

Enrolments at UK Higher Education Institutions: Northern Ireland Analysis 2019/20



This statistical bulletin provides information on the number of Northern Ireland (NI) students enrolled at UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the number of students enrolled at NI HEIs.

Published by: Statistics and Research Branch (Tertiary Education),
Department for the Economy, 39-49 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8FD

Date of Publication: 29 April 2021

Theme: Children, Education and Skills

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Frequency: Annual

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KEY STATISTICS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND DOMICILED ENROLMENTS AT UK HEIs

Enrolments of NI students at UK HEIs have been in a downward trend over the last decade	In 2019/20, 62,500 NI students were enrolled at UK HEIs. This represents a net 4.3% (2,815) decrease from 2010/11 and a net 0.9% (580) decrease from 2018/19 (Tables 1a and 1b).
Most NI students study full-time...	In 2019/20, 73.2% of NI domiciled enrolments were full-time. In comparison with 2018/19, full-time enrolments have decreased by 2.2% (from 46,760 to 45,720) and part-time enrolments have increased by 2.8% (from 16,315 to 16,775). Since 2010/11, full-time enrolments have fallen by a net 0.9% (from 46,145) and part-time enrolments have decreased by a net 12.5% (from 19,170) (Tables 1a, 1b and 1e).
Most NI students study in NI, with the proportion studying in GB decreasing slightly in the last year ...	Of the 62,500 NI domiciled students enrolled at UK HEIs in 2019/20, 73.6% (45,980) were enrolled at NI HEIs (including 6.8% studying locally at the Open University); the proportion studying in GB (26.4%) was slightly lower than the 27.6% enrolled in 2018/19 (Table 1a).
Outside of Northern Ireland, the North West of England and Scotland are the most popular regions for NI students...	The most popular regions for NI students who studied in GB were the North West of England and Scotland, with 5,240 and 3,940 NI students enrolled at HEIs in each region respectively (Table 5a).
Among NI students, more females than males have been progressing into higher education...	Females accounted for 57.7% of NI students enrolled at UK HEIs in 2019/20. A higher proportion of males (74.1%) than females (72.5%) were studying full-time (Tables 3a and 3b).
Fewer NI students are enrolling on undergraduate courses at UK HEIs, but more are enrolling on postgraduate courses...	‘First degree’ enrolments decreased by 1.4%, from 48,185 in 2018/19 to 47,530 in 2019/20 and ‘other undergraduate’ enrolments decreased by 5.9%, from 4,355 to 4,100, while ‘postgraduate’ enrolments increased by 3.2%, from 10,535 to 10,870 (Table 1f).
Over a quarter of NI students are enrolled on Narrow STEM courses...	In 2019/20, 27.1% of NI students at UK HEIs were studying a Narrow STEM related subject and 51.1% a Broad STEM related subject (Table 7a).

KEY STATISTICS FOR ENROLMENTS AT NORTHERN IRELAND HEIs

Student enrolments at NI HEIs increased by 6.9% over the last year, mainly due to enrolments on a new course at Ulster University...	A 6.9% (3,790) increase occurred in the number of student enrolments at NI HEIs between 2018/19 (56,615) and 2019/20 (59,075), the largest annual increase over the last decade. This increase can be explained mainly by a new part-time module introduced by Ulster University for students undertaking the Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE) of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) Test of Competence. Excluding this course results in a smaller (1.9%) increase in total enrolments over the year (Tables 9f and 9g).
Most students enrolled at NI HEIs were studying full-time...	In 2019/20, nearly two thirds (65.1%) of enrolments at NI HEIs were full-time. In comparison with 2018/19, full-time enrolments have increased by 2.4% (from 37,585 to 38,470) and part time enrolments have increased by 16.4% (from 17,705 to 20,605) (Tables 9j and 9k).
Most students at NI HEIs are from NI...	Of the 59,075 students enrolled at NI HEIs in 2019/20, 77.8% were from NI, 5.9% from GB, 3.5% from the Republic of Ireland, 0.6% from other EU countries and 12.1% from non-EU countries (Table 9a).
...however, we have students from a wide range of countries...	In 2019/20, students from 114 different countries throughout the world were enrolled at NI HEIs. The non-EU countries with the most students at NI HEIs were China (1,705), India (1,580) and the Philippines (1,225) (Tables 9d and 9e).
More females than males are enrolling at NI HEIs...	Females accounted for 58.8% of students enrolled at NI HEIs in 2019/20. A higher proportion of males (69.1%) than females (62.3%) were studying full-time (Tables 11a and 11b).
An increase in students on other undergraduate courses at NI HEIs is due to the introduction of a new course...	Between 2018/19 and 2019/20, 'first degree' enrolments increased by 0.5% (from 37,670 to 37,860) and 'postgraduates' increased by 10.3% (from 12,655 to 13,955). Over the same period, 'other undergraduate' enrolments increased by 46.3% (from 4,965 to 7,265), after declining every other year over the last decade. This can be explained by Ulster University's introduction of a part-time module for those completing the NMC's OSCE, which accounts for 2,760 enrolments (Table 9m).
Over a quarter of students at NI HEIs are enrolled on Narrow STEM courses...	In 2019/20, 25.1% of students at NI HEIs were studying a Narrow STEM related subject and 53.3% a Broad STEM related subject (Table 13a).

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), the latter focused on NI HEIs and NI domiciled students in attendance at any UK HEI. The Head of the Branch is the Principal Statistician, Brian French. Information is disseminated through a number of key statistical publications, including: HE enrolments; HE qualifications; FE Sector activity; and Essential Skills enrolments and outcomes.

A detailed list of these publications is available from:

[Higher and Further Education and Training Statistics](#)

Data Collection

The information presented in this statistical bulletin is based on data supplied by HESA, the official agency for the collection of information on publicly funded UK HEIs. It was set up in 1993 following the White Paper 'Higher Education: a new framework', which called for more coherence in HE statistics. In this context, HEIs include all publicly-funded universities. The HESA statistics presented in this bulletin relate to students at UK HEIs and, therefore, do not include HE enrolments at FE colleges in NI or GB, or at institutions in the Republic of Ireland (ROI).

Coverage

This statistical bulletin has been produced by the Department for the Economy (DfE) using data from HESA's [Student record](#) and presents information on HE enrolments of NI domiciled students UK HEIs in the 2019/20 academic year, and by all students at NI HEIs in the same time period. The statistics presented in this bulletin cover a range of topics, including changes over the academic years 2010/11 to 2019/20, mode and level of study, subject of study and classification of first degree.

In 2019/20, HESA made a notable change to its coverage of the data in its [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2019/20](#) release, combining for the first time data submitted by HEI providers to the HESA [Student record](#) and now also that submitted by Alternative Providers to the HESA [Student alternative record](#). An Alternative Provider is any provider of higher education courses, not in direct receipt of recurrent funding from UK funding bodies, not a Further Education college and not registered as 'approved (fee cap)' on the Office for Students (OfS) register. As this coverage change by HESA will require significant changes to our systems and processes to incorporate the new record, this publication retains the old data coverage and we plan to adopt the new data coverage in the 2020/21 bulletin. However, we have provided summary outputs on the number of NI domiciled enrolments at Alternative Providers in 2019/20. More information on the proposed change to data coverage can be found in the [notes and definitions](#) section.

National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority (the Authority) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). More information can be found in the Data Quality and Uses of Data section.

Rounding Strategy

To prevent the identification of individuals, figures throughout the report are rounded to the nearest 5, with 0, 1, and 2 rounded to 0. Due to rounding, the sum of numbers in each row or column may not match the total shown. Percentages are based on unrounded figures. Percentages have also been rounded to one decimal place. More information on the rounding strategy can be found in the [notes and definitions](#) section.

2019 Readership Survey – Acknowledgements, Analysis and Next Steps

Alongside the 2018/19 edition of the bulletin, we published an analysis of the HEI Enrolments and Qualifications statistical bulletins readership survey we conducted in September 2019. We have given careful consideration to the feedback and endeavoured to improve the quality and usability of our Higher Education statistics. For this edition, we have restructured the bulletin, giving attention to the layout so that the statistics are the key focus. Reflecting the priorities of our customers, we have reduced the main commentary and provided more information in the key statistics section of the bulletin. Information summarised in previous editions of the bulletin is still available in the comprehensive online tables, the element most frequently used by customers.

