

Survey of Further Education College Leavers Report Academic Year 2015/16

Date of Publication:
12th December 2017

Coverage:
Northern Ireland

Frequency of Publication:
Annual

Theme:
Children, Education and Skills

Issued by:
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This report presents findings from the third 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 in the FE sector during the academic year 2015/16.

KEY POINTS:

- Almost half (47.6%) of FE College leavers were in employment six months after achieving their 2015/16 qualification, up from 39.1% before their course began; conversely, the proportion in learning had fallen from 44.7% to 36.8%.
- The vast majority (95.1%) of leavers agreed that completing their 2015/16 course has had a positive impact on them, among the main non-economic gains being: 'boosted confidence' (84.6% of leavers); 'made new friends /met new people' (83.5%); and 'increased self-esteem' (69.7%).
- Over half (51.8%) of the FE College leavers in employment said their 2015/16 qualification is relevant to their current job, while almost a quarter (24.2%) said they could not have obtained/stayed in their employment without completing the course.
- Among FE College leavers in employment who have been with the same employer since before their 2015/16 course, almost three-fifths (56.9%) said they are better at their jobs, a quarter (25.7%) said they are doing a job with more responsibilities, while 13.2% said they have been promoted - with the majority attributing their progress to the course at least to some extent.
- Most (86.2%) FE College leavers still in learning had also been in learning before the course they had completed in 2015/16, while over four-fifths (82.6%) are now studying towards a higher level qualification.
- In line with recent economic trends, the proportion of FE College leavers who classified themselves as unemployed six months after completing their course in 2015/16 (5.5%) was lower than that for the 2013/14 cohort (7.6%).

Reader Information

Purpose	Monitor and report on the destinations of students and potential benefits after completing and achieving a regulated qualification at a Further Education College in Northern Ireland during 2015/16.
Authors	Louise Buckley, Allan Nesbitt, Brian French.
Publication Date	12th December 2017.
Reporting Period	Approximately six months after academic year 2015/16.
Fieldwork Period	3rd January to 31 st March 2017.
Publication Issue	3
Statistical Quality	Information detailed in this release has been quality assured prior to release.
Target audience	Department for the Economy (DfE), Directors of FE colleges in Northern Ireland, Board members of FE colleges, educational professionals, academics, media and members of the public interested in the FE sector.
Further copies from	analyticalservices@economy-ni.gov.uk
Internet address	https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-economic-research/further-education-statistics
Price	Free
Copyright	This publication is Crown copyright and may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium. Any material used must be acknowledged, and the title of the publication specified.
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) Allan Nesbitt - Allan.Nesbitt@economy-ni.gov.uk (Tel: 028 9025 7428)</p>
Acknowledgment	We would like to thank all the FE leavers who took part in the survey. Without your help this report would not have been possible.

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Summary of Findings

All FE College leavers

Almost half (47.6%) of FE College leavers were in employment six months after achieving their 2015/16 qualification, up from 39.1% before their course began; conversely, the proportion in learning had fallen from 44.7% to 36.8%.

The most popular reasons given by FE College leavers for undertaking their 2015/16 course were: 'to learn something new/gain new skills' (67.6%); 'to improve my job prospects or get a new job/career' (63.4%); 'personal interest in the course' (63.2%); and 'to gain a qualification' (58.3%).

The vast majority (95.1%) of leavers agreed that completing their 2015/16 course has had a positive impact on them, among the main non-economic gains being: 'boosted confidence' (84.6% of leavers); 'made new friends /met new people' (83.5%); and 'increased self-esteem' (69.7%).

Over four-fifths (84.6%) of FE College leavers agreed their 2015/16 course has helped them become 'more enthusiastic about learning', while 72.4% agreed that it has helped give them a 'better idea of what they want to do in their life'.

Over three-fifths (61.9%) of leavers agreed that completing their 2015/16 course has 'improved their quality of life', while over four-fifths (84.9%) said they are more likely to 'undertake further learning and training', primarily at a higher level, and almost all (98.4%) would recommend completing a course in further education to a friend.

FE College leavers in employment

Over a quarter (28.9%) of the FE College leavers in employment had not been in employment before they started their 2015/16 course – of these, almost three-quarters had been in learning.

Over half (51.8%) of the FE College leavers in employment said their 2015/16 qualification is relevant to their current job, while almost a quarter (24.2%) said they could not have obtained/stayed in their employment without completing the course.

Over three-fifths (62.3%) of FE College leavers in employment were earning less than £300 per week, 20.4% were earning between £300 and £399, while 17.2% were earning £400 or more.

The vast majority (96.7%) of FE College leavers in employment were working in Northern Ireland, while 2.6% were working in the Republic of Ireland, 0.5% in Great Britain and 0.3% overseas.

Most (91.8%) of FE College leavers in employment were paid employees, with most in jobs classified as: 'Skilled Non-manual' (29.4%); 'Managerial and Technical' (22.5%); 'Partly Skilled' (22.4%); or 'Skilled Manual' (20.6%).

Over two-thirds (69.9%) of FE College leavers in employment before and after the course they completed in 2015/16 said they are using the skills and knowledge acquired in their job.

Among FE College leavers in employment who have stayed with the same employer since before their 2015/16 course, almost three-fifths (56.9%) said they are better at their jobs, a quarter (25.7%) said they are doing a job with more responsibilities, while 13.2% said they have been promoted - with the majority attributing their progress to the course at least to some extent.

FE College leavers in learning

Most (86.2%) FE College leavers still in learning had also been in learning before the course they had completed in 2015/16, while over four-fifths (82.6%) are now studying towards a higher level qualification.

Over two-thirds (67.7%) of leavers in learning have continued their learning in the FE sector, while over a fifth (22.2%) have started university.

Almost three-quarters (72.4%) of FE College leavers in learning have continued their learning in the same subject area as the course they completed in 2015/16.

Almost two-thirds (65.7%) of leavers in learning said they probably / definitely could not have undertaken their current learning without the course they had completed in 2015/16, while most (87.2%) said this additional qualification should help them obtain the sort of job they want.

Unemployed FE College leavers

In line with recent economic trends, the proportion of FE College leavers who classified themselves as unemployed six months after completing their course in 2015/16 (5.5%) was lower than that for the 2013/14 cohort (7.6%).

Around half (49.5%) of unemployed leavers had also been unemployed immediately before undertaking the 2015/16 course.

Section One: Background and Introduction

How to use this report

This report presents findings from the third 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 competing and achieving a regulated qualification in the FE sector during the academic year 2015/16.

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 four 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, their main activities before and after their course, and non-economic benefits of doing 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.

Each sub-section contains cross year comparisons.

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 Activity publications. These provide additional information about the students enrolled on regulated courses at FE Colleges and are available at <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/further-education-activity-northern-ireland-201516>

Additional information on definitions and technical aspects of the survey are available in the [Annex](#). Supplementary tables (denoted by the prefix 'A') are available on the [Survey of FE College Leavers web page](#). 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](#). The **vision** of the Department is a globally competitive economy that works for everyone. Responsibilities include:

- economic policy (including Industrial Strategy)
- 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

For additional information on the Department:

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/>

Further Education in Northern Ireland: policy and operational context

FE Colleges in Northern Ireland (NI) aim to deliver high quality, economically relevant, professional and technical provision, and will play a key role in the delivery of the draft [Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland](#) and in developing a globally competitive economy.

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 40 campuses. 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 £260 million and a professional workforce of around 3,500. Engaging 80,000 learners in the 2015/16 academic year and working with over 10,000 businesses across NI, they have a significant footprint in our economy.

Through implementation of the FE strategy, 'FE Means Success', colleges will continue to fulfil the important dual role of helping to develop a strong and vibrant economy through helping employers to innovate and upskill, and supporting social inclusion by providing those with low or no qualifications, or who have barriers to learning, with the skills and qualifications they need to find employment. FE Means Success is a programme designed to ensure colleges are fit for purpose to deliver a higher profile skills agenda, and further strengthen quality of provision throughout the

sector, which will enable further education to be recognised as an equal and valued pillar of the education system, alongside higher education and the statutory school system.

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.

For additional information on FE in Northern Ireland:

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/further-education>

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/further-education>

Why has this survey been carried out?

The draft [Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland](#) places the focus of the Northern Ireland Executive on creating an inspiring vision of the future, with inclusive growth, prosperity and rebalancing our economy at its core.

A key pillar of this strategic approach, ‘Enhancing Education, Skills and Employability’, focuses on improving educational outcomes from an early age; supporting those furthest from the workforce; and ensuring NI has the necessary skills pipeline to meet its business needs now and in the future.

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
- the impact of the FE course on non-economic outcomes

Section Two: Methodology

Origins of first Survey of FE College Leavers

In September 2014, Statistics and Research Branch (Tertiary Education) commissioned [Central Survey Unit \(CSU\) of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(NISRA\)](#) to conduct a survey on the destinations of and potential benefits to individuals who had completed and achieved at least one regulated qualification course at one of NI's FE Colleges in the 2013/14 academic year.

Of particular interest are:

- progression into employment or further learning
- improving employment prospects, earnings and promotion
- potential non-economic benefits to the individual

Student destination is determined by main activity after completion of a course. For analysis purposes, destinations are grouped into four main activities: employment; learning; unemployment; and other.

What topics are covered in the survey?

Question topics include: how individuals had heard about their course; their reasons for taking the course; their main activity before their course; their main activity six months after completing their course; and their attitudes on potential non-economic benefits from their achievement.

Who is included in the 2015/16 survey?

The population of interest includes all 43,587 individuals who completed and achieved at least one regulated qualification at one of NI's FE Colleges in the 2015/16 academic year.

Due to resource constraints, a representative sample of 5,989 was selected to take part in a telephone interview. This sample was randomly selected and representative of the population of interest across five stratification variables: FE College; Age Band; Gender; Mode of Attendance (Full/Part-time); and Level of Course.

[Table 1](#) provides a profile of all respondents for each of the stratification variables. This table compares the proportions of survey respondents with the population of interest.

How?

Interviews with randomly selected FE College leavers are conducted over the telephone. Interviewers enter responses into an electronic version of the questionnaire. This information is collated by CSU and passed to Statistics and Research Branch (Tertiary Education) for analysis.

When?

For the 2015/16 survey, all telephone interviews were conducted approximately six months after course completion (3rd January - 31st March 2017). The interview workload was spread evenly over the

three months. Over this period, approximately 6,000 interview contacts were allocated to around 50 CSU interviewers. Each month, during the fieldwork period, CSU sent out letters to the sample of randomly selected respondents. The letter contained background information about the survey and let them know that an interviewer would be phoning them to invite them to take part in a brief telephone interview.

Response rate

The overall response rate for the 2015/16 survey was 69.8%. Although down slightly on previous years (2014/15: 70.2%; 2013/14: 72.5%), for a survey of this nature (telephone) a response rate of this level was considered excellent.

To calculate the response rate, any individuals with an invalid phone number were subtracted from the representative sample (n=5,989). Ineligible cases were also removed, leaving a total eligible sample of 5,331 (see [Box One](#)). The final response rate was calculated as follows:

$$(3,720 / 5,331) \times 100 = 69.8\%$$

Weighting

Weighting of the responses has not been required for the 2015/16 survey. Any differences in the distribution between the sample and population are not considered large enough to justify weighting the data.

Content changes

To ensure consistency and enable comparison across years, very few changes have been made to the questionnaire used in the third Survey of FE College Leavers (2015/16). Additional information is available in the [Annex](#).

