

Survey of Further Education College Leavers Report Academic Year 2018/19

Summary of Findings

This report presents the findings from the sixth 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 2018/19.

All FE College leavers

Over half (50.2%) of FE College leavers who completed a qualification at Level 3 or below were in employment six months after achieving their 2018/19 qualification, up from 47.4% before their course began; the proportion in learning also rose from 37.0% to 39.1% (**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' (23.2%); 'I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills' (15.8%); or 'I was interested in the subject' (15.2%) (**Table 2**).

Two-thirds (65.4%) of leavers agreed that, were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Over half (51.3%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while 55.0% 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 (73.6%), Business, Administration and Law (62.8%) and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (54.7%) (**Figure 8**).

The subject areas with the lowest proportions of FE College leavers in employment were History, Philosophy and Theology (9.7%), Social Sciences (13.6%) and Arts, Media and Publishing (16.3%); however, these subjects had some of the highest proportions of leavers in further full-time study (**Figure 8**).

Typically, unemployment rates were lower for those qualifying at higher levels. One-eighth of those who had studied at Entry Level or Level 1 were unemployed (12.5%), in contrast to 3.9% of those who had studied at Level 2 and 2.9% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).

FE College leavers in employment

Under three-tenths (29.2%) of the FE College leavers in employment had not been in employment before they started their 2018/19 course (**Figure 9** and **Table A12a**) – of these, seven-tenths (69.9%) had been in learning.

For leavers in full-time employment, 26.7% were earning less than £300 per week. For leavers in part-time employment this was 83.9%. A further 30.1% of leavers in full-time employment were earning between £300 and £399 per week, while 7.7% of those in part-time employment earn similar wages (**Figure 11** and **Table S23**).

Males (43.9%) were more than twice as likely as females (19.8%) to be earning £400 or more per week (**Table S24**).

The vast majority (94.0%) of FE College leavers in employment were working in Northern Ireland, while 4.5% were working in the Republic of Ireland, 1.0% in Great Britain and 0.6% overseas (**Table 7**).

Three-quarters (74.9%) of FE College leavers in employment said the course had prepared them well for employment (**Chart 1** and **Table S19**).

Of the FE College leavers who were in employment six months after their course, two-thirds (66.9%) were working full-time; a further 23.2% had one or more part-time jobs, while 10.0% 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 (21.7%); Skilled Trade occupations (19.0%); or Associate Professional and Technical occupations (12.9%) (**Figure 13** and **Table S18**).

FE College leavers in learning

Seven-tenths (69.2%) of FE College leavers in learning had also been in learning before the course they had completed in 2018/19 (**Figure 16** and **Table A12b**), while more than four-fifths (82.9%) are now studying towards a higher level qualification (**Table S28**).

Over three-fifths (62.5%) of leavers in learning have continued their learning in the FE sector, while over one-third (33.8%) have started university (**Figure 18** and **Table S29**).

Over nine-tenths (90.6%) of FE College leavers in learning stated the course they had undertaken during 2018/19 had prepared them well for further study (**Chart 2** and **Table S30**).

Unemployed FE College leavers

The proportion of FE College leavers who classified themselves as unemployed six months after completing their course in 2018/19 was 4.0%, down from 8.1% before their course (**Tables 3** and **A4**).

Typically, unemployment rates were lower for those qualifying at higher levels. One-eighth of those who had studied at Entry Level or Level 1 were unemployed (12.5%), in contrast to 3.9% of those who had studied at Level 2 and 2.9% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).