

Further Education Sector Activity of Students in Northern Ireland: 2014/15 to 2018/19



This statistical fact sheet presents a range of analysis on students in the Northern Ireland Further Education Sector covering academic years 2014/15 to 2018/19.

Further Education Sector Activity of Students in Northern Ireland: 2014/15 to 2018/19

The analysis in this new statistical fact sheet relates to activity with regards to all FE sector students, those enrolled on regulated and higher education courses and the qualifications they have achieved.

The figures are based on a full year count of students enrolled at FE colleges. It should be noted that students may be enrolled on more than one course at a given time.

Produced in response to feedback from a recent readership survey, this fact sheet is designed to complement our main Further Education Sector Activity bulletin, the primary focus of which to date has been on enrolments, rather than on students.

While it is our intention to release these statistics annually, we are still giving consideration to the timing and format of doing so, including whether to incorporate them into the main bulletin. As we want to engage with users of our statistics, we invite you to feedback your comments on this publication.

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Additional Tables

Detailed Additional Tables covering the characteristics of those enrolling in FE colleges and trends across a range of variables, including age, sex, mode of attendance, provision area, level of study, STEM provision, deprivation quintile and students achieving regulated qualifications are available on the DfE web page:

[Further Education Sector Activity of Students in Northern Ireland: 2014/15 to 2018/19](#)

Key findings

1. The total number of students enrolled at FE colleges has decreased by 18.2%, from 93,681 in 2014/15 to 76,670 in 2018/19; this relates mainly to a reduction in part-time students and coincides with a prolonged 'demographic dip' among 16-19-year-olds (Table 1).
2. The number of students enrolled on regulated courses at FE colleges has decreased by 18.4%, from 74,837 in 2014/15 to 61,057 in 2018/19. Throughout this period, all six colleges have experienced year-on-year numeric decreases (Table 5).
3. The total number of students only enrolled on non-regulated courses at FE colleges has decreased by a net 17.1%, from 18,844 in 2014/15 to 15,613 in 2018/19. The number of students only enrolled on non-regulated courses and aged '19 and under' has increased by a net 85.1%, from 2,794 in 2014/15 to 5,173 in 2018/19 (Table 2).
4. The number of students enrolled on Higher Education courses at FE colleges has decreased by a net 9.7%, from 10,923 in 2014/15 to 9,865 in 2018/19. In the most recent academic year (2018/19), BMC had the highest share of the 9,865 students enrolled on Higher Education courses, accounting for 29.9% (2,953) (Table 7).
5. The number of students achieving regulated qualifications at FE colleges has decreased by 17.6%, from 53,545 in 2014/15 to 44,103 in 2018/19. All six colleges have experienced numeric decreases over this period. In the most recent academic year (2018/19), BMC had the highest share of the 44,103 students achieving regulated qualifications, accounting for 23.0% (10,134) (Table 8).

1. All students enrolled by FE college

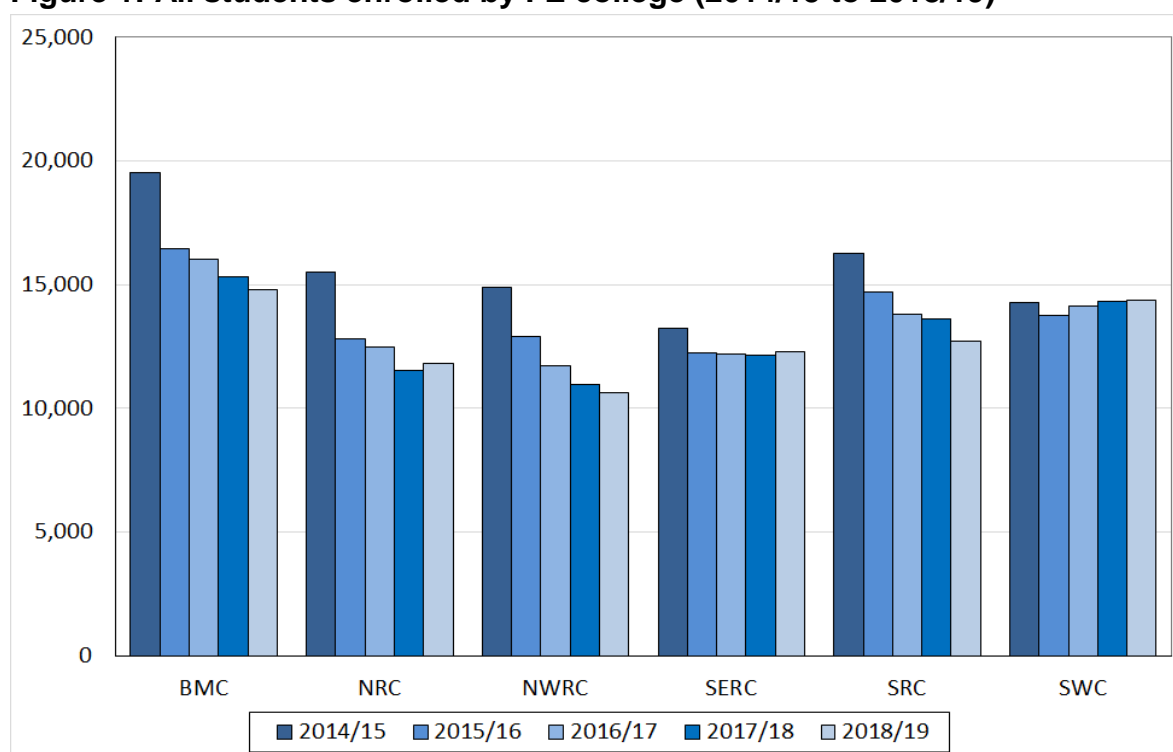
Table 1: All students enrolled by FE college (2014/15 to 2018/19)

FE College	Academic Year				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
BMC	19,546	16,466	16,042	15,321	14,812
NRC	15,493	12,785	12,497	11,540	11,795
NWRC	14,880	12,889	11,715	10,960	10,641
SERC	13,227	12,227	12,197	12,166	12,305
SRC	16,262	14,702	13,803	13,599	12,737
SWC	14,273	13,749	14,147	14,328	14,380
FE Sector Total	93,681	82,818	80,401	77,914	76,670

Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- The total number of students enrolled at FE colleges has decreased by 18.2%, from 93,681 in 2014/15 to 76,670 in 2018/19; this relates mainly to a reduction in part-time students and coincides with a prolonged 'demographic dip' among 16-19-year-olds.

Figure 1: All students enrolled by FE college (2014/15 to 2018/19)



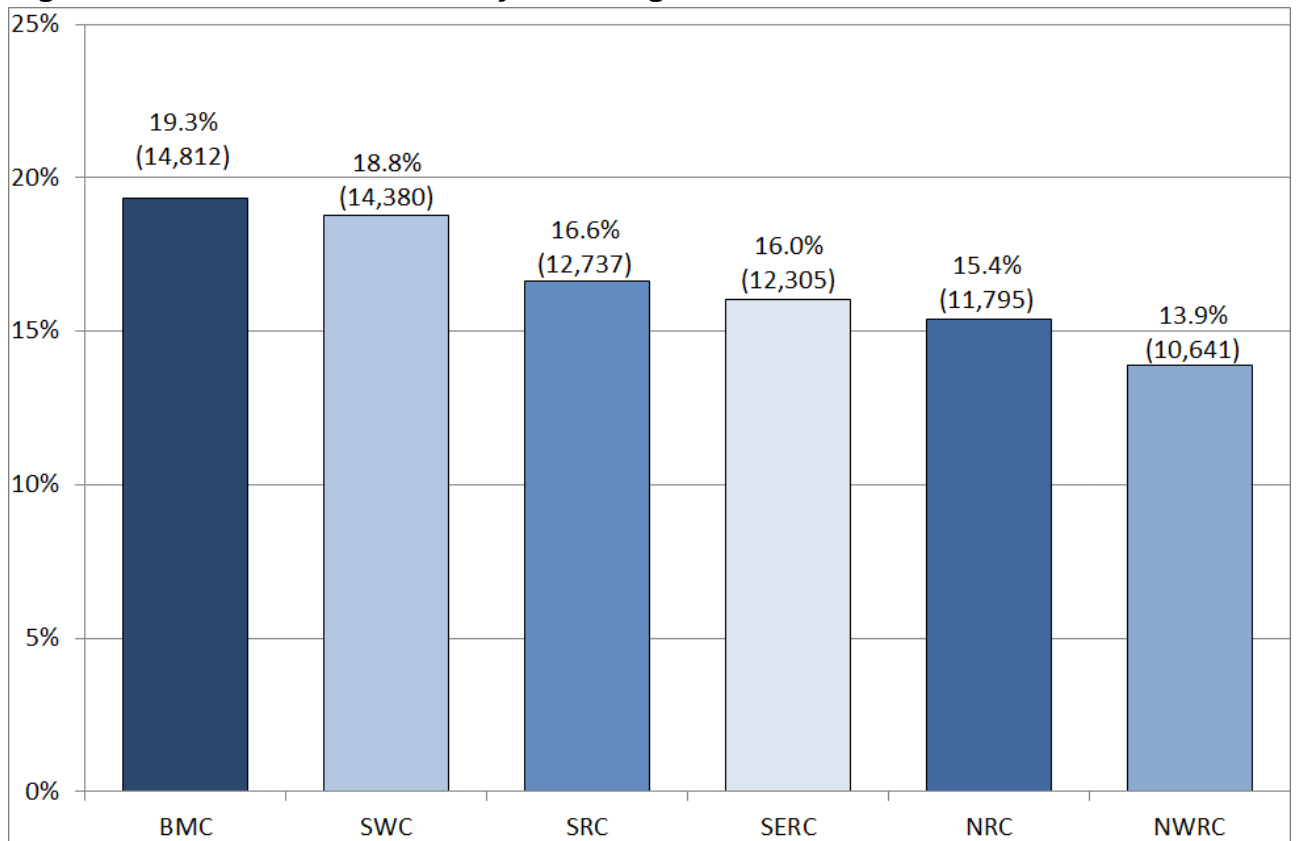
Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

