

Survey of Further Education College Leavers Report

Academic Year 2017/18

Date of Publication:

15 October 2019

Coverage:

Northern Ireland

Frequency of Publication:

Annual

Theme:

Children, Education and Skills

Issued by:

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This report presents findings from the fifth annual Northern Ireland Survey of Further Education (FE) 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 2017/18.

KEY POINTS:

- Over two-fifths (45.9%) of FE College leavers were in employment six months after achieving their 2017/18 qualification, up from 40.8% before their course began; conversely, the proportion in learning fell from 44.0% to 41.1% (**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' (25.2%); 'I was interested in the subject' (17.6%); or 'I wanted to go on to further / higher learning' (14.6%) (**Table 2**).
- Two-thirds (66.3%) of leavers agreed that, were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Over half (51.6%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while 52.9% 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' (55.4%), 'Business, Administration and Law' (52.8%) and 'Education and Training' (50.0%) (**Figure 7**).
- The subject areas with the lowest proportions of FE College leavers in employment were 'Social Sciences' (7.0%), 'History, Philosophy and Theology' (11.1%) and 'Science and Mathematics' (18.3%); however, these subjects had some of the highest proportions of leavers in further full-time study (**Figure 7**).
- Typically, unemployment rates were lower for those qualifying at higher levels. Over one-quarter of those who had studied at Entry Level were unemployed (27.5%), in contrast to 14.5% of those who had studied at Level 1, 7.0% of those at Level 2 and 3.7% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).

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 2017/18. |
| Authors | Louise Buckley, Allan Nesbitt, Brian French. |
| Publication Date | 15 th October 2019. |
| Reporting Period | Approximately six months after academic year 2017/18. |
| Fieldwork Period | 16 th January to 31 st March 2019. |
| Publication Issue | 5 |
| 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 |
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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) Allan Nesbitt - Allan.Nesbitt@economy-ni.gov.uk (Tel: 028 9025 7428)</p> |
| Acknowledgement | We would like to thank all the FE College 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

Over two-fifths (45.9%) of FE College leavers were in employment six months after achieving their 2017/18 qualification, up from 40.8% before their course began; conversely, the proportion in learning fell from 44.0% to 41.1% (**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' (25.2%); 'I was interested in the subject' (17.6%); or 'I wanted to go on to further / higher learning' (14.6%) (**Table 2**).

Two-thirds (66.3%) of leavers agreed that, were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Over half (51.6%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while 52.9% 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' (55.4%), 'Business, Administration and Law' (52.8%) and 'Education and Training' (50.0%) (**Figure 7**).

The subject areas with the lowest proportions of FE College leavers in employment were 'Social Sciences' (7.0%), 'History, Philosophy and Theology' (11.1%) and 'Science and Mathematics' (18.3%); however, these subjects had some of the highest proportions of leavers in further full-time study (**Figure 7**).

Typically, unemployment rates were lower for those qualifying at higher levels. Over one-quarter of those who had studied at Entry Level were unemployed (27.5%), in contrast to 14.5% of those who had studied at Level 1, 7.0% of those at Level 2 and 3.7% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).

FE College leavers in employment

Over one-third (35.4%) of the FE College leavers in employment had not been in employment before they started their 2017/18 course (**Table A12a**) – of these, three-quarters (74.9%) had been in learning.

For leavers in full-time employment, 40.2% were earning less than £300 per week. For leavers in part-time employment this was 89.7%. A further 27.5% of leavers in full-time employment were earning between £300 and £399 per week, while 5.1% of those in part-time employment earn similar wages (**Table S23**).

Males (32.2%) were twice as likely as females (16.7%) to be earning £400 or more per week (**Table S24**).

The vast majority (95.7%) of FE College leavers in employment were working in Northern Ireland, while 2.9% were working in the Republic of Ireland, 0.5% in Great Britain and 0.9% overseas (**Table 7**).

Seven-tenths (70.9%) of FE College leavers in employment said the course had prepared them well for employment (**Table S19**).

Of the FE College leavers who were in employment six months after their course, two-thirds (65.8%) were working full-time; a further 23.9% had one or more part-time jobs, while 10.4% were primarily working but also studying (**Table A11**).

Most of the FE College leavers in employment had jobs classified as either: 'Caring, leisure and other service occupations' (22.6%); 'Skilled Trade occupations' (20.4%); or 'Administrative and secretarial occupations' (12.5%) (**Figure 12** and **Table S18**).

FE College leavers in learning

Three-quarters (75.2%) of FE College leavers in learning had also been in learning before the course they had completed in 2017/18 (**Figure 15** and **Table A12b**), while four-fifths (80.8%) are now studying towards a higher level qualification (**Table S28**).

Almost two-thirds (65.7%) of leavers in learning have continued their learning in the FE sector, while almost three-tenths (29.5%) have started university (**Table S29**).

Over nine-tenths (91.0%) of FE College leavers in learning stated the course they had undertaken during 2017/18 had prepared them well for further study (**Table S30**).

Unemployed FE College leavers

The proportion of FE College leavers who classified themselves as unemployed six months after completing their course in 2017/18 was 6.4%, down from 9.2% before their course (**Table A5**).

Typically, unemployment rates were lower for those qualifying at higher levels. Over one-quarter of those who had studied at Entry Level were unemployed (27.5%), in contrast to 14.5% of those who had studied at Level 1, 7.0% of those at Level 2 and 3.7% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).

Section One: Background and Introduction

How to use this report

This report presents findings from the fifth 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 2017/18.

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, 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.

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-201718>.

Additional information on definitions and technical aspects of the survey are available in the [Annex](#). Online tables (denoted by the prefixes 'A' and 'S') 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 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 £260 million and a professional workforce of around 3,500. Engaging 80,000 learners in the 2017/18 academic year and working with over 10,000 businesses across NI, they have a significant footprint in our economy.

Through implementation of the 'FE Means Success' strategy, FE 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 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; improved quality of education; improved skills profile of the population; reduced economic inactivity; and an increased proportion of graduates moving into employment or on to further study.

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 fifth sweep of the Survey, conducted with the 2017/18 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, Gender, 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. In 2017/18, HE leavers will be participating 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 also entailed a census approach, providing an opportunity for all eligible leavers to participate. This 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. Towards the end of the fieldwork period NI Direct were also able to text a link to the online survey to eligible leavers who had not yet responded.

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 and telephone contact details for the initial overall target list of 32,008 leavers who had completed and achieved a qualification at Level 3 or below in 2017/18.

Before accepting the contact details returned by the Colleges, SRB (TE) performed extensive validation and data cleaning exercises.

In the end, Colleges supplied contact details for 31,035 leavers (the population of interest), amounting to 97.0% of the initial overall target list. The characteristics of the population of interest mirrored closely those of the initial overall target list in most respects.

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 Wednesday 16th January 2019 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 Survey Monkey 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. NI Direct commenced calling the contactable leavers with phone numbers on Tuesday 22nd January 2019.

Over the course of the following six and a half weeks, until the online fieldwork closed on Friday 1st March 2019, SRB (TE) issued four reminder emails to leavers who had not completed the Survey. NI Direct continued to dial and text the contactable leavers on the phone list until Sunday 31st March 2019 when the call centre fieldwork closed.

Despite extensive checking of contact details prior to the fieldwork, 3,071 (9.9%) 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) or the phone number provided was incorrect. This reduced the total eligible population to 28,754.

Response Rates

One in seven (14.8%) of the total eligible population participated in the online survey, resulting in 4,254 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:

- 61.7% were female (compared with 52.0% in the population of interest);
- 54.3% were aged 25+ (33.9% in the population of interest);
- 80.9% had studied on a part-time basis (77.0% in the population of interest).

Questionnaire

The survey captures a snapshot of activities that leavers from the 2017/18 academic year were engaged in approximately six months after completing their course.

Details were captured on leavers' employment, such as their job role and industry, 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 sweep of the Survey, some amendments were necessary to improve the wording and layout, given the switch from an online only survey to a multi-mode approach.

Data coding and weighting

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

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 iterative proportional fitting process, eleven combined raked weights were

produced for Age, Sex and Level of Qualification to provide a closer match between the characteristics of the participants and the population of interest.

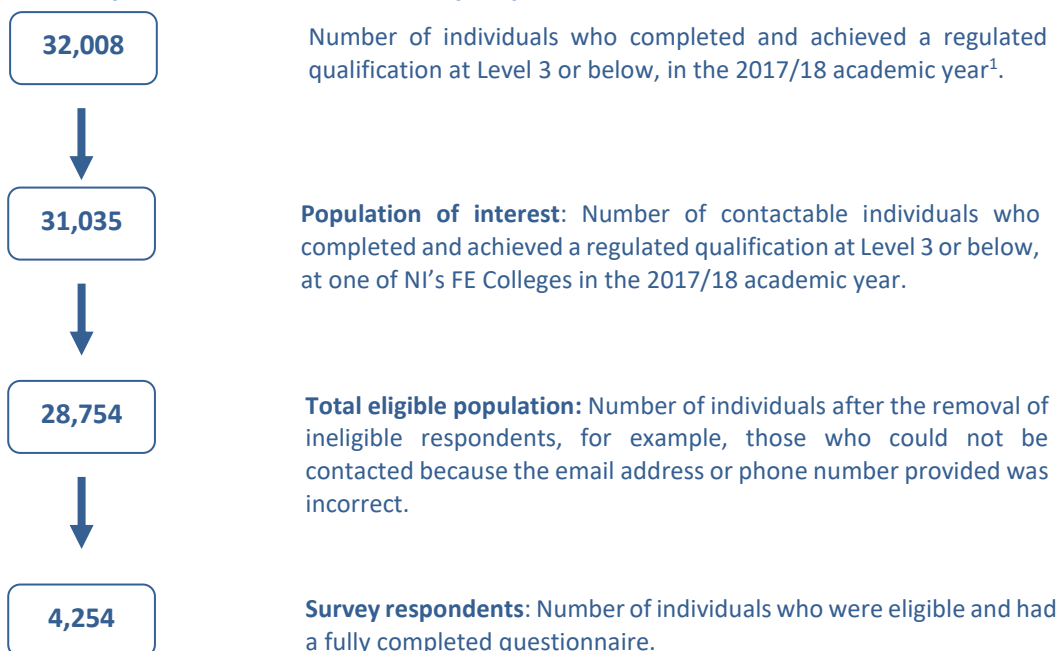
As a result of the raked weighting model:

- the male share of respondents increased from 38.3% to 48.1%, in line with their share of the population of interest
- the 19 and under share of respondents increased from 34.7% to 52.8%, whereas the 25 and over share decreased from 54.3% to 33.9%, both identical with their respective population shares
- the full-time study share of respondents increased from 19.1% to 21.8%, 1.2 percentage points below their share of the population of interest
- the level of course 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 survey respondents (4,254) and population of interest (31,035)

| Variable | Variable Categories | % of Population of interest (N=31,035) | 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 | 25.2 | 985 | 23.2 | -2.0 | 1,018 | 23.9 | -1.3 |
| | Northern Regional College | 13.8 | 662 | 15.6 | 1.8 | 690 | 16.2 | 2.4 |
| | North West Regional College | 11.7 | 585 | 13.8 | 2.1 | 522 | 12.3 | 0.6 |
| | South Eastern Regional College | 22.2 | 788 | 18.5 | -3.7 | 748 | 17.6 | -4.6 |
| | Southern Regional College | 17.2 | 722 | 17.0 | -0.2 | 739 | 17.4 | 0.2 |
| | South West College | 9.8 | 512 | 12.0 | 2.2 | 534 | 12.6 | 2.8 |
| | Total | 100.0 | 4,254 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 4,251 | 100.0 | 0.0 |
| Sex | Female | 52.0 | 2,625 | 61.7 | 9.7 | 2,208 | 51.9 | -0.1 |
| | Male | 48.0 | 1,629 | 38.3 | -9.7 | 2,043 | 48.1 | 0.1 |
| | Total | 100.0 | 4,254 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 4,251 | 100.0 | 0.0 |
| Age (years) | 19 and under | 52.8 | 1,475 | 34.7 | -18.1 | 2,245 | 52.8 | 0.0 |
| | 20-24 | 13.4 | 471 | 11.1 | -2.3 | 566 | 13.3 | -0.1 |
| | 25 and over | 33.9 | 2,308 | 54.3 | 20.4 | 1,440 | 33.9 | 0.0 |
| | Total | 100.0 | 4,254 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 4,251 | 100.0 | 0.0 |
| Mode of Attendance | Full-time | 23.0 | 812 | 19.1 | -3.9 | 926 | 21.8 | -1.2 |
| | Part-time | 77.0 | 3,442 | 80.9 | 3.9 | 3,324 | 78.2 | 1.2 |
| | Total | 100.0 | 4,254 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 4,251 | 100.0 | 0.0 |
| Level of Course | Entry Level | 1.5 | 89 | 2.1 | 0.6 | 59 | 1.4 | -0.1 |
| | Level 1 | 5.9 | 325 | 7.6 | 1.7 | 250 | 5.9 | 0.0 |
| | Level 2 | 52.6 | 1,931 | 45.4 | -7.2 | 2,240 | 52.7 | 0.1 |
| | Level 3 | 40.0 | 1,909 | 44.9 | 4.9 | 1,702 | 40.0 | 0.0 |
| | Total | 100.0 | 4,254 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 4,251 | 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:

- 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 28,754 contactable individual FE College leavers being eligible for inclusion in the 2017/18 Survey.
- Although it was intended that everyone within the population of interest would be contacted and provided an opportunity to respond to the survey, not all had valid contact details, and 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: Age Band, Sex and Level, 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, HE in FE, any individual under 16, SLDD and ESOL.

