


Reader Information

Purpose	Monitor and report on the destinations of students and potential benefits after completing and achieving a regulated qualification, at Level 3 or below, at a Further Education College in Northern Ireland during 2020/21.
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Feedback	<p>The report has been designed to provide the information required by key stakeholders. As we want to engage with report users, we invite you to feedback your comments on this publication. First points of contact include:</p> <p>Louise Buckley – Louise.Buckley@economy-ni.gov.uk (Tel: 028 9025 7519)</p>
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Summary of Findings

All FE College leavers

Half (50.0%) of FE College leavers who qualified at Level 3 or below were in employment six months after achieving their 2020/21 qualification, up from 43.4% before their course began; the proportion in learning fell slightly from 41.6% to 40.7% (**Table 3**).

When asked to give the most important reason for doing their course, FE College leavers were most likely to say: 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (29.3%); 'I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job' (13.2%); or 'I wanted greater job satisfaction' (9.7%) (**Table 2**).

Three-quarters (74.9%) of leavers agreed that, were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Just under two-thirds (63.6%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while 57.1% would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification (**Table 5**).

Employment rates for FE College leavers varied depending on subject area studied. The subject areas with the highest proportions of FE College leavers in full-time employment were Construction, Planning and the Built Environment (71.0%), Business, Administration and Law (67.0%) and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (59.0%) (**Figure 8**).

The subject areas with the lowest proportions of FE College leavers in employment were Arts, Media and Publishing (9.2%), Social Sciences (11.9%) and History, Philosophy and Theology (13.3%) (**Figure 8**).

Typically, unemployment rates were lower for those qualifying at higher levels. One-eighth of those who had studied at Entry Level or Level 1 were unemployed (11.7%), in contrast to 5.0% of those who had studied at Level 2 and 2.6% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).

FE College leavers in employment

One-third (33.4%) of the FE College leavers in employment had not been in employment before they started their 2020/21 course (**Figure 9** and **Table A14**) – of these, over two fifths (63.8%) had been in learning.

The vast majority (95.1%) of FE College leavers in employment were working in Northern Ireland, while 2.7% were working in the Republic of Ireland, 2.0% in Great Britain and 0.2% overseas (**Table 7**).

Three-quarters (74.9%) of FE College leavers in employment said they were utilising what they learnt during their course in their current work (**Chart 1** and **Table A26**).

Of the FE College leavers who were in employment six months after their course, seven-tenths (70.7%) were working full-time; a further 21.9% had one or more part-time jobs, while 7.4% were primarily working but also studying (**Table A19**).

Most of the FE College leavers in employment had jobs classified as either: Skilled Trade (20.4%); Caring, leisure and other service occupations (19.4%); or Associate professional and technical occupations (13.3%) (**Figure 13** and **Table A21**).

FE College leavers in learning

Almost seven-tenths (69.3%) of FE College leavers in learning had also been in learning before the course they had completed in 2020/21 (**Figure 15** and **Table A14**), while more than four-fifths (82.2%) were studying towards a higher-level qualification (**Table A31**).

Three-fifths (60.1%) of leavers in learning have continued their learning in the FE sector, while over one-third (34.7%) have started university (**Figure 17** and **Table A32**).

Almost nine-tenths (88.2%) of FE College leavers in learning stated they were utilising what they had learnt during their course in their current studies (**Chart 2** and **Table A35**).

Unemployed FE College leavers

The proportion of FE College leavers who classified themselves as unemployed six months after completing their course in 2020/21 was 4.4%, down from 10.0% before their course (**Tables 3** and **A11**).

Typically, unemployment rates were lower for those qualifying at higher levels. One-eighth of those who had studied at Entry Level or Level 1 were unemployed (11.7%), in contrast to 5.0% of those who had studied at Level 2 and 2.6% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).

Section One: Background and Introduction

How to use this report

This report presents findings from the eighth annual Northern Ireland Survey of Further Education College Leavers. Undertaken approximately six months after course completion, it provides a snapshot of the immediate added value to leavers of completing and achieving a regulated qualification, at Level 3 or below, in the FE sector during the academic year 2020/21. The destinations of those qualifying at Level 4 or above are researched separately, through their participation in HESA's Graduate Outcomes survey some 15 months after achieving their qualifications.

The report is divided into three main sections:

- Section 1: Background and Introduction
- Section 2: Methodology
- Section 3: Main Findings

Section 3 is divided into five sub-sections:

3.1 provides a summary overview of how all FE College leavers had heard about their course, their reasons for doing their course, and their main activities before and after their course.

3.2 presents findings for the FE College leavers whose destination was employment.

3.3 presents findings for the FE College leavers whose destination was further learning.

3.4 presents findings for the FE College leavers who were unemployed.

3.5 presents findings for the FE College leavers who were classified as other.

The main findings section should be read in conjunction with the methodology section, and particularly the sub-section on interpretation. It is also recommended that the report findings are read in conjunction with annual FE Sector Activity publications. These provide additional information about the students enrolled on regulated courses at FE Colleges and are available on the FE Sector Activity in NI web page (opens in new window).

Additional information on definitions and technical aspects of the survey are available in the Annex. Online tables (denoted by the prefix 'A') are available on the Survey of FE College Leavers web page (opens in new window). These tables enable quick comparison of the different FE College leaver groups presented in this report.

About the Department for the Economy

The Department for the Economy (DfE) is one of nine departments created under The Stormont House Agreement (opens in new window). The **vision** of the Department is a globally competitive economy that works for everyone. Responsibilities include:

- economic policy (including A 10X Economy – Northern Ireland's Decade of Innovation (opens in new window))

- employment and skills programmes (including apprenticeships)
- energy
- further education
- higher education
- employment rights
- consumer affairs
- European Fund Management
- telecoms
- tourism
- insolvency service
- minerals and petroleum
- credit unions and societies
- economic briefing, research, appraisal and evaluation
- statistics on higher and further education and training

Additional information is available on [DfE's website](#) (opens in new window).

Further Education in Northern Ireland: policy and operational context

As outlined in the DfE's paper [Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – Skills for a 10X Economy](#) (opens in new window), FE Colleges in Northern Ireland (NI) have dual objectives of providing essential entry level pathways to education and professional and technical skills, to support economic and social prosperity.

There are six regional FE Colleges:

- 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)

The FE Colleges are Non-departmental Public Bodies of DfE and operate across multiple sites. The courses they offer cover a wide variety of subjects and levels, ranging from Entry Level up to Level 8. They have a combined turnover of around £270 million and a professional workforce of around 3,700. Engaging 70,847 learners in the 2020/21 academic year and working with over 10,000 businesses across NI, they have a significant footprint in our economy.

Within the Northern Ireland Executive, responsibility for the FE Colleges rests with the Minister for the Economy. The Minister is accountable to the NI Assembly and its Committee for the Economy, which undertakes a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to DfE and plays a key role in the consideration and development of legislation.

Additional information on FE in Northern Ireland can be found on the [Further Education section of the DfE Website](#) (opens in new window) or on [NI Direct](#) (opens in new window).

Why has this survey been carried out?

DfE is monitoring the performance of FE Colleges in terms of the quality and relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the NI economy and the learner. Therefore, there is a need to identify what happens to the thousands of students who complete and achieve their regulated FE courses. In particular, it is hoped that information on the destinations of leavers following successful completion of a programme of study will provide evidence of the relevance of this learning in achieving positive outcomes. This research will inform that process by measuring the impact and outcomes of student learning in terms of progression into further learning and employment. The research also forms a key part of the underpinning evidence for the development of future policy and the FE curriculum in terms of:

- the progression of learners to and within employment
- the progression of learners to higher levels of study
- the development of skills of use within the workplace

Section Two: Methodology

Introduction

The Survey of FE College Leavers asks leavers what they are doing approximately six months after qualifying from their course. This publication reports on the eighth sweep of the Survey, conducted with the 2020/21 cohort of FE College leavers; the first sweep related to 2013/14 leavers.

Sampling strategy

The first three sweeps of the Survey involved NISRA undertaking telephone interviews with a 10% stratified random sample of eligible leavers, which was proportionately drawn on the basis of their FE College, Sex, Age Group, Course Mode of Attendance and Level of Course Studied.

To minimise survey burden, HE leavers (Level 4 and above) were not included in the Survey after the third sweep as their cohort would be participating in the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. Beginning in 2017/18, HE leavers participate in Graduate Outcomes.

The fourth sweep entailed a census approach, providing an opportunity for all eligible leavers with up-to-date email contact details to participate in a NISRA online survey using “Snap Survey”.

The fifth sweep onwards has also entailed a census approach, providing an opportunity for all eligible leavers to participate. The fifth sweep adopted a multi-mode approach, enabling those with up-to-date email addresses or phone numbers to participate in either an online survey using “Survey Monkey” or a phone interview undertaken by NI Direct.

During the sixth sweep, all eligible leavers with an up-to-date email address or phone numbers were invited to complete an online survey using “Survey Monkey”. Invitations were issued via email or text message, which, following on from the experience of the fifth sweep, proved to be more successful in garnering responses than phone calls.

The seventh and eighth sweeps entailed a census approach, providing an opportunity for all eligible leavers with up-to-date email contact details to participate in an online survey software (the survey moved to “Snap” from “Survey Monkey” for the eighth sweep).

Accessing contact details for eligible participants

In advance of the survey, Statistics and Research Branch (Tertiary Education) (SRB (TE)) liaised with all six FE Colleges, with a view to obtaining email contact details for the 21,285 leavers who had completed and achieved a qualification at Level 3 or below in 2020/21.

In the end, Colleges supplied contact details for 19,416 leavers (the population of interest), amounting to 91.2% of all the leavers who had completed and achieved a qualification at Level 3 or below in 2020/21. Before accepting the contact details returned by the Colleges, SRB (TE) performed extensive validation and data cleaning exercises.

Publicity and fieldwork

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, the FE Colleges issued publicity emails to their leavers. SRB (TE) commenced the online fieldwork on Friday 4th March 2022, by issuing email invitations to all leavers in the population of interest for which email addresses had been provided; these included unique links to the Snap website and contained the name and logo of the relevant FE College, the name of the leaver and the title of the course they had completed.

Over the course of the following four weeks, until the online fieldwork closed on Friday 8th April 2022, SRB (TE) issued five reminder emails to leavers who had not completed the Survey. Weekly updates on response rates for each college were shared to keep colleges included in the process and help encourage responses from their students.

Despite extensive checking of contact details prior to the fieldwork, 931 (4.8%) invitations were classified as undeliverable, either because the email address was not known (it was a 'soft bounce back', for instance, a mail server response indicating a non-delivery due to a full inbox) the email address provided was incorrect, or the recipient opted out. This reduced the total eligible population to 18,485.

Response rates

Approximately one in five (19.2%) of the total contactable population participated in the online survey (a decrease from 28.3% in the 2019/20 but on a par with the 19.2% response rate in the 2018/19 survey), resulting in 3,544 completed responses (see **Box One**). It was, therefore, very important to ascertain the extent to which the profile of the achieved responses differed from that of the population of interest.

In this respect, key variations among respondents included:

- 66.8% were female (compared with 51.5% in the population of interest);
- 29.3% had studied full-time (32.5% in the population of interest);
- 8.7% had studied at South West College (10.6% in the population of interest).

Questionnaire

The survey captures a snapshot of activities that leavers from the 2020/21 academic year were engaged in approximately six months after completing their course.

Details were captured on leavers' employment, such as their job role, the nature of their contract and salary. Those engaged in further study were asked where and what they were studying. Leavers were also asked more generally about their satisfaction with aspects of the course.

While the core questionnaire retained some consistency with the previous sweeps of the Survey, some amendments were necessary to improve the wording and layout. Additional questions were included on preparedness for work and further study and questions on salary were removed.

Data coding and weighting

Responses to some of the more open-ended questions were initially collected verbatim, then coded to code frames developed by SRB (TE) to classify responses, for example, relating to activities engaged in approximately six months after completing their course.

Coding to the official classification for occupation (SOC 2020) was undertaken by SRB (TE) using the ONS Occupation Coding Tool.

The final phase was to produce a data file by linking information from the Consolidation Data Return to the survey responses. The file was then logic checked, and amendments were made to correct for errors in responses.

Raked weighting was developed to improve the representativeness of estimates produced from the Survey. By using an algorithm in R, raking was converged in 33 iterations using age, mode of attendance, level of study, FE College and sex, to provide a closer match between the characteristics of the participants and the population of interest.

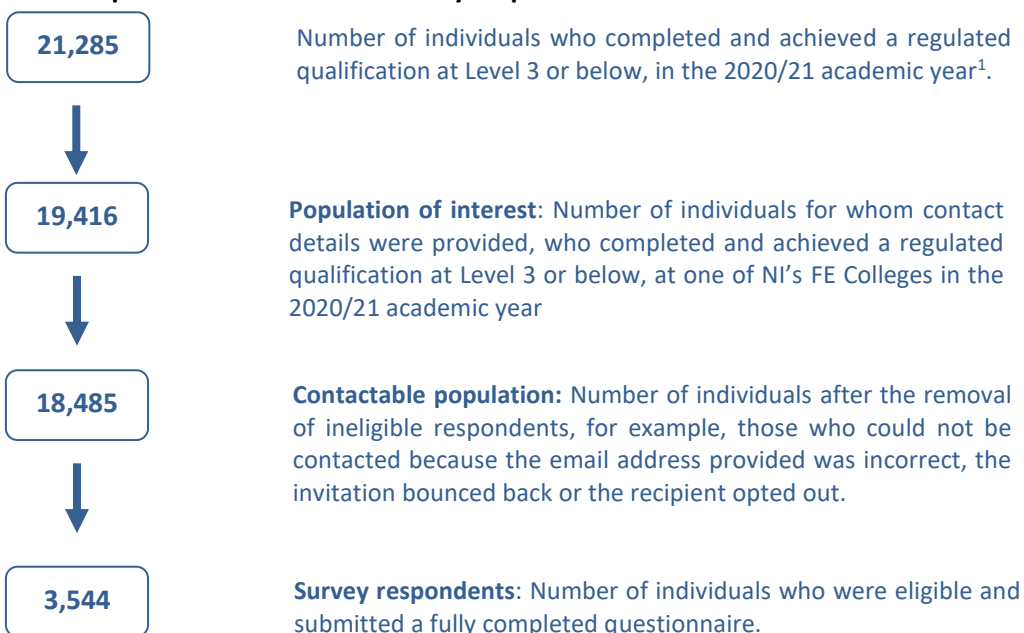
As a result of the raked weighting model:

- the male share of respondents increased from 33.2% to 48.6%, whereas the female share decreased from 66.8% to 51.4%, both in line with their respective population shares
- the part-time study share of respondents decreased from 70.7% to 67.3%, in line with their share of the population of interest
- the FE College proportions also aligned with their respective population shares

While it is designed to improve the representativeness of survey results, it should be borne in mind non-response weighting assumes the characteristics of non-respondents are like those of respondents.

