

# Survey of Further Education College Leavers Report Academic Year 2019/20



This report presents analysis of the seventh 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 FE College leavers of completing and achieving a regulated qualification at Level 3 or below in the FE sector during the academic year 2019/20.

**Published by:** Statistics and Research Branch (Tertiary Education)  
Department for the Economy, 39-49 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8FD

**Date of Publication:** 26 October 2021

**Theme:** Children, Education and Skills

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**Frequency:** Annual

## 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 2019/20.
Author	Louise Buckley
Publication Date	26 <sup>th</sup> October 2021.
Reporting Period	Approximately six months after academic year 2019/20.
Fieldwork Period	1 <sup>st</sup> March to 2 <sup>nd</sup> April 2021.
Publication Issue	7
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	<a href="mailto:analyticalservices@economy-ni.gov.uk">analyticalservices@economy-ni.gov.uk</a>
Internet address	<a href="https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-economic-research/further-education-statistics">https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-economic-research/further-education-statistics</a>
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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 – <a href="mailto:Louise.Buckley@economy-ni.gov.uk">Louise.Buckley@economy-ni.gov.uk</a> (Tel: 028 9025 7519)</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

More than four-tenths (43.6%) of FE College leavers who qualified at Level 3 or below were in employment six months after achieving their 2019/20 qualification, up from 40.9% before their course began; the proportion in learning fell slightly from 43.1% to 42.0% (**Table 3**).

Linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion in employment (43.6%) was lower than that for the 2018/19 cohort at the equivalent stage (47.7%) and included 2.9% who were on furlough. In addition, the unemployment rate (7.7%) was higher than for those who qualified in 2018/19 (4.0%).

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' (21.9%); 'I was interested in the subject' (17.3%); or 'I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills' (15.6%) (**Table 2**).

Less than two-thirds (65.7%) of leavers agreed that, were they to do their course again, 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 53.8% 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 (62.6%), Business, Administration and Law (55.3%) and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (51.5%) (**Figure 8**).

The subject areas with the lowest proportions of FE College leavers in employment were Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care (8.8%), History, Philosophy and Theology (11.5%) and Social Sciences (13.5%) (**Figure 8**).

Typically, unemployment rates were lower for those qualifying at higher levels. One-sixth of those who had studied at Entry Level or Level 1 were unemployed (15.6%), in contrast to 8.5% of those who had studied at Level 2 and 4.7% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).

### FE College leavers in employment

Over one-third (34.3%) of the FE College leavers in employment had not been in employment before they started their 2019/20 course (**Figure 9** and **Table A14**) – of these, three-quarters (74.8%) had been in learning.

For leavers in full-time employment, 42.4% were earning less than £300 per week. For leavers in part-time employment this was 90.3%. A further 31.6% of leavers in full-time employment were earning between £300 and £399 per week, while 6.5% of those in part-time employment were on similar wages (**Figure 11** and **Table A23**).

Males (26.2%) were more than twice as likely as females (9.9%) to be earning £400 or more per week (**Table A24**).

The vast majority (95.0%) of FE College leavers in employment were working in Northern Ireland, while 4.2% were working in the Republic of Ireland, 0.5% in Great Britain and 0.3% overseas (**Table 7**).

Over five-sevenths (73.3%) of FE College leavers in employment said the course had prepared them well for employment (**Chart 1** and **Table A28**).

Of the FE College leavers who were in employment six months after their course, three-fifths (62.1%) were working full-time; a further 20.5% had one or more part-time jobs, while 10.9% were primarily working but also studying (**Table A19**).

Most of the FE College leavers in employment had jobs classified as either: Skilled Trade (21.0%); Caring, leisure and other service occupations (20.8%); or Sales and customer service occupations (13.5%) (**Figure 13** and **Table A21**).

## FE College leavers in learning

Over seven-tenths (71.2%) of FE College leavers in learning had also been in learning before the course they had completed in 2019/20 (**Figure 16** and **Table A14**), while more than four-fifths (81.5%) were studying towards a higher-level qualification (**Table A33**).

Over two-thirds (67.2%) of leavers in learning have continued their learning in the FE sector, while three-tenths (29.6%) have started university (**Figure 18** and **Table A34**).

Just under nine-tenths (89.7%) of FE College leavers in learning stated the course they had undertaken during 2019/20 had prepared them well for further study (**Chart 2** and **Table A37**).

## Unemployed FE College leavers

The proportion of FE College leavers who classified themselves as unemployed six months after completing their course in 2019/20 was 7.7%, down from 8.2% before their course (**Tables 3** and **A11**).

Typically, unemployment rates were lower for those qualifying at higher levels. One-sixth of those who had studied at Entry Level or Level 1 were unemployed (15.6%), in contrast to 8.5% of those who had studied at Level 2 and 4.7% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).



## Section One: Background and Introduction

### How to use this report

This report presents findings from the seventh 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 2019/20. The destinations of those qualifying at Level 4 or above are researched separately, through their participation in HESA's Graduate Outcomes survey some 15 months after achieving their qualifications.

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 five 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.

[3.5](#) presents findings for the FE College leavers who were classified as other.

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 Sector Activity publications. These provide additional information about the students enrolled on regulated courses at FE Colleges and are available on the [FE Sector Activity in NI web page](#) (opens in new window).

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

- economic policy (including [A 10X Economy – Northern Ireland's Decade of Innovation](#) (opens in new window))

- 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

Additional information is available on [DfE's website](#) (opens in new window).

### **Further Education in Northern Ireland: policy and operational context**

As outlined in the DfE's consultation paper [Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – Skills for a 10X Economy](#) (opens in new window), FE Colleges in Northern Ireland (NI) have dual objectives of providing essential entry level pathways to education and professional and technical skills, to support economic and social prosperity.

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 £270 million and a professional workforce of around 3,700. Engaging 70,847 learners in the 2019/20 academic year and working with over 10,000 businesses across NI, they have a significant footprint in our economy.

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.

Additional information on FE in Northern Ireland can be found on the [Further Education section of the DfE Website](#) (opens in new window) or on [NI Direct](#) (opens in new window).

### **Why has this survey been carried out?**

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 seventh sweep of the Survey, conducted with the 2019/20 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, Sex, 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. Beginning in 2017/18, HE leavers participate 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, sixth and seventh sweeps also entailed a census approach, providing an opportunity for all eligible leavers to participate. The fifth 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.

During the sixth sweep, all eligible leavers with an up-to-date email address or phone numbers were invited to complete an online survey using “Survey Monkey”. Invitations were issued via email or text message, which, following on from the experience of the fifth sweep, proved to be more successful in garnering responses than phone calls.

The seventh sweep entailed a census approach, providing an opportunity for all eligible leavers with up-to-date email contact details to participate in an online survey using “Survey Monkey”.

### 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 contact details for the 26,444 leavers who had completed and achieved a qualification at Level 3 or below in 2019/20.

In the end, Colleges supplied contact details for 22,787 leavers (the population of interest), amounting to 86.2% of all the leavers who had completed and achieved a qualification at Level 3 or below in 2019/20. Before accepting the contact details returned by the Colleges, SRB (TE) performed extensive validation and data cleaning exercises. Removal of invalid contact details resulted in 22,256 leavers (the contactable population). The characteristics of the contactable population mirrored closely those of the population of interest 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 Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021, by issuing email invitations to all leavers in the contactable population 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.

Over the course of the following four weeks, until the online fieldwork closed on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2021, SRB (TE) issued four reminder emails to leavers who had not completed the Survey. Weekly updates on response rates for each college were shared to keep colleges included in the process and help encourage responses from their students.

Despite extensive checking of contact details prior to the fieldwork, 1,681 (7.6%) 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) the email address provided was incorrect, or the recipient opted out. This reduced the total eligible population to 21,106.

## Response rates

Approximately two in seven (28.3%) of the total contactable population participated in the online survey (an increase from 19.2% in the 2018/19 survey), resulting in 5,974 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:

- 65.3% were female (compared with 51.4% in the population of interest);
- 25.8% had studied full-time (22.8% in the population of interest);
- 9.4% had studied at South West College (13.3% in the population of interest).

