

# Essential Skills Enrolments and Outcomes in Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges from 2018/19 to 2022/23

## Background

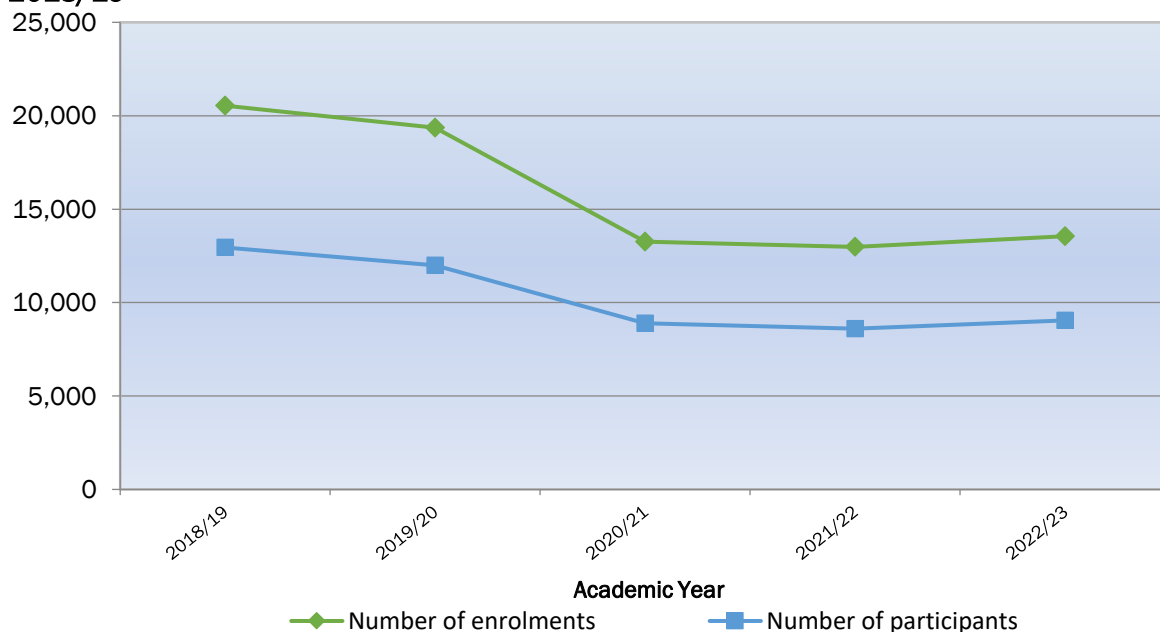
Essential Skills courses aim to improve adult literacy, numeracy and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Northern Ireland. Essential Skills (ES) courses, which are funded by DfE, are free to participants. This publication will analyse enrolments and performance rates for Essential Skills completed in Further Education Colleges over the most recent five years. Courses delivered by private training providers and community organisations are excluded from this analysis.

## Analysis

### Enrolments and Participants

There were 13,545 FE Sector enrolments on Essential Skills courses in 2022/23, an increase of 4% on the previous academic year (2021/22). In addition, the number of ES students rose by 5%, from 8,605 to 9,050. This marks the first year-on-year increase since before the pandemic-precipitated decline between 2019/20 and 2020/21 (32% decrease in enrolments and 26% decrease in students enrolled). (Table 1 and Figure 1)

