Further Education Sector Activity in Northern Ireland: 2015/16 to 2019/20



This statistical bulletin presents a range of analysis regarding enrolments and students (both regulated and non-regulated) in the Northern Ireland Further Education Sector covering academic years 2015/16 to 2019/20. The statistics presented cover the characteristics of those enrolling in FE Colleges along with analysis of areas of deprivation, funding streams and performance.

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About Statistics and Research Branch (Tertiary Education)

Statistics and Research Branch (Tertiary Education) is responsible for the collection, quality assurance, analysis and publication of timely and accurate information derived from a wide range of statistical information returns supplied by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Further Education (FE) colleges across Northern Ireland (NI) and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Statistical information is collected routinely from a variety of electronic individual level administrative systems.

The Head of Branch is the Principal Statistician, Brian French. The Branch aims to present information in a meaningful way and provide advice on its uses to customers in the Committee for the Economy, FE Colleges, universities, Professional Advisory Groups, policy branches within DfE, other educational organisations, academia, private sector organisations, charity/voluntary organisations, as well as the general public.

The statistical information collected is used to contribute to major exercises such as reporting on the performance of the HE and FE Sectors, other comparative performance exercises, target setting and monitoring, departmental research projects, development of service frameworks, as well as policy formulation and evaluation. In addition, the information is used in response to a high volume of ad hoc queries each year.

Information is disseminated through key statistical publications, including:

- Essential Skills Enrolments and Outcomes;
- Further Education Activity;
- Higher Education Enrolments;
- Higher Education Qualifications.

A detailed list of these publications is available from:
https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/statistics-publication-schedule

An Official Statistics Publication

The statistics within this bulletin have been compiled in accordance with Official Statistics guidelines. They aim to meet identified user needs; are accessible and explained; are produced in accordance with sound methods; and are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Further information on the Code of Practice for Statistics is available at:

http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/

Further information on the DfE Statement of Compliance in relation to the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2009 is available at:

https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/statement-compliance

Storyboard for Further Education Sector Activity 2015/16 to 2019/20	
FE Colleges have fewer enrolments....	FE College enrolments have decreased by a net 14.0%, from 153,817 in 2015/16 to 132,354 in 2019/20; this includes a 10.6% fall on 2018/19 (148,002), linked partly to COVID-19. Medium-term factors include fewer part-time enrolments, improved school exam performance and a 'demographic dip' in 16-19-year-olds (Table 1).
...and the regulated share of enrolments has fallen.	Over the period 2015/16 to 2019/20, the regulated share of enrolments has fallen in net terms, from 84.0% to 81.4% (Table A5).
The student population is becoming younger....	Since 2015/16, the 'aged 19 and under' share of regulated enrolments has increased from 59.9% to 62.6% (Table A6).
...fewer than before are on part-time courses....	Most regulated enrolments are part-time, although this proportion has reduced from 80.1% in 2015/16 to 77.6% in 2019/20. Including a 10.7% decrease on 2018/19 (93,660), the number of part-time regulated enrolments has decreased by 19,874 (19.2%) between 2015/16 (103,527) and 2019/20 (83,653) (Table A8).
....and more are studying at 'Level 2' or above.	Of the 107,760 regulated FE Sector enrolments in 2019/20, nearly four-fifths (78.9%) were at 'Level 2' or above, up from 78.2% in 2015/16. Those at 'Level 1 and below' accounted for 21.1% (22,723); 42.6% (45,935) were at 'Level 2', 26.7% (28,779) were at 'Level 3' and 9.6% (10,323) were at 'Level 4 and above (Table A19).
More males than females are studying full-time....	Males accounted for three-fifths (59.9%) of full-time regulated enrolments in 2019/20, whereas part-time regulated provision was fairly evenly split by sex (Table A17).
.....and the popularity of different subject areas varies by sex.	In 2019/20, females accounted for the vast majority of 'Health, Public Services and Care' (82.7%) and 'Education and Training' enrolments (72.9%). Male-dominated subject areas included 'Construction, Planning and the Built Environment' (96.9%) and 'Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies' (93.4%) (Table A20).
FE Sector regulated enrolments are fairly evenly spread across relative deprivation quintiles..... **.....but considerable variation occurs at college level.**	In 2019/20, although regulated enrolments were fairly evenly spread across the five relative deprivation quintiles, considerable variation occurred at college level. For instance, over 50% of regulated enrolments at NWRC, SRC and SWC came from the two most deprived areas (Quintiles 1 and 2), whereas SERC's largest share of enrolments (24.3%) came from the least deprived area (Quintile 5). Almost two fifths (39.1%) of NWRC's regulated enrolments were from Quintile 1, with 3.0% from Quintile 5. BMC enrolments were quite polarised, in that 53.5% were from either Quintiles 1 or 5 (Table A22).

Most enrolments are mainstream.	Of the 132,354 enrolments in 2019/20, nearly three fifths (59.2%) were mainstream, 17.4% were funded through government training programmes, 11.5% were cost recovery and 4.8% were funded through the Entitlement Framework programme (Table A10).
Higher Education enrolments are decreasing….	Higher Education enrolments at FE Colleges have decreased by a net 11.2%, from 11,631 in 2015/16 to 10,323 in 2019/20; this includes a 9.7% fall from 11,848 in 2017/18 to 10,704 in 2018/19 (Table 2).
….and fewer qualifications are being awarded.	A quarter (25.5%) fewer qualifications were awarded in FE Colleges in 2019/20 (65,659) than in 2015/16 (88,153). Net decreases have occurred in all six colleges [NWRC (by 33.6%), SWC (32.0%), NRC (31.6%), SRC (25.1%), SERC (21.0%) and BMC (17.6%)] (Table 5).
Proportionately more people are staying on and completing their course…..	Over the period 2015/16 to 2019/20, the retention rate at FE Colleges has increased in net terms, from 90.2% to 91.4% (Table A30).
….but fewer people who complete their course are achieving their qualification.	The achievement rate at FE Colleges has fallen by a net 3.4 percentage points, from 89.4% (2015/16) to 86.0% (2019/20). The success rate (that is, the percentage of final year regulated enrolments of students who complete and achieve a qualification) has decreased in net terms, from 80.7% to 78.6%, over the period 2015/16 to 2019/20 (Table A30).
FE Colleges have fewer students....	The number of students enrolled at FE Colleges has decreased by 14.5%, from 82,818 in 2015/16 to 70,847 in 2019/20; this includes a 7.6% fall on 2018/19 (76,670), linked partly to COVID-19 (Table 6).
….of which, fewer are enrolled on regulated courses	The number of students enrolled on regulated courses at FE Colleges has decreased by 18.6%, from 70,222 in 2015/16 to 57,185 in 2019/20 (Table 10).
….although more of these are full-time.	The full-time proportion of students enrolled on regulated courses has been increasing year-on-year, from 36.1% in 2015/16 to 41.1% in 2019/20 (Table 9).

FE College Abbreviations

Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC)
Northern Regional College (NRC)
North West Regional College (NWRC)
South Eastern Regional College (SERC)
Southern Regional College (SRC)
South West College (SWC)

Introduction

Further Education (FE) Colleges are the main providers of further education and training in Northern Ireland (NI). The sector plays a central role in raising literacy and numeracy levels and in up-skilling and re-skilling the population through a broad range of courses leading to qualifications, particularly at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) levels 2 and 3 and equivalents. Higher Education (at level 4 and above) is also delivered across the FE Colleges.

This statistical bulletin has been produced by statisticians based within DfE and presents a range of analysis regarding both enrolments and the individual students enrolled on courses in the NI FE Sector covering academic years 2015/16 to 2019/20. The statistics presented in this bulletin cover the characteristics of those enrolling in FE Colleges and trends across a range of variables, including sex, age, mode of attendance, provision area, level of study, subject area, deprivation quintile, funding stream and performance (retention, achievement and success rates).

The figures in this statistical bulletin are a full year count of enrolments; however, it should be noted that students may be enrolled on more than one course at a given time and may, therefore, be counted as two or more enrolments.

Structure

The bulletin is divided into five sections:

- Section 1 focuses on all enrolments at FE Colleges in NI, including:
  - an analysis of all enrolments
  - regulated and non-regulated provision
  - the funding streams of enrolments.
- Section 2 focuses on regulated enrolments only
- Section 3 focuses on Higher Education enrolments in FE Colleges only
- Section 4 details the qualifications and performance of final year enrolments at FE Colleges in NI.
- Section 5 focuses on all students at FE Colleges in NI, including:
  - non-regulated and regulated provision
  - Higher Education
  - students achieving qualifications.

In most sections, the analysis is broken down into the trend and patterns of the entire FE Sector, the individual FE Colleges and then a focus on the most recent full 2019/20 academic year.

Explanatory Notes

Annex A provides the definitions of the terms used within the report, while Annex B contains 'Technical Notes' on the methodology used to produce the statistics.

Where tables and figures are mentioned within the commentary, these are hyperlinked to their location within the document.

Data Collection

The information presented in this statistical bulletin has been derived from the Consolidated Data Return (CDR), which is provided by FE Colleges.

The CDR came into operation for the 2013/14 academic year. Each of the data returns are computerised data files consisting of individual records for each enrolment recorded by FE Colleges during each academic year.

The CDR brings together into a single dataset the five main individual Departmental returns from FE Colleges, namely, mainstream, Further Education Statistical Return (FESR), Essential Skills Enrolment Return (ESER), Entitlement Framework (EF) and Further Education Leavers' Survey (FELS).

There are significant benefits to be realised in collating all DfE's data requirements into one single return. Streamlining the production process of data increases the efficiency of the process in generating the data. With extra information now available for each enrolment record, it also increases the potential in terms of analytical ability, while increasing the consistency of analysis across all FE College data by reducing the potential of using several datasets. Data quality is also enhanced with data being generated at the same point in time and a substantial number of validations employed on the data through the CDR process. More information on the CDR process can be found at Annex B.

Additional Tables

Detailed Annex and Supplementary Tables are available on the DfE web page:

Further Education Sector Activity in FE Colleges in Northern Ireland 2019/20

Rounding

Percentages have been rounded to one decimal place and, as a consequence, some percentages may not sum to 100. Furthermore, due to rounding, the percentage point(s) difference may not equate to the difference between two percentages.

Data Quality

All information presented in this bulletin is based on data that have been validated and quality assured by FE Colleges prior to publication. FE Colleges are given a set period of time to submit the information to Statistics and Research Branch (Tertiary Education), which performs a series of validation checks to ensure that information is consistent both within and across returns and analyses annual variations and emerging trends. Queries arising from validation checks are presented to FE Colleges for clarification and, if required, returns may be amended and/or re-submitted. Finally, prior to the publication of this information, the data are presented to FE Colleges for final sign–off.

Main Uses of Data

The main uses of these data are: to monitor FE activity; to help assess FE College performance; for corporate monitoring; to inform and monitor related policy; and to respond to Assembly questions and ad hoc queries from the public.

DfE is responsible for the policy, strategic development and financing of the statutory FE Sector. Analysis of data trends against key strategic priorities remains a crucial component of data development within DfE.

Who will be interested?

The information presented in this statistical bulletin will be of interest to a wide variety of people. For example, the statistics are used by DfE policy officials in their role of assisting and advising the Minister for the Economy in discharging their duties; by the NI Assembly's Committee for the Economy to scrutinise the FE Sector; by other NI government departments, such as the Department of Education; by prospective students to inform their choices around further education; by local businesses to quantify the supply of those qualifying in their business area; and by researchers and academics to try and understand the underlying trends in FE.

2019 Readership Survey – Acknowledgements, Analysis and Next Steps

Alongside the 2018/19 edition of the bulletin, we published an analysis of the FE Activity readership survey we conducted in September 2019. We gave careful consideration to the feedback and have endeavoured to improve the coverage and quality of our FE Activity statistics. We discussed the feasibility of possible options with DfE policy colleagues, before drawing up an action plan for the 2019/20 edition of the bulletin. For this edition, we have increased our focus on students, while consequently reducing our enrolments content. In addition to a section of the bulletin covering student activity, several Annex tables relating to students are listed in the Contents and can be found alongside this document on the website.

https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/further-education-college-statistics

Contextual Information

For contextual information on the use of FE statistics and comparing levels of qualifications, please see the document:

Contextual Information for Using Further Education Statistics

Policy and Operational Context

For information on policy and operational context, please refer to:

Policy and Operational Context

Further Education Activity Information Elsewhere in the United Kingdom

Users should be aware that FE activity information in other administrations is not always measured in a comparable manner to that in Northern Ireland. Details of the FE activity information published elsewhere in the UK can be found at the links below:

England

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/further-education-and-skills-statistical-first-release-sfr

Scotland

http://www.sfc.ac.uk/publications-statistics/statistics/statistics.aspx

Wales

Further education and work-based learning (gov.wales)

Section 1: All enrolments

1.1 - All enrolments

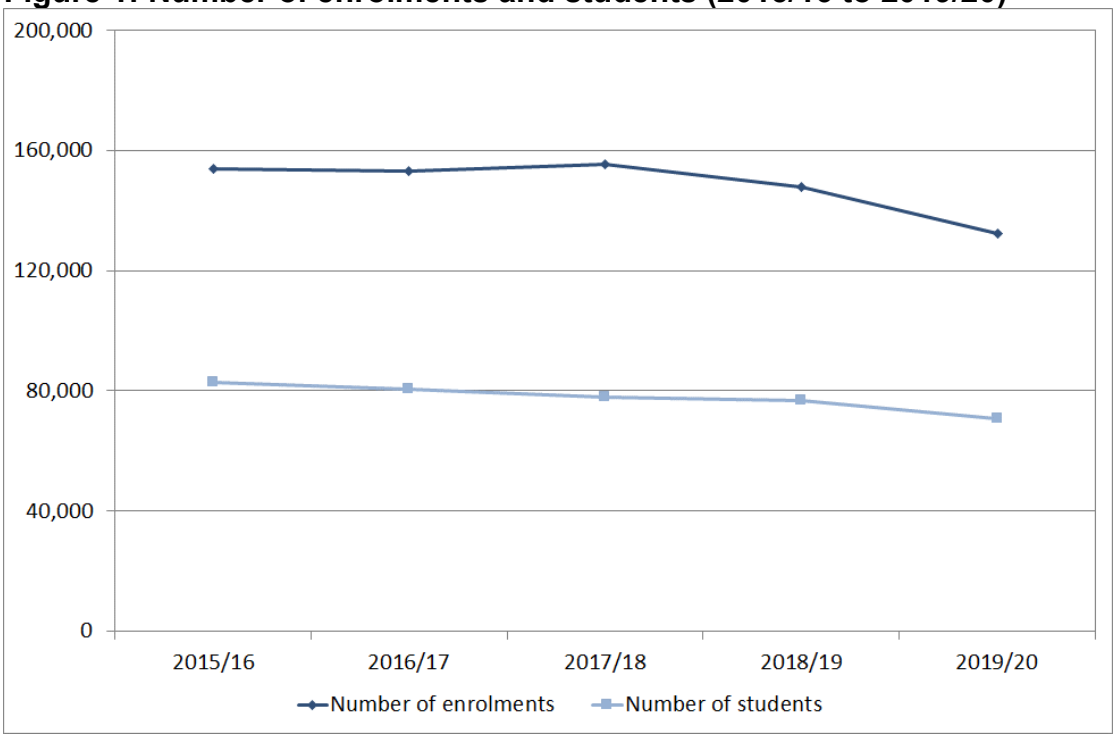
Background

This section provides detail on all FE College enrolments, which include general further education courses, Essential Skills provision and Higher Education in Further Education (HE in FE). General FE courses include mainstream enrolments, government training programmes, Entitlement Framework and cost recovery. Most FE College provision includes courses that can potentially lead to a regulated qualification on the Register of Regulated Qualifications (RRQ); a smaller proportion is non-regulated, that is, courses that have the potential to lead to a formal qualification not on the RRQ, as well as hobby and leisure (recreational) courses.

Trends – 2015/16 to 2019/20

Total enrolments at FE Colleges have decreased by a net 14.0%, from 153,817 in 2015/16 to 132,354 in 2019/20; this includes a 10.6% fall on 2018/19 (148,002), partly linked to COVID-19. Medium-term factors include fewer part-time enrolments, in particular among students aged 25 and over, improved school exam performance and a 'demographic dip' in 16-19-year-olds. The number of students has also decreased, by 14.5%, from 82,818 in 2015/16 to 70,847 in 2019/20; this includes a 7.6% fall on 2018/19 (76,670). The number of enrolments per student (1.9) hasn't changed in net terms over this period (Figure 1, Table A1).

Figure 1: Number of enrolments and students (2015/16 to 2019/20)



FE Colleges

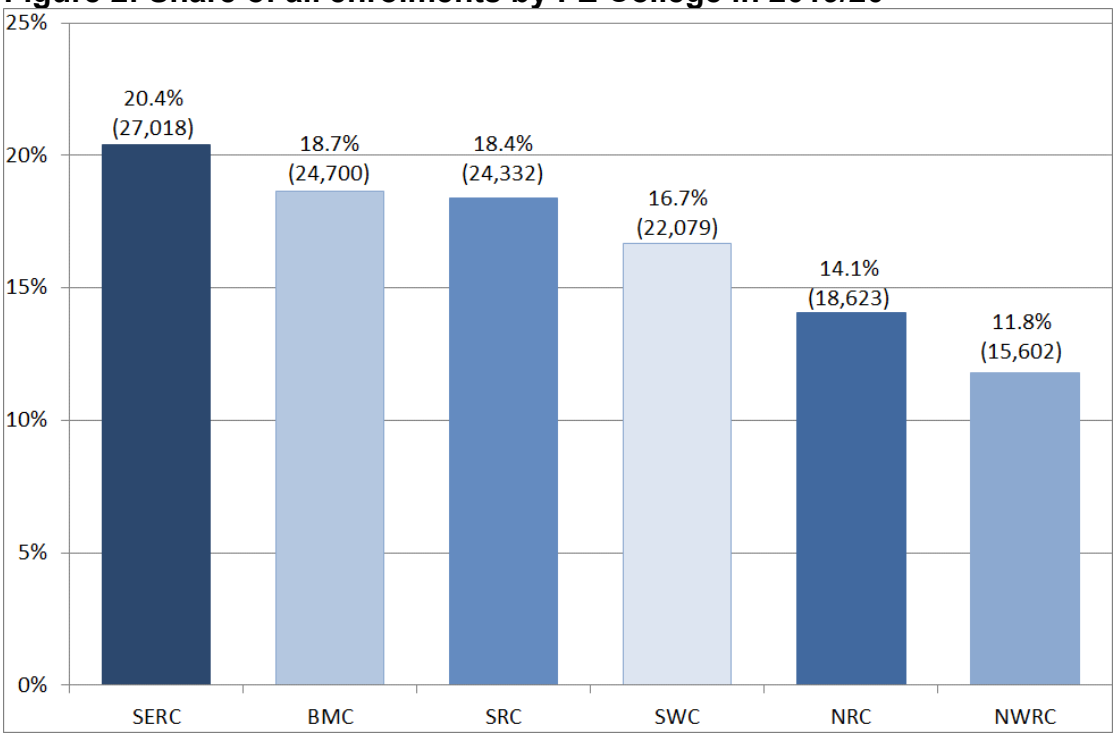
Since 2015/16, enrolments have decreased in net terms in each of the six FE Colleges [NWRC (by 18.7%), SERC (17.8%), NRC (13.9%), BMC (13.4%), SWC (10.5%) and SRC (9.8%)]. (Table 1).

Table 1: All enrolments by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

	Academic Year				
FE College	**2015/16**	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**
BMC	28,514	30,184	29,728	26,487	24,700
NRC	21,634	21,879	21,837	21,900	18,623
NWRC	19,181	17,577	18,349	18,519	15,602
SERC	32,858	31,999	30,187	30,422	27,018
SRC	26,967	27,234	31,327	26,004	24,332
SWC	24,663	24,215	24,082	24,670	22,079
FE Sector Total	**153,817**	**153,088**	**155,510**	**148,002**	**132,354**

In the most recent academic year (2019/20), SERC had the highest share of the 132,354 enrolments, accounting for 20.4% (27,018), and NWRC the lowest, with 11.8% (15,602) (Figure 2, Table 1).

Figure 2: Share of all enrolments by FE College in 2019/20



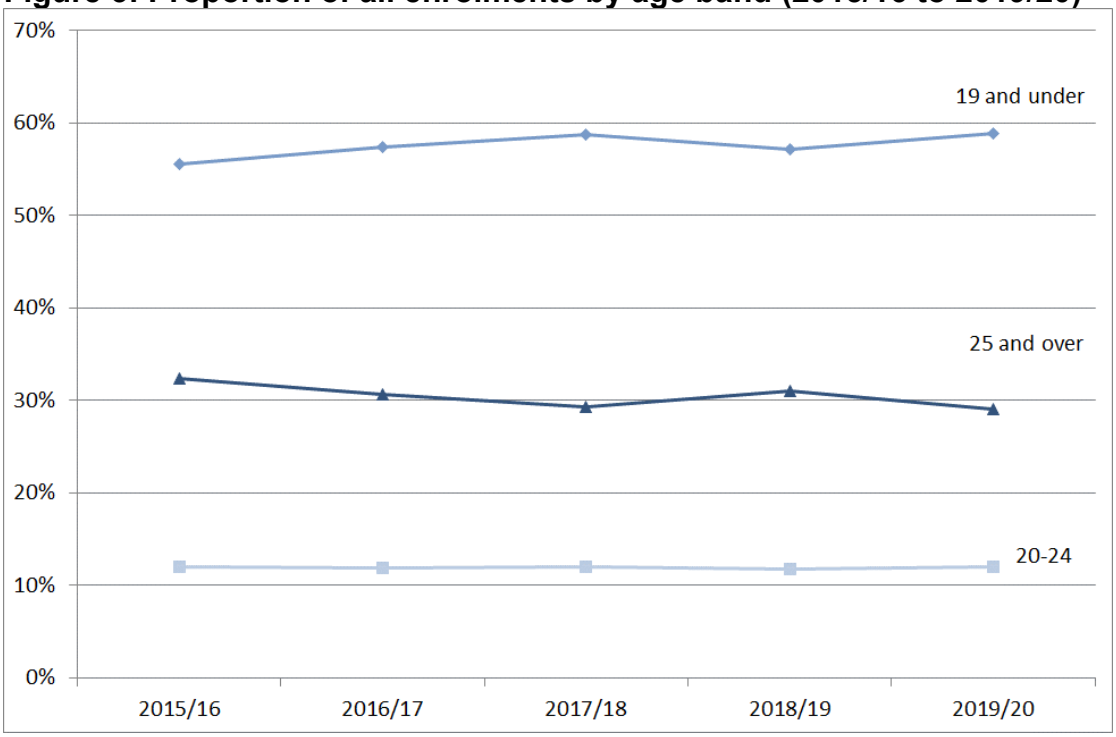
FE College Abbreviations

BMC: Belfast Metropolitan College
NRC: Northern Regional College
NWRC: North West Regional College
SERC: South Eastern Regional College
SRC: Southern Regional College
SWC: South West College

Age

Since 2015/16, the proportion of aged '19 and under' enrolments has increased from 55.6% to 58.9%; conversely, the proportion of those in the '25 and over' age group has decreased, from 32.4% to 29.1% (Figure 3, Table A2).

Figure 3: Proportion of all enrolments by age band (2015/16 to 2019/20)



Please note enrolments with unknown ages (<1.0%) are excluded from the chart but are included in Table A2.

An individual can attend any FE College across Northern Ireland, although typically individuals will attend their nearest college. Hypothetical Regional College Catchment Areas (HRCCAs) have been created for each of the six colleges to provide information, beyond enrolment data, on all eligible individuals aged 16 and above within the catchment area to each college, who may or may not be in enrolled at a FE College. Please refer to Annex B for further details on HRCCAs.

Based on mid-year population estimates in 2019, the age profile in each of the six college HRCCAs indicates that the majority (typically over 80%) of eligible individuals are aged 25 or over. However, this pattern is not reflected in 2019/20 enrolments in any of the colleges. In all six colleges, the highest proportions related to those aged '19 and under', ranging from 46.6% in NWRC to 67.2% in SWC (Table A2).

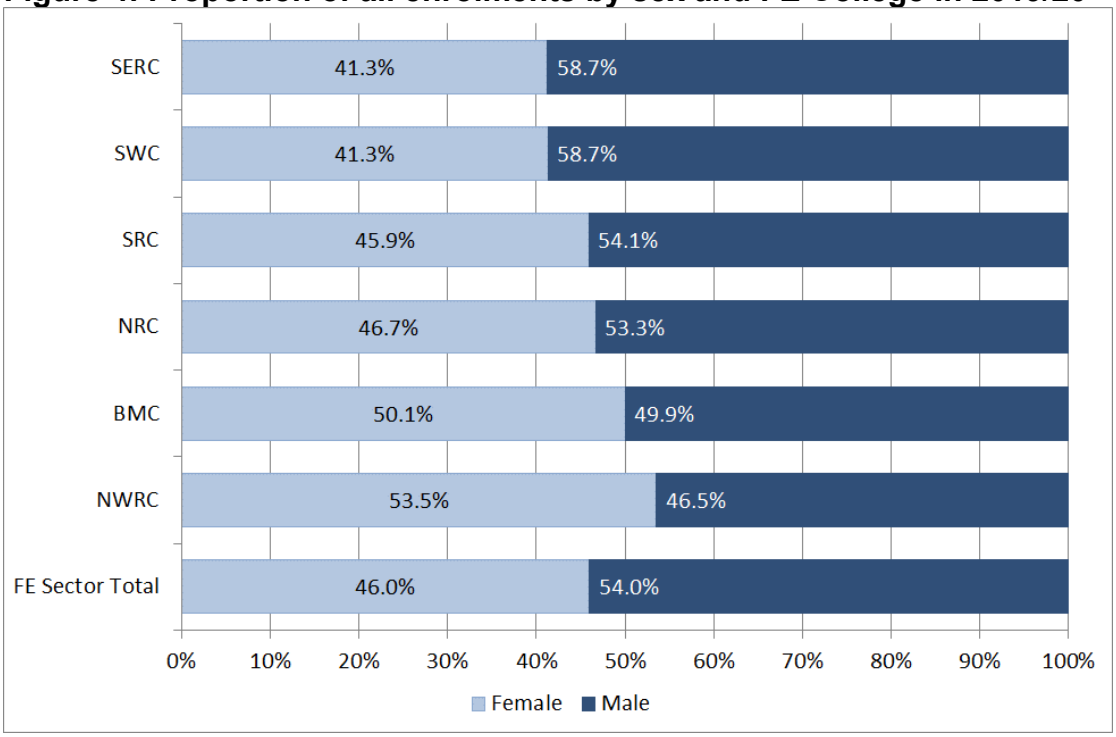
Sex

Although each of the college HRCCA profiles contains more females than males, typically there has been a more even split in terms of the sex profile across the FE Sector.

Most enrolments related to males in 2015/16 (51.8%), 2016/17 (53.2%), 2017/18 (53.0%) 2018/19 (53.6%) and 2019/20 (54.0%) (Table A3).

In the most recent academic year (2019/20), NWRC (53.5%) and BMC (50.1%) had higher proportions of female enrolments, whereas the other four colleges had higher proportions of male enrolments [SERC (58.7%), SWC (58.7%), SRC (54.1%) and NRC (53.3%)] (Figure 4, Table A3).