## Questionnaire

The survey captures a snapshot of activities that leavers from the 2019/20 academic year were engaged in approximately six months after completing their course.

Details were captured on leavers' employment, such as their job role, 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 sweeps of the Survey, some amendments were necessary to improve the wording and layout. In addition, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents were given the opportunity to indicate where they were on furlough.

## Data coding and weighting

Survey responses were initially collected verbatim, then coded 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.

Coding to the official classification for occupation (SOC 2020) was undertaken by SRB (TE) branch using CASCOT, a computer assisted coding tool.

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 algorithm in R, raking was converged in 26 iterations using age, mode of attendance, level of study, FE College and sex, to provide a closer match between the characteristics of the participants and the population of interest.

As a result of the raked weighting model:

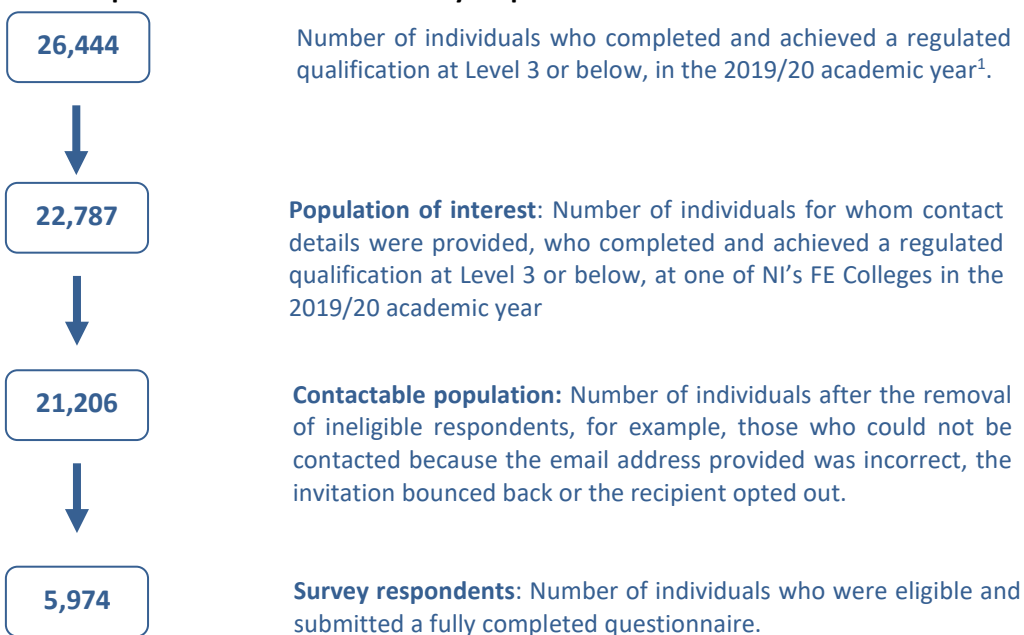
- the male share of respondents increased from 34.7% to 48.6%, whereas the female share decreased from 65.3% to 51.4%, both identical with their respective population shares
- the part-time study share of respondents increased from 74.2% to 77.1%, in line with their share of the population of interest
- the FE College 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 population of interest (22,787) and survey respondents (5,974)

Variable	Variable Categories	% of Population of interest (N=22,787)	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	21.8	1,568	26.2	4.4	1,302	21.8	0.0
	Northern Regional College	13.1	660	11.0	-2.1	783	13.1	0.0
	North West Regional College	14.2	1,067	17.9	3.7	848	14.2	0.0
	South Eastern Regional College	21.5	1,274	21.3	-0.2	1,281	21.4	-0.1
	Southern Regional College	16.1	841	14.1	-2.0	962	16.1	0.0
	South West College	13.3	564	9.4	-3.9	796	13.3	0.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5,974</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>5,973</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>
Sex	Female	51.4	3,900	65.3	13.9	3,073	51.4	0.0
	Male	48.6	2,074	34.7	-13.9	2,900	48.6	0.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5,974</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>5,973</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>
Age (years)	19 and under	51.3	2,775	46.5	-4.8	3,062	51.3	0.0
	20-24	13.0	741	12.4	-0.6	777	13.0	0.0
	25 and over	35.7	2,458	41.1	5.4	2,134	35.7	0.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5,974</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>5,973</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>
Mode of Attendance	Full-time	22.8	1,539	25.8	3.0	1,367	22.9	0.1
	Part-time	77.2	4,435	74.2	-3.0	4,606	77.1	-0.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5,974</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>5,973</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>
Level of Course	Entry Level	2.2	85	1.4	-0.8	133	2.2	0.0
	Level 1	8.9	360	6.0	-2.9	532	8.9	0.0
	Level 2	47.9	2,612	43.7	-4.2	2,857	47.8	-0.1
	Level 3	41.0	2,917	48.8	7.8	2,450	41.0	0.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5,974</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>5,973</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

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**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:<sup>1</sup>

- 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 26,444 individual FE College leavers being eligible for inclusion in the 2019/20 Survey.
- Although it was intended that everyone who completed a qualification would be contacted and provided an opportunity to respond to the survey, not all had valid contact details, leaving a population of interest of 22,787. 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 the profiling variables (age, mode of attendance, level of study, FE College and sex), 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.

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<sup>1</sup>Excludes withdrawals and transfers, entitlement framework enrolments, non-regulated enrolments, null ULNs, enrolments with missing level information, Higher Education (HE) in Further Education (FE), any individual under 16 and Disabilities (SLDD) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Please refer to Annex A for further details.



## Section Three: Main Findings

### 3.1 All FE College Leavers

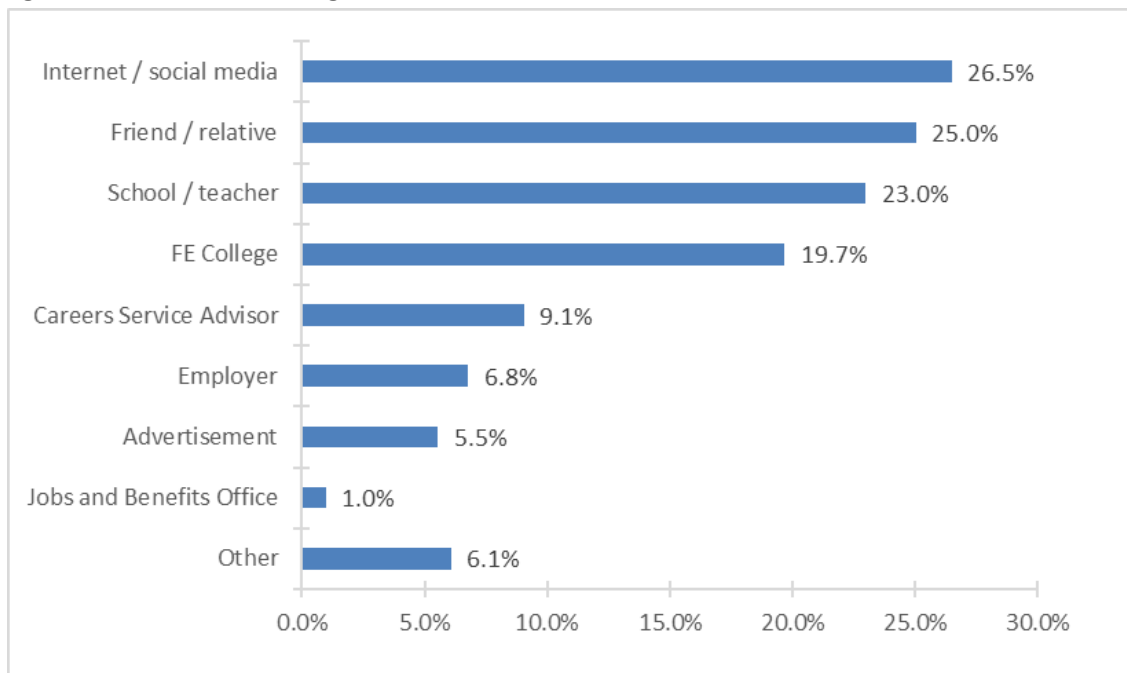
This section presents findings on all participants in the Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20 including:

- 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 (26.5%); Friend / relative (25.0%); School / teacher (23.0%); or FE College (19.7%) (**Figure 1** and **Table A2**).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

*n* = 5,971

Note: 3 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 four most popular reasons for undertaking their course cited by FE College leavers were: 'I was interested in the subject' (51.9%); 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (51.4%); 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (48.2%); and 'I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills' (46.4%) (Tables 2 and A5).