Cross year comparison

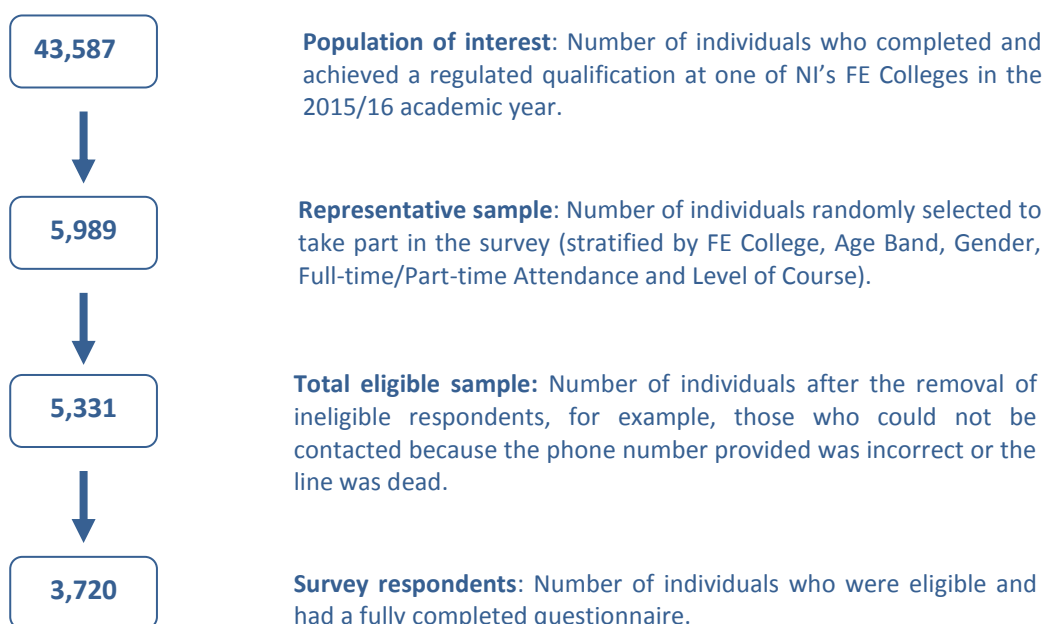
Cross year comparison tables are presented at the end of the [employment](#), [learning](#) and [unemployment](#) sub-sections and in the [Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16](#) online tables.

NWRC Sample Boost

At the request of the Department for Education and Skills, an additional sample of 323 Republic of Ireland domiciled leavers from NWRC has been surveyed; this group was asked an additional set of questions about their reasons for choosing a course in Northern Ireland. The results of this sample boost will be disseminated separately from this report.

Table 1: Comparison: stratification variable proportions for the survey respondents (3,720) and population of interest (43,587) (2015/16)

Variable	Variable Categories	Respondent Profile		Comparison with the Total FE College Population of Interest	
		Survey Respondents	%	% of Population of interest (n=43,587)	Percentage point difference
FE College	Belfast Metropolitan College	879	23.6	23.2	0.4
	Northern Regional College	545	14.7	13.8	0.9
	North West Regional College	516	13.9	15.0	-1.1
	South Eastern Regional College	553	14.9	16.7	-1.8
	Southern Regional College	670	18.0	17.1	0.9
	South West College	557	15.0	14.2	0.8
	Total	3,720	100.0	100.0	0.0
Gender	Female	2,037	54.0	52.6	1.4
	Male	1,683	46.0	47.4	-1.4
	Total	3,720	100.0	100.0	0.0
Age (years)	19 and under	1,625	43.7	43.6	0.1
	20-24	513	13.8	14.7	-0.9
	25 and over	1,582	42.5	41.7	0.8
	Total	3,720	100.0	100.0	0.0
Mode of Attendance	Full-time	977	26.3	25.9	0.4
	Part-time	2,743	73.7	74.1	-0.4
	Total	3,720	100.0	100.0	0.0
Level of Course	Entry Level	258	6.9	7.6	-0.7
	Level 1	319	8.6	9.1	-0.5
	Level 2	1,461	39.3	40.7	-1.4
	Level 3	1,238	33.3	31.9	1.4
	Level 4 and above	444	11.9	10.7	1.2
	Total	3,720	100.0	100.0	0.0

Box 1: Population of interest to survey respondents (2015/16)

Interpretation

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

- 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 achieved for each individual, which resulted in 43,587 individual FE College leavers being eligible for inclusion in the 2015/16 survey.
- Although the sample (n=5,989) has been designed to be representative of the population of 2015/16 FE College leavers, 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. To assist interpretation, **Table A14** in the supplementary tables, [available online](#), presents an upper and lower limit (margin of error) for each statistic. We can be 95% confident that the population value will occur within these limits.
- Inferences/statements about the population of interest can be made because the profile of survey respondents by the stratification variables (FE College, Age Band, Gender, Mode of Attendance (Full/Part-time) and Level) is broadly similar to that of the population of interest (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 totals 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.
- [The report and accompanying online tables](#) present significant and non-significant findings. Statistical techniques have been used to test for statistically significant differences in proportions across the main activity options before and after the course at FE College. [Statistically significant](#) findings are denoted by '*' in the tables and are reported at the 5% level, that is, there is a 1 in 20 likelihood that these differences have occurred by chance. Non-significant findings are included for descriptive purposes and to illustrate trends.

Section Three: Main Findings

3.1 All FE College Leavers

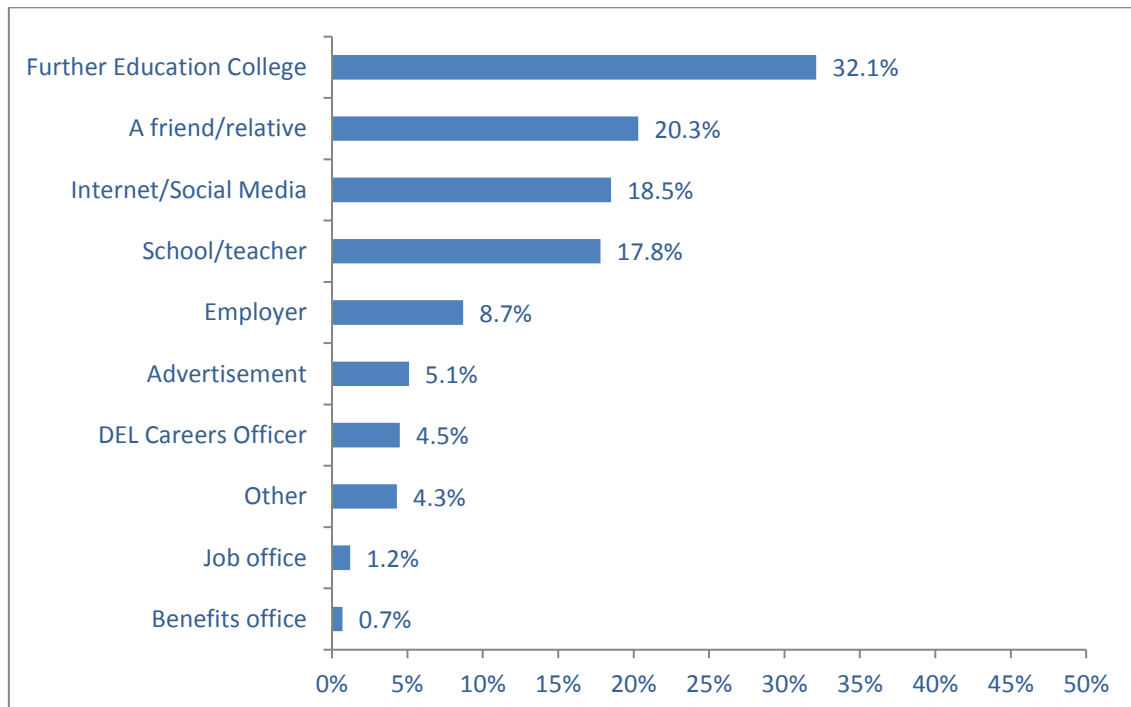
This section presents findings on all participants in the Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16 and includes:

- how they had heard about the course they recently completed and achieved
- main reasons for doing their course
- main activities before and approximately six months after their course
- perceived non-economic benefits of the course to the individual

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 three ways of hearing about their course were through: 'FE College' (32.1%); 'a friend/relative' (20.3%); and 'internet/social media' (18.5%). The inclusion of 'FE College' and 'internet/social media' within the top three reasons emphasises that the FE Colleges' own promotion and course prospectuses fulfil a significant role in attracting student enrolments, together accounting for around half of the responses (**Figure 1** and **Table A01** in the supplementary tables).

Figure 1: All FE College leavers: how individuals had heard about their course (2015/16)



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.

n = 3,642

Main reasons for undertaking the course

Improved employability and increased skills/qualifications are among the key drivers for undertaking courses at FE Colleges. The four most popular reasons cited by FE College leavers were: 'to learn something new/gain new skills' (67.6%); 'to improve my job prospects or get a new job/career' (63.4%); 'personal interest in the course' (63.2%); and 'to gain a qualification' (58.3%) (**Table 2**).

Table 2: All FE College leavers: main reasons for undertaking course (2015/16)

Reason	%
To learn something new/gain new skills	67.6%
To improve my job prospects or get a new job/career	63.4%
I have/had a personal interest in the course	63.2%
To gain a qualification	58.3%
To go on to further or higher learning	46.0%
Because it was at a time/place that suited me	39.7%
To meet new people and build my self confidence	33.9%
To get more job satisfaction	22.9%
To improve my ability to do my current job	22.0%
Because I did not have to pay for it	20.6%
To increase my income	19.0%
To improve my job security	18.2%
To get a promotion	7.8%
I was required to attend course by my employer	6.7%
It was mandatory	6.4%
To help/support my children/grandchildren with homework	2.9%
Other reason	2.0%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 3,719.

Main activity before and six months after course

Respondents were asked about their main activity before and after their course. For ease of analysis, interpretation and reporting, the eighteen main activity options are grouped into four main activity groups: employment; learning; unemployed; and other (**Table 4**).

While almost one-quarter (24.6%; 914) of students changed main activity group, the majority remained in the same activity group six months after completing their course. In particular, **Table 3** shows that:

- 33.8% (1,257) remained in employment
- 31.7% (1,179) remained in learning
- 2.7% (102) remained unemployed
- 7.1% (264) remained as other

Table B3 provides the numbers and proportions of FE College leavers within each main activity before and after the course at FE College.

Table 3: All FE College leavers: summary movement in main activity (2015/16)

Main Activity Before Completing Course	Main Activity Approximately Six Months After Course				Total
	Employment	Learning	Unemployed	Other	
Employment	1,257	120	24	50	1,451
Learning	377	1,179	61	44	1,661
Unemployed	79	34	102	16	231
Other	56	34	19	264	373
Total	1,769	1,367	206	374	3,716

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 3,716.

Table 4 provides an overview of how the four main activity groups map onto all eighteen main activities. It indicates an increase of 8.5 percentage points in the proportion of FE College leavers classed as in employment and a decrease of 7.9 percentage points in the proportion of those in some form of further learning compared with before the course at FE College. Both changes in proportion are statistically significant.

Table 4: All FE College leavers: grouped main activity before and six months after completing course (2015/16)

Main Activity Grouped	Main Activity Ungrouped	Before Completing Course		Six Months After Completing Course		Direction of % Change
		Count	%	Count	%	
Employment	Working in paid employment Self-employed Waiting to start a confirmed job	1,453	39.1%	1,769	47.6%	↑ *
Learning	On a scheme/training scheme Waiting to start a confirmed scheme At school aged 16 or below At school in sixth form At FE College At CAFRE (including Greenmount/Loughry/Enniskillen) At university (including OU) At another learning institution Waiting to start a confirmed course at college/university	1,661	44.7%	1,367	36.7%	↓ *
Unemployed	Unemployed and looking for work	231	6.2%	206	5.5%	↓
Other	In voluntary or unpaid work Looking after the family or home Travelling Temporarily sick, injured or disabled Long term sick or disabled Retired Other	374	10.1%	374	10.1%	-
Total		3,719	100.0%	3,716	100.0%	

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.

n = 3,719 before and 3,716 after.

* indicates that changes in proportions are proven to be statistically significant at 5% level.

Non-economic benefits

Box 2 provides an overview of perceived non-economic benefits reported by a high proportion of FE College leavers.

Box 2: All FE College leavers: non-economic benefits (2015/16)

Positive impact? (n=3,710)

The vast majority (95.1%) of FE College leavers agreed that completing their course has had a positive impact on them; this included 78.1% who said their course has definitely had a 'positive impact' on them (**Table A46**).

Gain from learning? (n=3,556)

The three most commonly reported gains from completing their course at FE College included: 'boosted confidence' (84.6%); 'made new friends/met new people' (83.5%); and 'increased self-esteem' (69.7%) (**Table A48**).

Enthusiasm about learning? (n=3,711)

Over four-fifths (84.6%) agreed that, as a result of completing their course, they have become 'more enthusiastic about learning' (**Table A50**).