Section Three: Main Findings

3.1 All FE College Leavers

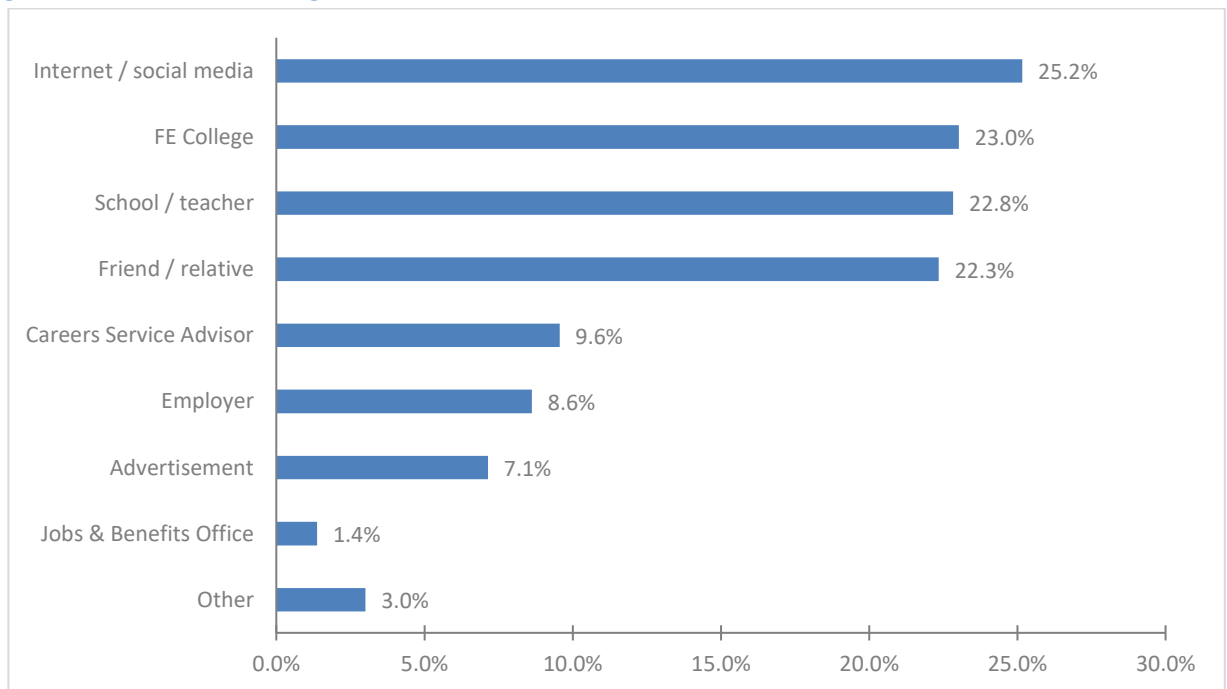
This section presents findings on all participants in the Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18 including:

- 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
- perceived overall educational experience

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: 'Internet / social media' (25.2%); 'FE College' (23.0%); 'School / teacher' (22.8%); or 'Friend / relative' (22.3%) (**Figure 1** and **Table A6**).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

n = 4,145

Note: 109 invalid responses were excluded.

Reasons for undertaking the course

An interest in the subject, improved employability and increased skills / qualifications were among the key drivers for undertaking courses at FE Colleges. The five most popular reasons for undertaking their course cited by FE College leavers were: 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (47.3%); 'I was interested in the subject' (45.9%); 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (44.2%); 'I wanted to learn something / gain new skills' (40.1%); and 'I wanted to go on to further / higher learning' (29.4%) (**Table 2**).

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' (25.2%); 'I was interested in the subject' (17.6%); or 'I wanted to go on to further / higher learning' (14.6%) (**Tables 2, A2a and A2b**).

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

| Reason | Overall % | Most Important % |
|--|-----------|------------------|
| I thought it would improve my career prospects | 47.3% | 25.2% |
| I was interested in the subject | 45.9% | 17.6% |
| I wanted to gain a qualification | 44.2% | 13.3% |
| I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills | 40.1% | 13.7% |
| I wanted to go onto further / higher learning | 29.4% | 14.6% |
| I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job | 14.4% | 6.1% |
| I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence | 13.9% | 1.4% |
| It was at a time / place that suited me | 12.3% | 1.1% |
| I wanted greater job satisfaction | 8.8% | 1.3% |
| I didn't have to pay for it | 7.7% | 0.3% |
| I wanted to increase my income | 6.6% | 0.8% |
| I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer | 5.8% | 2.7% |
| Other | 2.2% | 2.0% |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

n = 4,089 (Overall)

n = 4,079 (Most important reason)

Note: 165 (overall) and 175 (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, A4 and A5**).

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**).

Over two-fifths (45.9%) of FE College leavers were in employment six months after achieving their 2017/18 qualification, up from 40.8% before their course began; conversely, the proportion in learning fell from 44.0% to 41.1% (**Tables 3 and A5**).

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 | 26.8 | 30.2 |
| | Working part-time (one or more jobs) | 11.9 | 11.0 |
| | Primarily in work & also studying | 2.1 | 4.8 |
| | Employment Sub-total | 40.8 | 45.9 |
| Learning | Studying full-time | 35.0 | 24.1 |
| | Studying part-time | 1.5 | 2.8 |
| | Primarily studying but also in work | 7.5 | 14.2 |
| | Learning Sub-total | 44.0 | 41.1 |
| Unemployed | Unemployed | 9.2 | 6.4 |
| Other | Other | 6.0 | 6.6 |
| Total (n) | | 4,042 | 3,819 |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

Note: Not all respondents answered all questions.

While just under one-third (33.1%) 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:

- 29.7% remained in Employment
- 30.9% remained in Learning
- 3.6% remained Unemployed
- 2.8% 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 | 29.7% | 6.1% | 0.8% | 1.3% | 1,856 |
| Learning | 12.2% | 30.9% | 1.7% | 1.4% | 1,230 |
| Unemployed | 2.9% | 2.1% | 3.6% | 1.1% | 440 |
| Other | 1.2% | 2.0% | 0.3% | 2.8% | 288 |
| Total | 2,008 | 1,228 | 272 | 306 | 3,814 |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

n = 3,814 (six months after)

Note: 440 invalid responses were excluded.

Overall Educational Experience

Table 5 provides an overview of the overall education experience reported by FE College leavers. Two-thirds (66.3%) of leavers agreed that they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Just over half (51.6%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while 52.9% would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and over one-fifth (22.8%) would do something completely different (**Tables S35 to S42**).

Table 5: 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 | 19.6 | 8.6 | 12.5 | 10.2 |
| Likely | 16.7 | 8.5 | 17.7 | 12.6 |
| Not very likely | 19.4 | 24.1 | 21.4 | 20.6 |
| Not likely at all | 32.2 | 42.2 | 31.5 | 38.4 |
| Don't know | 12.1 | 16.7 | 17.0 | 18.1 |
| Total (n) | 3,526 | 3,501 | 3,492 | 3,499 |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

Note: Not all respondents answered all questions, therefore totals will vary.

Destinations of Leavers by Key Profiling Variables

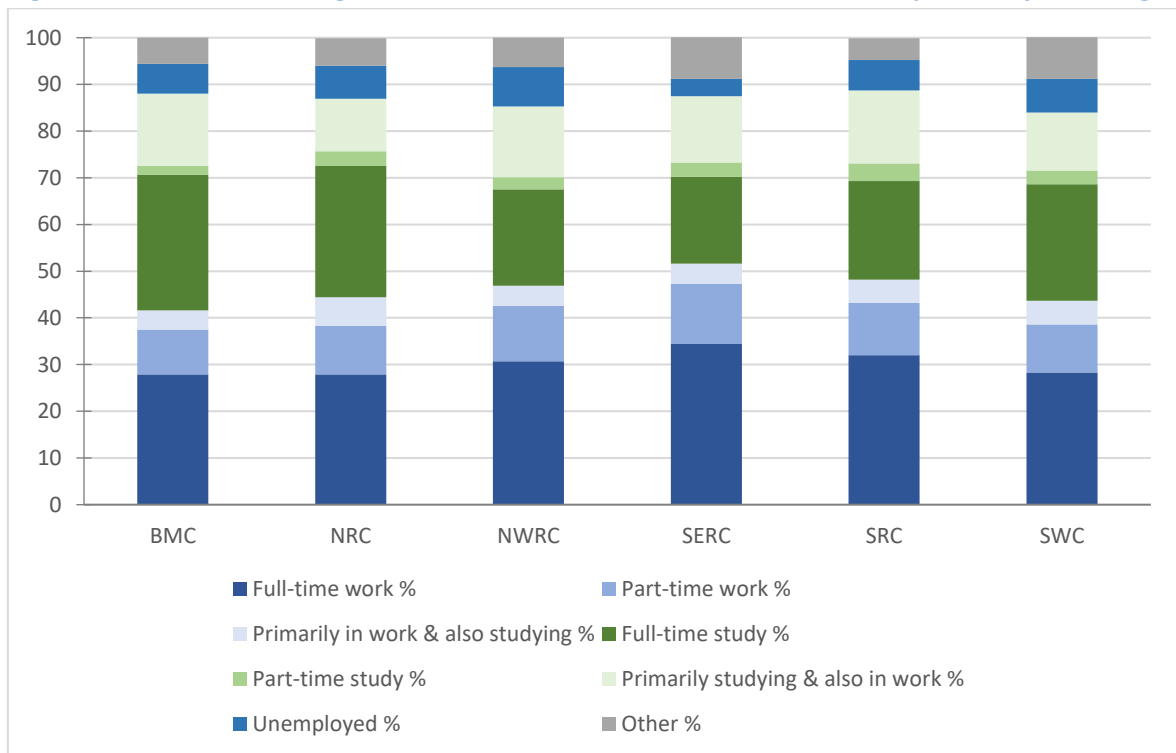
This section provides a comparison of each of the main destinations of the respondents to the Survey of FE College leavers 2017/18 by the key profiling variables (FE College, Sex, Age Group, Course Mode of Attendance and Level of Course Studied). Outputs for each are available in the online tables (**Table S14**).

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 (30.2%) and full-time study (24.1%) are the most popular activities 6 months after course completion; however, there are some variations across the colleges.