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' (21.9%); 'I was interested in the subject' (17.3%); or 'I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills' (15.6%) (Tables 2 and A6).

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

Reason	Overall %	Most Important %
I was interested in the subject	51.9	17.3
I wanted to gain a qualification	51.4	14.1
I thought it would improve my career prospects	48.2	21.9
I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills	46.4	15.6
I wanted to go on to further / higher learning	34.8	15.5
I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence	17.8	1.5
It was at a time / place that suited me	15.8	0.8
I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job	15.0	5.5
I wanted greater job satisfaction	10.0	1.2
I didn't have to pay for it	8.8	0.6
I wanted to increase my income	7.7	0.9
I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer	5.8	2.1
Other	3.3	3.0

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

*n* = 5,892 (Overall)

*n* = 5,873 (Most important reason).

Note: 82 (overall) and 101 (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, A11 and A12**).

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**).

More than four-tenths (43.6%) of FE College leavers were in employment six months after achieving their 2019/20 qualification, up from 40.9% before their course began. The proportion in learning fell slightly from 43.1% to 42.0% (**Tables 3 and A12**). Linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion in employment was lower than that for the 2018/19 cohort at the equivalent stage (47.4%) and included 2.9% who said they were on furlough. In addition the unemployment rate (7.7%) was higher than for those who qualified in 2018/19 (4.0%).

**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	26.1	27.1
	Working part-time (one or more jobs)	12.3	8.9
	Primarily in work and also studying	2.5	4.7
	Furloughed	0.0	2.9
	Employment Sub-total	40.9	43.6
Learning	Studying full-time	32.7	25.1
	Studying part-time	2.1	4.5
	Primarily studying and also in work	8.4	12.3
	Learning Sub-total	43.1	42.0
Unemployed	Unemployed	8.2	7.7
Other	Other	7.7	6.6
<b>Total (n)</b>		<b>5,834</b>	<b>5,604</b>

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

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

While just over one-third (34.8%) 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:

- 28.7% remained in Employment
- 29.9% remained in Learning
- 3.2% remained Unemployed
- 3.4% 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	28.7%	7.3%	1.7%	1.1%	2,298
Learning	11.2%	29.9%	2.1%	1.4%	2,341
Unemployed	2.2%	2.4%	3.2%	0.7%	479
Other	1.6%	2.4%	0.6%	3.4%	483
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,433</b>	<b>2,374</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>5,600</b>

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

### Overall Educational Experience

**Table 5** provides an overview of the overall education experience reported by FE College leavers. Two-thirds (65.7%) 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 53.8% would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and under one-fifth (19.0%) would do something completely different (**Tables A42 to A49**).

**Table 5: All FE College leavers: overall educational experience**

Response	If you were to do your course again, how likely or unlikely is it that you would...			
	Do a different subject (%)	Study at a different FE College (%)	Do a different kind of qualification (%)	Do something completely different (%)
Very likely	19.1	7.7	9.7	7.9
Likely	15.7	8.2	15.7	11.1
Not very likely	22.8	26.6	24.2	23.3
Not likely at all	28.8	39.1	29.6	37.2
Don't know	13.6	18.5	20.7	20.5
<b>Total (n)</b>	<b>5,265</b>	<b>5,225</b>	<b>5,235</b>	<b>5,223</b>

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

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

### Destinations of Leavers by Key Profiling Variables

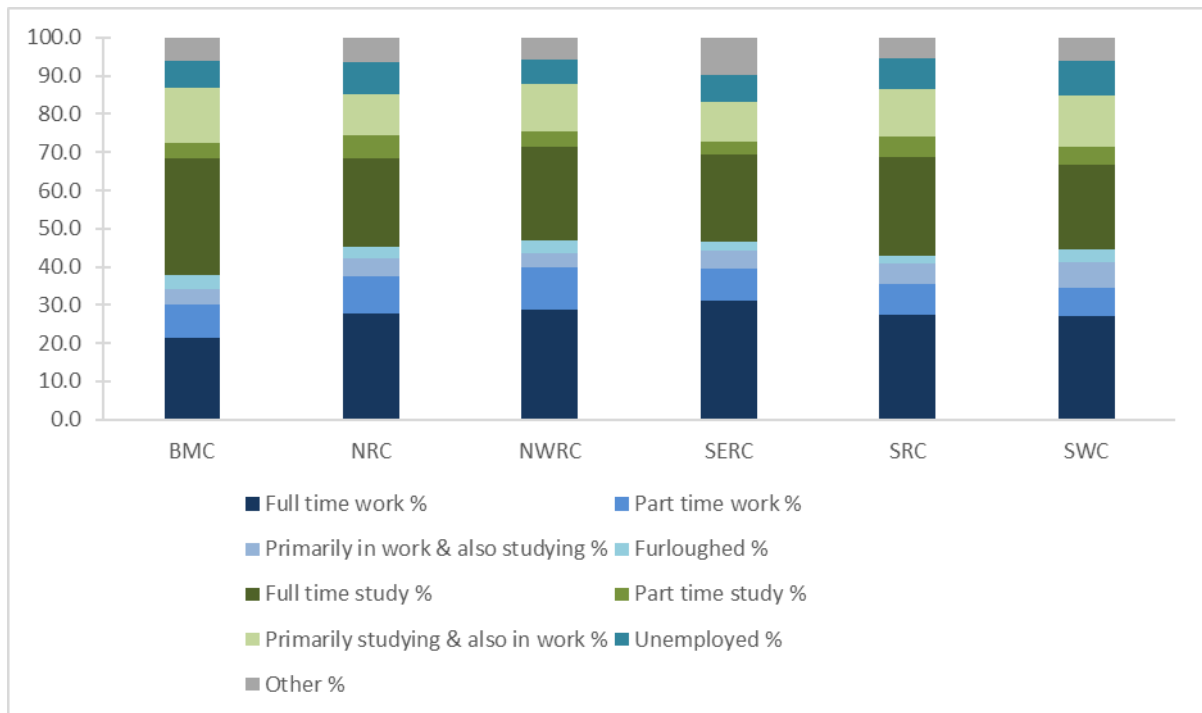
This section provides a comparison of each of the main destinations of the respondents to the Survey of FE College leavers 2019/20 by the key profiling variables (FE College, Sex, Age Group, Course Mode of Attendance and Level of Course Studied) and deprivation quintiles. Outputs for each are available in the online tables (Tables A16 and A17).

#### 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 (27.1%) and full-time study (25.1%) are the most popular activities 6 months after course completion; however, there are some variations across the colleges.