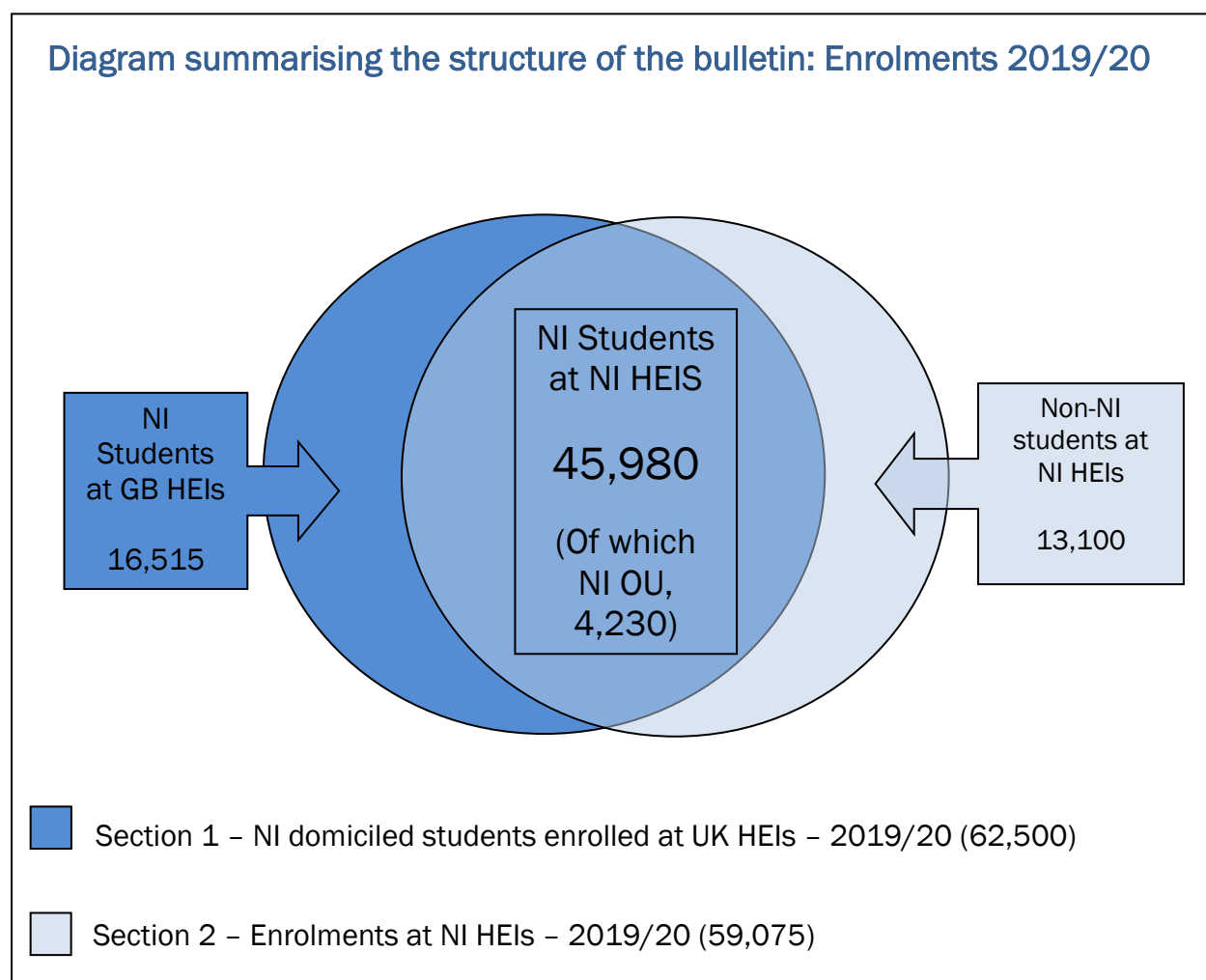
Covid-19 Impact

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was declared by the World Health Organisation in March 2020, just over half way through the 2019/20 academic year. As the vast majority of enrolments would have occurred at the beginning of the academic year, the pandemic has not had a noticeable impact on the statistics in this publication.

STRUCTURE OF REPORT

The bulletin is divided into two sections. Section 1 focuses on NI domiciled students enrolled at HEIs in NI, England, Scotland or Wales. Section 2 concentrates on all students enrolled at NI HEIs. This division into two sections reflects the two distinct policy and operational responsibilities of the Department. Furthermore, it is clear from customer feedback, the nature of questions on HE asked in the NI Assembly, and coverage of HE issues in the local media, that these two aspects are of key interest to readers.

It is worth noting that there is a large overlap between Section 1 and Section 2, namely NI students enrolled at NI HEIs are included in both sections. See the diagram below for details:

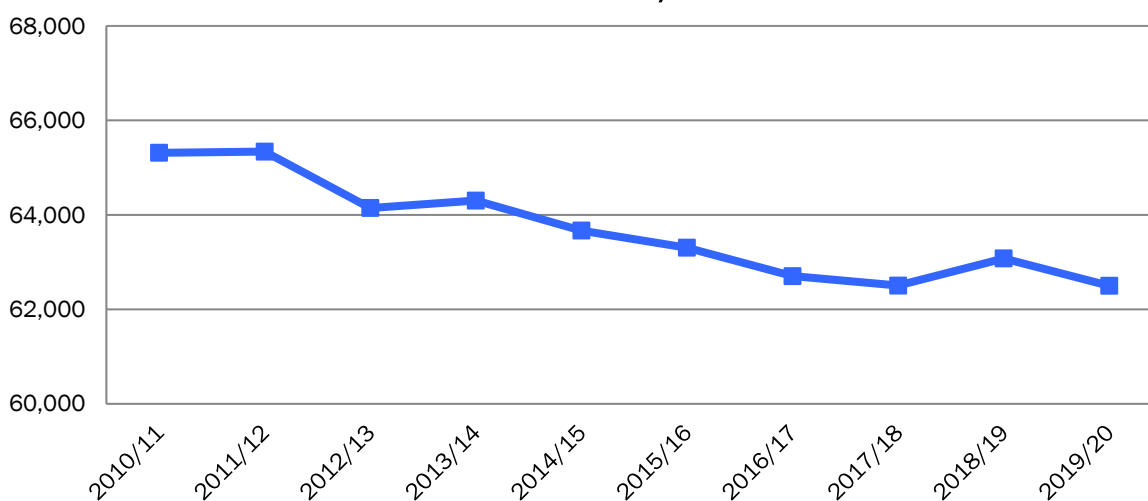


SECTION 1: Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled at UK Higher Education Institutions (Tables 1 to 7)

1.1 Change over the last 10 years – 2010/11 to 2019/20 (Tables 1 and 2, Figure 1)

In 2019/20, 62,500 NI students were enrolled at UK HEIs. This represents a net 4.3% (2,815) decrease from 2010/11 and a net 0.9% (580) decrease from 2018/19. There has been a steady trend of decline in enrolments over the last ten years, with slight increases in three years. (Tables 1a, 1b and 1d, Figure 1).

Figure 1 - NI domiciled students enrolled at UK HEIs - 2010/11 to 2019/20



See table x for underlying data.

Over the 10-year period covered by this bulletin (2010/11 to 2019/20), the number of NI domiciled students going to GB to study decreased by a net 1.3%, from 16,730 to 16,515; those studying locally through the Open University (OU) decreased by a net 13.1%, from 4,865 to 4,230 over the same period; while NI enrolments at NI HEIs (excluding the OU) decreased by a net 4.5%, from 43,720 in 2010/11 to 41,755 in 2019/20 (Tables 1a and 1b).

Full-time enrolments decreased by 0.9% over the decade (from 46,145 in 2010/11 to 45,720 in 2019/20), compared with a 12.5% decrease in part-time enrolments (from 19,170 to 16,775). The drop in part-time enrolments is mainly related to the drop in the number doing part-time 'other undergraduate' courses (Table 1c).

1.2 Breakdown of enrolments – 2019/20 (Tables 1 to 4)

In 2019/20, 62,500 NI students were enrolled at UK HEIs, showing a decrease of 0.9% from 63,080 in 2018/19 (Table 1d).

Mode of study – In 2019/20, 73.2% of enrolments were full-time. Between 2018/19 and 2019/20, full-time enrolments decreased by 2.2%, from 46,760 to 45,720, whereas part-time enrolments increased by 2.8%, from 16,315 to 16,775 (Tables 1e).

Level of study – Around three-quarters (76.0%) of NI students were enrolled on a ‘first degree’ course, 6.6% on ‘other undergraduate’ courses and 17.4% on a ‘postgraduate’ course in 2019/20. ‘First degree’ enrolments decreased by 1.4%, from 48,185 in 2018/19 to 47,530 in 2019/20, while ‘postgraduate’ enrolments increased by 3.2%, from 10,535 to 10,870, and ‘other undergraduate’ enrolments decreased by 5.9%, from 4,355 to 4,100 (Table 1f).

