full-time FE student satisfaction with their overall college experience 2020-21

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Number Satisfied	Proportion Satisfied
5,626	8,875	1,511	356	14,501	88.6%
34.4%	54.2%	9.2%	2.2%		

26. Table 1 above shows that combining ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ responses that 88.6% of those who responded to the survey were satisfied with the overall college experience.
27. Although we have published the results for all colleges, 16 of the 26 colleges with full-time FE students had response rates below 40%, care should therefore be taken when comparing the results of colleges.
28. While the results are not directly comparable, Table 2 shows the results of FE satisfaction to a previous non-COVID academic year. While for 2020-21 the overall satisfaction is lower, this is still almost nine out of ten students in what was certainly a very challenging time for students and staff alike.

Table 2: Full-time FE student satisfaction trend

FE full-time satisfaction trend	
2018-19	93.0%
2020-21	88.6%

As a result of the COVID pandemic and a national lockdown starting in the March 2020, the SSES did not take place in the academic year 2019-20.

29. The survey includes 13 statements for each student group. Table 3 below shows the results to each statement for full-time FE students.

Table 3: Summary of student satisfaction results for full-time further education students at colleges 2020-21

FE Full-time	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Statement Response	Total Strongly agree and agree	Proportion Satisfied
SSES summary statement results	20-21	20-21	20-21	20-21	20-21	20-21	20-21
1. Overall, I am satisfied with my college experience.	5,626	8,875	1,511	356	16,368	14,501	88.6%
2. Staff regularly discuss my progress with me.	6,027	8,191	1,811	303	16,332	14,218	87.1%
3. Staff encourage students to take responsibility for their learning.	8,311	7,504	418	140	16,373	15,815	96.6%
4. I am able to influence learning on my course.	4,723	9,724	1,622	236	16,305	14,447	88.6%
5. I receive useful feedback which informs my future learning.	6,752	7,936	1,397	266	16,351	14,688	89.8%
6. The way I'm taught helps me learn.	5,175	8,405	2,159	558	16,297	13,580	83.3%
7. My time at college has helped me develop knowledge and skills for the workplace.	6,224	7,947	1,607	429	16,207	14,171	87.4%
8. I believe student suggestions are taken seriously.	5,493	8,953	1,510	361	16,317	14,446	88.5%
9. I believe all students at the college are treated equally and fairly by staff.	8,315	6,827	840	326	16,308	15,142	92.9%
10. Any change in my course or teaching has been communicated well.	6,345	7,935	1,603	451	16,334	14,280	87.4%
11. The online learning materials for my course have helped me learn.	5,528	8,225	1,956	627	16,336	13,753	84.2%
12. I feel that I am part of the college community.	4,734	8,410	2,515	632	16,291	13,144	80.7%
13. The college Students' Association influences change for the better.	2,952	6,454	432	146	9,984	9,406	94.2%

SES Analysis of Full-time Higher Education students

30. Overall, 88% of all full-time HE student enrolments starting in the 2020-21 academic year were surveyed during the survey period. The other 12% of HE full-time students will have completed their studies prior to the survey period or withdrawn.
31. The Highlands and Islands partner colleges and SRUC report their HE students within the NSS University statistics. As a result only 16 colleges are included within the SSES HE results.
32. Sector response rates for full-time HE students are 42.3% in 2020-21, with rates at a college level ranging from 14% to 71%.
33. Table 4 shows the overall satisfaction for 12,575 full-time HE students at Scotland's colleges responding to the statement '*overall, I am satisfied with my college experience*'.

Table 4: Full-time HE student satisfaction with their overall college experience 2020-21

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Number Satisfied	Proportion Satisfied
3,246	6,850	1,981	498	10,096	80.3%
25.8%	54.5%	15.8%	4.0%		

34. Table 4 above shows that combining ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ responses that 80.3% of those who responded to the survey were satisfied with the overall college experience.
35. Although we have published the results for all colleges, seven of the 16 colleges with full-time HE students had response rates below 40%, care should therefore be taken when comparing the results of colleges. Response rates and satisfaction rates for full-time students at individual colleges are shown in Appendix A.
36. While the results are not directly comparable, Table 5 below shows full-time HE satisfaction to a previous non-COVID academic year 2018-19. For 2020-21 the overall satisfaction rate is still eight out of ten students in what certainly was a very challenging time for students and staff alike.

Table 5: Full-time HE student satisfaction trend

HE full-time satisfaction trend	
2018-19	86.8%
2020-21	80.3%

As a result of the COVID pandemic and a national lockdown starting in the March 2020, the SSES did not take place in the academic year 2019-20.