SERC (31.0%) and NWRC (28.9%) had the highest proportions of leavers engaged in full-time work. In contrast, BMC (30.5%) and SRC (25.9%) 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**



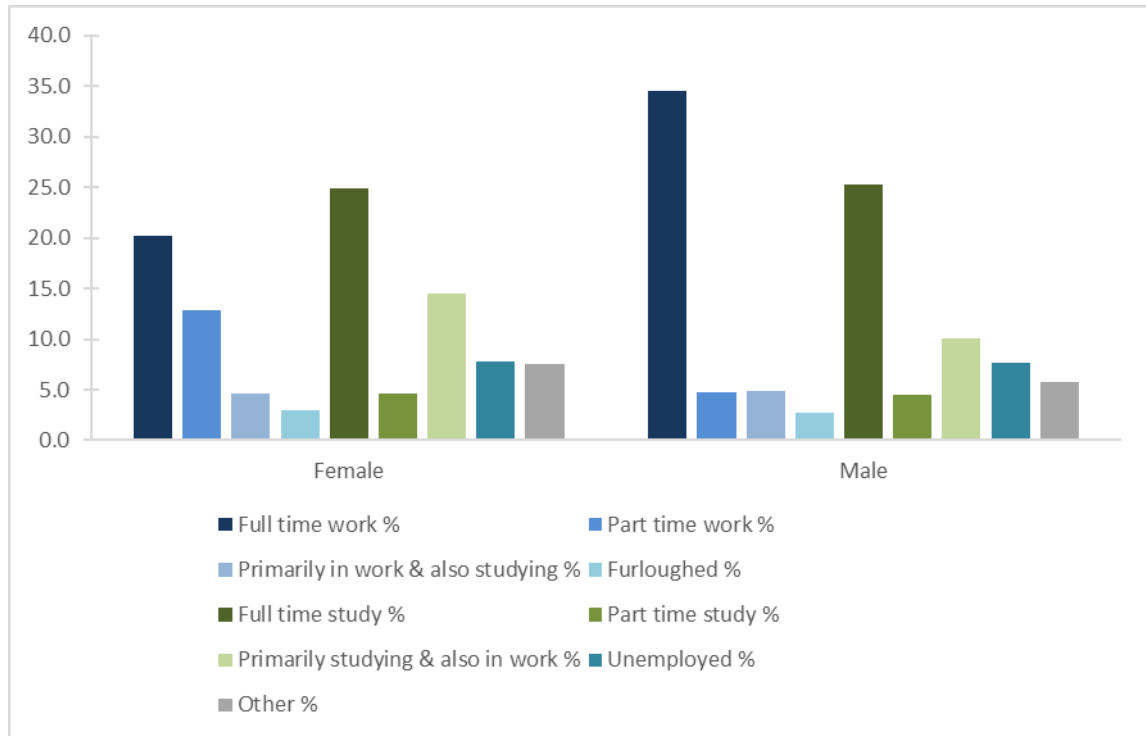
Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20  
n=5,604

Note: 370 invalid responses were excluded.

**Sex**

**Figure 3** demonstrates that male leavers were more likely than female leavers to be in full-time work (34.6% vs 20.2%) or full-time study (25.3% vs 24.9%). Conversely, in line with the pattern in the labour market<sup>2</sup>, female FE College leavers were more likely than their male counterparts to be in part-time employment (12.8% vs 4.7%).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n=5,604

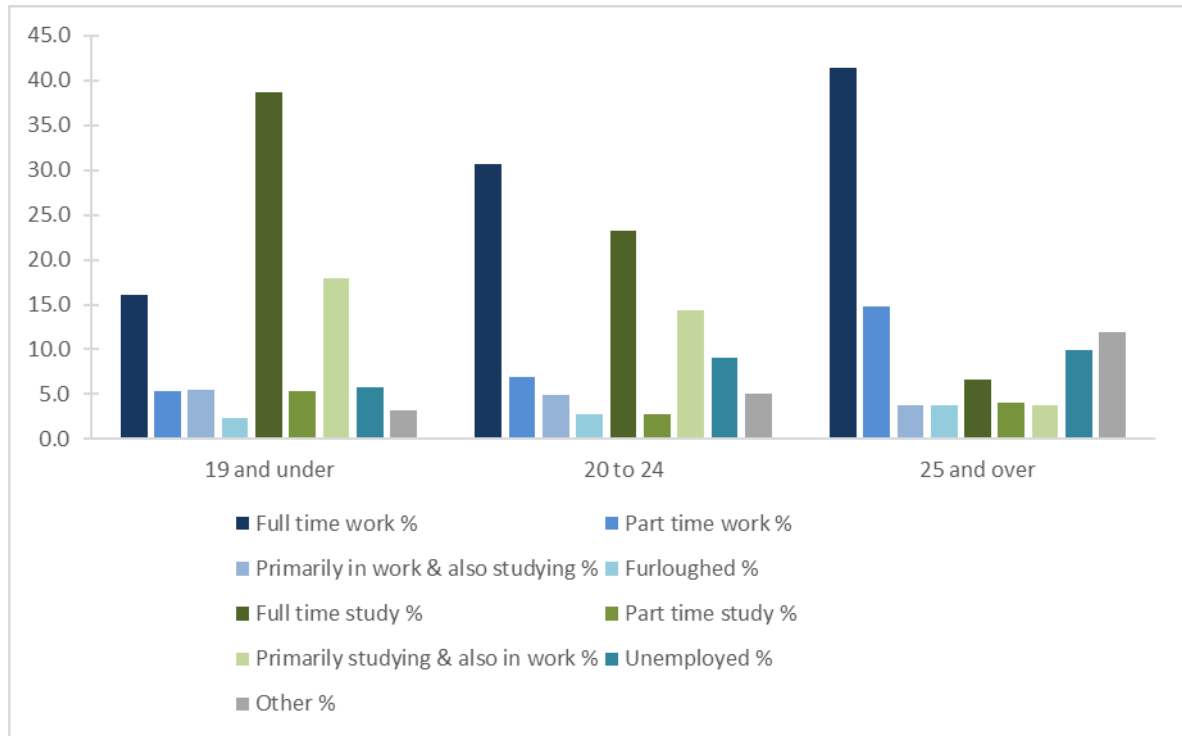
Note: 370 invalid responses were excluded.

<sup>2</sup>Northern Ireland. NISRA. (2020). *Labour Force Survey Annual Report 2019 – data tables*. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/labour-force-survey-annual-report-2019> (Accessed: 12 September 2020).

**Age Group**

As illustrated in **Figure 4**, respondents aged 25 and over were most likely to be working full-time six months after completing their course (41.4%), in contrast to those aged 19 and under (16.1%). Conversely, those aged 19 and under were more than five times as likely to be studying full-time (38.6%) as those aged 25 and over (6.7%).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n= 5,604

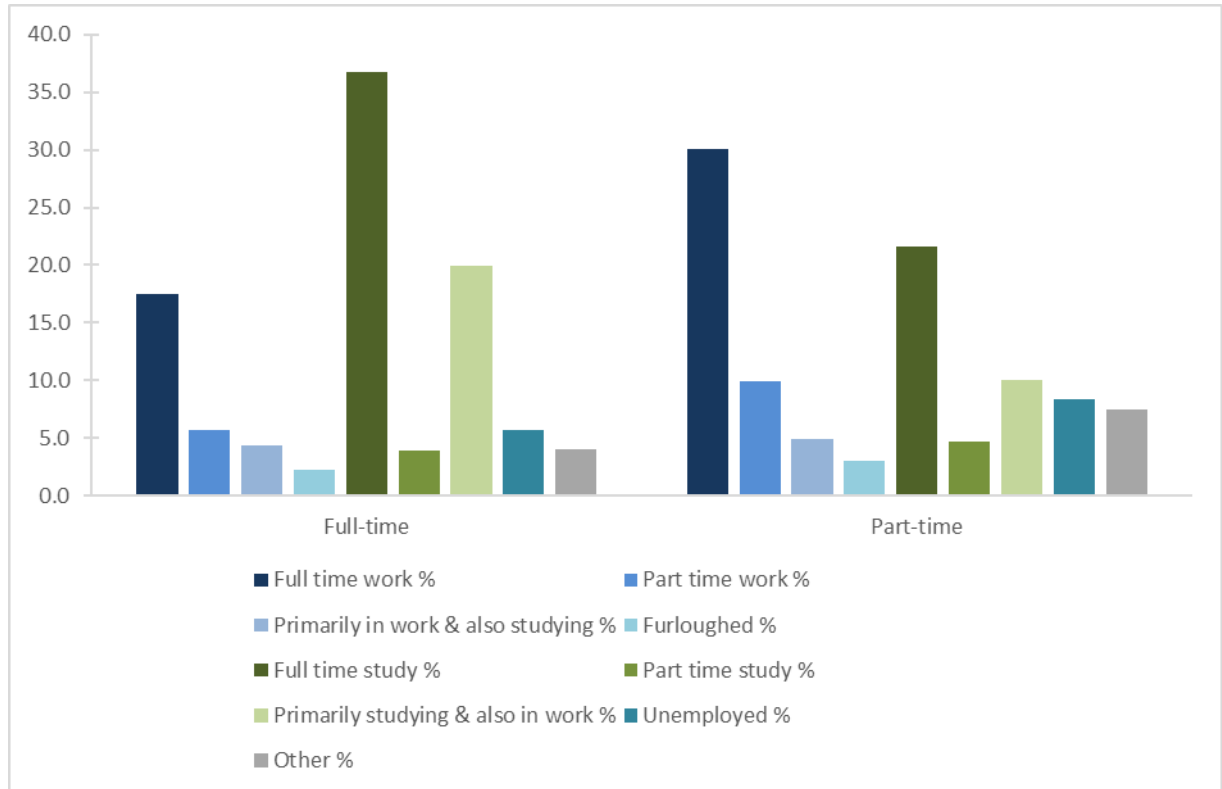
Note: 370 invalid responses were excluded.