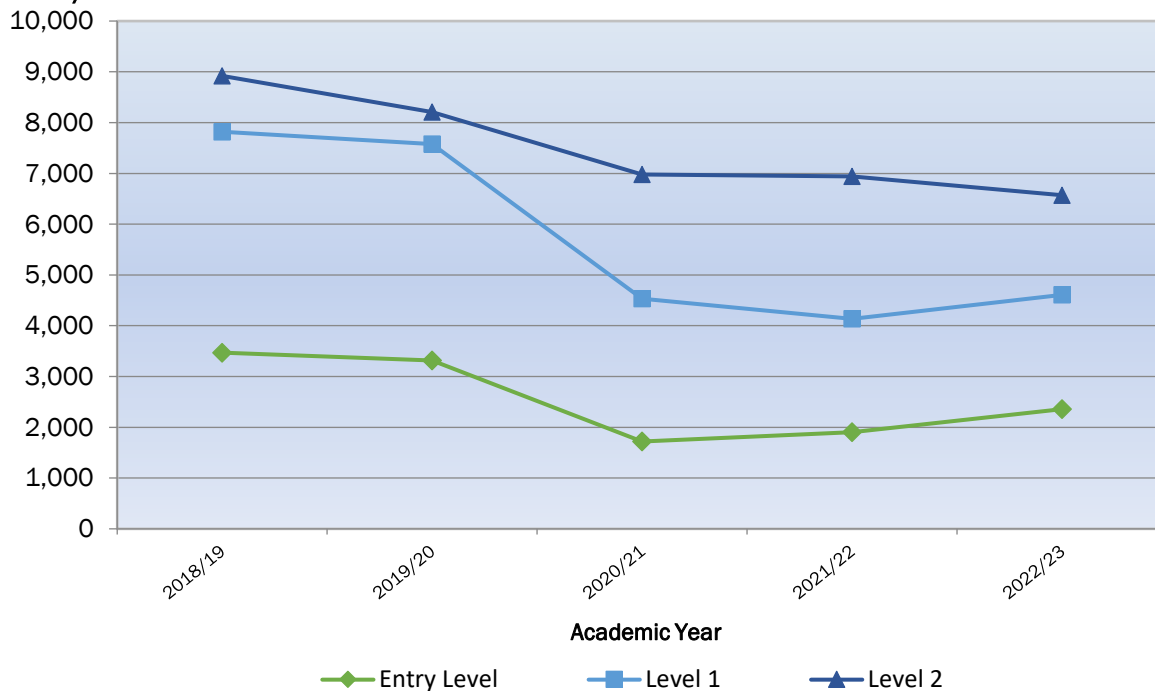
**Figure 1: Essential Skills enrolments and participants in FE Colleges by academic year since 2018/19**



## Level of Study

Since 2018/19, the Level 2 share of ES enrolments has increased from 43% to 49%, whereas the Level 1 share has fallen from 38% to 34%. Entry Level enrolments have consistently had the lowest share of enrolments. (Table 2 and Figure 2)

Figure 2: Number of Essential Skills enrolments in FE Colleges by level and academic year since 2018/19



## Age

16- and 17-year-olds make up over half of FE Sector ES enrolments. Despite large net decreases in enrolments for each age group since 2018/19, the percentage values have not fluctuated by more than 3 percentage points above or below the 2018/19 values. (Table 3)

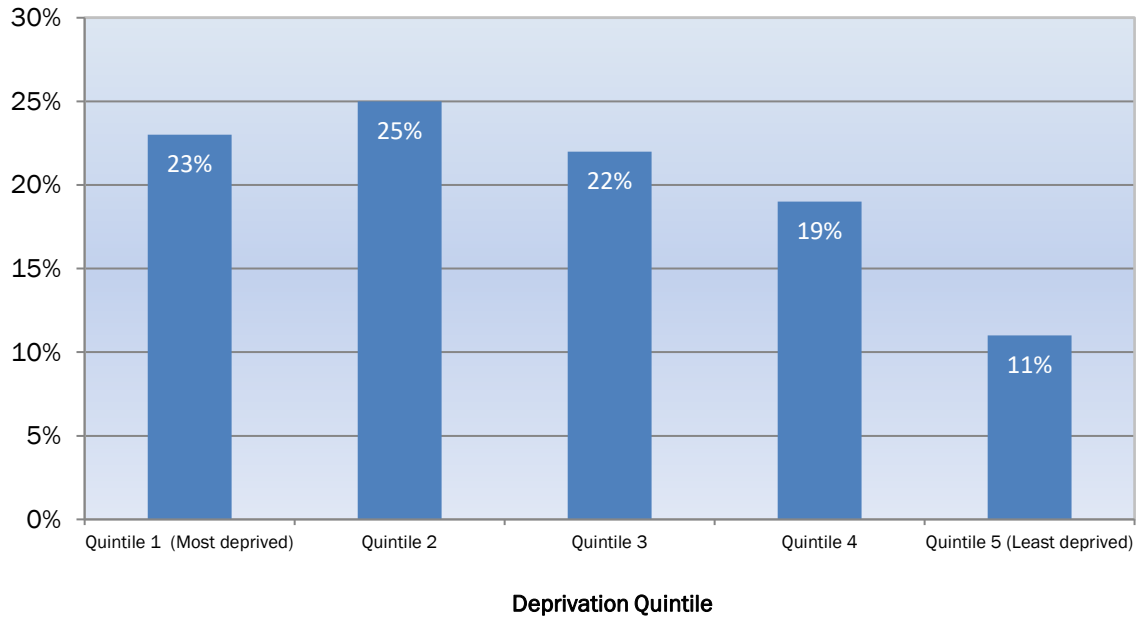
## Sex

Males account for over half of ES enrolments, with their share increasing from 56% in 2018/19 to 58% in 2022/23. (Table 5)