Sex – In recent history, more females than males have been progressing into higher education. In 2019/20, 57.7% of NI domiciled enrolments were female (Table 3a). This gap between the sexes does not begin at the point of entry to HE but can be observed early on in the educational system. In NI, females are more likely than males to stay on in full-time education at age 16.

1.3 Location of Study (Tables 1 to 3, 5 and Map 1)

There are various reasons why students leave NI to study, including their choice of subject, for example, some courses such as veterinary science are not supplied in Northern Ireland. However, available research¹ suggests that the majority of those who plan to leave NI to study do so out of choice.

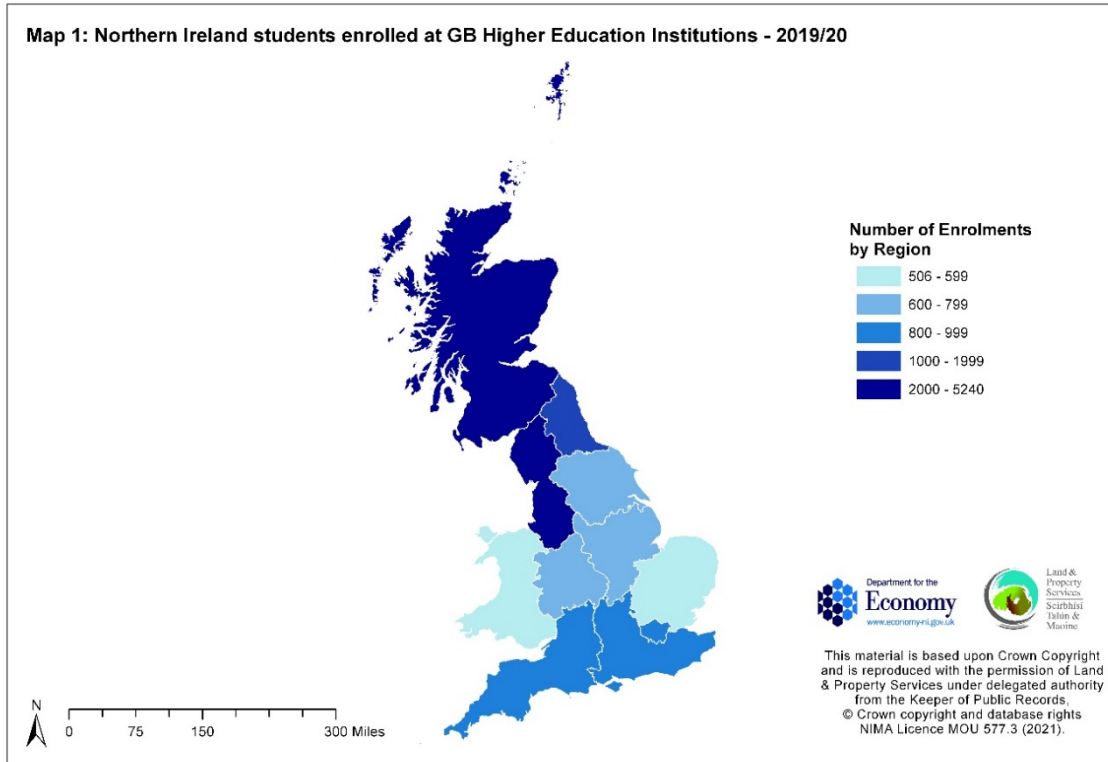
Of the 62,500 NI students enrolled at UK HEIs in 2019/20, 73.6% (45,980) were enrolled at NI HEIs (including 6.8% (4,230) studying at the OU) and 26.4% (16,515) at HEIs in GB (Table 1a).

Map 1 illustrates how many NI students were studying in each region of GB. The darker the shade of blue, the higher the number of NI students enrolled at HEIs in that region.

The most popular regions for NI students studying in GB were the North West of England and Scotland, with 5,240 and 3,940 NI students enrolled at HEIs in these regions respectively. Other popular regions were the North East of England, with 1,450 NI students, and the South East of England, with 915 (Table 5a).

Similar proportions of NI domiciled males (26.6%) and females (26.3%) were studying at GB HEIs in 2019/20 (Table 3d).

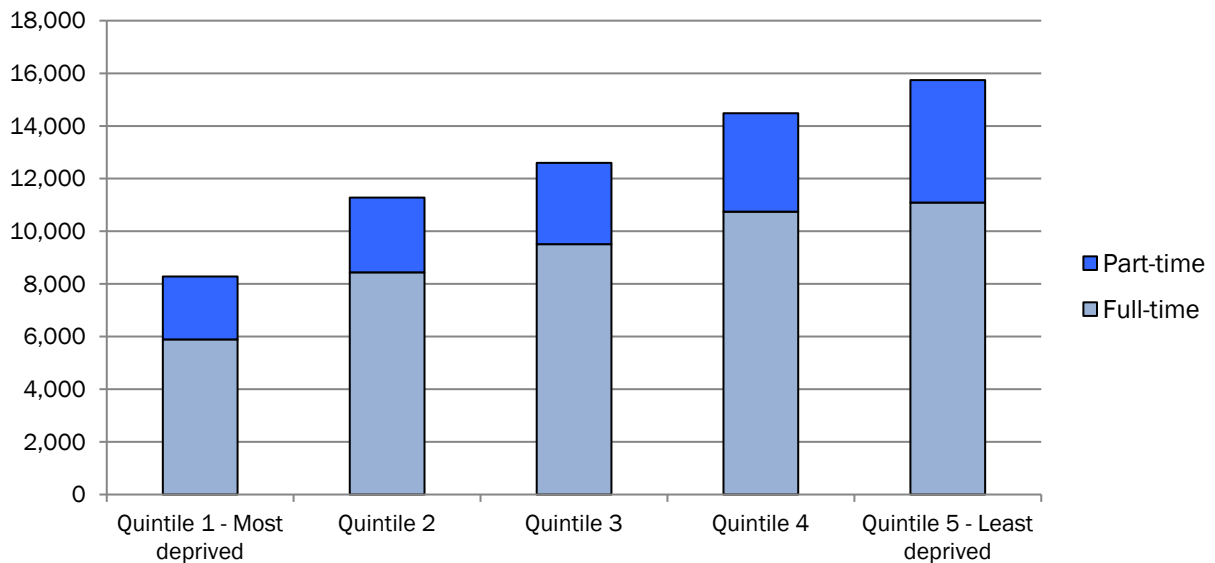
¹[After school: attitudes and perceptions of Northern Ireland school leavers towards higher and further education, training & employment](#)



1.4 Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM) quintiles (Table 6, Figure 2)

Of the 62,385 NI domiciled students enrolled at UK HEIs in 2019/20 whose postcodes were known, the highest proportion (25.2%) were from the least deprived MDM areas in NI (Quintile 5), almost double the proportion (13.3%) from the most deprived MDM areas (Quintile 1) (Table 6a, Figure 2).