**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 (30.0% FT, 9.9% PT) than those who had completed their studies on a full-time basis (17.5% FT, 5.7% 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 (36.8% vs 21.6%). They were also more likely to be primarily studying and also working (19.9% vs 10.1%).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n=5,604

Note: 370 invalid responses were excluded.

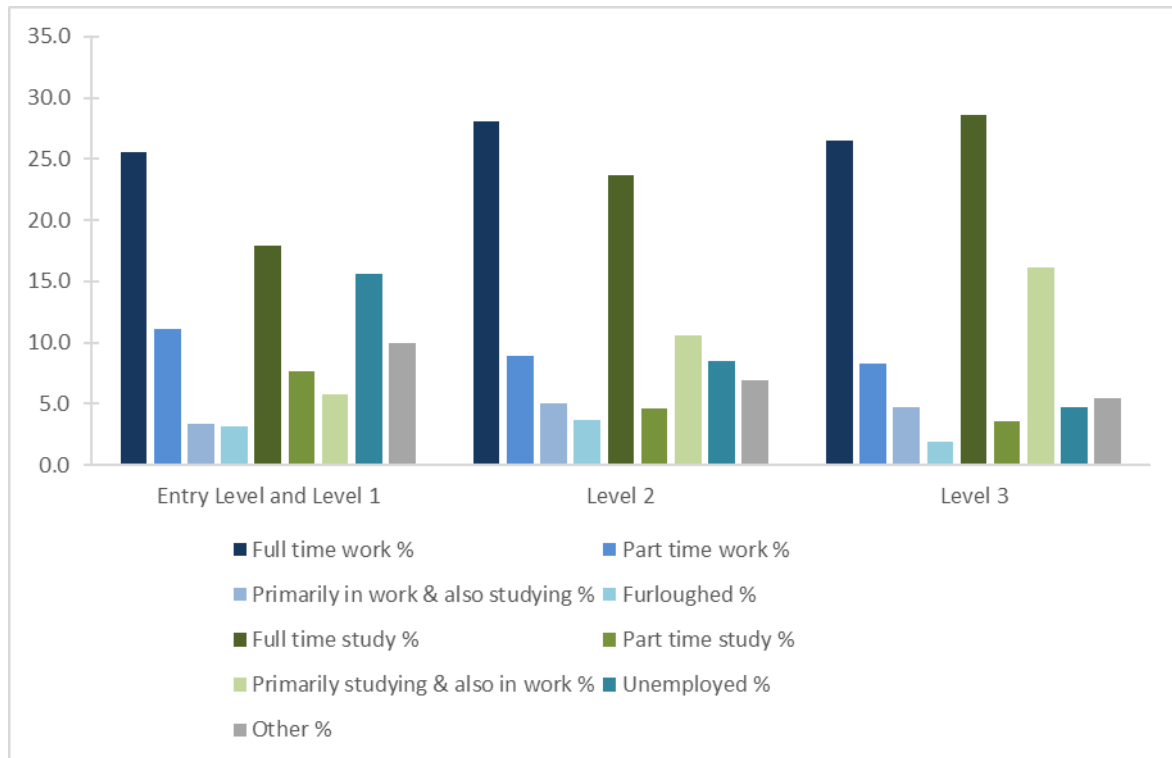


### Level of Study

Approximately six months after completing a course at FE College, those who had studied a course at Entry Level or Level 1 were less likely to be in full-time study (17.9%) than those who had studied at Level 2 or Level 3 (23.7% Level 2, 28.6% Level 3).

One-sixth of those who had studied at Entry Level or Level 1 were unemployed (15.6%), in contrast to 8.5% of those who had studied at Level 2 and 4.7% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n=5,604

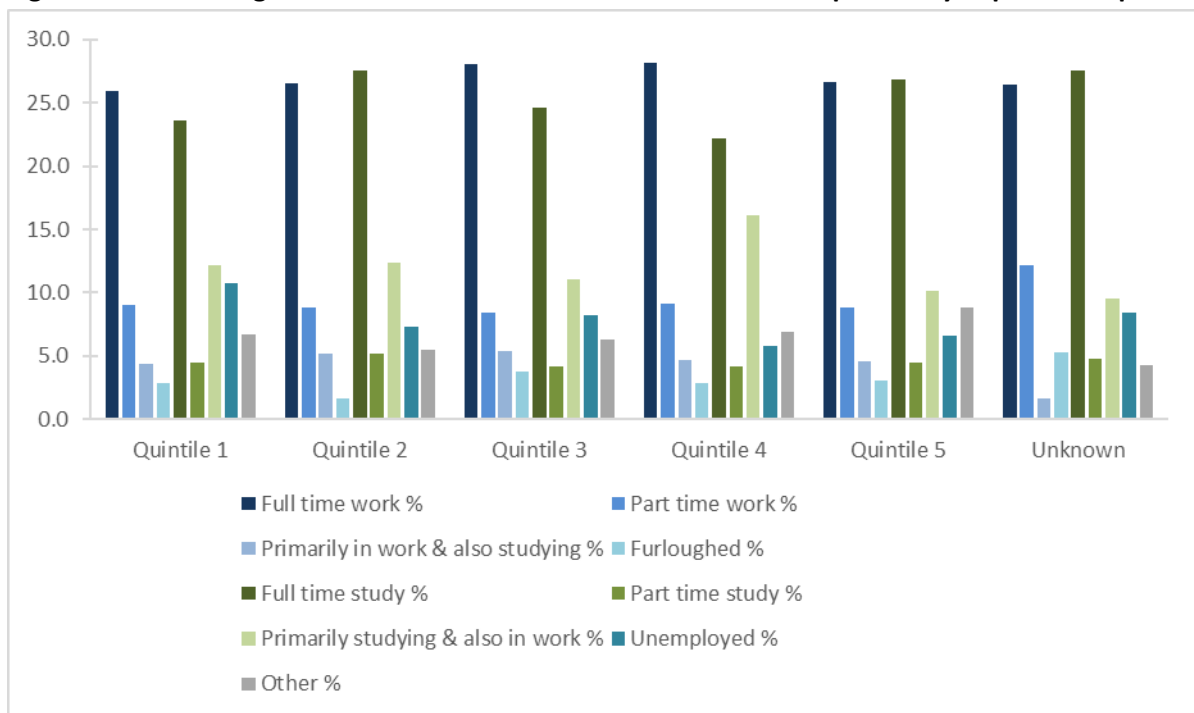
Note: 370 invalid responses were excluded.

## Deprivation

As **Figure 7** shows, leavers from each deprivation quintile are broadly similar in terms of the activities they move on to after completion of their course. Full-time work (27.1%) and full-time study (25.1%) are the most popular activities 6 months after course completion; however, there are some variations across the quintiles.