SERC (34.4%) and SRC (32.0%) had the highest proportions of leavers engaged in full-time work. Conversely, BMC (29.1%) and NRC (28.1%) 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 2017/18

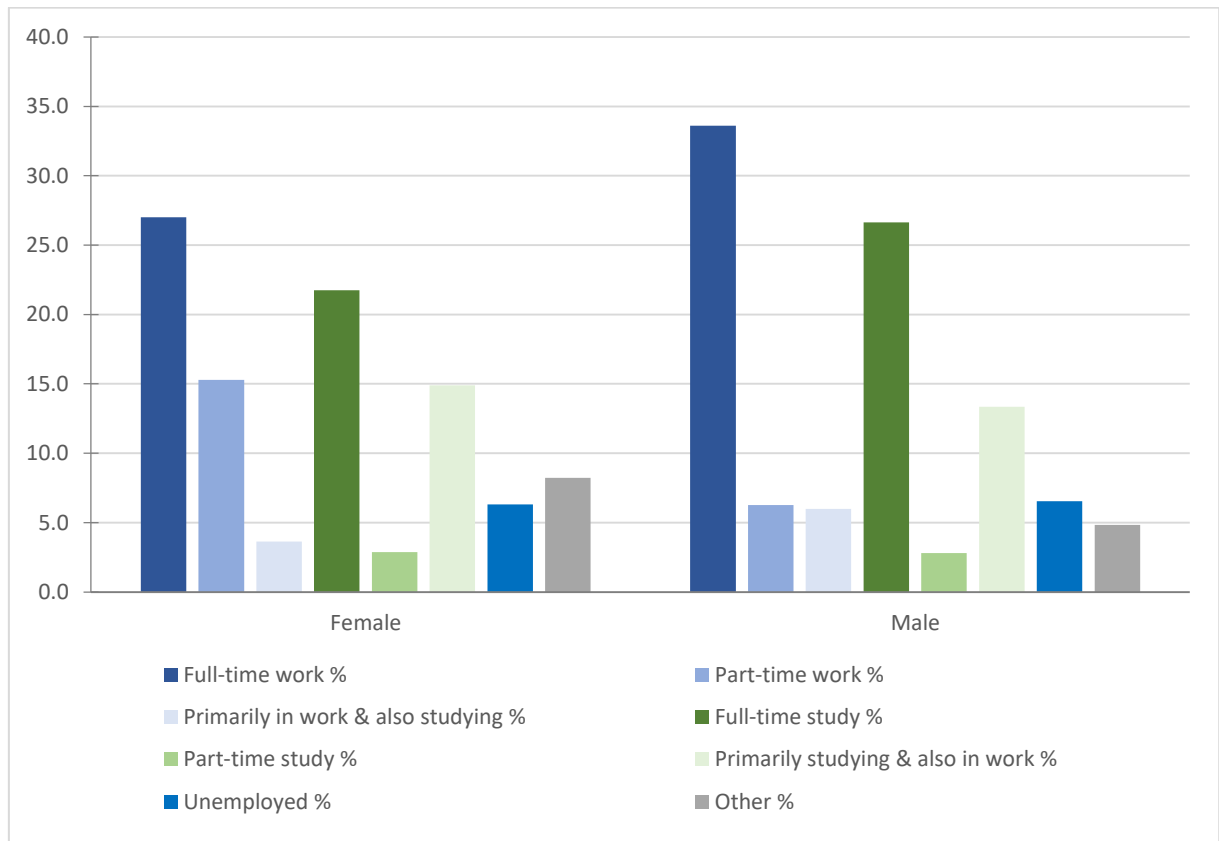
n=3,819

Note: 435 invalid responses were excluded.

Sex

Figure 3 demonstrates that male leavers were more likely than female leavers to be in full-time work (33.6% vs 27.0%) or full-time study (26.6% vs 21.8%). 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 (15.3% vs 6.3%).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

n=3,819

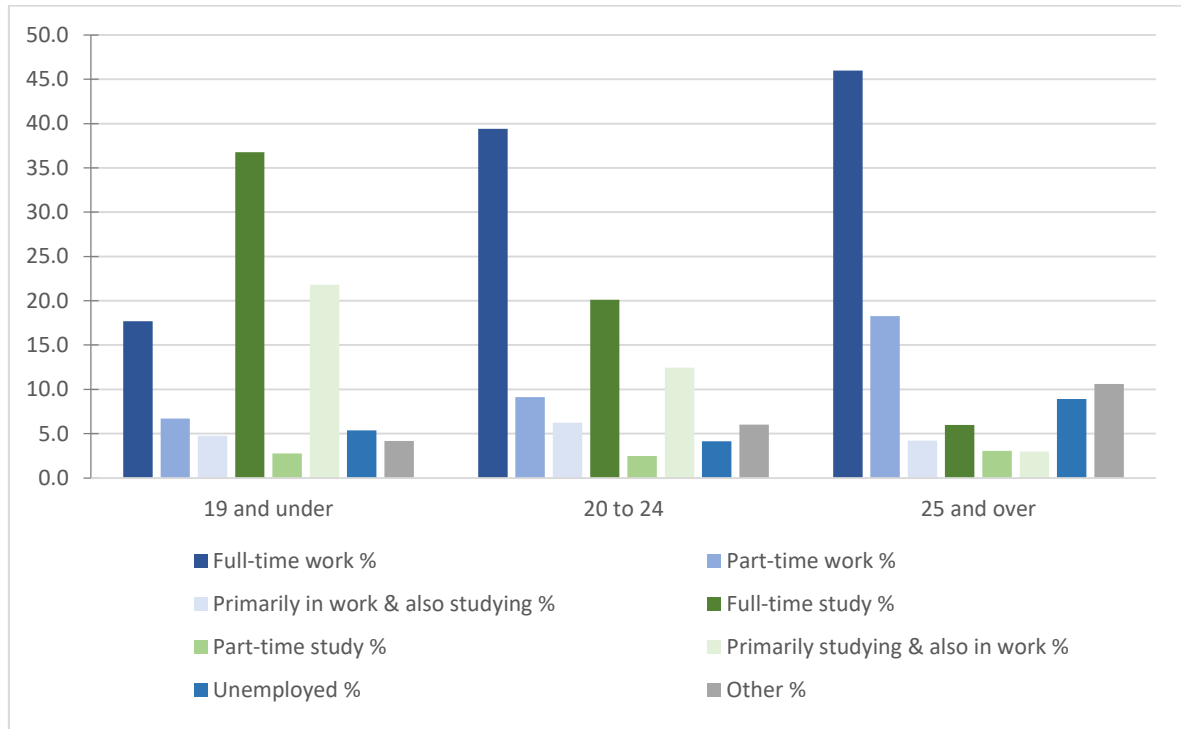
Note: 435 invalid responses were excluded.

²Northern Ireland. NISRA. (2019). *Labour Force Survey Annual Report 2018 – data tables*. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/labour-force-survey-annual-report-2018> (Accessed: 30 August 2019).

Age Group

As illustrated in **Figure 4**, respondents over the age of 25 were most likely to be working full-time six months after completing their course (46.0%), in contrast to those aged 19 and under (17.7%). Conversely, those aged 19 and under were more than six times as likely to be studying full-time (36.8%) as those aged 25 and over (6.0%).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

n= 3,819

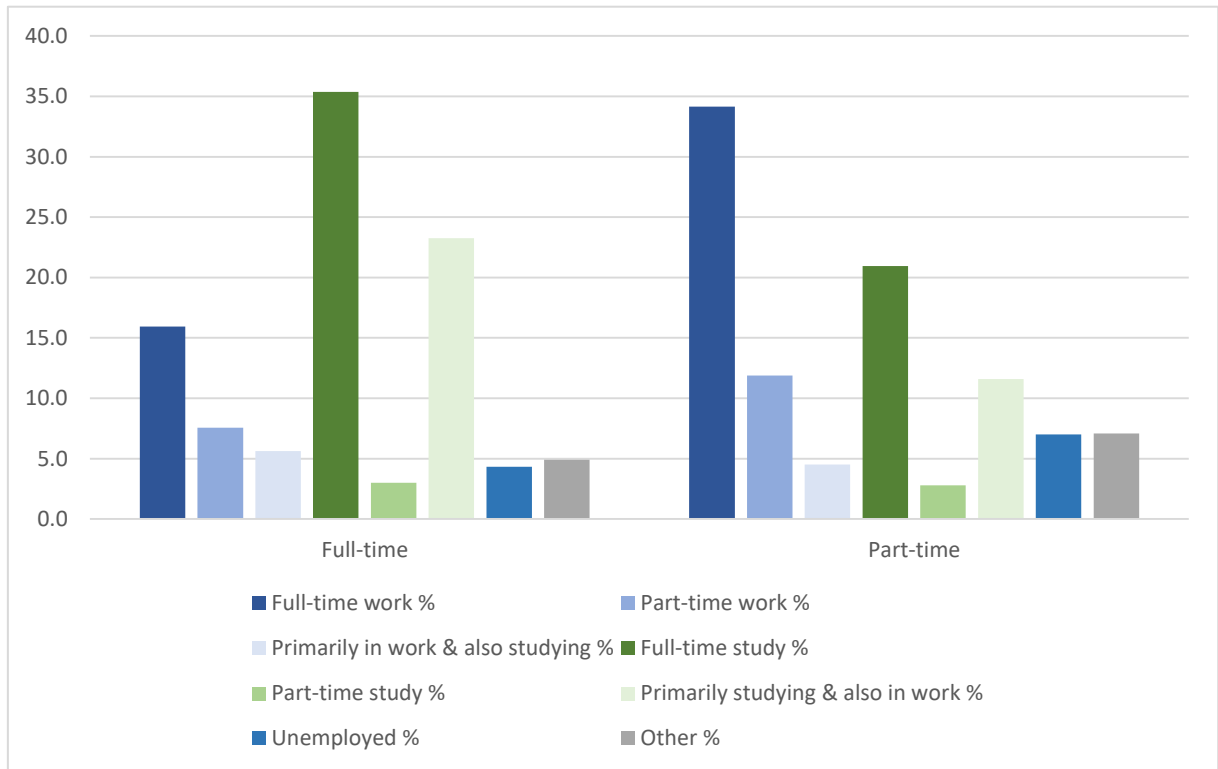
Note: 435 invalid responses were excluded.

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 (34.2% FT, 11.9% PT) than those who had completed their studies on a full-time basis (15.9% 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 (35.4% vs 21.0%). They were also more likely to be primarily studying but also working (23.3% vs 11.6%).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

n=3,819

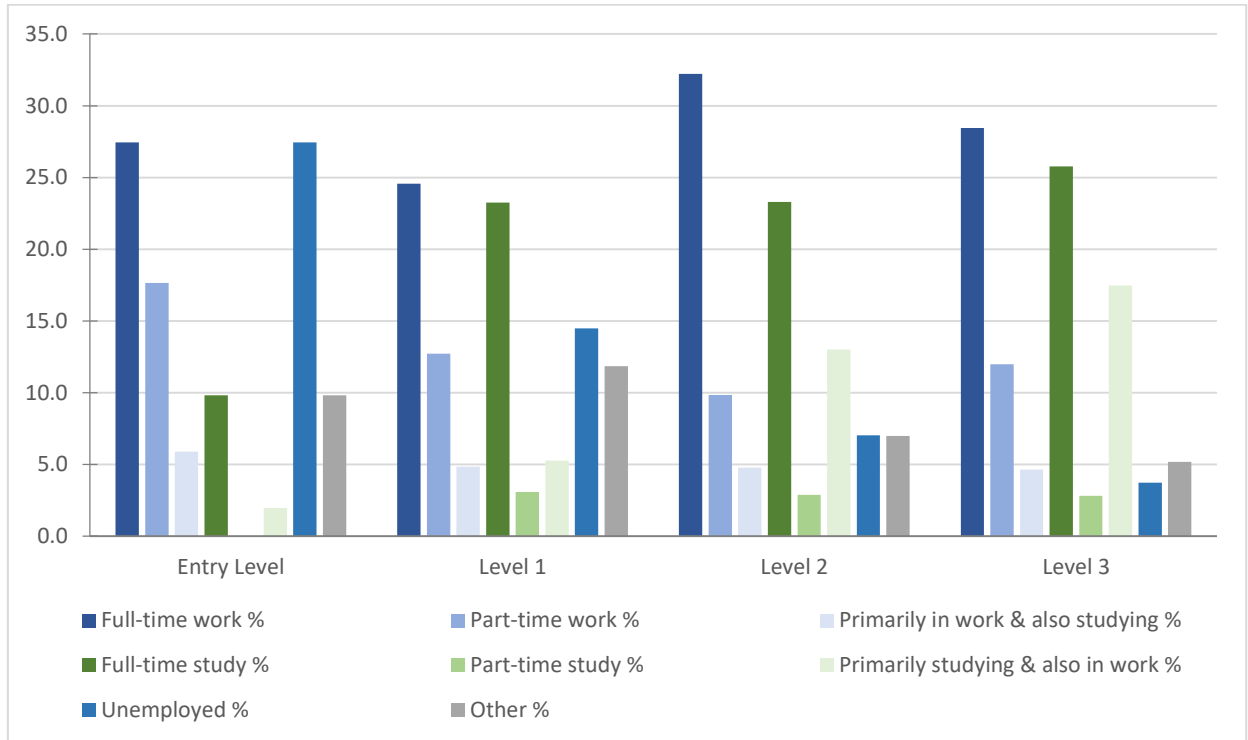
Note: 435 invalid responses were excluded.

Level of Study

Approximately six months after completing a course at FE College, 9.8% of those who had studied a course at Entry Level were in full-time study, in contrast to 23.2% of those who had studied at Level 1, 23.3% who had studied at Level 2 and 25.8% who had studied at Level 3.

