

Higher Education Statistical Fact Sheet: Enrolments at NI Higher Education Institutions by available equality categories: 2020/21 to 2024/25

Key points

- The equality characteristics of students enrolled at NI Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have remained relatively unchanged over the five-year period 2020/21 to 2024/25.
- Females accounted for a 56% share of enrolments in 2024/25. This is in line with previous years.
- Approximately a third (35%) of students enrolled were aged 25 years or over in 2024/25. This proportion increased from 36% in 2020/21 to 42% in 2022/23 before decreasing to 35% in 2024/25. The increase in 2022/23 reflects the increase in postgraduate and international student enrolments in that year.
- 15% of students enrolled at NI HEIs reported having a disability in 2024/25; similar to previous years.
- Half of students stated 'Roman Catholic', 30% stated 'Protestant', and the remainder were categorised as 'Other' (2%), 'No Religion' (12%) or 'Unknown' (7%) as the religion they were brought up in. Information on religion brought up in is only collected for NI domiciled students studying at NI HE institutions.

More females are enrolled than males

Sex ⁽⁵⁾	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Male	43%	43%	42%	43%	44%
Female	57%	57%	57%	57%	56%
Total	61,165	64,675	67,515	63,875	65,695

Over a third of students enrolled were aged 25 or over

Age	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
20 and under	34%	34%	33%	36%	38%
21 to 24	30%	27%	26%	27%	27%
25 to 29	13%	14%	15%	14%	14%
30 and over	23%	25%	26%	22%	21%
Total	61,165	64,675	67,515	63,875	65,695

15% of enrolled students reported a disability

Disability Status ⁽¹⁾	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Disability reported	14%	15%	14%	15%	15%
No disability reported	86%	85%	86%	85%	85%
Total	61,165	64,675	67,515	63,875	65,695

Most enrolled students are White

Ethnicity ^{(1) (3)}	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
White	94%	93%	90%	93%	92%
Irish Traveller	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Black	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Indian	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Pakistani	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Bangladeshi	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Chinese	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other Asian	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Mixed	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unknown	3%	3%	5%	2%	3%
Total	52,115	52,285	51,315	47,755	49,385

Half of enrolled students are from a Catholic background

Religion ^{(2) (4)}	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Protestant	32%	31%	30%	30%	30%
Roman Catholic	53%	52%	52%	51%	50%
Other	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Unknown	4%	5%	6%	6%	7%
No Religion	10%	10%	11%	11%	12%
Total	43,480	41,950	40,960	40,270	41,290

Single students make up 84% of enrollees

Marital Status ⁽²⁾	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Single (never married or never in civil partnership)	85%	85%	84%	84%	84%
Married or in civil partnership	10%	10%	10%	9%	9%
Separated (but still legally married or in civil partnership)	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Divorced or civil partnership dissolved	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Widowed	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Co-habiting	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Unknown	1%	2%	3%	3%	4%
Total	43,480	41,950	40,960	40,270	41,290

85% of enrolled students have no dependants

Dependants ⁽²⁾	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Young people/children (YP/C)	11%	10%	10%	10%	9%
Other relative/friends (OR/F)	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Both YP/C and OR/F	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
No dependants	86%	86%	85%	86%	85%
Unknown	1%	2%	3%	2%	3%
Total	43,480	41,950	40,960	40,270	41,290

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

1. Information on disability and ethnicity is collected on the basis of a student's self assessment.
2. Information on religion, marital status and dependants is only collected for NI domiciled students studying at NI HE institutions.
3. Information on ethnicity is only collected for UK domiciled students studying at NI HE institutions.
4. Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and therefore can have a high non-response rate.
5. For Sex, the sum of Male and Female enrolments may not match the total shown due to some students being labelled as "Other"; these are not included as a separate category but are included in the total.
6. For dependents, YP/C refers to Young people/children and OR/F refers to Other relatives/friends.
7. To prevent the identification of individuals, figures in the tables are rounded to the nearest 5, with 0, 1 and 2 rounded to 0. Due to rounding, the sum of numbers in each row or column may not match the total shown.
8. Percentages are based on unrounded figures and rounded to the nearest integer.
9. Between 2019/20 and 2022/23, Ulster University returned information for those undertaking the Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE) of the Nursing and Midwifery (NMC) Test of Competence (ToC). The ToC is for overseas nurses and midwives seeking registration as a nurse and/or midwife in the UK and the NMC Competence Test Centre (CTC) at Ulster University's Magee campus is one of five CTC test centres across the UK. The course is a part-time, stand-alone, credit bearing course, which means that, while students receive credit for undertaking the module, no qualification is awarded. This accounted for approximately 4,900 students at the Magee campus in 2022/23. From 2023/24, data for these students has been excluded due to a reassessment of the coverage of the HESA Student Record for these students and is no longer returned. Historical figures published since 2023/24 reflect this change, so total student numbers for NI HEIs will differ from those shown in previous editions of this release.
10. Enrolments at the Open University (where the national centre is located in NI) have been removed from the figures for religion, marital status and dependants due to high levels of unknowns.
11. To avoid a duplication of foundation year figures across HE institutions and Further Education Colleges, Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College changed their return to HESA during 2019/20 and no longer report on foundation degrees that are offered as part of a validated collaborative arrangement with Further Education Colleges. Historical figures in this fact sheet have been backdated to reflect this change.

Data from this fact sheet are available in open data format at the following link:

[Higher Education Statistical Factsheets](#)

More Higher Education statistics are available from:

[Higher Education Statistics and Research](#)