Quintile 3 (28.1%) and Quintile 4 (28.2%) had the highest proportions of leavers engaged in full-time work. Quintile 4 also had the highest proportions of leavers engaged in part-time work (9.2%). Along with Quintile 2 (27.6%), Quintile 5 (26.9%) had one of the highest proportions of leavers engaged in full-time study or in other activities (8.8%). Notably, unemployment proportions fall as the level of deprivation falls (10.8% in Quintile 1 (most deprived), falling to 6.6% in Quintile 5 (least deprived)).

**Figure 7: All FE College leavers: activities 6 months after course completion by deprivation quintile**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n=5,604

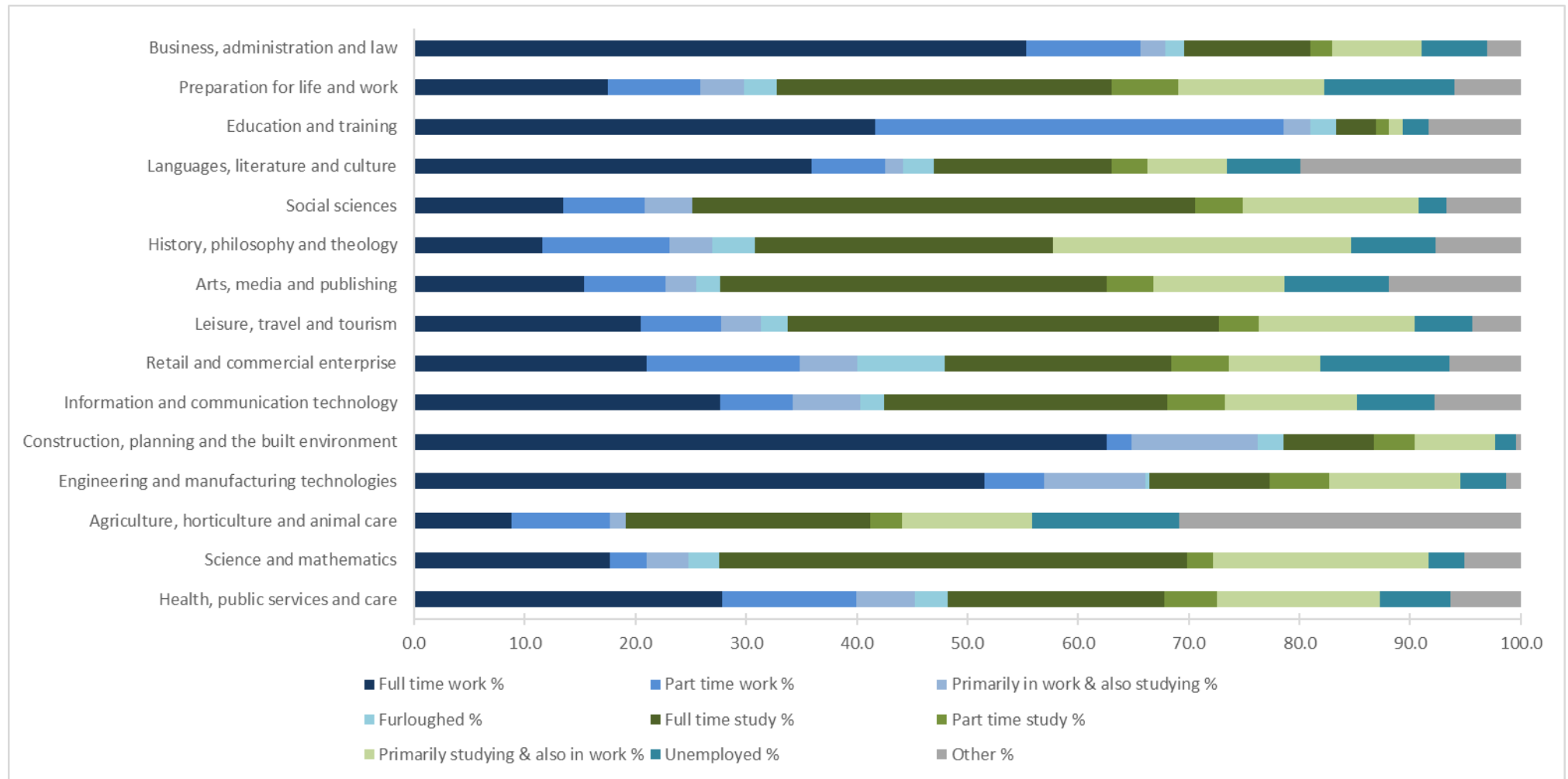
Note: 370 invalid responses were excluded.

## 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 (62.6%), Business, Administration and Law (55.3%) and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (51.5%).

The subject areas with the lowest proportions of FE College leavers in full-time employment were Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care (8.8%), History, Philosophy and Theology (11.5%) and Social Sciences (13.5%) (**Figure 8** and **Table A18**).

**Figure 8: All FE College leavers: activities 6 months after course completion by subject area**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n=5,604

Note: 370 invalid responses were excluded.

### 3.2 FE College Leavers in Employment

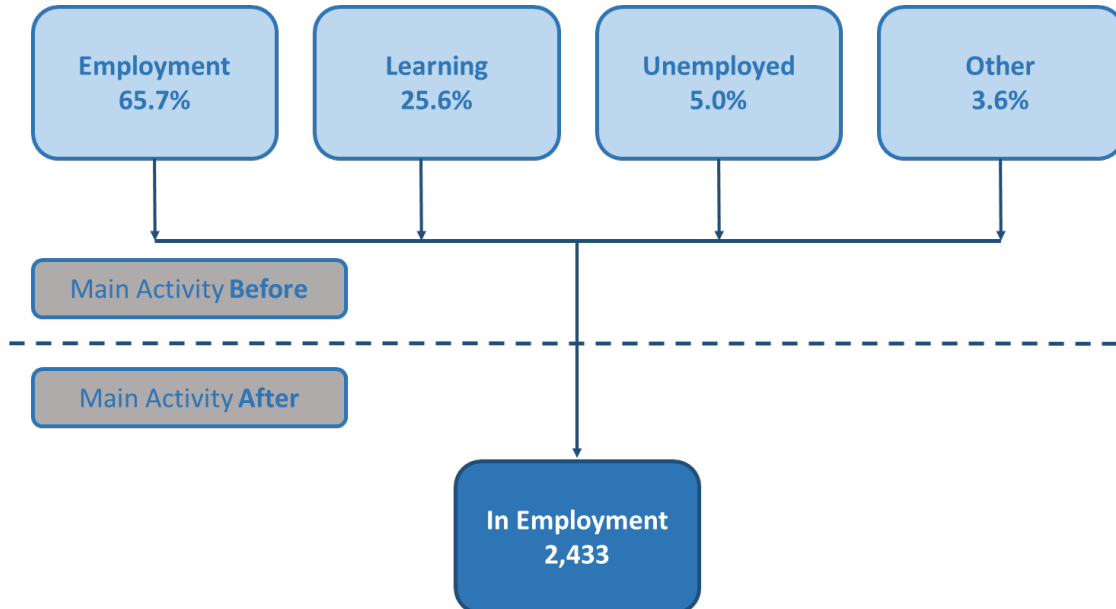
This section presents findings for the FE College leavers in employment six months after their course. This includes those leavers in full-time work, part-time work and those primarily in work but also studying. It provides: an overview of their main activities before the course; whether those in employment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

- 65.7% had previously been in employment
- 25.6% had previously been in learning
- 5.0% had previously been unemployed
- 3.6% had previously been categorised as other (Figure 9 and Table A14)

