



College Statistics Annex

2023-24



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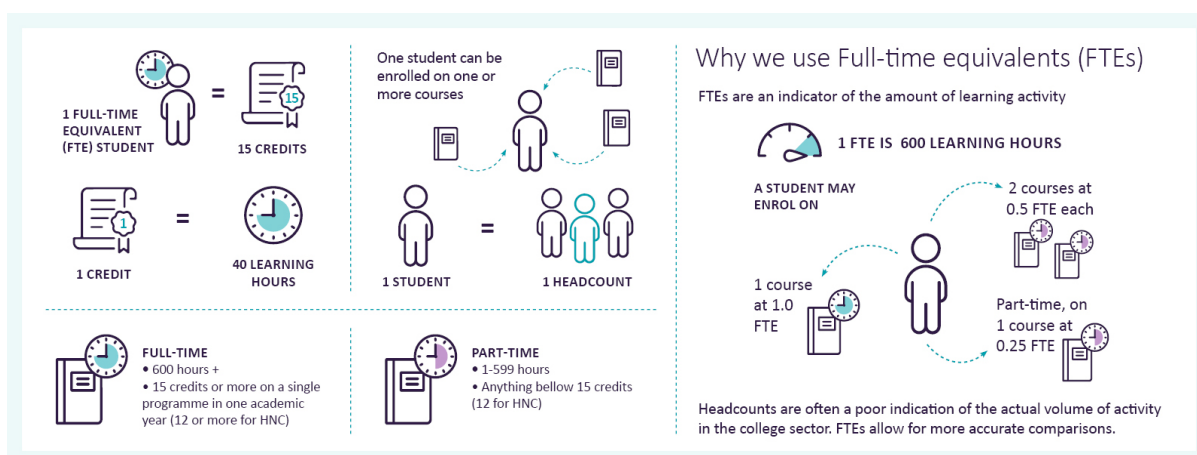
College Statistics 2023-24 Annex

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Summary:	This document provides context and methodological information pertaining to the College Statistics 2023-24 publication and background tables.
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REPORT CONTEXT AND DEFINITIONS

1. The College Statistics Report is published annually by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and provides an overview of student activity in the college sector over the last ten years, from 2014-15 to 2023-24¹. Except where noted otherwise, all data reported in this publication has been sourced from the SFC's Further Education Statistical (FES) return as provided by all Scottish colleges and has been collated and quality assured by SFC². The publication reports on student numbers in the form of headcounts, course enrolments, credits and Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) as measures of college student activity³.
2. Colleges offer a wide range of courses and study options across many levels of study to accommodate a diverse range of students. College students can study for Higher National Certificates (HNCs, which normally take one year to complete full-time) or Higher National Diplomas (HNDs, which normally take two years)⁴, Access Courses, Degree courses, Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programmes, National Qualifications, Professional Qualifications and Scottish Vocational Qualifications, among others. Colleges also award qualifications from awarding bodies outside the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) such as the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT) and City and Guilds. Courses vary from full-time programmes lasting a year or more to part-time courses lasting one hour,

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

² Notes and guidance on how colleges submit data to SFC via the FES return can be found in the FES Guidance 2023-24, available at [FES Guidance notes 2023-24 \(sfc.ac.uk\)](https://www.sfc.ac.uk/fes-guidance-notes-2023-24)

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

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

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.

3. In addition to the above, the college sector also delivers a substantial volume of introductory and pre-access courses that do not lead to qualifications recognised by assessors. These are designed to give a grounding in a vocational subject or act as a route back in to vocational learning for people with no or very few qualifications. They also provide bespoke training for employers.
4. Additionally, the sector delivers non-vocational courses which are often self-funded by learners and typically delivered as weekend or evening courses. Many learners enrol on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) modules, bridging courses - i.e. courses which support transition/progression to a more substantive college course as part of the learner journey, or to an employment opportunity - or on personal or family care courses. Such students often come from disadvantaged backgrounds and participation in these courses will have a social benefit.
5. For more information on non-recognised qualifications and the cohorts of students benefitting from them, see Annex F.
6. SFC funds colleges for the delivery of Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) based on the volume of activity delivered in credits, with one credit equivalent to 40 hours of learning. One FTE then is equivalent to 15 credits or 600 hours of learning.
7. Background tables containing data for all the charts, tables and annexes found in this release can be downloaded from the SFC website.
8. This report explores the trends relating to selected student characteristics such as age and gender, whilst others, such as ethnicity and disability, have been omitted. These will be included in the Report on Widening Access 2023-24, which is due to be published later in 2025. Previous Widening Access Reports are available on the SFC website. Other college metrics are addressed in reports such as the College Performance Indicators and College Leaver Destinations (CLD). More information on SFC's statistics publication schedule can be found online.
9. A publication detailing College Performance Indicators for 2023-24 is due to be published on the SFC website in spring 2025. 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.
10. The SFC Report on Widening Access presents further statistics on widening access in the college and university sectors whilst SFC Higher Education Student and Qualifiers covers HE activity delivered in Scotland by universities and colleges.