Better idea of what to do in life? (n=3,710)

Almost three-quarters (72.4%) of respondents agreed that, as a result of completing their course, they have a 'better idea of what they want to do in their life' (**Table A52**).

Improved quality of life? (n=3,711)

Over three-fifths (61.9%) agreed that completing their course has 'improved their quality of life' (**Table A54**).

Undertake further learning and training? (n=3,706); at a higher level? (n=3,701)

Over four-fifths (84.9%) of FE College leavers agreed that, as a result of their course, they were more likely to 'undertake further learning and training' (**Table A56**). Just over three-quarters (76.9%) agreed they were more likely to do so at a 'higher level' (**Table A58**).

Recommend completing a course to a friend?

Almost all (98.4%) leavers would recommend completing a course at FE College to a friend.

Findings by stratification variable categories are available in the [Survey of FE College Leavers](#) online tables 2015/16 (Tables A47, A49, A51, A53, A55, A57, & A59).

Findings by FE Sector, employment sub-groups, learning and unemployment are available in the [Survey of FE College Leavers](#) online tables 2015/16 (Tables A46, A48, A50, A52, A54, A56, A58, & A60).

FE College leavers: cross year comparison (academic years 2013/14 - 2015/16)

This section provides a cross year comparison of the first three sweeps of the survey. **Table 5** provides an overview of all FE College leavers by the five survey stratification variables. **Table 6** compares cross year findings on how FE College leavers heard about their course and reasons for doing their course. **Table 7** summarises the progression of the FE College leavers before and after their course. **Table 8** overviews the non-economic benefits of course completion for all the FE College leavers.

Table 5 shows that across all three years, the proportions for each of the five survey stratification variables are largely unchanged. Over this period, increases have occurred in the proportions of those studying at higher levels (up 2.4% points at Level 3 to 33.3%; and up 1.3% points at Level 4 and above to 11.9%).

Outputs for each year are available in the [Survey of FE College Leavers](#) online tables.

Table 5: Overview: survey of FE College leavers (stratification variables) 2013/14 -2015/16

Stratification Variables	Variable Categories	Academic Year		
		2013/14 (%)	2014/15 (%)	2015/16 (%)
College	Belfast Metropolitan College	23.0	22.5	23.6
	Northern Regional College	14.0	15.7	14.7
	North West Regional College	15.8	14.6	13.9
	South Eastern Regional College	13.4	14.1	14.9
	Southern Regional College	20.3	18.0	18.0
	South West College	13.5	15.0	15.0
Gender	Female	55.5	54.0	54.0
	Male	44.5	46.0	46.0
Age (years)	19 and under	41.2	42.9	43.7
	20-24	14.1	14.0	13.8
	25 and over	44.7	43.1	42.5
Mode of attendance	Full-Time	24.4	23.5	26.3
	Part-Time	75.6	76.5	73.7
Level of course	Entry Level	7.7	7.8	6.9
	Level 1	9.7	8.3	8.6
	Level 2	41.1	40.9	39.3
	Level 3	30.9	32.1	33.3
	Level 4 and above	10.6	10.9	11.9
Total number of respondents		3,861	3,700	3,720

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Note:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

As **Table 6** shows, each cohort of FE College leavers found out about their course of study via the same top three ways, namely: 'FE College'; 'friend/relative'; and 'internet/social media'.

The top four reasons for undertaking the course have remained the same for each year, with 'learning something/gain new skills' unchanged at the top; the other main reasons are: 'I have/had a personal interest in the course'; 'to improve my job prospects or get a new job/career'; and 'to gain a qualification'.

Table 6: Comparison: FE College leavers (2013/14 - 2015/16)

	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
How did individuals hear about their course? (top three ways) [Table A06]	FE College (33.2%)	FE College (34.0%)	FE College (32.1%)
	Friend/relative (19.5%)	Friend/relative (21.4%)	Friend/relative (20.3%)
	Internet (17.3%)	Internet (18.5%)	Internet/social media (18.5%)
Main reasons for undertaking course? (top four reasons) [Table A12]	To learn something new/gain new skills (64.0%)	To learn something new/gain new skills (70.3%)	To learn something new/gain new skills (67.6%)
	I have/had a personal interest in the course (60.4%)	I have/had a personal interest in the course (63.8%)	To improve my job prospects or get a new job/career (63.4%)
	To improve my job prospects or get a new job/career (58.6%)	To gain a qualification (59.2%)	I have/had a personal interest in the course (63.2%)
	To gain a qualification (50.3%)	To improve my job prospects or get a new job/career (58.7%)	To gain a qualification (58.3%)

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16

Note:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

Table 7 shows that, across the three academic years 2013/14 to 2015/16, proportions for each main activity group before and after completing their course at FE College were largely unchanged. After completing a course, respondents were more likely to be in employment and less likely to be in further learning or to be unemployed. In line with recent economic trends, the proportion of leavers who are unemployed has fallen from 7.9% (2013/14) to 5.5% (2015/16).

Table 7: Main activity (grouped) before and after completing course at FE College (2013/14 - 2015/16)

Main Activity (Grouped)	Before Completing Course			After Completing Course		
	Academic Year			Academic Year		
	2013/14 (%)	2014/15 (%)	2015/16 (%)	2013/14 (%)	2014/15 (%)	2015/16 (%)
Employment	38.0	36.7	39.1	47.5	46.7	47.6
Learning	42.5	44.6	44.7	34.1	35.2	36.8
Unemployed	7.9	7.3	6.2	7.6	6.6	5.5
Other	11.6	11.4	10.1	10.9	11.6	10.1
Total number of respondents	3,861	3,695	3,719	3,861	3,700	3,716

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Notes:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

As illustrated in **Table 8**, consistently high proportions of leavers have indicated their course has had a positive impact overall, ranging from 94.3% in 2013/14 to 95.5% in 2014/15.

The top three non-economic gains have remained the same for each year, and have become more prevalent between 2013/14 and 2015/16: ‘boosted my confidence’ (from 79.4% to 84.6%); ‘made new friends/met new people’ (from 74.5% to 83.5%); and ‘increased my self-esteem (from 66.2% to 69.7%’. Little change is evident in the ratings for other non-economic benefits as shown in the table.

Table 8: Non-economic benefits for FE College leavers (2013/14 - 2015/16)

Non-economic Benefits	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Probably/definitely positive impact overall [Table A46]	94.3%	95.5%	95.1%
Gains (top three) [Table A48]	Boosted my confidence (79.4%)	Boosted my confidence (84.0%)	Boosted my confidence (84.6%)
	I made new friends/met new people (74.5%)	I made new friends/met new people (81.7%)	I made new friends/met new people (83.5%)
	Increased my self-esteem (66.2%)	Increased my self-esteem (66.6%)	Increased my self-esteem (69.7%)
More enthusiastic about learning [Table A50]	85.1%	83.7%	84.6%
Better idea what to do in life [Table A52]	71.2%	68.9%	72.4%
Improved quality of life [Table A54]	61.9%	60.7%	61.9%
More likely to undertake further learning and training [Table A56]	85.3%	84.0%	84.9%
More likely to undertake further learning and training at a higher level [Table A58]	78.7%	76.3%	76.9%
Recommend completing a course to a friend [Table A60]	98.1%	98.1%	98.4%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16

Note:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

3.2 FE College Leavers in Employment

This section presents findings for the FE College leavers in employment (paid employment and self-employed) six months after their course.

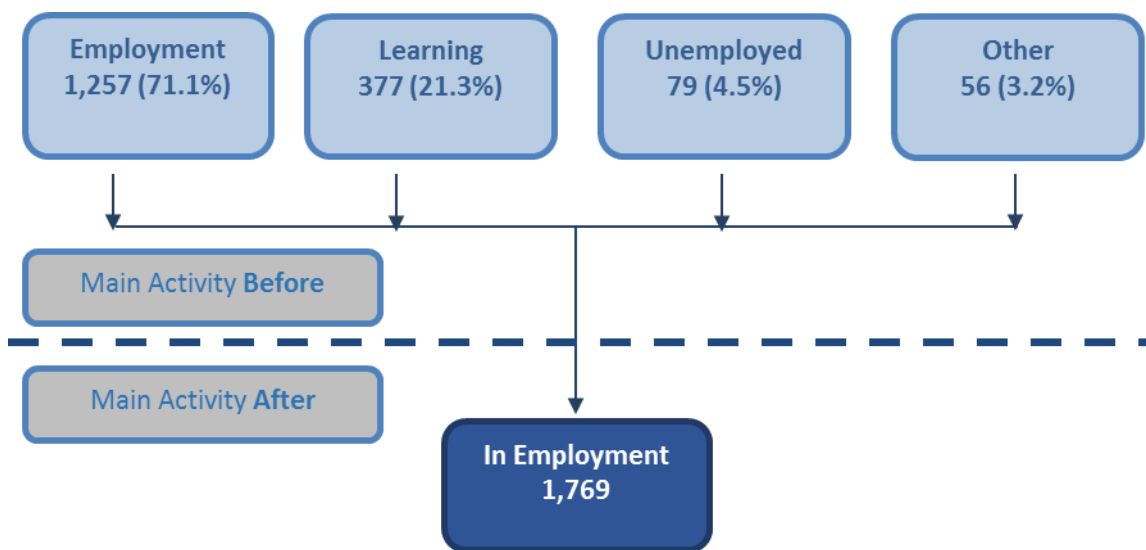
After an overview of their main activities before the course at FE College, this section presents findings on: how FE College leavers in employment had heard about the course; their reasons for undertaking the course; if they are using the skills and knowledge acquired from the course; the subject area they had studied in; if their job is in the same subject area as their course; their earnings; the location of their work; characteristics of their employment; whether they feel the course has made a difference in obtaining or staying in a job; and the perceived non-economic benefits of completing their course.

Overview of main activity before the course

Of the 1,769 FE College leavers in employment six months after achieving a regulated qualification:

- 71.1% (1,257) had previously been in employment
- 21.3% (377) had previously been in learning
- 4.5% (79) had previously been unemployed
- 3.2% (56) had previously been categorised as other (**Chart 1**)

Chart 1: FE College leavers in employment (1,769): main activity before (2015/16)

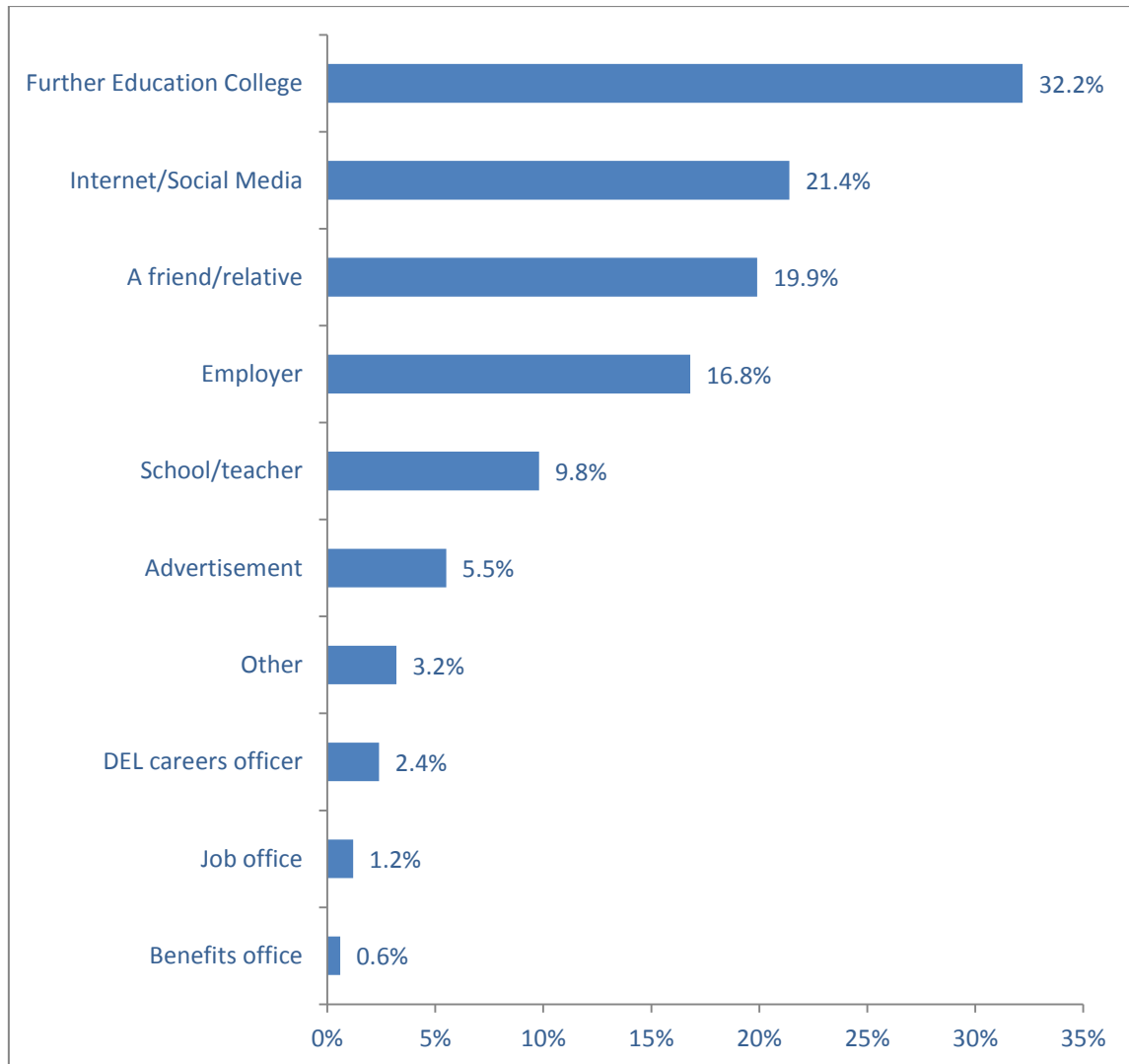


Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 1,769.