Table 1: Comparison: key profiling variable proportions for the population of interest (19,416) and survey respondents (3,544)

Variable	Variable Categories	% of Population of interest (N=19,416)	Respondent Profile <u>Before</u> Weighting			Respondent Profile <u>After</u> Weighting		
			Survey Respondents	%	Percentage Point Difference	Survey Respondents	%	Percentage Point Difference
FE College	Belfast Metropolitan College	22.8	775	21.9	-0.9	802	22.6	-0.2
	Northern Regional College	14.0	554	15.6	1.6	496	14.0	0.0
	North West Regional College	12.0	529	14.9	2.9	426	12.0	0.0
	South Eastern Regional College	24.8	771	21.8	-3.0	882	24.8	0.0
	Southern Regional College	15.9	608	17.2	1.3	565	15.9	0.0
	South West College	10.6	307	8.7	-1.9	379	10.7	0.1
	Total	100.0	3,544	100.0	0.0	3,551	100.0	0.0
Sex	Female	51.5	2,369	66.8	15.3	1,826	51.4	-0.1
	Male	48.5	1,175	33.2	-15.3	1,752	48.6	0.1
	Total	100.0	3,544	100.0	0.0	3,551	100.0	0.0
Age (years)	19 and under	50.0	1,300	36.7	-13.3	1,783	50.2	0.2
	20-24	14.3	425	12.0	-2.3	508	14.3	0.0
	25 and over	35.7	1,819	51.3	15.6	1,259	35.5	-0.2
	Total	100.0	3,544	100.0	0.0	3,551	100.0	0.0
Mode of Attendance	Full-time	32.5	1,038	29.3	-3.2	1,161	32.7	0.2
	Part-time	67.5	2,506	70.7	3.2	2,390	67.3	-0.2
	Total	100.0	3,544	100.0	0.0	3,551	100.0	0.0
Level of Course	Entry Level	1.0	33	0.9	-0.1	35	1.0	0.0
	Level 1	6.3	156	4.4	-1.9	223	6.3	0.0
	Level 2	48.3	1,553	43.8	-4.5	1,708	48.1	-0.2
	Level 3	44.5	1,802	50.8	6.3	1,585	44.6	0.1
	Total	100.0	3,544	100.0	0.0	3,551	100.0	0.0

Box 1: Population of interest to survey respondents

Interpreting the findings

When interpreting the findings presented, it is important to be aware of the following points:¹

- Individuals in FE Colleges can enrol and achieve on multiple courses simultaneously. The methodology used to determine the population of interest was to select the highest level of regulated qualification (up to and including Level 3) achieved for each individual, which resulted in 21,185 individual FE College leavers being eligible for inclusion in the 2020/21 Survey.
- Although it was intended that everyone who completed a qualification would be contacted and provided an opportunity to respond to the survey, not all had valid contact details, leaving a population of interest of 19,416. Of those participants who responded, not all answered all the questions. Therefore, variation occurs in the total number of responses provided for some questions. This affects the statistics derived from the survey when trying to infer patterns within the population of interest.
- Inferences/statements about the population of interest can be made because the profile of survey respondents has been re-weighted by the profiling variables (age, mode of attendance, level of study, FE College and sex), so that it is broadly similar to that of the population of interest in respect of these key variables (Refer to **Table 1**).
- Comparison of percentages should be considered with caution when base numbers (the number of valid responses to a particular question) are small (<100). Base numbers (n) are included in charts and tables.
- Due to rounding to one decimal place: some figures may not add to 100%; differences reported may not equate to the difference between the two figures shown in the text; and summing of proportions may not equate to the value reported.

¹Excludes withdrawals and transfers, entitlement framework enrolments, non-regulated enrolments, null ULNs, enrolments with missing level information, Higher Education (HE) in Further Education (FE), any individual under 16 and Disabilities (SLDD) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Please refer to Annex A for further details.

Section Three: Main Findings

3.1 All FE College Leavers

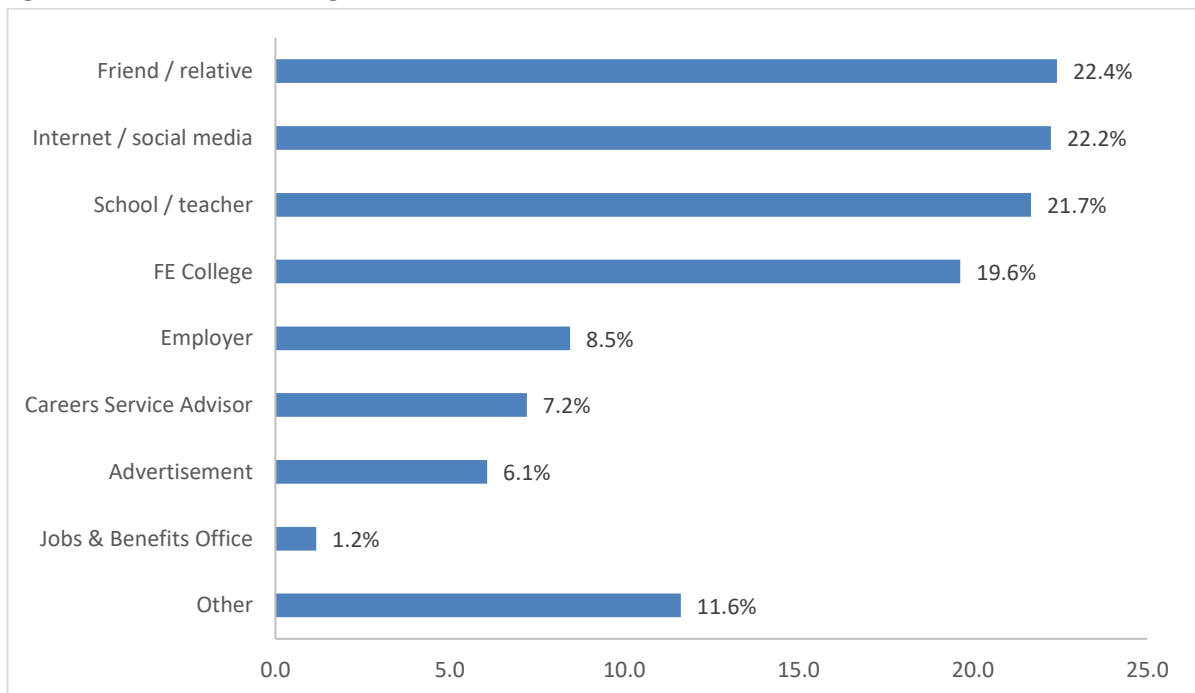
This section presents findings on all participants in the Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21 including:

- how they had heard about their recently completed course
- main reasons for doing their course
- main activities before and approximately six months after their course
- if they would do their course again

How did individuals hear about their course?

Respondents were asked how they had heard about their course and could provide as many responses to this question as they wanted. The top four ways of hearing about their course were through: Friend / relative (22.4%); Internet / social media (22.2%); School / teacher (21.7%); or FE College (19.6%) (**Figure 1** and **Table A2**).

Figure 1: All FE College leavers: how individuals had heard about their course



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n = 3,502

Note: 42 invalid responses were excluded.

Reasons for undertaking the course

Improved employability and social factors were among the key drivers for undertaking courses at FE Colleges, including wanting to meet new people and build self-confidence. The four most popular reasons for undertaking their course cited by FE College leavers were: 'I thought it would improve my career prospects (41.4%); 'I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence' (33.1%); 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (33.0%); and 'It was at a time / place that suited me' (32.8%) (Tables 2 and A5).

When asked to give the most important reason for undertaking their course, leavers were most likely to say: 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (29.3%); 'I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job' (13.2%); or 'I wanted greater job satisfaction' (9.7%) (Tables 2 and A6).

Table 2: All FE College leavers: reasons for undertaking course

Reason	Overall %	Most Important %
I thought it would improve my career prospects	41.4	29.3
I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence	33.1	3.6
I wanted to gain a qualification	33.0	2.2
It was at a time / place that suited me	32.8	1.7
I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job	30.4	13.2
I wanted to go onto further / higher learning	28.5	5.1
I was interested in the subject	26.0	6.8
I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills	25.6	7.6
I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer	24.6	9.5
I didn't have to pay for it	24.1	1.2
I wanted to increase my income	23.4	9.6
I wanted greater job satisfaction	18.3	9.7
Other	9.5	0.4

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n = 3,213 (Overall)

n = 3,212 (Most important reason).

Note: 331 (overall) and 332 (most important reasons) invalid responses were excluded.

Activity before and six months after course

Respondents were asked about their main activities before and after their course, and to state which of these was most important to them. For ease of analysis, interpretation and reporting, the most important of these options are grouped into four main activity groups: employment; learning; unemployed; and other (**Tables 3, A11 and A12**).

As well as the activity that was most important to each leaver, respondents also provided information on what else they were doing at the same time. This information was then combined to achieve a better understanding of the combinations of working and studying that leavers engage in. **Technical notes** in the online tables detail how each of these categories were derived (**Table 3**).

Half (50.0%) of FE College leavers were in employment six months after achieving their 2020/21 qualification, up from 43.4% before their course began. The proportion in learning fell slightly from 41.6% to 40.7% (**Tables 3 and A12**), though this masks the large rise in those who are primarily studying but also working (11.8% up from 5.5%).

Table 3: All FE College leavers: activity before and six months after completing course

Main Activity Group	Activity	Before Completing Course	Six Months After Completing Course
		%	%
Employment	Working full-time	29.6	35.4
	Working part-time (one or more jobs)	12.0	10.9
	Primarily in work and also studying	1.8	3.7
	Employment Sub-total	43.4	50.0
Learning	Studying full-time	34.1	24.9
	Studying part-time	2.0	4.0
	Primarily studying and also in work	5.5	11.8
	Learning Sub-total	41.6	40.7
Unemployed	Unemployed	10.0	4.4
Other	Other	5.0	4.9
Total (n)		3,208	3,159

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

Note: As not all respondents answered all questions, totals will vary.

While just over one-third (34.3%) of leavers changed main activity group, the majority remained in the same activity group six months after completing their course. In particular, **Table 4** shows that:

- 33.3% remained in Employment
- 28.2% remained in Learning
- 2.1% remained Unemployed
- 2.1% remained as Other

Table 4: All FE College leavers: summary movement between main activity groups

Main Activity Before Completing Course	Main Activity Approximately Six Months After Course				Total
	Employment	Learning	Unemployed	Other	
Employment	33.3%	7.8%	0.9%	0.8%	1,607
Learning	11.2%	28.2%	1.3%	1.3%	1,021
Unemployed	3.9%	3.3%	2.1%	0.7%	335
Other	1.5%	1.4%	0.1%	2.1%	196
Total	1,723	1,122	142	172	3,159

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

If you were to do your course again

Three-quarters (74.9%) of leavers agreed that they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Just under two-thirds (63.6%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while 57.1% would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and one-sixth (16.6%) would do something completely different (**Tables A42 to A49**).

Table 5: All FE College leavers: if you were to do your course again, how likely or unlikely is it that you would...

Response	Do a different subject (%)	Study at a different FE College (%)	Do a different kind of qualification (%)	Do something completely different (%)
Very likely	9.3	4.5	8.6	6.7
Likely	12.0	5.9	14.6	9.9
Not very likely	28.7	30.8	26.0	24.7
Not likely at all	34.9	44.1	31.1	41.8
Don't know	15.2	14.7	19.7	16.9
Total (n)	3,061	3,061	3,061	3,061

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

Note: As not all respondents answered all questions, totals will vary.

Destinations of Leavers by Key Profiling Variables

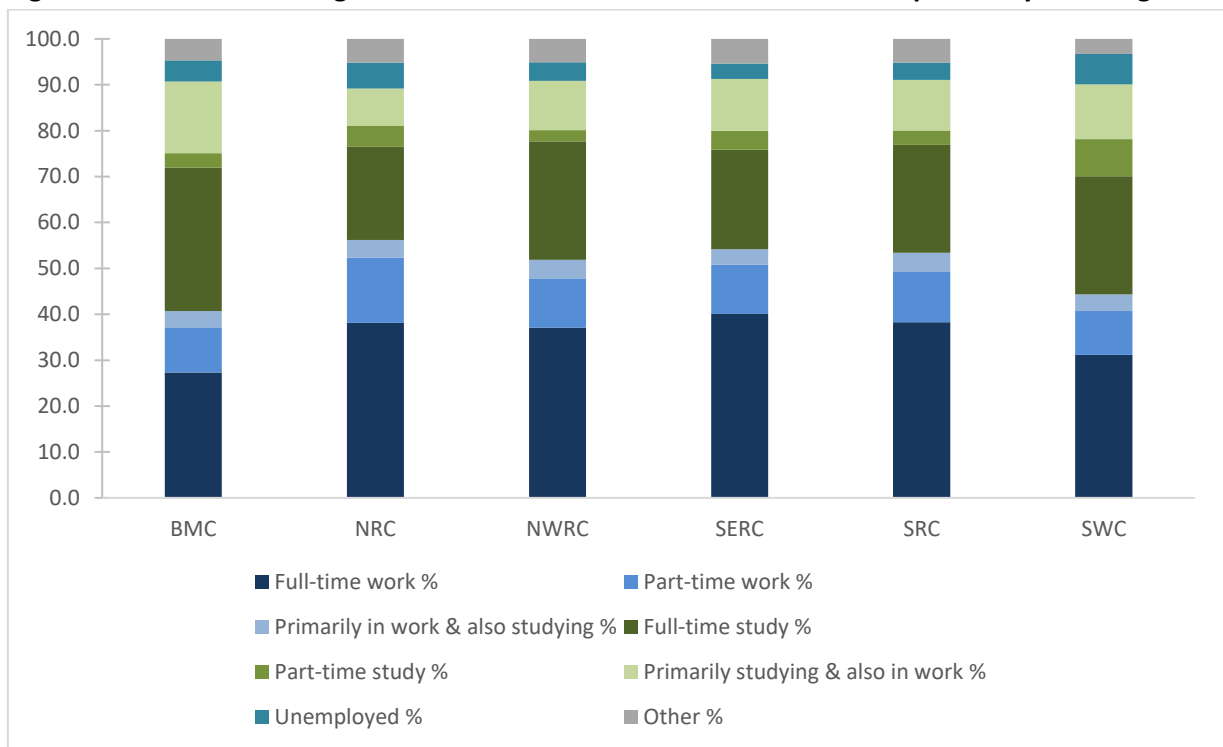
This section provides a comparison of each of the main destinations of the respondents to the Survey of FE College leavers 2020/21 by the key profiling variables (FE College, Sex, Age Group, Course Mode of Attendance and Level of Course Studied) and deprivation quintiles. Outputs for each are available in the online tables (**Tables A16 and A17**).