FE College Abbreviations

BMC: Belfast Metropolitan College
 NRC: Northern Regional College
 NWRC: North West Regional College
 SERC: South Eastern Regional College
 SRC: Southern Regional College
 SWC: South West College

- Since 2014/15, student numbers have decreased in net terms at five of the six FE colleges, with the largest numeric decreases occurring at BMC (4,734) and NWRC (4,239).
- The largest percentage net decrease has occurred at NWRC (28.5%), from 14,880 in 2014/15 to 10,641 in 2018/19.
- The only percentage net increase has occurred at SWC (0.7%), from 14,273 in 2014/15 to 14,380 in 2018/19.

Figure 2: All students enrolled by FE college share in 2018/19



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- In the most recent academic year (2018/19), BMC had the highest share of the 76,670 students, accounting for 19.3% (14,812), and NWRC the lowest, with 13.9% (10,641).

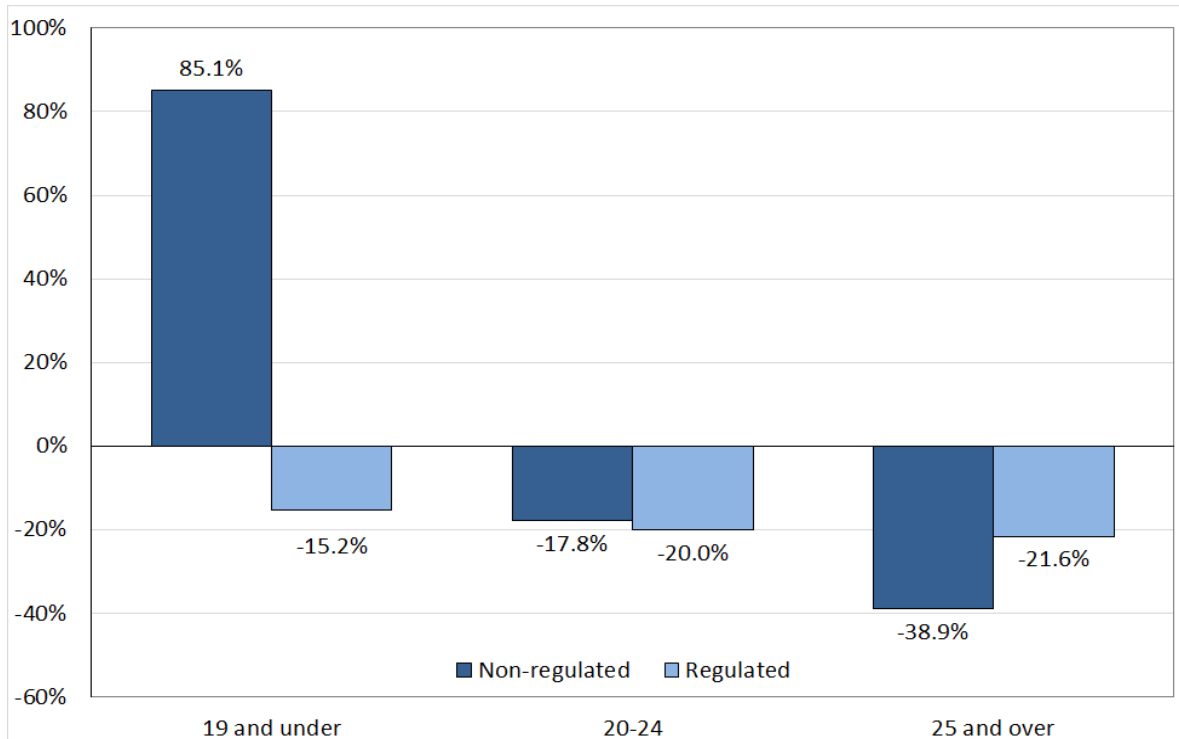
2. All students enrolled at FE colleges by regulated status and age band

Table 2: All students enrolled at FE colleges by regulated status and age band (2014/15 to 2018/19)

Regulated Status	Age Band	Academic Year				
		2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Non-regulated	19 and under	2,794	2,723	4,087	4,609	5,173
	20-24	1,401	925	924	993	1,152
	25 and over	14,425	8,838	7,935	8,275	8,807
	Unknown	224	110	111	111	481
	Total	18,844	12,596	13,057	13,988	15,613
Regulated	19 and under	34,581	33,504	32,165	30,922	29,334
	20-24	11,412	10,350	9,927	9,487	9,128
	25 and over	28,809	26,341	25,245	23,510	22,593
	Unknown	35	27	7	7	2
	Total	74,837	70,222	67,344	63,926	61,057
FE Sector Total	19 and under	37,375	36,227	36,252	35,531	34,507
	20-24	12,813	11,275	10,851	10,480	10,280
	25 and over	43,234	35,179	33,180	31,785	31,400
	Unknown	259	137	118	118	483
	Total	93,681	82,818	80,401	77,914	76,670

Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

Figure 3: Percentage net change in students enrolled at FE colleges by regulated status and age band (2014/15 to 2018/19)

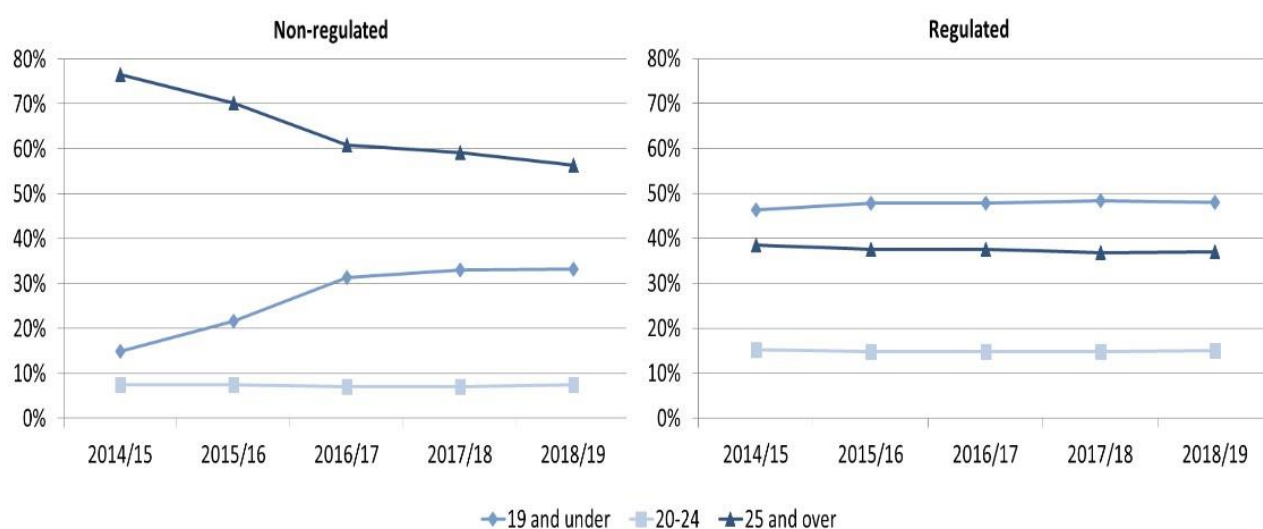


Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

Please note students with unknown ages (<1.0%) are not reflected in the chart, but are included in Table 2.