How did individuals hear about their course?

Respondents were asked how they had heard about their course and could provide multiple answers. The three most common sources were: 'FE College' (32.2%); 'internet/social media' (21.4%); and 'a friend/relative' (19.9%) (Figure 2 and Table A06).

Figure 2: FE College leavers in employment: how individuals had heard about their course (2015/16)



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 1,737.

Main reasons for undertaking the course

Each of the 1,769 respondents to this question provided an average of 5 reasons for undertaking their course. The most popular reasons were the same for those in employment after completing their course as for FE College leavers as a whole, namely: 'learning something new/gain new skills' (14.0%); 'personal interest in the course' (13.2%); 'to improve job prospects or get a new job/career' (12.8%); and 'to gain a qualification' (11.0%) (Table 9).

Table 9: FE College leavers in employment: main reasons for undertaking the course (2015/16)

Reason	%
To improve my job prospects or get a new job/career	67.7%
To learn something new/gain new skills	66.5%
I have/had a personal interest in the course	63.0%
To gain a qualification	56.4%
Because it was at a time/place that suited me	37.9%
To improve my ability to do my current job	37.3%
To go on to further or higher learning	35.7%
To get more job satisfaction	30.4%
To meet new people and build my self confidence	29.2%
To improve my job security	26.5%
To increase my income	23.2%
Because I did not have to pay for it	17.8%
To get a promotion	12.0%
I was required to attend course by my employer	10.9%
It was mandatory	6.9%
To help/support my children/grandchildren with homework	2.7%
Other reason	1.6%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 1,769.

Using skills and knowledge acquired in course?

Over two-thirds (69.5%) of FE College leavers who took part in the survey and who were in employment stated they have been using the skills and knowledge acquired at least to some extent in their jobs; in particular, 32.9% said 'to a great extent' (**Table A20**).

Subject area

Two subjects areas accounted for almost a third (28.0%) of the FE College leavers in employment: 'Health, public services and care' (14.4%); and 'Retail and commercial enterprise' (13.6%) (**Table 10**).

Is the job in the same subject area as the course?

Over half (51.8%) of the FE College leavers in employment had studied a course in the same subject area as their current job. Around three-quarters of those who had studied 'Education and training' (78.4%), 'Construction, planning and the built environment' (78.2%) or 'Engineering and manufacturing technologies' (73.3%) were employed in jobs in the same subject area (**Table 10**).

Table 10: FE College leavers in employment: subject area studied and if job in the same subject area (2015/16)

Subject Area	% of All Subjects	% job within same subject area
Health, public services and care	14.4	68.9
Retail and commercial enterprise	13.6	53.7
Preparation for life and work	13.1	28.7
Business, administration and law	13.0	67.7
Information and communication technology	11.4	38.9
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	9.2	73.3
Languages, literature and culture	6.3	9.1
Construction, planning and the built environment	4.3	78.2
Arts, media and publishing	3.7	19.6
Leisure, travel and tourism	3.3	23.3
Education and training	2.5	78.4
Science and mathematics	2.4	26.5
Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	1.8	66.7
Social sciences	0.9	24.0
History, philosophy and theology	0.1	0.0
Total	100.0	51.8

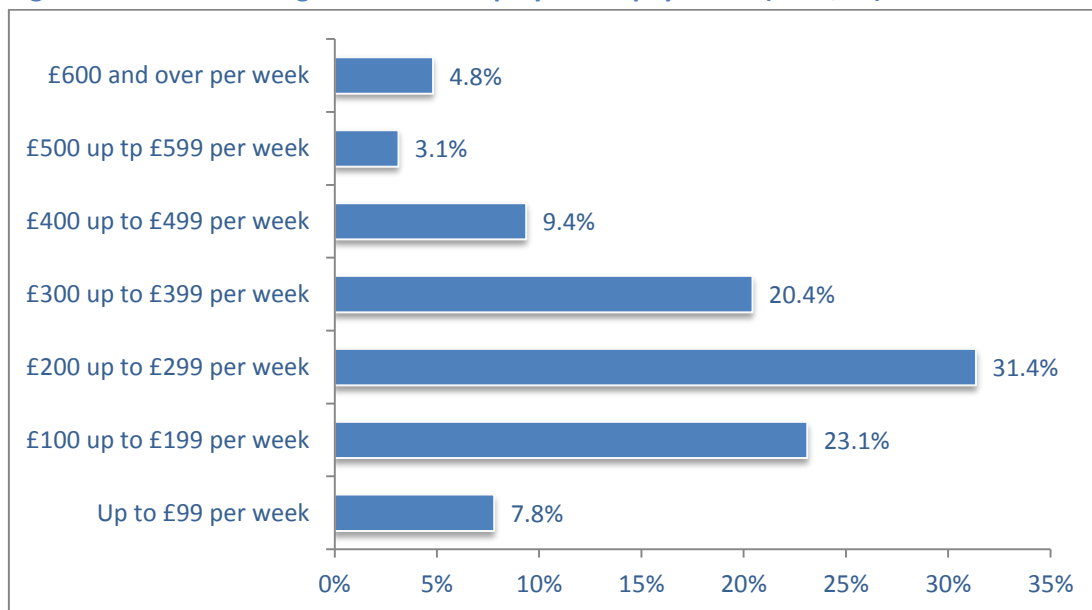
Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 1,769.

Usual take home pay

For FE College leavers in employment, over three-fifths (62.3%) were earning less than £300 per week. A further 20.4% were earning between £300 and £399 per week, while 17.2% were earning £400 or more per week (**Figure 3** and **Table A30**). Males (21.4%) were more likely than females (11.8%) to be earning more than £400 per week (**Table A30B**).

Putting these figures into context, the **2016 NI gross weekly pay** averaged £495, although it should be noted that the age distribution of FE College leavers is much younger than that of the overall working population.

Figure 3: FE College leavers in employment: pay bands (2015/16)



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.

n = 1,601. Please note that pay information was not available for 8.6% of this sub-group.

Where did they work?

The vast majority of the FE College leavers in employment were working in Northern Ireland (96.7%); 2.6% were working in the Republic of Ireland, 0.5% in England, Scotland or Wales, and 0.3% overseas (**Table A17**).

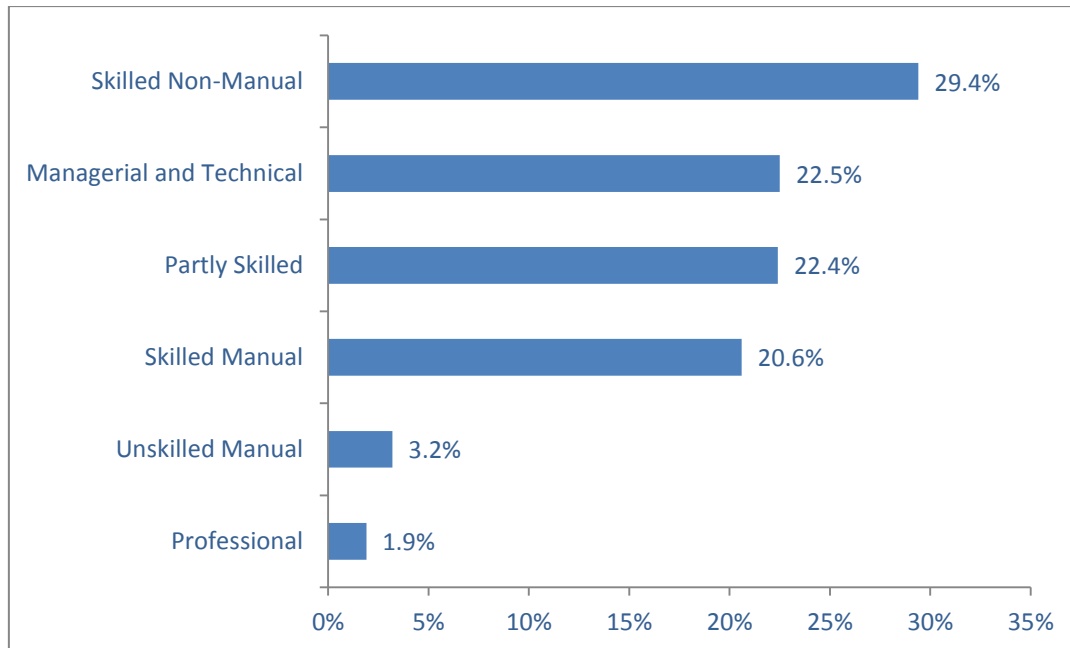
Employment type

Most (91.8%) of the FE College leavers who were in employment six months after their course were paid employees; a further 7.2% were self-employed, while 1.0% were waiting to start a confirmed job (**Table A16**).

National Statistics Socio-economic Classification

Most of the FE College leavers in employment had jobs classified as either: 'Skilled Non-manual' (29.4%); 'Managerial and Technical' (22.5%); 'Partly Skilled' (22.4%); or 'Skilled Manual' (20.6%) (**Figure 4** and **Table A18**).

Figure 4: FE College leavers in employment: National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (2015/16)



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 1,745.

Obtain/stay in employment without doing the course?

Almost one-quarter (24.2%) of the FE College leavers said they could not have obtained/stayed in their employment without doing the course (**Table A19**).

Working pattern?

Almost three-quarters (71.9%) of the FE College leavers who were in employment six months after their course said they were working full-time (defined as 30 hours or more per week); 28.1% worked part-time (**Table A23**). A higher proportion of males (84.7%) than females (62.9%) were working full-time (**Table A23B**).

Non-economic benefits

Box 3 provides an overview of non-economic benefits experienced by FE College leavers in employment approximately six months after completing and achieving their course. Although these findings are very positive, this group was less likely than all FE College leavers to report non-economic benefits.

Box 3: FE College leavers in employment: non-economic benefits (2015/16)

Positive impact? (n=1,766)

The majority of FE College leavers in employment (94.9%) said their course has had a 'positive impact' on them; this included 78.1% who said their course has definitely had a positive impact on them (**Table A46**).

Gain anything from learning? (n=1,677)

The three most popular responses among this group included: 'boosting their confidence' (82.8%); 'making new friends/met new people' (80.5%); and 'increased self-esteem' (66.5%) (**Table A48**).

Enthusiasm about learning? (n=1,766)

Over four-fifths (82.4%) of FE College leavers in employment agreed that they have become 'more enthusiastic about learning' as a result of completing their course (**Table A50**).

Better idea of what to do in life? (n=1,764)

Over three-fifths (67.5%) of this group agreed that, as a result of their course, they have a 'better idea what to do in life' (**Table A52**).

Improved quality of life? (n=1,765)

Over half (55.6%) of leavers in employment agreed that completing their course has 'improved their quality of life' (**Table A54**).