FE College

As **Figure 2** shows, each cohort of FE College leavers is broadly similar in terms of the activities they move on to after completion of their course. Full-time work (35.4%) and full-time study (24.9%) are the most popular activities 6 months after course completion; however, there are some variations across the colleges.

SERC (40.1%), SRC (38.2%) and NRC (38.1%) had the highest proportions of leavers engaged in full-time work. In contrast, BMC (31.2%), NWRC (25.8%) and SWC (25.7%) had the highest proportions of leavers engaged in full-time study.

Figure 2: All FE College leavers: activities 6 months after course completion by FE College



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

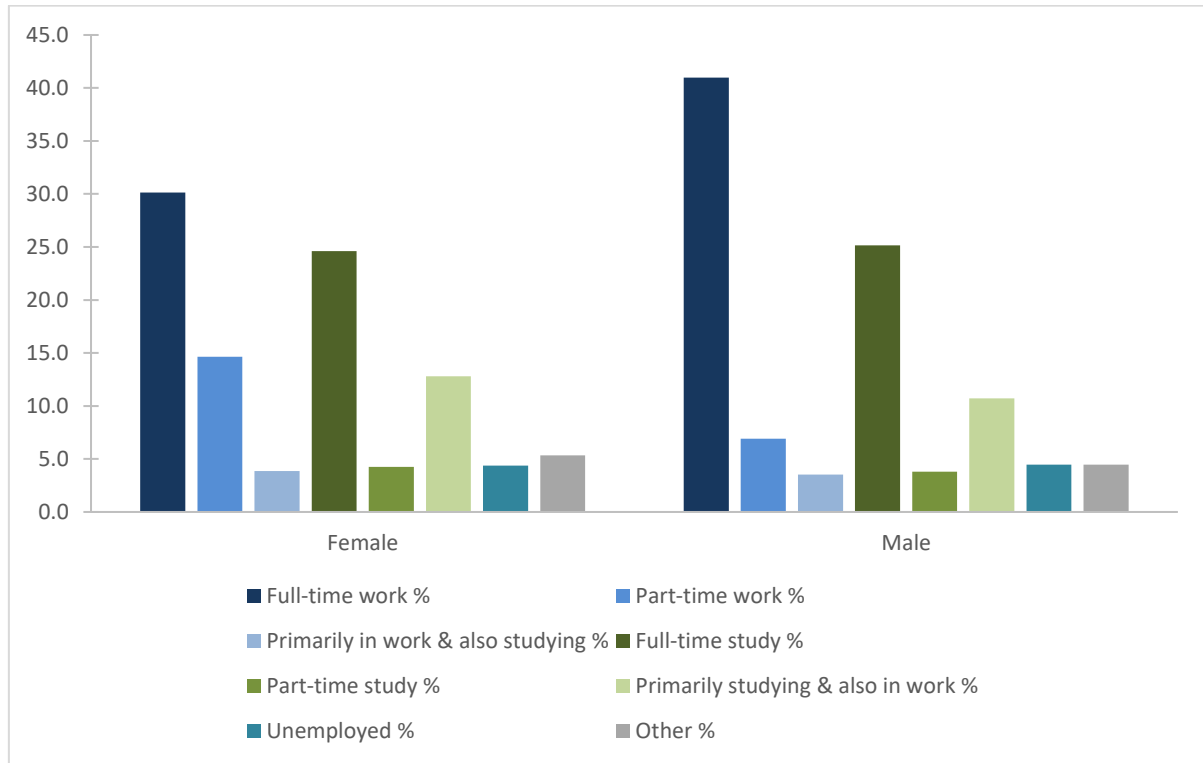
n=3,159

Note: 385 invalid responses were excluded.

Sex

Figure 3 demonstrates that male leavers were more likely than female leavers to be in full-time work (41.0% vs 30.1%) or full-time study (25.1% vs 24.6%). Conversely, in line with the pattern in the labour market², female FE College leavers were more likely than their male counterparts to be in part-time employment (14.6% vs 6.9%).

Figure 3: All FE College leavers: activities 6 months after course completion by sex



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n=3,159

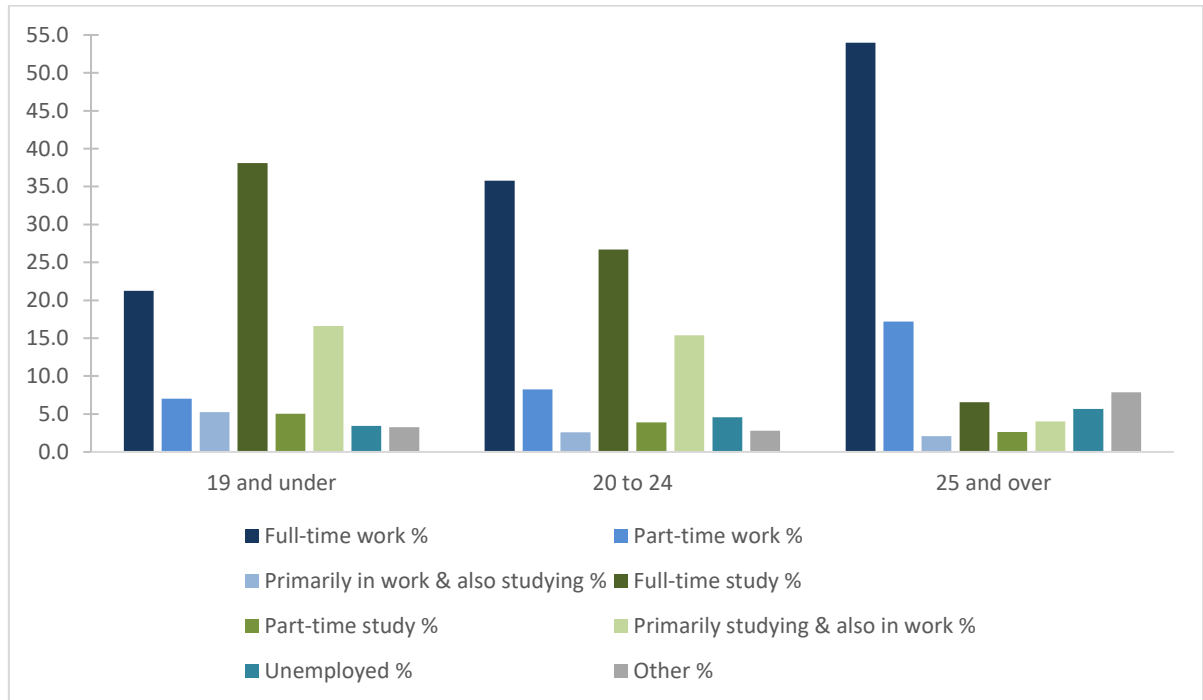
Note: 385 invalid responses were excluded.

²Northern Ireland. NISRA. (2022). *Labour Force Survey Annual Summary Report 2021 – data tables*. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/labour-force-survey-annual-report-2021> (Accessed: 4 November 2022).

Age Group

As illustrated in **Figure 4**, respondents aged 25 and over were most likely to be working full-time six months after completing their course (54.0%), in contrast to those aged 19 and under (21.3%). Conversely, those aged 19 and under were more than five times as likely to be studying full-time (38.1%) as those aged 25 and over (6.6%).

Figure 4: All FE College leavers: activities 6 months after course completion by age band



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n= 3,159

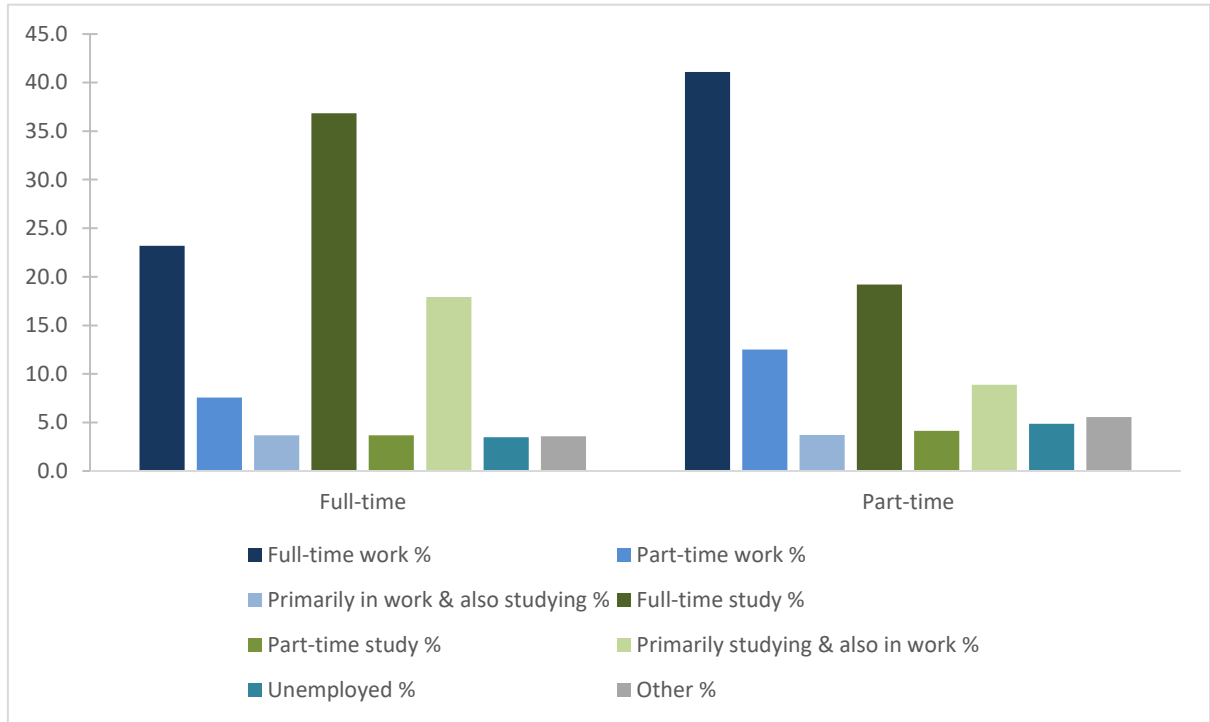
Note: 385 invalid responses were excluded.

Course Mode of Attendance

Figure 5 indicates that the FE College leavers who had completed their studies on a part-time basis were more likely to be in employment either full-time or part-time (41.1% FT, 12.5% PT) than those who had completed their studies on a full-time basis (23.2% FT, 7.6% PT).

Leavers who had completed a course on a full-time basis were more likely than part-time leavers to be in full-time study six months later (36.9% vs 19.2%). They were also more likely to be primarily studying and also working (17.9% vs 8.9%).

Figure 5: All FE College leavers: activities 6 months after course by mode of attendance



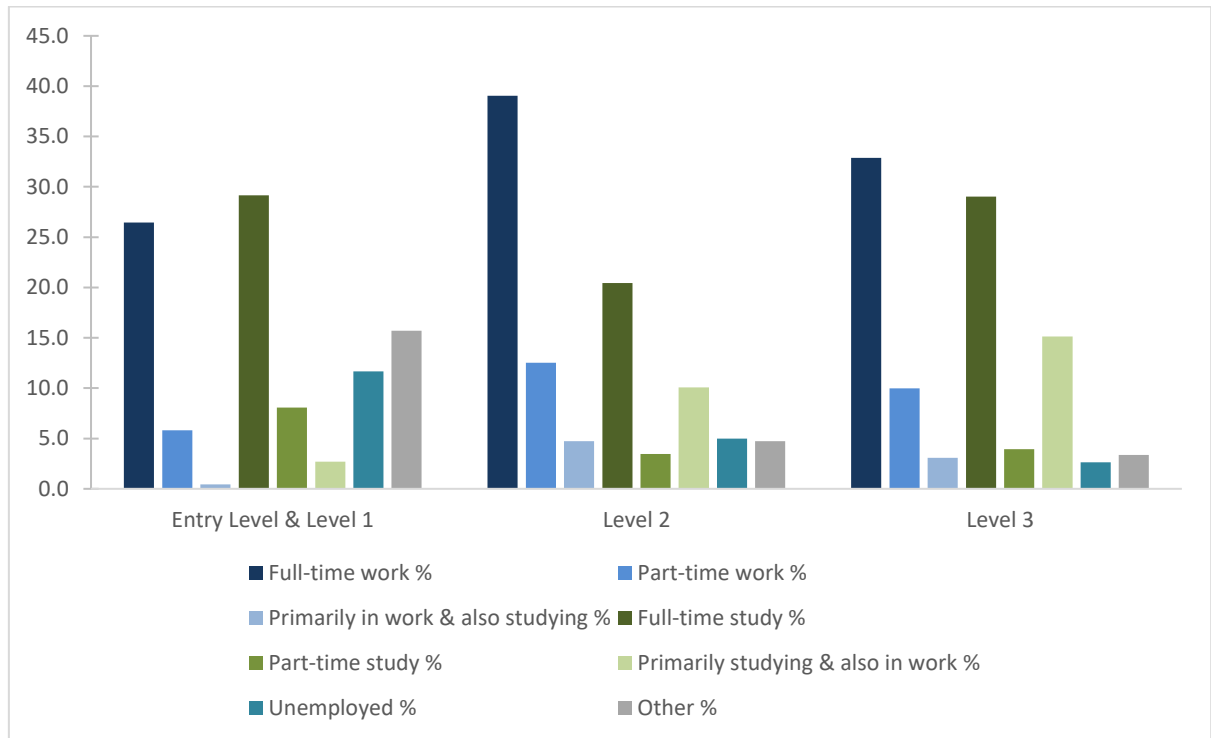
Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21
 n=3,159
 Note: 385 invalid responses were excluded.