- The total number of students only enrolled on non-regulated courses at FE colleges has decreased by a net 17.1%, from 18,844 in 2014/15 to 15,613 in 2018/19.
- The total number of students enrolled on regulated courses at FE colleges has decreased by 18.4%, from 74,837 in 2014/15 to 61,057 in 2018/19.
- The number of students only enrolled on non-regulated courses and aged '19 and under' has increased by a net 85.1%, from 2,794 in 2014/15 to 5,173 in 2018/19.
- The number of students only enrolled on non-regulated courses and aged '25 and over' has decreased by a net 38.9%, from 14,425 in 2014/15 to 8,807 in 2018/19.
- The number of students enrolled on regulated courses has decreased in each of the age bands, ranging from 15.2% in the 19 and under age band to 21.6% among those aged '25 and over'.

Figure 4: Proportions of students enrolled at FE colleges by regulated status and age band (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

Please note students with unknown ages (<1.0%) are not reflected in the chart, but are included in Table 2.

- The aged '19 and under' share of students only enrolled on non-regulated courses has increased year-on-year, from 14.8% in 2014/15 to 33.1% in 2018/19. Conversely, the proportion of those '25 and over' has decreased year-on-year, from 76.5% in 2014/15 to 56.4% in 2018/19.
- The aged '19 and under' share of students enrolled on regulated courses has increased in net terms, from 46.2% in 2014/15 to 48.0% in 2018/19. Conversely, the proportions of those aged '20 to 24' and '25 and over' have fallen in net terms over this period, from 15.2% to 14.9% and from 38.5% to 37.0% respectively.

3. All students enrolled at FE colleges by regulated status and sex

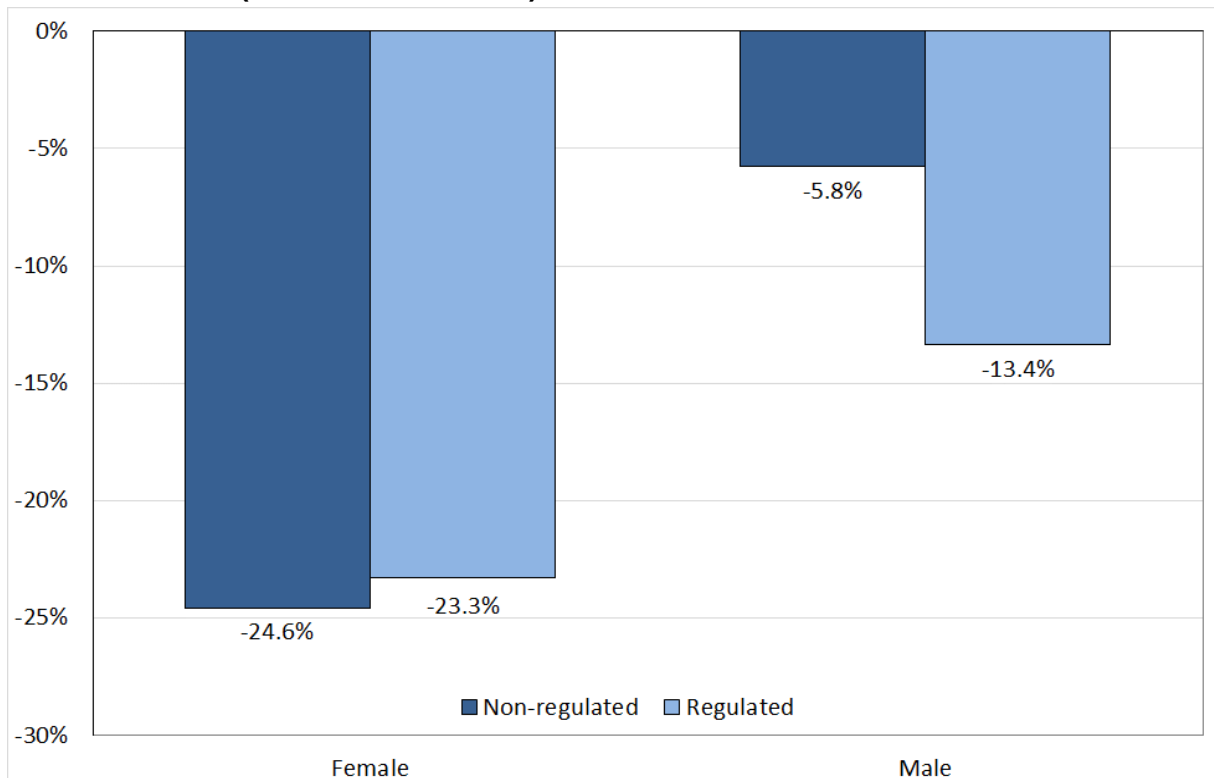
Table 3: All students enrolled at FE colleges by regulated status and sex (2014/15 to 2018/19)

Regulated Status	Sex	Academic Year				
		2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Non-regulated	Female	11,402	7,037	7,103	7,430	8,601
	Male	7,442	5,559	5,954	6,558	7,012
	Total	18,844	12,596	13,057	13,988	15,613
Regulated	Female	38,217	35,272	33,277	31,747	29,330
	Male	36,620	34,950	34,067	32,179	31,727
	Total	74,837	70,222	67,344	63,926	61,057
FE Sector Total	Female	49,619	42,309	40,380	39,177	37,931
	Male	44,062	40,509	40,021	38,737	38,739
	Total	93,681	82,818	80,401	77,914	76,670

Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- The number of female students only enrolled on non-regulated courses has decreased by a net 24.6%, from 11,402 in 2014/15 to 8,601 in 2018/19.
- The number of male students only enrolled on non-regulated courses has decreased by a net 5.8%, from 7,442 in 2014/15 to 7,012 in 2018/19.

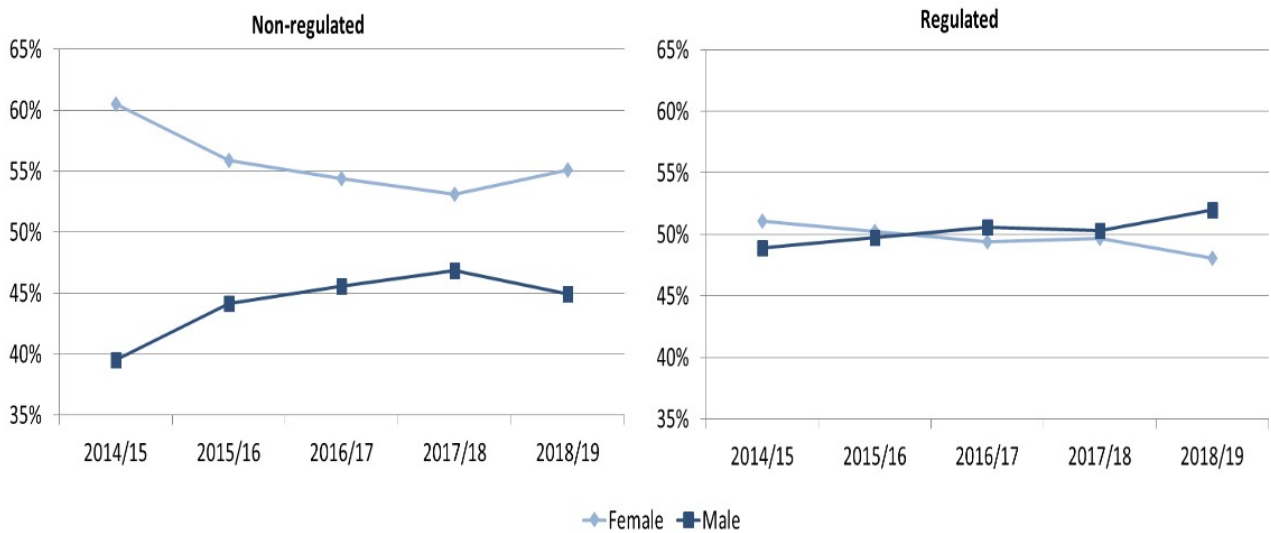
Figure 5: Percentage net change in students enrolled at FE colleges by regulated status and sex (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- The number of female students enrolled on regulated courses has decreased by 23.3%, from 38,217 in 2014/15 to 29,330 in 2018/19.
- The number of male students enrolled on regulated courses has decreased by 13.4%, from 36,620 in 2014/15 to 31,727 in 2018/19.