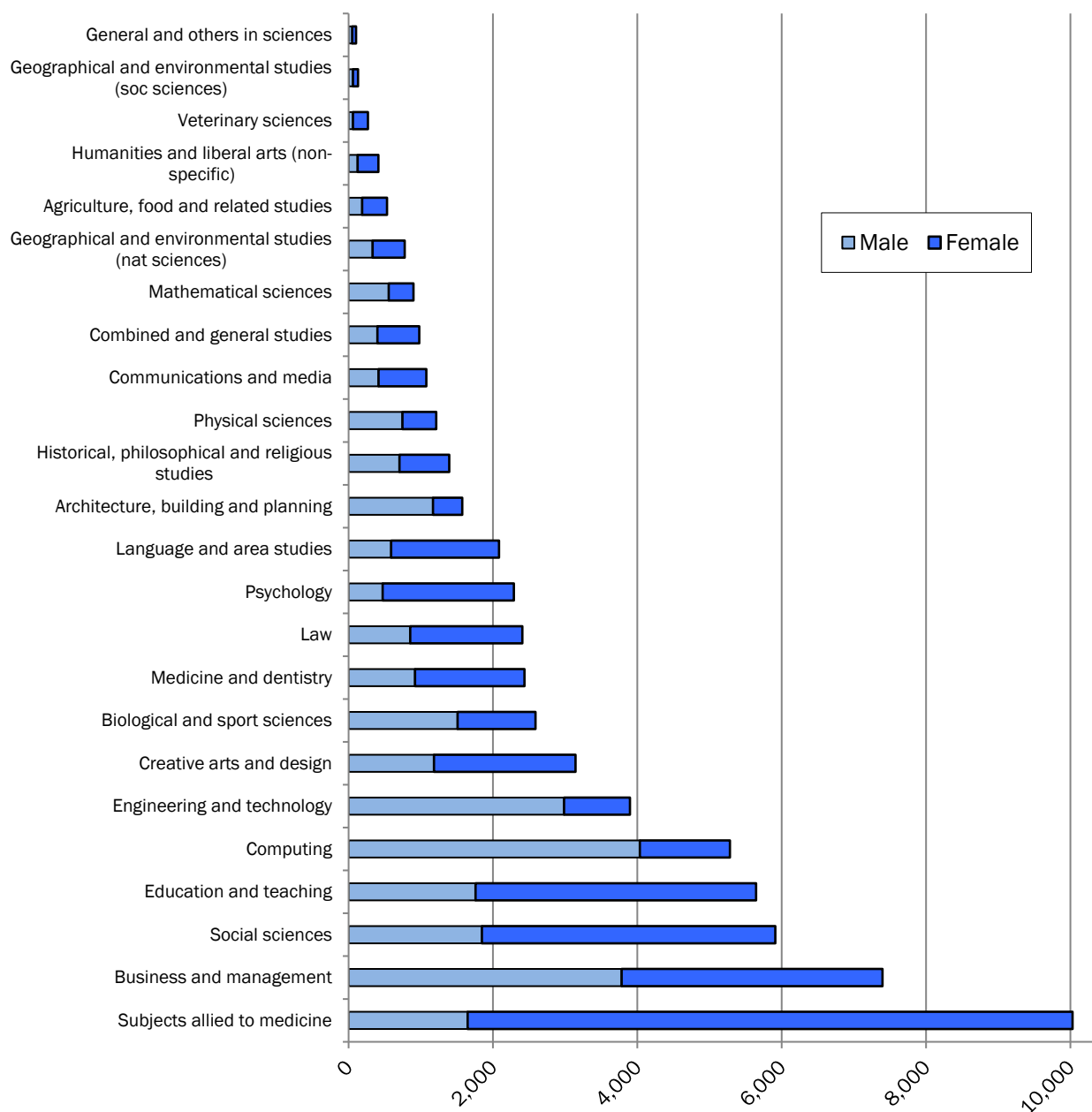
Figure 2: NI domiciled students enrolled at UK HEIs by mode of study and multiple deprivation measure quintile - 2019/20



1.5 Subject of Study (Table 7, Figure 3)

In 2019/20, the most popular subject areas for NI students studying at UK HEIs were: ‘Subjects allied to medicine’ (which includes subjects such as nursing, pharmacy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy), with 10,030 (16.1%) enrolments; ‘Business and management’ (which includes subjects such as business studies, management studies, accounting, marketing and finance), with 7,395 (11.8%) enrolments; and ‘Social sciences’ with 5,910 (9.5%) enrolments (Table 7c).

Figure 3 : NI domiciled students enrolled at UK HEIs by sex and subject area - 2019/20



In 2019/20, 51.1% of NI students at UK HEIs were studying a Broad STEM² related subject. A higher proportion of males (55.6%) than females (47.7%) were studying Broad

² Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – see notes to readers for description.

STEM subjects. Full-time students (53.4%) were more likely to be studying Broad STEM subjects than part-time students (44.7%) (Tables 7a and 7b).

In 2019/20, 27.1% of NI students at UK HEIs were studying a Narrow STEM related subject. Males (40.3%) were more than twice as likely as females (17.5%) to be studying Narrow STEM subjects. Full-time students (29.4%) were more likely than part-time students (20.8%) to be studying Narrow STEM subjects (Tables 7a and 7b).

Figure 4: Proportion of NI domiciled students enrolled at UK HEIs in Broad and Narrow STEM subjects by sex – 2019/20

STEM enrolments	Male	Female	Total
Broad STEM	55.6%	47.7%	51.1%
Narrow STEM	40.3%	17.5%	27.1%

1.6 Enrolments at UK Alternative Providers – 2019/20 (Tables 8 to 8d)

As discussed in the introduction, HESA made a notable change to its data coverage in its [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2019/20](#) release, combining for the first time data from both UK HEIs and Alternative Providers in the UK. An Alternative Provider is any provider of higher education courses, not in direct receipt of recurrent funding from UK funding bodies, not a Further Education college and not registered as 'approved (fee cap)' on the Office for Students (OfS) register. This coverage change has not been included in this edition of the bulletin, but the figures below present information on the number of NI domiciled students enrolled at Alternative Providers in 2019/20. We plan to adopt this new data coverage in the 2020/21 bulletin.

In 2019/20, 190 NI domiciled students were enrolled at Alternative Providers in the UK, of which 59.7% were full-time. Of these 190 enrolments, 48.2% were 'postgraduate', 46.6% were 'first degree' and 5.2% were 'other undergraduate' (Tables 8, 8a and 8b).

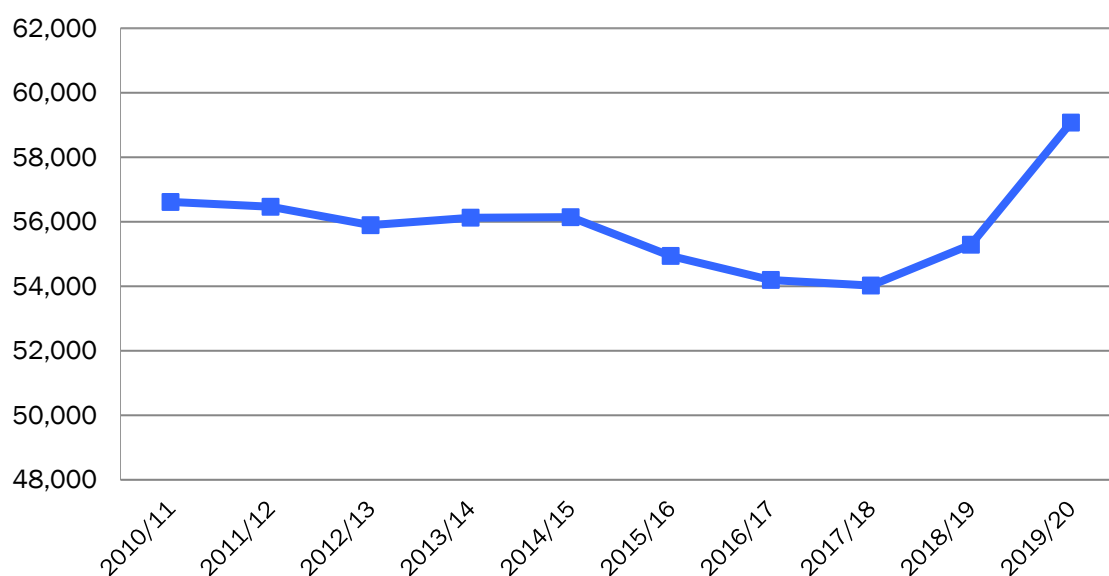
In total, combining enrolments from UK HEIs and those from Alternative Providers, 62,690 NI domiciled students were enrolled during 2019/20 (Table 8c and 8d).

SECTION 2: Enrolments at Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions (Tables 8 to 14)

2.1 Change over the last 10 years – 2010/11 to 2019/20 (Tables 8 & 9, Figure 5)

While student enrolments at NI HEIs have increased by a net 4.3% (2,460) over the decade (from 56,615 in 2010/11 to 59,075 in 2019/20), this is mainly due to the 6.9% (3,790) increase in enrolments between 2018/19 (55,290) and 2019/20 (59,075), the largest annual increase over the last decade (Tables 9, 9f and 9g, Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Enrolments at NI HEIs - 2010/11 to 2019/20



The 6.9% increase in enrolments over the last year can be explained mainly by a new part time module introduced by Ulster University for students undertaking the Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE) of the NMC Test of Competence (ToC). The ToC is for overseas nurses and midwives seeking registration as a nurse and/or midwife in the UK. More information can be found in the [notes and definitions](#) section.

Excluding those undertaking this new course results in a smaller (1.9%) increase in total enrolments between 2018/19 (55,290) and 2019/20 (56,320) (Tables 9, 9f and 9g, Figure 5).