Level of Study

Approximately six months after completing a course at FE College, those who had studied a course at Entry Level or Level 1 were less likely to be in full-time employment (26.5%) than those who had studied at Level 2 or Level 3 (39.0% Level 2, 32.9% Level 3).

One-ninth of those who had studied at Entry Level or Level 1 were unemployed (11.7%), in contrast to 5.0% of those who had studied at Level 2 and 2.6% of those at Level 3 (Figure 6).

Figure 6: All FE College leavers: activities 6 months after course completion by level of course



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n=3,159

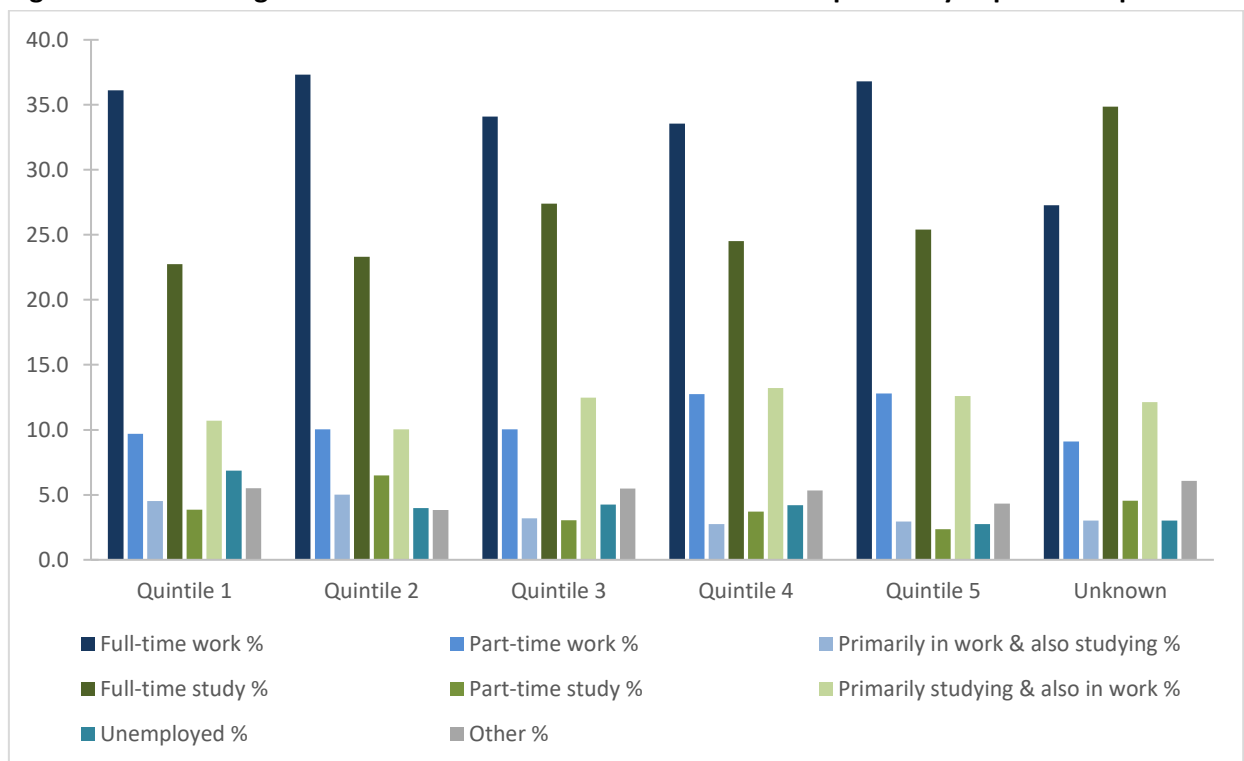
Note: 385 invalid responses were excluded.

Deprivation

As **Figure 7** shows, leavers from each deprivation quintile are broadly similar in terms of the activities they move on to after completion of their course. Full-time work (35.4%) and full-time study (24.9%) are the most popular activities 6 months after course completion; however, there are some variations across the quintiles.

Quintile 2 (37.3%) and Quintile 5 (36.8%) had the highest proportions of leavers engaged in full-time work. Quintile 5 also had the highest proportions of leavers engaged in part-time work (12.8%). Along with those with unknown postcodes³ (34.8%), Quintile 3 (27.4%) had one of the highest proportions of leavers engaged in full-time study or in other activities (5.5%). Notably, unemployment proportions fall as the level of deprivation falls (6.9% in Quintile 1 (most deprived), falling to 2.8% in Quintile 5 (least deprived)).

Figure 7: All FE College leavers: activities 6 months after course completion by deprivation quintile



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n=3,159

Note: 385 invalid responses were excluded.

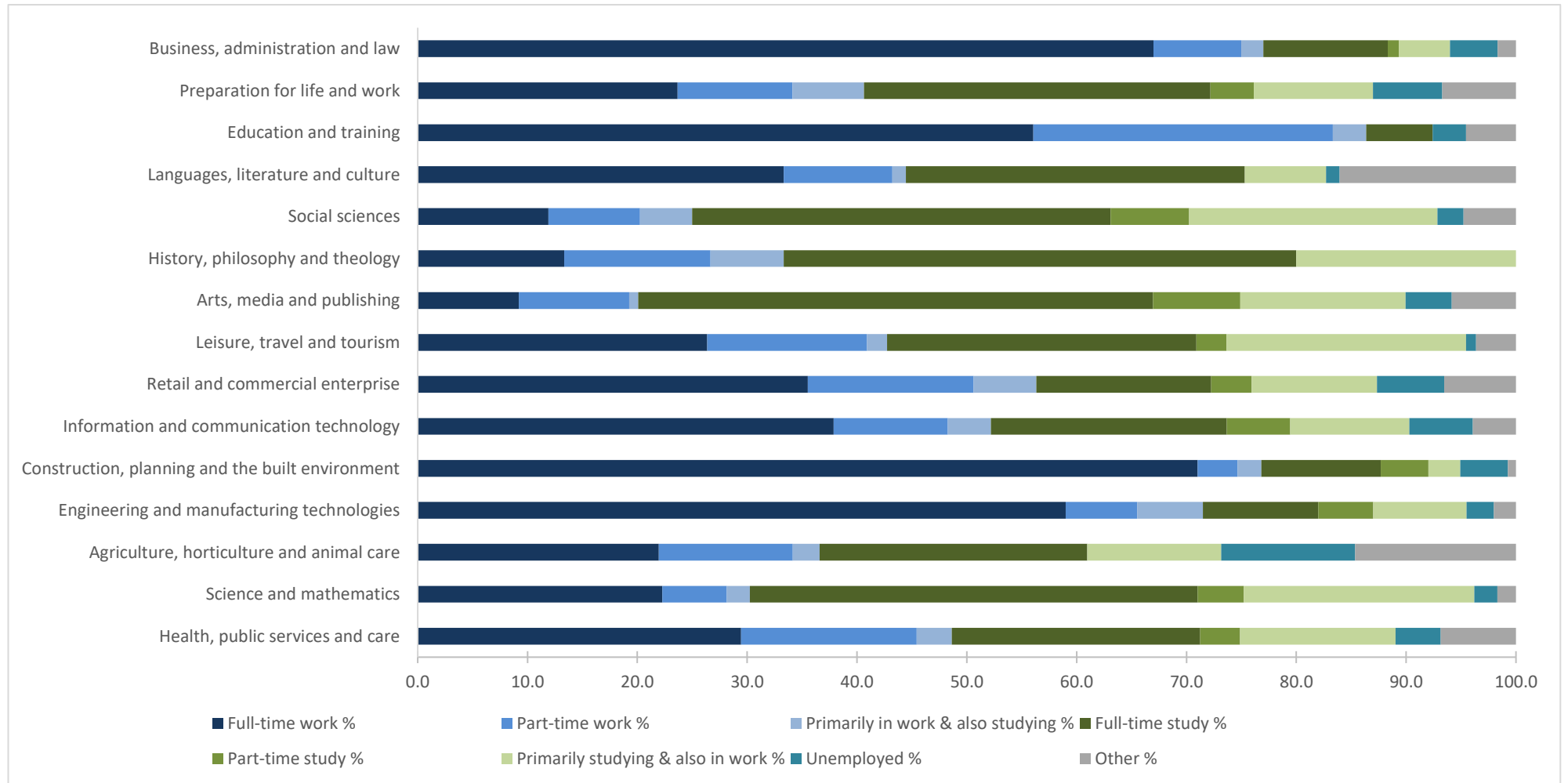
Subject area

Approximately six months after leaving, the subject areas with the highest proportions of FE College leavers in full-time employment were Construction, planning and the built environment (71.0%), Business, administration and law (67.0%) and Engineering and manufacturing technologies (59.0%).

The subject areas with the lowest proportions of FE College leavers in full-time employment were Arts, media and publishing (9.2%), Social sciences (11.9%) and History, philosophy and theology (13.3%) (**Figure 8** and **Table A18**).

³ Those who are not able to supply a Northern Ireland postcode, either because they have an address outside Northern Ireland at the time of registration or because they postcode supplied is invalid.

Figure 8: All FE College leavers: activities 6 months after course completion by subject area



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21
n=3,159

Note: 385 invalid responses were excluded.

3.2 FE College Leavers in Employment

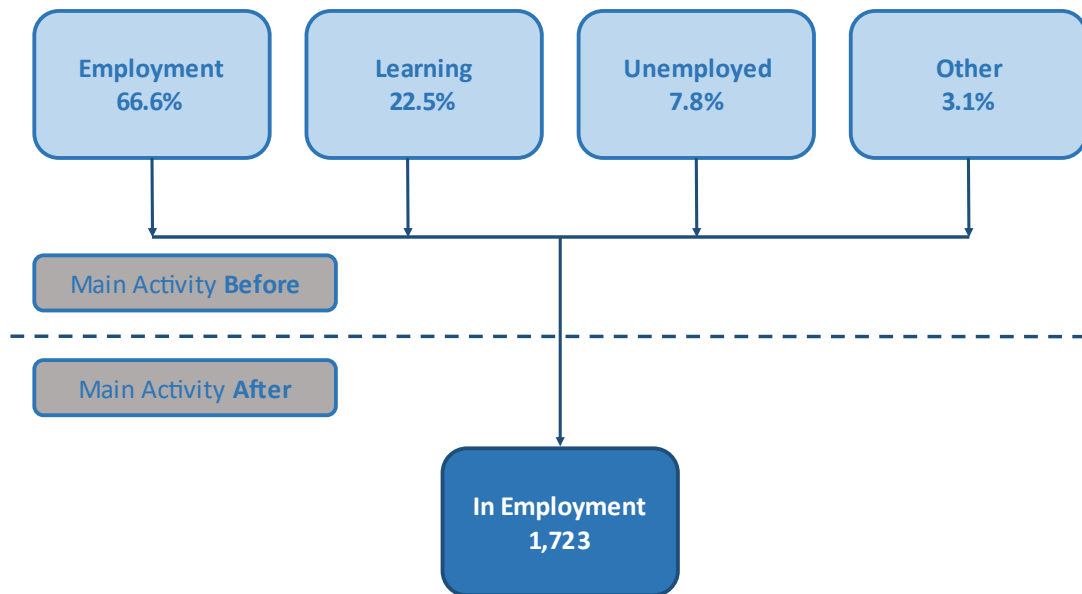
This section presents findings for the FE College leavers in employment six months after their course. This includes those leavers in full-time work, part-time work and those primarily in work but also studying. It provides: an overview of their main activities before the course; whether those in employment before the course have remained with the same employer; how they had heard about the course; and their main reasons for taking the course.

Overview of main activity before the course

Of the FE College leavers in employment six months after achieving a regulated qualification:

- 66.6% had previously been in employment
- 22.5% had previously been in learning
- 7.8% had previously been unemployed
- 3.1% had previously been categorised as other (**Figure 9** and **Table A14**)

Figure 9: FE College leavers in employment: most important activity before

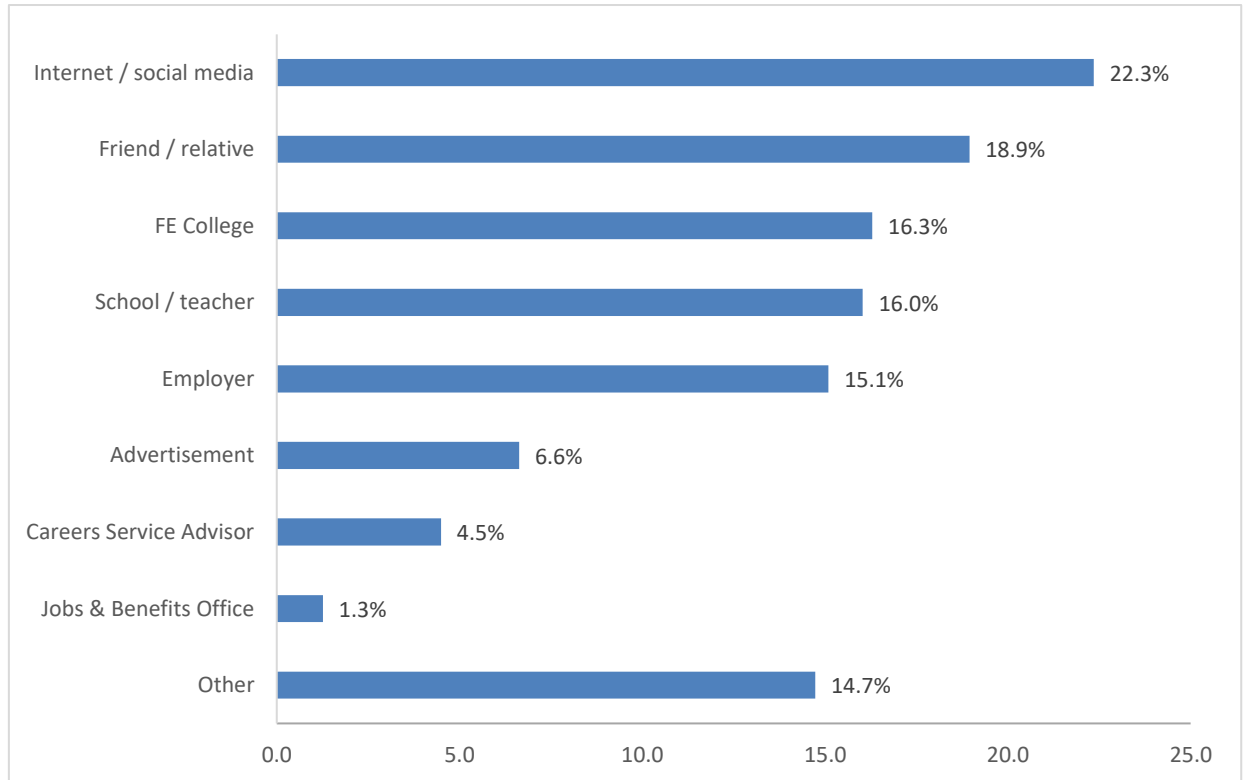


Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

How did individuals hear about their course?