37. Table 6 below shows the results to each satisfaction statement for full-time HE students.

Table 6: Summary of student satisfaction results for full-time HE students at colleges 2020-21

HE Full-time	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Statement Response	Total Strongly agree and agree	Proportion Satisfied
SSES summary statement results	20-21	20-21	20-21	20-21	20-21	20-21	20-21
1. Overall, I am satisfied with my college experience.	3,246	6,850	1,981	498	12,575	10,096	80.3%
2. Staff regularly discuss my progress with me.	3,397	6,163	2,461	539	12,560	9,560	76.1%
3. Staff encourage students to take responsibility for their learning.	6,114	5,765	452	222	12,553	11,879	94.6%
4. I am able to influence learning on my course.	2,799	7,139	2,167	428	12,533	9,938	79.3%
5. I receive useful feedback which informs my future learning.	4,316	6,188	1,613	442	12,559	10,504	83.6%
6. The way I'm taught helps me learn.	2,869	6,118	2,644	917	12,548	8,987	71.6%
7. My time at college has helped me develop knowledge and skills for the workplace.	4,050	6,194	1,774	539	12,557	10,244	81.6%
8. I believe student suggestions are taken seriously.	3,542	6,603	1,837	563	12,545	10,145	80.9%
9. I believe all students at the college are treated equally and fairly by staff.	5,992	5,288	868	380	12,528	11,280	90.0%
10. Any change in my course or teaching has been communicated well.	4,160	5,813	1,834	744	12,551	9,973	79.5%
11. The online learning materials for my course have helped me learn.	3,965	6,111	1,787	693	12,556	10,076	80.2%
12. I feel that I am part of the college community.	2,660	5,890	2,915	1,052	12,517	8,550	68.3%
13. The college Students' Association influences change for the better.	1,515	4,171	407	202	6,295	5,686	90.3%

38. The results for the full-time HE students across all statements, including overall satisfaction, were less positive than for the full-time FE students. HE students are encouraged to be more independent in their learning which may explain some of the variances across the two groups. However, there is a need to better understand these differences.

SSES comparison of full-time and part-time satisfaction rates

39. Table 7 below allows for the comparison of satisfaction rates for both full-time and part-time FE and HE students at colleges.

Table 7: Student satisfaction comparisons for full-time and part-time FE and HE students 2020-21

SSES comparison of full-time and part-time satisfaction rates	FE Full-time	FE Part-time	HE Full-time	HE Part-time
SSES statements	Satisfaction rates			
1. Overall, I am satisfied with my college experience.	88.6%	92.2%	80.3%	84.4%
2. Staff regularly discuss my progress with me.	87.1%	88.7%	76.1%	80.6%
3. Staff encourage students to take responsibility for their learning.	96.6%	97.8%	94.6%	96.9%
4. I am able to influence learning on my course.	88.6%	91.0%	79.3%	82.8%
5. I receive useful feedback which informs my future learning.	89.8%	92.1%	83.6%	85.7%
6. The way I'm taught helps me learn.	83.3%	88.0%	71.6%	76.9%
7. My time at college has helped me develop knowledge and skills for the workplace.	87.4%	89.1%	81.6%	86.2%
8. I believe student suggestions are taken seriously.	88.5%	92.7%	80.9%	86.5%
9. I believe all students at the college are treated equally and fairly by staff.	92.9%	96.2%	90.0%	93.2%
10. Any change in my course or teaching has been communicated well.	87.4%	90.7%	79.5%	83.6%
11. The online learning materials for my course have helped me learn.	84.2%	86.0%	80.2%	81.8%
12. I feel that I am part of the college community.	80.7%	82.0%	68.3%	69.4%
13. The college Students' Association influences change for the better.	94.2%	95.1%	90.3%	88.6%

40. The satisfaction rate for part-time students is higher than for full-time students at both FE and HE level across all survey statements apart from the statement *'the college Students' Association influences change for the better'* at HE part-time.

41. Similar to previous years the highest level of satisfaction for full-time and

part-time FE and HE students is given for the statement '*staff encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning*'.

42. When looking at satisfaction rates across level and mode of study, students are least satisfied when asked if they feel 'part of the college community'. However, it is very likely that this may have been influenced by the pandemic and extended periods of off-campus learning for many students. The proportion of students who did feel part of the college community, was, however, still relatively high, particularly for FE students where four in five students agreed that they felt part of the college community.
43. Response rates for part-time students are lower than for full-time students at both FE and HE levels.
 - FE part-time 18.1% compared to 44.0% for FE full-time.
 - HE part-time 18.4% compared to 42.3% for HE full-time.