## Deprivation analysis

Learners from the two most deprived geographical quintiles in NI make up 48% of ES enrolments in FE (see NIMDM in metadata) over the last five academic years. The third, fourth and fifth quintiles decrease in enrolments as they decrease in relative deprivation. (Table 6 and Figure 3)

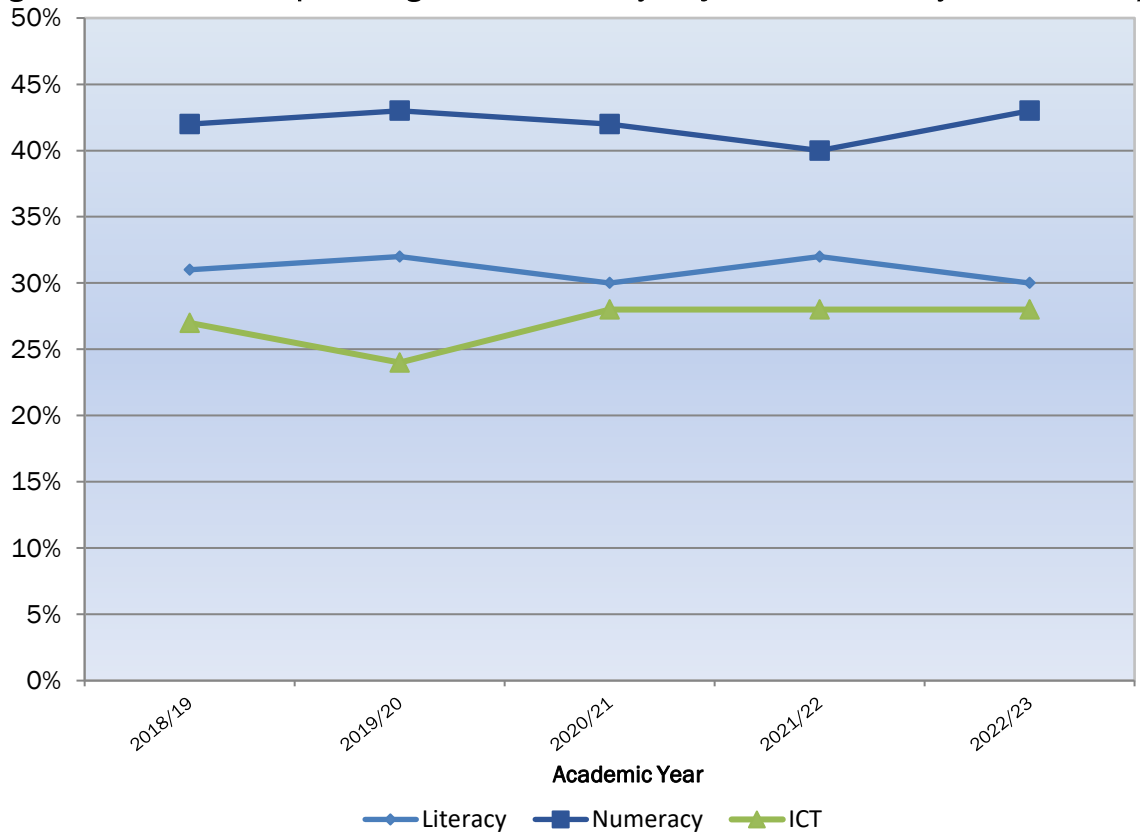
**Figure 3: Essential Skills enrolments by deprivation quintile since 2018/19**



**Subject**

Numeracy is the most common ES course studied in FE, followed by Literacy and finally ICT; this order has not changed in the last five years. (Table 8 and Figure 4)