FE College leavers in employment were most likely to have heard about their course through: Internet / social media (22.3%); Friend / relative (18.9%); FE College (16.3%); or School / teacher (16.0%). While all four response categories were also most popular among all FE College leavers, those in employment were less likely than all leavers to have heard about their course through their School / teacher (16.0% vs 21.7%), although they were almost twice as likely to have heard through their Employer (15.1% vs 8.5%) (Figure 10 and Table A4).

Figure 10: FE College leavers in employment: how individuals had heard about their course



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21
 n = 1,723

Main reasons for undertaking the course

The 1,723 leavers in employment who responded to this question provided an average of three reasons for undertaking their course. The four most popular reasons cited were: 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (51.4%); 'I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job' (36.6%); 'It was at a time / place that suited me' (29.8%); and 'I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence' (29.4%) (Tables 6 and A9).

When asked to give the most important reason for undertaking their course, leavers in employment were most likely to say: 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (32.4%); 'I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job' (12.9%); or 'I wanted greater job satisfaction' (9.3%) (Tables 6 and A10).

Table 6: FE College leavers in employment: main reasons for undertaking course

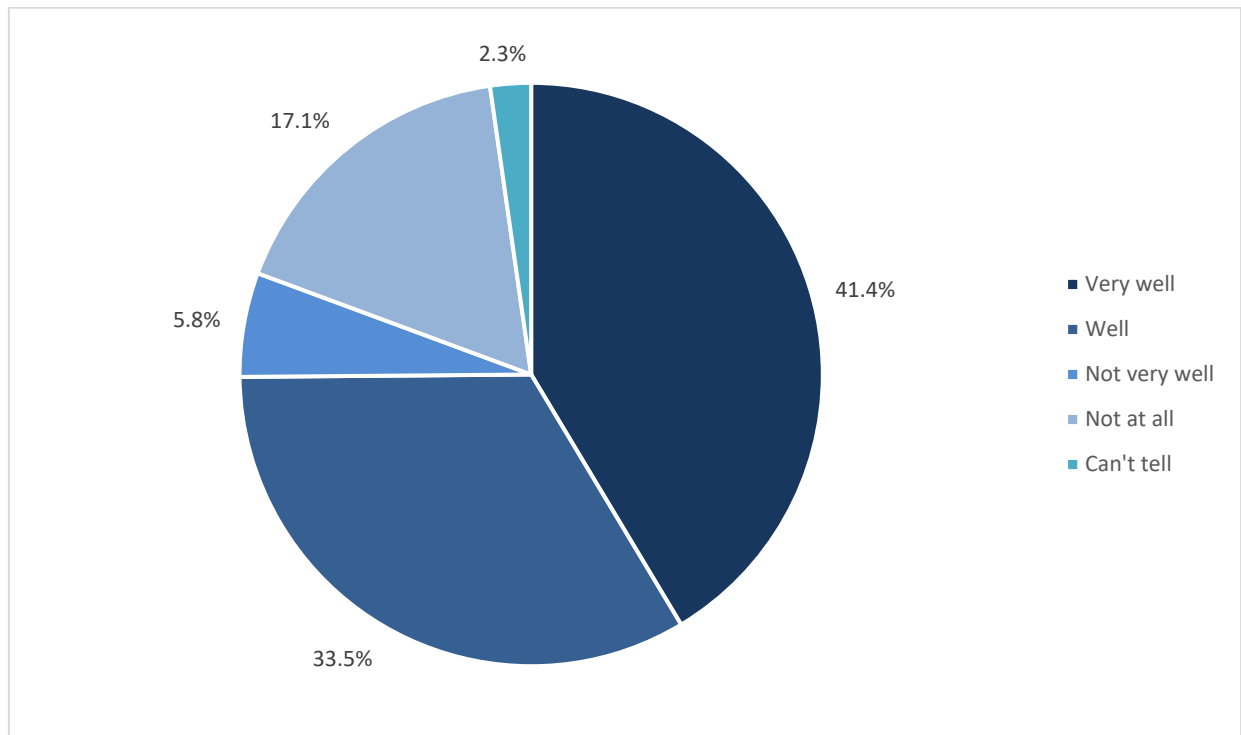
Reason	Overall %	Most Important %
I thought it would improve my career prospects	51.4	32.4
I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job	36.6	12.9
It was at a time / place that suited me	29.8	2.2
I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence	29.4	3.7
I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills	28.8	7.6
I wanted to gain a qualification	28.7	3.0
I wanted to go onto further / higher learning	27.5	4.6
I was interested in the subject	27.5	6.3
I wanted to increase my income	26.6	8.5
I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer	26.1	8.0
I didn't have to pay for it	19.9	1.1
I wanted greater job satisfaction	18.7	9.3
Other	7.9	0.4

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21
n = 1,723

Using skills and knowledge acquired in course in current work

Three-quarters (74.9%) of FE College leavers who took part in the survey and who were in employment stated the course they were utilising what they had learnt during their course at FE College during 2020/21 in their current work, in particular, 41.4% said 'very well' (**Chart 1** and **Table A26**).

Chart 1: FE College leavers in employment: I am utilising what I learnt during my course in my current work?



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n = 1,668

Note: 55 invalid responses were excluded.

Subject area

The three largest subject areas accounted for over two-fifths (42.8%) of the FE College leavers in employment: Business, administration and law (14.7%); Information and communication technology (14.5%) and Health, public services and care (13.7%) (**Table A27**).

Employment type

Over seven-tenths (70.7%) of the FE College leavers who were in employment six months after their course were working full-time; a further 21.9% were working in one or more part-time jobs, while 7.4% were primarily working but also studying (**Table A19**); this is equivalent to 74.3% working full-time and 25.7% working part-time.

According to the Labour Force Survey in the spring of 2022, when the survey fieldwork took place, over three-quarters of the 16+ population in employment (77.5%) were working full-time.⁴

⁴ Northern Ireland. NISRA. (2022). *Labour Force Survey Historical Tables October 2022*. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/labour-market-report-october-2022> (Accessed 7 November 2022)

Occupation

Most of the FE College leavers in employment had jobs classified as: Skilled Trade (20.4%); Caring, leisure and other service occupations (19.4%); or Associate professional and technical occupations (13.3%) (Figure 12 and Table A21).

Similarly, according to ONS⁵ analysis, 61% of non-graduates aged 22 to 29 work in one of four occupation types:

- Elementary occupations, for example, cleaner, warehouse work and security guard
- Skilled trade occupations, for example, building and plumbing
- Caring, leisure and other service occupations
- Sales and customer service occupations.

While analysis from the Survey of FE College Leavers is not limited to the 22 to 29 age range, findings show 58.8% of respondents are employed in one of these four occupation types.

Figure 12: FE College leavers in employment: Occupation

Caring, leisure and other service occupations (19%)	Professional occupations (9%)	Managers, directors and senior officials (5%)	Process, plant and machine operatives (3%)
	Sales and customer service occupations (10%)	Elementary occupations (9%)	
Skilled Trade occupations (20%)	Associate professional and technical occupations (13%)	Administrative and secretarial occupations (11%)	

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21.

n = 1,691

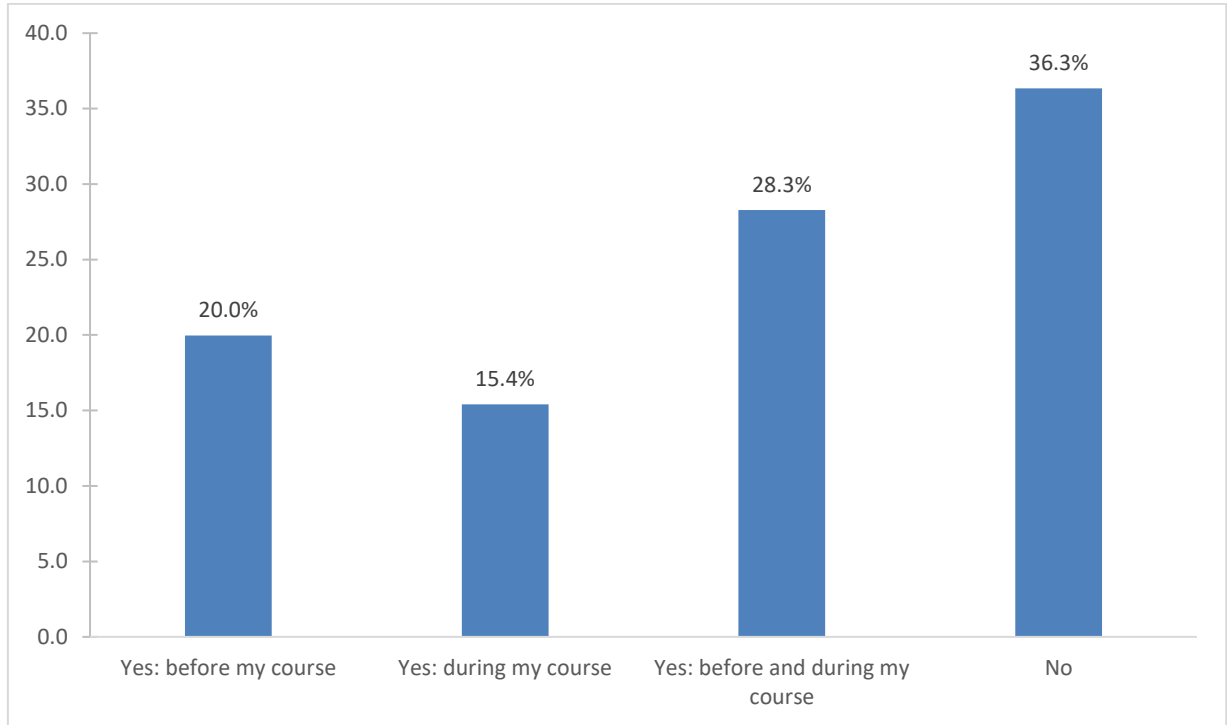
Note: 32 invalid responses were excluded.

⁵ UK. ONS. (2018). *One in eight young people without degrees work in graduate jobs*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/oneineightyoungpeoplewithoutdegreesworkinggraduatejobs/2018-09-18> (Accessed: 7 November 2022).

Employed before and after with the same employer

Of those in **paid employment before and after** completing their course, over five-eighths (63.7%) had worked for their employer before and/or during their 2020/21 course (**Figure 13** and **Table A25**).

Figure 13: FE College leavers in employment: Did you work for this employer before or during your course?



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n = 1,672

Note: 51 invalid responses were excluded.

Why did you decide to take this job?

FE College leavers in employment were asked what was important to them in deciding to take their current job. The three most popular responses included: 'It fitted into my career plan/it was exactly the type of work I wanted' (48.2%); 'In order to earn a living' (25.2%); and 'To gain and broaden my experience in order to get the type of job I really want' (18.7%) (Figure 14 and Table A24).

Figure 14: FE College leavers in employment: Why did you decide to take this job?



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n =1,673

Note: 50 respondents did not answer this question.

Where did they work?

The vast majority of the FE College leavers in employment were working in Northern Ireland (95.1%); 2.7% were working in the Republic of Ireland, 2.0% in England, Scotland or Wales, and 0.2% overseas (Tables 7 and A23).

Table 7: FE College leavers in employment: location of employment

Country	%
Northern Ireland	95.1
Republic of Ireland	2.7
Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales)	2.0
Overseas	0.2
Total	1,682

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n= 1,682

Note: 41 invalid responses were excluded.

If you were to do your course again

Three-quarters (73.4%) of respondents agreed that, were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Three-fifths (60.9%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while 52.6% would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and one-fifth (19.8%) would do something completely different (Tables A42 to A49).

Table 8: FE College leavers in employment: If you were to do your course again, how likely or unlikely is it that you would...

Response	Do a different subject (%)	Study at a different FE College (%)	Do a different kind of qualification (%)	Do something completely different (%)
Very likely	11.3	4.1	10.6	7.7
Likely	12.0	6.2	16.8	12.1
Not very likely	29.1	30.5	24.9	25.1
Not likely at all	31.8	42.9	27.8	37.7
Don't know	15.8	16.2	19.9	17.4
Total (n)	1,684	1,684	1,684	1,684

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

Note: 75 invalid responses were excluded.