Figure 9: FE College leavers in employment: most important activity before

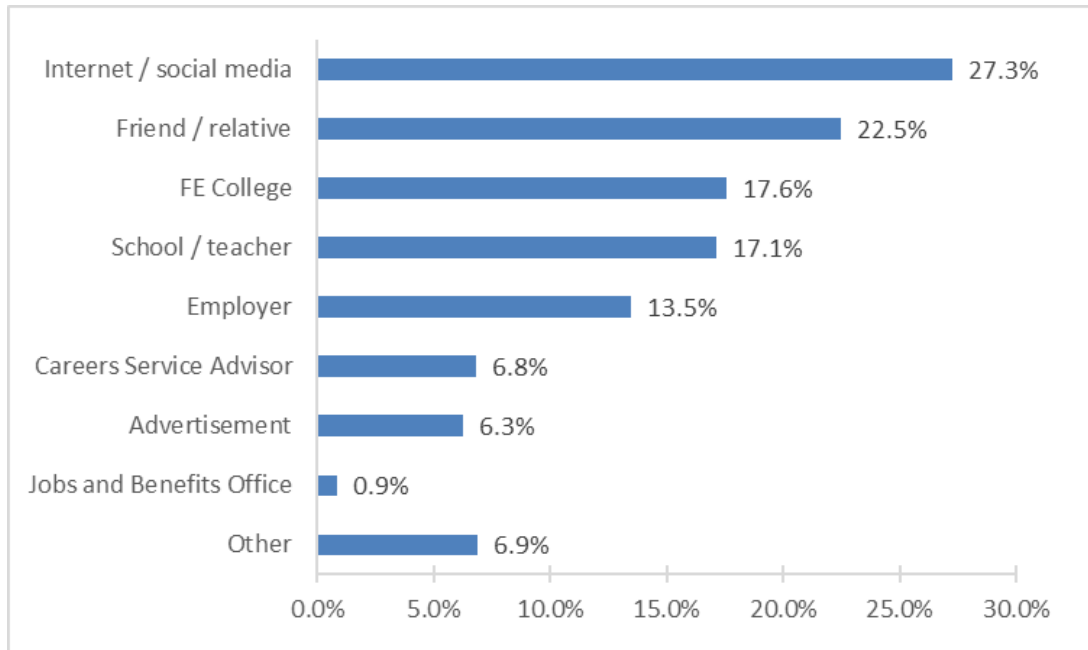


Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

**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 (27.3%); Friend / relative (22.5%); FE College (17.6%); or School / teacher (17.2%). 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 (17.2% vs 23.0%), although they were twice as likely to have heard through their Employer (13.5% vs 6.8%) (Figure 10 and Table A4).

**Figure 10: FE College leavers in employment: how individuals had heard about their course**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n = 2,432

Note: 1 invalid response was excluded.

### Main reasons for undertaking the course

The 2,432 leavers in employment who responded to this question provided an average of three reasons for undertaking their course. The four most popular reasons cited were: 'I wanted to learn something / gain new skills' (52.0%); 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (50.7%); 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (49.8%); and 'I was interested in the subject' (48.2%) (Tables 6 and A9).

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' (25.7%); 'I wanted to learn something / gain new skills' (17.2%); or 'I was interested in the subject' (15.1%) (Tables 6 and A10).

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

Reason	Overall %	Most Important %
I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills	52.0	17.2
I thought it would improve my career prospects	50.7	25.7
I wanted to gain a qualification	49.8	13.4
I was interested in the subject	48.2	15.1
I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job	25.9	10.6
I wanted to go on to further / higher learning	22.8	6.6
It was at a time / place that suited me	15.5	0.7
I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence	12.8	0.6
I wanted greater job satisfaction	11.7	1.3
I wanted to increase my income	10.9	1.4
I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer	10.2	4.2
I didn't have to pay for it	8.5	0.4
Other	2.9	2.6

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

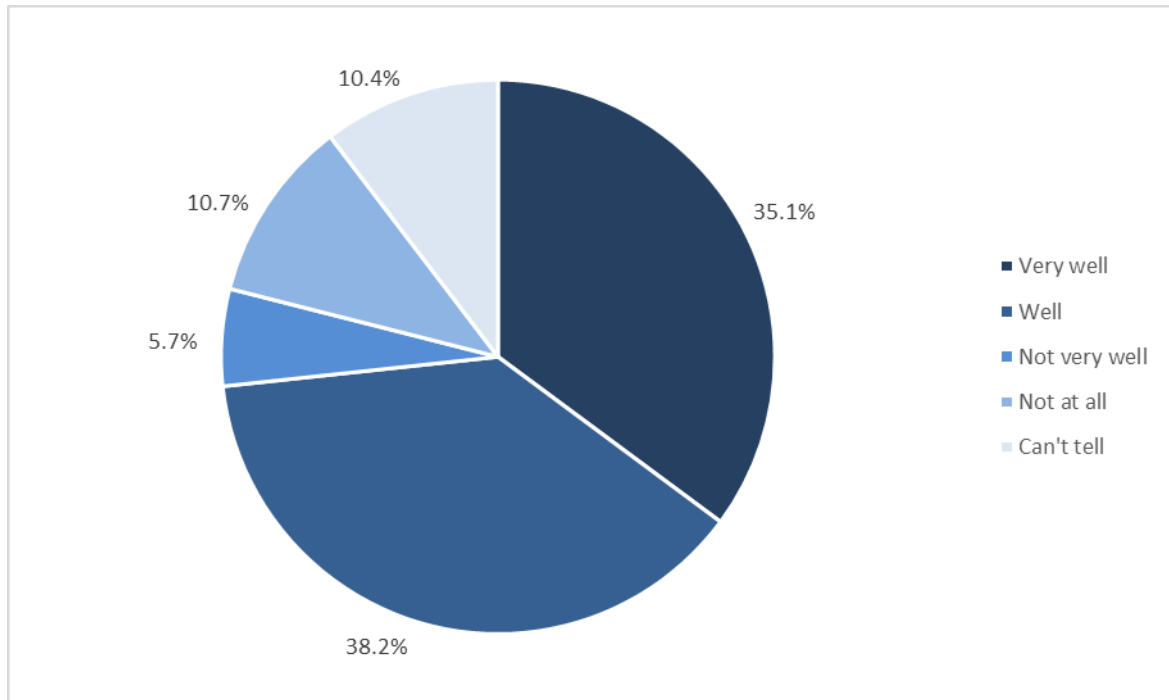
n = 2,432

Note: 1 invalid response was excluded.

### Using skills and knowledge acquired in course

Over five-sevenths (73.3%) 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 2019/20 had prepared them well for employment; in particular, 35.1% said 'very well' (**Chart 1** and **Table A28**).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n = 2,176

Note: 257 invalid responses were excluded.

### Subject area

The two largest subject areas accounted for over one-third (34.1%) of the FE College leavers in employment: Preparation for Life and Work (17.9%) and Health, public services and care (16.3%) (**Table A29**).

### Employment type

Over three-fifths (62.1%) of the FE College leavers who were in employment six months after their course were working full-time; a further 20.5% were working in one or more part-time jobs, while 10.9% were primarily working but also studying (**Table A19**); this is equivalent to 67.7% working full-time and 25.7% working part-time. Of the FE College leavers in employment after their course 2.9% said they were furloughed from their job.

According to the Labour Force Survey in the spring of 2021, when the survey fieldwork took place, over three-quarters of the 16+ population in employment (76.1%) were working full-time.<sup>3</sup>