Undertake further learning and training? (n=1,762); at a higher level? (n=1,759)

Almost four-fifths (79.8%) of this group agreed that as a result of their course, they are more likely to 'undertake further learning and training' (**Table A56**). Almost three-quarters (72.2%) agreed they are more likely to do so at a 'higher level' (**Table A58**).

Recommend completing a course to a friend?

Almost all (97.7%) leavers in employment would recommend completing a course at FE College to a friend (**Table A60**).

Findings by employment sub-groups, learning and unemployment are available in the [Survey of FE College Leavers](#) online tables 2015/16 (Tables A46, A48, A50, A52, A54, A56, A58, & A60).

Employed before and after with the same employer

Of those in **paid employment before and after** completing their course (n=1,241), more than three-quarters (77.1%) were working for the same employer. Most were doing the same type of work.

Of those **working for the same employer and still doing the same type of work after** completing their course (n=869):

- Almost three-fifths (56.9%; n=493) said they are **probably/definitely better at doing their job (Table A24)**.
- A quarter (25.7%; n=223) said they are **doing a job with more responsibilities (Table A26)**.
- 13.2% (n=115) have since been **promoted**, over two-thirds (69.6%) of whom said they **probably/definitely would not have been promoted without doing the course (Table A29)**.

FE College leavers in employment: cross year comparison (academic years 2013/14 - 2015/16)

This sub-section provides a cross year comparison of the FE College leavers who said their main activity was employment. *Outputs for each year are available in the [Survey of FE College Leavers](#) online tables.*

Table 11 provides an overview of all FE College leavers in employment.

Table 11: Overview: FE College leavers in employment and employment sub-groups (2013/14 - 2015/16)

Employment After	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number in employment after * [Table 3]	1,834	1,727	1,769
Proportion of all FE leavers [Table 3]	47.5%	46.7%	47.6%
Number in employment before [Table 4]	1,469	1,355	1,453
Sub-groups of those in employment after [Tables A16 and A17]:			
Employment before	1,246	1,166	1,257
Same employer before	845	839	869
Different employer before	N/A*	242	258
In learning before	413	419	377
Unemployed before	105	83	79

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16

Notes:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

*Data on FE College leavers who changed employer were not collected for 2013/14.

Table 12 summarises the progression of the FE College leavers employed with the same employer before and after their FE course. The findings show fluctuation across the three academic years in terms of whether leavers said they are better at their jobs, doing a job with more responsibility or have been promoted. For instance, the proportion saying they are better at their job was lower among 2015/16 leavers (56.9%) than among 2013/14 leavers (62.7%), whereas 2015/16 leavers (13.2%) were more likely than 2013/14 leavers (12.2%) to say they have been promoted.

Table 12: Comparison: progression within employment (same employer) 2013/14 - 2015/16

In Employment After	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Employment before [Table A16]	1,246	1,166	1,257
Same employer before [Table A16]	845	839	869
Same employer			
Better at job [Table A24]	62.7%	59.5%	56.9%
Doing a job with more responsibilities [Table A26]	29.3%	23.2%	25.7%
Promoted [Table A28]	12.2%	8.7%	13.2%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Note:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

Table 13 compares cross year findings on how FE College leavers in employment had heard about their course, reasons for doing their course, and job characteristics. With some exceptions, findings are broadly similar across academic years. Of note perhaps is the decrease in proportion of those in a job in the same subject area as their course between 2014/15 (57.2%) and 2015/16 (51.8%).

Table 13: Comparison: FE College leavers in employment (2013/14 - 2015/16)

In Employment after	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
How did individuals hear about their course? (top three ways) [Table A06]	FE College (31.6%)	FE College (32.0%)	FE College (32.2%)
	Internet (19.3%)	Internet (20.7%)	Internet/social media (21.4%)
	Friend/relative (17.8%)	Friend/relative (20.0%)	Friend/relative (19.9%)
Main reasons for undertaking course? (top four reasons) [Table A12]	To learn something new/gain new skills (63.4%)	To learn something new/gain new skills (70.7%)	To improve my job prospects or get a new job (67.7%)
	To improve my job prospects or get a new job (61.9%)	To improve my job prospects or get a new job (64.2%)	To learn something new/gain new skills (66.5%)
	I have/had a personal interest in the course (58.3%)	I have/had a personal interest in the course (63.7%)	I have/had a personal interest in the course (63.0%)
	To gain a qualification (48.2%)	To gain a qualification (59.4%)	To gain a qualification (56.4%)
Employee or self-employed? [Table A16]	Employee (90.5%) Self-Employed (9.5%)	Employee (94.4%) Self-Employed (5.2%) Waiting to start a confirmed job (0.3%)	Employee (91.8%) Self-Employed (7.2%) Waiting to start a confirmed job (1.0%)
Have job in same subject area as course [Table A22]	56.6%	57.2%	51.8%
National Statistics Socio-economic Classification? (NSSeC) (top three) [Table A18]	Skilled Manual (26.2%)	Skilled Non-Manual (29.6%)	Skilled Non-Manual (29.4%)
	Partly Skilled (24.6%)	Partly Skilled (23.3%)	Managerial and Technical (22.5%)
	Skilled Non-Manual (22.9%)	Managerial and Technical (21.7%)	Partly Skilled (22.4%)
% Working in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI) [Table A17]	NI (95.1%) ROI (3.9%)	NI (96.3%) ROI (2.3%)	NI (96.7%) ROI (2.6%)
Probably/definitely <u>would not</u> have obtained/stayed in work without course? [Table A19]	25.6%	25.7%	24.2%
Working pattern? [Table A23]	70.4% full-time 29.6% part-time	72.3% full-time 27.7% part-time	71.9% full-time 28.1% part-time

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Note:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

Table 14 overviews the non-economic benefits of course completion for all the FE College leavers in employment. The top three non-economic gains have remained the same for each year, and have become more prevalent between 2013/14 and 2015/16: ‘boosted my confidence’ (from 77.4% to 82.8%); ‘made new friends/met new people’ (from 70.2% to 80.5%); and ‘increased my self-esteem’ (from 63.3% to 66.5%). Little change is evident in the ratings for other non-economic benefits shown in the table.

Table 14: Comparison: non-economic benefits for FE College leavers in employment (2013/14 - 2015/16)

In Employment after	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Probably/definitely positive impact [Table A46]	94.1%	95.6%	94.9%
Gains (top three) [Table A48]	Boosted my confidence (77.4%)	Boosted my confidence (82.0%)	Boosted my confidence (82.8%)
	I made new friends/met new people (70.2%)	I made new friends/met new people (79.0%)	I made new friends/met new people (80.5%)
	Increased my self-esteem (63.3%)	Increased my self-esteem (63.7%)	Increased my self-esteem (66.5%)
More enthusiastic about learning [Table A50]	83.0%	80.5%	82.4%
Better idea what to do in life [Table A52]	65.7%	62.8%	67.5%
Improved quality of life [Table A54]	57.1%	53.9%	55.6%
More likely to undertake further learning and training [Table A56]	81.8%	79.3%	79.8%
More likely to undertake further learning and training at a higher level [Table A58]	75.1%	71.0%	72.2%
Recommend completing a course to a friend [Table A60]	98.1%	97.7%	97.7%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16

Note:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

3.3 FE College Leavers in Learning

After an overview of their main activity before the course, this sub-section presents findings on: how FE College leavers in learning had heard about their 2015/16 course; their reasons for undertaking the 2015/16 course; and their learner progression. Learner progression includes: where they were doing their new learning; the level of new learning compared with the course they completed and achieved in 2015/16; whether the new learning is in the same subject area as their course; the mode of attendance for the new learning; whether their additional learning could have been done without their course; whether their additional learning is helping them to obtain the sort of job wanted; and perceived non-economic benefits reported.

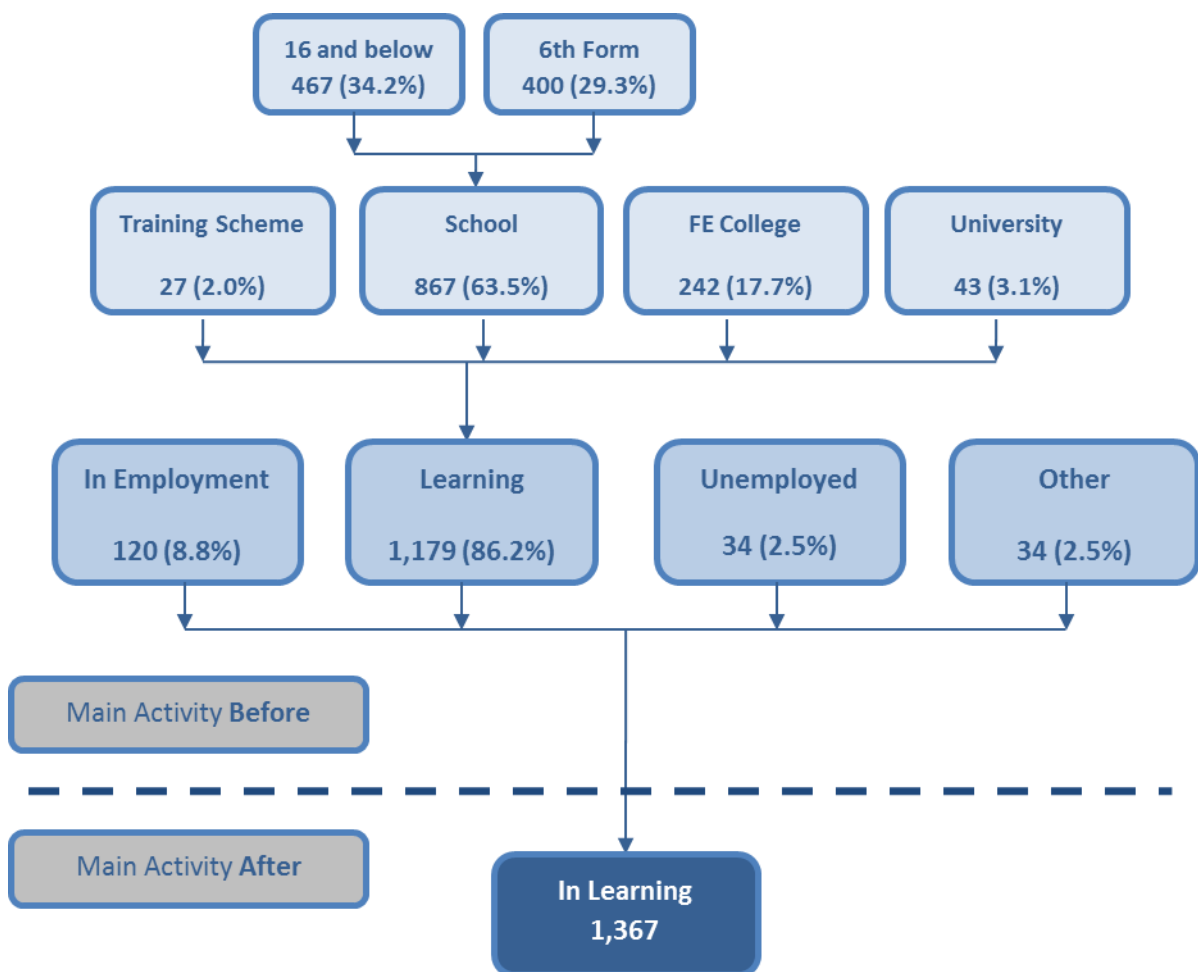
Note: some sections are based on small numbers (<100). These findings should be used with caution.

Overview of main activity before the course

Of the 1,367 FE College leavers in learning six months after achieving a regulated qualification:

- 8.8% (120) had previously been in employment
- 86.2% (1,179) had previously been in learning
- 2.5% (34) had previously been unemployed
- 2.5% (34) had previously been categorised as other (**Chart 2**).

Chart 2: FE College leavers in learning (1,367): main activity before (2015/16)



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.

n = 1,367.