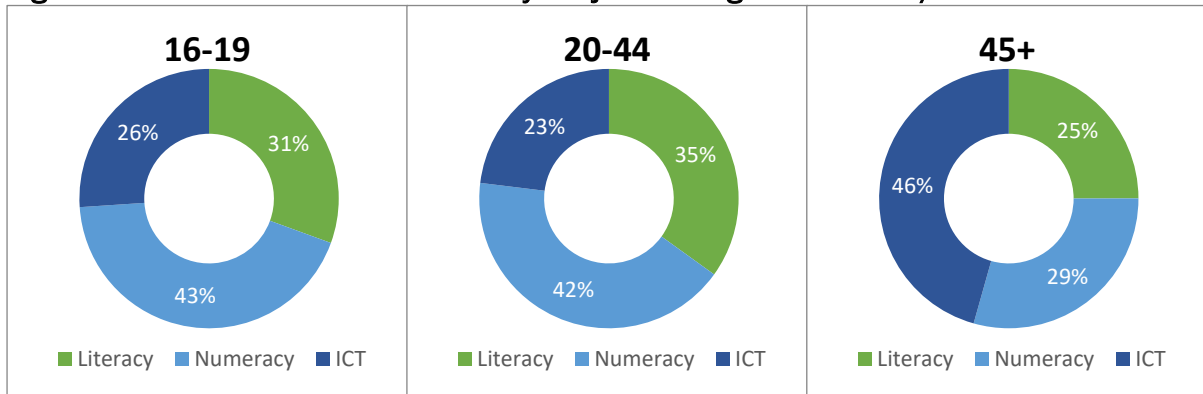
**Figure 4: Essential Skills percentage of enrolments by subject and academic year since 2018/19**



## Subject and Age

Numeracy is the most popular subject for under 45s while those aged 45 and over are more likely to study ICT. (Table 9 and Figure 4)

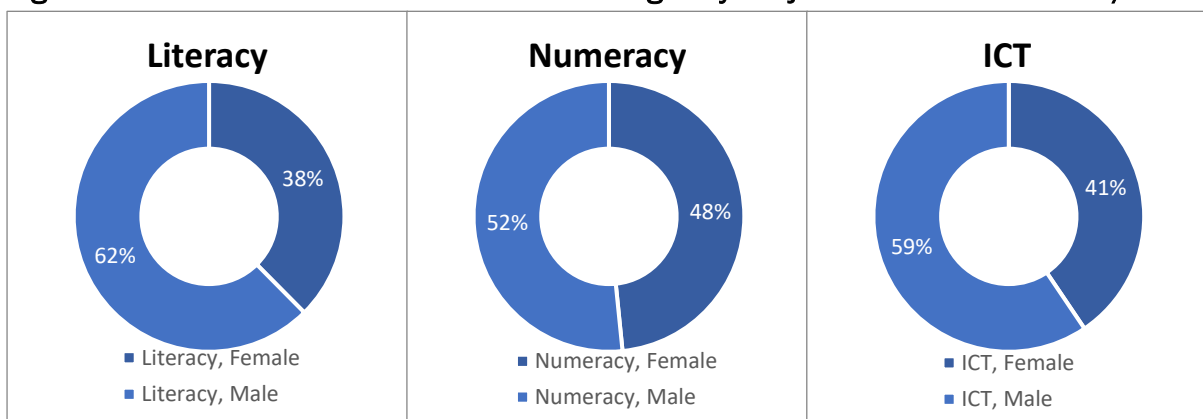
**Figure 5: Essential Skills enrolments by subject and age since 2018/19**



## Subject and Sex

Males make up the majority of enrolments in all subject areas, with numeracy having the highest share of female learners (48%). (Table 10 and Figure 6)