Figure 4: Proportion of all enrolments by sex and FE College in 2019/20

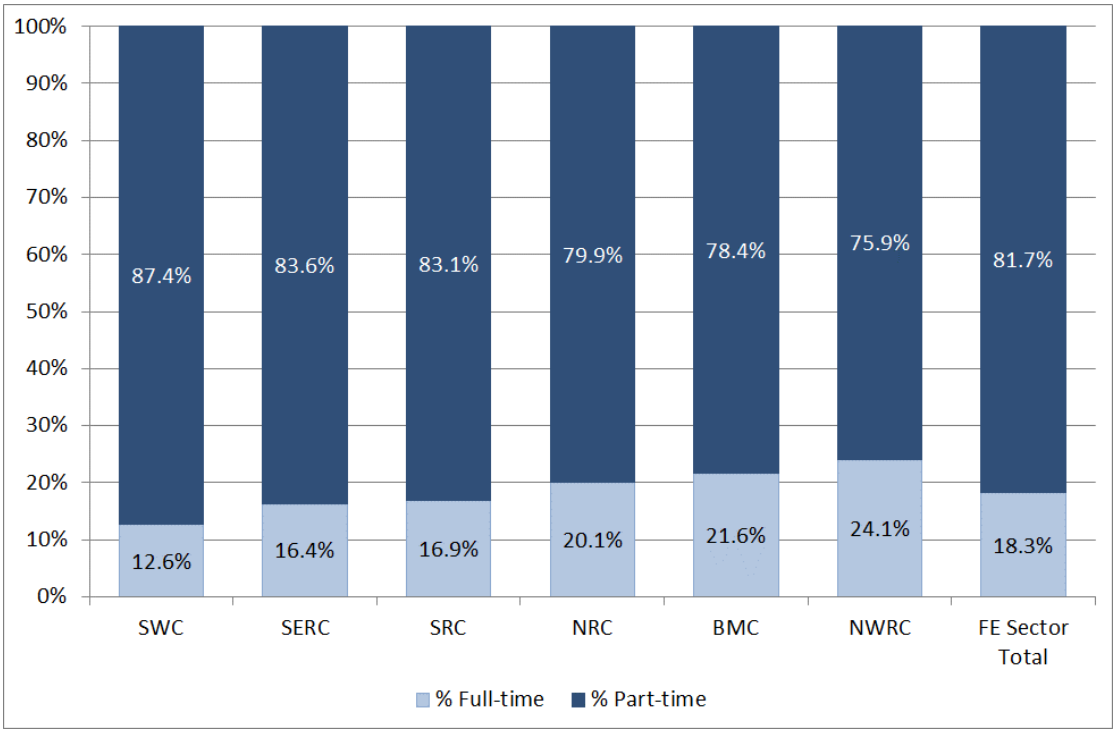


Mode of attendance

Between 2015/16 and 2019/20, the full-time proportion of all enrolments has increased from 16.8% to 18.3% (Table A4).

Comparing the FE Colleges in 2019/20 indicates that NWRC had the highest proportion of full-time enrolments (24.1%), while SWC had the lowest proportion (12.6%) (Figure 5, Table A4).

Figure 5: All enrolments by mode of attendance and FE College in 2019/20



1.2 – Non-regulated and regulated enrolments

Background

An internal departmental review was conducted in 2014 on the definition of 'regulated' provision to ensure clarity and consistency across data analysis. Consequently, from the academic year 2013/14, 'regulated enrolments' are regarded as:

- those on courses that are at 'Level 3' or below and appear on the Register of Regulated Qualifications (RRQ), which contains qualifications on both the Qualifications and Credit Framework and the National Qualifications Framework or part of the Department's Prescribed List of Approved Qualifications[1] (PLAQ/Access list)

- those on courses that lead to Higher Education qualifications ('Level 4 and above').

From 2013/14, 'non-regulated enrolments' are those that either potentially lead to a formal qualification (at 'Level 3' or below) that doesn't appear on the RRQ or don't usually lead to a formal qualification, typically hobby and leisure or recreational courses.

The new definition of 'regulated enrolments' from 2013/14 onwards may result in a change in the number of regulated enrolments and, therefore, comparison with earlier years needs to take this into account. This publication reports on trend analysis over five years from 2015/16; this is the third publication based on five years' trend data since the review on 'regulated' provision. Refer to Annex B for further details on this estimation work.

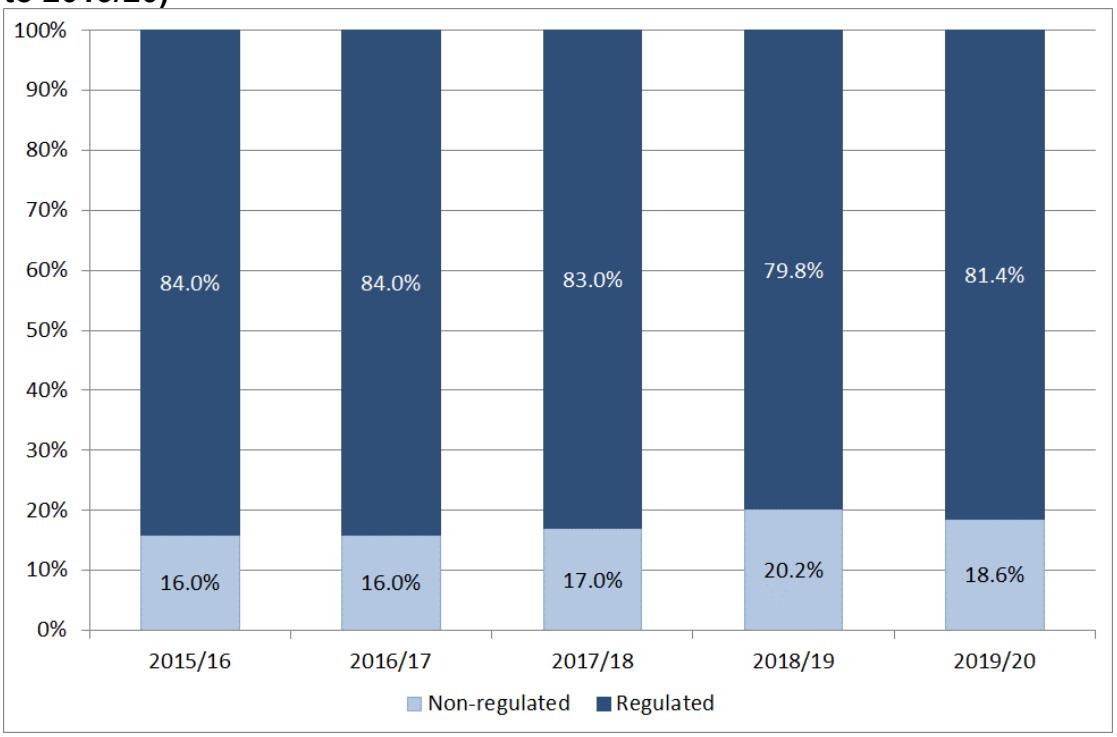
The 'Further Education Means Success' strategy aims to reduce the number of non-regulated enrolments and encourage regulated, economically focused provision. This strategy is being reviewed as part of a review of the Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland.

[1] Prescribed List of Approved Qualifications (PLAQ) are defined within Annex A: Definitions

Trends – 2015/16 to 2019/20

Between 2015/16 and 2019/20, the regulated share of enrolments has fallen in net terms, from 84.0% to 81.4%. This included an increase from 79.8% in 2018/19 to 81.4% in 2019/20 (Figure 6, Table A5).

Figure 6: Proportion of non-regulated and regulated enrolments (2015/16 to 2019/20)

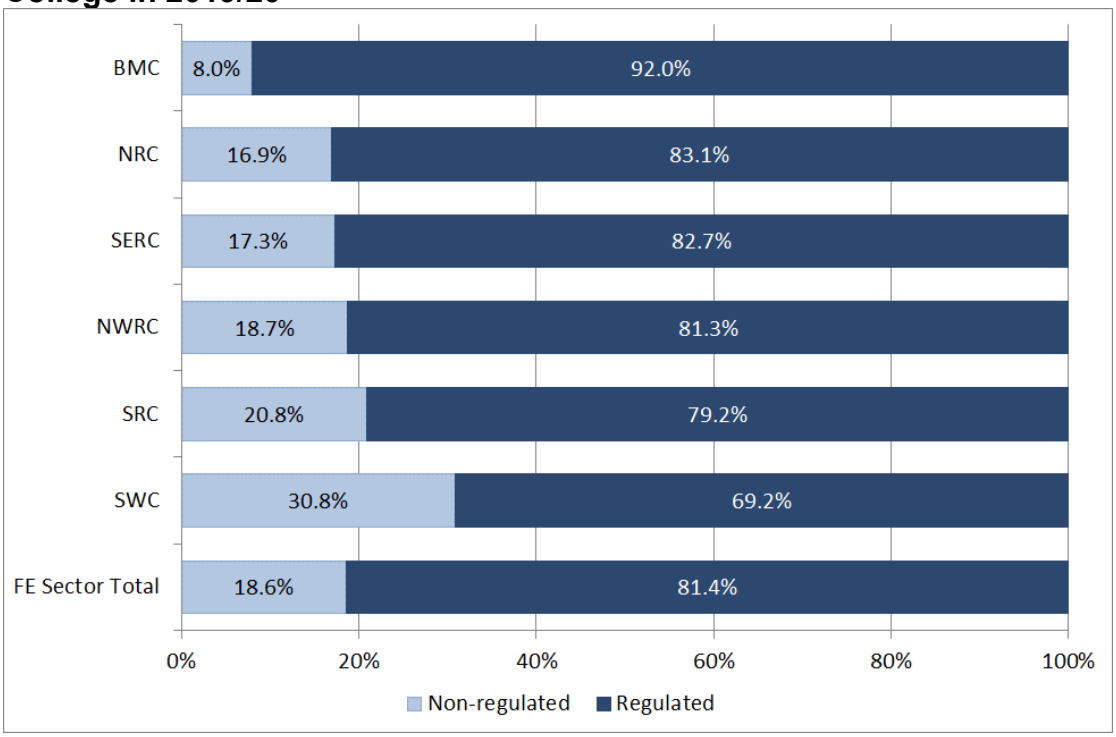


FE Colleges

The majority of enrolments were on regulated courses in all six colleges over the five year period 2015/16 to 2019/20. However, the profile varies across the FE Sector; for instance, in 2019/20, the proportion of regulated enrolments ranged from 69.2% in SWC to 92.0% in BMC (Figure 7, Table A5).

Over the period, NWRC reported the largest net increase in the proportion of regulated enrolments (1.9 percentage points), from 79.4% to 81.3%, while SWC reported the largest decrease (7.9 percentage points), from 77.1% to 69.2% (Table A5).

Figure 7: Proportion of non-regulated and regulated enrolments by FE College in 2019/20

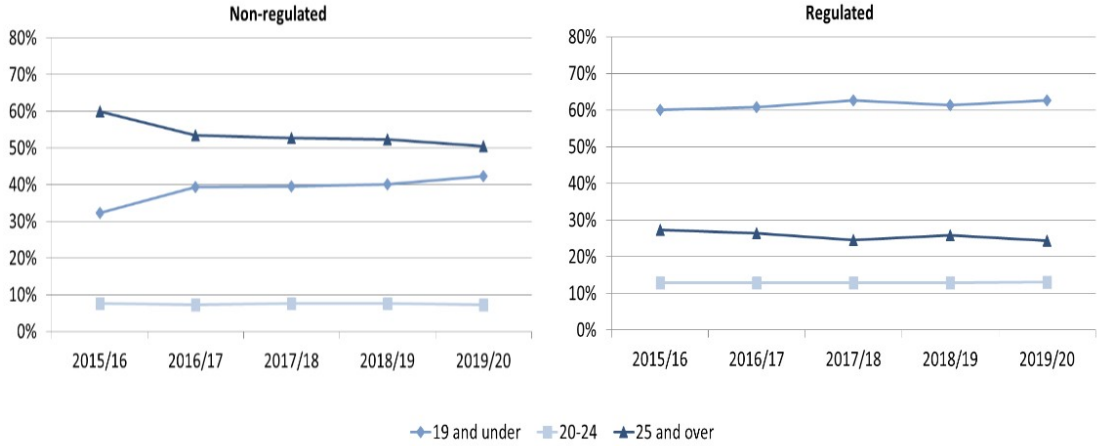


Age

While traditionally the majority of non-regulated enrolments relate to individuals aged '25 and over', this proportion has fallen from 59.9% in 2015/16 to 50.5% in 2019/20. Conversely, the proportion of those in the '19 and under' age group has increased over this period, from 32.4% to 42.4% (Figure 8, Table A6).

Since 2015/16, the aged '19 and under' share of regulated enrolments has increased from 59.9% to 62.6%; conversely, the proportion of those aged '25 and over' has decreased from 27.2% to 24.3% (Figure 8, Table A6).

Figure 8: Proportion of non-regulated and regulated enrolments by age band (2015/16 to 2019/20)



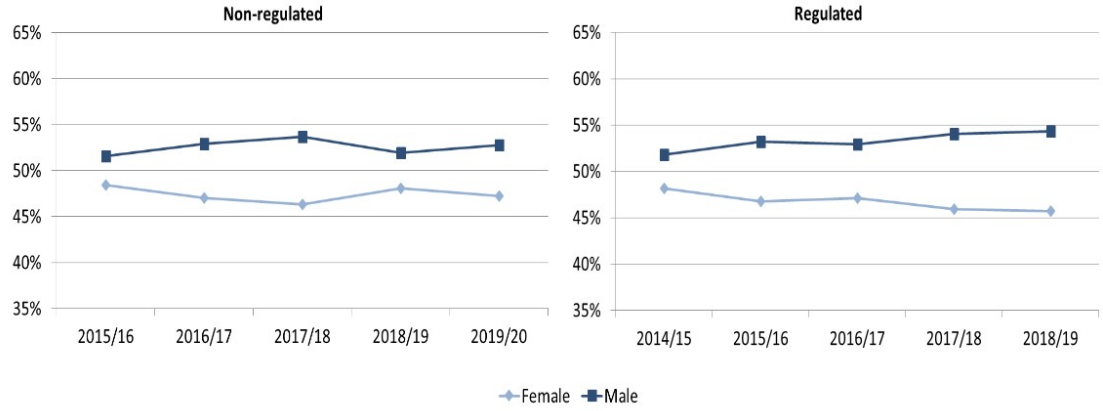
Please note enrolments with unknown ages (<3.0%) are excluded from the chart but are included in Table A6.

Sex

The proportions of female non-regulated and regulated enrolments have fallen from 48.4% to 47.2% and from 48.2% to 45.7% respectively (Figure 9, Table A7).

In 2015/16, the sex profile for regulated enrolments was fairly evenly split, at 51.8% male and 48.2% female. By 2019/20, however, the gap had widened, at 54.3% for males and 45.7% for females (Figure 9, Table A7).

Figure 9: Proportion of non-regulated and regulated enrolments by sex (2015/16 to 2019/20)



Mode of attendance

Most regulated enrolments are part-time, although this proportion has reduced from 80.1% in 2015/16 to 77.6% in 2019/20. Including a 10.7% decrease on 2018/19 (93,660), the number of part-time regulated enrolments has decreased by 19,874 (19.2%) between 2015/16 (103,527) and 2019/20 (83,653). Almost all non-regulated enrolments are part-time, for instance, 99.7% in 2019/20 (Table A8).

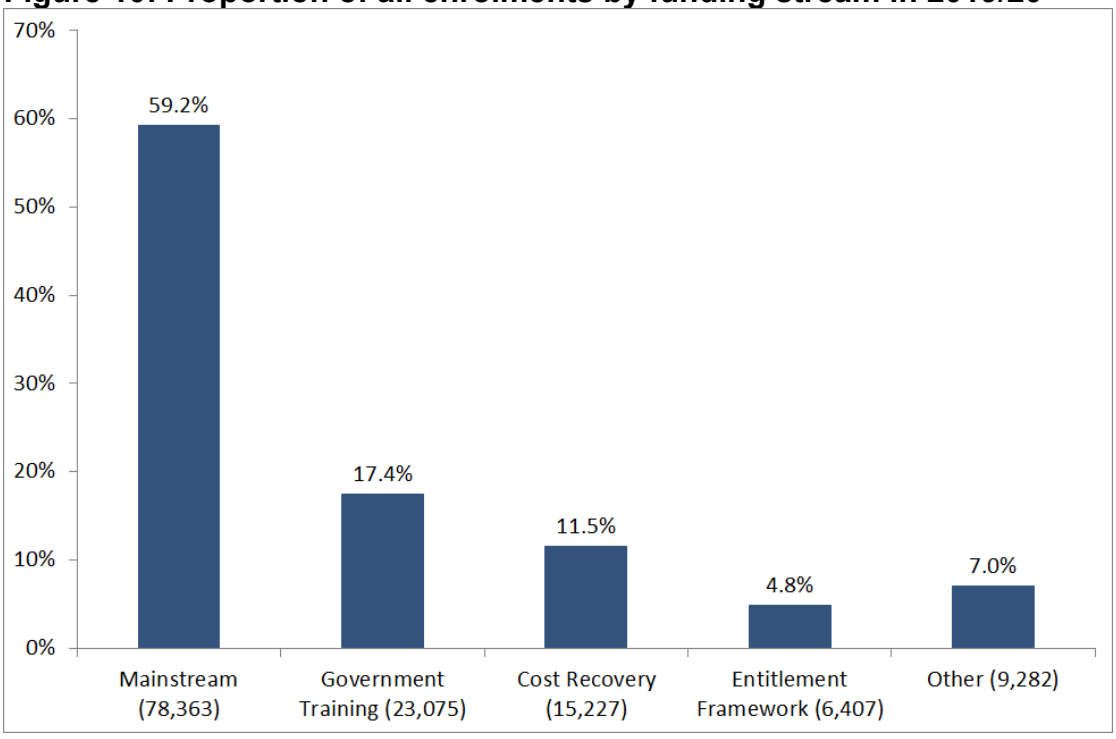
1.3 – Funding streams 2019/20

Several funding streams are available to FE Colleges to deliver provision. These include direct funding from DfE, through a mainstream mechanism or government training programmes, such as Training for Success. FE Colleges can also receive funding from businesses/individuals, termed as cost recovery, or from other government departments, such as Department of Education (DE), through the Entitlement Framework programme. These main funding streams are analysed below for the academic year 2019/20.

Of the 132,354 enrolments in 2019/20, nearly three-fifths (59.2%) were mainstream, 17.4% were funded through government training programmes, 11.5% were cost recovery and 4.8% were funded through the Entitlement Framework programme. For a further 7.0% of enrolments, the funding stream was classed as 'Other'. These 'Other' enrolments include programmes such as Assured Skills, European Social Fund and Skills Focus (Figure 10, Table A10 and Table A12).

In 2019/20, the mainstream proportion of all enrolments in colleges ranged from 43.0% in SWC to 78.7% in BMC (Table A10).

Figure 10: Proportion of all enrolments by funding stream in 2019/20



For further information regarding Funding streams, please see the Funding streams definition at Annex A (page 75).

Section 2: Regulated enrolments

Background

Most FE College provision includes courses that can potentially lead to a regulated qualification on the Register of Regulated Qualifications (RRQ). The following section focuses solely on regulated enrolments at FE Colleges in the 2019/20 academic year.

The Department's 'Further Education Means Success' strategy emphasises the pivotal role of the further education system in Northern Ireland "in generating a strong and vibrant economy through the development of professional and technical skills, increasingly at higher levels, and by helping employers to innovate". As a result, regulated provision is becoming increasingly important in delivering this role.

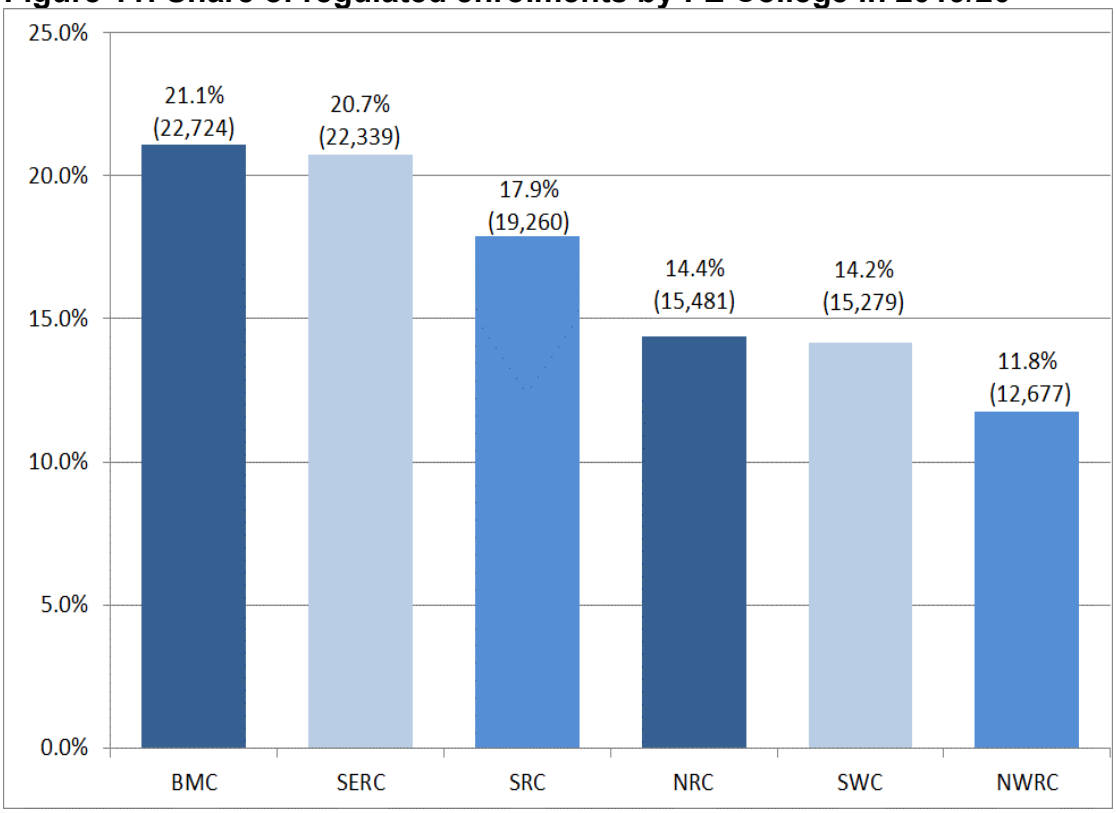
Academic year 2019/20

FE Colleges

In 2019/20, the 107,760 enrolments on regulated courses at FE Colleges in Northern Ireland related to 57,185 individual students. Over 25,000 of these students were enrolled on more than one programme of study, resulting in 1.9 enrolments on regulated courses per student in 2019/20 (Table A1).

Of the 107,760 regulated enrolments, BMC accounted for the highest share, with 21.1% (22,724), and NWRC the lowest, with 11.8% (12,677) (Figure 11, Table A5). This distribution of regulated enrolments is very similar to the pattern within all enrolments (Figure 2).

Figure 11: Share of regulated enrolments by FE College in 2019/20

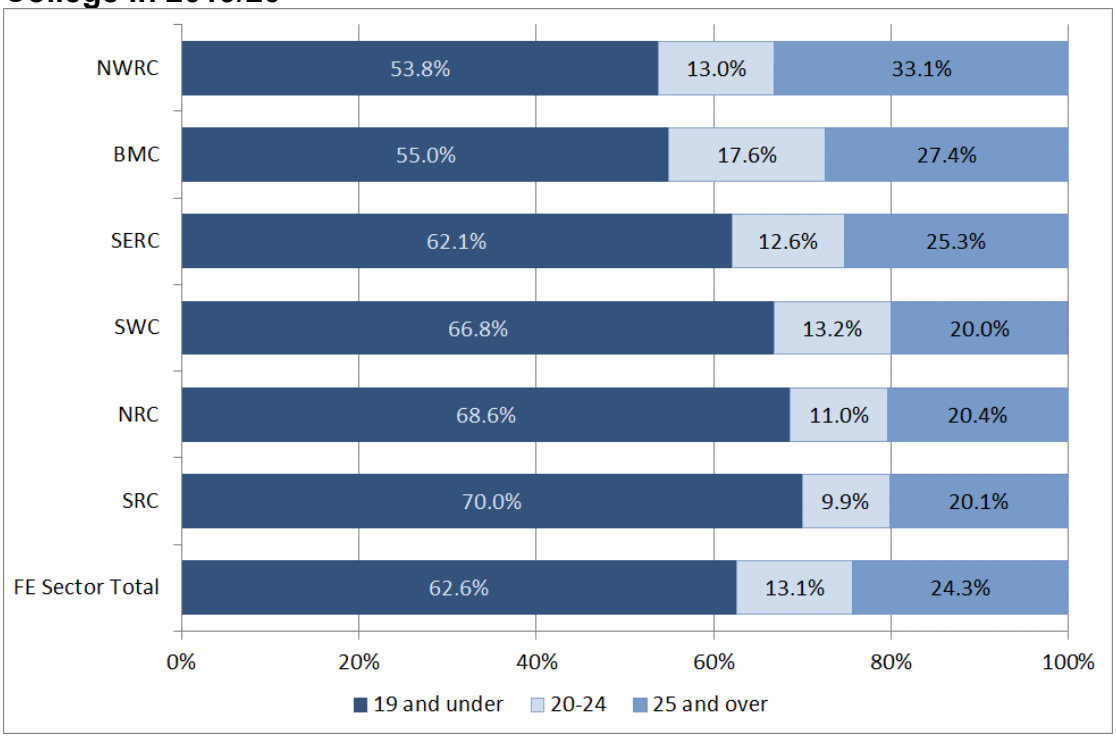


Age

Of the 107,760 regulated enrolments in 2019/20, over three-fifths (62.6%) related to students aged '19 and under', 13.1% to those aged '20 to 24' and 24.3% to the '25 and over' age band. All six FE Colleges showed a similar pattern, with aged '19 and under' having the highest proportions and '20 to 24' the lowest (Figure 12, Table A15).

In 2019/20, SRC (70.0%), NRC (68.6%) and SWC (66.8%) had larger proportions aged '19 and under' and smaller proportions in the '25 and over' age band than those for the FE Sector (Figure 12, Table A15).

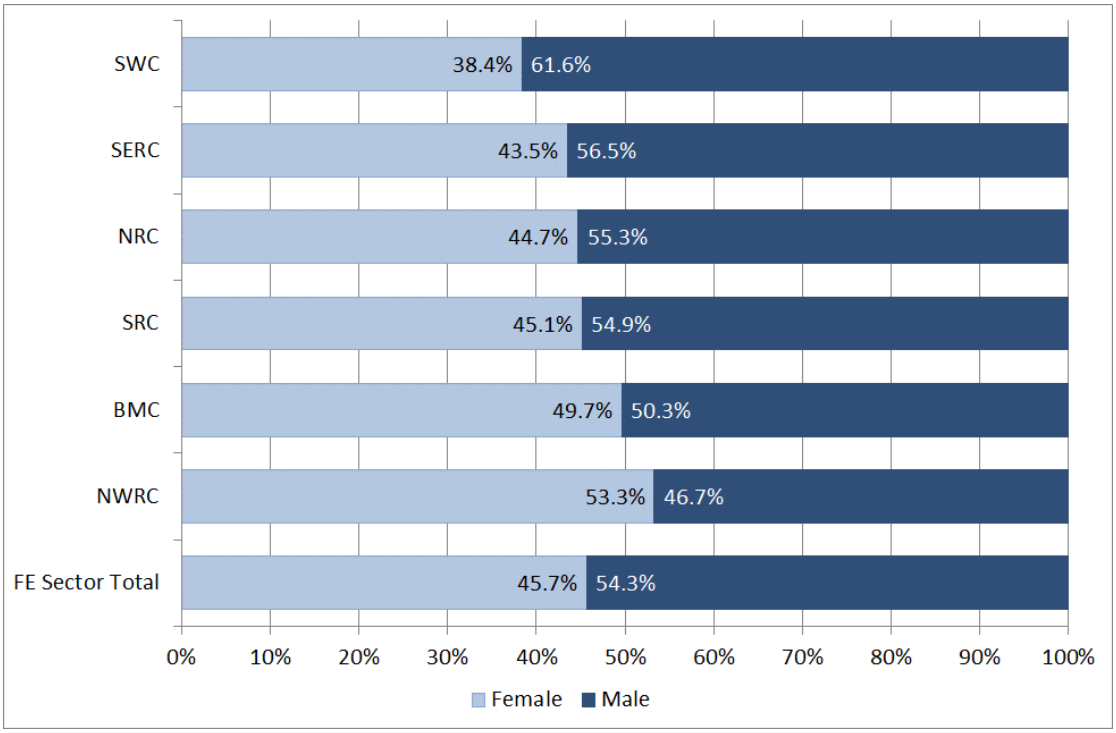
Figure 12: Proportion of regulated enrolments by age band and FE College in 2019/20



Sex

The sex profile of regulated enrolments varied across the six colleges in 2019/20. At five colleges, a higher proportion of enrolments were of males [SWC (61.6%), SERC (56.5%), NRC (55.3%), SRC (54.9%) and BMC (50.3%)], whereas at NWRC over half of enrolments (53.3%) were of females. As a result, the majority (54.3%) of regulated enrolments were of males; the same pattern as for all enrolments (Figure 13, Table A16).