Students from NI now account for a smaller proportion of the total population of students at NI HEIs than they did 10 years ago. In 2010/11, students from NI accounted for 85.8% (48,580) of the total population of students at NI HEIs. However, by 2019/20 this proportion has decreased to 77.8% (45,980) (Table 9a).

2.2 Breakdown of enrolments – 2018/19 (Tables 8 to 11, Figure 6)

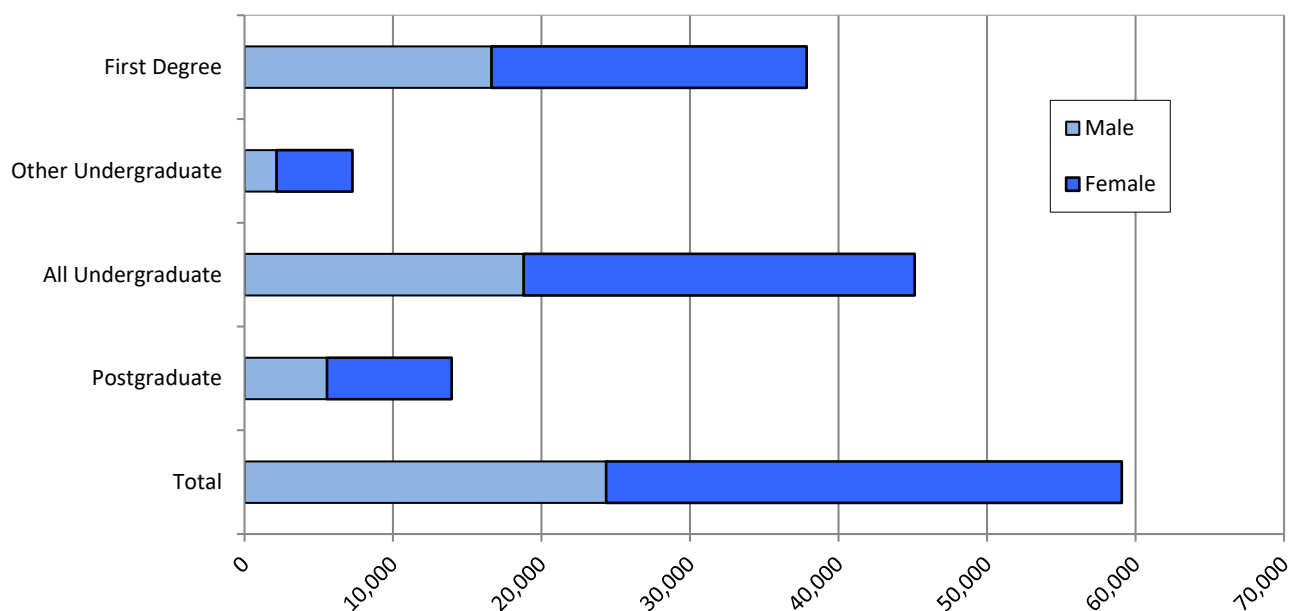
In 2019/20, 59,075 students were enrolled at NI HEIs, showing an increase of 6.9% from 55,290 in 2018/19 (Table 9g).

Mode of study – In 2019/20, nearly two-thirds (65.1%) of enrolments at NI HEIs were full-time. In comparison with 2018/19, full-time enrolments have increased by 2.4% (from 37,585 to 38,470) while part-time enrolments have increased by 16.4% (from 17,705 to 20,605) (Tables 9j and 9k).

Level of study – In 2019/20, 64.1% of students at NI HEIs were enrolled on a ‘first degree’ course, 12.3% on ‘other undergraduate’ courses and 23.6% on a ‘postgraduate’ course. Between 2018/19 and 2019/20, ‘first degree’ enrolments increased by 0.5% (from 37,670 to 37,860) and ‘postgraduates’ increased by 10.3% (from 12,655 to 13,955). Over the same period ‘other undergraduate’ enrolments increased by 46.3% (from 4,965 to 7,265) after declining every other year over the last decade. This can be explained by Ulster University’s introduction of a part time module for those completing the NMC’s OSCE. Excluding the 2,760 students enrolled on this module, other undergraduate enrolments actually decreased (Tables 9l and 9m).

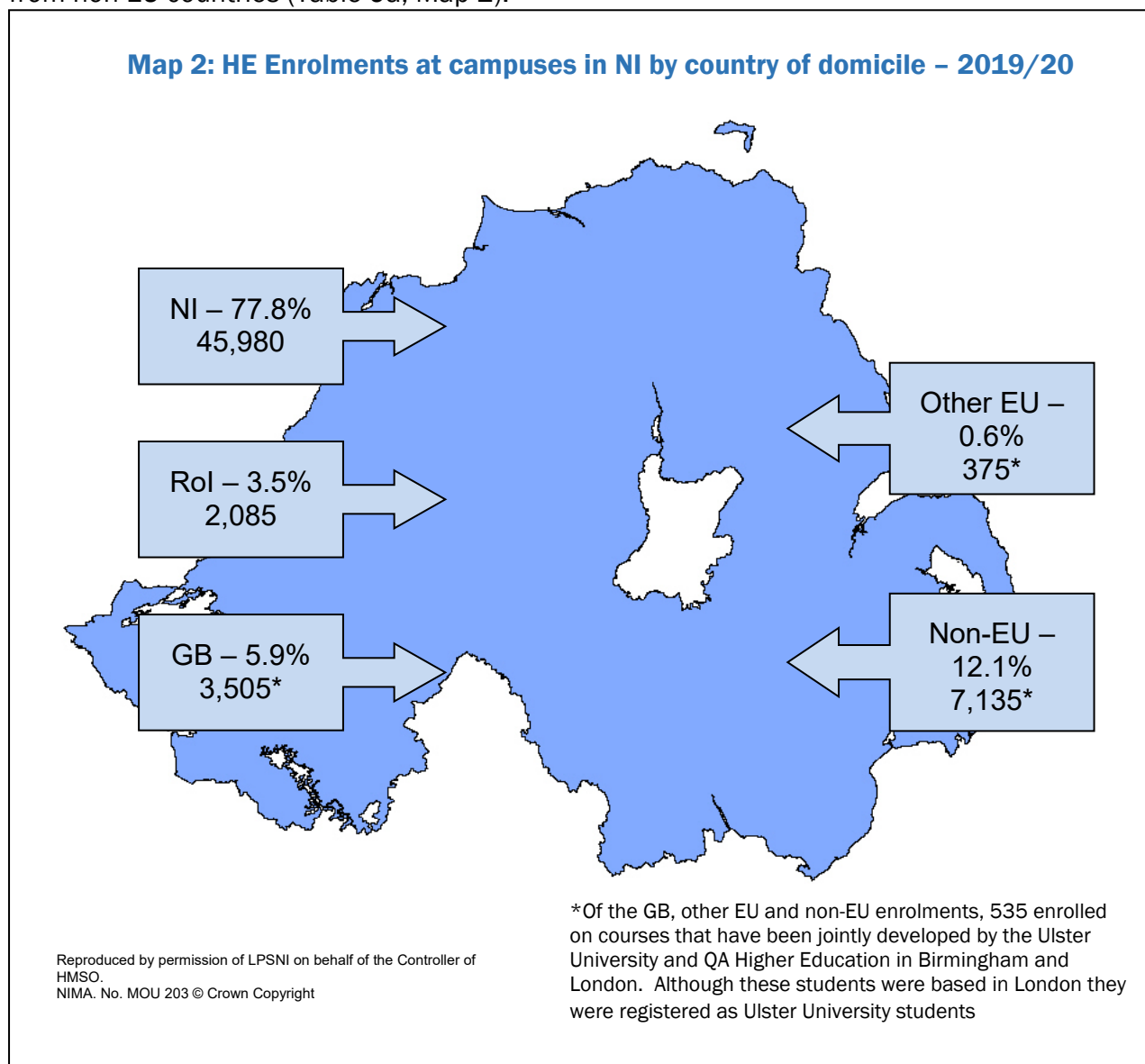
Sex – Females accounted for 58.8% of students enrolled at NI HEIs in 2019/20. A higher proportion of males (69.1%) than females (62.3%) were studying full-time. Over the past ten years, the female share of the student population at NI HEIs has remained relatively stable, with 58.7% in 2010/11, compared with 58.8% in 2019/20 (Tables 11a and 11b).

Figure 6 : Enrolments at NI HEIs by level of study and sex - 2019/20



2.3 Country of Domicile (Tables 8 to 10, Figure 7)

Of the 59,075 students enrolled at NI HEIs in 2019/20, 77.8% were from NI, 5.9% from GB, 3.5% from the Republic of Ireland (RoI), 0.6% from other EU countries and 12.1% from non-EU countries (Table 9a, Map 2).