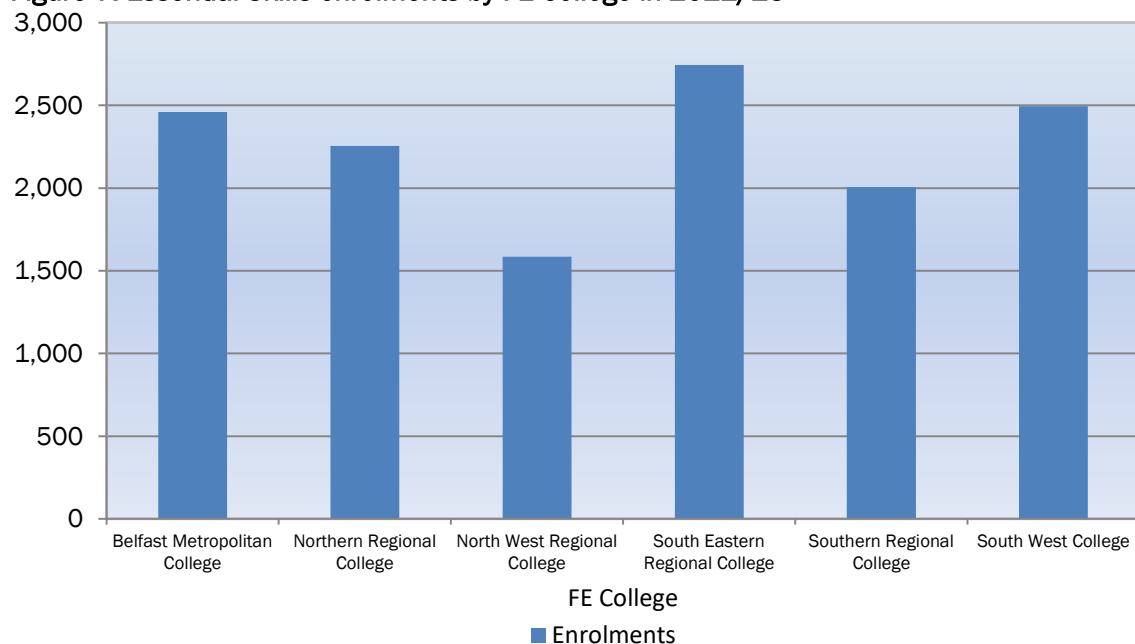
**Figure 6: Essential Skills enrolments in FE Colleges by subject and sex since 2018/19**



## Course Delivery Location

South Eastern Regional College hosted the largest number of ES enrolments in FE in 2022/23 (2,745) and North West Regional College hosted the fewest enrolments (1,585). (Table 11 and Figure 7)

**Figure 7: Essential Skills enrolments by FE College in 2022/23**



### Performance in FE (see notes 7-11)

The retention rate for all ES enrolments in FE over the last five academic years has been 80%, the achievement rate has been 72% and the success rate has been 58%. (Table 11 and Table A)

### Performance by subject area

ICT has the highest rates in all three performance measures, followed by Literacy and finally Numeracy. (Table 12 and Table A)

**Table A: Essential Skills performance indicators by subject since 2018/19**

Subject	Retention rate	Achievement rate	Success rate
Literacy	79%	70%	55%
Numeracy	78%	63%	49%
ICT	84%	89%	75%
<b>Total</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>58%</b>

### Performance by sex

Males have higher Retention (by 3 percentage points), Achievement (by 1 percentage point) and Success (by 3 percentage points) rates than Females. (Table 13 and Table B)

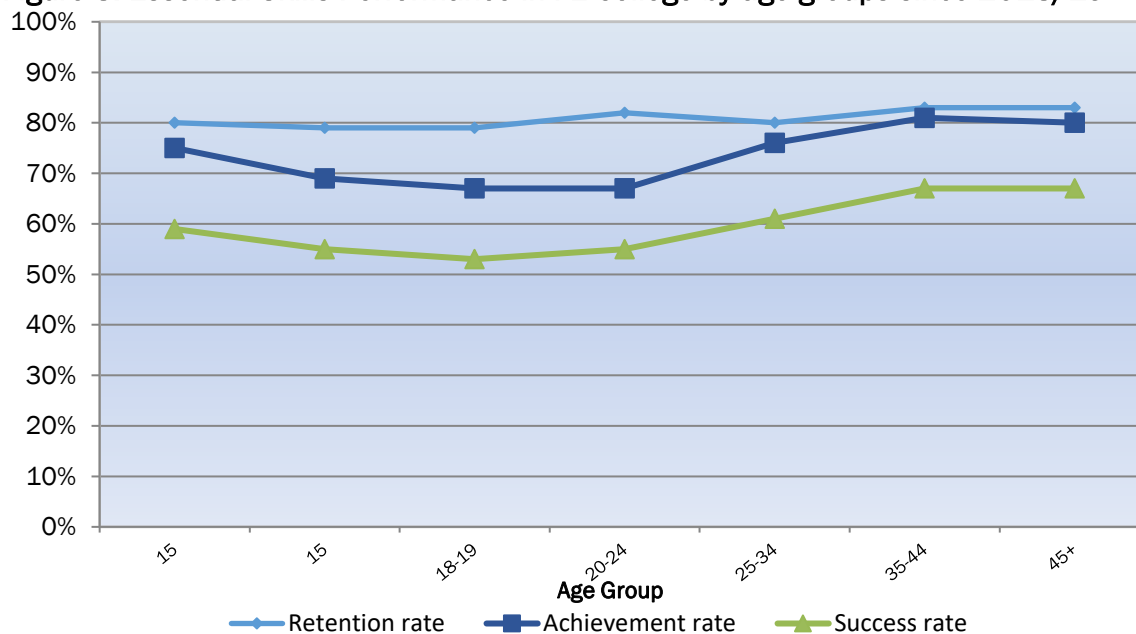
**Table B: Essential Skills performance indicators by sex since 2018/19**