Figure 13: Proportion of regulated enrolments by sex and FE College in 2019/20



Mode of attendance

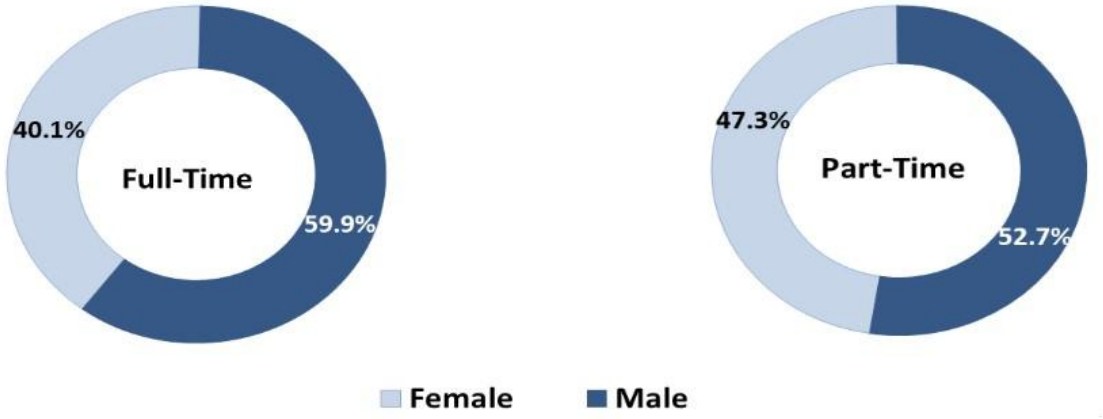
In 2019/20, 22.4% (24,107) of regulated enrolments were on a full-time basis and over three quarters (77.6%, 83,653) were part-time. Across the colleges, NWRC (29.7%) had the highest proportion of full-time enrolments, while SWC (18.3%) and SERC (19.8%) had lower proportions (Table A17).

Mode of attendance and sex

Males accounted for three-fifths (59.9%) of full-time regulated enrolments in 2019/20, whereas part-time regulated provision was fairly evenly split by sex (Figure 14, Table A17).

In contrast to the overall FE Sector sex profile for part-time provision in 2019/20, female enrolments were in the majority in NWRC (55.1%) and BMC (52.5%). In full-time provision, all six colleges followed the FE Sector profile, with a majority of male enrolments (Table A17).

Figure 14: Proportion of regulated enrolments by sex and mode of attendance in 2019/20



Trends – 2015/16 to 2019/20 and Academic Year 2019/20

Provision area

Three main provision areas are delivered within FE Colleges:

i. Further Education is regarded as enrolments at 'Level 3 or below', such as: professional and technical provision; A-Levels; GCSEs; and Apprenticeships.

ii. Higher Education is regarded as enrolments at 'Level 4 or above', such as: Certificate of Higher Education; Diplomas of Higher Education; Foundation degrees; Higher National Certificates (HNCs); Higher National Diplomas (HNDs); Bachelor's degrees; Master's degrees; Postgraduate certificates; and Doctorates.

iii. Essential Skills provision can be at Entry Level up to Level 2, which is equivalent to GCSEs. This cohort is separate from (i) Further Education (above). Further information on Essential Skills provision is available at: https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-economic-research/essential-skills-statistics

Trend – 2015/16 to 2019/20

Between 2015/16 and 2019/20, the proportion of regulated enrolments in Further Education (FE) courses has increased from 71.9% to 72.5%; whereas the proportion of those in Essential Skills has decreased, from 19.1% to 18.0%. The proportion of regulated enrolments in Higher Education (HE) has increased from 9.0% to 9.6% over this period (Table A18).

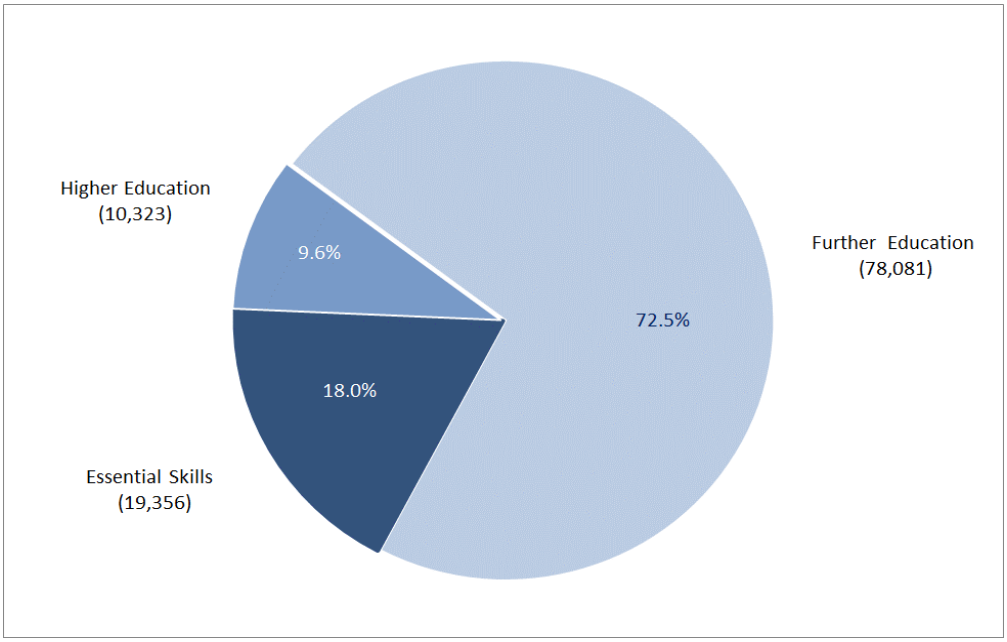
Academic year 2019/20

Of the 107,760 regulated enrolments in 2019/20, 72.5% were in FE courses, 9.6% were in HE courses and 18.0% in Essential Skills (Figure 15, Table A18).

Across each of the FE Colleges, the proportions for each provision area generally followed the overall FE Sector (Table A18).

In 2019/20, SERC's share of enrolments in FE courses (74.7%) was the highest across all colleges, while its HE proportion (7.2%) was the lowest. BMC's proportion of enrolments in HE courses (12.9%) was the highest across all colleges, while its Essential Skills share (14.5%) was the lowest. NRC had the highest proportion of enrolments in Essential Skills (22.3%), while its FE share (70.2%) was the lowest (Table A18).

Figure 15: Proportion of regulated enrolments by provision area in 2019/20



Level of study

Each enrolment on a regulated course is assigned a level between 'Entry Level' and 'Level 8'. Qualifications at the same level have a similar level of demand or difficulty, for example at:

- 'Level 1 and Entry Level' includes Vocational Qualifications Level 1, GCSEs at grade D–G, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Essential Skills;
- 'Level 2' includes Vocational Qualifications Level 2, GCSEs at grade A*–C, ESOL and Essential Skills;
- 'Level 3' includes Vocational Qualifications Level 3, GCE AS and A Level;
- 'Level 4 and above' includes Vocational Qualifications Levels 4 to 8; Higher National Certificates (HNC), Higher National Diplomas (HND), Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE) and degrees.

Trend – 2015/16 to 2019/20

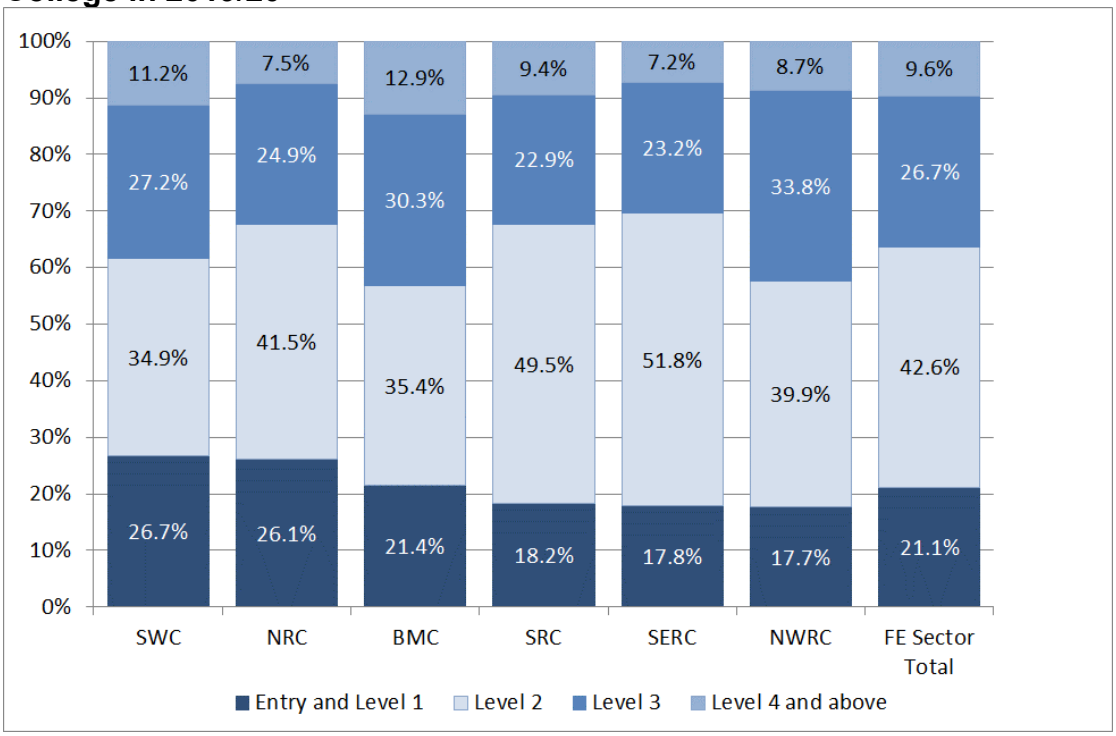
Since 2015/16, decreases have occurred in the proportions of regulated enrolments at 'Level 1 and below' (21.5% to 21.1%) and 'Level 2' (44.4% to 42.6%). Conversely, over the same period, increases have occurred in the proportions at 'Level 3' (24.8% to 26.7%) and 'Level 4 and above' (9.0% to 9.6%) respectively (Table A19).

Academic year 2019/20

Of the 107,760 FE Sector regulated enrolments in 2019/20, nearly four-fifths (78.9%) were at 'Level 2' or above, up from 78.2% in 2015/16. Those at 'Level 1 and below' accounted for 21.1% (22,723); 42.6% (45,935) were at 'Level 2', 26.7% (28,779) were at 'Level 3' and 9.6% (10,323) were at 'Level 4 and above' (Figure 16, Table A19).

There was a notable variation across the six colleges in terms of the level of study. While all colleges had their largest proportion of enrolments at 'Level 2', this ranged from 34.9% in SWC to 51.8% in SERC. SERC was the only college where the majority of enrolments were at 'Level 2', whereas BMC (43.2%) and NWRC (42.5%) were the only colleges where over two-fifths of provision was at 'Level 3' and above (Figure 16, Table A19).

Figure 16: Proportion of regulated enrolments by level of study and FE College in 2019/20



Subject area

Trend – 2015/16 to 2019/20

Since 2015/16, the proportions of regulated enrolments by subject area have been in a largely steady state. Notably, the proportion of regulated enrolments in the subject area 'Construction, Planning and the Built Environment' has increased from 4.8% in 2015/16 to 7.1% in 2019/20. In contrast, the proportion of Information and Communication Technology enrolments has decreased from 11.2% to 9.5% over the same period (Table A20).

Academic year 2019/20

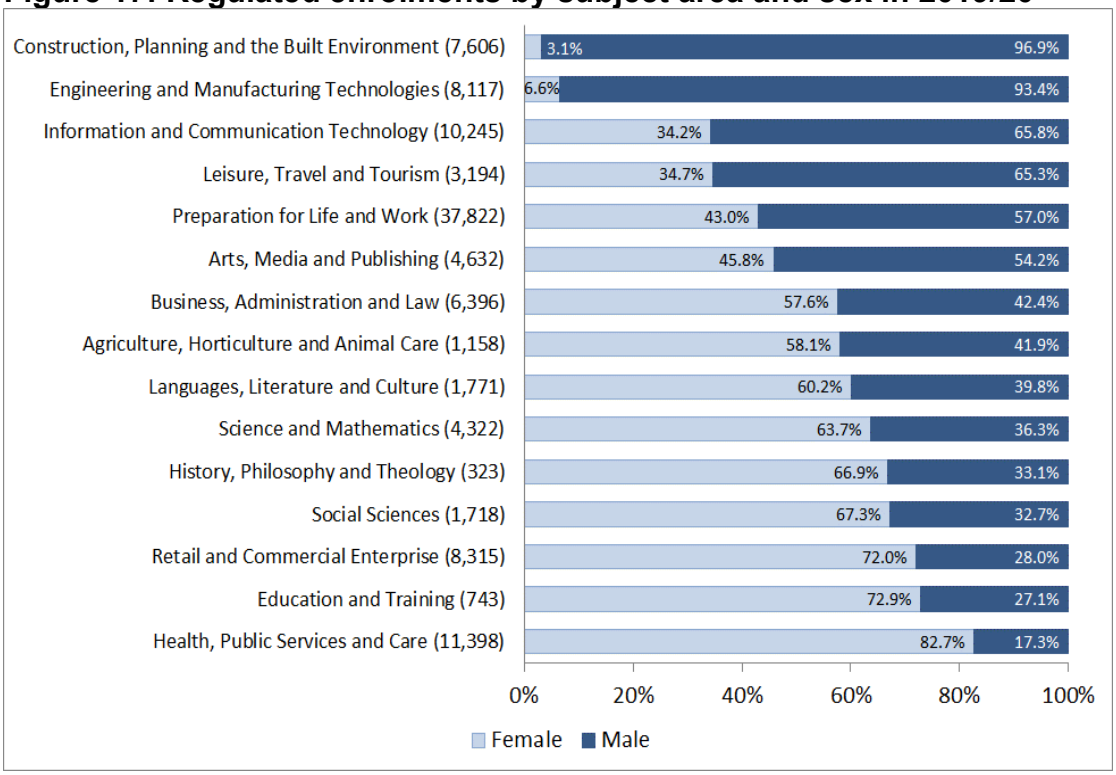
Of the 107,760 regulated enrolments in 2019/20, the subject area 'Preparation for Life and Work' had the largest share (35.1%). This was followed by 'Health, Public Services and Care' (10.6%) and 'Information and Communication Technology (ICT)' (9.5%). Almost two-fifths (38.7%, 14,646) of regulated enrolments within the subject area 'Preparation for Life and Work' were Essential Skills courses in Literacy and Numeracy (Table A20).

Subject area and sex

Although the overall sex profile was fairly evenly split for all regulated enrolments in 2019/20, wide variation occurred between male and female enrolments across the subject areas. Females accounted for the vast majority of 'Health, Public Services and Care' (82.7%) and 'Education and Training' enrolments (72.9%). Male-dominated subject areas included 'Construction, Planning and the Built Environment' (96.9%) and 'Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies' (93.4%) (Figure 17, Table A20).

Across the FE Colleges, there was a similar pattern in the subject area by sex profile. Any college variations from the sector were mainly in 'Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care', which accounted for 1,158 enrolments across the FE Sector. In SWC, SRC and NWRC, the male share of this subject area was 87.1%, 71.2% and 62.4% respectively, compared with the 'FE Sector male' share of 41.9% (Table A20).

Figure 17: Regulated enrolments by subject area and sex in 2019/20



Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

The 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures' publication highlights a need to address subject imbalances, as forecasts predict that degree subject requirements will become more skewed towards STEM. The 'Report of the STEM Review' examines ways in which Government and business can increase the number of people with STEM qualifications entering the workplace.

This section examines the level of enrolments within STEM subject areas to illustrate the FE Sector contribution towards those undertaking STEM courses.

STEM or 'Broad' STEM provision is identified by subject category. 'Broad' STEM enrolments are regarded as those on courses of: 'Medicine, Dentistry and Allied Subjects'; 'Biological and Physical Sciences'; 'Agriculture; Mathematics and IT'; 'Engineering and Technology'; and 'Architecture, Building and Planning'.

A subset of this cohort is termed 'Narrow' STEM and is identified as those enrolment records within courses of: 'Biological and Physical Sciences'; 'Mathematics and IT'; and 'Engineering and Technology'.

Trend – 2015/16 to 2019/20

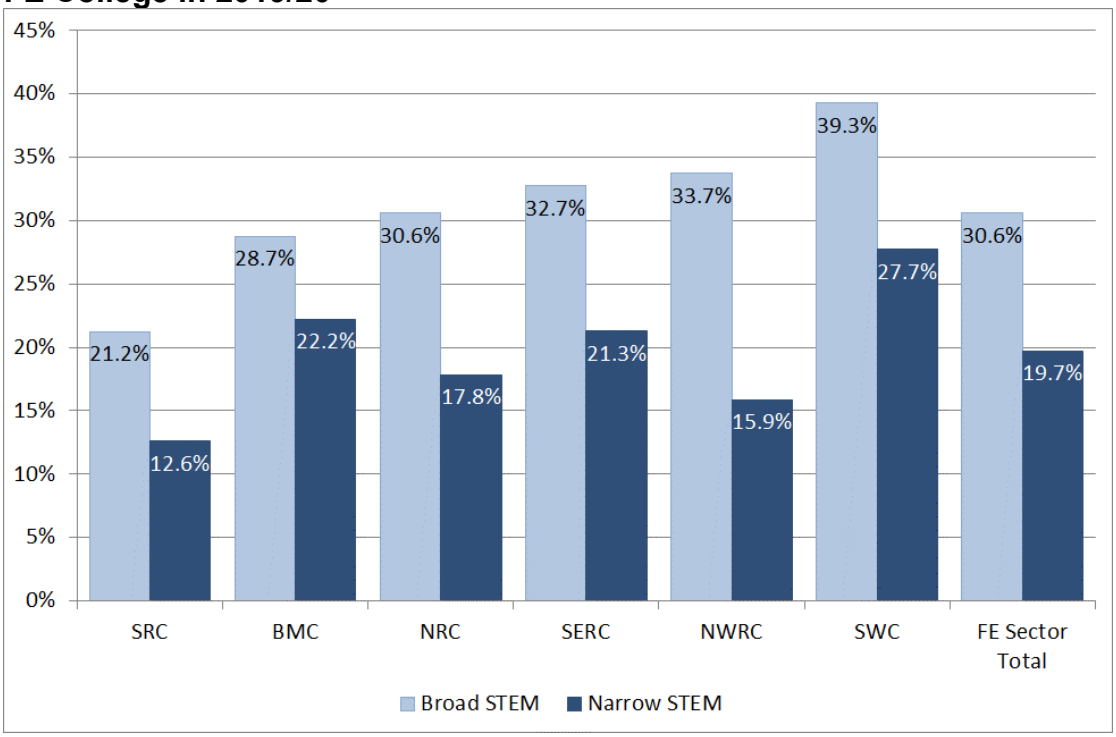
Over the period 2015/16 to 2019/20, the proportion of regulated enrolments in 'Broad' STEM subjects increased from 28.3% to 30.6%. The proportion of regulated enrolments in 'Narrow' STEM subjects also increased, from 19.4% to 19.7%, over the same period (Table A21).

Academic year 2019/20

In 2019/20, 'Broad' STEM enrolments accounted for 30.6% (32,944) of all regulated enrolments, while 'Narrow' STEM enrolments accounted for 19.7% (21,236). Males accounted for almost three-quarters of 'Broad' STEM (72.2%) enrolments and over three-quarters of 'Narrow' STEM (77.3%) enrolments (Table A21).

Across the FE Colleges, the proportion of enrolments in 'Broad' STEM subjects ranged from 21.2% in SRC to 39.3% in SWC, while the proportion in 'Narrow' STEM subjects ranged from 12.6% in SRC to 27.7% in SWC (Figure 18, Table A21).

Figure 18: Proportion of regulated enrolments by STEM indicators and FE College in 2019/20



Deprivation

Relative deprivation has been measured using the official Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM), which categorises areas across Northern Ireland into five geographical groups, termed 'quintiles', each accounting for 20% of the 890 Super Output Areas (SOAs). Quintile 1 is the most deprived group of areas and Quintile 5 is the least deprived group of areas. Only enrolments of Northern Ireland domicile students have been included; these have been identified by a known, valid Northern Ireland postcode in this analysis.

Trend – 2015/16 to 2019/20

Between 2015/16 and 2019/20, little change occurred in the proportions of regulated enrolments from each relative deprivation quintile. The proportions of Quintile 1, Quintile 3 and Quintile 5 decreased from 20.8%, 22.3% and 14.5% to 20.6%, 21.8% and 14.2% respectively. Conversely, the proportions of Quintile 2 and Quintile 4 increased from 23.4% and 18.8% to 23.9% and 19.5% respectively (Table A22).

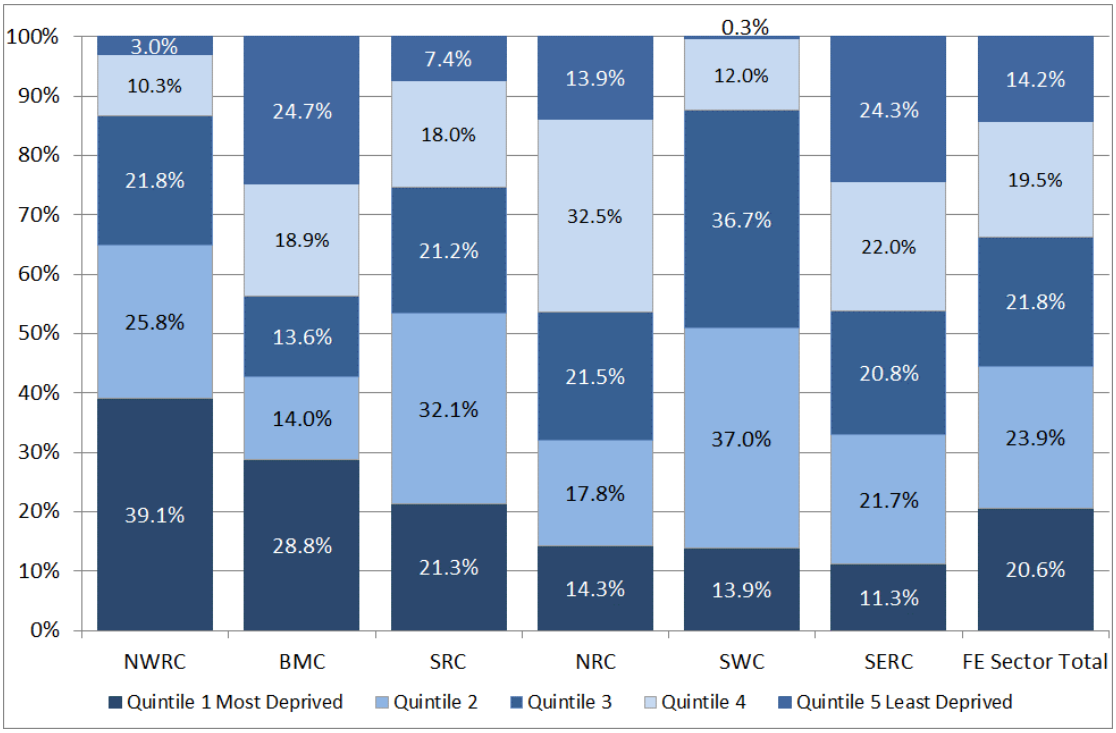
Academic year 2019/20

In 2019/20, over two-fifths (44.5%) of regulated enrolments were from the two most deprived quintiles. One-fifth (20.6%) of regulated enrolments came from Quintile 1, compared with 14.2% from Quintile 5 (Figure 19, Table A22).

Considerable variation occurred at college level in 2019/20. For instance, over 50% of regulated enrolments at NWRC, SRC and SWC came from the two most deprived areas (Quintiles 1 and 2), whereas SERC's largest share of enrolments (24.3%) came from the least deprived area (Quintile 5) (Figure 19, Table A22).

Almost two-fifths (39.1%) of NWRC's regulated enrolments in 2019/20 were from Quintile 1, with 3.0% from Quintile 5. BMC, another college with a large urban concentration, was quite polarised in terms of relative deprivation levels of intake. Over half of BMC regulated enrolments (53.5%) were from either Quintile 1 or Quintile 5 (Figure 19, Table A22).

Figure 19: Proportion of regulated enrolments of Northern Ireland domiciled students by relative deprivation quintile and FE College in 2019/20



Please note enrolments with unknown or invalid postcodes are not reflected in the chart and are excluded from Table A22.

The 2,560 2019/20 enrolments with unknown or invalid postcodes have been excluded from this relative deprivation analysis. Notably, 63.6% (1,628) of these enrolments were in NWRC. This is mainly due to a student flow from the Republic of Ireland (RoI). Of the 1,628 enrolments with unknown or invalid postcodes in NWRC, 1,380 were RoI domiciled student enrolments.

Section 3: Higher Education enrolments

Background

Higher Education in Further Education (HE in FE) enrolments account for most regulated provision at 'Level 4 or above'. They include: Certificates of Higher Education; Diplomas of Higher Education; Foundation degrees; Higher National Certificates (HNCs); Higher National Diplomas (HNDs); Bachelor's degrees; Master's degrees; Postgraduate certificates; and Doctorates. For further details on HE provision at UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), please click Higher Education Statistics.

Trends – 2015/16 to 2019/20

HE in FE enrolments have decreased by a net 11.2% (1,308), from 11,631 in 2015/16 to 10,323 in 2019/20; this includes a 9.7% fall from 11,848 in 2017/18 to 10,704 in 2018/19 (Table 2).

Five of the six colleges experienced net decreases in the number of HE in FE enrolments [NWRC (30.9%), NRC (22.7%), SRC (11.0%), BMC (8.0%) and SWC (2.5%)] between 2015/16 and 2019/20. SERC, however, experienced a net increase of 3.0% (Table 2).