Over one-quarter of those who had studied at Entry Level were unemployed (27.5%), in contrast to 14.5% of those who had studied at Level 1, 7.0% of those at Level 2 and 3.7% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

n=3,819

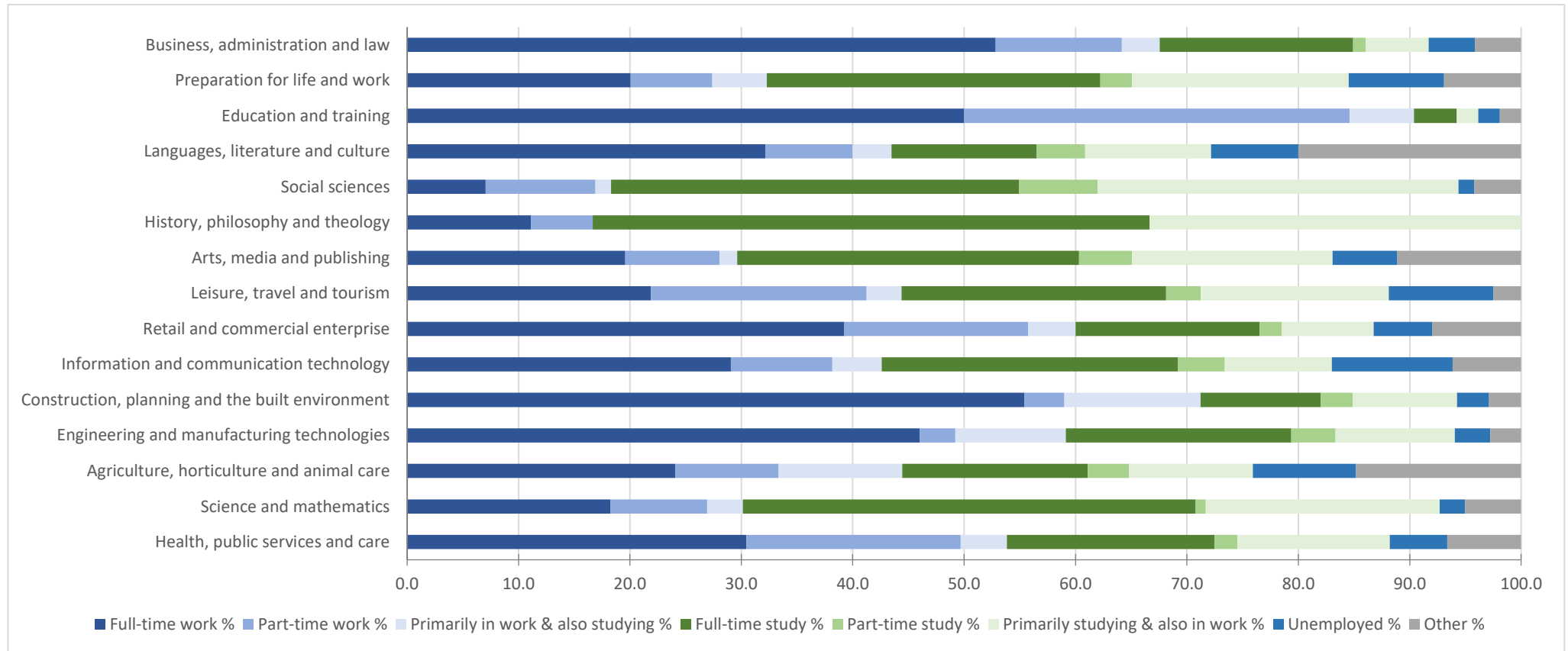
Note: 435 invalid responses were excluded.

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' (55.4%), 'Business, Administration and Law' (52.8%) and 'Education and Training' (50.0%).

The subject areas with the lowest proportions of FE College leavers in full-time employment were Social Sciences (7.0%), History, Philosophy and Theology (11.1%) and Science and Mathematics (18.3%). However, these subjects had some of the highest proportions of leavers in further full-time study (**Figure 7** and **Table S15**).

Figure 7: All FE College leavers: activities 6 months after course completion by subject area



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18
n=3,819.

Note: 435 invalid responses were excluded.

3.2 FE College Leavers in Employment

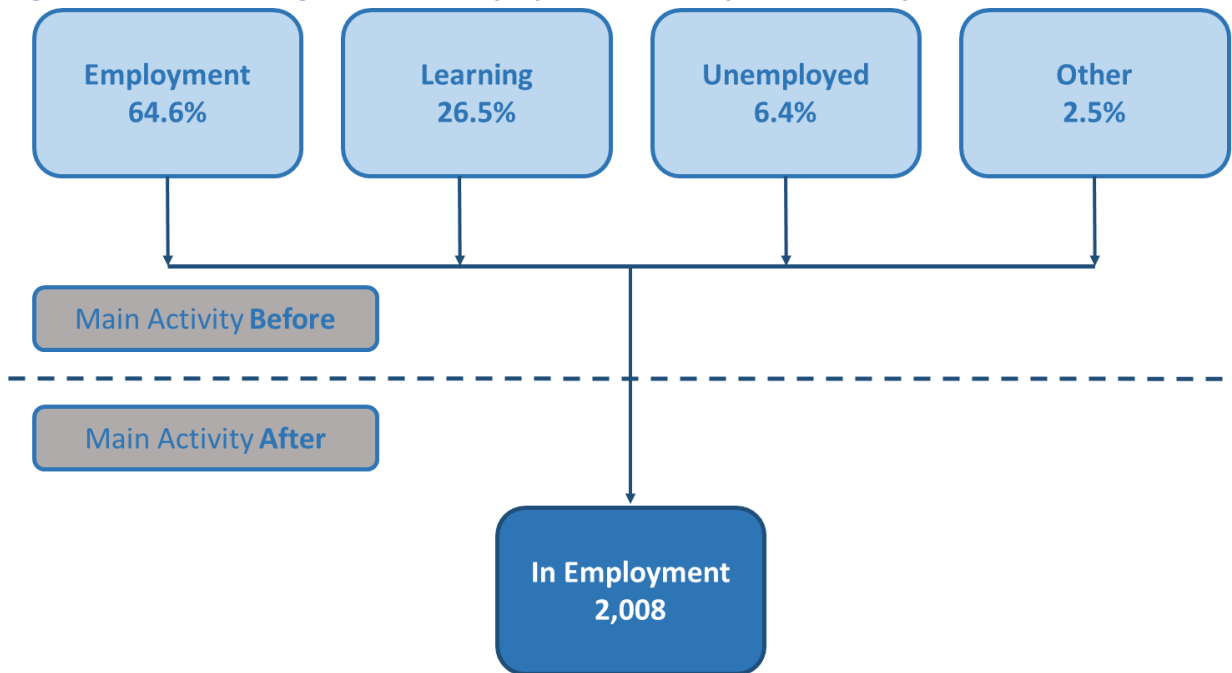
This section presents findings for the FE College leavers in employment six months after their course. This includes those leavers in full-time work, part-time work and those primarily in work but also studying. It provides: an overview of their main activities before the course; whether those in employment 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:

- 64.6% had previously been in employment
- 26.5% had previously been in learning
- 6.4% had previously been unemployed
- 2.5% had previously been categorised as other (**Figure 8** and **Table A12A**)

Figure 8: FE College leavers in employment: most important activity before



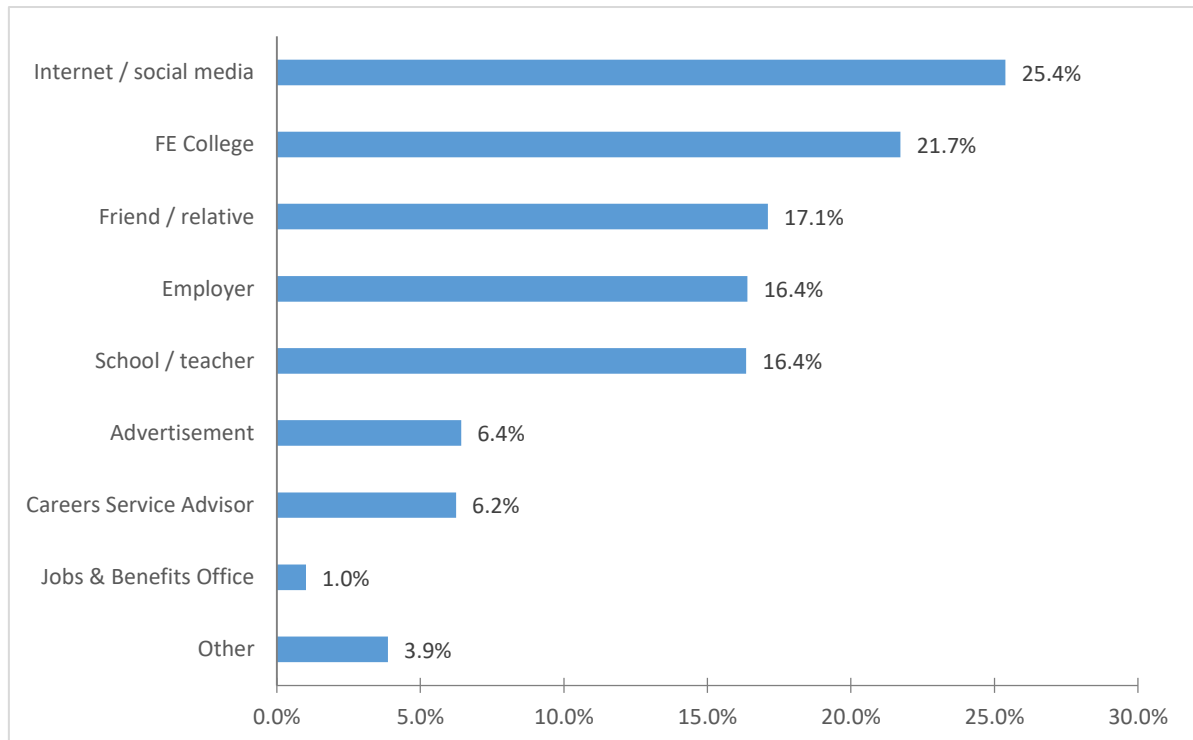
Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

Note: 1 invalid response was excluded.

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' (25.4%); 'FE College' (21.7%); 'Friend / relative' (17.1%); or 'Employer' (16.4%). While three out of the 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' (16.4% vs 22.8%) or a 'Friend / relative' (17.1% vs 22.3%); although they were almost twice as likely to have heard through their 'Employer' (16.4% vs 8.6%) (**Figure 9** and **Table S06**).

Figure 9: FE College leavers in employment: how individuals had heard about their course



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

n = 2,007

Note: 2 invalid responses were excluded.

Main reasons for undertaking the course

The 2,006 respondents to this question provided an average of three reasons for undertaking their course. The four most popular reasons for undertaking the course cited by leavers in employment were: 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (46.9%); 'I was interested in the subject' (43.0%); 'I wanted to learn something / gain new skills' (43.0%); and 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (42.3%) (Tables 6 and S12A).

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' (26.5%); 'I wanted to learn something / gain new skills' (16.5%); or 'I was interested in the subject' (15.7%) (Tables 6 and S12B).