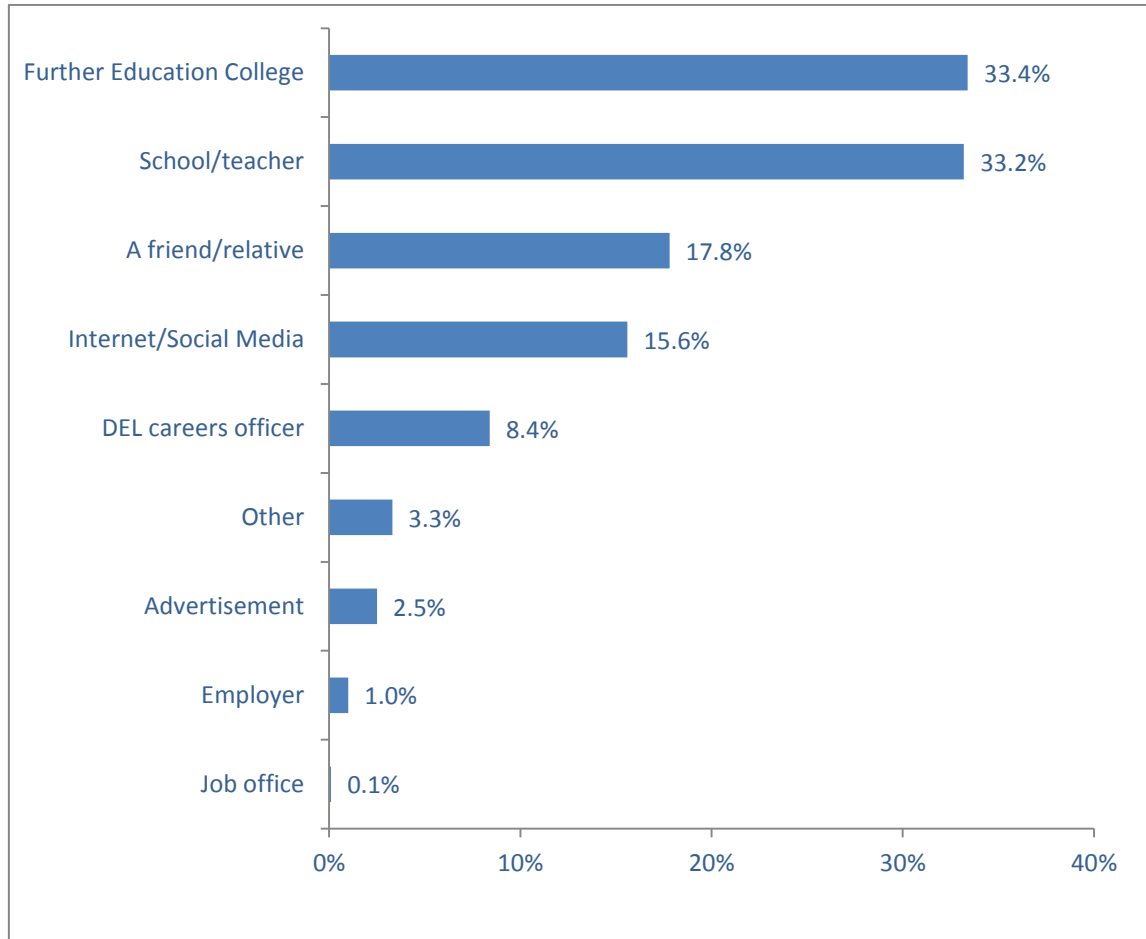
Note: 'Training Scheme' includes seven respondents waiting to start a scheme/training scheme.

'University' includes two respondents waiting to start a confirmed course at university.

How did individuals hear about their course?

FE College leavers in learning were asked how they had heard about their course and could provide multiple responses. The three most common sources were: the 'FE College' (33.4%); 'school/teacher' (33.2%); and 'friend/relative' (17.8%) (Figure 5 and Table A06).

Figure 5: FE College leavers in learning: how individuals had heard about their course (2015/16)



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 1,336.

Main reasons for undertaking the completed course

Each of the 1,367 respondents to this question provided an average of 5 reasons for completing their course. The three most popular reasons given by FE College leavers in learning for undertaking the course they have completed were: 'to learn something new/gain new skills' (66.2%); 'to go on to further or higher learning' (65.3%); and 'to gain a qualification' (64.5%) (**Table 15**).

Table 15: FE College leavers in learning: main reasons for undertaking course (2015/16)

Reason	%
To learn something new/gain new skills	66.2%
To go on to further or higher learning	65.3%
To gain a qualification	64.5%
I have/had a personal interest in the course	64.0%
To improve my job prospects or get a new job/career	62.3%
Because it was at a time/place that suited me	41.2%
To meet new people and build my self confidence	38.0%
Because I did not have to pay for it	23.7%
To get more job satisfaction	17.6%
To increase my income	16.5%
To improve my job security	11.6%
To improve my ability to do my current job	8.2%
It was mandatory	7.2%
To get a promotion	4.5%
I was required to attend course by my employer	3.4%
Other reason	1.6%
To help/support my children/grandchildren with homework	0.7%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 1,367.

Learning progression

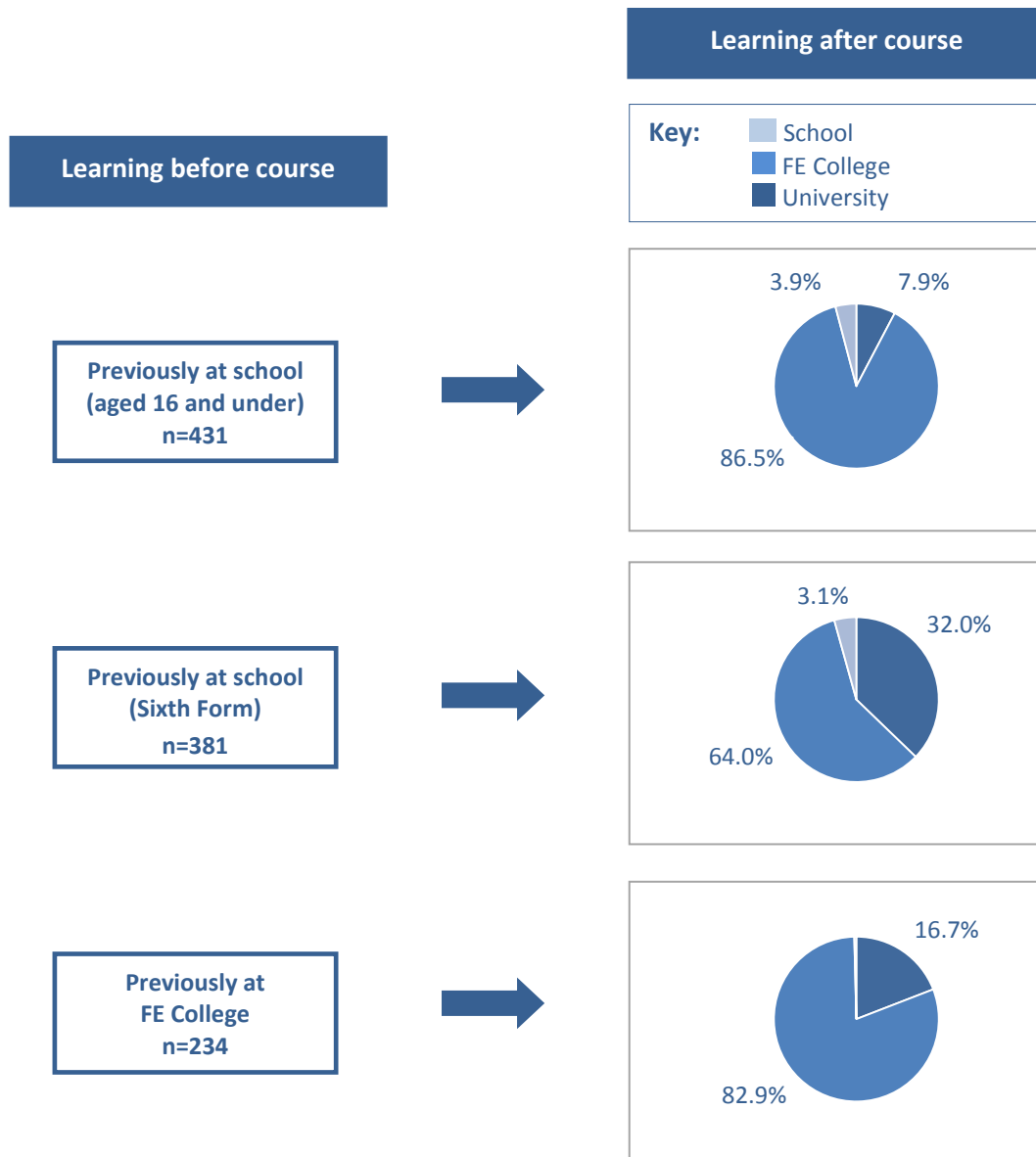
FE College leavers in learning before and after course

Of the 1,367 FE College leavers in learning six months after their course, over four-fifths (86.2%) had also been in learning before the course they completed in 2015/16 (**Chart 2**).

Figure 6 illustrates some of the previous main learning activities of this group and the location of the additional learning undertaken after course completion (**Table A39**).

Six months after completing and achieving their course, most FE College leavers in learning were continuing their learning at an FE College (75.3%), while a fifth (20.6%) had moved to university (**Table A38**).

Figure 6: FE College leavers in learning before and after course: main activity before course and location of additional learning (2015/16)



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.

Notes:

This analysis excludes 96 FE College leavers in learning previously on a training scheme, or waiting to start a confirmed scheme or course at college/university.

Studying at a higher level

Over four-fifths (82.6%) of FE College leavers in learning said their additional learning is at a higher level than the course they completed in 2015/16 (**Table A35**).

Of the FE College leavers in learning who had been at school (in sixth form) or FE College before their 2015/16 course, at least four-fifths of each group progressed to additional learning at a higher level after their course (**Table 16**).

Of the 1,367 respondents undertaking additional learning, four-fifths (80.4%) had completed a course at Level 2 or 3 (**Table A61**).

Table 16: FE College leavers in learning before and after course: progression to study at a higher level (by location of learning) (2015/16)

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	School		
At school aged 16 or below	7.9%	86.5%	3.9%	431	76.3%
At school in sixth form	32.0%	64.0%	3.1%	381	89.2%
At FE college	16.7%	82.9%	0.0%	234	82.9%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.

Note:

Excludes FE College leavers whose main activity before the course had been: 'on a scheme/training scheme'; 'waiting to start a confirmed scheme'; 'waiting to start a confirmed course at college/university'; or 'at a university'.

Studying at the same level

Of the FE College leavers asked about their additional learning, 14.7% said this would lead to a qualification at the same level as the course they had undertaken in 2015/16 (**Table A35**).

Same subject area as the course?

Of the 1,367 FE College leavers in learning, almost three-quarters (72.4%) were continuing their learning in the same subject area as the course they had completed in 2015/16. Three subject areas accounted for half (50.0%) of this group: 'Preparation for life and work' (23.5%); 'Health, public services and care' (14.4%); and 'Information and communication technology' (12.1%) (Table 17).

Table 17: FE College leavers in learning - subject area studied and if course in the same subject area (2015/16)

Subject Area	% of All Subjects (n=1,367)	% now studying in same subject area (n=930)
Preparation for life and work	23.5	48.2
Health, public services and care	14.4	88.1
Information and communication technology	12.1	71.8
Arts, media and publishing	8.9	85.0
Retail and commercial enterprise	8.0	70.1
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	7.1	93.7
Leisure, travel and tourism	6.5	80.7
Science and mathematics	6.0	81.5
Business, administration and law	4.6	79.0
Social sciences	2.9	61.5
Construction, planning and the built environment	2.3	90.3
Languages, literature and culture	1.6	57.1
History, philosophy and theology	1.1	40.0
Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	1.0	76.9
Education and training	0.1	100.0
Total	100.0	72.4

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.

Note:

Excludes FE College leavers in learning waiting to start a training scheme or confirmed university course.

Could the additional learning have been undertaken without the course?

Almost two-thirds (65.7%) of FE College leavers in learning said they probably/definitely could not have undertaken their current learning or training without the course they had completed and achieved in 2015/16 (Table A40).

Additional learning helping me to obtain the sort of job I want?

Most (87.2%) of the FE College leavers in learning said their additional learning should help them to obtain the sort of job they want (Table A43).

Non-economic benefits

Box 4 provides an overview of non-economic benefits experienced by FE College leavers in learning approximately six months after completing and achieving their course. The perceived non-economic benefits most likely to be cited by FE College leavers in learning included: ‘boosted my confidence’ (87.7%); ‘made new friends/met new people’ (87.7%); and ‘increased self-esteem’ (74.5%).