3.3 FE College Leavers in Learning

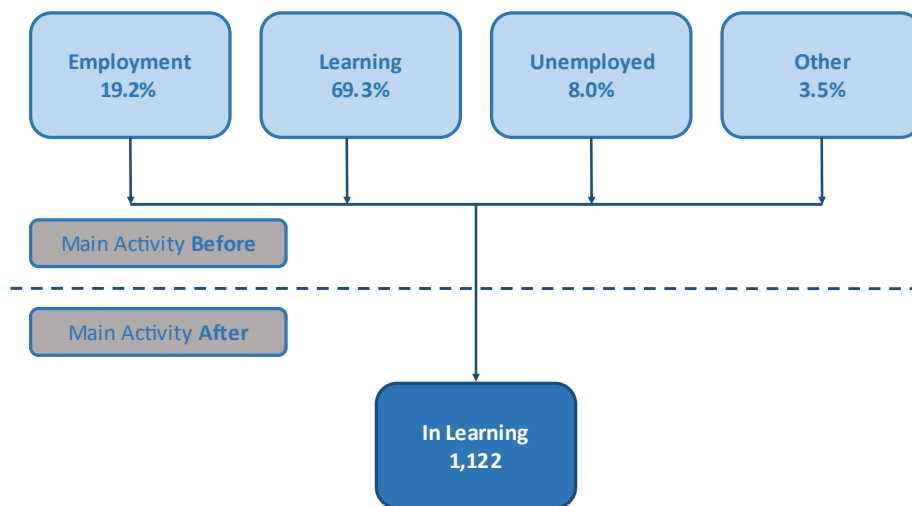
This section presents findings for FE College leavers in learning six months after their 2020/21 course, including those in full-time study, part-time study or primarily studying but also in work. It contains an overview of: their main activities before the course; their learning progression; how they had heard about the course; and their main reasons for taking the course.

Overview of main activity before the course

Of the FE College leavers in learning six months after achieving a regulated qualification:

- 19.2% had previously been in employment
- 69.3% had previously been in learning
- 8.0% had previously been unemployed
- 3.5% had previously been categorised as other (Figure 15 and Table A14).

Figure 15: FE College leavers in learning: most important activity before

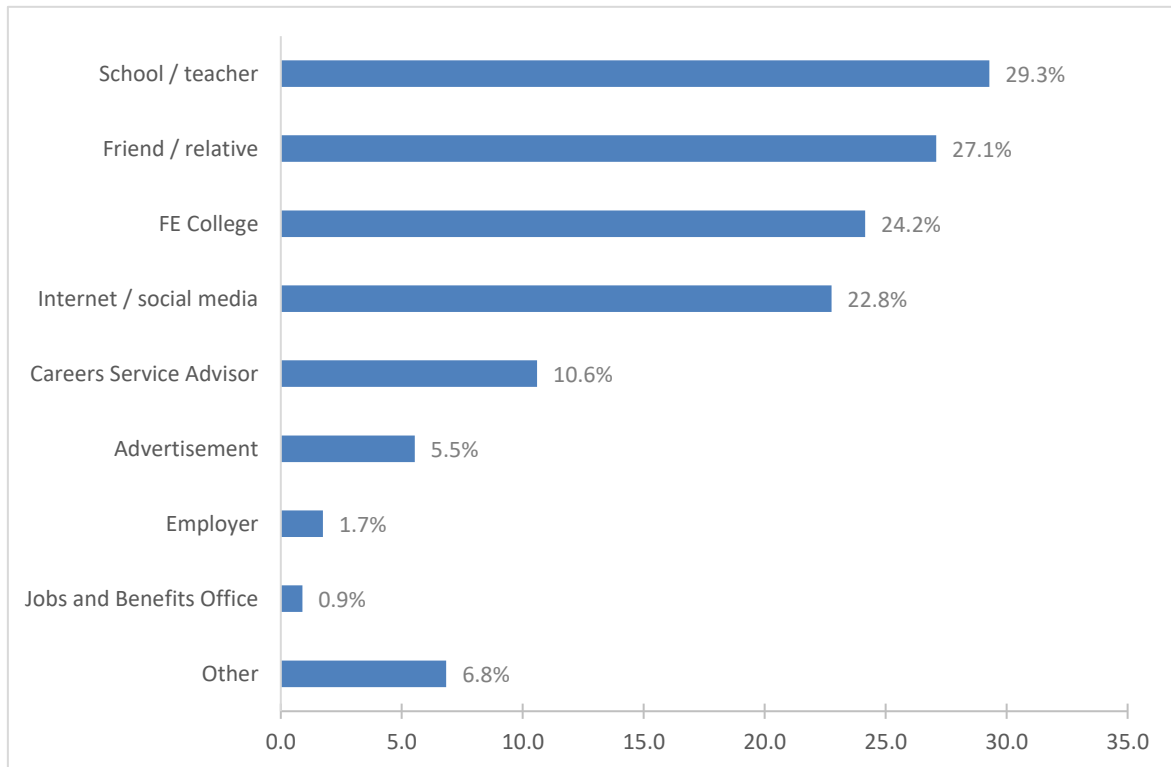


Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

How did individuals hear about their course?

FE College Leavers in learning were most likely to have heard about their course through: School / teacher (29.3%); Friend / relative (27.1%); FE College (24.2%) or Internet / social media (22.8%). While the same four response categories were also most popular among all FE College leavers, those in learning were more likely than all leavers to mention these information sources, in particular School / teacher (29.3% vs 21.7%) (**Figure 17** and **Table A4**).

Figure 16: FE College leavers in Learning: how individuals had heard about their course



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21
 n = 1,122

Main reasons for undertaking the completed course

The 1,122 leavers in learning who responded to this question provided an average of three reasons for undertaking their course. The four most popular reasons cited were: 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (37.3%); 'I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence' (36.5%); 'It was at a time / place that suited me' (36.2%); and 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (31.4%) (Tables 9 and A9).

When asked to give the most important reason for undertaking their course, leavers in learning were most likely to say: 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (27.0%) 'I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job' (13.3%); 'I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer' (11.4%); or (Tables 9 and A10).

Table 9: FE College leavers in learning: main reasons for undertaking course

Reason	Overall %	Most Important %
I wanted to gain a qualification	37.3	1.2
I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence	36.5	3.5
It was at a time / place that suited me	36.2	0.8
I thought it would improve my career prospects	31.4	27.0
I wanted to go onto further / higher learning	28.9	4.4
I didn't have to pay for it	28.7	1.2
I was interested in the subject	24.5	7.0
I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job	23.7	13.3
I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer	23.3	11.4
I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills	22.6	8.1
I wanted to increase my income	18.8	11.0
I wanted greater job satisfaction	17.8	10.7
Other	10.8	0.3

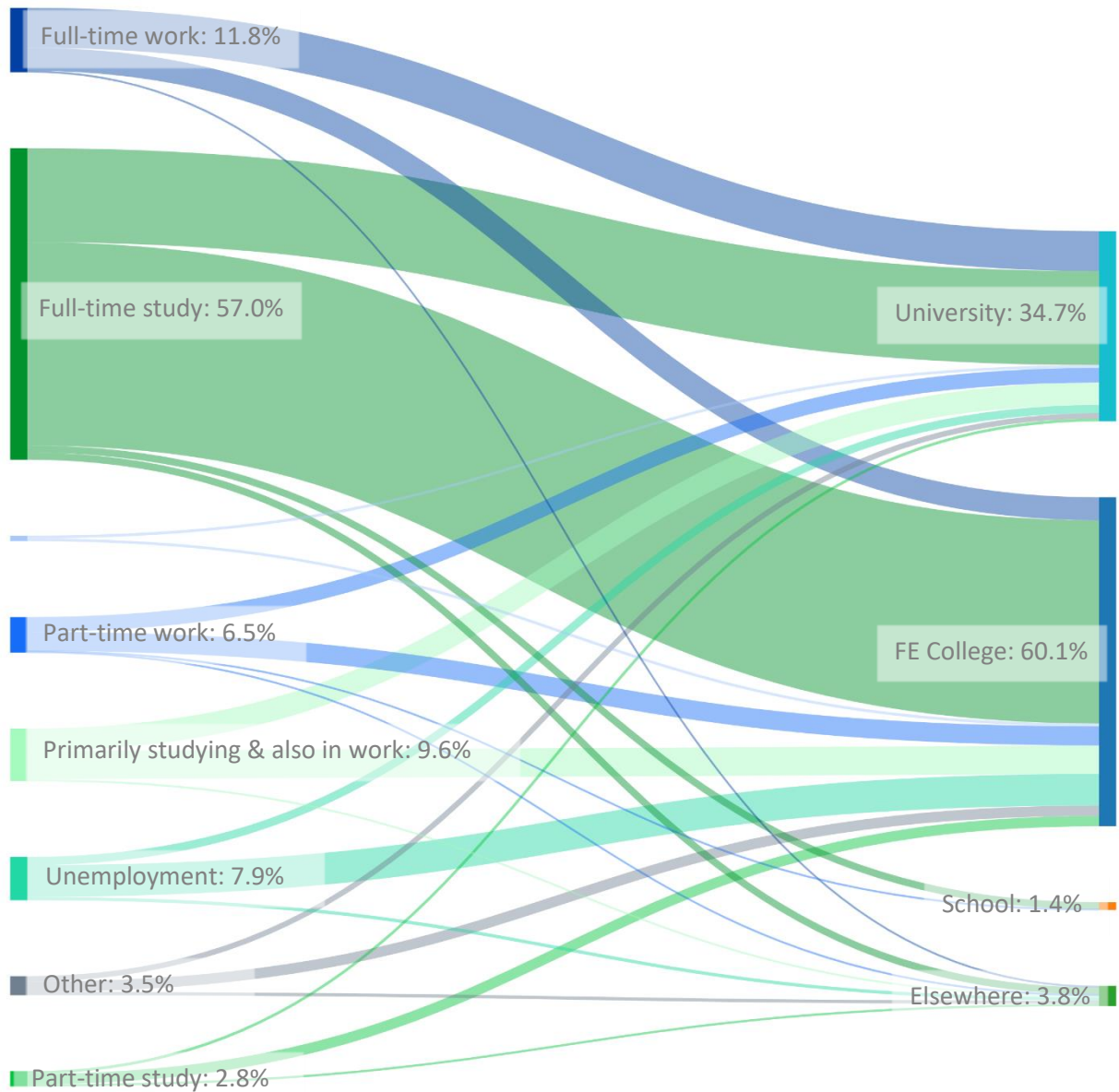
Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21
n = 1,122

Learning progression

Approximately seven-tenths (69.4%) of the FE College leavers in learning six months after their course had also been in learning before their course (Figure 16 and Table A14).

As illustrated in the Sankey Diagram overleaf (Figure 17), six months after completing and achieving their course, most FE College leavers in learning were continuing their learning at FE Colleges (60.1%), while over one-third (34.7%) had started university (Table A32).

Figure 17: FE College leavers in learning after course: main activity before course and location of additional learning



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n=1,027

Note: 95 invalid responses were excluded.

Studying at a higher level

More than four-fifths (82.2%) of FE College leavers in learning said their additional learning is at a higher level than the course they had completed in 2020/21 (**Table A31**).

Of the FE College leavers in learning who had been in full-time study before their 2020/21 course, the majority of each group have progressed to additional learning at a higher level after their course (**Tables 10 and A34**).

Of the 1,027 respondents undertaking additional learning, over nine-tenths (93.1%) had completed a course at Level 2 or 3 (**Table A31**).

Table 10: FE College leavers in learning before and after course: progression to study at a higher level (by location of learning)

Main Activity (Learning) <u>before</u> Course	Attending additional Learning <u>after</u> Course at:			Total (Before)	Undertaking additional learning at a higher level
	University	FE College	Other		
Only studying (either full-time or part-time)	29.5%	65.5%	5.0%	597	78.4%
Primarily studying but also in work	42.6%	54.1%	3.3%	105	92.6%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21.

Note: Excludes those studying at locations other than those listed above.

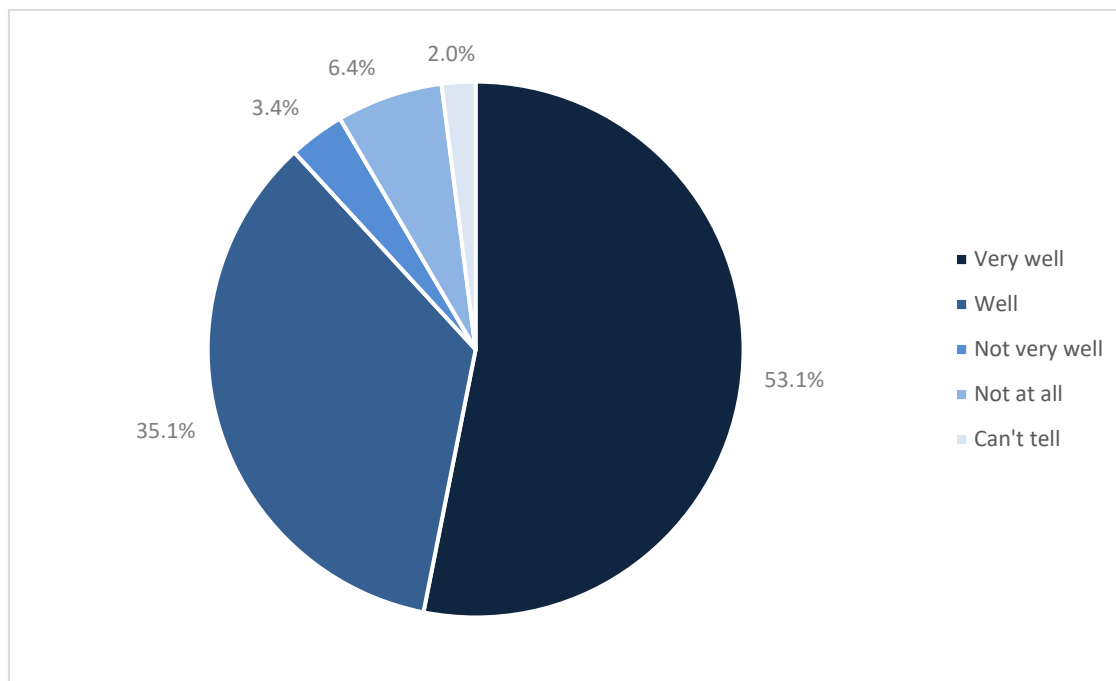
Studying at the same level

Of the FE College leavers who provided details about their additional learning, 16.0% said this would lead to a qualification at the same level as the course they had undertaken in 2020/21 (**Table A31**).

Using skills and knowledge acquired in course

Almost nine-tenths (88.2%) of FE College leavers in learning stated they were utilising what they had learnt during their recent course in their current studies, in particular, 53.1% said 'very well' (**Chart 2** and **Table A35**).

Chart 2: FE College leavers in learning: I am utilising what I learnt during my recent course in my current studies?



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

n = 1,113

Note: 9 invalid responses were excluded.