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

| Reason | Overall % | Most Important % |
|--|-----------|------------------|
| I thought it would improve my career prospects | 46.9% | 26.5% |
| I was interested in the subject | 43.0% | 15.7% |
| I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills | 43.0% | 16.5% |
| I wanted to gain a qualification | 42.3% | 12.9% |
| I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job | 23.2% | 10.6% |
| I wanted to go onto further / higher learning | 17.7% | 5.7% |
| It was at a time / place that suited me | 12.1% | 1.1% |
| I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence | 11.9% | 1.3% |
| I wanted greater job satisfaction | 10.6% | 1.7% |
| I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer | 10.3% | 5.1% |
| I wanted to increase my income | 8.7% | 1.2% |
| I didn't have to pay for it | 7.2% | 0.3% |
| Other | 1.7% | 1.5% |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

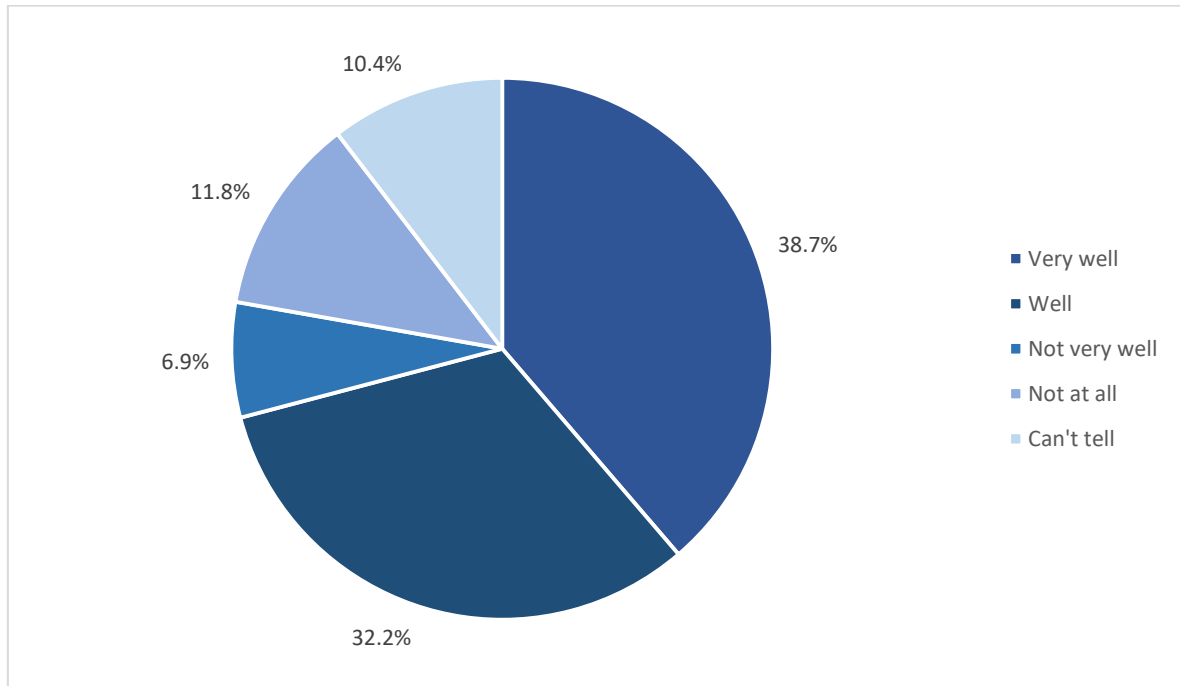
n = 2,006

Note: 3 invalid responses were excluded.

Using skills and knowledge acquired in course?

Seven-tenths (70.9%) of FE College leavers who took part in the survey and who were in employment stated the course they had undertaken at FE College during 2017/18 had prepared them well for employment; in particular, 38.7% said 'very well' (**Chart 1** and **Table S19**).

Chart 1: FE College leavers in employment: How well did your recent course prepare you for employment?



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

n = 1,737

Note: 272 invalid responses were excluded.

Subject area

The two largest subject areas accounted for one-third (33.1%) of the FE College leavers in employment: 'Preparation for Life and Work' (18.2%) and 'Health, public services and care' (14.9%) (**Table A8**).

Employment type

Two-thirds (65.8%) of the FE College leavers who were in employment six months after their course were working full-time; a further 23.9% were working in one or more part-time jobs, while 10.4% were primarily working but also studying (**Table A11**); this is equivalent to 71.6% working full-time and 28.4% working part-time.

According to the Labour Force survey in 2018, approximately three-quarters of the 16+ population in employment (74.7%) were working full-time.³

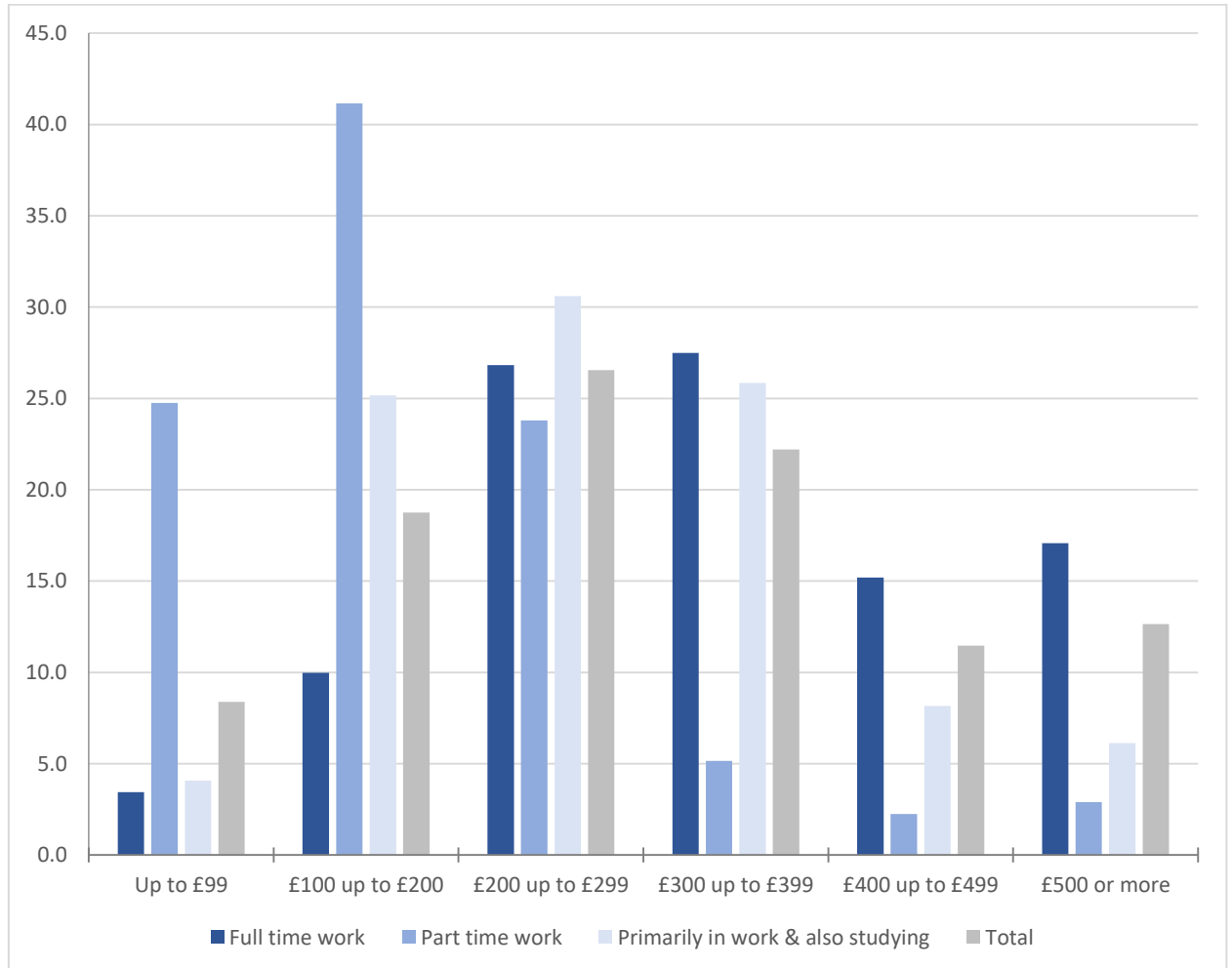
³ Northern Ireland. NISRA. (2019). *Labour Force Survey Annual Report 2018*. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/Labour%20Force%20Survey%20Annual%20Report%202018.PDF> (Accessed 30 August 2019)

Salary

The median weekly salary for all FE College leavers in employment was £200 up to £299 (£300 up to £399 for those in full-time employment).

For leaver in full-time employment, 40.2% were earning less than £300 per week; for those in part-time employment, the proportion was 89.7%. A further 27.5% of leavers in full-time employment were earning between £300 and £399 per week, in contrast to 5.1% of those in part-time employment (**Figure 10** and **Table S23**).

Figure 10: FE College leavers in employment by employment type: pay bands



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18.

n = 1,367

Note: 642 invalid responses were excluded.

Males (32.2%) were twice as likely as females (16.7%) to be earning £400 or more per week (**Table S24**). In the labour market generally, men on average work longer hours per week than women as a higher proportion of males work full-time, and full-time workers earn more on average than part-time workers⁴.

⁴ Northern Ireland. NISRA. (2018). *Northern Ireland Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings*. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/ASHE%202018%20Bulletin.PDF> (Accessed: 5 September 2019)

Occupation

Most of the FE College leavers in employment had jobs classified as: ‘Caring, leisure and other service occupations’ (22.6%); ‘Skilled Trade occupations’ (20.4%); or ‘Administrative and secretarial occupations’ (12.5%) (**Figure 4** and **Table S18**).

Similarly, according to ONS⁷ 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 62.2% of respondents are employed in one of these four occupation types.

Figure 12: FE College leavers in employment: Occupation

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Skilled Trade occupations (20.4%) | Professional occupations (8.3%) | <i>Process, plant and machine operatives (2.7%)</i> |
| | | <i>Managers, directors and senior officials (3.6%)</i> |
| Caring, leisure and other service occupations (22.6%) | Sales and customer service occupations (10.8%) | Elementary occupations (8.4%) |
| | Administrative and secretarial occupations (12.5%) | Associate professional and technical occupations (10.9%) |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18.

n = 1,795

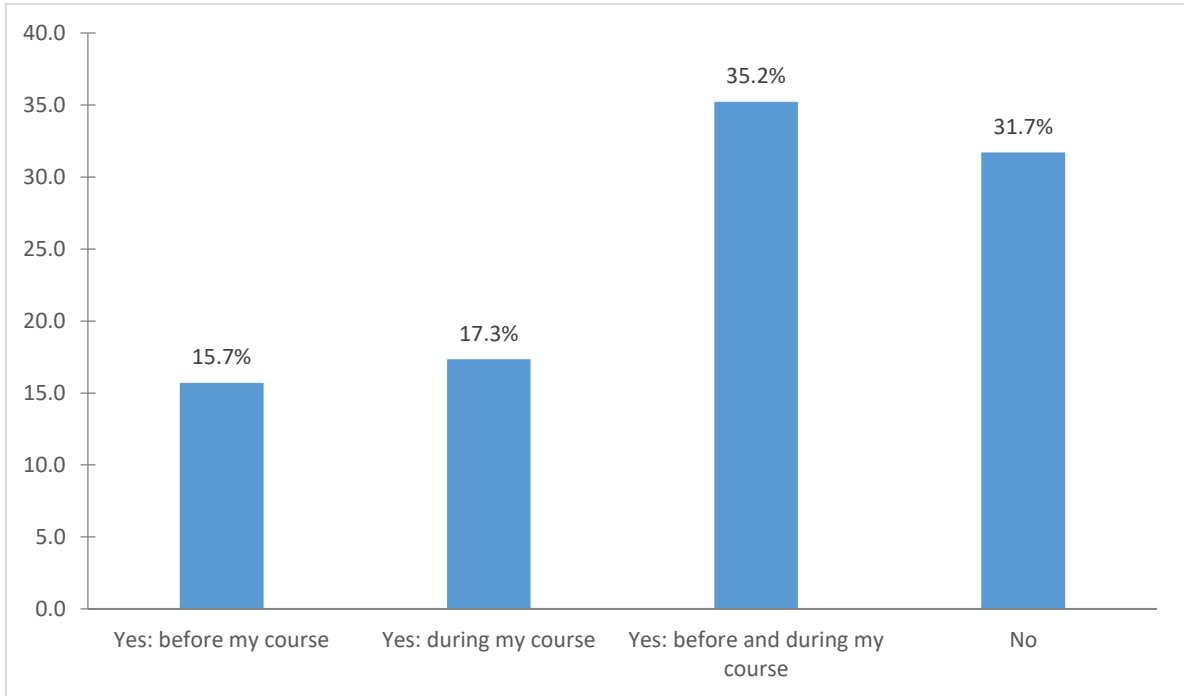
Note: 214 invalid responses were excluded.

⁷ 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: 5 September 2019).

Employed before and after with the same employer

Of those in **paid employment before and after** completing their course, over two-thirds (68.2%) had worked for their employer before and/or during their 2017/18 course (**Figure 13** and **Table S20**).