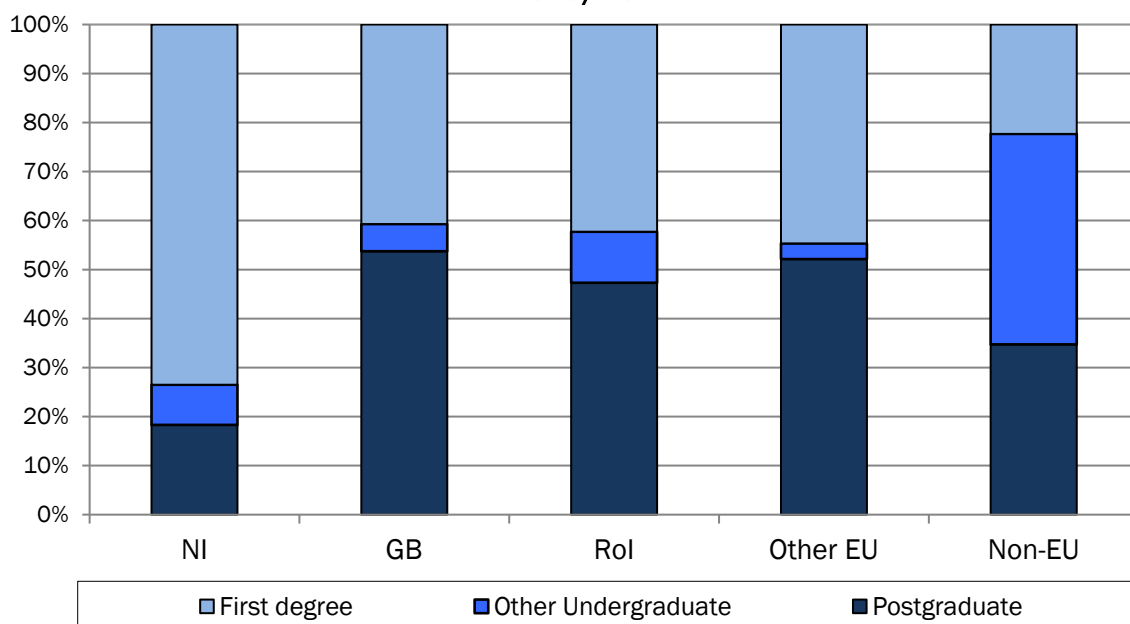


In 2019/20, students from 114 different countries throughout the world were enrolled at NI HEIs. The countries outside NI, GB and the RoI with the most students enrolled at NI campuses (not including those registered to Ulster University but based in London) were China (1,665), India (1,365), Philippines (1,225), Malaysia (325) and Nigeria (235) (Table 9d).

Figure 7 below illustrates the contrast in level of study for NI students and those from other countries in 2019/20. Around half of students at NI HEIs from GB, RoI and other EU countries are enrolled on 'postgraduate' courses, whereas 73.5% of students from NI are enrolled on 'first degree' courses (Table 9). This year saw a notable increase in the proportion of non-EU overseas students enrolled on 'other undergraduate' courses (42.9% compared to 9.2% in 2018/19). This sharp increase can largely be explained by

a new part time module introduced by Ulster University for students undertaking the Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE).

Figure 7 : Enrolments at NI HEIs by domicile and level of study - 2019/20

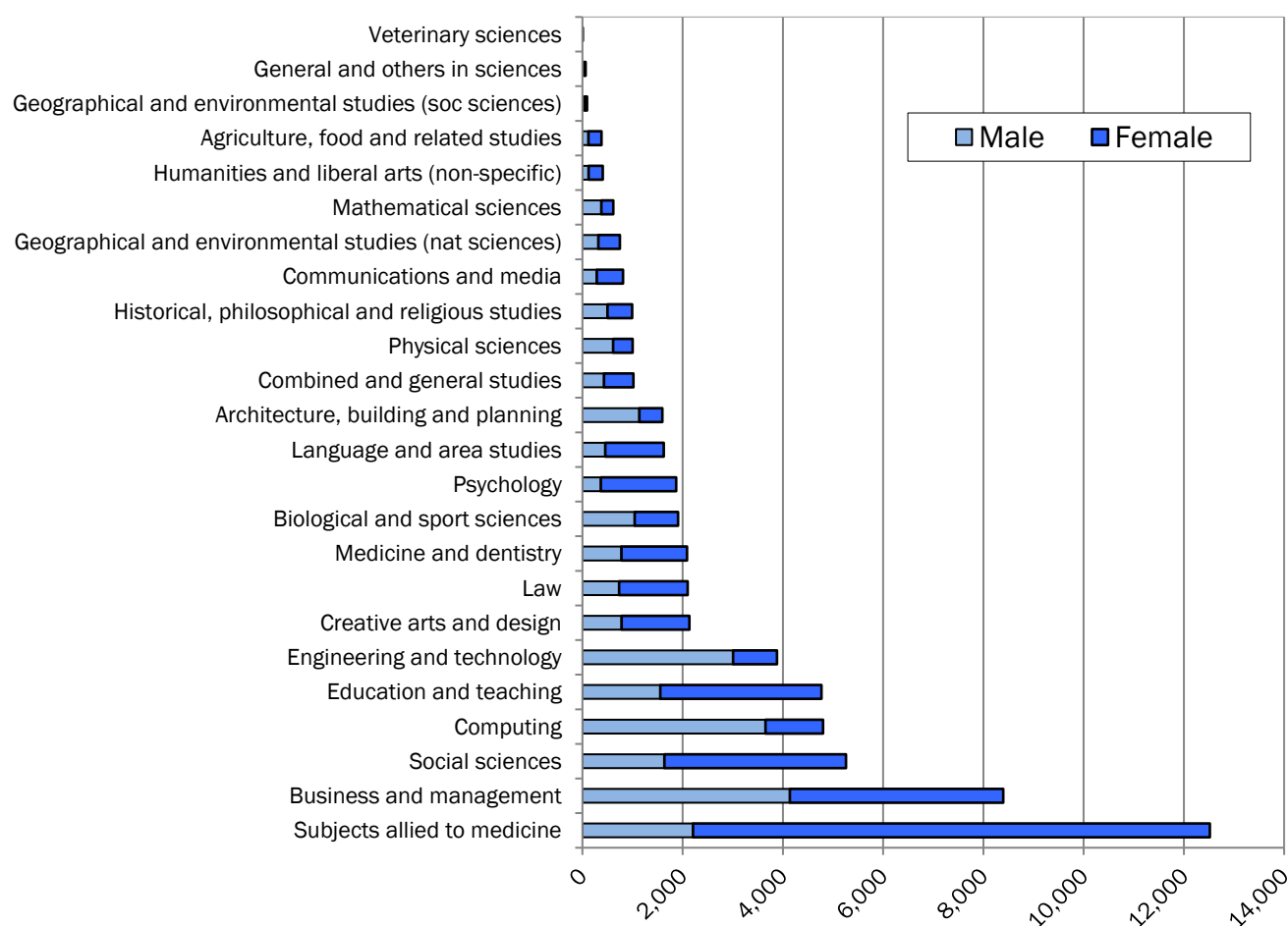


2.4 Subject of Study (Table 13, Figures 8 and 9)

In 2019/20, the most popular subject areas students were studying at NI HEIs were: ‘Subjects allied to medicine’, with 12,520 (21.2%) enrolments; ‘Business and management’, with 8,395 (14.2%) enrolments; and ‘Social sciences’, with 5,260 (8.9%) enrolments (Table 13c).

Females accounted for 82.4% of 2019/20 enrolments at NI HEIs in ‘Subjects allied to medicine’, 80.4% of those studying ‘Psychology’ and 71.9% of those studying ‘Language and area studies’. In contrast, males accounted for 77.5% of those studying ‘Engineering and technology’, 76.1% of ‘Computing’ enrolments and 71.2% of ‘Architecture, building and planning’ enrolments (Table 13c, Figure 8).

Figure 8 : Enrolments at NI HEIs by sex and subject area - 2019/20



In 2019/20, 53.3% of students at NI HEIs were studying a Broad STEM³ related subject. A higher proportion of males (56.1%) than females (51.3%) were studying Broad STEM subjects. Full-time students (53.4%) were similarly likely to part-time students (53.1%) to be studying Broad STEM subjects (Tables 13a, 13b and Figure 9).