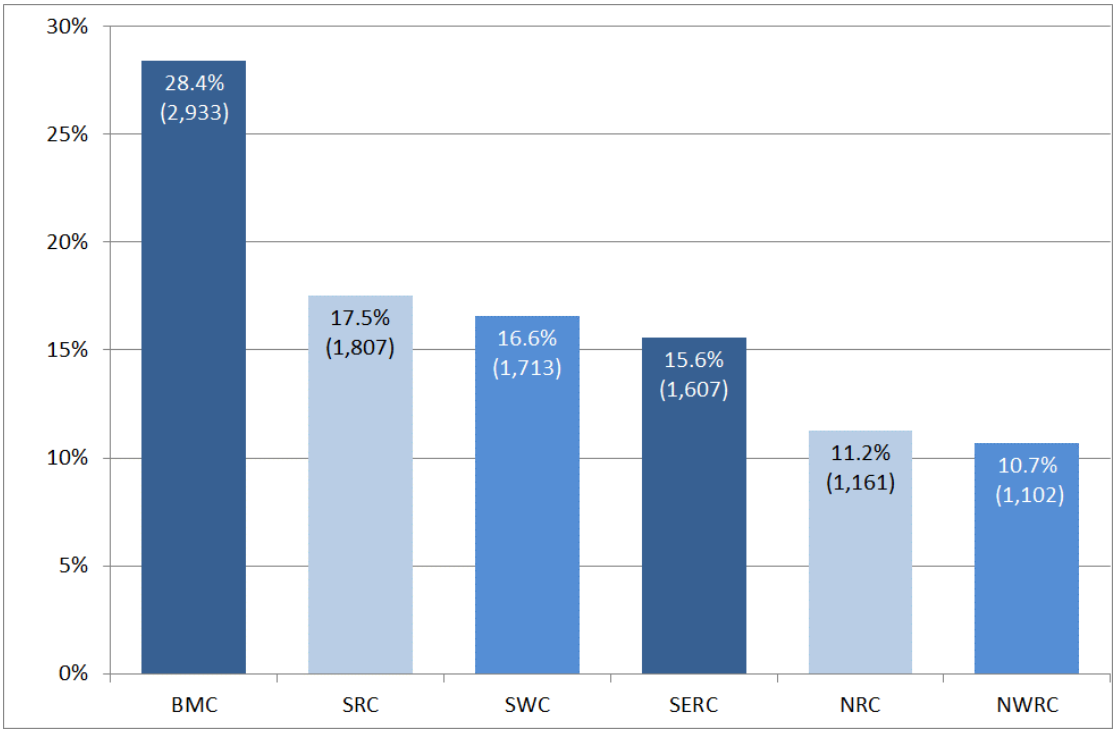
Table 2: Higher Education enrolments by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

	Academic Year				
FE College	**2015/16**	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2019/20**	**2019/20**
BMC	3,188	3,178	3,146	3,030	2,933
NRC	1,502	1,399	1,299	1,170	1,161
NWRC	1,594	1,534	1,524	1,243	1,102
SERC	1,560	1,564	1,454	1,486	1,607
SRC	2,030	1,836	2,683	1,866	1,807
SWC	1,757	1,664	1,742	1,909	1,713
FE Sector Total	**11,631**	**11,175**	**11,848**	**10,704**	**10,323**

Higher Education enrolments in 2019/20

In 2019/20, BMC accounted for the highest proportion of all HE in FE enrolments (28.4%, 2,933) and NWRC the lowest, with 10.7% (1,102) (Figure 20, Table 2).

Figure 20: Share of Higher Education enrolments by FE College in 2019/20



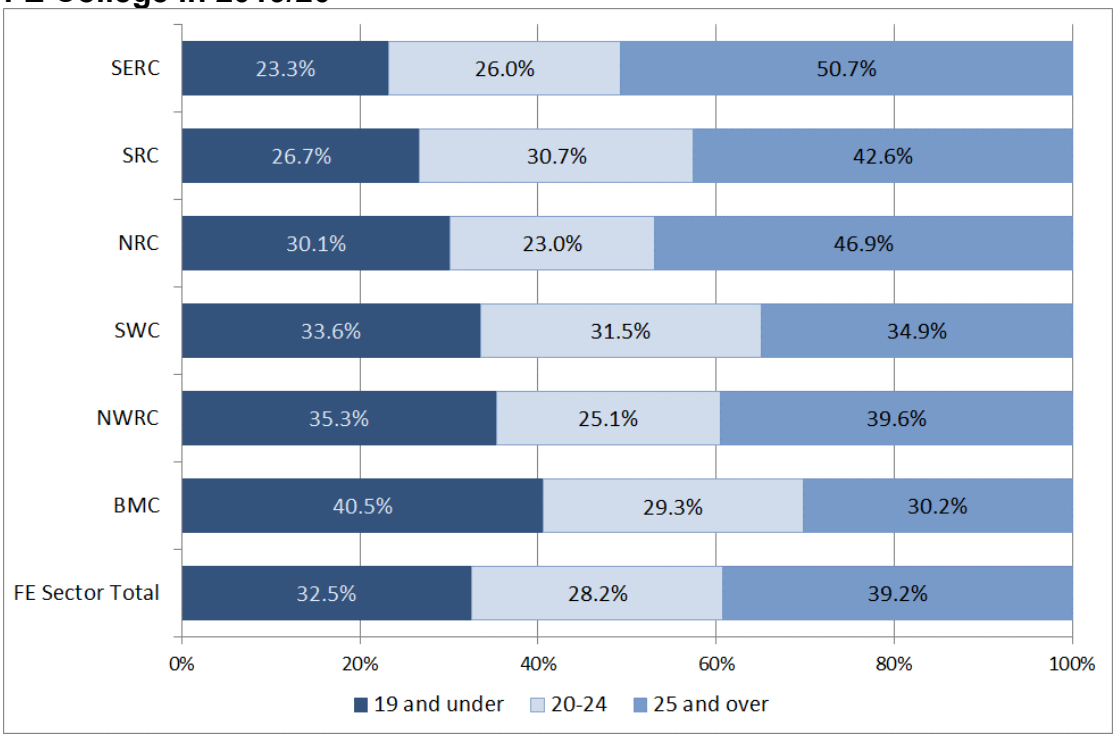
Age

Of the 10,323 HE in FE enrolments in 2019/20, the highest proportion was in the age group '25 and over' (39.2%), followed by those aged '19 and under' (32.5%) and those aged '20 to 24' (28.2%) (Figure 21, Table A23).

Three of the six FE Colleges (NRC, NWRC and SWC) showed a similar trend to the overall FE Sector in 2019/20, with those aged '25 and over' having the highest proportions of HE in FE enrolments (46.9%, 39.6% and 34.9% respectively) and those aged '20 to 24' the lowest (23.0%, 25.1% and 31.5% respectively) (Figure 21, Table A23).

In 2019/20 BMC (40.5%) had the highest proportion of HE in FE enrolments of those aged '19 and under' and also had the lowest proportion within the '25 and over' group (30.2%) (Figure 21, Table A23).

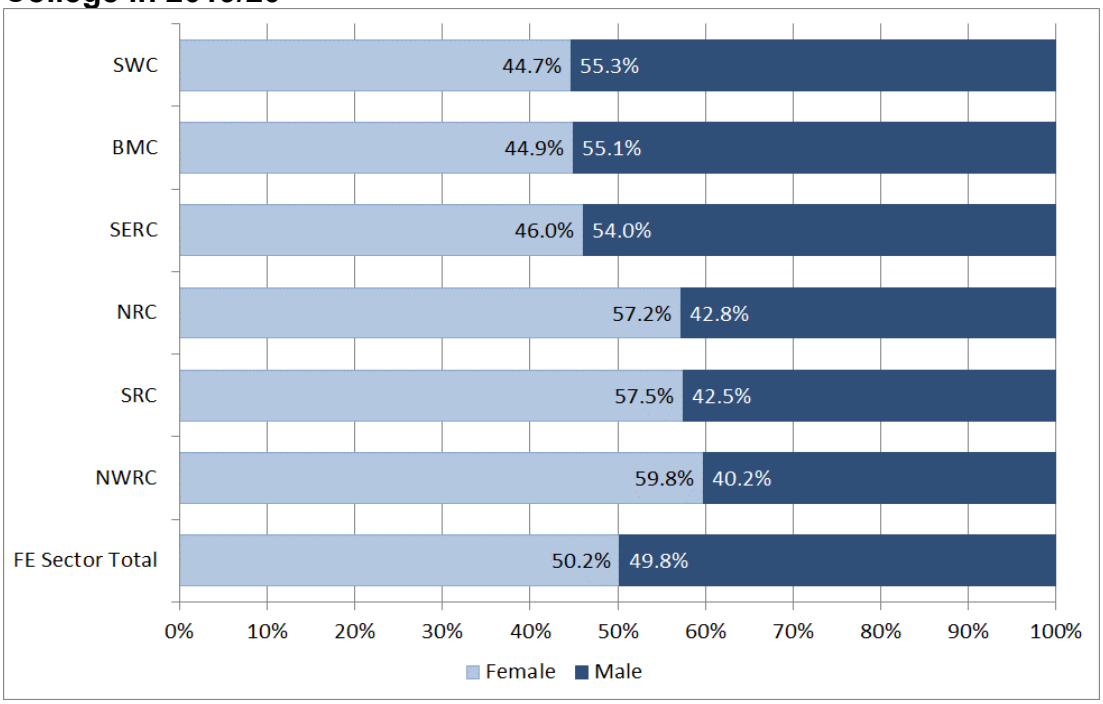
Figure 21: Proportion of Higher Education enrolments by age band and FE College in 2019/20



Sex

The sex profile of HE in FE enrolments varied greatly across the six colleges in 2019/20. Three colleges had higher proportions of male enrolments [SWC (55.3%), BMC (55.1%) and SERC (54.0%)], while the others had higher proportions of female enrolments [NWRC (59.8%), SRC (57.5%) and NRC (57.2%)]. The resultant effect was a fairly even split in the HE in FE sex profile, at 50.2% female and 49.8% male (Figure 22, Table A24).

Figure 22: Proportion of Higher Education enrolments by sex and FE College in 2019/20



Mode of attendance

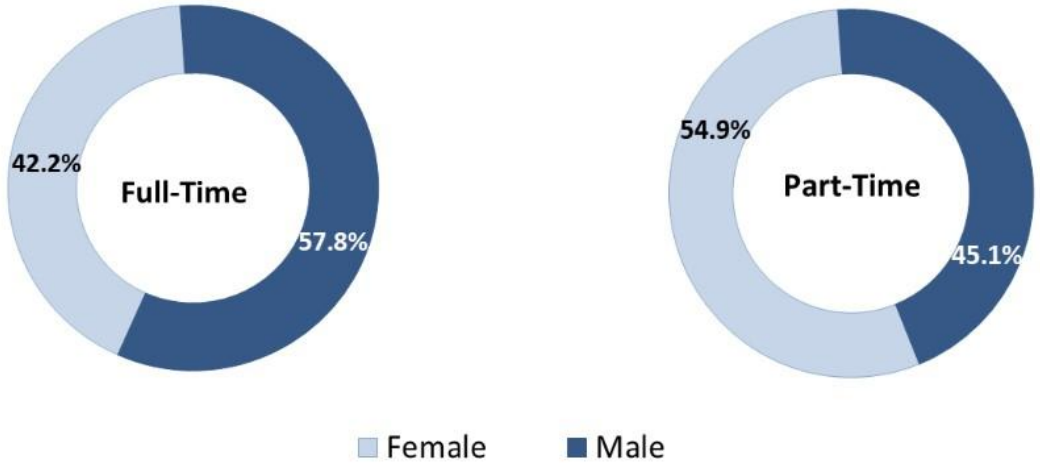
In 2019/20, 37.0% (3,816) of HE in FE enrolments were on a full-time basis and 63.0% were part-time (6,507). In comparison with the FE Sector, BMC (52.8%) and NWRC (51.2%) had above average proportions of full-time enrolments, while NRC (22.9%), SRC (23.4%), SERC (30.1%) and SWC (31.0%) had lower proportions (Table A25).

Mode of attendance and sex

For part-time provision, females made up the majority of HE in FE enrolments (54.9%) in 2019/20, while in full-time provision males (57.8%) accounted for the majority (Figure 23, Table A25).

In terms of the part-time provision and sex profile for each college, SWC, BMC and SERC deviated from the overall HE in FE pattern in 2019/20, with a majority of male enrolments (52.0%), (51.6%) and (51.3%) respectively. In full-time provision, NWRC alone differed from the FE Sector pattern, with a majority of female enrolments (56.0%) (Table A25).

Figure 23: Proportion of Higher Education enrolments by sex and mode of attendance in 2019/20



Level of study

Each enrolment on a Higher Education course is assigned a level between 'Level 4' and 'Level 8'. Qualifications at the same level typically have a similar level of demand or difficulty:

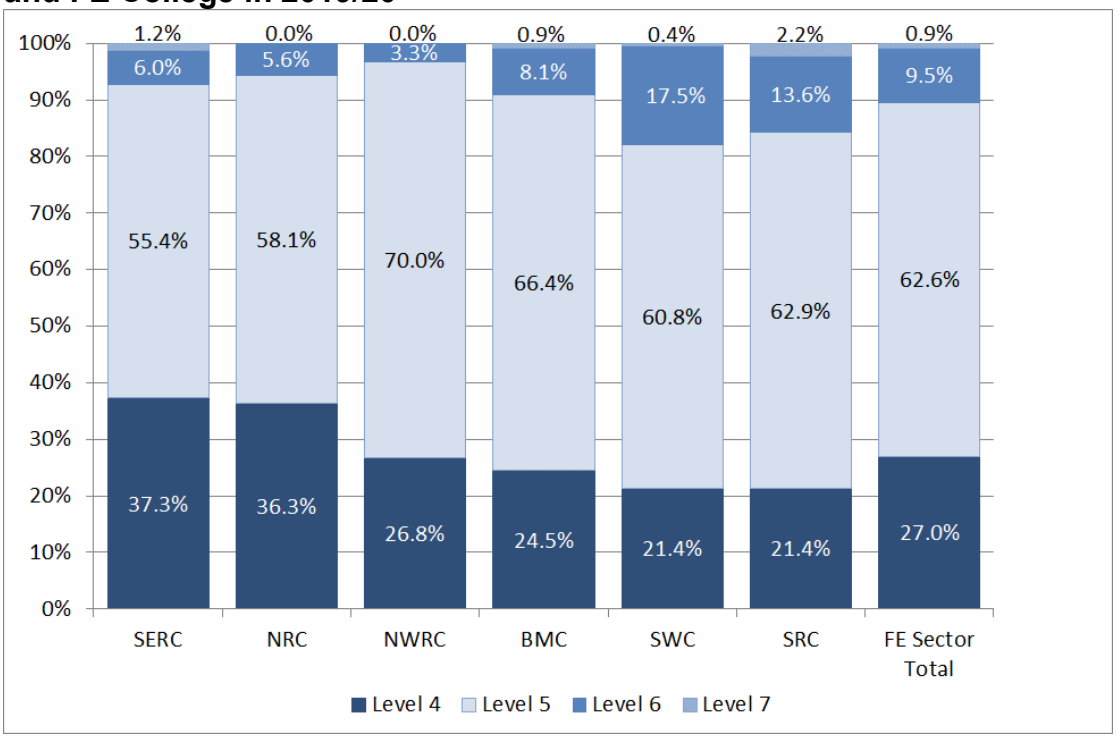
- 'Level 4' are Vocational Qualifications Level 4 and qualifications at a level equivalent to Certificates of Higher Education and Higher National Certificates (HNC);
- 'Level 5' are Vocational Qualifications Level 5 and qualifications at a level equivalent to intermediate Higher Education qualifications, such as Higher National Diplomas (HND), Foundation Degrees and other degrees that do not typically provide direct access to postgraduate programmes;
- 'Level 6' are Vocational Qualifications Level 6 and qualifications at a level equivalent to Bachelor's degrees with honours, graduate certificates and graduate diplomas;

- ‘Level 7’ are Vocational Qualifications Level 7 and qualifications at a level equivalent to Master's degrees, postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas;
- ‘Level 8’ are Vocational Qualifications Level 8 and qualifications at a level equivalent to doctorates.

Of the 10,323 HE in FE enrolments in 2019/20, the vast majority (89.6%) were at levels 4 or 5. ‘Level 5’ accounted for 62.6% (6,460) of enrolments and ‘Level 4’ 27.0% (2,789), while 9.5% (981) were at ‘Level 6’ and 0.9% (93) at ‘Level 7’ (Figure 24, Table A26).

There is some variation across the six colleges in terms of the level of HE in FE study. While all colleges had their largest share of enrolments at ‘Level 5’ in 2019/20, this ranged from 55.4% in SERC to 70.0% in NWRC. In all six colleges, over four-fifths of HE enrolments were at ‘Level 4’ or ‘Level 5’, ranging from 82.1% in SWC to 96.7% in NWRC (Figure 24, Table A26).

Figure 24: Proportion of Higher Education enrolments by level of study and FE College in 2019/20



Subject area

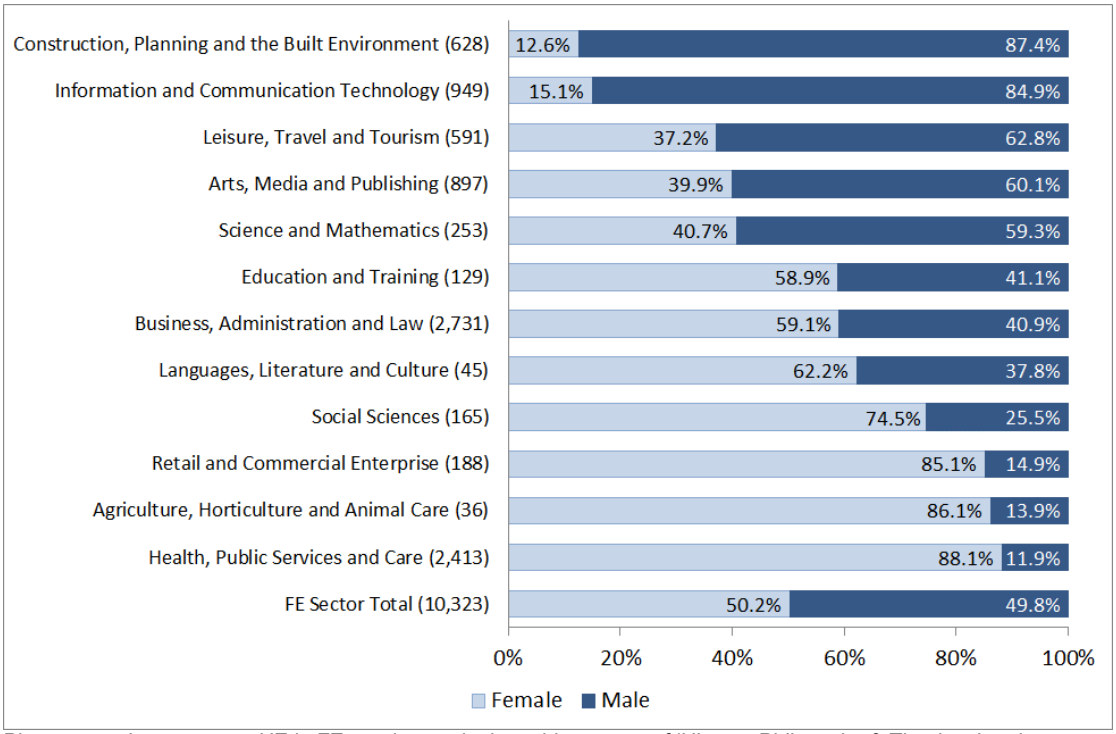
Of the 10,323 HE in FE enrolments in 2019/20, over three-fifths (62.4%, 6,442) fell within three subject areas: ‘Business, Administration and Law’ (26.5%, 2,731); ‘Health, Public Services and Care’ (23.4%, 2,413); and ‘Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies’ (12.6%, 1,298) (Table A27).

Subject area and sex

While the overall sex profile was fairly evenly split for all HE in FE enrolments in 2019/20, there was wide variation between male and female enrolment shares across the subject areas. Females accounted for the vast majority in 'Health, Public Services and Care' (88.1%) and in 'Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care' (86.1%). Male-dominated subject areas included 'Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (90.4%) and 'Construction, Planning and the Built Environment (87.4%) (Figure 25, Table A27).

Typically, the FE Colleges followed a similar pattern to the FE Sector subject area by sex profile in 2019/20. Some notable differences were in SERC and SWC, where the proportions of female HE in FE enrolments in 'Science and Mathematics' were 64.5% and 57.7% respectively, in comparison with 40.7% in the FE Sector. In contrast, the male share of the same subject area was 84.9% in NRC, as opposed to 59.3% in the FE Sector (Table A27).

Figure 25: Higher Education enrolments by subject area and sex in 2019/20



Please note there were no HE in FE enrolments in the subject areas of 'History, Philosophy & Theology' and 'Preparation for Life & Work'.

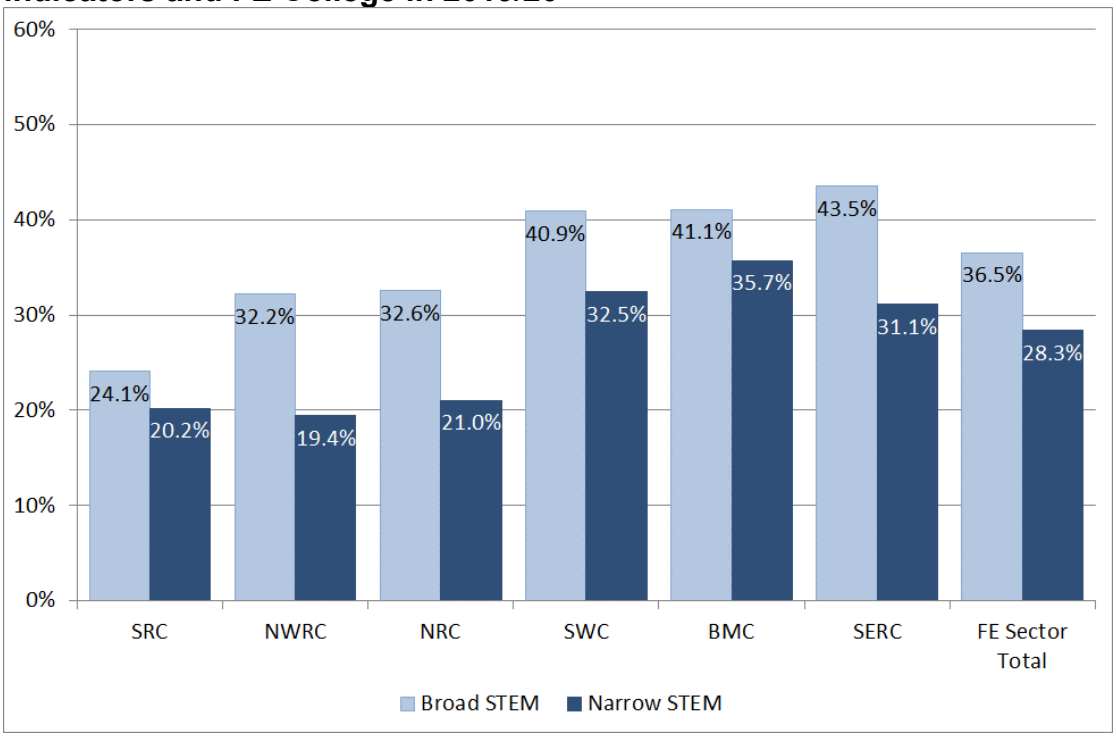
Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

'Broad' STEM enrolments are regarded as those on courses of: 'Medicine, Dentistry and Allied Subjects'; 'Biological and Physical Sciences'; 'Agriculture'; 'Mathematics and IT'; 'Engineering and Technology; and 'Architecture, Building and Planning'. A subset of this cohort is termed 'Narrow' STEM and is identified as those enrolment records within courses classed as: 'Biological and Physical Sciences'; 'Mathematics and IT'; and 'Engineering and Technology'.

In 2019/20, 'Broad' STEM accounted for 36.5% (3,773) of all HE in FE enrolments, while 'Narrow' STEM accounted for 28.3% (2,926). Males accounted for nearly four-fifths of 'Broad' STEM (78.2%) and for over four-fifths of 'Narrow' STEM (83.2%) enrolments (Table A28).

In comparison with the FE Sector, SERC (43.5%), BMC (41.1%) and SWC (40.9%) had higher 'Broad' STEM proportions of HE enrolments in 2019/20. The same three colleges also had above average 'Narrow' STEM proportions: BMC (35.7%); SWC (32.5%); and SERC (31.1%) (Figure 26, Table A28).

Figure 26: Proportion of Higher Education enrolments by STEM indicators and FE College in 2019/20



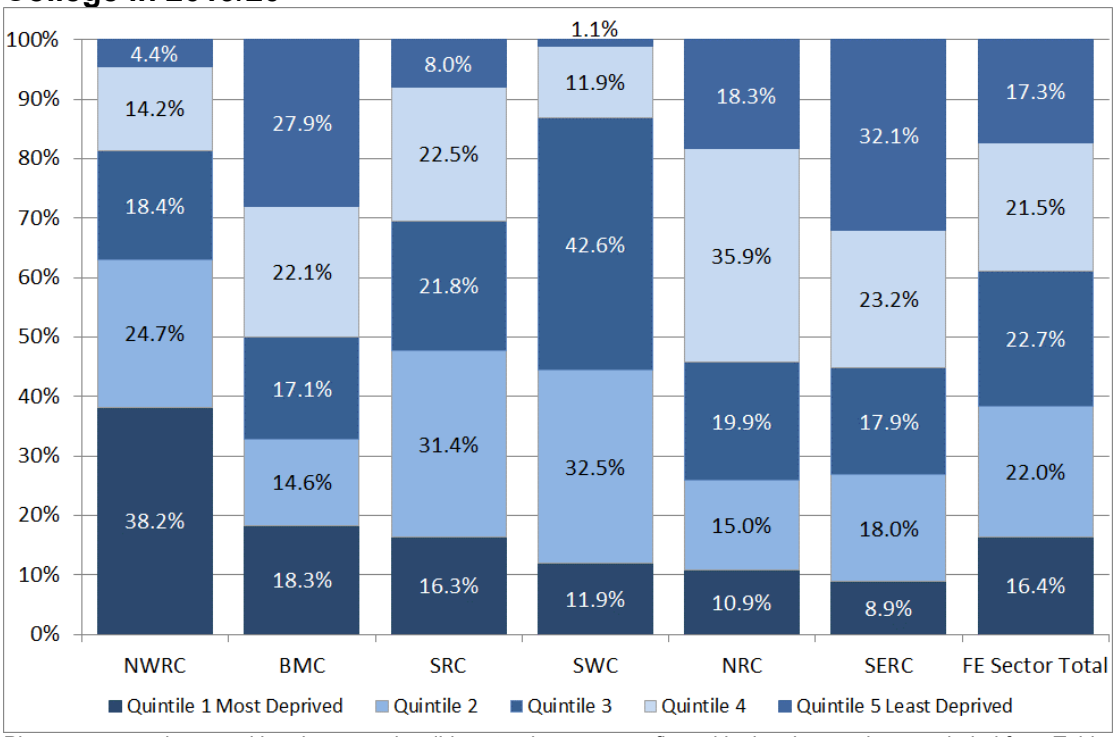
Deprivation

Relative deprivation has been measured on the official Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM), which categorises geographical areas across Northern Ireland into five groups, termed 'quintiles', each accounting for 20% of the 890 Super Output Areas (SOAs). Quintile 1 is the most deprived group of areas and Quintile 5 is the least deprived group of areas. Only enrolments of Northern Ireland domicile students have been included; these have been identified by a known, valid Northern Ireland postcode in this analysis.

Almost two-fifths (38.4%) of 2019/20 HE in FE enrolments were from the two most deprived quintiles. Almost a sixth (16.4%) of enrolments came from Quintile 1, similar to the proportion from Quintile 5 (17.3%) (Figure 27, Table A29).

When considering HE in FE enrolments from different deprivation quintiles across the six colleges, there was a lot of regional variation in 2019/20. NWRC attracted 38.2% of its HE enrolments from Quintile 1, compared with 4.4% from Quintile 5. BMC, another college with a large urban concentration, is quite polarised in terms of deprivation levels of its intake, with 46.2% of enrolments being from either the most or least deprived quintile. In contrast, 13.1% of SWC enrolments came from these two quintiles (Figure 27, Table A29).

Figure 27: Proportion of Higher Education enrolments of Northern Ireland domiciled students by relative deprivation quintile and FE College in 2019/20



Please note enrolments with unknown or invalid postcodes are not reflected in the chart and are excluded from Table A29.

The 291 2019/20 HE in FE enrolments with unknown or invalid postcodes have been excluded from this relative deprivation analysis. Notably, 54.3% (158) of these HE in FE enrolments were in NWRC. This is mainly due to a student flow from the Republic of Ireland (RoI). Of the 158 enrolments with unknown or invalid postcodes in NWRC, 136 were RoI domiciled student enrolments.