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



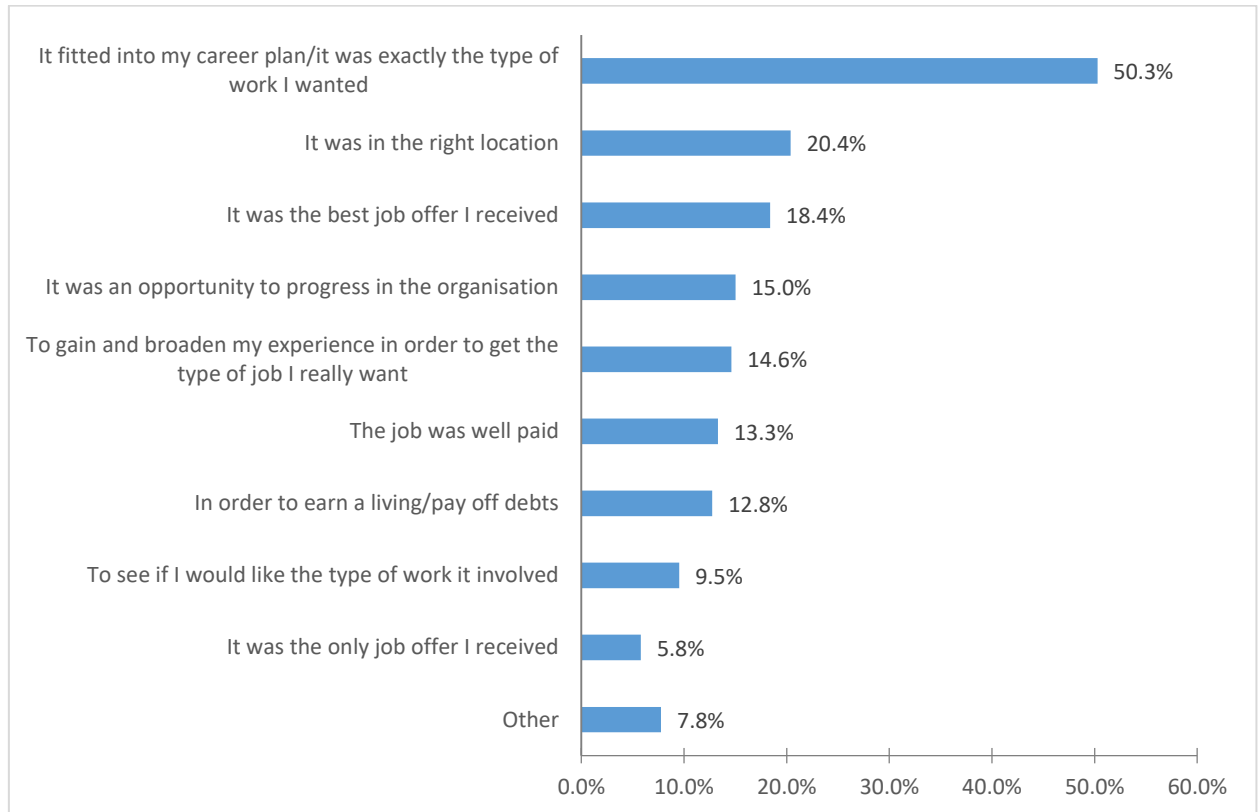
Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18
 n = 1,738

Note: 271 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’ (50.3%); ‘It was in the right location’ (20.4%); and ‘It was the best job offer I received’ (18.4%) (Figure 14 and Table S21).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18
n =826.

Note: 1,183 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 (95.7%); 2.9% were working in the Republic of Ireland, 0.5% in England, Scotland or Wales, and 0.9% overseas (Tables 7 and S17).

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

| Country | % |
|--|--------------|
| Northern Ireland | 95.7 |
| Republic of Ireland | 2.9 |
| Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales) | 0.5 |
| Outside UK | 0.9 |
| Total | 1,754 |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18
n= 1,754

Note: 255 invalid responses were excluded.

Overall Educational Experience

Table 8 provides an overview of the overall education experience reported by FE College leavers in employment. Almost three-fifths (59.7%) of respondents agreed that, were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Almost half (47.1%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while 45.0% would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and less than one-third (30.3%) would do something completely different (**Tables S35, S37, S39 and S41**).

Table 8: 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 | 21.2 | 10.9 | 16.1 | 13.4 |
| Likely | 19.4 | 11.2 | 21.8 | 16.9 |
| Not very likely | 17.7 | 23.3 | 18.8 | 18.8 |
| Not likely at all | 29.4 | 36.4 | 26.2 | 32.3 |
| Don't know | 12.3 | 18.2 | 17.0 | 18.6 |
| Total (n) | 1,749 | 1,737 | 1,730 | 1,734 |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

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

3.3 FE College Leavers in Learning

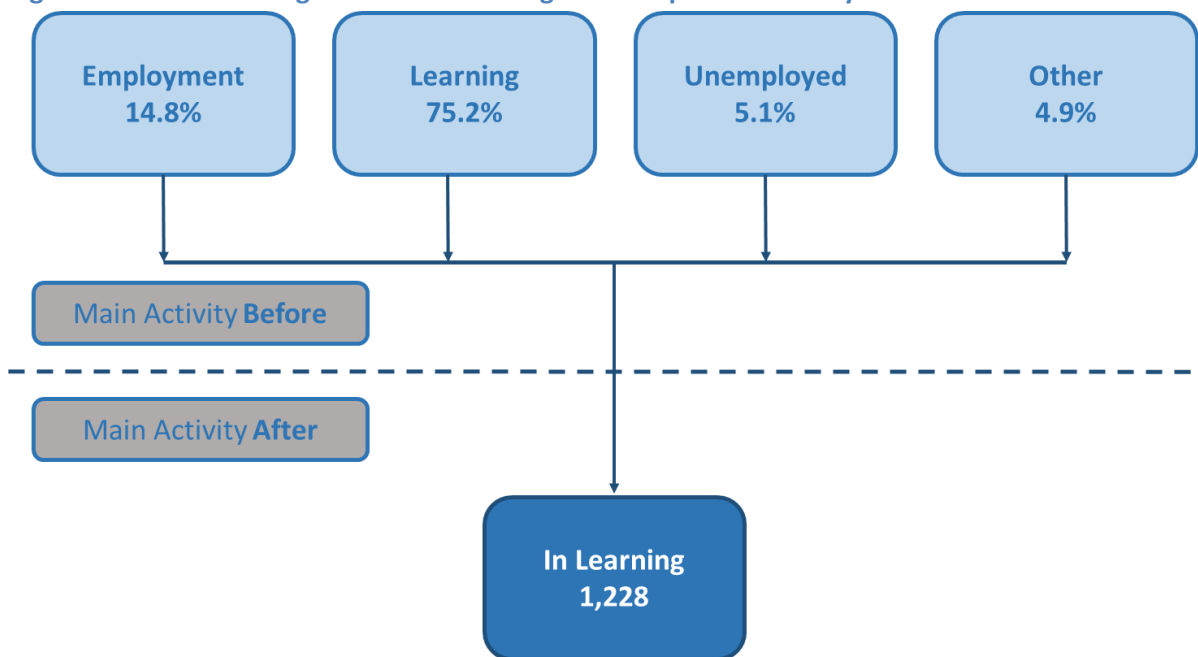
This section presents findings for FE College leavers in learning six months after their 2017/18 course, including those in full-time study, part-time study or primarily studying but also in work. It contains an overview of: their main activities before the course; their learning progression; how they 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:

- 14.8% had previously been in employment
- 75.2% had previously been in learning
- 5.1% had previously been unemployed
- 4.9% had previously been categorised as other (**Figure 15 and Table A12b**).

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



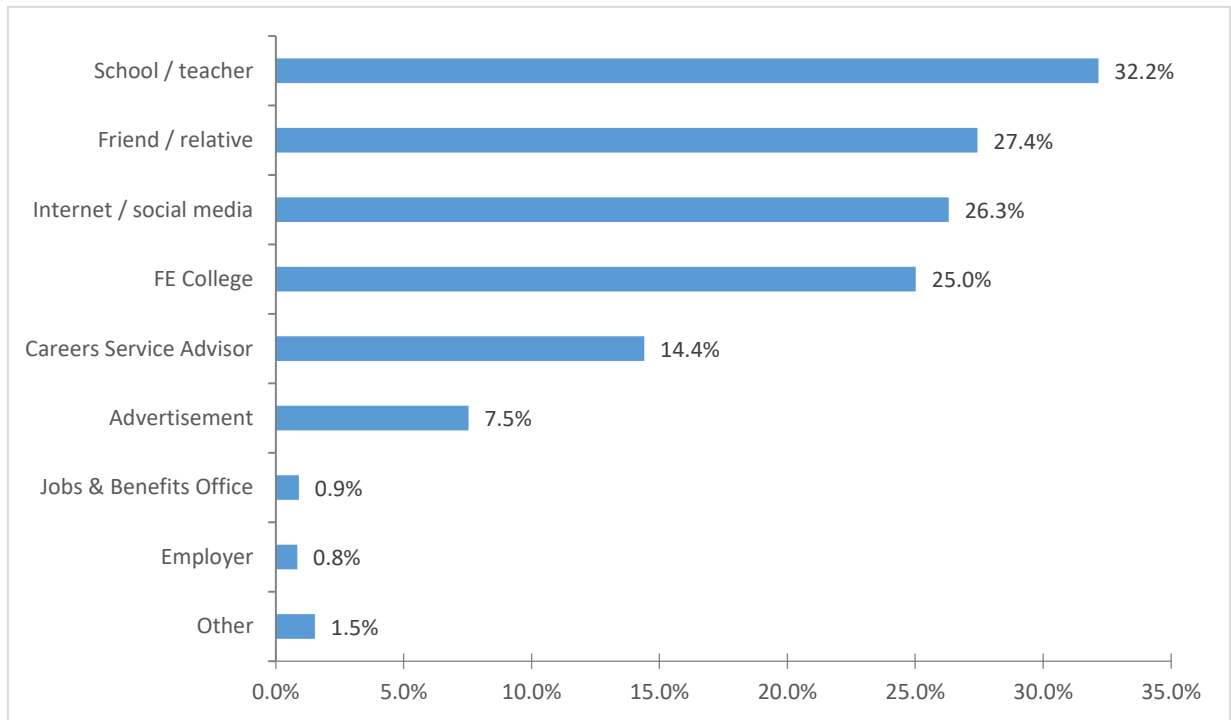
Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

Note: 3 invalid responses are excluded.

How did individuals hear about their course?

FE College Leavers in learning were most likely to have heard about their course through: ‘School / teacher’ (32.2%); ‘Friend / relative’ (27.4%); ‘Internet / social media’ (26.3%) or ‘FE College’ (25.0%). 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’ (32.2% vs 22.8%) (**Figure 16** and **Table S06**).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18
 n = 1,231

Main reasons for undertaking the completed course

The 1,230 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 was interested in the subject' (51.8%); 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (50.6%); 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (48.3%); and 'I wanted to go on to further / higher learning' (48.0%) (**Tables 9 and S12A**).

When asked to give the most important reason for undertaking their course, leavers in learning were most likely to say: 'I wanted to go on to further / higher learning' (27.5%); 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (24.4%); or 'I was interested in the subject' (20.0%) (**Tables 9 and S12B**).