Figure 6: Proportions of students enrolled at FE colleges by regulated status and sex (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- Between 2014/15 and 2018/19, the female share of students only enrolled on non-regulated courses reduced from 60.5% to 55.1%; while the male share of those enrolled on regulated courses increased from 48.9% to 52.0%.

4. All students enrolled at FE colleges by regulated status and mode of attendance

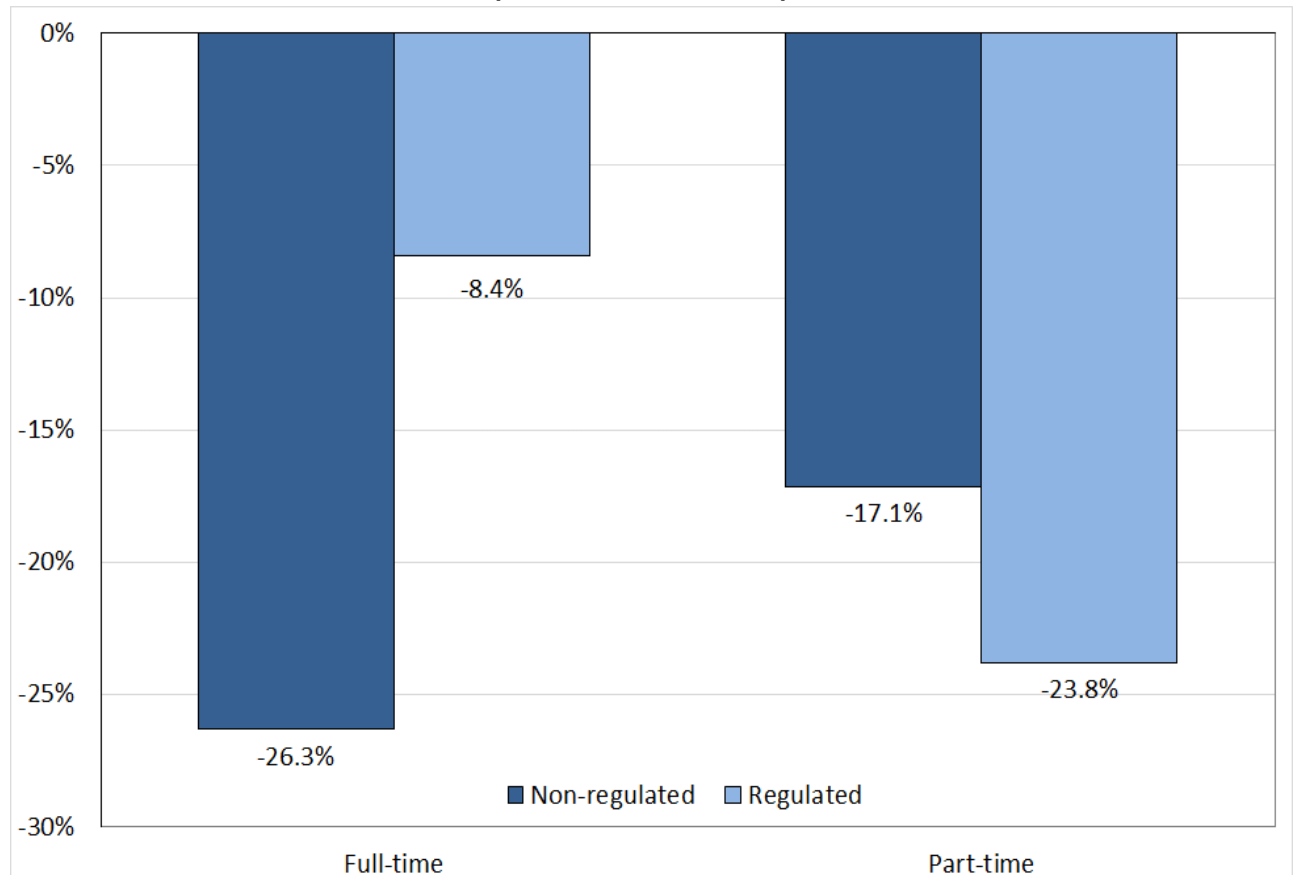
Table 4: All students enrolled at FE colleges by regulated status and mode of attendance (2014/15 to 2018/19)

Regulated Status	Mode of Attendance	Academic Year				
		2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Non-regulated	Full-time	19	38	19	10	14
	Part-time	18,825	12,558	13,038	13,978	15,599
	Total	18,844	12,596	13,057	13,988	15,613
Regulated	Full-time	26,130	25,331	25,407	24,533	23,931
	Part-time	48,707	44,891	41,937	39,393	37,126
	Total	74,837	70,222	67,344	63,926	61,057
FE Sector Total	Full-time	26,149	25,369	25,426	24,543	23,945
	Part-time	67,532	57,449	54,975	53,371	52,725
	Total	93,681	82,818	80,401	77,914	76,670

Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- The number of part-time students only enrolled on non-regulated courses has decreased by a net 17.1%, from 18,825 in 2014/15 to 15,599 in 2018/19.

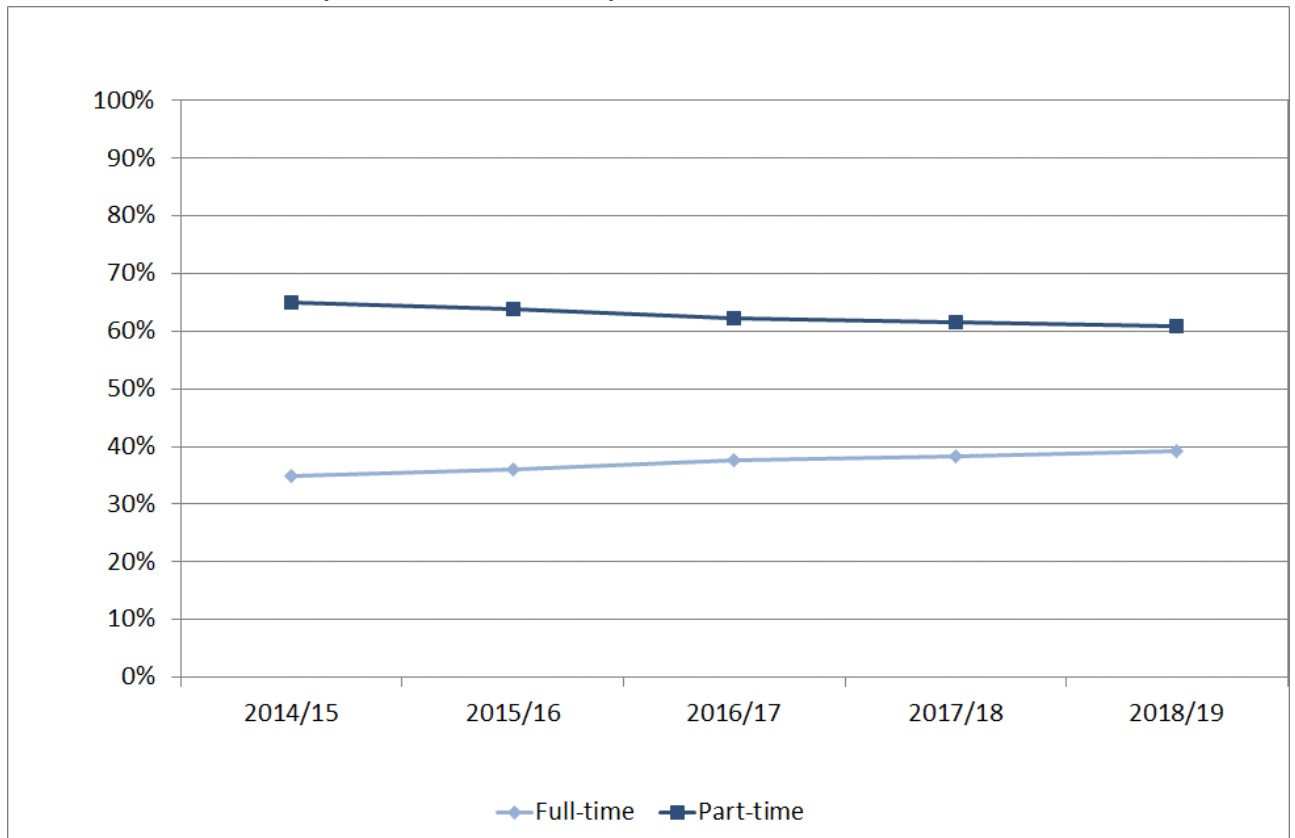
Figure 7: Percentage net change in students enrolled at FE colleges by regulated status and mode of attendance (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- The number of full-time students enrolled on regulated courses has decreased by a net 8.4%, from 26,130 in 2014/15 to 23,931 in 2018/19.
- The number of part-time students enrolled on regulated courses has decreased by 23.8%, from 48,707 in 2014/15 to 37,126 in 2018/19.