Appendix A: Full-time survey response and satisfaction rates by college

Full-time survey response and satisfaction rates with overall college experience 2020-21

College	FE		HE	
	Response rate	Satisfaction rate	Response rate	Satisfaction rate
Argyll*	58.3%	96.8%	-	-
Ayrshire	59.5%	89.9%	39.0%	79.8%
Borders	58.1%	91.6%	54.6%	73.7%
City of Glasgow	38.5%	79.8%	37.6%	73.9%
Dumfries and Galloway	35.7%	89.4%	43.0%	88.0%
Dundee and Angus	50.2%	93.1%	50.7%	89.4%
Edinburgh	23.6%	86.6%	22.6%	75.8%
Fife	71.2%	85.2%	70.6%	82.9%
Forth Valley	33.2%	86.9%	30.0%	82.7%
Glasgow Clyde	47.2%	91.9%	50.3%	83.2%
Glasgow Kelvin	28.7%	88.4%	28.7%	77.3%
Inverness*	24.6%	81.8%	-	-
Lewis Castle*	35.4%	89.7%	-	-
Moray*	25.7%	91.7%	-	-
New College Lanarkshire	40.9%	87.3%	42.2%	77.9%
Newbattle Abbey	4.8%	100.0%	14.3%	100.0%
North East Scotland	65.2%	91.8%	59.2%	86.6%
North Highland*	10.0%	84.4%	-	-
Orkney*	9.9%	87.5%	-	-
Perth*	37.5%	85.4%	-	-
Scotland's Rural College*	18.2%	92.6%	-	-
Shetland*	23.1%	83.3%	-	-
South Lanarkshire	43.5%	89.7%	41.6%	86.7%
West College Scotland	48.5%	87.3%	52.4%	75.1%
West Highland*	33.6%	97.9%	-	-
West Lothian	36.1%	89.6%	34.0%	84.9%
Scotland	44.0%	88.6%	42.3%	80.3%

* UHI partner colleges and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) HE level student satisfaction is reported in the National Student Survey (NSS)

Appendix B: Publication Metadata

Metadata Indicator	Description
Publication title	College Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey 2020-21
Description	College student satisfaction data for full-time and part-time courses during the academic year 2020-2021.
Theme	Education
Topic	College Student Satisfaction information
Format	PDF
Data source(s)	Scotland's colleges student satisfaction survey (for Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and the UHI partner colleges coverage is only for FE level students)
Date that data is acquired	28 May 2021
Release date	02 November 2021
Frequency	Annual
Timeframe of data and timeliness	Academic year (1 August 2020 to 31 July 2021), and limited trend data from academic year 2017-18. Data is not available for 2019-20 as the survey was cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Continuity of data	From 2015-16 aggregate student satisfaction data has been submitted in Excel tables. Data for 2019-20 is not available as the survey was cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Revisions statement	There are no revisions to this publication
Enhancements relevant to this publication	The publishing of satisfaction and response rates at a college level for full-time FE and HE students.
Concepts and definitions	Please see the College Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey Guidance 2020-21 .
Relevance and key uses of the statistics	The results from the college student satisfaction publication are used by the Scottish Funding Council, Scottish Government, Audit Scotland, Colleges Scotland, academics and member of the general public to monitor college student satisfaction and to support policy development.
Official Statistics designation	Official Statistics
UK Statistics Authority Assessment	N/A
Last published	30 October 2018
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Appendix C: Glossary

College student satisfaction data - aggregate data from colleges based on the number of current students, at the point of survey, responding.

FE level - courses at SCQF or 'broadly comparable' level 6 and below.

HE level - courses at SCQF or 'broadly comparable' level 7 and above.

Full-time

- Programme of at least 600 planned notional hours or for a 1 year HNC at least 480 hours.

Part-time

- Self-contained full-time programme, i.e. one not supplemented by other periods of study of 18 weeks duration or less.
- Programme for which students are released by their employer for periods of full-time attendance.
- Programme for which employer sponsored students are released by their employer for part of the week.
- Day programmes in which periods of evening or twilight study form an integral part of the programme.
- Programme held only in evening or twilight sessions or at weekends.

Student target group - students on courses of 160 hours or more in duration.

Survey timing - the period and the number of weeks the survey should be conducted. This is within an 8 week window between March and April and during this period, colleges will operate their survey for a period of 6 weeks (and this could straddle the Spring break).