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

| Reason | Overall % | Most Important % |
|--|-----------|------------------|
| I was interested in the subject | 51.8% | 20.0% |
| I thought it would improve my career prospects | 50.6% | 24.4% |
| I wanted to gain a qualification | 48.3% | 12.0% |
| I wanted to go onto further / higher learning | 48.0% | 27.5% |
| I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills | 35.6% | 8.5% |
| I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence | 16.8% | 1.1% |
| It was at a time / place that suited me | 11.5% | 1.1% |
| I didn't have to pay for it | 7.8% | 0.1% |
| I wanted greater job satisfaction | 7.2% | 0.8% |
| I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job | 6.4% | 1.4% |
| I wanted to increase my income | 5.2% | 0.4% |
| I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer | 1.5% | 0.1% |
| Other | 2.8% | 2.5% |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

n = 1,230

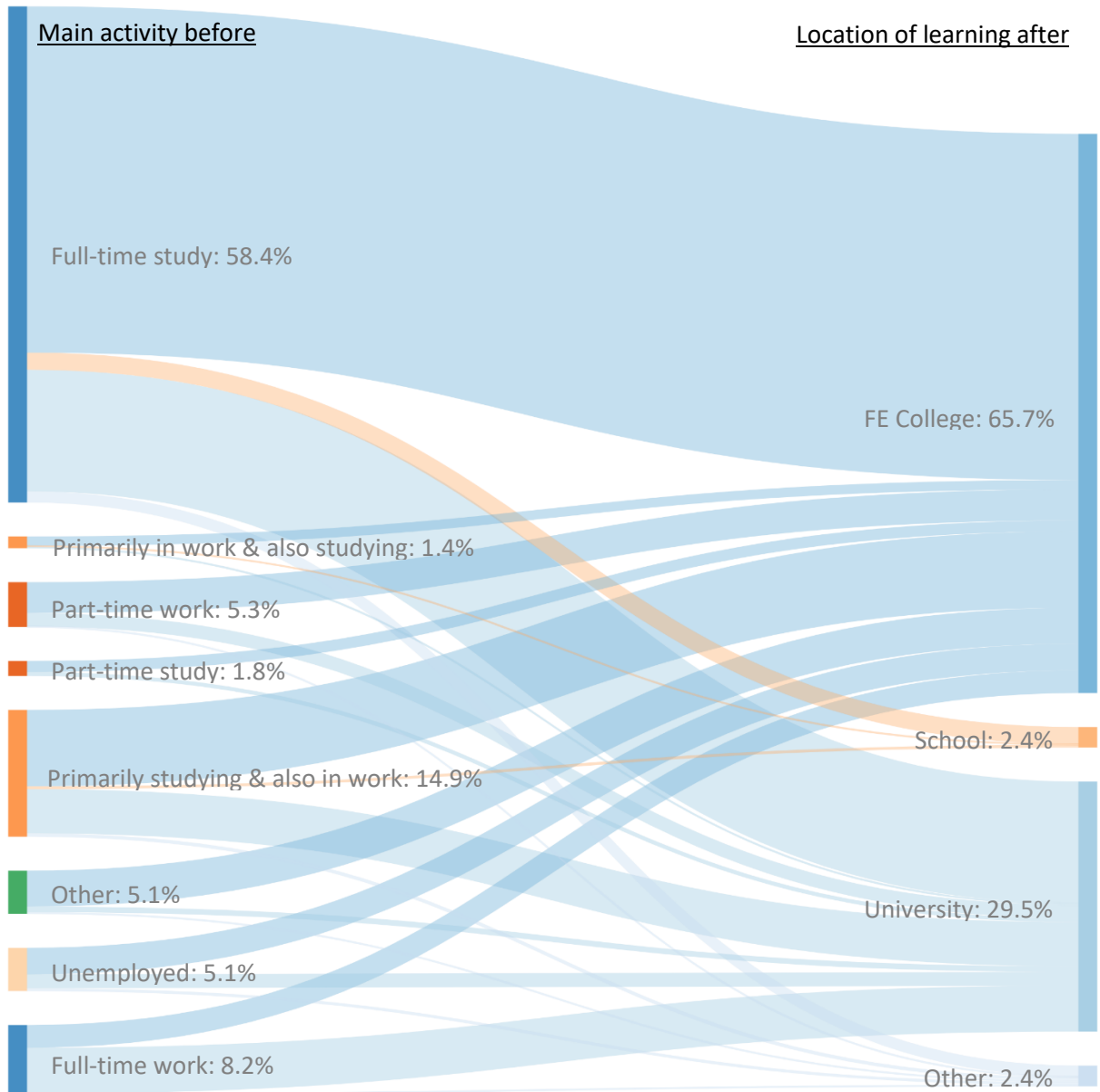
Note: 1 invalid response was excluded.

Learning progression

Three-quarters (75.2%) of the FE College leavers in learning six months after their course had also been in learning before their course (**Figure 15 and Table A12b**).

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 (65.7%), while almost three-tenths (29.5%) had started university (**Table S29**).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

n=1,211

Note: 20 invalid responses were excluded.

Studying at a higher level

Four-fifths (80.8%) of FE College leavers in learning said their additional learning is at a higher level than the course they had completed in 2017/18 (**Table S28**).

Of the FE College leavers in learning who had been in full-time study before their 2017/18 course, the majority of each group have progressed to additional learning at a higher level after their course (**Tables 10 and A10**).

Of the 1,212 respondents undertaking additional learning, over nine-tenths (95.0%) had completed a course at Level 2 or 3 (**Table S28**).

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 | School | | |
| Only studying (either full-time or part-time) | 24.6% | 69.9% | 3.4% | 633 | 78.9% |
| Primarily studying but also in work | 34.9% | 60.3% | 2.2% | 168 | 82.5% |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18.

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

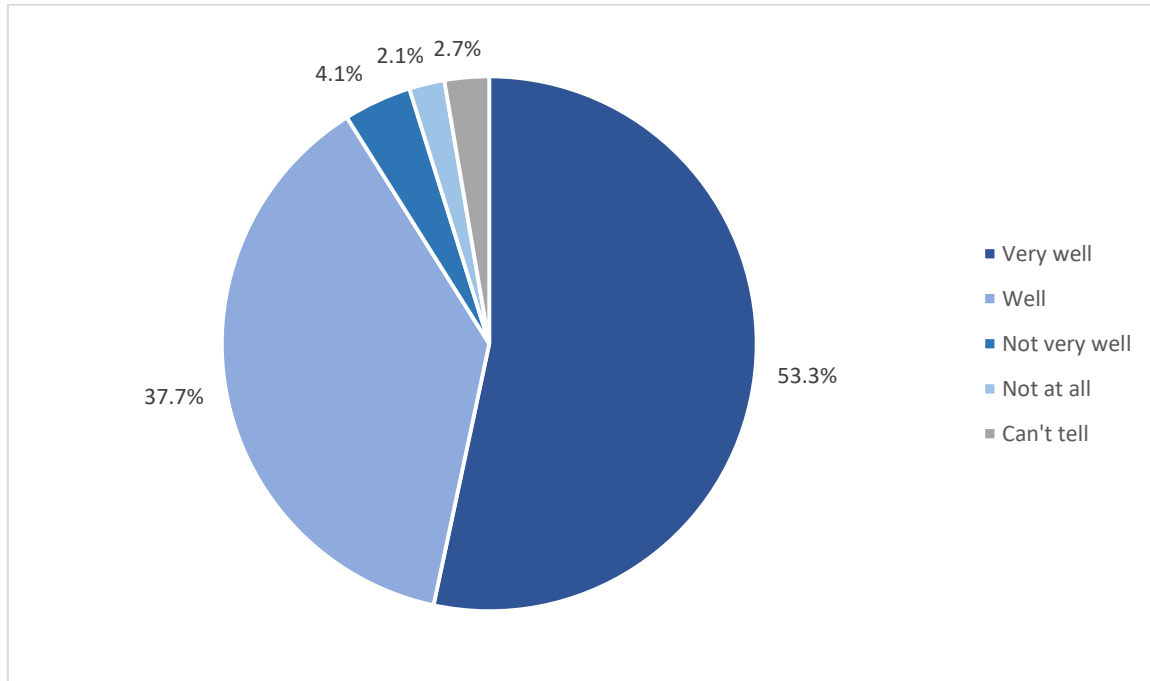
Studying at the same level

Of the FE College leavers who provided details about their additional learning, 17.3% said this would lead to a qualification at the same level as the course they had undertaken in 2017/18 (**Table S28**).

Using skills and knowledge acquired in course?

Nine-tenths (91.0%) of FE College leavers in learning stated the course they had undertaken during 2017/18 had prepared them well for further study; in particular, 53.3% said ‘very well’ (**Chart 2** and **Table S30**).

Chart 2: FE College leavers in learning: how well did your course prepare you for further study?



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18
n = 1,214

Note: 17 invalid responses were excluded.

Overall Educational Experience

Table 11 provides an overview of the overall education experience reported by FE College leavers in learning. Just under three-quarters (72.3%) of respondents agreed that, were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Over half (56.8%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while under two-thirds (63.9%) would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and 11.7% would do something completely different (**Tables S35, S37, S39** and **S41**).

Table 11: 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 | 16.7 | 5.1 | 5.9 | 4.3 |
| Likely | 14.6 | 6.4 | 13.1 | 7.4 |
| Not very likely | 22.4 | 26.6 | 25.5 | 22.9 |
| Not likely at all | 34.4 | 45.7 | 38.4 | 47.7 |
| Don't know | 11.9 | 16.2 | 17.0 | 17.7 |
| Total (n) | 1,200 | 1,193 | 1,193 | 1,195 |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

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

3.4 Unemployed FE College Leavers

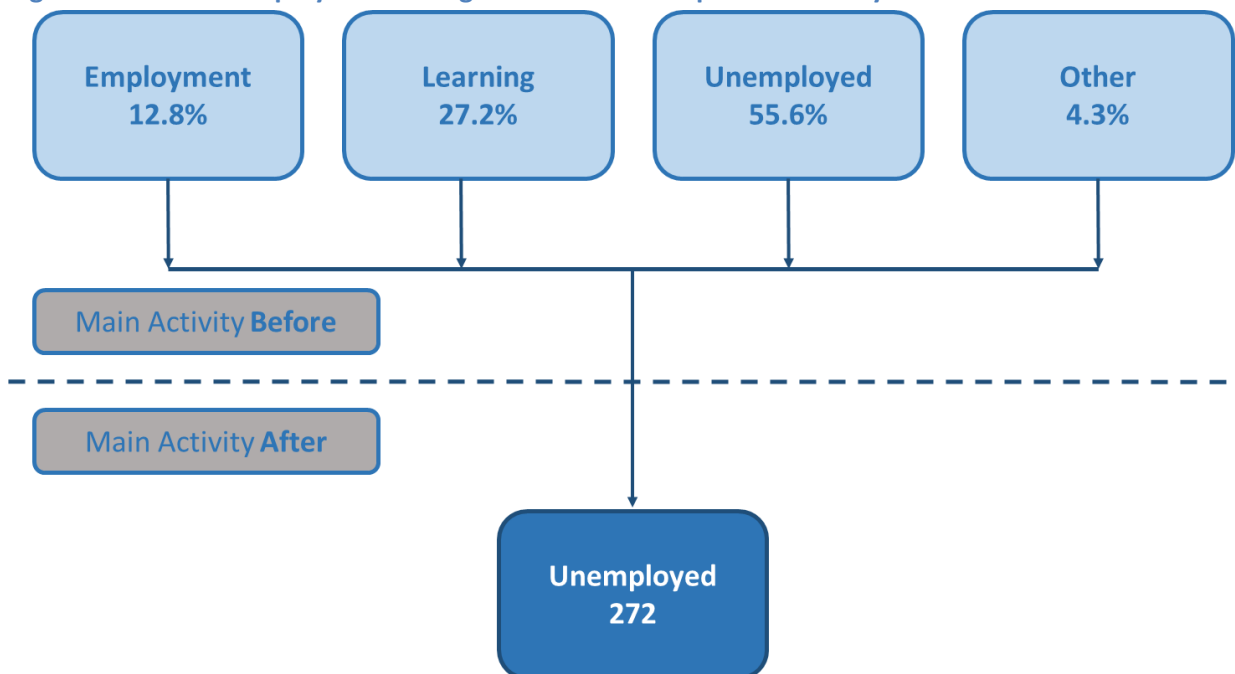
This section presents findings for FE College leavers who were unemployed and looking for work six months after their course, including: an overview of their main activities before the course; how long they have been unemployed; how they had heard about the course; and the main reasons for taking the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

Overview of main activity before the course

Of the 272 FE College leavers who were unemployed six months after achieving a regulated qualification:

- 12.8% had previously been in employment
- 27.2% had previously been in learning
- 55.6% had previously been unemployed
- 4.3% had previously been categorised as other (**Figure 18** and **Table A12c**).