In 2019/20, 25.1% of students at NI HEIs were studying a Narrow STEM related subject. A higher proportion of males (38.5%) than females (15.7%) were studying Narrow STEM subjects. Full-time students (29.5%) were more likely than part-time students (16.8%) to be studying Narrow STEM subjects (Tables 13a, 13b and Figure 9).

Figure 9: Proportion of students enrolled at NI HEIs in Broad and Narrow STEM subjects by sex – 2019/20

STEM enrolments	Male	Female	Total
Broad STEM	56.1%	51.3%	53.3%
Narrow STEM	38.5%	15.7%	25.1%

³ Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – see notes to readers for full description.

2.5 Institutional breakdown (Table 13, Figure 10)

Of all students enrolled at NI HEIs in 2019/20, 42.2% were enrolled at Queen's University Belfast, 46.9% at Ulster University, 2.0% at Stranmillis University College, 1.8% at St Mary's University College and 7.1% at the Open University (Table 14b).

Figure 10: Students enrolled at NI HEIs by institution and level of qualification – 2018/19 to 2019/20

Level of Study	Academic Year	QUB	UU	Stranmillis	St Mary's	OU (NI)
First Degree	2018/19	15,460	17,120	1,040	865	3,185
	2019/20	15,380	17,140	1,070	845	3,425
Other Undergraduate	2018/19	3,165	1,205	0	0	590
	2019/20	2,935	3,725	0	0	605
Postgraduate	2018/19	5,965	6,205	135	180	175
	2019/20	6,605	6,815	140	200	195
Total	2018/19	24,590	24,530	1,175	1,045	3,945
	2019/20	24,915	27,680	1,210	1,045	4,225

2.6 UK Comparison (Table 14, Figure)

In 2019/20, 2,456,070 students were enrolled at HEIs throughout the UK. In comparison with 2018/19, student numbers have increased by 3.0% (from 2,383,500) (Table 15a).

Over this period, all locations of the UK showed an increase in the number of total enrolments - NI HEIs by 6.9% (from 55,290 to 59,075), Welsh HEIs by 3.1% (from 132,205 to 136,355), English HEIs by 3.0% (from 1,942,535 to 2,000,150) and Scottish HEIs by 2.8% (from 253,475 to 260,490), (Table 15a).

National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority (the Authority) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

National Statistics status means that Official Statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All Official Statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate. Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are well explained and readily accessible; are produced according to sound methods; and are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics, it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed. It is DfE's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

Data Quality

All information presented in this bulletin has been validated and quality assured by HEIs prior to publication. HEIs are given a set period of time to submit the information to HESA. Following submission, both HESA and DfE perform a series of validation checks to ensure that information is consistent both within and across returns. Trend analyses are used to monitor annual variations and emerging trends. Queries arising from validation checks are presented to HEIs for clarification and, if required, returns may be amended and/or re-submitted. Finally, prior to publication, the data are presented to HEIs for a final sign-off. More information on the methods for collecting and analysing HEI data, the quality of HEI statistics, and links to the quality guidance used in managing the production of HEI statistics can be accessed via the link [Quality of Higher Education Statistics](#)

Who will be interested in this bulletin?

The information presented in this statistical bulletin will be of interest to a wide variety of people. For example, the statistics within and those derived from this bulletin are currently used by: DfE policy officials in their role of assisting and advising the Minister for the Economy to discharge his or her duties; by the NI Assembly and its Committee for the Economy to scrutinise the HE sector; by other government departments such as DoF as a key indicator in the education domain of the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM); by prospective students to inform their choices around HE; by local businesses to quantify the supply of graduates in their business area; and by researchers and

academics to try and understand the underlying trends in HE. Further details about the uses made of HE statistics can be found in the [notes and definitions](#) section.

Main Uses of HE statistics

The main uses of these statistics are to monitor HE enrolments and the characteristics of students enrolling both from NI and to NI HEIs. This helps in assessing HEI performance, corporate monitoring, informing and monitoring related policy, and responding to parliamentary/assembly questions and ad hoc queries from the public.

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

The bulletin and further analysis of the data provide an evidence base that is used in a number of DfE policies, strategies and reviews. Some of the most recent examples are: -

- DfE's Higher Education Strategy
- DfE's Widening Participation Strategy

Further details on these strategies are available from the DfE website:

[Higher Education Strategies Northern Ireland](#)

In addition, HEI statistics are used within other NI departments and their agencies.

Some of the most recent examples are: -

- NISRA – as a key indicator in the Education Domain of the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NI MDM).
- Department of Education (DE) – teacher demand model
- Invest NI – to quantify the supply of graduates for potential inward investment to NI

Around 75 HEI statistical enquiries per year are received by the Department from various sources. These include requests for further breakdowns of enrolments, qualifications and destinations data.

There continues to be a lot of media interest in the HE sector and HE statistics. With changes in fee regimes throughout the UK, fluctuations in the strength of the economy and the potential impact of EU exit, the demand for HE is often in the spotlight. DfE is responsible for formulating policy and administering funding to support education, research and related activities in the Northern Ireland HE sector. This bulletin forms part of the evidence base used to shape and evaluate DfE strategies and policies.

Draft Programme for Government (PfG) Framework 2016-2021

The work of the Department is shaped by the draft Programme for Government (2016-2021), which sets the strategic direction of travel for the work of the Executive, expressed in terms of wellbeing-focused outcomes. The document identifies innovation, research and development, and skills and employability as the key drivers of achieving a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy. Higher education has a pivotal role in supporting this aspiration, especially with regard to increasing the skills levels of the Northern Ireland workforce and increasing the proportion of local graduates from local institutions in professional and management occupations, or indeed further study.

Maximum Student Number (MaSN)

Before higher education became a devolved matter, the UK Government introduced an annual cap on the number of students each UK HEI could enrol. Following devolution in 1998, the cap (known as the Maximum Student Number (MaSN)) was maintained in Northern Ireland and is still in use today.

The MaSN applies primarily to full-time home and EU domiciled undergraduates enrolled in Northern Ireland. It does not curtail the recruitment of part-time or postgraduate students (with the exception of PGCE students). Nor does it curtail the recruitment of GB or international (non-EU) students.

Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, both approved to deliver full-time undergraduate provision, receive an annual MaSN allocation from the Department. St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College are not subject to MaSN as the De sets the numbers required for initial teacher training. The OU is also not subject to MaSN given its wholly part-time offering.

Part-Time and Postgraduate Student Loans

From the beginning of the 2017/18 academic year, DfE extended its student support package, with tuition fee loans being made available for part-time undergraduate and full-time distance learning study students, and postgraduate students studying certain courses.

Northern Ireland students studying part time undergraduate (or full time distance learning) courses in Northern Ireland, England, Wales or Scotland could apply for a tuition fee loan of up to £3,206.25 for the 2019/20 academic year. Those starting Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma, or Taught or Research Master's courses in Northern Ireland, England, Wales or Scotland could apply for a loan of up to £5,500 per course to help with fee costs. For both types of loans, the fees are paid direct to the university to cover tuition fees.

HEI Activity Elsewhere in the UK

Summary figures for the four UK administrations were published by HESA in their [Higher Education Statistics 2019/20](#) on 27th January 2021.

HESA's [Higher Education Student Data 2019/20](#) open data release was published by HESA on 9th February 2021. This provides more detailed information about students in higher education across the UK.