Figure 8: Proportions of students enrolled on regulated courses at FE colleges by mode of attendance (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- The full-time proportion of students enrolled on regulated courses has been increasing year-on-year, from 34.9% in 2014/15 to 39.2% in 2018/19.

5. Students enrolled on regulated courses by FE college

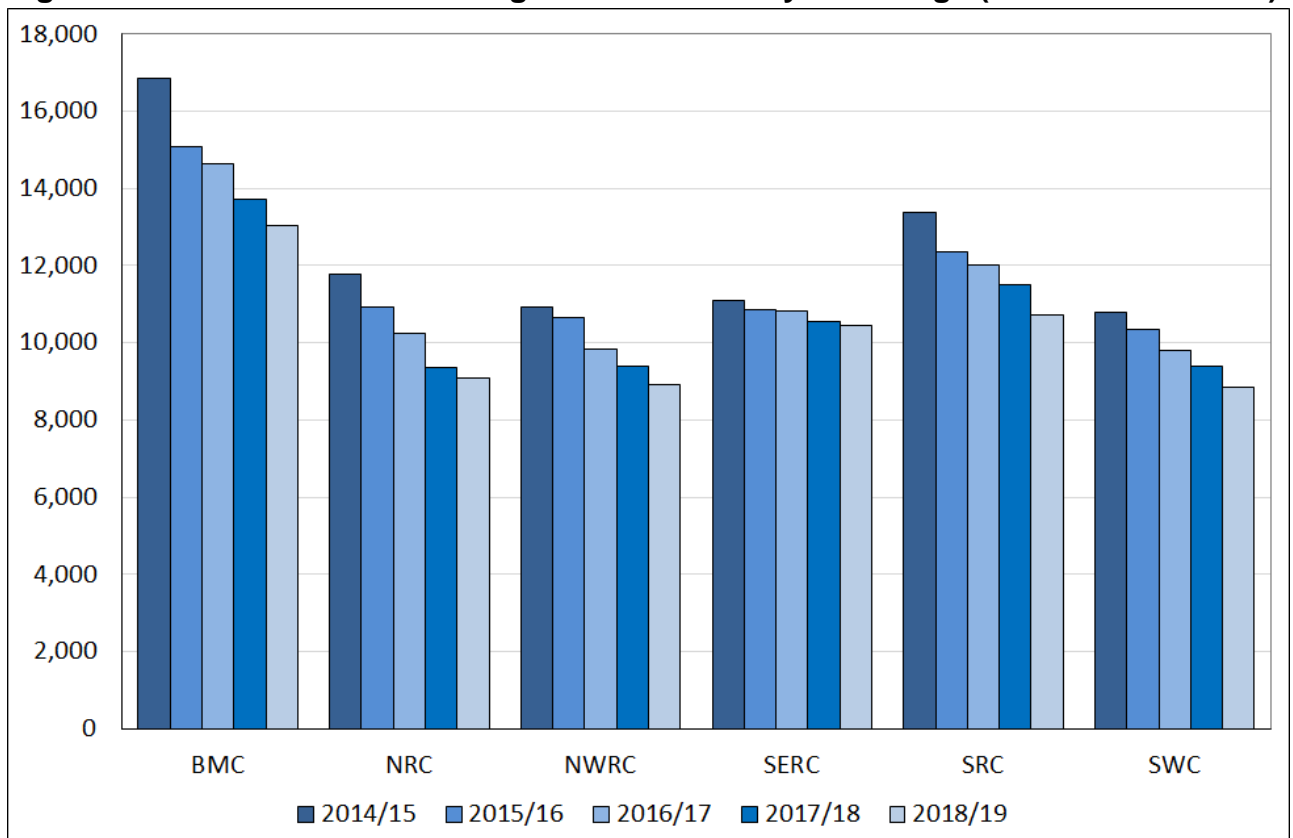
Table 5: Students enrolled on regulated courses by FE college (2014/15 to 2018/19)

FE College	Academic Year				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
BMC	16,856	15,077	14,629	13,710	13,027
NRC	11,771	10,926	10,238	9,365	9,085
NWRC	10,930	10,668	9,840	9,391	8,921
SERC	11,109	10,858	10,813	10,554	10,457
SRC	13,371	12,359	12,030	11,497	10,710
SWC	10,800	10,334	9,794	9,409	8,857
FE Sector Total	74,837	70,222	67,344	63,926	61,057

Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

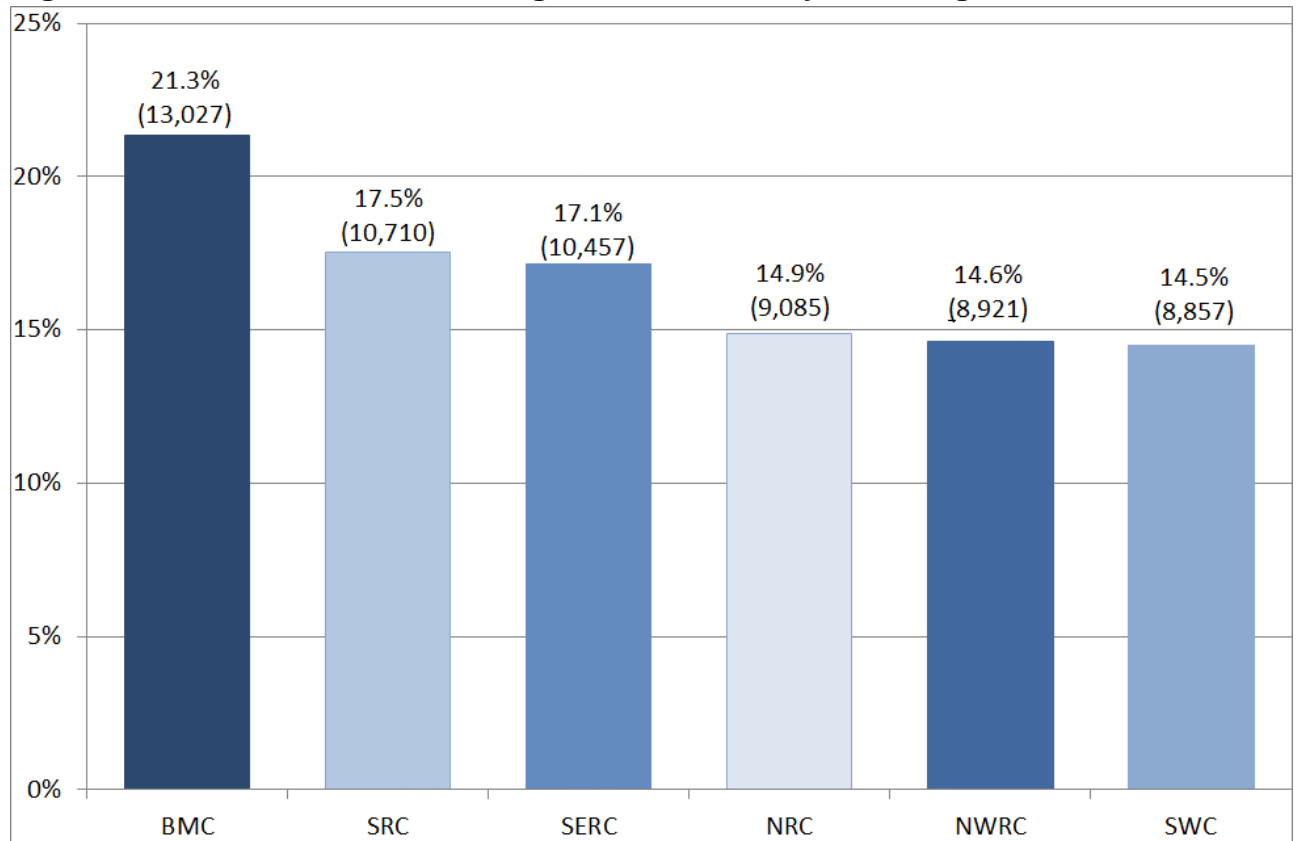
- The number of students enrolled on regulated courses at FE colleges has decreased by 18.4%, from 74,837 in 2014/15 to 61,057 in 2018/19. Throughout this period, all six colleges have experienced year-on-year numeric decreases, with the largest overall decrease being at BMC (3,829).
- The largest percentage decrease has been in NRC (22.8%), from 11,771 in 2014/15 to 9,085 in 2018/19, while the smallest percentage decrease has been in SERC (5.9%), from 11,109 in 2014/15 to 10,457 in 2018/19.