Box 4: FE College leavers in learning: non-economic benefits (2015/16)

Positive impact? (n=1,364)

The vast majority (96.3%) of FE College leavers in learning said their completed course has had a ‘positive impact’ on them; this included 80.9% who said their course has definitely had a positive impact on them (**Table A46**).

Gain anything from learning? (n=1,315)

The three most popular responses among this group included: ‘boosted my confidence’ (87.7%); ‘made new friends/met new people’ (87.7%); and ‘increased self-esteem’ (74.5%) (**Table A48**).

Enthusiasm about learning? (n=1,365)

Most (88.3%) FE College leavers in learning agreed they have ‘become more enthusiastic about learning’ as a result of completing their course (**Table A50**).

Better idea of what to do in life? (n=1,366)

Over four-fifths (86.2%) of FE College leavers in learning agreed that, as a result of their course, they have a ‘better idea what to do in life’ (**Table A52**).

Improved quality of life? (n=1,366)

Over two-thirds (71.2%) of FE College leavers in learning agreed that completing their course has ‘improved their quality of life’ (**Table A54**).

Undertake further learning and training? (n=1,365); at a higher level? (n=1,365)

The vast majority (93.7%) of FE College leavers in learning agreed that, as a result of their course, they are ‘more likely to undertake further learning and training’ (**Table A56**). Most (89.6%) also agreed they are more likely to do so at a ‘higher level’ (**Table A58**).

Recommend completing a course to a friend?

Almost all (99.3%) leavers in learning would recommend completing a course at FE College to a friend (**Table A60**).

Findings by employment sub-groups, learning and unemployment are available in the [Survey of FE College Leavers](#) online tables 2015/16 (Tables A46, A48, A50, A52, A54, A56, A58, & A60).

FE College leavers in learning: cross year comparison (academic years 2013/14 - 2015/16)

This section provides a cross year comparison of the FE College leavers in learning. *Outputs for each year are available in the [Survey of FE College Leavers](#) online tables.*

Note: some sections are based on small numbers (<100). These findings should be used with caution.

Table 18 provides an overview of all FE College leavers in learning. Due to refinement of main activity options available to respondents, caution should be exercised when comparing all FE College leavers in learning across academic years. In addition to separating 'FE College' and 'University', the following main activities were introduced for the 2014/15 academic year: 'waiting to start a scheme/training scheme' and 'waiting to start a confirmed course at university'.

Table 18: Overview: FE College leavers in learning 2013/14 - 2015/16

Learning after	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number in learning after * [Table 3]	1,315	1,301	1,367
Proportion of all FE College Leavers [Table 3]	34.1%	35.2%	36.8%
Number in learning before [Table 3]	1,642	1,648	1,661
Main activity of FE College Leavers in learning before [Chart 2]:			
Employment	129	108	120
Learning	1,080	1,088	1,179
<i>On a training scheme</i>	13	19	20
<i>Waiting to start a scheme/training scheme</i>	NA	4	7
<i>At school (aged 16 and below)</i>	441	446	467
<i>At school (sixth form)</i>	292	318	400
<i>At FE College</i>	334	260	242
<i>At University</i>		40	41
<i>Waiting to start a confirmed course at university</i>	NA	1	2
Unemployed	50	58	34
Other	56	46	34

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Notes:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

'NA' indicates these options as not applicable.

Table 19 compares cross year findings on how FE College leavers in learning had heard about their course and reasons for doing their course. Findings are broadly similar across the three academic years.

Table 19: Comparison: FE College leavers in learning 2013/14 - 2015/16

Learning after	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
How did individuals hear about their course? (top three ways) [Table A06]	FE College (35.8%)	FE College (37.2%)	FE College (33.4%)
	School/teacher (28.7%)	School/teacher (28.8%)	School/teacher (33.2%)
	Internet (16.7%); Friend/relative (16.7%)	Friend/relative (20.6%)	Friend/relative (17.8%)
Main reasons for undertaking course? (top four reasons) [Table A12]	I have/had a personal interest in the course (62.3%)	To learn something new/gain new skills (65.3%)	To learn something new/gain new skills (66.2%)
	To go on to further or higher learning (60.6%)	I have/had a personal interest in the course (62.5%)	To go on to further or higher learning (65.3%)
	To learn something new/gain new skills (60.4%)	To gain a qualification (61.8%)	To gain a qualification (64.5%)
	To improve my job prospects or get a new job/career (60.0%)	To go on to further or higher learning (61.7%)	I have/had a personal interest in the course (64.0%)

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Note:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

Table 20 summarises the learning progression of FE College leavers in learning. Due to refinement of main activity options available to respondents, caution should be exercised when comparing all FE College leavers in learning across academic years. Not all sub-groups are asked the same questions. ‘Is this additional learning helping you to get the sort of job you want?’ was introduced for the 2014/15 academic year.

Table 20: Comparison: learner progression 2013/14 - 2015/16

Learning after	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
In learning after	1,315	1,301	1,367
In learning before and after	1,080	1,088	1,179
Additional learning			
Location of learning [Table A38]	<i>n</i> =1,258	<i>n</i> =1,216	<i>n</i> =1,100
	FE College 73.3%	FE College 71.5%	FE College 75.3%
	University 24.2%	University 26.0%	University 20.6%
	School 2.5%	School 2.5%	School 2.6%
Mode of attendance for course [Table A32]	<i>n</i> =1,315	<i>n</i> =1,301	<i>n</i> =1,367
	Full-time 43.5%	Full-time 39.8%	Full-time 45.8%
	Part-time 56.5%	Part-time 60.2%	Part-time 54.2%
Mode of attendance for additional learning [Table A33]	<i>n</i> =1,314	<i>n</i> =1,301	<i>n</i> =1,271
	Full-time 86.9%	Full-time 88.3%	Full-time 87.7%
	Part-time 13.1%	Part-time 11.7%	Part-time 12.3%
Level of study compared with course [Table A35]	<i>n</i> =1,315	<i>n</i> =1,216	<i>n</i> =1,270
	Higher 81.4%	Higher 81.1%	Higher 82.6%
	Lower 1.4%	Lower 1.0%	Lower 1.0%
	Same 15.5%	Same 15.9%	Same 14.7%
	Unsure 17.0%	Unsure 2.1%	Unsure 1.7%
Studying in the same subject as course [Table 22]	<i>n</i> =1,260	<i>n</i> =933	<i>n</i> =930
	71.0%	73.3%	73.3%
Undertake without course [Table A40]	<i>n</i> =1,314	<i>n</i> =1,272	<i>n</i> =1,269
	Yes (definitely/probably) 36.9%	Yes (definitely/probably) 33.9%	Yes (definitely/probably) 32.0%
	No (definitely/probably) 60.4%	No (definitely/probably) 63.1%	No (definitely/probably) 65.7%
	Unsure 2.7%	Unsure 3.0%	Unsure 2.3%
Helping get me the sort of job I want [Table A43]	NA	<i>n</i> =1,272	<i>n</i> =1,270
		Yes 83.5%	Yes 87.2%
		No 4.3%	No 3.6%
		Unsure 12.2%	Unsure 9.2%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16

Notes:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

‘NA’ indicates these options as not applicable.

Table 21 overviews the non-economic benefits of course completion for all the FE College leavers in learning. Findings are broadly similar across academic years.

Table 21: Comparison: non-economic benefits for FE College leavers in learning 2013/14 - 2015/16

Learning after	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Probably/definitely positive impact [Table A46]	95.1%	96.0%	96.3%
Gains (top three) [Table A48]	Boosted my confidence (82.4%)	Boosted my confidence (85.4%)	Boosted my confidence (87.7%)
	I made new friends/met new people (77.8%)	I made new friends/met new people (83.8%)	I made new friends/met new people (87.7%)
	Increased my self-esteem (70.2%)	Increased my self-esteem (68.6%)	Increased my self-esteem (74.5%)
More enthusiastic about learning [Table A50]	88.5%	88.0%	88.3%
Better idea what to do in life [Table A52]	87.2%	84.6%	86.2%
Improved quality of life [Table A54]	69.9%	68.0%	71.2%
More likely to undertake further learning and training [Table A56]	92.3%	91.4%	93.7%
More likely to undertake further learning and training at a higher level[Table A58]	89.7%	88.8%	89.6%
Recommend completing a course to a friend [Table A60]	98.5%	98.6%	99.3%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Note:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

3.4 FE College Leavers Unemployed and Looking for Work

After an overview of their main activity before their course, this section presents findings on: how unemployed FE College leavers had heard about their course; their reasons for undertaking the course; any employment in the six months after leaving their course; and the perceived non-economic benefits of completing their course.

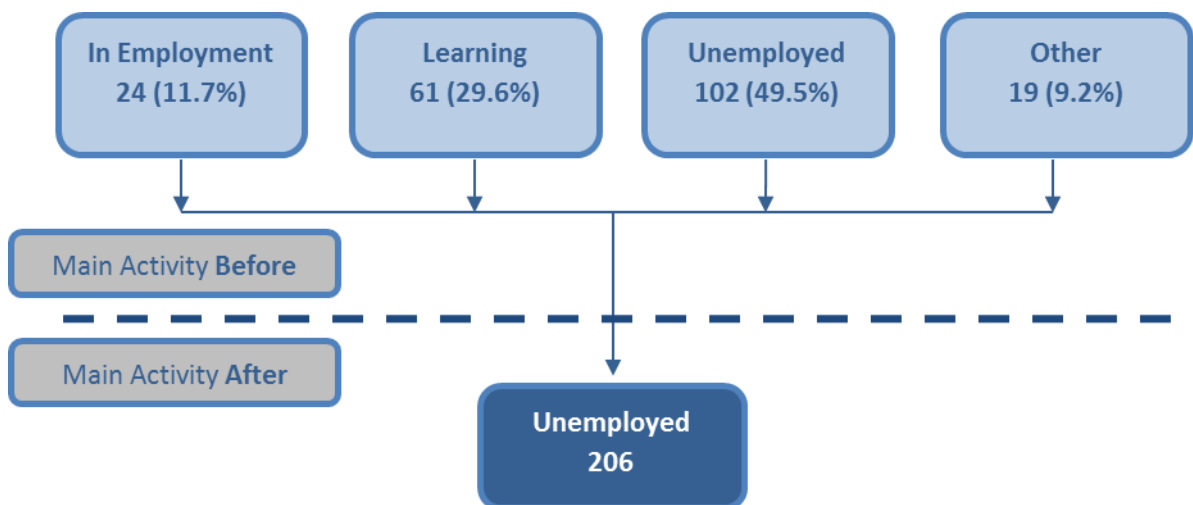
Note: some sections are based on just over 100 cases. These findings should be used with a degree of caution.

Overview of main activity before the course

Of the 206 FE College leavers who were unemployed six months after achieving a regulated qualification:

- 11.7% (24) had previously been in employment
- 29.6% (61) had previously been in learning
- 49.5% (102) had previously been unemployed
- 9.2% (19) had previously been categorised as other (**Chart 3**).