If you were to do your course again

Over three-quarters (78.4%) of respondents agreed that, were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Seven-tenths (69.7%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while two-thirds (65.6%) would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and 10.9% would do something completely different (**Tables A42 to A49**).

Table 11: FE College leavers in learning: If you were to do your course again, how likely or unlikely is it that you would...

Response	Do a different subject (%)	Study at a different FE College (%)	Do a different kind of qualification (%)	Do something completely different (%)
Very likely	6.6	4.5	5.6	4.5
Likely	10.5	5.4	10.9	6.4
Not very likely	29.3	31.4	29.0	25.6
Not likely at all	40.4	47.0	36.6	49.3
Don't know	13.2	11.7	17.9	14.2
Total (n)	1,101	1,101	1,101	1,101

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

Note: 21 invalid responses were excluded.

3.4 Unemployed FE College Leavers

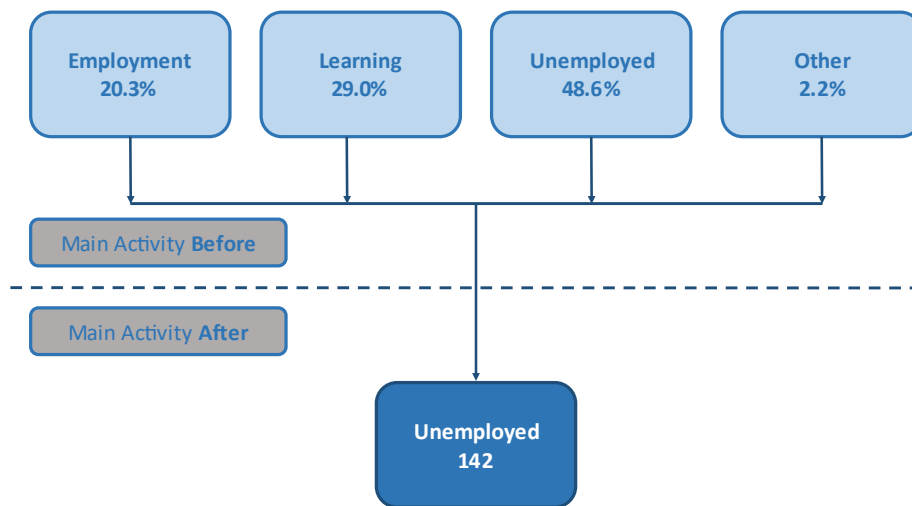
This section presents findings for FE College leavers who were unemployed and looking for work six months after their course, including: an overview of their main activities before the course; how long they have been unemployed; how they had heard about the course; and the main reasons for taking the course.

Overview of main activity before the course

Of the FE College leavers who were unemployed six months after achieving a regulated qualification:

- 20.3% had previously been in employment
- 29.0% had previously been in learning
- 48.6% had previously been unemployed
- 2.2% had previously been categorised as other (**Figure 18** and **Table A14**).

Figure 18: Unemployed FE College leavers: most important activity before

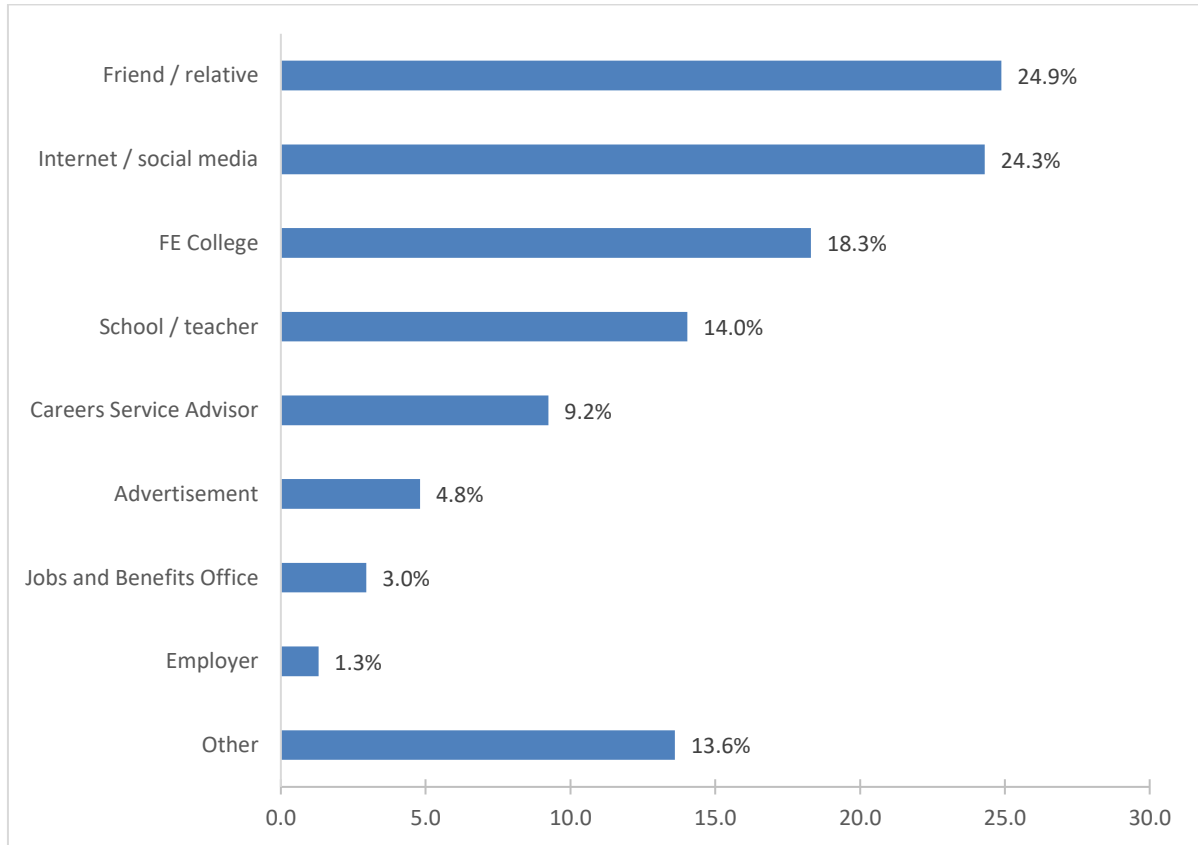


Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

How did individuals hear about their course?

Unemployed FE College Leavers were most likely to have heard about their course through: Friend / relative (24.9%); Internet / social media (24.3%); FE College (18.3%); or School / teacher (14.0%). These top four reasons were also the most popular among all FE College leavers. (Figure 19 and Table A4).

Figure 19: Unemployed FE College leavers: how individuals had heard about their course



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21
 n = 142

Main reasons for undertaking the course

The 142 unemployed leavers who responded to this question provided an average of three reasons for completing their course. The four most popular reasons cited were: 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (39.0%); 'I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job' (31.0%); 'I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence' (30.2%); and 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (28.8%) (Tables 12 and A9).

When asked to give the most important reason for undertaking their course, unemployed leavers were most likely to say: 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (29.0%); 'I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job' (16.0%) or 'I wanted to increase my income' (12.6%) (Tables 12 and A10).

Table 12: Unemployed FE College leavers: main reasons for undertaking course

Reason	Overall %	Most Important %
I thought it would improve my career prospects	39.0	29.0
I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job	31.0	16.0
I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence	30.2	2.1
I wanted to gain a qualification	28.8	3.4
I wanted to increase my income	28.4	12.6
It was at a time / place that suited me	28.1	2.3
I didn't have to pay for it	26.1	0.8
I wanted to go onto further / higher learning	25.1	7.1
I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer	19.8	9.8
I was interested in the subject	19.3	4.8
I wanted greater job satisfaction	19.2	7.2
I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills	18.1	4.9
Other	13.8	0.0

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21
n = 142

Subject area

The three largest subject areas account for over half (54.0%) of unemployed FE College leavers: Preparation for life and work (23.1%); Retail and commercial enterprise (18.2%); and Health, public services and care (12.7%) (Tables 13 and A39).

Table 13: Unemployed FE College leavers: subject area studied

Subject Area	% of All Subjects
Preparation for life and work	23.1
Information and communication technology	18.2
Health, public services and care	12.7
Retail and commercial enterprise	10.7
Business, administration and law	9.1
Arts, media and publishing	7.0
Construction, planning and the built environment	4.4
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	3.6
Science and mathematics	3.5
Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	3.4
Social sciences	1.6
Education and training	1.5
Languages, literature and culture	0.7
Leisure, travel and tourism	0.6
History, philosophy and theology	0.0
Total	100.0%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21.

n = 142

Level of study

One-eighth of those who had studied at Entry Level or Level 1 were unemployed (11.7%), in contrast to 5.0% of those who had studied at Level 2 and 2.6% of those at Level 3 (Table A15).

Any employment after course?

One-quarter (28.0%) of the unemployed FE College leavers said they had had some employment in the six months since completing their course (Table A36).

Long-term unemployment?

Almost half (48.7%) of those unemployed after their course had also been unemployed before their course. Of these, two-thirds (66.4%) were aged 25 years and over and four-fifths (81.3%) had studied their course at Level 2 or below (Tables A37 and A38).

Not unemployed before the course

The largest group of leavers to move into unemployment had previously been in learning (29.0%), while one-fifth (20.3%) had been in employment (Figure 18).

If you were to do your course again

Over half (56.6%) of leavers agreed that were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Just over one-third (35.6%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while just under one-third (32.0%) would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and almost two-fifths (38.8%) would do something completely different (Tables A42 to A49).

Table 14: Unemployed FE College leavers: If you were to do your course again, how likely or unlikely is it that you would...

Response	Do a different subject (%)	Study at a different FE College (%)	Do a different kind of qualification (%)	Do something completely different (%)
Very likely	14.5	8.2	18.4	16.7
Likely	26.9	8.2	20.7	17.0
Not very likely	16.7	31.5	15.9	16.8
Not likely at all	18.9	25.1	16.1	22.0
Don't know	23.0	27.0	28.9	27.6
Total (n)	140	140	140	140

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

Note: 2 invalid responses were excluded.

3.5 Other FE College Leavers

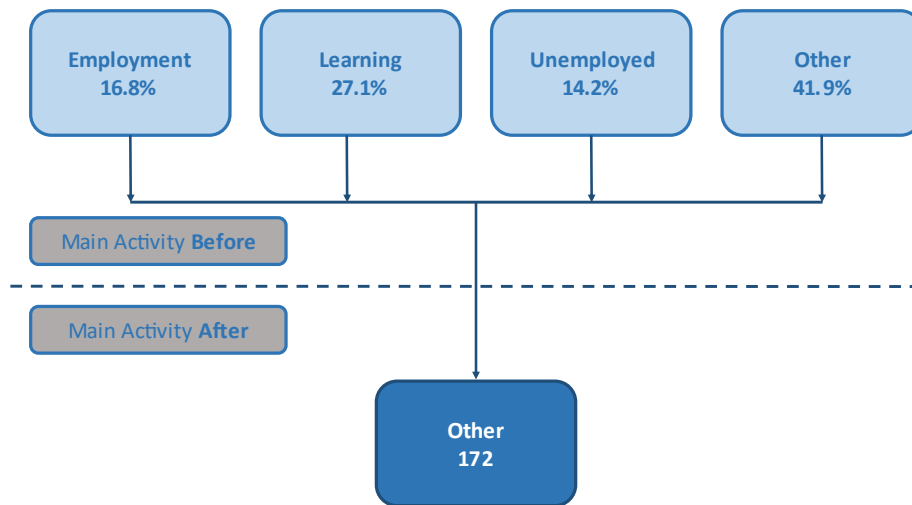
This section presents findings for FE College leavers who were engaged in other activities six months after their course. This includes respondents who were retired, those with caring responsibilities or a long-term illness, or those who were taking time out to travel. Included in this section is an overview of their main activities before the course; how they had heard about the course; and the main reasons for taking the course.

Overview of main activity before the course

Of the FE College leavers who were engaged in other activities six months after achieving a regulated qualification:

- 16.8% had previously been in employment
- 27.1% had previously been in learning
- 14.2% had previously been unemployed
- 41.9% had previously been categorised as other (**Figure 20** and **Table A14**).

Figure 20: Other FE College leavers: most important activity before

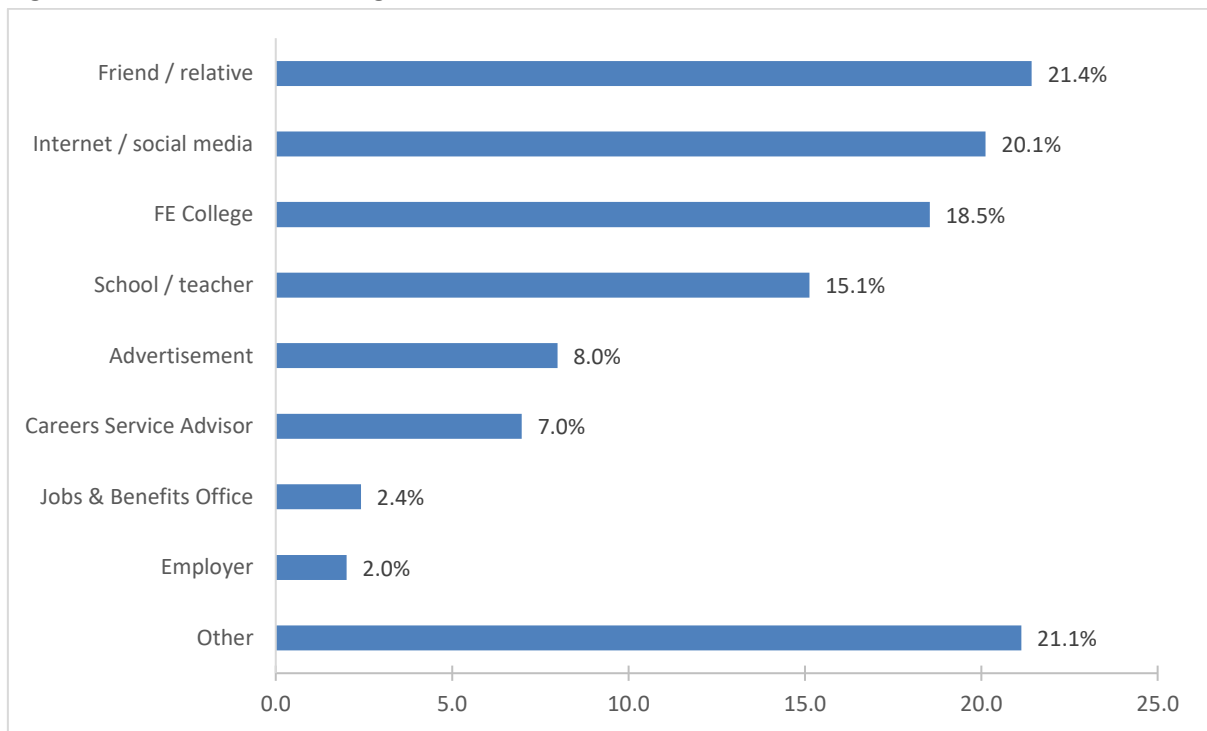


Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

How did individuals hear about their course?