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

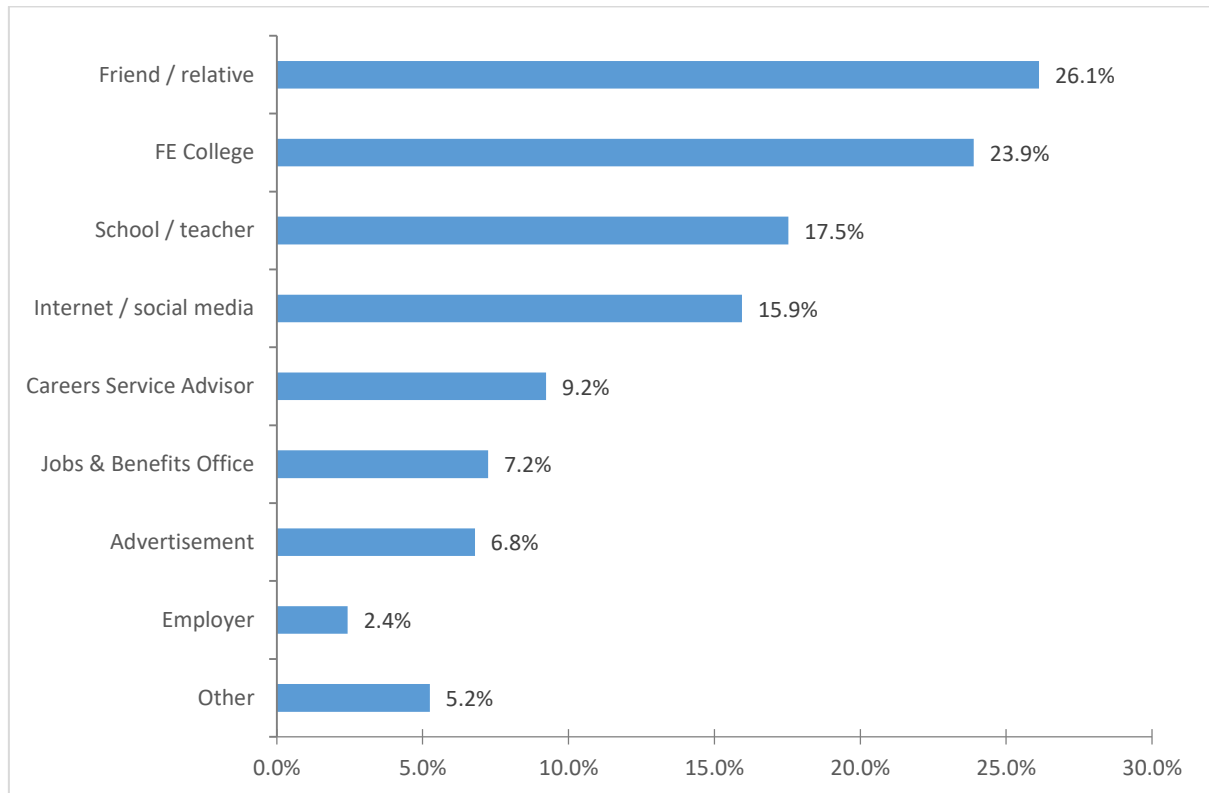


Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

How did individuals hear about their course?

Unemployed FE College Leavers were most likely to have heard about their course through: ‘Friend / relative’ (26.1%); ‘FE College’ (23.9%); ‘School / teacher’ (17.5%); or ‘Internet / social media’ (15.9%). These top four reasons were also the most popular among all FE College leavers (**Figure 19** and **Table S06**).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18
 n = 272.

Main reasons for undertaking the course

The 272 unemployed leavers who responded to this question provided an average of two reasons for completing their course. The four most popular reasons cited were: 'I wanted to learn something / gain new skills' (41.5%); 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (41.3%); 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (38.4%); and 'I was interested in the subject' (37.8%); (**Tables 12 and S12A**).

When asked to give the most important reason for undertaking their course, unemployed leavers were most likely to say: 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (23.9%); 'I wanted to learn something / gain new skills' (22.0%); or 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (21.7%) (**Tables 12 and S12B**).

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

| Reason | Overall % | Most Important % |
|--|-----------|------------------|
| I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills | 41.5% | 22.0% |
| I wanted to gain a qualification | 41.3% | 23.9% |
| I thought it would improve my career prospects | 38.4% | 21.7% |
| I was interested in the subject | 37.8% | 16.8% |
| I wanted to go onto further / higher learning | 13.8% | 5.6% |
| It was at a time / place that suited me | 12.3% | 0.3% |
| I didn't have to pay for it | 9.9% | 1.8% |
| I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence | 9.4% | 1.8% |
| I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job | 5.7% | 2.5% |
| I wanted greater job satisfaction | 4.0% | 0.5% |
| I wanted to increase my income | 3.0% | 1.0% |
| I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer | 2.2% | 1.2% |
| Other | 1.0% | 1.0% |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18
n = 272.

Subject area

The two largest subject areas account for over half (52.5%) of unemployed FE College leavers: 'Preparation for life and work' (34.4%); and 'Information and communication technology' (18.1%) (**Tables 13** and **A13**).

Table 13: Unemployed FE College leavers: subject area studied

| Subject Area | % of All Subjects |
|--|-------------------|
| Preparation for life and work | 34.4% |
| Information and communication technology | 18.1% |
| Health, public services and care | 10.1% |
| Retail and commercial enterprise | 8.4% |
| Leisure, travel and tourism | 6.3% |
| Business, administration and law | 4.7% |
| Arts, media and publishing | 4.5% |
| Languages, literature and culture | 3.5% |
| Engineering and manufacturing technologies | 3.1% |
| Agriculture, horticulture and animal care | 2.1% |
| Science and mathematics | 2.0% |
| Construction, planning and the built environment | 1.7% |
| Social sciences | 0.5% |
| Education and training | 0.5% |
| Total | 100.0% |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18.
n = 272.

Level of study

Over one-quarter of those who had studied at Entry Level were unemployed (27.5%), in contrast to 14.5% of those who had studied at Level 1, 7.0% of those at Level 2 and 3.7% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).

Any employment after course?

Less than one-quarter (22.9%) of the unemployed FE College leavers said they had had some employment in the six months since completing their course (**Table S32**).

Long-term unemployment?

Four-fifths (80.7%) of those unemployed before and after their course report being in long-term unemployment⁸. Of these, three-quarters (75.1%) were aged 25 years and over and nearly four-fifths (79.9%) had studied their course at Level 2 or below (**Tables S33** and **S34**).

⁸ Long-term unemployment refers to the number of people who are out of work and have been actively seeking employment for at least a year. (OECD (2019), Long-term unemployment rate (indicator) Available at: <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/long-term-unemployment-rate.htm#targetText=Long%2Dterm%20unemployment%20refers%20to,for%2012%20months%20or%20more.&targetText=It%20is%20also%20of%20particular,as%20a%20percentage%20of%20unemployed>. (Accessed: 5 September 2019)

Not unemployed before the course

The largest group of leavers to move into unemployment had previously been in learning (27.2%), while over one-eighth (12.8%) had been in employment (**Figure 18**).

Overall Educational Experience

Table 14 provides an overview of the overall education experience reported by unemployed FE College leavers. Two-thirds (64.1%) of leavers agreed that were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Almost half (49.9%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while over one-third (37.0%) would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and over two-fifths (42.4%) would do something completely different (**Tables S35, S37, S39 and S41**).

Table 14: 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 | 21.5 | 15.9 | 24.8 | 23.4 |
| Likely | 15.2 | 7.0 | 21.7 | 19.0 |
| Not very likely | 14.0 | 13.1 | 13.2 | 17.4 |
| Not likely at all | 35.9 | 51.0 | 23.8 | 22.1 |
| Don't know | 13.3 | 13.1 | 16.4 | 18.1 |
| Total (n) | 268 | 264 | 265 | 265 |

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2017/18

Note: Not all respondents answered all questions, therefore totals will vary.

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 for who want to improve their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills and for who English is not their first language. Further information can be found here: https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/english-speakers-other-languages-esol |
| 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 at Level 3 or below during the 2017/18 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 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 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 link: <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean>
- Occupation:** The classification of respondents' occupations is based on the SOC2010 (Standard Occupational Classification) codes adopted since 2011, further information on SOC2010 classification can be found on the ONS website: [SOC2010](#).
- 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 which require specialised teaching i.e. 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: <http://ofqual.gov.uk/help-and-advice/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 2017/18 academic year and you completed the course [insert course title].

ASK ALL

SECTION A: What were you doing before your 2017/18 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 & Benefits office
- Advertisement
- Friend / relative
- Other

2. What were your reasons for undertaking this course? *(please select all that apply)*

- 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 & 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

ASK Q3 IF MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE SELECTED AT Q2

IF JUST ONE RESPONSE AT Q2 AUTOMATICALLY CODE THIS TO Q3 AND GO TO Q4

3. What was your most important reason for undertaking your course *(please select one)*

- 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 & 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

ASK ALL

4. 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)
- Taking time out to travel
- Unemployed
- Doing something else

ASK Q5 IF MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE SELECTED AT Q4

IF JUST ONE RESPONSE AT Q4 AUTOMATICALLY CODE THIS TO Q5 AND GO TO ROUTING BEFORE Q6

5. 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)
- Taking time out to travel
- Unemployed
- Doing something else

IF EMPLOYED (Q5=1 OR 2) ASK SECTION B

SECTION B: Your employment before your 2017/18 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.

6. What was your job title?

7. Briefly describe what you did in your main job

(TO BE CODED TO 4 DIGIT SOC)

8. 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

We ask questions about salaries because it helps us to understand what impact studying FE College courses has on what people earn.

Any information you provide here will be completely anonymous. Individual answers will not be used. All salary information will be grouped together in 'salary bands'.

9. We would like to ask you some general questions about your salary/earnings before tax. What payment period would you prefer to give this as?

- Annually
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Hourly

10-12. In Pounds Sterling (£), what was your approximate gross pay before tax, for the payment period selected in Q9?

Weekly

- Up to £99
- £100 up to £199
- £200 up to £299
- £300 up to £399
- £400 up to £499
- £500 or more

Monthly

- Up to £432
- £433 up to £866
- £867 up to £1,299
- £1,300 up to £1,732
- £1,733 up to £2,166
- £2,167 or more

Annually

- Up to £5,199
- £5,200 up to £10,399
- £10,400 up to £15,599
- £15,600 up to £20,799
- £20,800 up to £25,999
- £26,000 or more

13. How many hours per week did you normally work? (If this varied, please give an estimation)

14. Including all sources of employment, what do you estimate your annual gross salary (before tax) would be (£)?

15. 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.

16. What town/city did you work in?

IF UNEMPLOYED (Q5=6) ASK SECTION C

SECTION C: Your unemployment before your 2017/18 FE College course

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

- Yes
- No

ASK ALL SECTION D

SECTION D: AFTER your course?

18. 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)
- Taking time out to travel
- Unemployed
- Doing something else

ASK Q19 IF MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE SELECTED AT Q18

IF JUST ONE RESPONSE AT Q18 AUTOMATICALLY CODE THIS TO Q19 AND GO TO ROUTING BEFORE Q20

19. 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)
- Taking time out to travel
- Unemployed
- Doing something else

IF EMPLOYED (Q19=1 OR 2) ASK SECTION E

SECTION E: Your employment before your 2017/18 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.

20. What is your job title?

21. Briefly describe what you do in your main job

(TO BE CODED TO 4 DIGIT SOC)

22. 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)

ASK ALL EXCEPT THOSE WHO WERE DOING VOLUNTARY WORK (Q22=6)
ALLOW BLANKS FOR THOSE UNWILLING TO ANSWER

We ask questions about salaries because it helps us to understand how studying FE College courses helps improve what people earn.

Any information you provide here will be completely anonymous. Individual answers will not be used. All salary information will be grouped together in 'salary bands'.

23. We would like to ask you some general questions about your salary (before tax). What payment period would you prefer to give this as?

- Annually
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Hourly

24-26. In Pounds Sterling (£), what was your approximate gross pay before tax, for the payment period selected in Q20?

Weekly

- Up to £99
- £100 up to £199
- £200 up to £299
- £300 up to £399
- £400 up to £499
- £500 or more

Monthly

- Up to £432
- £433 up to £866
- £867 up to £1,299
- £1,300 up to £1,732
- £1,733 up to £2,166
- £2,167 or more

Annually

- Up to £5,199
- £5,200 up to £10,399
- £10,400 up to £15,599
- £15,600 up to £20,799
- £20,800 up to £25,999
- £26,000 or more

27. How many hours per week do you normally work? (If this varies, please give an estimation.)

28. Including all sources of employment, what do you estimate your annual gross pay (before tax) is (£)?

29. 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 Q29, OTHERWISE SKIP TO Q31.

30. What town/city do you work in?

ASK ALL IN EMPLOYMENT (Q19 = 1 or 2)

31. 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 / pay off debts
- Other

32. 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 (Q32=1,2 or 3)
OTHERWISE GO TO Q34**

33. 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

34. How well did your recent course prepare you for employment?

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

**IF IN ENGAGED IN STUDY OR TRAINING AFTER COURSE (Q19=3 or 4) ASK
SECTION F, OTHERWISE GO TO ROUTING BEFORE Q38**

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.

35. Where are you attending this course?

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

36. Will this lead to a qualification that is higher, lower or the same level as the course you took in 2017/18?

- Higher
- Same
- Lower

37. How well did your recent course prepare you for further study?

- Very well

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

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

SECTION G: Unemployment

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

- Yes
- No

ASK ALL SECTION H

SECTION H: Non-economic benefits

39. 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

The Unique Learner Number (ULN) is a 10 digit reference number used in education in Northern Ireland, England and Wales. From 2017 onwards, it is anticipated that all learners, aged 14+, will have a ULN.

40. Do you know where to find your ULN?

- Yes
- No