Chart 3: Unemployed FE College leavers (206): main activity before (2015/16)

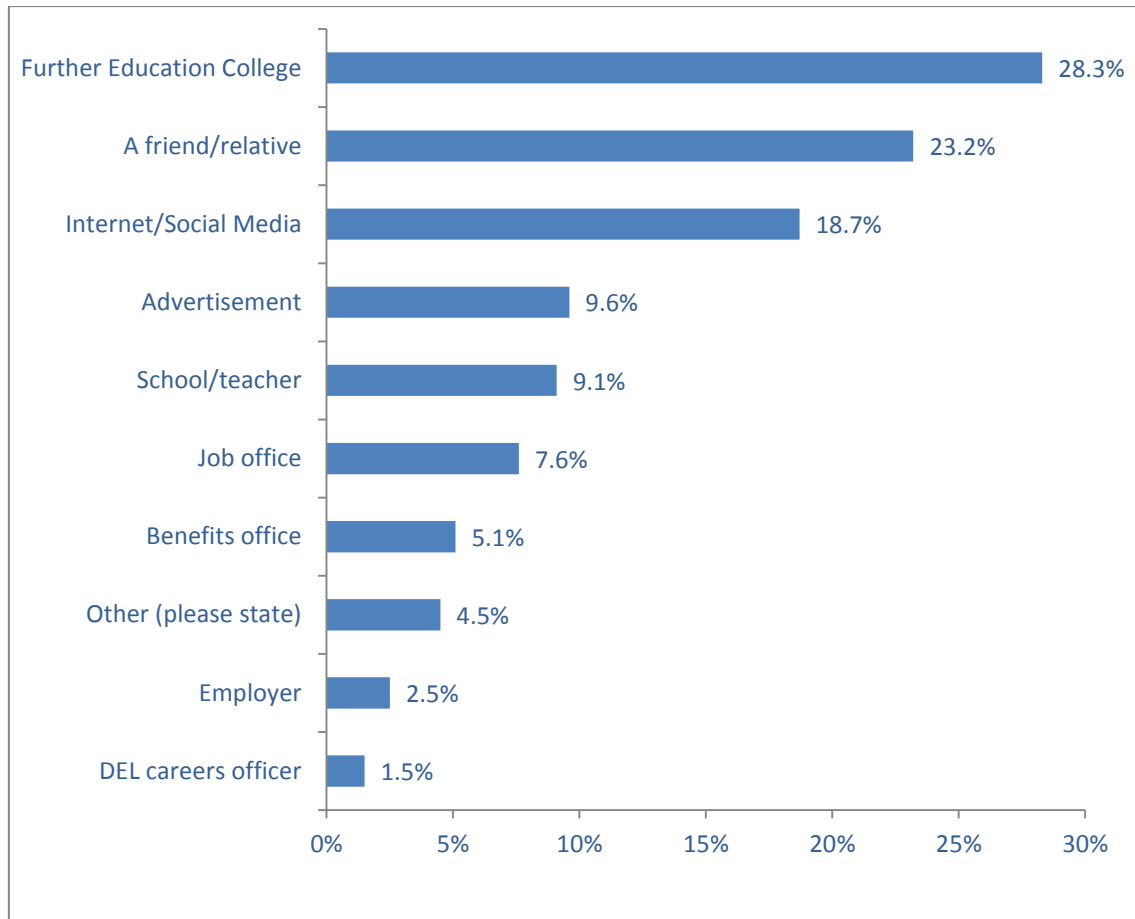


Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 206.

How did individuals hear about their course?

Unemployed respondents were asked how they had heard about their course and could provide multiple responses. The three most common sources were: 'FE College' (28.3%); 'friend/relative' (23.2%); and 'internet/social media' (18.7%) (Figure 7 and Table A06).

Figure 7: Unemployed FE College leavers: how individuals had heard about their course (2015/16)



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 206

Main reasons for undertaking the course

Each of the 206 respondents to this question provided an average of 5 reasons for completing their course. The four most popular reasons for undertaking the course were: 'to improve my job prospects or get a new job/career' (80.1%); 'to learn something new/gain new skills' (71.4%); 'personal interest in the course' (55.8%); and 'to gain a qualification' (55.8%) (Tables 22 and A12).

Table 22: Unemployed FE College leavers: main reasons for undertaking course (2015/16)

Reason	%
To improve my job prospects or get a new job/career	80.1%
To learn something new/gain new skills	71.4%
I have/had a personal interest in the course	55.8%
To gain a qualification	55.8%
To go on to further or higher learning	37.4%
To meet new people and build my self confidence	36.4%
Because it was at a time/place that suited me	36.4%
Because I did not have to pay for it	23.3%
To get more job satisfaction	18.4%
To increase my income	18.0%
To improve my job security	13.1%
To improve my ability to do my current job	7.8%
It was mandatory	4.4%
To help/support my children/grandchildren with homework	4.4%
To get a promotion	3.9%
I was required to attend course by my employer	2.9%
Other reason	1.9%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.
n = 206.

Subject area

Four subject areas accounted for over three-quarters (78.2%) of unemployed FE College leavers: 'Preparation for life and work' (44.2%); 'Information and communication technology' (12.6%); 'Retail and commercial enterprise' (11.2%); and 'Health, public services and care' (10.2%) (**Table 23**).

Table 23: Unemployed FE College leavers: subject area studied (2015/16)

Subject Area	% of All Subjects
Preparation for life and work	44.2%
Information and communication technology	12.6%
Retail and commercial enterprise	11.2%
Health, public services and care	10.2%
Arts, media and publishing	4.4%
Leisure, travel and tourism	3.9%
Business, administration and law	3.9%
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	3.4%
Construction, planning and the built environment	1.9%
Languages, literature and culture	1.9%
Science and mathematics	1.5%
Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	0.5%
Education and training	0.5%
Total	100.0%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2015/16.

n = 206.

Any employment after course?

A tenth (10.7%) of the 206 unemployed FE College leavers said they had had some employment in the six months since completing their course (**Table A44**).

Unemployed before and after course?

Of the 206 unemployed FE College leavers, around half (49.5%) had also been unemployed before their course (**Chart 3**).

Of the 102 unemployed before and after their course, over two-thirds (70.6%) were aged 25 years and above. Nearly four-fifths (79.4%) had studied their regulated course at Level 2 or below (**Table A45B**).

Not unemployed before the course

The largest group to move into unemployment had come from learning (29.6%). Just over one tenth (11.7%) had been in employment.

Non-economic benefits

Box 5 provides an overview of non-economic benefits experienced by FE College leavers unemployed approximately six months after completing and achieving their course.

Box 5: Unemployed FE College leavers: non-economic benefits (2015/16)

Positive impact? (n=205)

The vast majority of unemployed FE College leavers (91.2%) said their course has had a positive impact on them; this included 66.3% who said their course has definitely had a positive impact (**Table A46**).

Gain anything from learning? (n=199)

The three most popular responses among this group were: 'boosted my confidence' (83.4%); 'made new friends/ met new people' (77.9%); and 'increased self-esteem' (75.9%) (**Table A48**).

Enthusiasm about learning? (n=205)

Over four-fifths (83.4%) of unemployed FE College leavers agreed that they have become 'more enthusiastic about learning' as a result of completing their course (**Table A50**).

Better idea of what to do in life? (n=205)

Over two-thirds (67.3%) of this group agreed that, as a result of their course, they have a 'better idea of what to do in life' (**Table A52**).

Improved quality of life? (n=205)

Almost three-fifths (59.0%) of unemployed leavers agreed that completing their course has 'improved their quality of life' (**Table A54**).

Undertake further learning and training? (n=205); at a higher level? (n=204)

Over four-fifths (83.9%) of this group agreed that, as a result of their course, they are more likely to 'undertake further learning and training' (**Table A56**). Two-thirds (66.7%) also agreed they are more likely to do so at a 'higher level' (**Table A58**).

Recommend completing a course to a friend?

Almost all (98.0%) unemployed leavers would recommend completing a course at FE College to a friend (**Table A60**).

Findings by employment sub-groups, learning and unemployment are available in the [Survey of FE College Leavers](#) online tables 2015/16 (Tables A46, A48, A50, A52, A54, A56, A58, & A60).

Unemployed FE College leavers: cross year comparison (academic years 2013/14 - 2015/16)

This section provides a cross year comparison of the unemployed FE College leavers who took part in the surveys. **Given the low numbers of such respondents, changes from year to year should be interpreted with caution.** Table 24 provides an overview of all unemployed FE College leavers.

Table 24: Overview: unemployed FE College leavers (2013/14 -2015/16)

Unemployed after	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number unemployed after [Table 3]	293	244	206
Proportion of all FE College leavers [Table 3]	7.6%	6.6%	5.5%
Number unemployed before [Table 4]	304	271	231
Main activity of unemployed FE College leavers before [Chart 3]:			
Employment	38	21	24
Learning	105	107	61
Unemployed	124	106	102
Other	26	10	19

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Notes:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

Due to refinement of main activity options available to respondents, caution should be exercised when comparing all unemployed FE College leavers across academic years.

Table 25 provides findings on how unemployed FE College leavers had heard about their course, reasons for doing their course, and the proportion having had some paid employment since course completion.

Table 25: Comparison: unemployed FE College leavers (2013/14 - 2015/16)

Unemployed after	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2014/15
How did individuals hear about their course? (top three ways) [Table A06]	FE College (31.7%)	FE College (34.0%)	FE College (28.3%)
	Friend/relative (27.3%)	Friend/relative (23.8%)	Friend/relative (23.2%)
	Internet (14.3%)	School/teacher (16.8%)	Internet/social media (18.7%)
Main reasons for undertaking course? (top four reasons) [Table A12]	To improve my job prospects or get a new job/career (67.9%)	To learn something new/gain new skills (78.7%)	To improve my job prospects or get a new job/career (80.1%)
	To learn something new/gain new skills (66.6%)	To improve my job prospects or get a new job/career (68.9%)	To learn something new/gain new skills (71.4%)
	I have/had a personal interest in the course (56.7%)	I have/had a personal interest in the course (66.8%)	I have/had a personal interest in the course (55.8%)
	To gain a qualification (53.2%)	To gain a qualification (63.9%)	To gain a qualification (55.8%)
Proportion doing some paid work since completing course [Table A44]	16.0%	15.6%	10.7%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Note:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

Table 26 overviews the non-economic benefits of course completion for unemployed FE College leavers.

Table 26: Comparison: non-economic benefits for unemployed FE College leavers 2013/14 - 2015/16

Unemployed after	Academic Year		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Probably/definitely positive impact [Table A46]	92.8%	90.5%	91.2%
Gains (top three) [Table A48]	Boosted my confidence (85.3%)	Boosted my confidence (85.7%)	Boosted my confidence (83.4%)
	I made new friends/met new people (79.5%)	I made new friends/met new people (85.7%)	I made new friends/met new people (77.9%)
	Increased my self-esteem (69.6%)	Increased my self-esteem (68.7%)	Increased my self-esteem (75.9%)
More enthusiastic about learning [Table A50]	86.7%	81.5%	83.4%
Better idea what to do in life [Table A52]	71.2%	68.3%	67.3%
Improved quality of life [Table A54]	57.7%	58.4%	59.0%
More likely to undertake further learning and training [Table A56]	82.9%	83.1%	83.9%
More likely to undertake further learning and training at a higher level [Table A58]	77.1%	71.2%	66.7%
Recommend completing a course to a friend [Table A60]	96.2%	97.5%	98.0%

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Note:

Counts vary by question and academic year.

Annex - Commonly used terms and abbreviations

Academic year:	1st August to 31st July.
Course:	A course leading to a regulated qualification.
Further Education sector:	The six FE Colleges in NI: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)
FE College leavers:	FE College leavers who completed and achieved a regulated qualification during the 2015/16 academic year.
FE College leavers in employment:	This includes: working in paid employment; self-employed; and waiting to start a confirmed job.
FE College leavers in learning:	This includes: on a scheme/training scheme; waiting to start a confirmed scheme; at school aged 16 or below; at school in sixth form; at FE College; at university; or waiting to start a confirmed course at college/university.
FE College leavers who were unemployed:	This includes FE College leavers who were unemployed and looking for work.
FE College leavers classed as other:	This includes any FE College leavers not included in 'employment', 'learning' or 'unemployed'.
Main activity:	Respondents were asked to select (from a menu of 18) the activity they spent the majority of their time doing both before and after their course. See Table 4 .
Main activity group:	The 18 main activities (above) are grouped into four main activity groups: 'employment'; 'learning'; 'unemployed'; and 'other'. As these groups have been refined over time, caution with cross year comparison is recommended.
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 link: https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean

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.
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. http://ofqual.gov.uk/help-and-advice/comparing-qualifications/
Statistically significant:	Statistical techniques have been used to test for statistically significant differences in proportions across the main activity options before <u>and</u> after the course at FE College. Statistically significant findings are denoted by ‘*’ in the tables and are reported at the 5% level, that is, there is a 1 in 20 likelihood that these differences have occurred by chance. Non-significant findings are included for descriptive purposes and to illustrate trends.
Stratification variables:	To help maximise the likelihood of the sample being representative of particular sub-groups within the population of interest (all FE College leavers who completed and achieved at least one regulated qualification in the 2015/16 academic year), it has been proportionately stratified by five variables: FE College; Age Band; Gender; Mode of Attendance (Full-/Part-time); and Level of Course.