Figure 9: Students enrolled on regulated courses by FE college (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

Figure 10: Students enrolled on regulated courses by FE college share in 2018/19



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- In the most recent academic year (2018/19), BMC had the highest share of the 61,057 students enrolled on regulated courses, accounting for 21.3% (13,027), and SWC the lowest, with 14.5% (8,857).

6. Students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above by FE college

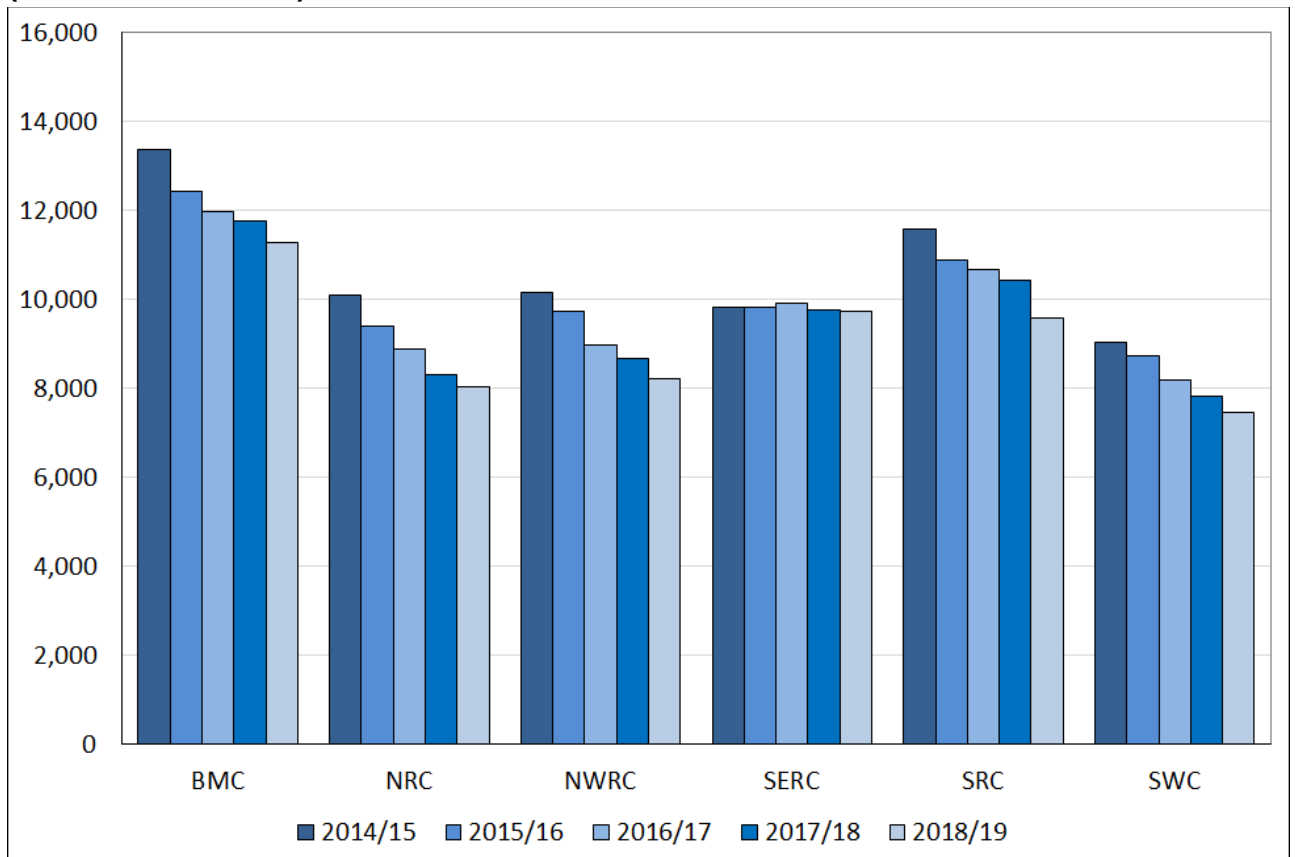
Table 6: Students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above by FE college (2014/15 to 2018/19)

FE College	Academic Year				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
BMC	13,373	12,437	11,978	11,767	11,268
NRC	10,084	9,399	8,899	8,314	8,044
NWRC	10,162	9,722	8,982	8,665	8,210
SERC	9,839	9,820	9,919	9,760	9,742
SRC	11,572	10,881	10,688	10,438	9,582
SWC	9,032	8,721	8,194	7,837	7,472
FE Sector Total	64,062	60,980	58,660	56,781	54,318

Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- The number of students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above at FE colleges has decreased by 15.2%, from 64,062 in 2014/15 to 54,318 in 2018/19. All six colleges have experienced numeric decreases over this period, with the largest being at BMC (2,105) and NRC (2,040).

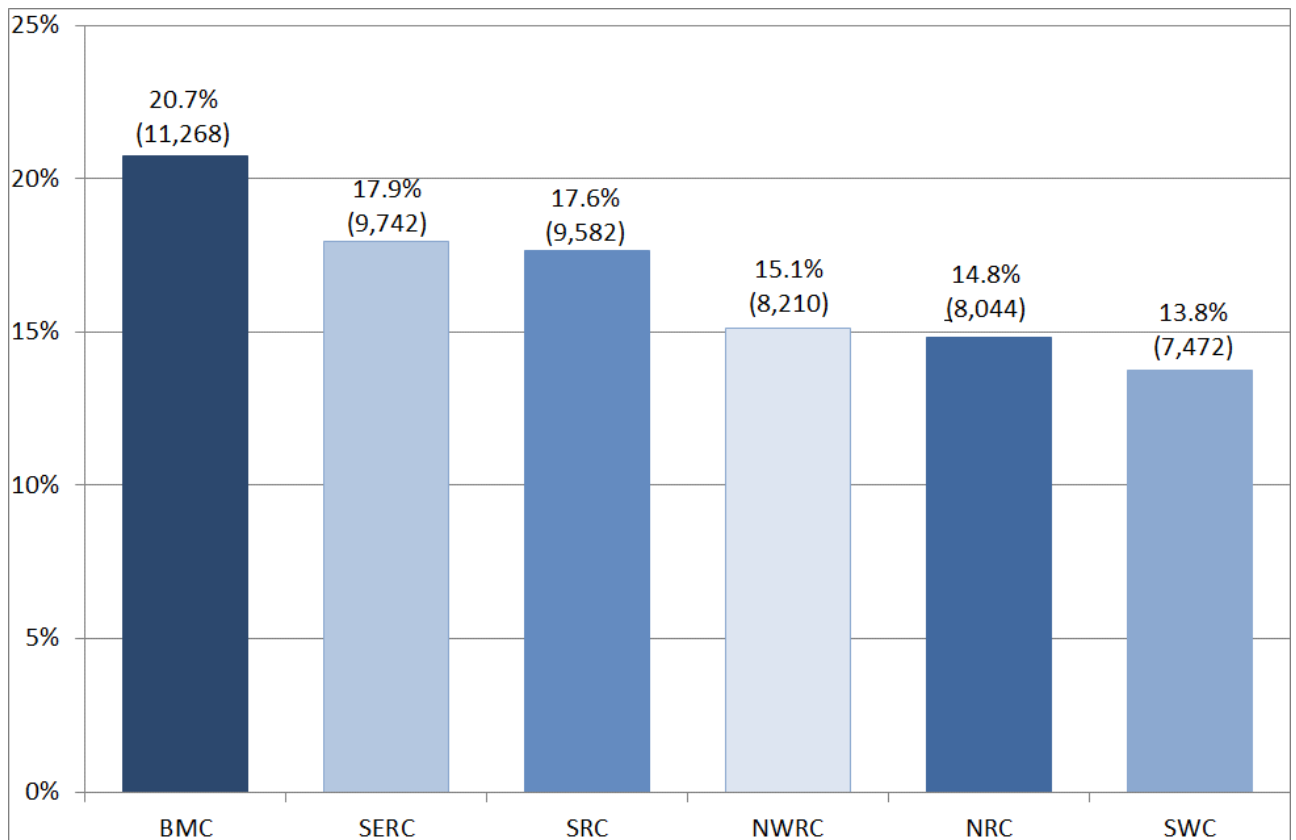
Figure 11: Students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above by FE college (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- The largest percentage net decrease has been in NRC (20.2%), from 10,084 in 2014/15 to 8,044 in 2018/19.
- The smallest percentage net decrease has been in SERC (1.0%), from 9,839 in 2014/15 to 9,742 in 2018/19.