Section 4: Qualifications and Performance

4.1 - Final year enrolments

A student can enrol on a course that is multiple years in length, but will only have the opportunity to achieve within the final year of an enrolment. Regulated enrolments are those that potentially result in a formal qualification at the end of the study. Consequently, performance analysis is only focused on the final year of regulated enrolments, for example, regulated enrolments on a one year course, or the second year of a two year course. Please refer to Annex A and Annex B for further details on the definitions and changes to these in regard to performance analysis.

Trends - 2015/16 to 2019/20

In each year between 2015/16 and 2019/20, around four-fifths of all regulated enrolments were in the final year and as such are included in any performance analysis over this period. The percentage of final year enrolments within all regulated enrolments has decreased from 84.6% in 2015/16 to 77.5% in 2019/20 (Table 3).

Final year enrolments have decreased (by 23.6%), from 109,303 in 2015/16 to 83,529 in 2019/20. The number of students on final year enrolments has also fallen, by 22.9%, from 60,907 to 46,942 over the same period (Table 3).

Since 2015/16, final year enrolments have decreased in each of the six FE Colleges [NWRC (by 33.4%), SWC (27.9%), NRC (24.4%), SRC (21.5%), SERC (20.2%) and BMC (19.9%)] (Table 3).

Table 3: Number of final year enrolments by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

	Academic Year				
FE College	**2015/16**	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2019/20**	**2019/20**
BMC	22,765	23,351	22,246	20,188	18,242
NRC	15,484	14,985	15,103	13,826	11,705
NWRC	12,785	11,336	11,520	11,431	8,519
SERC	23,317	23,386	22,228	20,765	18,607
SRC	19,606	19,607	22,769	17,487	15,384
SWC	15,346	14,428	13,609	12,827	11,072
Total Final Year Enrolments	**109,303**	**107,093**	**107,475**	**96,524**	**83,529**
Total Regulated Enrolments	**129,274**	**128,629**	**129,054**	**118,160**	**107,760**
Final Year/Regulated (%)	**84.6%**	**83.3%**	**83.3%**	**81.7%**	**77.5%**
Total Students on Final Year Enrolments	**60,907**	**57,944**	**55,830**	**52,359**	**46,942**

4.2 – Qualifications

The following section focuses solely on qualifications from final year enrolments in regulated courses at FE Colleges. A student can fully achieve, partially achieve or fail their qualification. The number of qualifications presented within this section includes both full and partial achievements. Please refer to Annex A and Annex B for further information on partial and full achievement.

Table 4: Number of achievements in FE Colleges (2015/16 to 2019/20)

	Academic Year				
Achievements	**2015/16**	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2019/20**	**2019/20**
Partial achievements	4,637	3,942	4,025	3,310	2,430
Total achievements	88,153	83,015	82,770	74,579	65,659
Partial achievement proportion	**5.3%**	**4.7%**	**4.9%**	**4.4%**	**3.7%**

As a proportion of all achievements, partial achievements fell from 5.3% in 2015/16 to 3.7% in 2019/20 (Table 4).

Trends – 2015/16 to 2019/20

A quarter (25.5%) fewer qualifications were awarded in FE Colleges in 2019/20 (65,659) than in 2015/16 (88,153), this includes a decrease of 8,920 (12.0%) between 2018/19 (74,579) and 2019/20 (65,659) (Table 5).

Net decreases have occurred in qualifications awarded in all six colleges over the period 2015/16 to 2019/20 [NWRC (by 33.6%), SWC (32.0%), NRC (31.6%), SRC (25.1%), SERC (21.0%) and BMC (17.6%)] (Table 5).

Table 5: Number of qualifications achieved by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

	Academic Year				
FE College	**2015/16**	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2019/20**	**2019/20**
BMC	17,766	18,403	17,457	16,051	14,643
NRC	12,022	10,431	10,443	9,304	8,219
NWRC	10,029	8,382	8,687	9,032	6,659
SERC	19,416	19,115	18,151	16,994	15,329
SRC	16,575	15,770	17,910	13,631	12,412
SWC	12,345	10,914	10,122	9,567	8,397
FE Sector Total	**88,153**	**83,015**	**82,770**	**74,579**	**65,659**

4.3 - Performance

Originally related to a Programme for Government (2011-2015) commitment, FE College performance is measured across three indicators:

- **Retention rate** is defined as the percentage of final year regulated enrolments completed by students. Since 2012/13, those who complete their course early (and recorded in the data as a withdrawal) and who have subsequently achieved their programme of study qualification have been regarded as a 'completer'.

- **Achievement rate** relates to the percentage of final year regulated enrolments completed by students who achieve a qualification. Please note that, within this publication, achievement rate is presented within the trend analysis and FE College sections below, but, to minimise repetitiveness, not in the remaining sections of the 2019/20 analysis; these figures are available in the accompanying online tables.

- **Success rate** is recognised as the overall measure of performance, which is the percentage of final year regulated enrolments of students who complete and achieve a qualification.

Trends – 2015/16 to 2019/20

Retention rate

Over the period 2015/16 to 2019/20, the retention rate in FE Colleges has increased by a net 1.2 percentage points, from 90.2% to 91.4%. Compared with 2015/16, this implies that proportionately more people stayed on and completed their course in the most recent year (Figure 28, Table A30).

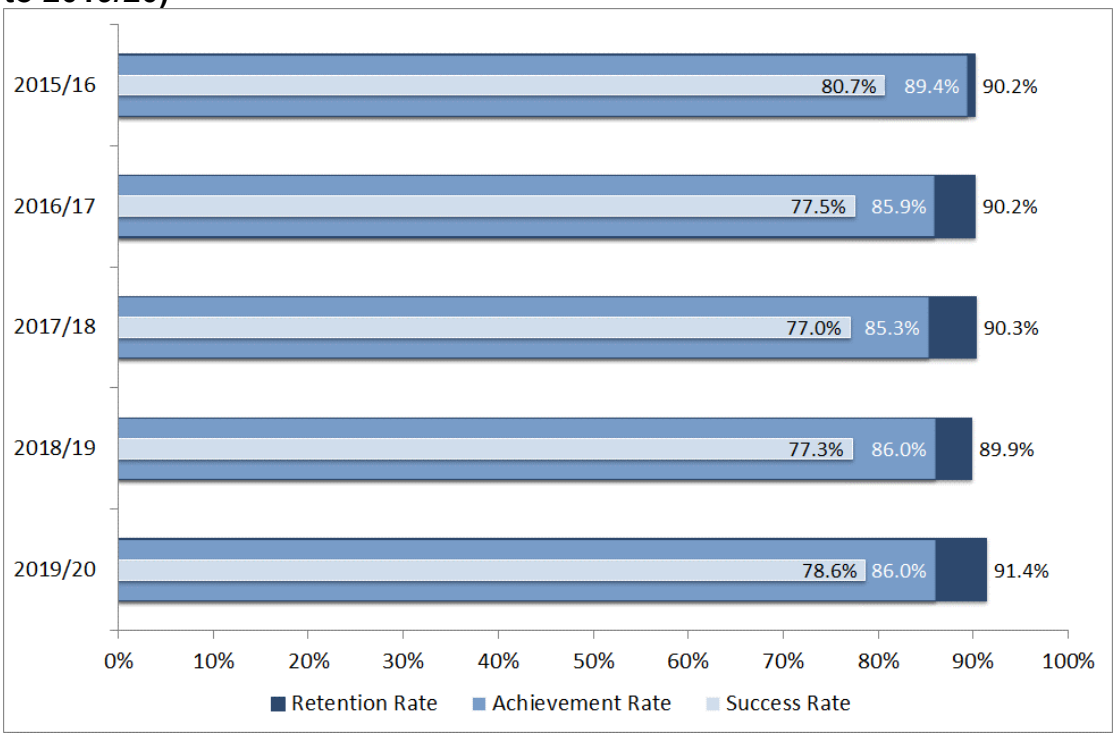
Achievement rate

The achievement rate at FE Colleges has fallen by a net 3.4 percentage points, from 89.4% (2015/16) to 86.0% (2019/20). This indicates that, of those who completed their course, proportionately fewer people achieved their qualification in 2019/20 than in 2015/16 (Figure 28, Table A30).

Success rate

The success rate (that is, the percentage of final year regulated enrolments of students who complete and achieve a qualification) has decreased in net terms, from 80.7% to 78.6%, over the period 2015/16 to 2019/20 (Figure 28, Table A30).

Figure 28: Performance rates of final year regulated enrolments (2015/16 to 2019/20)



FE Colleges

Retention rate

Between 2015/16 and 2019/20, increases in retention rates occurred in NRC, NWRC and BMC (3.8, 2.4 and over 2.1 percentage points respectively). SRC had no net change over the period, while decreases of 0.2 percentage points occurred in both SWC and SERC (Table A30).

Achievement rate

Five of the six colleges followed the FE Sector trend of a net decrease in achievement rates between 2015/16 and 2019/20. The largest decrease (almost 11.9 percentage points) over this period was in NRC, from 88.9% to 77.1%, while the smallest decrease was in SERC (0.8 percentage points), from 91.4% to 90.6%. In contrast, BMC's achievement rate improved by 0.4 percentage points, from 87.3% in 2015/16 to 87.7% in 2019/20 (Table A30).

Success rate

Success rates in five colleges (NRC, SWC, SRC, SERC and NWRC) decreased between 2015/16 and 2019/20, with the largest decrease (7.4 percentage points) being in NRC, from 77.6% to 70.2%. In BMC, the success rate increased by over 2.2 percentage points (to 80.3%) (Table A30).

Academic Year 2019/20

Performance by age

Retention rate

In 2019/20, the retention rate for those aged '19 and under' was 91.5%, for the '20 to 24' age group it was 91.8%, and for those aged '25 and over' it was 91.1% (Figure 29, Table A31).

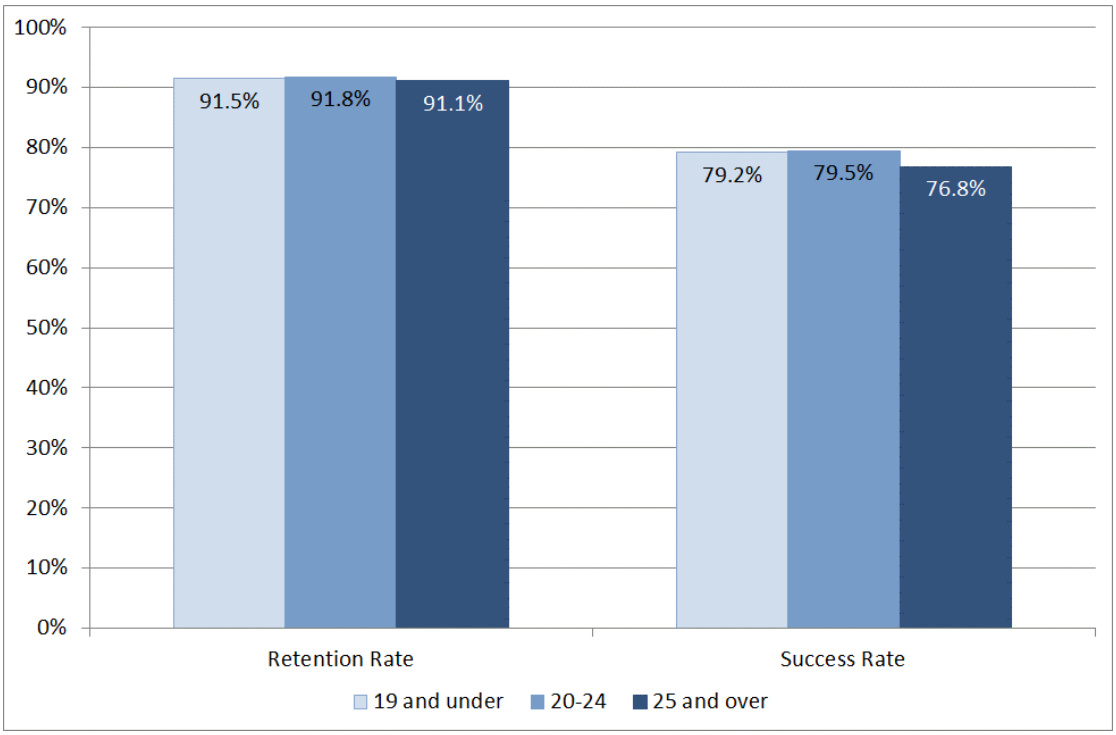
In three of the six colleges (SWC, NRC and SERC), the highest retention rates were in the '19 and under' age group, at 92.8%, 91.7% and 91.1% respectively. In BMC and SRC, the highest retention rates were in the '20-24' age group at 93.6% and 92.3% respectively, while NWRC's highest rate was in the '25 and over' age group (93.3%) (Table A31).

Success rate

In 2019/20, the success rate for those aged '19 and under' was 79.2%, for the '20 to 24' age group it was 79.5%, and for those aged '25 and over' it was 76.8% (Figure 29, Table A31).

The success rates for the '19 and under' age group ranged from 70.5% in NRC to 82.7% in SERC. For the '20 to 24' age group, they ranged from 68.8% in NRC to 84.2% in BMC, while those for the '25 and over' age group ranged from 70.1% in NRC to 81.6% in SERC (Table A31).

Figure 29: Performance rates of final year regulated enrolments by age band in 2019/20



Performance by sex

Retention rate

In 2019/20, within the FE Sector, males (92.0%) had a slightly higher retention rate than females (90.8%) (Figure 30, Table A32).

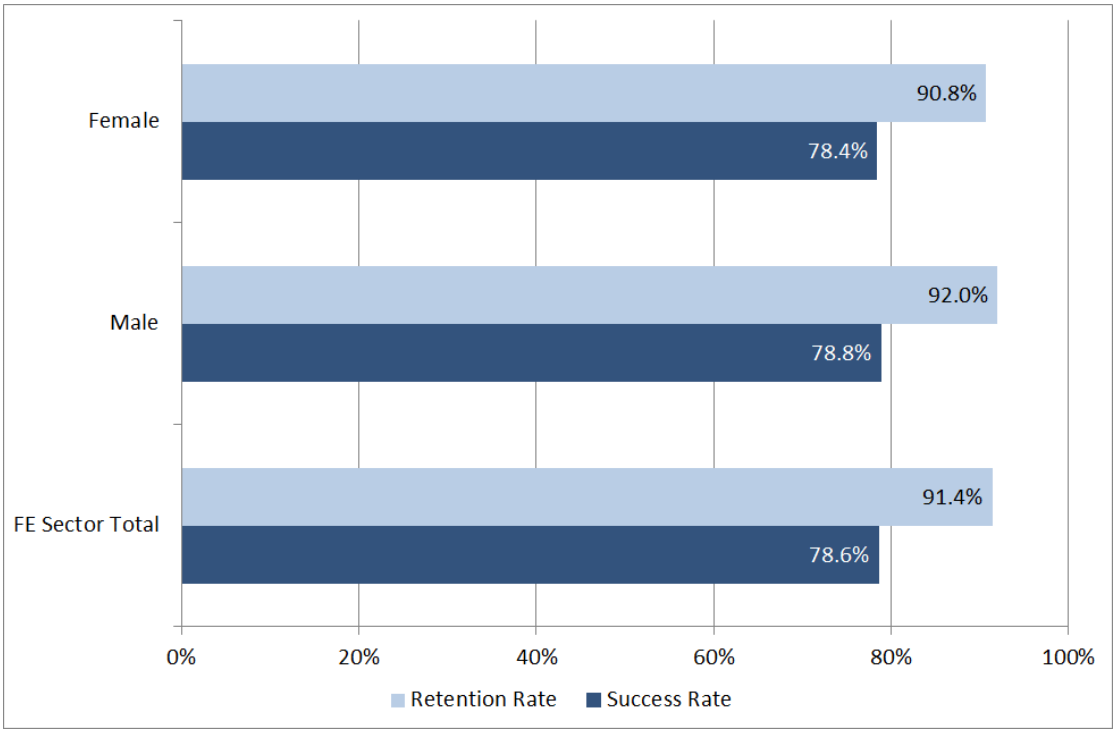
Across all colleges, the female retention rate ranged from 90.3% in SERC to 91.2% in both NWRC and NRC, while the male retention rate ranged from 90.1% in NWRC to 93.4% in SWC. Within colleges, the largest difference between male (93.4%) and female (90.4%) retention rates was in SWC (Table A32).

Success rate

The FE Sector success rates by sex were similar, at 78.8% for males and 78.4% for females (Figure 30, Table A32).

The largest difference in success rates by sex was in SWC, at 77.3% for males and 73.8% for females (Table A32).

Figure 30: Performance rates of final year regulated enrolments by sex in 2019/20



Performance by mode of attendance

Retention rate

In 2019/20, the part-time retention rate (91.7%) was higher than that for full-time enrolments (89.9%) (Figure 31, Table A33).

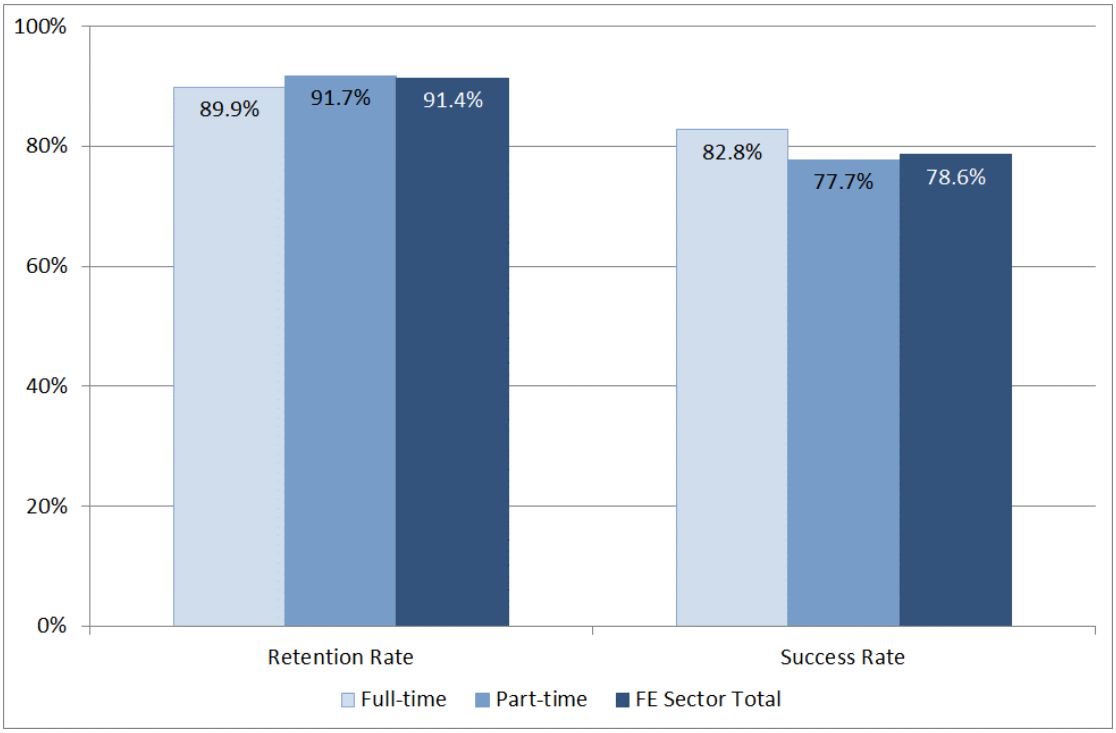
Across the FE Sector, the exception to the above pattern occurred in NRC, where the full-time retention rate (92.6%) was higher than the part-time rate (90.8%) in 2019/20. At 6.9 percentage points, NWRC had the largest difference between part-time (92.6%) and full-time (85.7%) retention rates (Table A33).

Success rate

In 2019/20, the full-time success rate (82.8%) was higher than that for part-time enrolments (77.7%) (Figure 31, Table A33).

In five of the six colleges, the full-time success rate was higher than the part-time rate in 2019/20. However, in NWRC the part-time success rate (78.3%) was higher than the full-time success rate (77.8%). Success rates within part-time provision ranged from 67.7% in NRC to 81.7% in SERC, while those for full-time provision ranged from 77.8% in NWRC to 85.7% in SERC. The largest difference in success rates between full-time (81.7%) and part-time (67.7%) provision occurred in NRC (nearly 14.1 percentage points) (Table A33).

Figure 31: Performance rates of final year regulated enrolments by mode of attendance in 2019/20



Performance by provision area

Retention rate

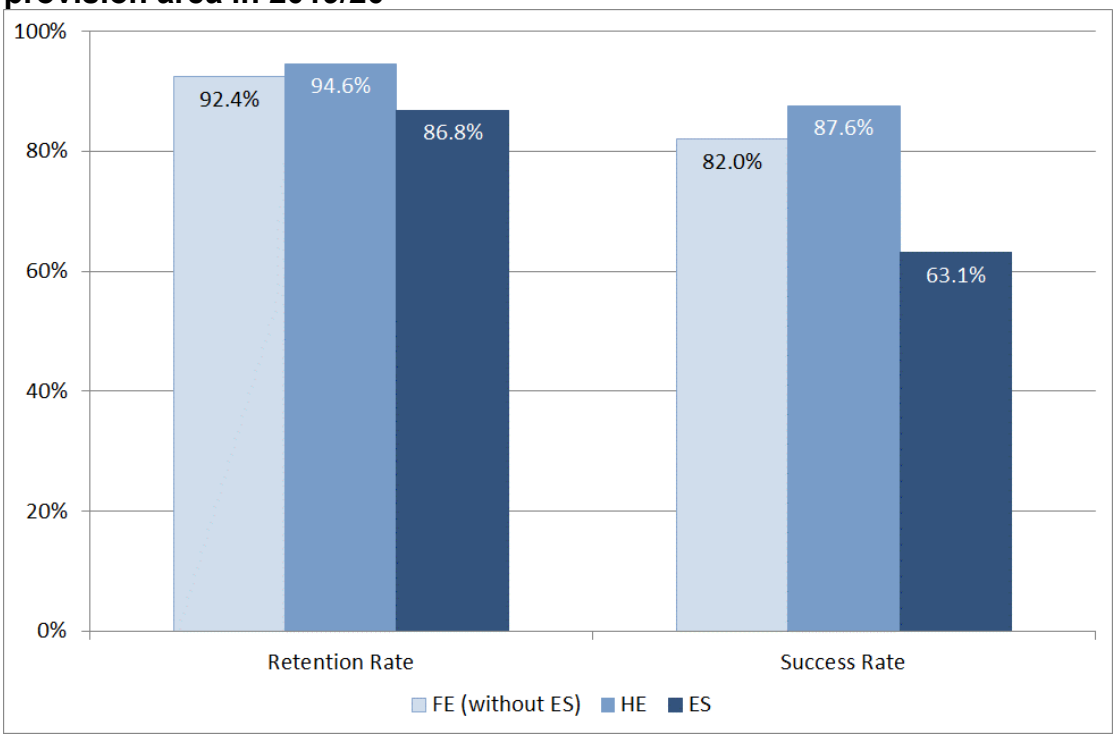
In 2019/20, within the FE Colleges, HE students were more likely than Further Education (FE) or Essential Skills (ES) students to complete their courses. The retention rates across the three main provision areas were 94.6% for HE, 92.4% for FE and 86.8% for ES regulated enrolments (Figure 32, Table A34).

Within FE provision, retention rates ranged from 91.6% in NWRC to 93.1% in SERC, while those for HE provision ranged from 91.7% in SERC to 97.0% in BMC. Retention rates within ES provision ranged from 81.3% in SERC to 89.3% in SWC. In five of the six colleges, the highest retention rate was within HE provision. The exception was SERC, where the highest retention rate was in FE (93.1%) (Table A34).

Success rate

Within the FE Sector, higher proportions of people stayed on and achieved qualifications within HE than in either FE or ES; the respective success rates in 2019/20 were 87.6% for HE, 82.0% for FE and 63.1% for ES (Figure 32, Table A34).

Figure 32: Performance rates of final year regulated enrolments by provision area in 2019/20



In 2019/20, success rates within FE provision ranged from 77.3% in NRC to 86.4% in SERC, while those for HE provision ranged from 81.8% in NRC to 90.9% in BMC. Success rates within ES provision ranged from 51.2% in NRC to 70.0% in BMC. In five of the six colleges, the highest success rate was within HE provision. The exception was SERC, where the highest success rate was in FE (86.4%) (Table A34).

Performance by level of study

Retention rate

In 2019/20, the retention rate in FE Colleges increased as the level of study increased, ranging from 89.0% at 'Entry and Level 1' to 94.6% at 'Level 4 and above' (Figure 33, Table A35).

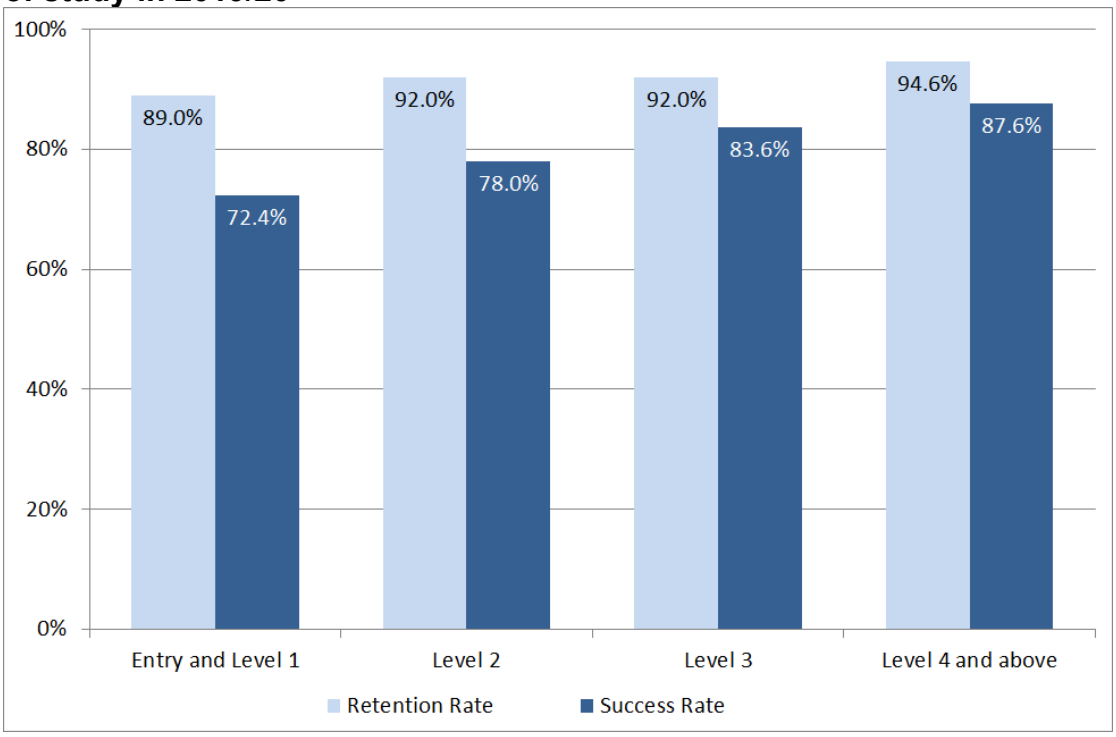
This same pattern of retention rates increasing as the level of study increases generally occurred across all the colleges in 2019/20. In all six colleges, the lowest retention rates were at 'Entry and Level 1', ranging from 86.8% at both SERC and NWRC to 91.0% in SWC. Across all colleges, the highest retention rate was at 'Level 4 and above' in BMC (97.0%) (Table A35).

Success rate

In 2019/20, success rates in FE Colleges increased as the level increased, ranging from 72.4% ('Entry and Level 1') to 87.6% ('Level 4 and above'). Following on from the patterns seen within retention rates, it seems those on higher levels of study are more likely to stay on and achieve in their courses (Figure 33, Table A35).

In four colleges, the lowest success rates in 2019/20 were at 'Entry and Level 1', ranging from 70.8% in NWRC to 75.4% in SERC. Across all colleges, the lowest success rate was at 'Level 2' in NRC (65.3%). In four colleges, the highest success rates were at 'Level 4 and above', with BMC the highest at 90.9%; the exceptions were SERC and NRC, where the highest rates (86.2% and 83.2% respectively) were at 'Level 3' (Table A35).