11. The reporting period was impacted by the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic which presented a unique and significant external shock to the further and higher education system in Scotland. Colleges pivoted rapidly to move learning online from March 2020, but these unprecedented circumstances presented colleges with particular challenges, notably the ability to deliver practical and work-based learning. Those challenges notwithstanding, colleges adapted quickly, taking swift action to protect staff and students' wellbeing and contribute to the national effort to tackle the virus and support vulnerable communities. The measures put in place to protect staff and students in 2020-21 were stricter and longer lasting than was experienced in 2019-20 and severely limited colleges' ability to deliver learning and teaching activities and student support services on campus.
12. Demographics are a crucial factor to note when considering student headcount. In recent years there has been a significant drop in young people in the Scottish population. However, the pool of 18–24-year-olds in the Scottish population that colleges can recruit from is now growing and is expected to grow until the beginning of the next decade. Figures relating to this are shown in the accompanying background tables, where more information is also provided on participation rates of 18-to-19-year-olds. College participation rates for 18-to-19-year-olds fell in 2022-23 to a ten-year low. Subsequently, in 2023-24 this participation rate increased. There are multiple factors that may contribute to this data point. Firstly, disregarding COVID affected years, the number of young (18-years old and under) Scottish domiciled students accepted to Scottish higher education institutions through the UCAS system remains high compared to the figures ten years prior, despite a slight decrease in 2023 application cycle⁵. Figures published from the Scottish Government also showed that there was an increase in the number of school-leavers that went into Further Education, but a decrease in the number that went into Higher Education after the 2022-23 school year⁶.
13. Colleges continued to implement a more standard teaching model compared to what was employed in the two sessions more heavily impacted by the pandemic. Colleges are facing a tight fiscal environment, and students are being impacted by a reduction in the availability of funding. Enrolments, student headcount and FTEs have all dropped to close to levels during the pandemic.

⁵ [UCAS Undergraduate end of cycle data resources 2023 | Undergraduate | UCAS](#)

⁶ [Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations, no. 6: 2024 edition - gov.scot](#)

Annex A: Notable Changes affecting the College Sector

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

students were eligible for funding and are included in 2023-24 figures in this publication.

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

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

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

Age	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
16	55,510	58,418	59,648
17	56,826	55,510	58,418
18	58,009	56,826	55,510
19	56,610	58,009	56,826

Source: National Records of Scotland, 2023 Mid-year population estimates.

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

15. The number Aged 18-19 in the Scottish Population is calculated by ageing forward the population values for younger people in previous years. This is explained and demonstrated in Annex 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 D: Further Information on College Students

16. Some aspects of the college sector have not been covered in this report, such as various student characteristics and trends surrounding learning hours. Student characteristics will be addressed, with more relevance and detail, in other reports such as the Report on Widening Access which is scheduled to be published in later in 2025. Previous years' reports can be found on SFC's Statistics Publication Schedule.

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

What Are Non-Recognised Qualifications?

17. In Scotland's colleges in 2023-24, there were a total of 267,688 enrolments. 80,779 (30.2%) were to courses leading to 'non-recognised' qualifications.
18. Whilst non-recognised qualifications account for over a third of all college enrolments, they account for just 6.1% of hours of learning delivered by the college sector that year (measured in Full-time Equivalent places). This indicates that these courses are typically short part-time in nature, and they average around 48 hours in duration. Many are shorter still, less than 10 hours in duration in many cases.
19. Non-recognised courses are an important part of the learner journey for many students. Non-vocational leisure courses which are often self-funded and typically delivered as weekend or evening courses; or Introductory and pre-access courses that do not lead to qualifications recognised by assessors.
20. These are designed to give a grounding in a vocational subject or act as a route back into vocational learning for people with no or very few qualifications.

Characteristics of students enrolling on non-recognised qualifications

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

School Pupils

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

Additional Support Needs (ASN) programmes

24. Students with Additional Support Needs (ASN) can include those with disabilities or health concerns, those with difficult family circumstances, e.g. looked after children; those who are enrolled on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) modules.
25. 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 10% is delivered to care-experienced, and nearly 40% to enrolments that 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.

26. 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.
27. 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

28. These are programmes where the main source of finance is industry or commerce. Much of the funding will come from the employer. These courses are delivered to meet the needs of apprenticeship levy-payers that, whilst vocational, may not immediately lead to a recognised qualification.
29. 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

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

Other

31. 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.
32. Aside from that, there is also a wide range of 'enabling' courses, as learners studying other qualifications can receive help in preparing their university UCAS applications, applying for the armed forces, the emergency services, health & social care careers and many other routes - these courses are supporting learners by giving them a grounding in

a vocational subject on the road into employment or further study (i.e. a recognised qualification) as part of the learner journey. They also act as a route back into vocational learning for those with minimal or no qualifications.

Metadata

Metadata Indicator	Description
Publication Title	College Statistics 2023-24
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	Website-based reports, PDFs and Excel Tables
Data Source(s)	The majority of data reported in this publication is collected and quality assured by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as part of the Further Education Statistical (FES) return. More information on the FES data collection process can be found on the SFC website. Population data used to calculate the age 18-19 full-time college participation rate is sourced from National Records Scotland Mid-Year Population Estimates. The population projections for people in Scotland aged 18-24 are taken from National Records of Scotland Projected Population of Scotland (2022-based)
Date that data are acquired	College statistics FES return: January 2025
Release date	24/02/2025
Timeframe of data and timeliness	Trend data are presented as a time series continuation from the 2014-2015 academic year (AY) to the 2023-24AY. Data is also presented for the 2014-2015 AY vs. the 2023-24 AY to allow for comparison between the two years. Data is also presented for the 2014-2015 AY vs. the 2018-19 AY vs. the 2023-24 AY to allow for comparison across the three years
Continuity of data	Data from Scottish colleges continues to exclude those students who were not eligible for funding.

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.
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