Figure 12: Students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above by FE college share in 2018/19



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- In the most recent academic year (2018/19), BMC had the highest share of the 54,318 students enrolled on regulated courses at Level 2 or above, accounting for 20.7% (11,268), and SWC the lowest, with 13.8% (7,472).

7. Students enrolled on Higher Education courses by FE college

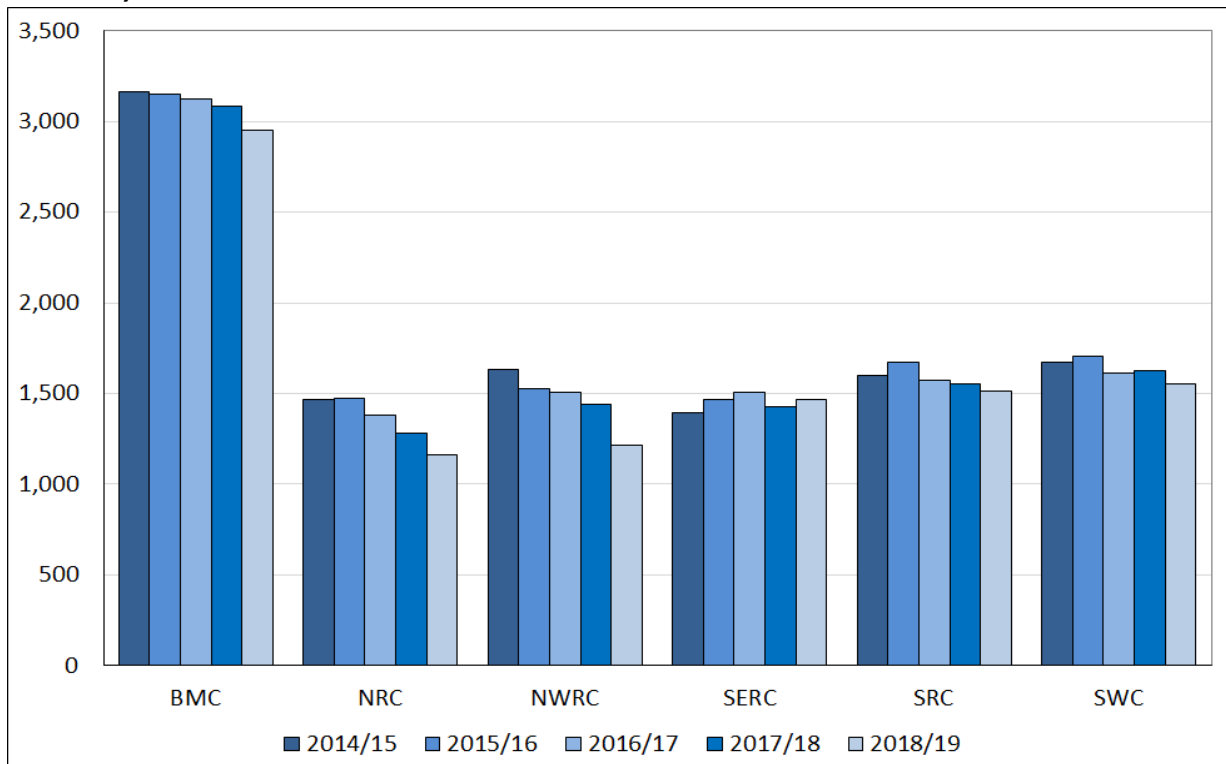
Table 7: Students enrolled on Higher Education courses by FE college (2014/15 to 2018/19)

FE College	Academic Year				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
BMC	3,164	3,148	3,121	3,084	2,953
NRC	1,466	1,476	1,382	1,284	1,161
NWRC	1,631	1,528	1,504	1,439	1,217
SERC	1,392	1,469	1,509	1,427	1,465
SRC	1,597	1,670	1,571	1,552	1,513
SWC	1,673	1,705	1,615	1,623	1,556
FE Sector Total	10,923	10,996	10,702	10,409	9,865

Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

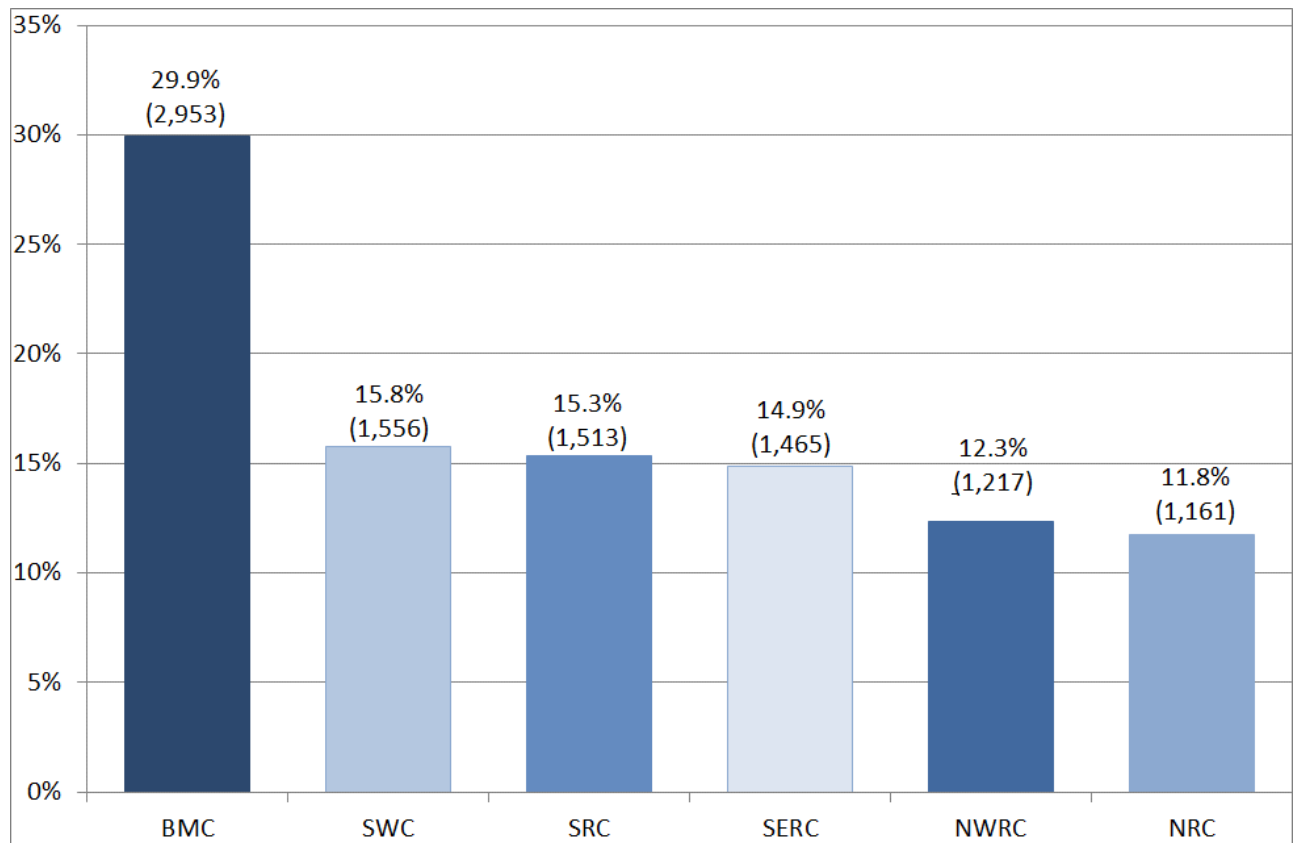
- The number of students enrolled on Higher Education courses at FE colleges has decreased by a net 9.7%, from 10,923 in 2014/15 to 9,865 in 2018/19.
- The largest percentage net decrease has been in NWRC (25.4%), from 1,631 in 2014/15 to 1,217 in 2018/19.
- The only percentage net increase has been in SERC (5.2%), from 1,392 in 2014/15 to 1,465 in 2018/19.

Figure 13: Students enrolled on Higher Education courses by FE college (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

Figure 14: Students enrolled on Higher Education courses by FE college share in 2018/19



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- In the most recent academic year (2018/19), BMC had the highest share of the 9,865 students enrolled on Higher Education courses, accounting for 29.9% (2,953), and NRC the lowest, with 11.8% (1,161).