NOTES

1. The statistics presented in this bulletin are based on data supplied by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). HESA is the official agency for the collection of information on publicly funded UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It was set up in 1993 following the White Paper 'Higher Education: a new framework', which called for more coherence in HE statistics. The HESA data presented in this bulletin relate to students at UK HEIs and, therefore, do not include HE enrolments at FE colleges in NI or GB, the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) or at institutions in the Republic of Ireland.
2. The Department for the Economy (DfE) also publishes information on HE enrolments at FE colleges in NI in its Further Education Activity statistical bulletin:
[FE College Statistics](#)
3. Information on enrolments on HE courses at NI and GB FE colleges, CAFRE and RoI institutions is available via a separate statistical fact sheet, which is published on the Department's website:
[HE Statistical Fact Sheets](#)
4. Further statistics on the Northern Ireland HE sector, including qualifications gained, graduate destinations and various higher education fact sheets can be downloaded from the Department's website:
[Higher Education Statistics and Research](#)
5. From 2019/20 Ulster University introduced a new part time module for those undertaking the Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE) of the NMC Test of Competence (ToC). In 2019/20 enrolments on this course accounted for 2,760 of the 7,265 other undergraduate enrolments alone. The ToC is for overseas nurses and midwives seeking registration as a nurse and/or midwife in the UK. The NMC Competence Test Centre (CTC) at Magee campus of UU is one of three CTC test centres across the UK and has been open since 2018. However, 2019/20 is the first year this module has been offered alongside registration for the exam. This is a stand-alone, credit bearing course, which means that while students will receive credit for undertaking the module, no qualification will be awarded, and, hence, they will not appear in the qualification statistics.
6. **HESA's change to data coverage** - From 2019/20, HESA has made a notable change to the coverage of data for its [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2019/20](#) release. In previous issues of this publication, it reported all HEI providers submitting data to the HESA [Student record](#). A later supplement to the release added in separate additional tables and charts relating to data reported within the HESA [Student alternative record](#) (previously known as the Alternative provider record). An Alternative Provider is any provider of higher education courses, not in direct receipt of recurrent funding from UK funding bodies, not a Further Education college; and not registered as 'approved (fee cap)' on the Office for Students (OfS) register. They consist solely of English providers, such as The University of Law, BIMM Limited and BPP University. Due to regulatory changes in England, boundaries between the two HESA student records become less clear cut

and HESA made the decision to combine together data submitted via both records from 2019/20. As this coverage change by HESA will require significant changes to our systems and processes to incorporate the new record, this publication retains the old data coverage and we plan to adopt the new data coverage in the 2020/21 bulletin. However, we have provided summary statistics on the number of NI domiciled enrolments from Alternative Providers in 2019/20.

7. HESA releases separate publications providing information on HE Student Enrolments and Qualifications obtained at HEIs for the whole of the UK. A notable difference in the HESA publications and those released by DfE is that, from 2014/15, HESA uses revised data returns for the time series figures, whereas DfE does not. Consequently, historical figures for the number of enrolments and qualifications at UK HEIs published by DfE may differ from those in HESA's publications. Further information on this can be found in the ['Notes'](#) section of HESA's Student Statistics bulletin 2018/19.
8. **Change to recording practice** - To avoid a duplication of foundation year figures across HE institutions and Further Education Colleges, Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College changed their return to HESA during 2019/20 and no longer report on foundation degrees that are offered as part of a validated collaborative arrangement with Further Education Colleges. Historical figures in this bulletin have been backdated to reflect this change.
9. **Allocation of OU students** – The Open University's administrative centre is based in the south east of England. However, enrolments registered at one of the OU's national centres in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland will contribute to the totals of those countries where statistics are shown by country of provider. Please note that all non-UK domicile OU students and those who study at postgraduate research level are registered to England.
10. **Subject coding** - 2019/20 saw the introduction of a new subject coding system, the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS). This replaced the previous subject coding system, the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) used in years prior to 2019/20. In addition to HECoS, a Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) was introduced this year to provide a standardised hierarchical aggregation of HECoS codes suitable for the majority of users. The CAH has been developed to provide standard groupings that can be applied to both HECoS and JACS allowing for consistent analysis across coding frames. It is important to remember though that these are two distinct coding frames. For more information, refer to HESA's webpage on [HECoS and CAH](#). Where information on subject area is provided in this bulletin it is based on CAH level 1, comprising 23 groups; for the purposes of STEM analysis Geographical and environmental studies have been split into natural sciences and social sciences.
11. **Rounding Strategy** – DfE conforms to the HESA rounding strategy. Due to the provisions of the Data Protection Act (2018) and the Human Rights Act (1998), HESA (and therefore DfE) implements a strategy, in published and released tabulations, designed to prevent the disclosure of personal information about any individual. This strategy involves rounding all numbers to the nearest 5, and suppressing percentages and averages based on small populations. A full list of the rounding strategy includes:

- 0, 1 and 2 are rounded to 0;
- all other numbers are rounded to the nearest multiple of 5;
- percentages based on fewer than 22.5 individuals are suppressed;
- averages based on fewer individuals are also suppressed;
- percentages and averages are based on unrounded figures;
- percentages are rounded to one decimal place;
- full-time equivalent (FTE) data are not rounded; and

Total figures are also subject to this rounding methodology; so the sum of numbers in each row or column may not match the total shown.

DEFINITIONS

Higher Education

12. For the purpose of HESA's data collection, HE students are those on courses for which the level of instruction is above that of Level 3 of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (for example, courses at the level of Certificate of HE and above).

Count of Students

13. The HESA Student Record contains information about individual enrolments which, because a student can be enrolled on more than one programme of study, will exceed the number of students.

Academic Year

14. HESA data are a count of enrolments across the entire academic year. The academic year runs from 1st August to 31st July.

First year students

15. First year students are based on the HESA standard registration population who commenced their instance in the reporting period relevant to the data collection year. The term 'instance' is used to describe a student's engagement with the institution aiming towards the award of a qualification(s) or credit.

Domicile

16. Domicile refers to a student's permanent place of residence prior to enrolment on a course.

17. Student enrolments recorded with domicile UK region unknown, Channel Islands and Isle of Man are included in the GB category for the purposes of this statistical bulletin.

Level of course

18. Level of study

- I. *Postgraduate* programmes of study are those leading to higher degrees, diplomas and certificates (including Postgraduate Certificate of Education

(PGCE) and professional qualifications) and usually require that entrants are already qualified to degree level (that is, already qualified at Level 6 of the QCA NQF).

- Higher degrees include doctorates, master's degrees and higher bachelor's degrees.
 - Other postgraduate includes postgraduate diplomas, certificates and professional qualifications, PGCE at Level M, institutional postgraduate credits and no formal postgraduate qualifications.
- II. *First degrees* include: first degrees with or without eligibility to register to practice with a health or social care or veterinary statutory regulatory body; first degrees with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)/registration with a General Teaching Council (GTC); enhanced first degrees; first degrees obtained concurrently with a diploma; and intercalated first degrees.

Mode of study

19. Mode of attendance distinguishes students studying full-time or part-time:

- I. Full-time students are those normally required to attend an Institution for periods amounting to at least 24 weeks within the year of study, on thick or thin sandwich courses, and those on a study-related year out of their institution. During that time, students are normally expected to undertake periods of study, tuition or work experience, which amount to an average of at least 21 hours per week.
- II. *Part-time* students are those recorded as studying part-time, or studying full-time on courses lasting less than 24 weeks, on block release, or studying during the evenings only.

Sexual Identifier

20. In line with AdvanceHE's guidance on equality monitoring (related primarily to the Equality Act 2010), HESA has included 'other' as a valid entry alongside 'male' and 'female' for its sex identifier variable. Due to small numbers and issues of disclosure, students of 'other' sex are included in total figures, but not in separate breakdowns in this publication and associated tables.

Age

21. Age is as at 31st August within the relevant academic year.

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths Enrolments

22. The STEM groupings used in this bulletin are based on the approach developed by HESA to categorise subjects into science/non-science subjects. Their science grouping is an aggregation of relevant CAH level 1 subject codes (derived from HECoS), with the exception of CAH12 (Geographical and environmental studies), which has been split into natural sciences and social sciences. The natural science element is categorised into the science grouping and the social sciences element into the non-science grouping. The same approach has been taken when categorising

CAH level 1 subject codes into STEM groupings, and maps well to the previous JACS coding of STEM subjects.

23. Broad STEM includes the following subject areas: Medicine and dentistry; Subjects allied to medicine; Biological and sports sciences; Psychology; Veterinary sciences; Agriculture, food and related studies; Physical Sciences; General and others in sciences; Mathematical sciences; Engineering and technology; Computing; Geographical and environmental studies (natural sciences); and Architecture, building and planning.

Narrow STEM is a subset of Broad STEM and includes the following subject areas: Biological and sports sciences; Psychology; Physical sciences; Mathematical sciences; Engineering and technology; Computing; and Geographical and environmental studies (natural sciences).

Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM)

24. The analysis presented in section 1.4 utilises five groups (quintiles) of Super Output Areas (SOAs) across Northern Ireland. These five groups are determined based on relative level of deprivation using the NIMDM.

SOAs ranked 1 to 178 form the most deprived quintile relative to all other SOAs. Those ranked 713 to 890 are the most affluent relative to all other SOAs. SOA is determined using the valid postcode provided on the enrolment record.

NIMDM 2017 is a weighted combination of the seven domains of deprivation. The Income and Employment Deprivation domains combined account for nearly 50% of the MDM. The Health and Disability Domain, and Education Skills and Training Domain combined account for a further 30%, and the remainder is made up of the Access to Services, Living Environment and Crime and Disorder Domains.

For further details on deprivation measurement in Northern Ireland, please follow this link: [NISRA MDM 2017](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION

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