Figure 33: Performance rates of final year regulated enrolments by level of study in 2019/20



Performance by subject area

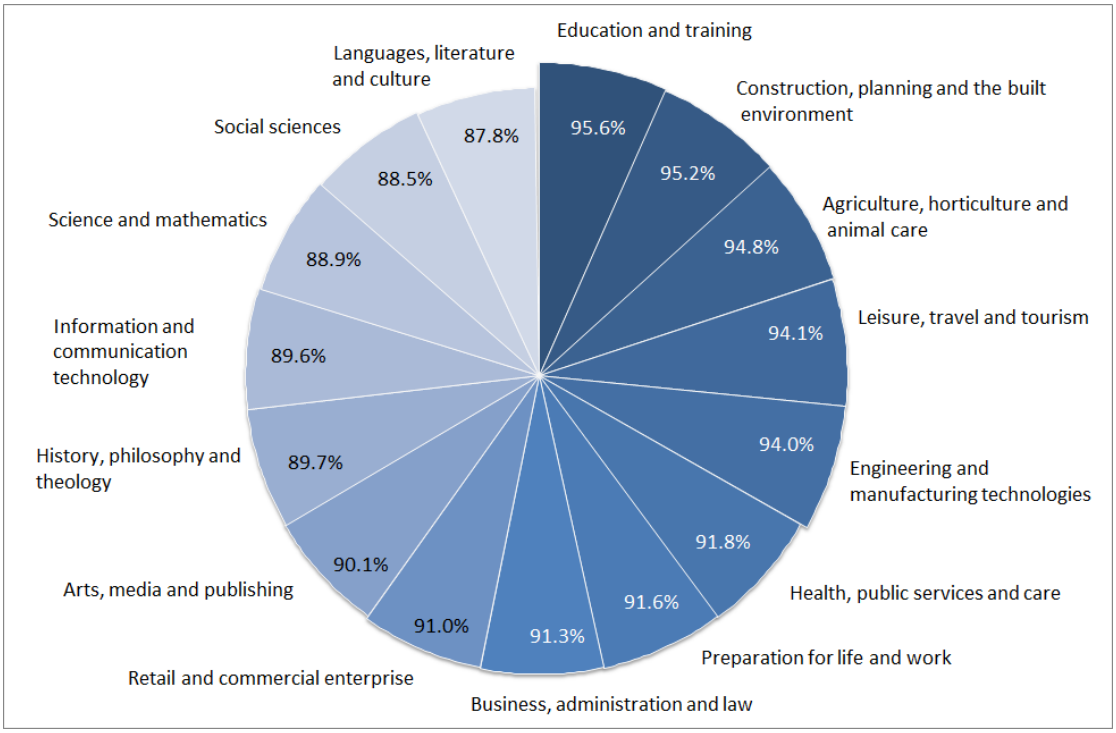
Retention rate

Subject area retention rates ranged from 87.8% in 'Languages, literature and culture' to 95.6% in 'Education and training' in 2019/20 (Figure 34, Table A36).

In 2019/20, the highest retention rates were also in 'Education and training' at SWC (100.0%), NWRC (98.0%) and BMC (97.2%) (Table A36).

Across all colleges, subject area retention rates ranged from 83.9% in 'Science and mathematics' at SERC to 100.0% in 'Education and Training' at SWC (Table A36).

Figure 34: Retention rates of final year regulated enrolments by subject area in 2019/20



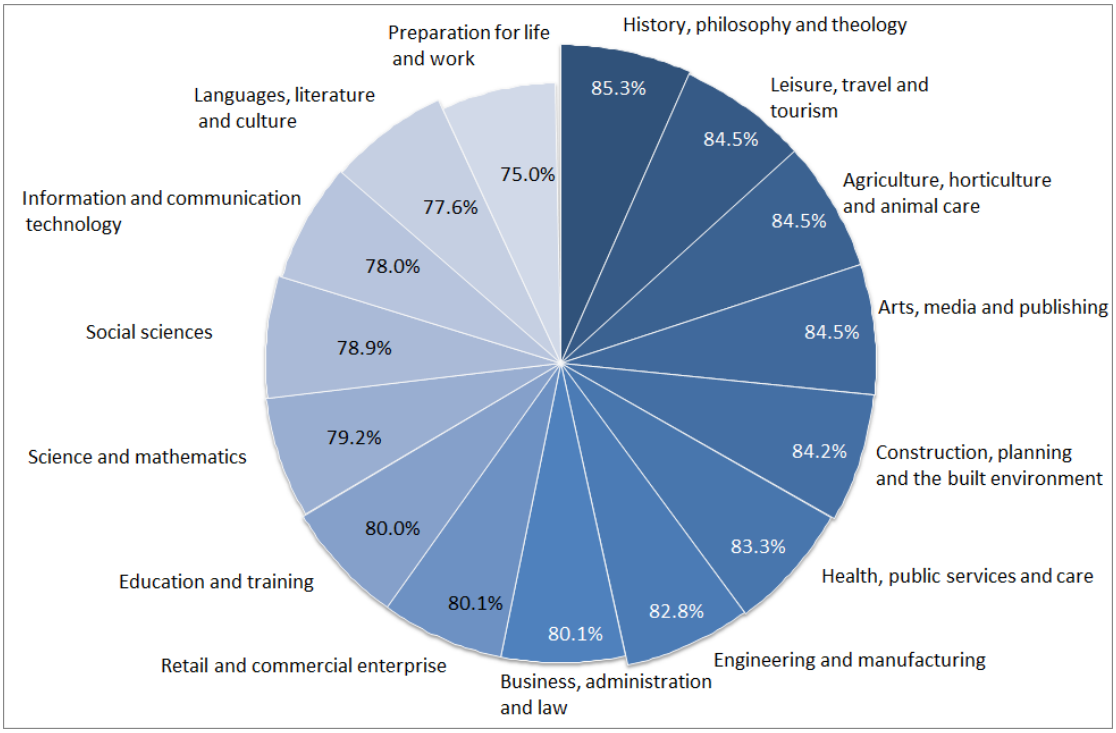
Success rate

In 2019/20, subject area success rates ranged from 75.0% in 'Preparation for life and work' to 85.3% in 'History, philosophy and theology' (Figure 35, Table A36).

Across all colleges, subject area success rates ranged from 62.5% in 'Preparation for life and work' at NRC to 95.2% in 'Construction, planning and the built environment' at BMC (Table A36).

In SERC (91.6%) and NWRC (91.1%), the highest success rates were in the subject area, 'Engineering and manufacturing technologies'. In NRC (94.5%) and SWC (94.1%), the highest success rates were in 'Agriculture, horticulture and animal care', whereas this subject had the lowest success rate in SERC (78.3%) (Table A36).

Figure 35: Success rates of final year regulated enrolments by subject area in 2019/20



Performance by STEM

Retention rate

In 2019/20, the FE Sector retention rate was higher for 'Broad' STEM (92.2%) than those for either 'Narrow' STEM (91.4%) or non-STEM (91.2%) (Figure 36, Table A37).

In comparison with the FE Sector average, three colleges [SWC (94.3%), SRC (94.3%) and NRC (92.4%)] had higher retention rates for 'Broad' STEM in 2019/20. The same three colleges also had above average 'Narrow' STEM retention rates [SWC (93.7%), NWRC (93.4%) and SRC (92.7%)] (Table A37).

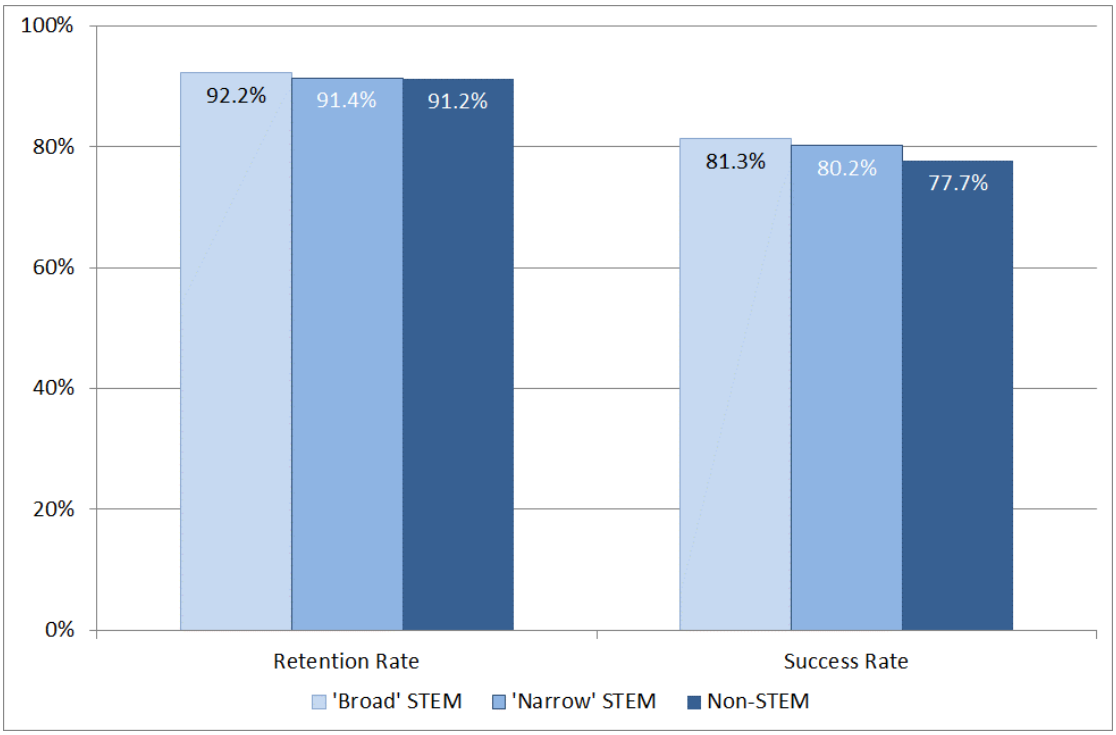
Success rate

The 2019/20 FE Sector success rates for 'Broad' STEM (81.3%) and 'Narrow' STEM (80.2%) were higher than that for non-STEM (77.7%) (Figure 36, Table A37).

NRC's 'Broad' STEM success rate (70.7%) was 10.6 percentage points below the FE Sector average (81.3%) in 2019/20. The equivalent rates for the other five colleges ranged from 80.4% in SWC to 85.1% in SERC (Table A37).

In 2019/20, success rates in 'Narrow' STEM by college ranged from 62.3% in NRC to 85.0% in SERC (Table A37).

Figure 36: Performance rates of final year regulated enrolments by STEM indicators in 2019/20



Performance by deprivation quintile

Retention rate

Across the FE Sector, 2019/20 retention rates were higher for less deprived areas; ranging from 89.5% for the most deprived quintile (Quintile 1) to 93.2% for the least deprived quintile (Quintile 5) (Figure 37, Table A38).

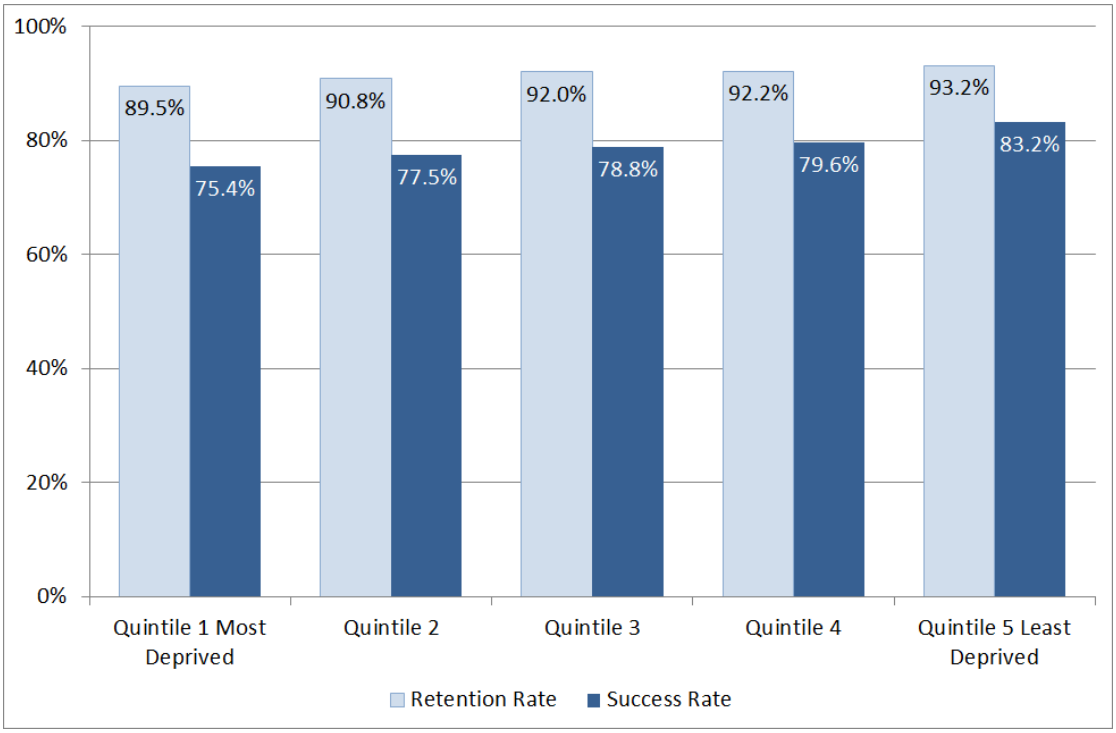
In 2019/20, final year enrolments from Quintile 5 had the highest retention rates at three colleges (94.5% in NRC, 93.3% in BMC and 92.9% in SERC). The highest retention rates in NWRC (94.0%), SRC (93.7%) and SWC (92.7%) related to Quintile 3 (Table A38).

Success rate

In 2019/20, success rates in the FE Sector ranged upwards from 75.4% for final year enrolments from Quintile 1 to 83.2% for those from Quintile 5 (Figure 37, Table A38).

Across the colleges, the success rate ranged from 66.7% in Quintile 2 at NRC to 85.6% in Quintile 5 at SERC. NWRC had the widest range (14.2 percentage points) between quintiles with the lowest and highest success rates [Quintile 5 (70.0%) and Quintile 3 (84.2%)] (Table A38).

Figure 37: Performance rates of final year regulated enrolments of Northern Ireland domiciled students by relative deprivation quintile in 2019/20



Please note enrolments with unknown or invalid postcodes are not reflected in the chart and are excluded from Table A38.

Section 5: Students

Background

The analysis in this section relates to activity with regard to all FE Sector students, those enrolled on regulated and higher education courses and the qualifications they have achieved. This analysis has been produced in response to feedback received from the FE Activity readership survey we conducted in September 2019. Initially, we published a factsheet covering student activity for the period 2014/15 to 2018/19; however, it is now our intention to incorporate this analysis into this bulletin. In addition to the tables below, further Annex tables relating to students are listed in this publication's contents and can be found alongside this document on the website.

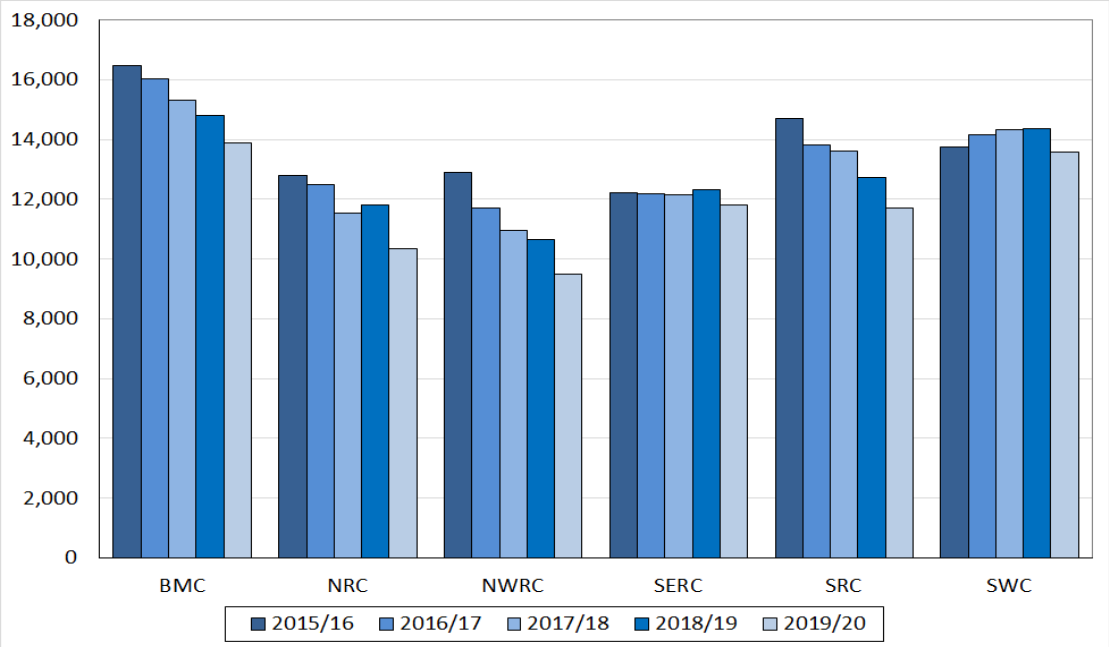
5.1. All students enrolled

Table 6: All students enrolled by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

	Academic Year				
FE College	**2015/16**	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**
BMC	16,466	16,042	15,321	14,812	13,882
NRC	12,785	12,497	11,540	11,795	10,350
NWRC	12,889	11,715	10,960	10,641	9,507
SERC	12,227	12,197	12,166	12,305	11,815
SRC	14,702	13,803	13,599	12,737	11,720
SWC	13,749	14,147	14,328	14,380	13,573
FE Sector Total	**82,818**	**80,401**	**77,914**	**76,670**	**70,847**

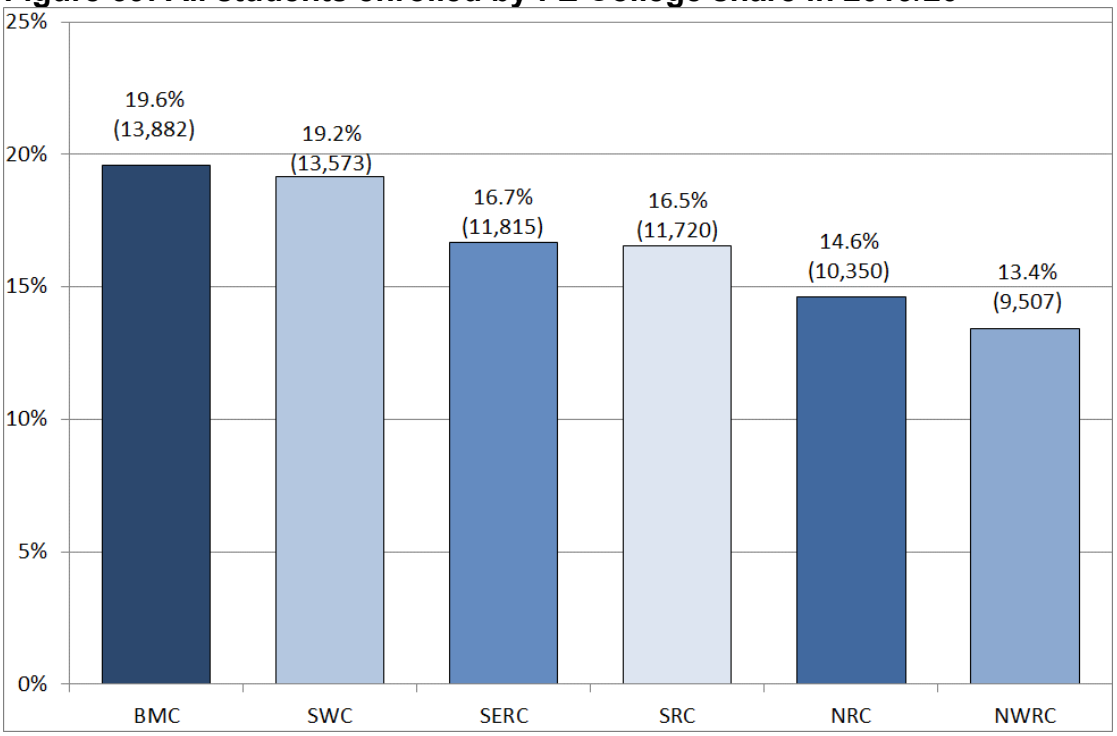
The number of students enrolled at FE Colleges has decreased by 14.5%, from 82,818 in 2015/16 to 70,847 in 2019/20; this includes a 7.6% fall on 2018/19 (76,670), partly linked to COVID-19. Medium-term factors include fewer part-time students, in particular those aged 25 and over, improved school exam performance and a 'demographic dip' in 16-19-year-olds (Figure 38, Table 6).

Figure 38: All students enrolled by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)



Since 2015/16, student numbers have decreased in net terms at all six FE Colleges. Over this period, the largest net percentage decrease has occurred at NWRC (26.2%), from 12,889 in 2015/16 to 9,507 in 2019/20, while the smallest decrease has been at SWC (1.3%), from 13,749 to 13,573 (Figure 38, Table 6).

Figure 39: All students enrolled by FE College share in 2019/20



In the most recent academic year (2019/20), BMC had the highest share of the 70,847 students, accounting for 19.6% (13,882), and NWRC the lowest, with 13.4% (9,507) (Figure 39, Table 6).

5.2. All students enrolled by regulated status

Table 7: All students enrolled at FE Colleges by regulated status and age band (2015/16 to 2019/20)

Regulated Status	Age Band	Academic Year				
		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Non-regulated	19 and under	2,723	4,087	4,609	5,173	4,832
	20-24	925	924	993	1,152	956
	25 and over	8,838	7,935	8,275	8,807	7,672
	Unknown	110	111	111	481	202
	Total	**12,596**	**13,057**	**13,988**	**15,613**	**13,662**
Regulated	19 and under	33,504	32,165	30,922	29,334	28,290
	20-24	10,350	9,927	9,487	9,128	8,940
	25 and over	26,341	25,245	23,510	22,593	19,954
	Unknown	27	7	7	2	1
	Total	**70,222**	**67,344**	**63,926**	**61,057**	**57,185**
FE Sector Total	**19 and under**	**36,227**	**36,252**	**35,531**	**34,507**	**33,122**
	20-24	**11,275**	**10,851**	**10,480**	**10,280**	**9,896**
	25 and over	**35,179**	**33,180**	**31,785**	**31,400**	**27,626**
	Unknown	**137**	**118**	**118**	**483**	**203**
	Total	**82,818**	**80,401**	**77,914**	**76,670**	**70,847**

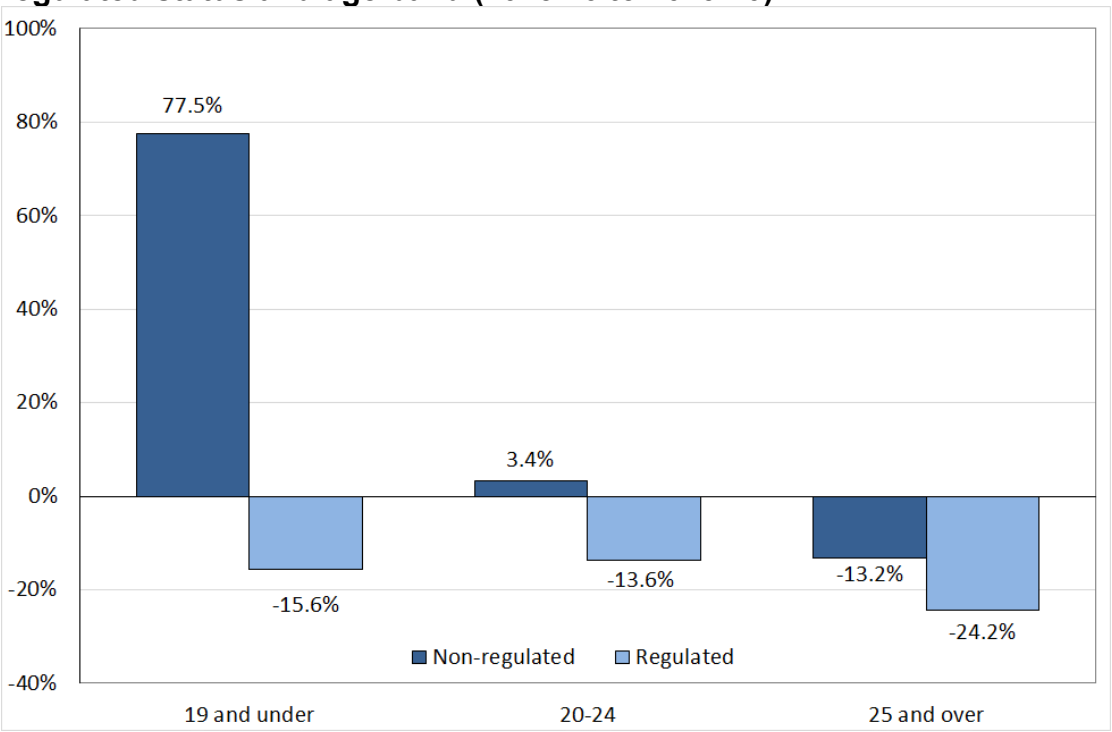
The number of students solely enrolled on non-regulated courses at FE Colleges has increased by a net 8.5%, from 12,596 in 2015/16 to 13,662 in 2019/20. Over the same period, the number of students enrolled on regulated courses at FE Colleges has decreased by 18.6%, from 70,222 to 57,185 (Table 7).

Age

The number of students solely enrolled on non-regulated courses and aged '19 and under' has increased by a net 77.5%, from 2,723 in 2015/16 to 4,832 in 2019/20. In contrast, the number of students solely enrolled on non-regulated courses and aged '25 and over' has decreased by a net 13.2%, from 8,838 in 2015/16 to 7,672 in 2019/20 (Figure 40, Table 7).

Since 2015/16, the number of students enrolled on regulated courses has decreased in each of the age bands, ranging from 13.6% in the 20-24 age band to 24.2% among those aged '25 and over' (Figure 40, Table 7).

Figure 40: Net percentage change in students enrolled at FE Colleges by regulated status and age band (2015/16 to 2019/20)

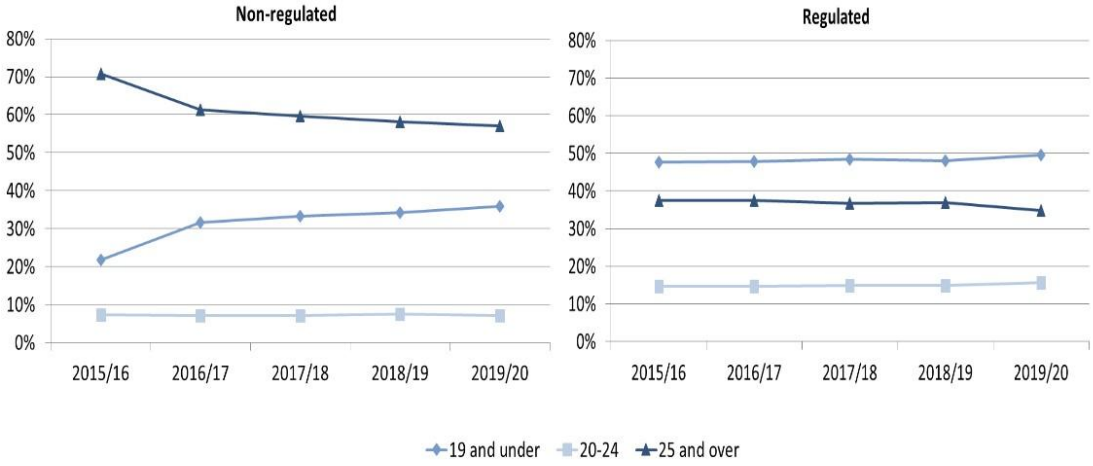


Please note students with unknown ages (<4.0%) are excluded from the chart, but are included in Table 7.