8. Students achieving regulated qualifications by FE college

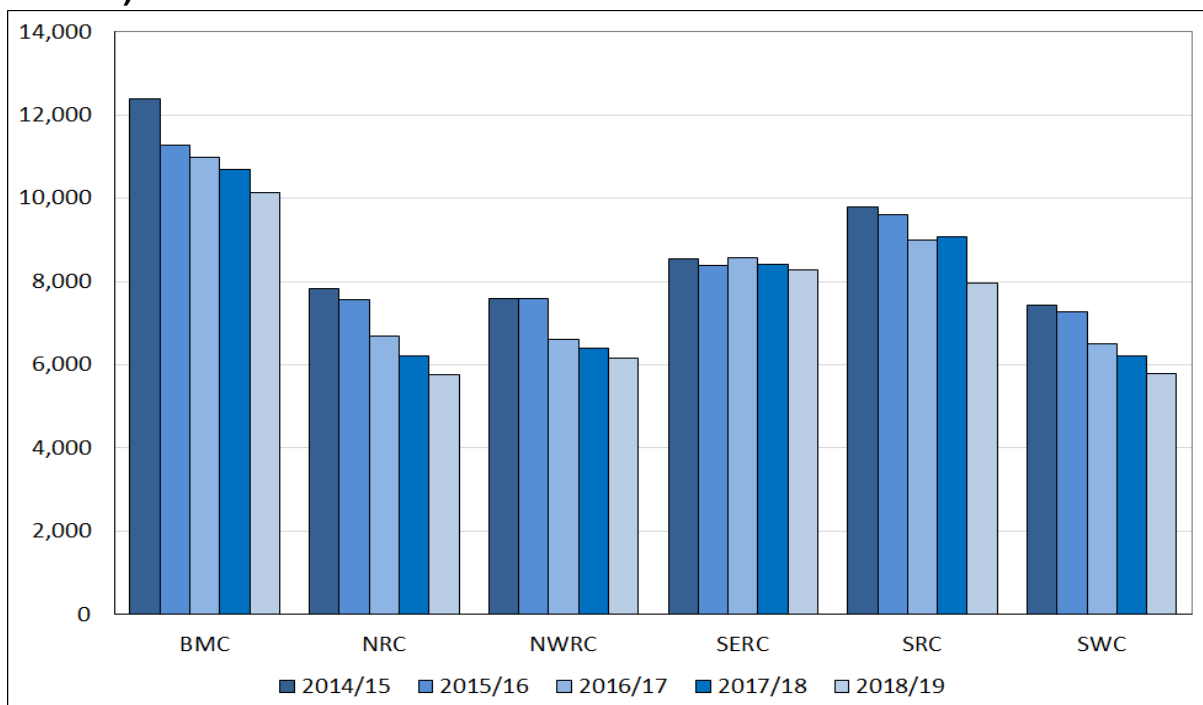
Table 8: Students achieving regulated qualifications by FE college (2014/15 to 2018/19)

FE College	Academic Year				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
BMC	12,384	11,266	10,996	10,688	10,134
NRC	7,820	7,569	6,699	6,210	5,774
NWRC	7,578	7,580	6,613	6,406	6,164
SERC	8,539	8,387	8,574	8,423	8,276
SRC	9,783	9,614	9,007	9,078	7,971
SWC	7,441	7,266	6,515	6,223	5,784
FE Sector Total	53,545	51,682	48,404	47,028	44,103

Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

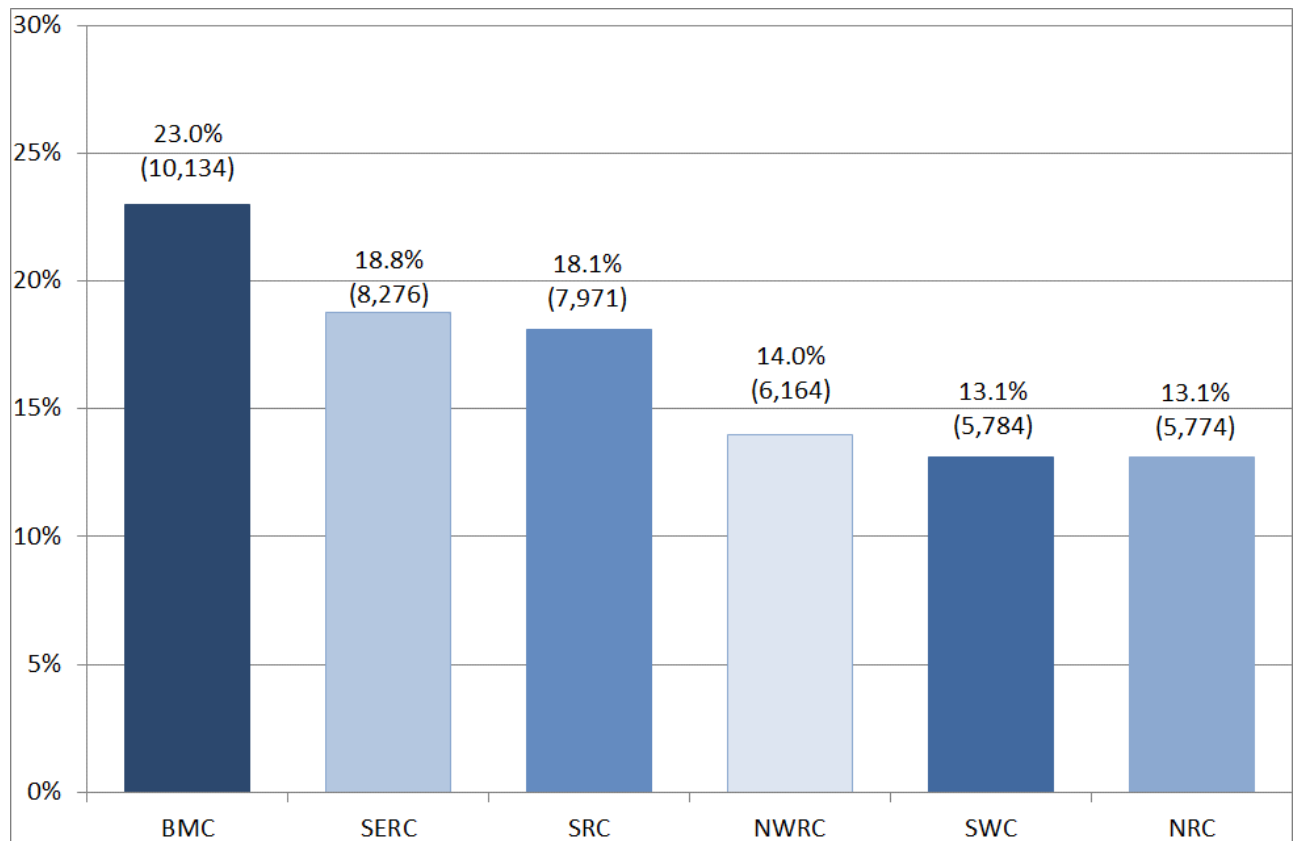
- The number of students achieving regulated qualifications at FE colleges has decreased by 17.6%, from 53,545 in 2014/15 to 44,103 in 2018/19. All six colleges have experienced numeric decreases over this period, with the largest being at BMC (2,250) and NRC (2,046).
- The largest percentage net decrease has been in NRC (26.2%), from 7,820 in 2014/15 to 5,774 in 2018/19.
- The smallest percentage net decrease has been in SERC (3.1%), from 8,539 in 2014/15 to 8,276 in 2018/19.

Figure 15: Students achieving regulated qualifications by FE college (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

Figure 16: Students achieving regulated qualifications by FE college share in 2018/19



Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

- In the most recent academic year (2018/19), BMC had the highest share of the 44,103 students achieving regulated qualifications, accounting for 23.0% (10,134), and NRC the lowest, with 13.1% (5,774).

Notes

1. Figures are correct as at 11th October 2019.
2. Age is at 1st July of the previous academic year, based on the start date of the course.
3. The level of study indicates the nationally recognised qualification level of the course.
4. Regulated enrolments consist of Higher Education courses (Level 4 or above) and courses at Level 3 or below that appear on either the Register of Regulated Qualifications (RRQ) or the Department for the Economy's Prescribed List of Approved Qualifications (PLAQ).
5. Full-time is calculated using Mode of Attendance value of full-time (greater than or equal to 30 weeks and greater than 15 hours per week). All other enrolments are part-time.
6. Withdrawals are included where there is an achieved outcome.
7. Those in their final year who have completed a course and subsequently achieved are regarded as final year achievers.

More detailed notes are available in the metadata sheet contained within the Additional Tables.

More Further Education sector statistics are available from:

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-economic-research/further-education-statistics>