Subject	Retention rate	Achievement rate	Success rate
Female	78%	72%	56%
Male	81%	73%	59%
<b>Total</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>58%</b>

## Performance by age band

Retention rates vary narrowly between age groups (lowest is 79% and highest is 83%) and older age groups tend to have higher rates. Achievement rates also tend to be highest among the oldest age groups and lowest among those aged 18-24 (16-17-year-olds achieve at slightly higher rates). Success rates follow a similar pattern to Achievement rates. (Table 14 and Figure 8)

**Figure 8: Essential Skills Performance in FE College by age groups since 2018/19**



## Notes:

1. Completions are defined as enrolments not classified as 'Withdrawn' or 'Transferred', namely those with Student Status as 'Continuing', 'Completed' or 'Not Known'.
2. Age is calculated at the first of July prior to the start of the Academic Year.
3. Enrolment information for FE colleges has been sourced from the Consolidated Data Return (CDR) for 2018/19 to 2022/23.
4. Enrolment figures are simply a count of the number of Essential Skills enrolment records within the data return.
5. Individual students are determined using Student ID, College Identifier and Academic Year (Each student will be counted once per academic year they begin an enrolment).
6. The analysis presented in the publication utilises 5 groups or quintiles of Super Output Areas (SOAs), based on relative level of deprivation using the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM). Enrolments are assigned to SOAs using the postcodes provided on enrolment records. This provides a mechanism for ranking the 890 SOAs from the most deprived (rank 1) to the least deprived (rank 890). Accordingly, SOAs ranked 1 to 178 form the most deprived group relative to all other SOAs (Quintile 1), while those ranked 713 to 890 form the least deprived group (Quintile 5). The analysis of deprivation quintiles in these tables excludes all unknown or invalid postcodes, including those relating to Republic of Ireland domiciles; thus the tables refer to

- enrolments of Northern Ireland domiciles and their relative multiple deprivation quintiles.
7. Figures provided within this publication and the accompanying tables are rounded to the nearest 0 or 5 and percentages are rounded to the nearest integer.
  8. Performance analysis is determined over academic years 2018/19 to 2022/23. No individual academic year's retention, achievement or success rates are calculated.
  9. Retention rate is defined as the percentage of enrolments completed by students. Retention rate is calculated by dividing the number of completions by the number of enrolments.
  10. Achievement rate is defined as the percentage of enrolments completed by students who achieve a qualification. Achievement rate is calculated by dividing the number of achievements by the number of completions.
  11. Success rate is recognised as the overall measure of performance, which is the percentage of enrolments of students who complete and achieve a qualification. Success rate is calculated by dividing the number of achievements by the number of enrolments.
  12. Essential Skills qualification statistics that include those courses conducted outside of FE Colleges are published by CCEA and are available from the following link: <https://ceea.org.uk/regulation/reports-statistics/technical-and-professional-qualification-bulletins>.
  13. All references to lettered tables (e.g. Table A, Table B) refer to tables within this document.
  14. All references to numbered tables (e.g. Table 1, Table 2) refer to the Excel tables that accompany this publication. The tables are available at the following link: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/essential-skills-enrolments-and-outcomes>

**Published by:** Statistics and Research Branch (Tertiary Education)

Department for the Economy, 39-49 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8FD

**Date of Publication:** 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024

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**Frequency:** Annual