The aged '19 and under' share of students solely enrolled on non-regulated courses has increased year-on-year, from 21.8% in 2015/16 to 35.9% in 2019/20. Conversely, the proportion of those aged '25 and over' has decreased year-on-year, from 70.8% in 2015/16 to 57.0% in 2019/20 (Figure 41, Table 7).

The aged '19 and under' share of students enrolled on regulated courses has increased in net terms, from 47.7% in 2015/16 to 49.5% in 2019/20. Conversely, the proportion of those aged '25 and over' has fallen in net terms over this period, from 37.5% to 34.9% (Figure 41, Table 7).

Figure 41: Proportion of students enrolled at FE Colleges by regulated status and age band (2015/16 to 2019/20)



Please note students with unknown ages (<4.0%) are excluded from the chart, but are included in Table 7.

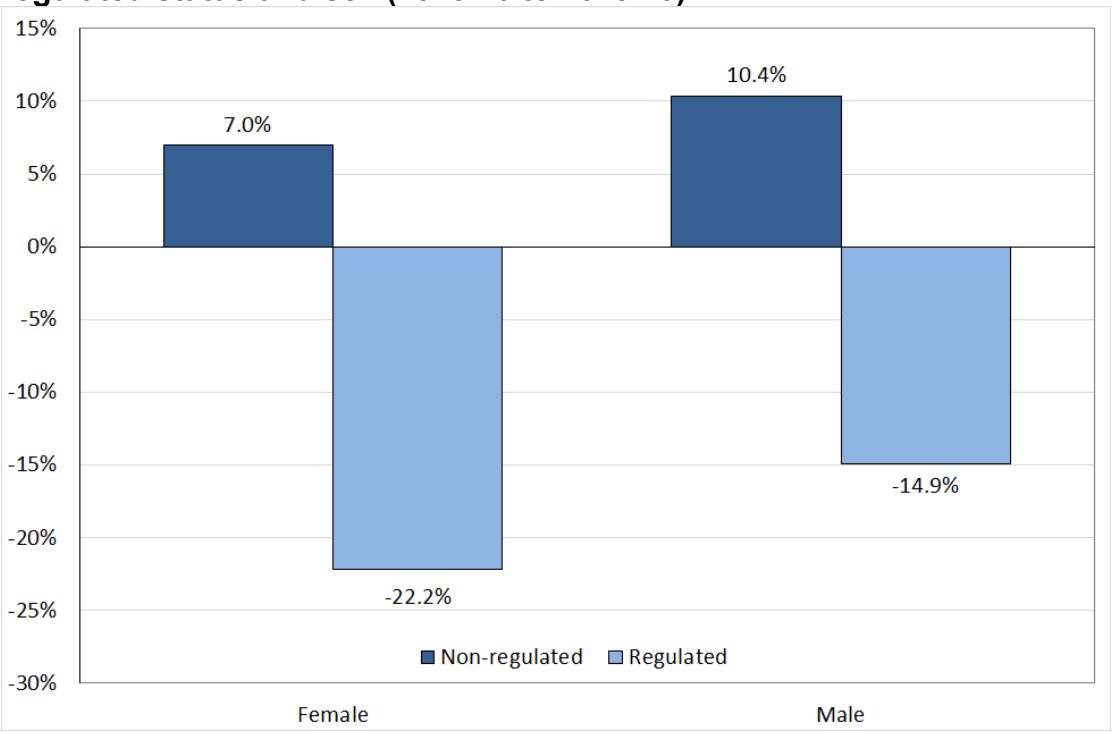
Sex

Table 8: All students enrolled at FE Colleges by regulated status and sex (2015/16 to 2019/20)

Regulated Status	Sex	Academic Year				
		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Non-regulated	Female	7,037	7,103	7,430	8,601	7,527
	Male	5,559	5,954	6,558	7,012	6,135
	Total	**12,596**	**13,057**	**13,988**	**15,613**	**13,662**
Regulated	Female	35,272	33,277	31,747	29,330	27,444
	Male	34,950	34,067	32,179	31,727	29,741
	Total	**70,222**	**67,344**	**63,926**	**61,057**	**57,185**
FE Sector Total	**Female**	**42,309**	**40,380**	**39,177**	**37,931**	**34,971**
	Male	**40,509**	**40,021**	**38,737**	**38,739**	**35,876**
	Total	**82,818**	**80,401**	**77,914**	**76,670**	**70,847**

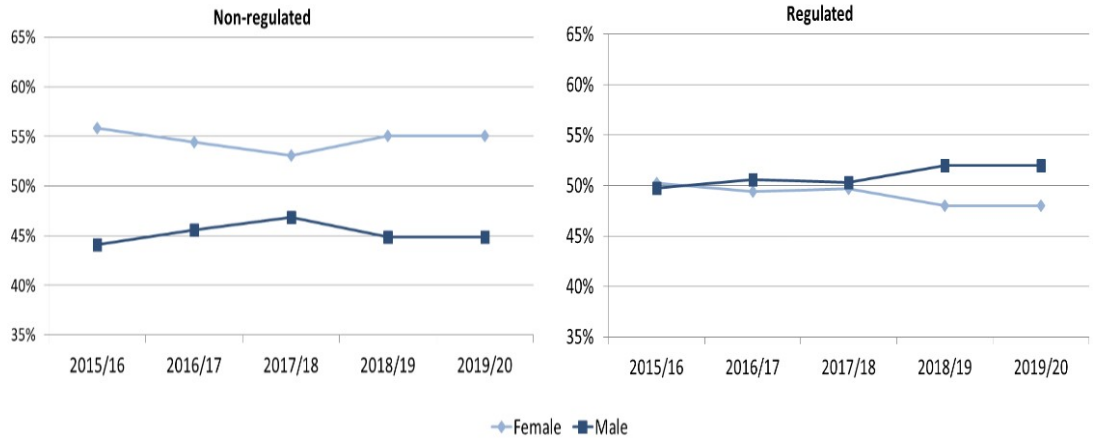
The number of female students solely enrolled on non-regulated courses has increased by a net 7.0%, from 7,037 in 2015/16 to 7,527 in 2019/20. Similarly, the number of male students solely enrolled on non-regulated courses has increased by a net 10.4% over this period, from 5,559 to 6,135 (Figure 42, Table 8).

Figure 42: Net percentage change in students enrolled at FE Colleges by regulated status and sex (2015/16 to 2019/20)



The number of female students enrolled on regulated courses has decreased by 22.2%, from 35,272 in 2015/16 to 27,444 in 2019/20. Over the same period, the number of male students enrolled on regulated courses has decreased by 14.9%, from 34,950 to 29,741 (Figure 42, Table 8).

Figure 43: Proportion of students enrolled at FE Colleges by regulated status and sex (2015/16 to 2019/20)



Between 2015/16 and 2019/20, the female share of students solely enrolled on non-regulated courses reduced from 55.9% to 55.1%; while the male share of those enrolled on regulated courses increased from 49.8% to 52.0% (Figure 43, Table 8).

Mode of attendance

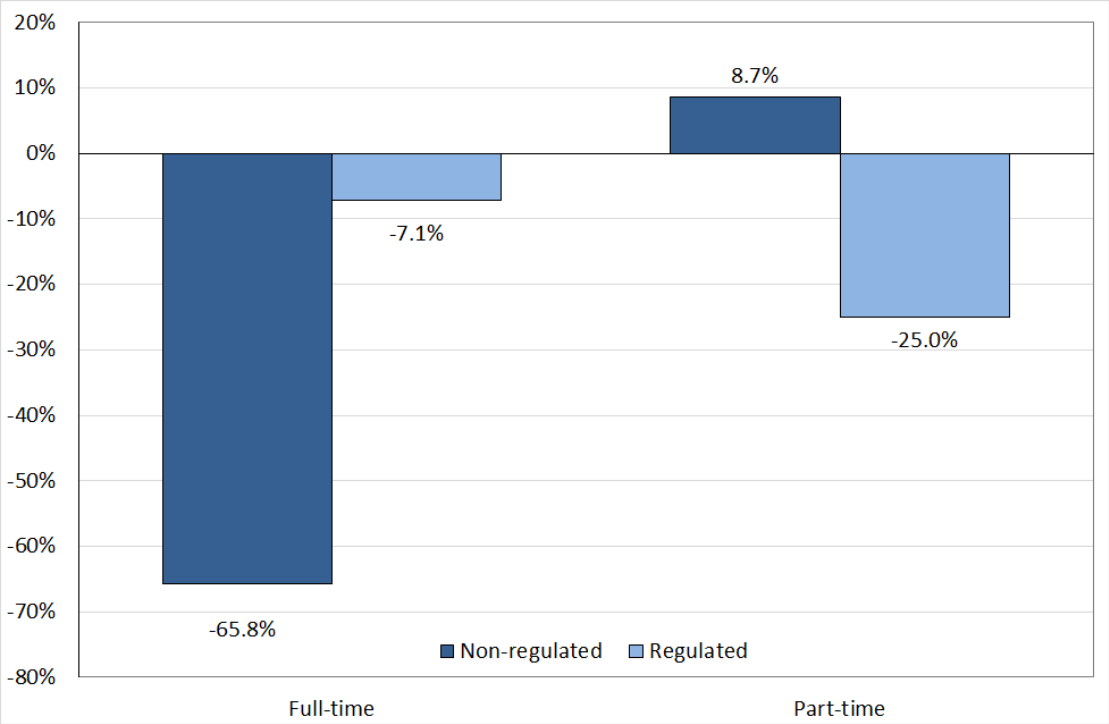
Table 9: All students enrolled at FE Colleges by regulated status and mode of attendance (2015/16 to 2019/20)

Regulated Status	Mode of Attendance	Academic Year				
		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Non-regulated	Full-time	38	19	10	14	13
	Part-time	12,558	13,038	13,978	15,599	13,649
	Total	**12,596**	**13,057**	**13,988**	**15,613**	**13,662**
Regulated	Full-time	25,331	25,407	24,533	23,931	23,524
	Part-time	44,891	41,937	39,393	37,126	33,661
	Total	**70,222**	**67,344**	**63,926**	**61,057**	**57,185**
FE Sector Total	**Full-time**	**25,369**	**25,426**	**24,543**	**23,945**	**23,537**
	Part-time	**57,449**	**54,975**	**53,371**	**52,725**	**47,310**
	Total	**82,818**	**80,401**	**77,914**	**76,670**	**70,847**

The number of part-time students solely enrolled on non-regulated courses has increased by a net 8.7%, from 12,558 in 2015/16 to 13,649 in 2019/20 (Figure 44, Table 9).

The number of full-time students enrolled on regulated courses has decreased by a net 7.1%, from 25,331 in 2015/16 to 23,524 in 2019/20. Over the same period, the number of part-time students enrolled on regulated courses has decreased by 25.0%, from 44,891 to 33,661 (Figure 44, Table 9).

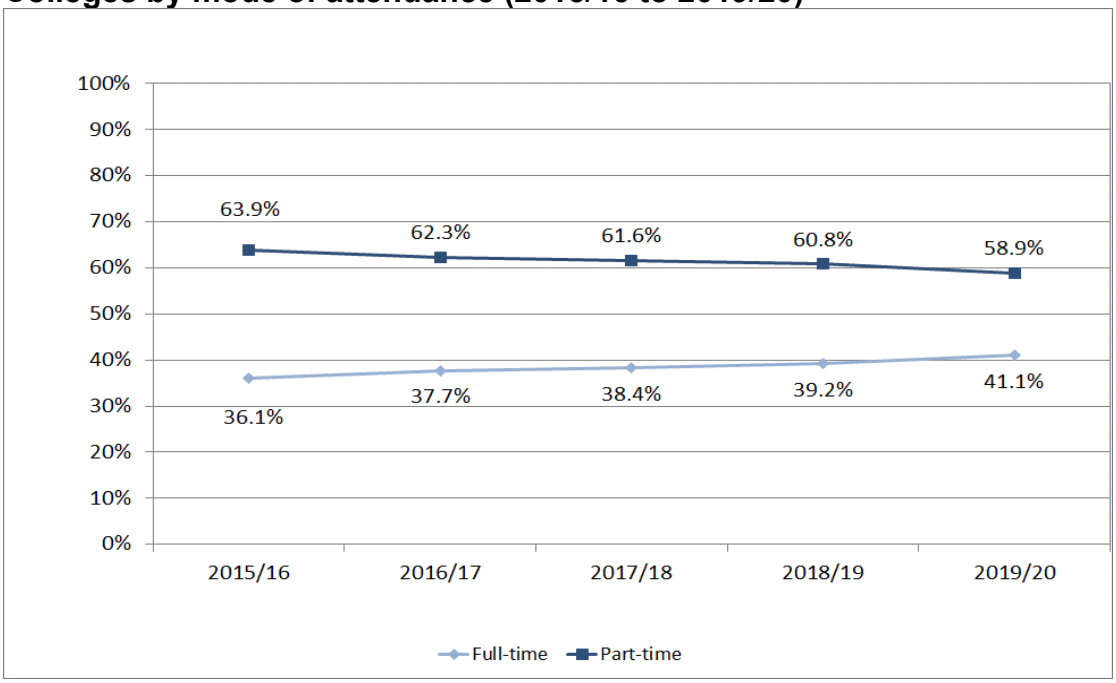
Figure 44: Net percentage change in students enrolled at FE Colleges by regulated status and mode of attendance (2015/16 to 2019/20)



Please note the 65.8% decrease in full-time students on non-regulated courses relates to a decrease of 25 students.

The full-time proportion of students enrolled on regulated courses has been increasing year-on-year, from 36.1% in 2015/16 to 41.1% in 2019/20 (Figure 45, Table 9).

Figure 45: Proportion of students enrolled on regulated courses at FE Colleges by mode of attendance (2015/16 to 2019/20)



5.3 Students enrolled on regulated courses

Table 10: Students enrolled on regulated courses by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

FE College	Academic Year				
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
BMC	15,077	14,629	13,710	13,027	12,567
NRC	10,926	10,238	9,365	9,085	8,349
NWRC	10,668	9,840	9,391	8,921	8,108
SERC	10,858	10,813	10,554	10,457	10,230
SRC	12,359	12,030	11,497	10,710	9,774
SWC	10,334	9,794	9,409	8,857	8,157
FE Sector Total	**70,222**	**67,344**	**63,926**	**61,057**	**57,185**

The number of students enrolled on regulated courses at FE Colleges has decreased by 18.6%, from 70,222 in 2015/16 to 57,185 in 2019/20. Throughout this period, all six colleges have experienced year-on-year numeric decreases, with the largest overall decrease being at SRC (2,585). (Figure 46, Table 10).

The largest percentage decrease has been at NWRC (24.0%), from 10,668 in 2015/16 to 8,108 in 2019/20, while the smallest percentage decrease has been at SERC (5.8%), from 10,858 to 10,230 (Figure 46, Table 10).

Figure 46: Students enrolled on regulated courses by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

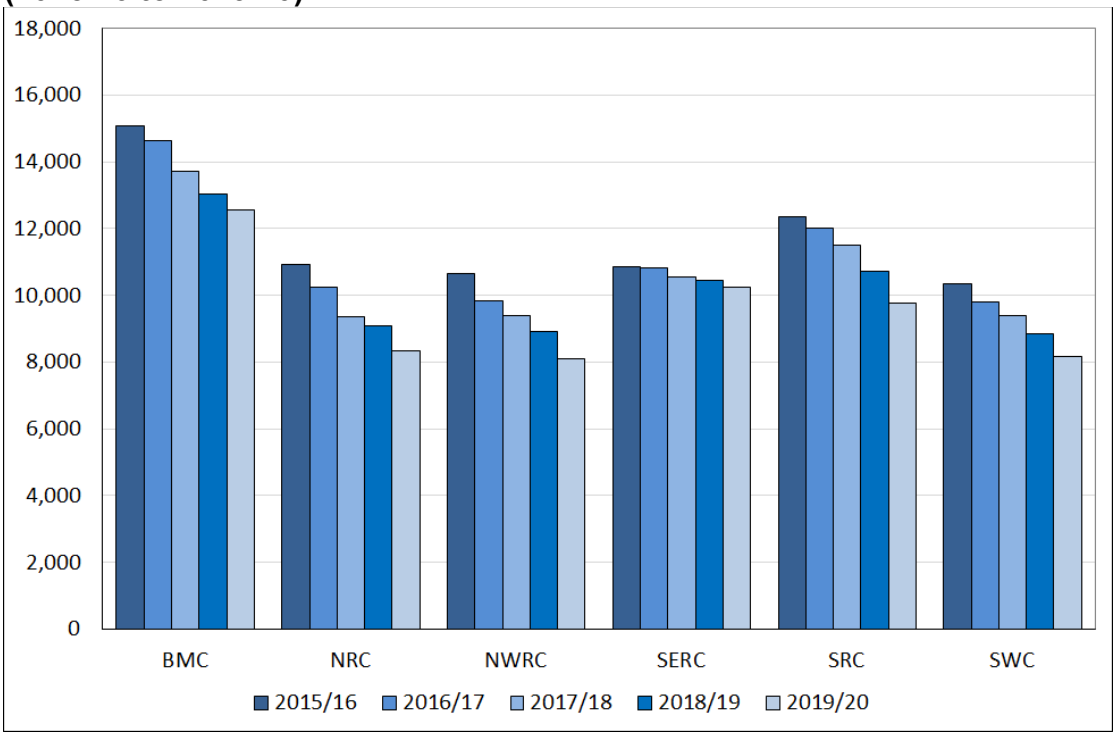
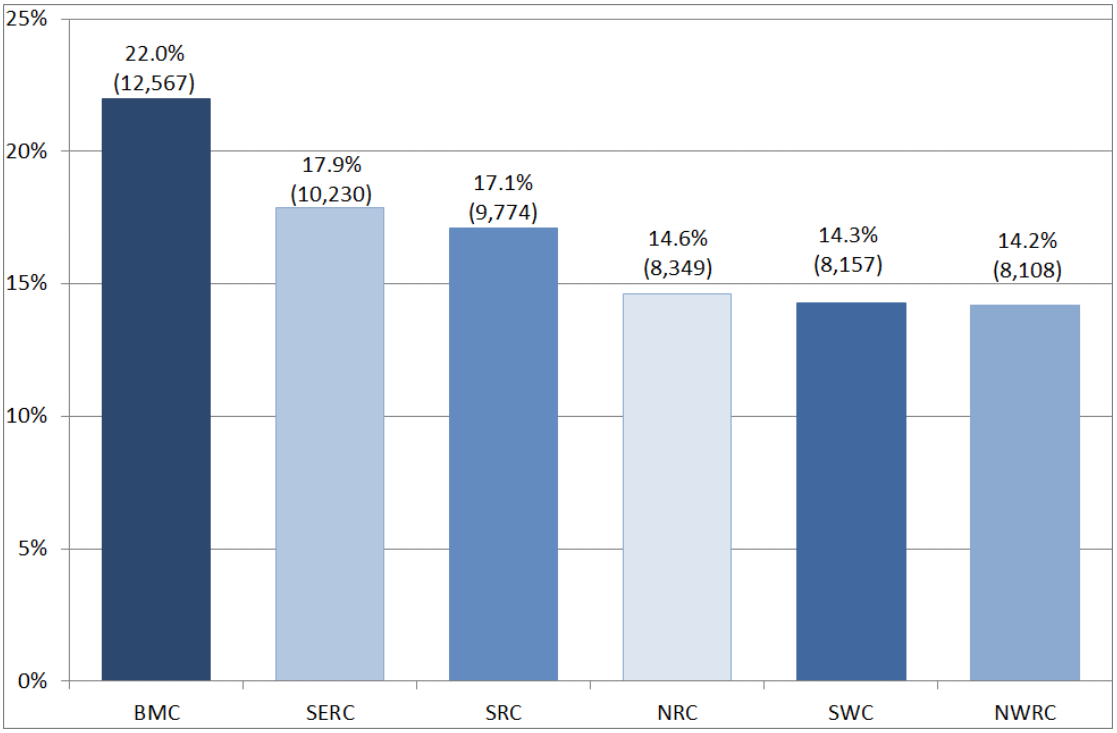


Figure 47: Students enrolled on regulated courses by FE College share in 2019/20



In the most recent academic year (2019/20), BMC had the highest share of the 57,185 students enrolled on regulated courses, accounting for 22.0% (12,567), and NWRC the lowest, with 14.2% (8,108) (Figure 47, Table 10).

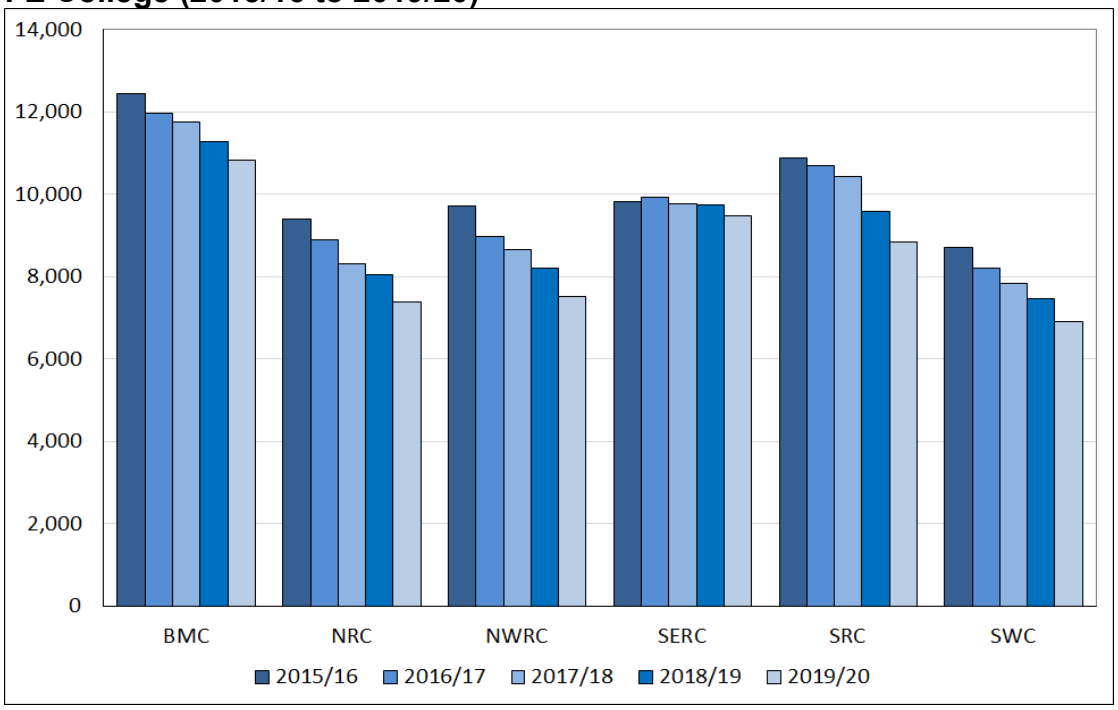
Level 2 or above

Table 11: Students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

	Academic Year				
FE College	**2015/16**	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**
BMC	12,437	11,978	11,767	11,268	10,832
NRC	9,399	8,899	8,314	8,044	7,390
NWRC	9,722	8,982	8,665	8,210	7,524
SERC	9,820	9,919	9,760	9,742	9,485
SRC	10,881	10,688	10,438	9,582	8,847
SWC	8,721	8,194	7,837	7,472	6,922
FE Sector Total	**60,980**	**58,660**	**56,781**	**54,318**	**51,000**

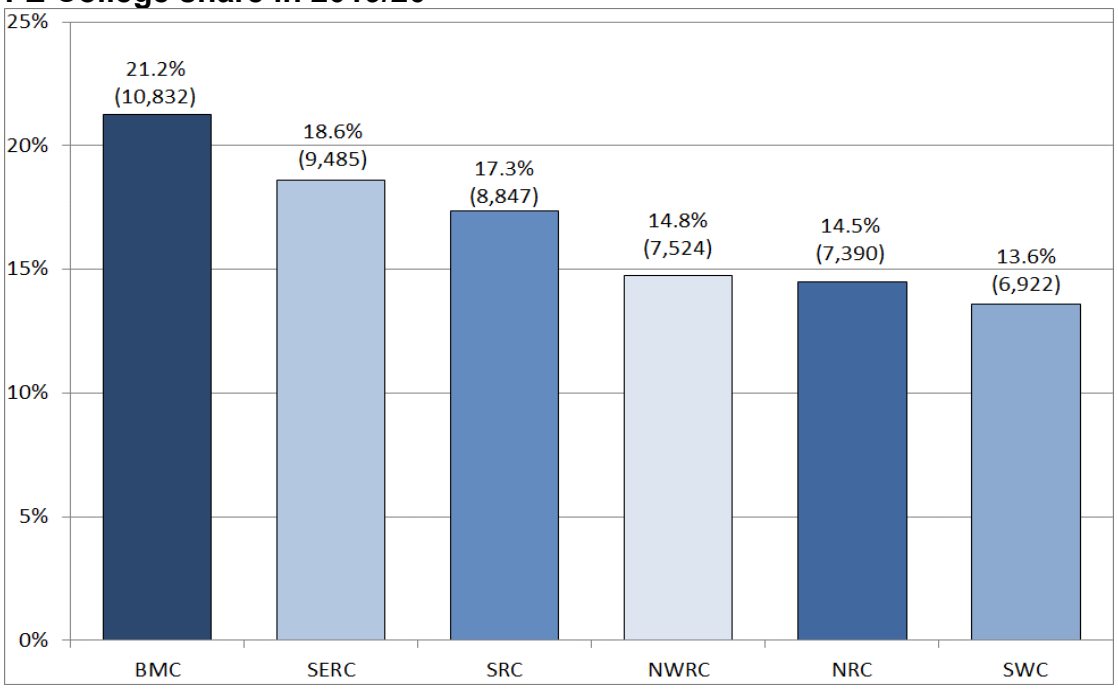
The number of students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above at FE Colleges has decreased by 16.4%, from 60,980 in 2015/16 to 51,000 in 2019/20. All six colleges have experienced numeric decreases over this period, with the largest being at NWRC (2,198) and SRC (2,034) (Figure 48, Table 11).

Figure 48: Students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)



NWRC has experienced the largest net percentage decrease in students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above (22.6%), from 9,722 in 2015/16 to 7,524 in 2019/20. Over the same period, the smallest decrease has been at SERC (3.4%), from 9,820 to 9,485 (Figure 48, Table 11).

Figure 49: Students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above by FE College share in 2019/20



In the most recent academic year (2019/20), BMC had the highest share of the 51,000 students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above, accounting for 21.2% (10,832), and SWC the lowest, with 13.6% (6,922) (Figure 49, Table 11).

5.4 Students enrolled on Higher Education courses

Table 12: Students enrolled on Higher Education courses by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

FE College	Academic Year				
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
BMC	3,148	3,121	3,084	2,953	2,864
NRC	1,476	1,382	1,284	1,161	1,136
NWRC	1,528	1,504	1,439	1,217	1,074
SERC	1,469	1,509	1,427	1,465	1,557
SRC	1,670	1,571	1,552	1,513	1,463
SWC	1,705	1,615	1,623	1,556	1,602
FE Sector Total	**10,996**	**10,702**	**10,409**	**9,865**	**9,696**

The number of students enrolled on Higher Education courses at FE Colleges has decreased by 11.8%, from 10,996 in 2015/16 to 9,696 in 2019/20. Over this period, five colleges experienced net decreases, with the largest overall decrease being at NWRC (454) (Figure 50, Table 12).

The largest net percentage decrease has been in NWRC (29.7%), from 1,528 in 2015/16 to 1,074 in 2019/20. The only net percentage increase over this period has been at SERC (6.0%), from 1,469 to 1,557 (Figure 50, Table 12).

