



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

College Statistics 2019-20 Executive Summary

SFC Statistics

Issue Date: 26 January 2021

Cover photo credit: Borders College

College Statistics 2019-20 Executive Summary

Issue date: 26 January 2021

Reference: SFC/ST/01/2021

Summary: This publication provides an overview of college sector statistics from 2010-11 to 2019-20. Estimates of student numbers for the 2020-21 session are also provided on an experimental basis.

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

Further information: **Contact:** Danni Tarrant
Job title: Policy/Analysis Officer
Department: Policy, Measurement, and Analysis
Email: dtarrant@sfc.ac.uk

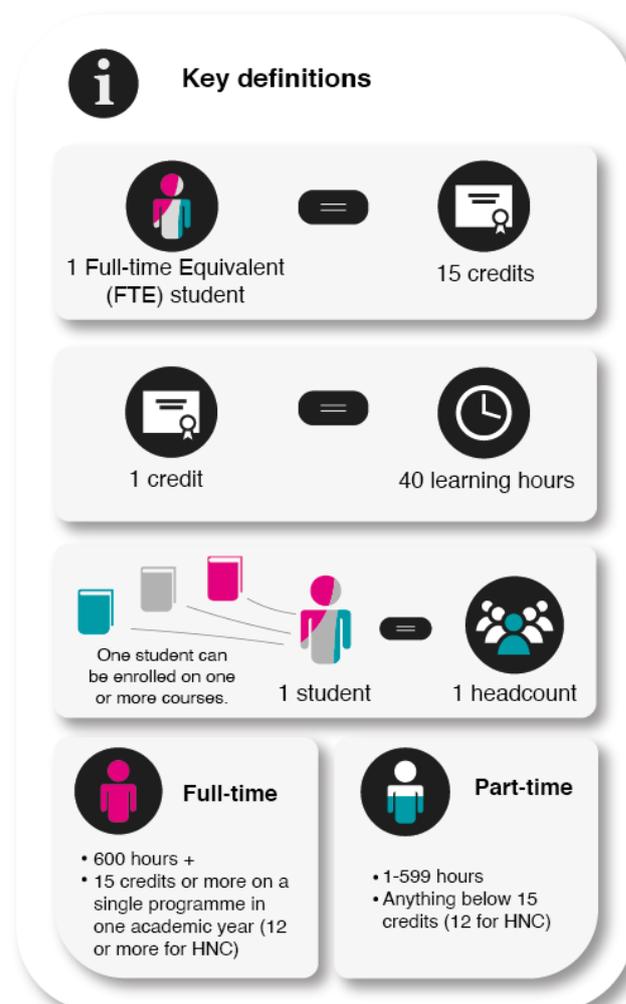
This is an official statistics publication.

All official statistics should comply with the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice to Official Statistics, which promotes the production and dissemination of official statistics that inform decision-making. Find out more about the Code of Practice for Official Statistics at www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/

Executive Summary

1. This report provides a statistical overview of the college sector in Scotland for the academic year 2019-20 and shows how these figures have changed over the last ten years, since 2010-11. In its analysis, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) uses student headcounts, course enrolments, credits and Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) as measures to track student numbers, college activity and the sector's performance towards Scottish Government targets (see Key Definitions box below). The data reported in this publication is collected and quality assured by SFC as part of the Further Education Statistical (FES) return. More information on the FES data collection process can be found on the [SFC website](#). Previous editions of this report, alongside other publications relating to the college sector, can also be found on the [SFC website](#).
2. The reporting period covers the early months of the global COVID-19 crisis which presented a unique and significant external shock to the further and higher education system in Scotland. Colleges pivoted rapidly to move learning online but these unprecedented circumstances presented colleges with particular challenges, notably the ability to deliver practical and work-based learning. Those challenges notwithstanding, colleges adapted quickly, taking swift action to protect staff and students' wellbeing and contribute to the national effort to tackle the virus and support vulnerable communities. However, the ability to enrol new students during this period was more difficult than in previous years.
3. Overall, the number of FTEs in Scotland's colleges in 2019-20 has continued to remain stable exceeding the key FTE target despite the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Enrolments and headcount have decreased this year mainly occurring during the months of April and May due to the national lockdown. This ended the upward trend which began in 2015-16 and continued until 2018-19 for these measures. Most of these enrolments and students were students on courses with lower hours so large downturns did not have a significant impact on overall teaching activity.
4. Colleges will have a shrinking pool of 18-24 year olds until 2024. However from 2021-22 we will begin to see an increase in the number of 18 year olds. The last four academic years have shown that there is a resurgence in part-time FE enrolments and a downward trend in full-time FE enrolments, which points to a returning trend of FE students electing to study part-time rather than on full-time courses.
5. The main findings from this year's report are:

- Despite the COVID-19 pandemic severely limiting enrolment in April and May, the college sector exceeded the Scottish Government’s FTE target by 1,397 FTEs in 2019-20, delivering 117,666 FTEs.
- The total number of 18-19 year-olds in the Scottish population has decreased 13.6% over the last decade and decreased by 2.6% from 2018-19 to 2019-20 alone. However, the participation rate for 18-19 year-olds in the Scottish population attending college full-time has remained stable. In 2019-20, one fifth (20.9%) of 18-19 year olds in the Scottish population attended college full-time. Nonetheless studying at college is just one of the options available to 18-19 year olds, with many choosing to go into work or university. See Figure 10.
- At Further Education (FE) level, full-time FTEs (all funding sources) have remained the same since 2018-19 whilst part-time FTEs have decreased (down 2.7%). At Higher Education (HE) level, full-time FTEs decreased by 1.5% and part-time FTEs decreased by 11.3% since 2018-19. See Figure 2.
- These reductions largely took place during April and May when FTE’s were down 79.1% (1,797 FTE) from 2018-19. Between August and March FTEs were up 0.3% (318 FTE) from 2018-19. See Figure 3.
- Whilst FTEs have remained more stable in recent years, in 2019-20 the total student headcount and number of enrolments decreased by 9.8% and 8.1% respectively from the previous year, returning to similar numbers as in 2017-18. These reductions largely occurred again between April and May. The period between 2017-18 and 2018-19 saw the largest year-to-year increases in the last 10 years. See Figure 4.
- Enrolments on non-recognised qualifications have decreased by 2.5% since 2018-19. Enrolments on courses under 10 hours in duration have decreased by 37.8% since 2018-19. See Figure 6.



Key statistics



302,092

Enrolments to
courses



117,666

FTEs*

1397 above target in 2019-20 



1 in 5 (20.9%)

of 18- to 19-year-olds in the
Scottish population attended
college full-time in 2019-20



239,004

Student headcount

Students may enrol on
multiple courses

* Full-time Equivalent (FTE), funded through the government purse