

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL) first annual survey of leavers from Further Education (FE) Colleges in Northern Ireland (NI). The focus of the survey was to assess the destinations of students and potential benefits of completing and achieving a regulated qualification at an FE College.

Each year thousands of students leave FE colleges across NI having completed and achieved a regulated qualification. Of the leavers who had completed and achieved their regulated qualification in the academic year 2013/14, a random representative sample were invited to take part in a short telephone interview with trained interviewers, approximately six months after leaving a FE College. Questions were asked about how they had heard about their course, their reasons for taking the course, their main activity before their course, their main activity six months after completing their course, and their attitudes towards potential non-economic benefits from their achievement.

Summary of Key Points:

Achievement of a regulated qualification from a FE College facilitates progression into employment...

The percentage who said their main activity was paid or self employment had increased from 38.0% before the FE Course to 47.5% six months after. While most (67.9%) of those FE Leavers now employed were also employed before the FE Course, nearly a quarter (22.5%), started out in some form of learning, 5.7% had been unemployed and 3.8% were classed as 'Other' before they started the FE Course, indicating progression into employment.

... and also progression into further or higher education.

Over a third (34.1%) of FE Leavers were in learning six months after leaving FE. This was a decrease from 42.5% of those in learning prior to the course starting.

While the majority (82.1%) were in some form of learning before the FE Course, nearly a tenth (9.8%) started out in employment, 4.8% from 'other' activities and 3.8% were unemployed before they started the FE Course, the latter groups indicating progression into learning.

Most of the FE Leavers now in learning continued their learning at a FE College (73.3%), while almost one quarter (24.2%) had progressed to university. Of the FE Leavers in further learning, the majority (81.4%) were studying towards a qualification at a higher level than the course completed in 2013/14. The largest group were now studying towards a degree level qualification (30.1%). The majority of FE Leavers in learning (60.4%) said they probably/definitely could not have done their current learning or training without the FE Course they completed and achieved in 2013/14.

For those FE Leavers who were already in employment, there was some progression within the workplace...

The majority (68.8%) of those remained in employment after completing their FE Course stated they were using the skills and knowledge acquired to some extent. This is encouraging as they are utilising skills learned from the FE Course and using it in their job.

In relation to earnings, for those FE Leavers in employment before and after their FE Course, a higher proportion were earning £400 or more a week (21.2%) when compared to those in employment after (16.2%). This would indicate that those already established in the labour markets are starting to progress up the pay bands either through natural increment or potentially from gaining additional qualifications from FE. In addition, nearly a third (30.7%) stated they were on a higher wage than before the course and only 8.4% on a lower wage.

....and additional benefits for those who stayed with the same employer.

Almost two thirds (62.7%) said they were now better at their job, while 39.8% felt they would not have been better at doing their job without the course they completed in 2013/14.

Over a quarter (29.3%) said they did have more responsibilities and of these, nearly half (45.2%) felt they would not have been doing a job with more responsibility without the course they did in 2013/14.

Just over a tenth (12.2%) said they had been promoted and of these, over half (55.3%) felt they would not have been promoted without the course they did in 2013/14.

Irrespective of destination after leaving FE with a regulated qualification, there are positive non-economic benefits to the individual.....

Most FE Leavers (94.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that their course had a positive impact on them. Nearly four-fifths (79.4%) reported that the course they completed had boosted their confidence. Three quarters (74.5%) reported making new friends/meeting new people. Two thirds (66.2%) reported an increase in self-esteem.

Over four-fifths (85.1%) agreed that as a result of completing their course they have become more enthusiastic about learning. Almost three-quarters (71.2%) of respondents agreed that as a result of completing their course they had a better idea of what they wanted to do in their life. Over three-fifths (61.9%) agreed that the course they completed had improved their quality of life.

Over four fifths (85.3%) agreed that as a result of their course they were more likely to undertake further learning and training. Just over three quarters (78.7%) agreed they were more likely to do so at a higher level.

... and would recommend a FE Course to a friend.

Almost all (98.1%) of those in employment after their FE Course said they would recommend completing a further education course to a friend.