Figure 50: Students enrolled on Higher Education courses by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

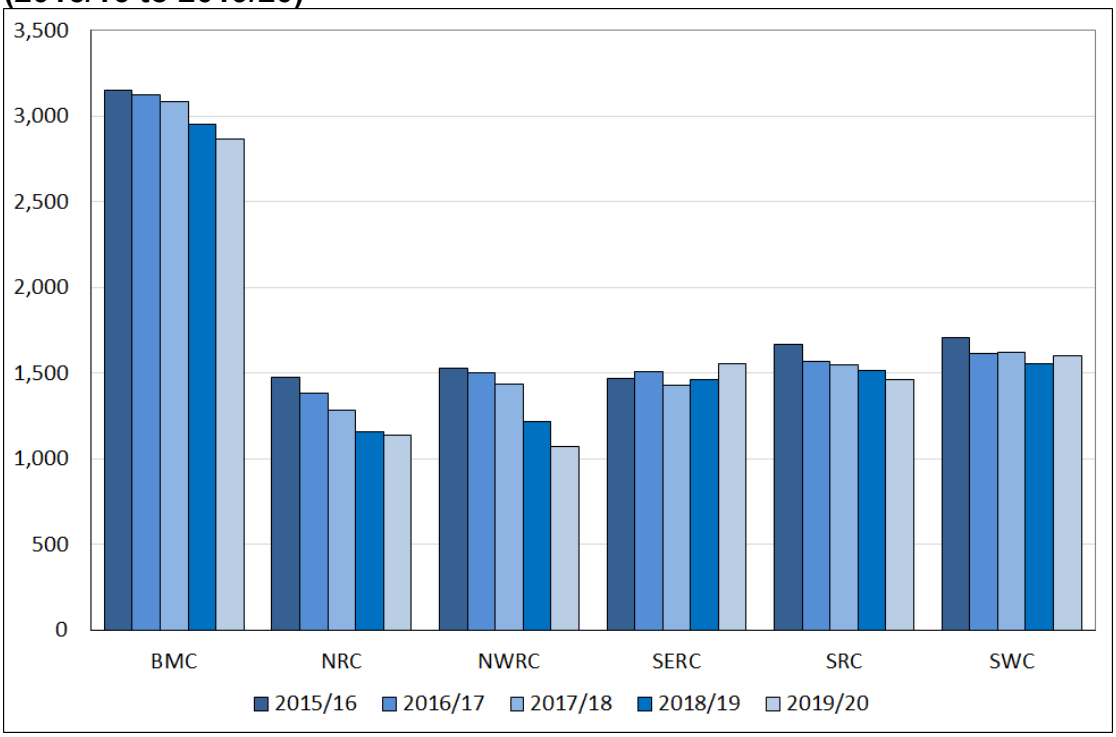
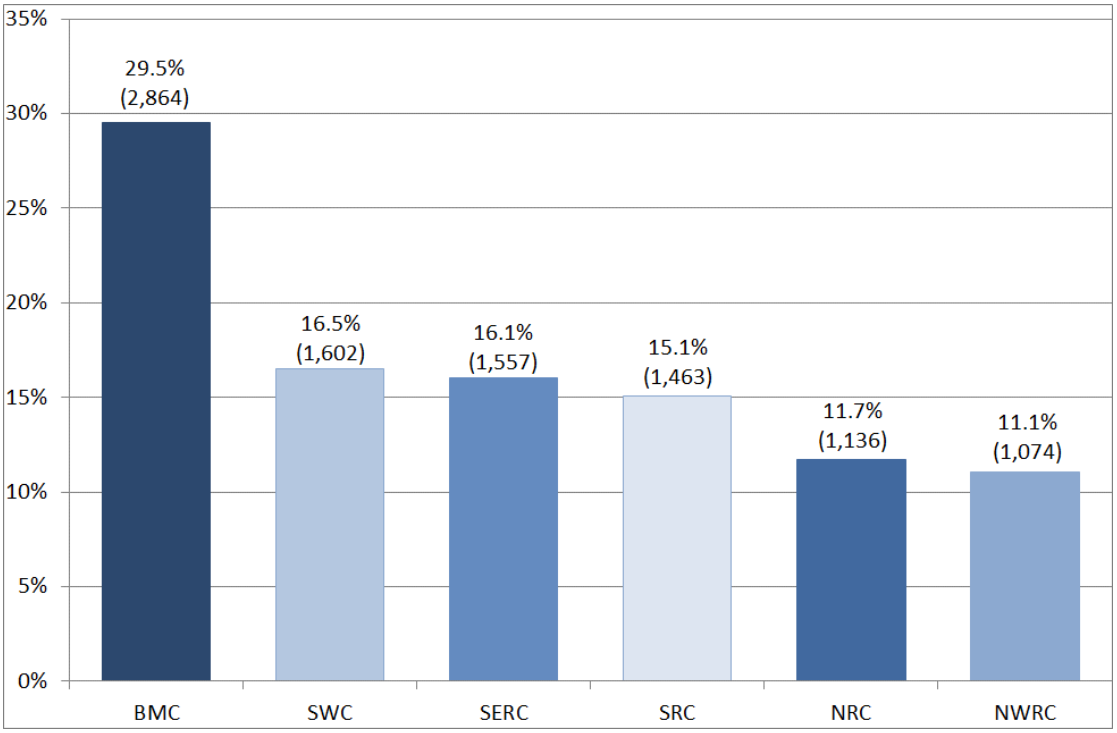


Figure 51: Students enrolled on Higher Education courses by FE College share in 2019/20



In the most recent academic year (2019/20), BMC had the highest share of the 9,696 students enrolled on Higher Education courses, accounting for 29.5% (2,864), and NWRC the lowest, with 11.1% (1,074) (Figure 51, Table 12).

5.5. Students achieving regulated qualifications

Table 13: Students achieving regulated qualifications by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

FE College	Academic Year				
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
BMC	11,266	10,996	10,688	10,134	9,062
NRC	7,569	6,699	6,210	5,774	5,227
NWRC	7,580	6,613	6,406	6,164	5,021
SERC	8,387	8,574	8,423	8,276	7,880
SRC	9,614	9,007	9,078	7,971	7,028
SWC	7,266	6,515	6,223	5,784	5,359
FE Sector Total	**51,682**	**48,404**	**47,028**	**44,103**	**39,577**

The number of students achieving regulated qualifications at FE Colleges has decreased by 23.4%, from 51,682 in 2015/16 to 39,577 in 2019/20. All six colleges have experienced numeric decreases over this period, with the largest being at SRC (2,586) and NWRC (2,559) (Figure 52, Table 13).

The largest net percentage decrease has been at NWRC (33.8%), from 7,580 in 2015/16 to 5,021 in 2019/20, while the smallest decrease over this period has been at SERC (6.0%), from 8,387 to 7,880 (Figure 52, Table 13).

Figure 52: Students achieving regulated qualifications by FE College (2015/16 to 2019/20)

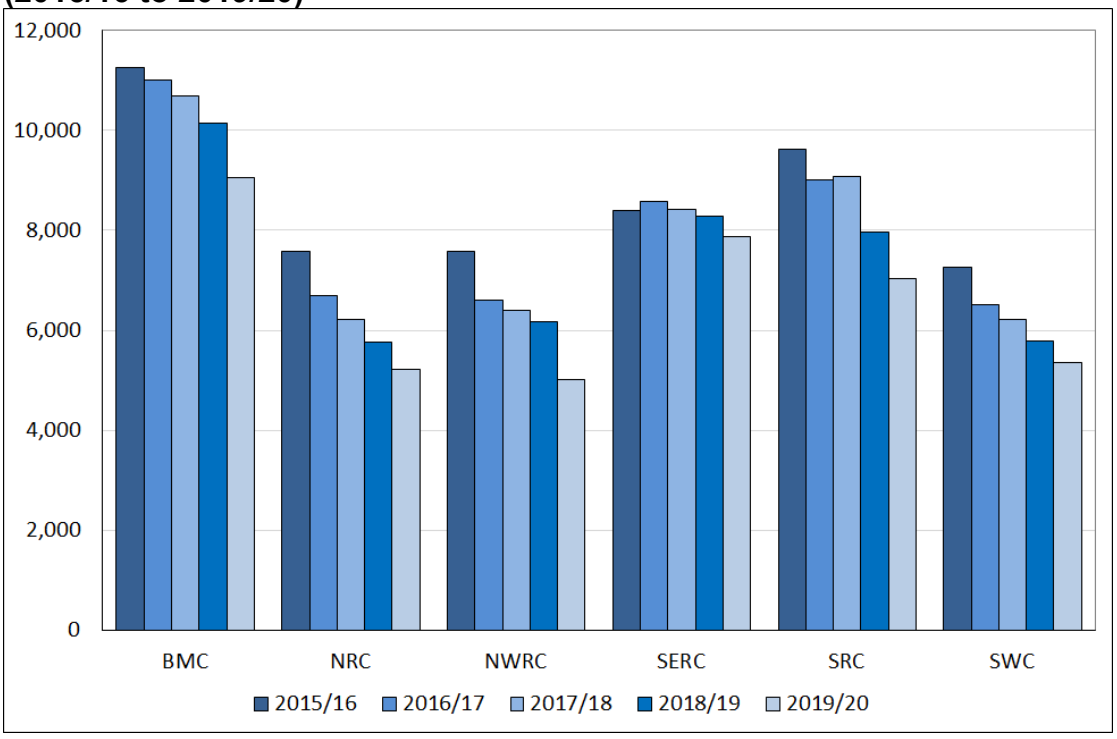
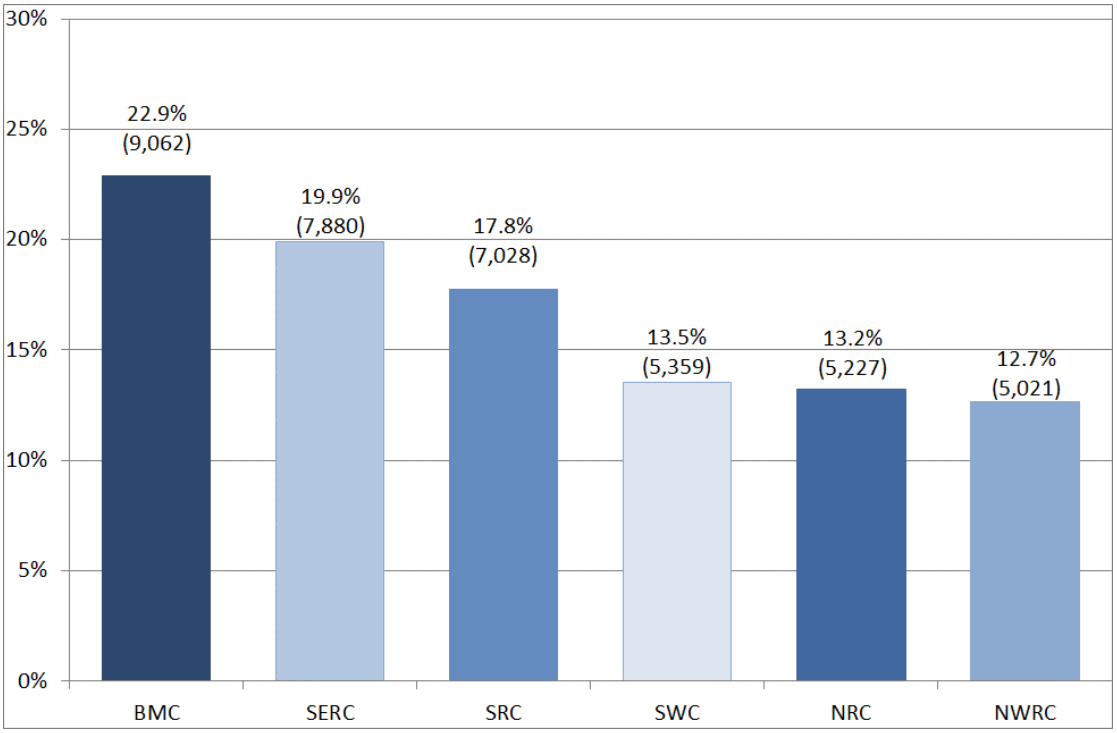


Figure 53: Students achieving regulated qualifications by FE College share in 2019/20



In the most recent academic year (2019/20), BMC had the highest share of the 39,577 students achieving regulated qualifications, accounting for 22.9% (9,062), and NWRC the lowest, with 12.7% (5,021) (Figure 53, Table 13).

Annex A: Definitions

Academic Year
Each academic year period is defined by each FE College and potentially could differ across all six colleges. An academic year traditionally starts in August and finishes in July the following year.

Achievement rate
Achievement rate relates to the percentage of final year regulated enrolments completed by students who achieve a qualification.

Age
Age is at 1st July of the previous academic year, based on the start date of the course.

Deprivation
The analysis presented in the publication utilises 5 groups or quintiles of Super Output Areas (SOAs), based on relative level of deprivation using the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM). Enrolments are assigned to SOAs using the postcodes provided on enrolment records.

On 23rd November 2017, NIMDM 2017 replaced NIMDM 2010 as the official measure of relative deprivation in Northern Ireland. This provides a mechanism for ranking the 890 SOAs from the most deprived (rank 1) to the least deprived (rank 890). Accordingly, SOAs ranked 1 to 178 form the most deprived group relative to all other SOAs (Quintile 1), while those ranked 713 to 890 form the least deprived group (Quintile 5).

The analysis of deprivation quintiles in this publication excludes all unknown or invalid postcodes, including those relating to Republic of Ireland domiciles; thus the charts and Annex tables refer to enrolments of Northern Ireland domiciles and their relative deprivation quintiles.

For further details on deprivation measurement in Northern Ireland, please follow this link:

https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/deprivation/northern-ireland-multiple-deprivation-measure-2017-nimdm2017

Enrolments
Total enrolments are taken to be the sum of all regulated and non-regulated enrolments within FE Colleges during each academic year. The enrolment figures are simply a count of the number of enrolment records within the data return.

Essential Skills
The former Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) launched the Essential Skills for Living Strategy and action plan in April 2002. The Essential Skills for Living Strategy aims to improve adult literacy, numeracy and Information and Communication Technology (ICT)) in Northern Ireland. Essential Skills courses, which are funded by DfE (formerly DEL), are free to participants and delivered by accredited tutors working in FE Colleges, private training providers and community organisations.

Final year enrolments
A student can enrol on a course that is multiple years in length, but will only have the opportunity to achieve within the final year of that course. Enrolments of students on a one year course or in the second year of a two year course are regarded as final year enrolments.

Final year completers
Enrolments of students in their final year of a course who do not withdraw from their course are regarded as final year completers.

Final year achievements
Enrolments of students in their final year of a course who have completed the course and subsequently achieve are regarded as final year achievements.

Funding streams
Several funding streams are available to FE Colleges to deliver provision. These include direct funding from DfE, through a mainstream mechanism or government training programmes, such as Training for Success. Enrolments can also be funded through non-DfE funded provision, such as Entitlement Framework (EF) or Cost Recovery (CR). EF includes Discrete Special Education/Needs. CR can either be public or private. For any further enrolments, the funding stream was classed as 'Other'. These 'Other' enrolments include programmes such as Assured Skills, European Social Fund and Skills Focus.

From 2017/18, government training programmes also include Into Work Training Support, Youth Training (Level 2) and Apprenticeships (Level 3) and Higher Level Apprenticeships.

Further Education College
Please refer to the link below for further detail about FE Colleges in Northern Ireland.

Contextual-Information regarding the FE Sector

Level
If the enrolment is regulated, the level is derived from the Register of Regulated Qualifications (RRQ). If the enrolment is not part of the RRQ, the level is based on the information entered against the enrolment by the FE College.

Each regulated qualification has a level between entry level and Level 8. Qualifications at the same level typically have a similar level of demand or difficulty. The content and size of qualifications at the same level may be quite different.

For further information on comparing qualifications across the UK, RoI and overseas, please refer to the link below:

https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean

Mode of Attendance
Mode of attendance identifies enrolments studying full-time or part-time.

For enrolments from 2013/14:
(a) Full-time enrolments include all enrolments where attendance is:
i. full-time (for at least 15 hours and at least 7 sessions per week, or for more than 21 hours per week, with no sessional requirement);

(b) Part-time enrolments include all enrolments where attendance is:
i. on sandwich courses;
ii. on short courses (single self-contained periods of full-time study of under 4 weeks' duration, within one academic year, which do not have to satisfy the hour and session requirement of (a) above).
iii. part-time day;
iv. block release;
v. evening only;
vi. open/distance learning; or
vii. linked to their attendance at a school on a full-time basis.

Prescribed List of Approved Qualifications (PLAQ)
Access courses and courses included on DfE's PLAQ reside outside those recognised by OFQUAL, but comply with quality criteria specified by the Department. DfE has granted all such qualifications the same status as those qualifications on the OFQUAL register for the purposes of funding and performance measurement.

Provision Area
For the purposes of this analysis, the three Provision Areas are Further Education, Higher Education and Essential Skills:

- Further Education provision is identified by the qualification aim code and level entered. If the code is 500 or higher and the level is 3 or lower, this indicates that the enrolment is Further Education. This excludes Essential Skills provision, which is identified by the codes 960, 961 or 962.

- Higher Education provision is identified by the qualification aim and level entered. If the code is lower than 500 and the level is 4 or higher, this indicates that the enrolment is Higher Education.

- Essential Skills provision is identified by the qualification aim entered. If the code is 960, 961 or 962, this indicates that the enrolment is Essential Skills. Only Essential Skills enrolments in FE Colleges are included in this analysis. For further details on all Essential Skills enrolments, please refer to the Essential Skills publications at:

- https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/essential-skills-enrolments-and-outcomes

Qualifications
Qualifications are counted for those final year enrolments in regulated courses at FE Colleges. An individual can fully achieve, partially achieve or fail their qualification.

The underlying principle is that full achievement and partial achievement should be measured against the programme of study on which a student is enrolled, for example, what is agreed in the learner's Individual Learning Programme. Therefore, full and partial achievements are defined as:

- Full achievement will be recorded when those enrolling on a full qualification achieve that qualification, and when those enrolling on a part/unit of a qualification achieve that part/unit.

- Partial achievement should be recorded when the qualification for which a student has enrolled has not been achieved in full and either: (a) a student achieves a certified component of the intended qualification, for example, a Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) Award instead of a QCF Certificate, or a QCF Certificate instead of a QCF Diploma; or (b) a student does not achieve a certified component of the intended qualification, but still achieves 50% or more of the intended qualification, for example, 50% or more of the QCF units. It should be noted that 50% or more of QCF qualifications is based on units achieved and not on credits; even though credits would be a more accurate measure of achievement, credit information is not readily available to colleges from the examination results provided by awarding organisations.

Regulated
From academic year 2013/14, only those courses on the Register of Regulated Qualifications (RRQ) or DfE's Prescribed List of Approved Non NQF/QCF Qualification (PLAQ) list (for Level 3 and below), or are Higher Education (HE) in FE courses (Level 4 and above), will be deemed as 'regulated' by the Department. Anything that falls outside this definition is not considered as 'regulated', regardless of whether it is considered to produce 'outcomes', for example, internal college certification.

The term 'regulated' is comparable with the previous figures for Professional and Technical used in publications covering years prior to 2013/14.

As students can be enrolled in multiple courses, the same individual can have enrolments in regulated and non-regulated courses within the one academic year.

Retention rate
Retention rate is defined as the percentage of final year regulated enrolments completed by students. Since 2012/13, those who complete their course early (and recorded in the data as a withdrawal) and who have subsequently achieved their programme of study qualification have been regarded as a 'completer'.

The number of non-withdrawals includes any enrolments that have not been classified as a withdrawal, namely those options within Course Status - 'Continuing', 'Completed' or the status is unknown.

Sector Subject Area
The Sector Subject Area (SSA) code is derived from the OFQUAL Register of Regulated Qualifications, which is based on the qualification or unit code. The SSA code registered against each qualification or unit has been assigned by the responsible awarding organisation. The SSAs were developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Department for Education and Skills (Wales), along with other key educational bodies according to industry sector and academic subject area. They aim to allow more consistent reporting of data across the UK.

Further information on SSAs is available at:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/www.ofqual.gov.uk/research-and-statistics/statistics/429-sector-subject-area-classification-system-ssac

STEM
STEM provision is identified by the subject code entered by the FE College. If the subject code starts with a letter between A and K (that is, Medicine, Dentistry and Allied Subjects; Biological and Physical Sciences; Agriculture; Mathematics and IT; Engineering and Technology; and Architecture, Building and Planning), it is regarded as 'Broad' STEM. 'Narrow' STEM comprises those enrolment records with a subject code starting with a letter C, F, G, H or J (that is, Biological and Physical Sciences; Mathematics and IT; and Engineering and Technology).

Student
The number of students for each academic year has been determined (using Student Reference and FE College as the unique identifier) within the specific academic year period. The total number of students calculated over the entire time period, therefore, does not equal the summation of all individual students' academic years. This is due to the fact an individual student may be enrolled in a number of academic years.

Students on Final Year Enrolments
A student can enrol on a course that is multiple years in length, but will only have the opportunity to achieve within the final year of that course. Students enrolled on a one year course or in the second year of a two year course are regarded as students in final year enrolments.

Success rate
Success rate is recognised as the overall measure of performance, which is the percentage of final year regulated enrolments of students who complete and achieve a qualification.

Annex B: Technical Notes

1. The information presented in this statistical bulletin has been derived from the Consolidated Data Return (CDR), which is provided by FE Colleges.

2. Extensive work has been carried out to develop the CDR, which brings together into a single dataset the five main individual Departmental returns from FE Colleges, namely Mainstream, Further Education Statistical Return (FESR), Essential Skills Enrolment Return (ESER), Entitlement Framework (EF) and Further Education Leavers' Survey (FELS).

3. The CDR came into operation for the 2013/14 academic year. Each of the data returns are computerised data files consisting of individual records for each enrolment recorded by FE Colleges during each academic year.

4. Substantial benefits have been realised from collating all the data requirements of the Department into one single return. Streamlining the production process of data increases the efficiency of the process in generating the data. With extra information now available for each enrolment record, it also increases the potential in terms of analytical ability, while increasing the consistency of analysis across all FE College data. Data quality is also enhanced with data being generated at the same point in time and a substantial number of validations employed on the data through the CDR process.

5. The number of enrolments is simply a count of the number of enrolment records within the relevant data return.

6. The number of individual students for each academic year has been determined (using Student Reference and FE College as the unique identifier) within the specific academic year period.

7. The enrolment information is correct as at 13th November 2020.

8. The SLDD field indicates if a Student has any Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities **and** requires special teaching instruction, for example, taught in a reduced class number, in order to reach their full potential in terms of achieving their learning goals. Students who indicate a learning need on their enrolment form are assessed accordingly by learning support through the student's FE College. For this analysis, a student has been identified, using the SLDD field within the Mainstream return, as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities if the codes '02' (Mainstream - Do require extra support) or '03' (Discrete) are recorded by the FE College. This group of students is funded through the Additional Support Fund (ASF), which is provided to facilitate SLDD students to attend college.

9. A student can also be registered as '04' (Day Centre). This provision is delivered outside of FE College campuses. As no overheads or adjustments are required for these students, they are not included as part of the ASF and, therefore, are excluded from this analysis. Further information is available at: https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/interim-policy-students-learning-difficulties-and-disabilities-sldd-further-education

10. A student can enrol on a course for a matter of weeks (sometimes months) and then transfer to another course. Due to the original course incurring teaching hours and funding, it is included within the overall enrolment count. It is, therefore, a measurable component of enrolment activity actually delivered. The recording of transfers is also important due to particular interest in transferred students and linking this to careers guidance.

11. In terms of outcome, the original enrolment recorded as a transfer will not have any outcome recorded against it and, therefore, the transferred enrolment cannot be measured in terms of performance. Consequently, any enrolments recorded as transfers are excluded from performance analysis and are not included in final year enrolment counts.

12. Full-time provision consists of either: at least 15 hours and at least 7 sessions per week; or more than 21 hours per week, with no sessional requirement. All other mode of attendance options are regarded as part-time.

13. Regulated enrolments relate to courses at 'Level 3 or below' that appear on the Register of Regulated Qualifications (RRQ), which contains qualifications on both the Qualifications and Credit Framework and the National Qualifications Framework or part of the Department's Prescribed List of Approved Qualifications (PLAQ)/Access list) and Higher Education qualifications ('Level 4 and above').

    Non-regulated enrolments are those that potentially lead to a formal qualification (at 'Level 3 or below'), but do not appear on the RRQ, or where a qualification is not expected; typically hobby and leisure or recreational courses.

14. For all enrolments, the Sector Subject Area (SSA) categorisation was revised during 2013/14. Derived from the RRQ, the SSA code registered against each qualification or unit code has been assigned by the responsible awarding organisation. Prior to this, it was derived from the subject code entered by the FE College.

15. Equality related data, such as political opinion, religious belief and sexual orientation, were introduced to the data capture process within FE Colleges in 2013/14. Due mainly to an ongoing large number of 'rather not say' responses, statistics on political opinion are no longer included in the supplementary tables.

16. Since 2013/14, additional dependant categories (older people, disability, no care required) have been added to the data collection process. In previous academic years, only dependant adults and children were recorded (Table S2).

17. Although typically students will attend their local college, a student can attend any FE College across Northern Ireland. 'Hypothetical Regional College Catchment Areas' (HRCCAs) have been created for each of the six colleges to provide information, beyond enrolment data, on all individuals within the catchment area to each college, who may or may not be in contact with the FE College.

18. The HRCCAs were established by merging certain pre-2014 Local Government District (LGD) areas together, based on enrolments over a five academic year period. The FE College with the highest percentage of enrolments from a particular LGD was assigned to that LGD.

19. Analysis has been produced for students enrolled in the categories: - regulated status, age, sex, mode of attendance, provision area, level of study, 'Broad STEM', 'Narrow STEM' and deprivation quintile. Analysis has not been produced with regard to subject area, as one subject area cannot be categorised above another.

20. Where a student has a regulated enrolment and a non-regulated enrolment, the regulated one will be chosen in analysis of students.

21. In a small number of cases, a student has more than one age in the academic year. This can occur where, for example, a student enrols on a course in July 2020, that is, the last month of the 2019/20 academic year. In such a case, the age of the student would be as at 1st July 2020. This student may also have other enrolments from earlier in the 2019/20 academic year. In such cases, the age of the student would be as at 1st July 2019. When considering the student's age, priority is given to the younger age, that is, as at 1st July 2019.

22. Where a student has a full-time enrolment and a part-time enrolment, the full-time one will be chosen in this analysis. Similarly, where a student has achieved a full-time qualification and a part-time qualification, the full-time one will be chosen in this analysis.

23. Where a student has not achieved a qualification at full-time study, but has achieved a qualification at part-time study, this could produce higher numbers of students who have achieved qualifications than the number of students who have enrolled at part-time study.

24. When considering provision area and a student has more than one enrolment, priority is given in the order Higher Education, Further Education and then Essential Skills. Similarly, where a student has achieved more than one qualification, priority is also given in the order Higher Education, Further Education and then Essential Skills.

25. Where a student has more than one enrolment, and thus potentially enrolments at more than one level of study, the higher level of study is chosen in this analysis. Similarly, where a student has achieved more than one qualification, and thus potentially qualifications at more than one level of study, the higher level of study is chosen in this analysis.

26. Where a student has not achieved a qualification in a higher education course, but has achieved a qualification at a lower level of study, this could produce higher numbers of students who have achieved qualifications than the number of students who have enrolled at the lower level of study.

27. A student is categorised as being enrolled in a ‘Broad’ STEM subject if at least one of their enrolments is in a ‘Broad’ STEM course.

28. A student is categorised as being enrolled in a ‘Narrow’ STEM subject if at least one of their enrolments is in a ‘Narrow’ STEM course.

29. The 2019 mid-year population estimates have been examined in terms of the age and sex profile to compare against the profiles within the enrolments of each FE College.

30. Further information on the mid-year population estimates, please visit: http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp17.htm

Further Enquiries

Further details about any of the statistics in this statistical bulletin can be obtained from:

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