FE College Leavers categorised as other were most likely to have heard about their course through: Friend / relative (21.4%); Other (21.1%); Friend / relative (21.4%) or Internet / social media (20.1%). While three of the four response categories were also most popular among all FE College leavers, those categorised as undertaking other activities were more likely than all leavers to mention other information sources (21.1% vs 11.6%) (Figure 21 and Table A4).

Figure 21: Other FE College leavers: how individuals had heard about their course



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21
n = 172

Main reasons for undertaking the course

The 172 leavers who were classified as other and responded to this question provided an average of three reasons for completing their course. The four most popular reasons cited were: 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (45.2%); 'I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence' (42.2%); 'It was at a time / place that suited me' (41.2%); and 'I wanted to go onto further / higher learning' (38.0%) (Tables 15 and A9).

When asked to give the most important reason for undertaking their course, leavers who were classified as other were most likely to say: 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (21.1%); 'I wanted to go onto further / higher learning' (12.1%); or 'I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job' (12.1%) (Tables 15 and A10).

Table 15: Other FE College leavers: main reasons for undertaking course

Reason	Overall %	Most Important %
I wanted to gain a qualification	45.2	2.3
I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence	42.2	4.8
It was at a time / place that suited me	41.2	4.6
I wanted to go onto further / higher learning	38.0	12.1
I was interested in the subject	30.7	9.7
I didn't have to pay for it	28.3	3.7
I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills	23.8	4.5
I wanted to increase my income	23.6	6.6
I thought it would improve my career prospects	23.3	21.1
I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job	20.2	12.1
I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer	20.0	7.5
I wanted greater job satisfaction	15.5	9.4
Other	9.8	1.6

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21
n = 172

If you were to do your course again

Around three-quarters (76.9%) of leavers agreed that were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Five-eighths (64.6%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while over half (53.8%) would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and one-sixth (16.8%) would do something completely different (Tables A42 to A49).

Table 16: FE College leavers categorised as other: If you were to do your course again, how likely or unlikely is it that you would...

Response	Do a different subject (%)	Study at a different FE College (%)	Do a different kind of qualification (%)	Do something completely different (%)
Very likely	7.4	3.9	5.4	5.3
Likely	10.1	5.3	17.6	11.4
Not very likely	30.3	27.0	21.5	21.3
Not likely at all	34.3	49.9	32.3	37.9
Don't know	17.9	13.9	23.3	24.1
Total (n)	172	172	172	172

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2020/21

Annex A - Commonly used terms and abbreviations

Academic year:	1st August to 31st July.
Course:	A course leading to a regulated qualification at Level 3 or below.
ESOL:	An ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) course is for students who want to improve their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills and for whom English is not their first language. Further information can be found on the ESOL page of the NI Direct Website .
Further Education sector:	The six FE Colleges in NI: Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC); Northern Regional College (NRC); North West Regional College (NWRC); South Eastern Regional College (SERC); Southern Regional College (SRC); and South West College (SWC).
Leavers:	FE College leavers who completed and achieved a regulated qualification at Level 3 or below during the 2020/21 academic year.
Leavers in employment:	This includes: working in paid employment; self-employed; and waiting to start a confirmed job.
Leavers in learning:	This includes: on a scheme/training scheme; waiting to start a confirmed scheme; at school in sixth form; at FE College; at university; or waiting to start a confirmed course at college/university.
Leavers unemployed:	This includes FE College leavers who were unemployed and looking for work.
Leavers classed as other:	This includes any FE College leavers not included in employment, learning or unemployed.
Main activity:	Respondents were asked to select the activity they spent the majority of their time doing both before and after their course. See Table 3 .
Main activity group:	The 7 main activities (above) are grouped into four main activity groups: employment; learning; unemployed; and other. See Table 4 .
Qualification level:	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, Republic of Ireland and overseas please refer to the GOV.UK what different qualifications levels mean webpage .

Occupation:	The classification of respondents' occupations is based on the SOC2020 (Standard Occupational Classification) codes adopted since 2021, further information on SOC2020 classification can be found on the ONS website: SOC2020 .
Regulated Qualification:	Any course at Level 3 or below offering a qualification that has a qualification code on the Register of Regulated Qualifications (RRQ) or any course at Level 4 or above.
SLDD:	Special Learning Difficulties and Disabilities courses, which require specialised teaching, which is taught in a reduced class size or in a day centre.
Sector Subject Area:	Sector Subject Areas (SSAs) were developed according to industry sector and academic subject area 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. They aim to allow more consistent reporting of data across the UK. SSA codes are derived from the OFQUAL Register of Regulated Qualifications, based on the qualification or unit code. The SSA code registered against each qualification or unit has been assigned by the responsible awarding organisation. Further information can be found on the OFQUAL help page on comparing qualifications .
ULN:	Unique Learner Number. This is a unique code used to track each student through their Learning Cycle and is defined by the Learner Records Service (LRS). It is generated by education providers and held by the Learner Register.

Annex B - Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in our survey. Your feedback is important.

The information you provide will be linked to other general enrolment data held about you by DfE for statistical and research purposes only (e.g. gender, age band, level of study).

You will not be identified in any publication from the survey. To protect the privacy of your responses, survey results will be subject to statistical disclosure control procedures and will only be published in aggregate format.

Those who fully complete the questionnaire will be entered into a prize draw to win an iPad.

According to our records you attended [insert college name] College during the 2020/21 academic year and you completed the course [insert course title].

ASK ALL

SECTION A: What were you doing before your 2020/21 course at FE College

1. How did you hear about your course? *(please select all that apply)*

- School/teacher
- Careers Service advisor
- FE College
- Internet / social media
- Employer
- Jobs and Benefits office
- Advertisement
- Friend / relative
- Other

2. What were your reasons for undertaking this course? *(please rank in order of importance, with 1 as the most important and 13 as the least important)*

- I thought it would improve my career prospects
- I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job
- I wanted to increase my income
- I wanted greater job satisfaction
- I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer
- I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills
- I was interested in the subject
- I wanted to go on to further / higher learning
- I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence
- I wanted to gain a qualification
- It was at a time / place that suited me
- I didn't have to pay for it
- Other

3. What were you doing BEFORE your course *(please select all that apply)*

- Working full-time
- Working part-time (one or more jobs)
- Studying full-time (15 or more hours per week)
- Studying part-time (less than 15 hours per week)
- Unemployed
- Doing something else (including taking time out to travel, unpaid caring for someone or retired)

ASK Q4 IF MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE SELECTED AT Q3

IF JUST ONE RESPONSE AT Q3 AUTOMATICALLY CODE THIS TO Q4 AND GO TO ROUTING BEFORE Q5

4. Which ONE of those activities was MOST IMPORTANT to you?

- Working full-time
- Working part-time (one or more jobs)
- Studying full-time (15 or more hours per week)
- Studying part-time (less than 15 hours per week)
- Unemployed
- Doing something else (including taking time out to travel, unpaid caring for someone or retired)

IF EMPLOYED (Q4=1 OR 2) ASK SECTION B

SECTION B: Your employment before your 2020/21 FE College course

You've indicated you were working before you started your course. We'd like to know a bit more about the type of work you were doing.

For the following questions, please provide details of what you considered to be your MAIN job. Your main job might be the one that you spent the most time doing, the one which paid you the most money or was related to your future plans.

5. What was your job title?

6. Briefly describe what you did in your main job

(TO BE CODED TO 4 DIGIT SOC)

7. Which best describes the basis on which you were employed?

- Paid employee on a permanent or open ended contract
- Paid employee on a fixed-term contract lasting 12 months or longer
- Paid employee on a fixed-term contract lasting less than 12 months
- Temping (including supply teaching)
- On an internship / placement
- Voluntary work
- Self-employed / freelance
- Starting up own business
- Developing a professional portfolio / creative practice
- Other

8. Where was your place of work?

- Northern Ireland
- Republic of Ireland
- Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales)
- Other (please specify)

ASK IF SELECTED NORTHERN IRELAND AT Q15, OTHERWISE SKIP TO Q18.

9. What town/city do you work in? (your main day to day location – if you travel about for work use the town where your depot is)?

IF UNEMPLOYED (Q5=6) ASK SECTION C

SECTION C: Your unemployment before your 2020/21 FE College course

10. Were you unemployed for over a year before starting your course?

- Yes
- No

ASK ALL SECTION D

SECTION D: AFTER your course?

11. What are you doing now? *(please select all that apply)*

- Working full-time
- Working part-time (one or more jobs)
- Studying full-time (15 or more hours per week)
- Studying part-time (less than 15 hours per week)
- Unemployed
- Doing something else (including taking time out to travel, unpaid caring for someone or retired)

ASK Q12 IF MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE SELECTED AT Q11

IF JUST ONE RESPONSE AT Q11 AUTOMATICALLY CODE THIS TO Q12 AND GO TO ROUTING BEFORE Q13

12. Which ONE of these is MOST IMPORTANT to you?

- Working full-time
- Working part-time (one or more jobs)
- Studying full-time (15 or more hours per week)
- Studying part-time (less than 15 hours per week)
- Unemployed
- Doing something else (including taking time out to travel, unpaid caring for someone or retired)

IF EMPLOYED (Q12=1 OR 2) ASK SECTION E

SECTION E: Your employment after your 2020/21 FE College course

For the following questions, please provide details of what you consider to be your MAIN job as at last week. Your main job might be the one that you spend the most time doing, the one which pays you the most money or is related to your future plans.

13. What is your job title?

14. Briefly describe what you do in your main job

(TO BE CODED TO 4 DIGIT SOC)

15. Which best describes the basis on which you are employed?

- Paid employee on a permanent or open ended contract
- Paid employee on a fixed-term contract lasting 12 months or longer
- Paid employee on a fixed-term contract lasting less than 12 months
- Temping (including supply teaching)

- On an internship / placement
- Voluntary work
- Self-employed / freelance
- Starting up own business
- Developing a professional portfolio / creative practice
- Other (please specify)

16. Where is your place of work?

- Northern Ireland
- Republic of Ireland
- Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales)
- Other (please specify)

ASK IF SELECTED NORTHERN IRELAND AT Q16, OTHERWISE SKIP TO Q18.

17. What town/city do you work in? (your main day to day location – if you travel about for work use the town where your depot is)?

ASK ALL IN EMPLOYMENT (Q12 = 1 or 2)

18. Why did you decide to take this job? *(please select all that apply)*

- It fitted into my career plan / it was exactly the type of work I wanted
- It was the best job offer I received
- It was the only job offer I received
- It was an opportunity to progress in the organisation
- To see if I would like the type of work it involved
- To gain and broaden my experience in order to get the type of job I really want
- It was in the right location
- The job was well-paid
- In order to earn a living
- Other

19. Did you work for this employer before or during the course you recently completed?

- Yes: before my course
- Yes: during my course
- Yes: before and during my course
- No

IF WORKED FOR EMPLOYER DURING OR BEFORE COURSE (Q19=1,2 or 3) OTHERWISE GO TO Q21

20. In which of the ways listed below did you work for this employer?

- On a sandwich placement
- On another kind of placement or project work
- As a holiday job
- Full-time or part-time work all year round
- Full-time or part-time work during term time
- On an internship
- Zero hours contract
- In other ways

ASK ALL IN EMPLOYMENT

21. I am utilising what I learnt during my recent course in my current work?

- Very well
- Well
- Not very well
- Not at all
- Can't tell

22. My recent course has prepared me well for my current work

- Very well
- Well
- Not very well
- Not at all
- Can't tell

IF EMPLOYED BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER COURSE (Q19 = 1 or 3) ASK Q23, OTHERWISE GO TO ROUTING BEFORE SECTION F

23. Since my course:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I have been doing a job with more responsibilities | YES/NO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I have been earning more money | YES/NO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I have performed better at my job | YES/NO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I have had more job satisfaction | YES/NO |

IF IN ENGAGED IN STUDY OR TRAINING AFTER COURSE (Q12=3 or 4) ASK SECTION F, OTHERWISE GO TO ROUTING BEFORE Q37

SECTION F: Your additional learning

For the following questions, please provide details of what you consider to be your MAIN course. Your main course might be the one that you spend the most time doing, or the one which is related to your future plans. 'Course' includes all forms of study, training scheme or apprenticeship.

24. Where are you attending this course?

- Further Education College
- School
- University (including Open University)
- Other

25. Will this lead to a qualification that is higher, lower or the same level as the course you took in 2020/21?

- Higher
- Same
- Lower

26. I am utilising what I learnt during my recent course in my current studies?

- Very well
- Well
- Not very well
- Not at all
- Can't tell

27. My recent course has prepared me well for my current studies?

- Very well
- Well
- Not very well
- Not at all
- Can't tell

IF UNEMPLOYED AFTER COURSE (Q19=6) ASK SECTION G

SECTION G: Unemployment

28. Have you had any employment since completing your course?

- Yes
- No

ASK ALL SECTION H

SECTION H: Non-economic benefits

29. The skills I have developed during my course will help improve my career prospects?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

30. If you were to choose now whether or not to do your course, how likely or unlikely is it that you would.....?

Do a different subject?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Don't know
- Not very likely
- Not likely at all

Study at a different FE College?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Don't know
- Not very likely
- Not likely at all

Do a different kind of qualification?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Don't know
- Not very likely
- Not likely at all

Do something completely different?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Don't know
- Not very likely
- Not likely at all