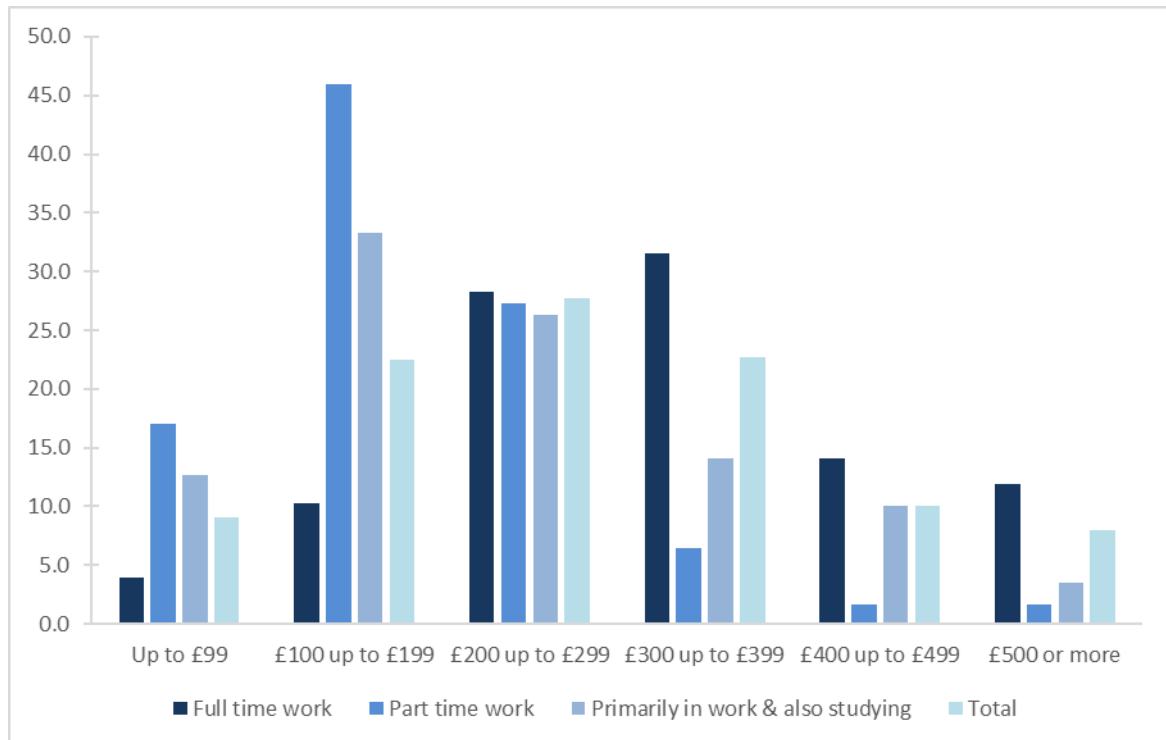
<sup>3</sup> Northern Ireland. NISRA. (2021). *Labour Force Survey Monthly Tables September 2021*. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/labour-force-survey-tables-september-2021> (Accessed 27 September 2021)

## Salary

The median weekly salary band for all FE College leavers in employment was £200 up to £299.

For leavers in full-time employment, 42.4% were earning less than £300 per week; for those in part-time employment, the proportion was 90.3%. A further 31.6% of leavers in full-time employment were earning between £300 and £399 per week, in contrast to 6.5% of those in part-time employment (**Figure 11** and **Table A23**).

**Figure 11: FE College leavers in employment by employment type: pay bands**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20.

n = 1,643

Note: 790 invalid responses were excluded.

Males (26.2%) were more than twice as likely as females (9.9%) to be earning £400 or more per week (**Table A24**). Males report working an average of 38.5 hours a week, while females report working an average of 27 hours per week. 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 workers (the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) estimates that men work median 38.5 hours and women 33.2 hours)<sup>4</sup>.

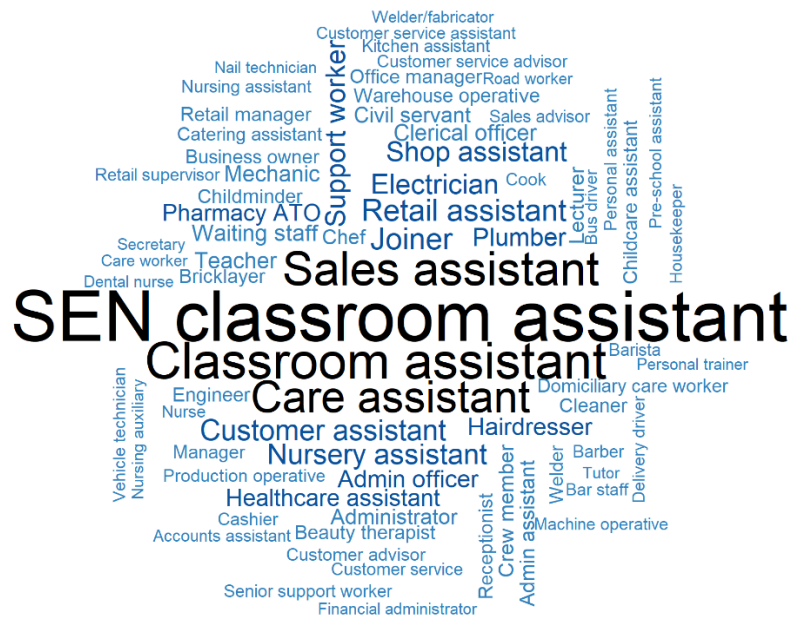
<sup>4</sup> Northern Ireland. NISRA. (2020). *Northern Ireland Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings*. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/labour-market-and-social-welfare/annual-survey-hours-and-earnings> (Accessed: 27 August 2021)



Putting these figures into context, the ASHE<sup>4</sup> median full-time gross weekly pay in NI for April 2020 was £529 (£539 males, £515 female), £201 part-time (£188 male, £206 female), although it should be noted that the age distribution of FE College leavers is much younger, and the typical skills level of those taking part in the survey is lower than that of the overall working population.

Further analysis from ASHE indicates that full-time median weekly pay at skill level 2 (£346)<sup>5</sup> is comparable within the median salary range for FE College leavers. In addition, analysis of occupations reported by FE College leavers (**Figures 12** and **13**) shows the majority of the leavers are employed in jobs and occupations associated with skill level 2 and below.

**Figure 12: FE College leavers in employment: job titles**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20.  
 n = 2,181  
 Note: 252 invalid responses were excluded.

<sup>5</sup> SOC2020 classifies jobs into groups according to the concept of ‘skill level’ and ‘skill specialisation’. Skill level 2 “covers a large group of occupations, all of which require the knowledge provided via a good general education.....Occupations classified at this level include machine operation, driving, caring occupations, retailing and clerical and secretarial occupations”.

**Occupation**

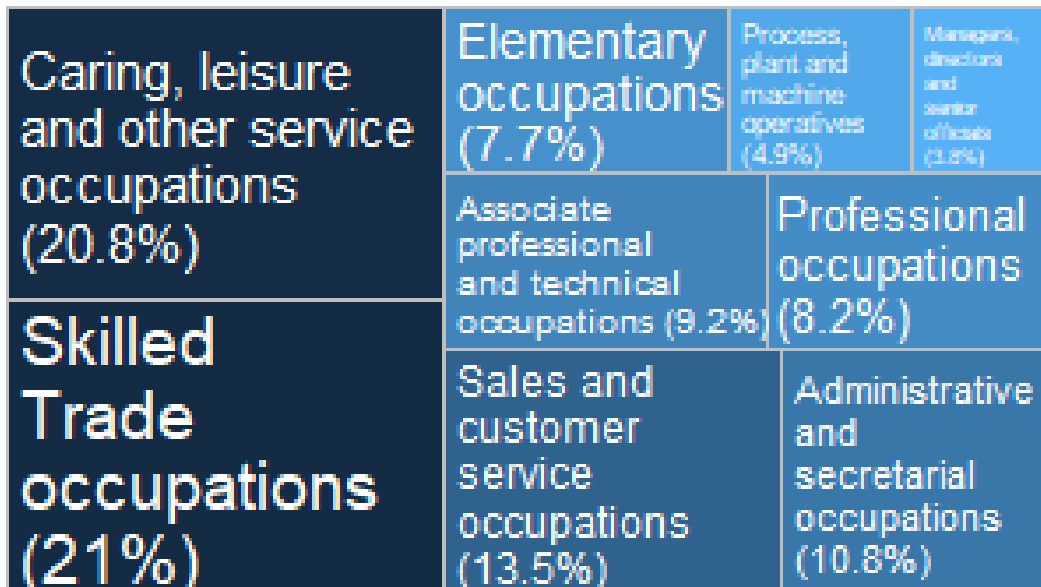
Most of the FE College leavers in employment had jobs classified as: Skilled Trade (21.0%); Caring, leisure and other service occupations (20.8%); or Sales and customer service occupations (13.5%) (Figure 13 and Table A21).

Similarly, according to ONS<sup>6</sup> 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 63.0% of respondents are employed in one of these four occupation types.

**Figure 13: FE College leavers in employment: Occupation**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20.

n = 2,181

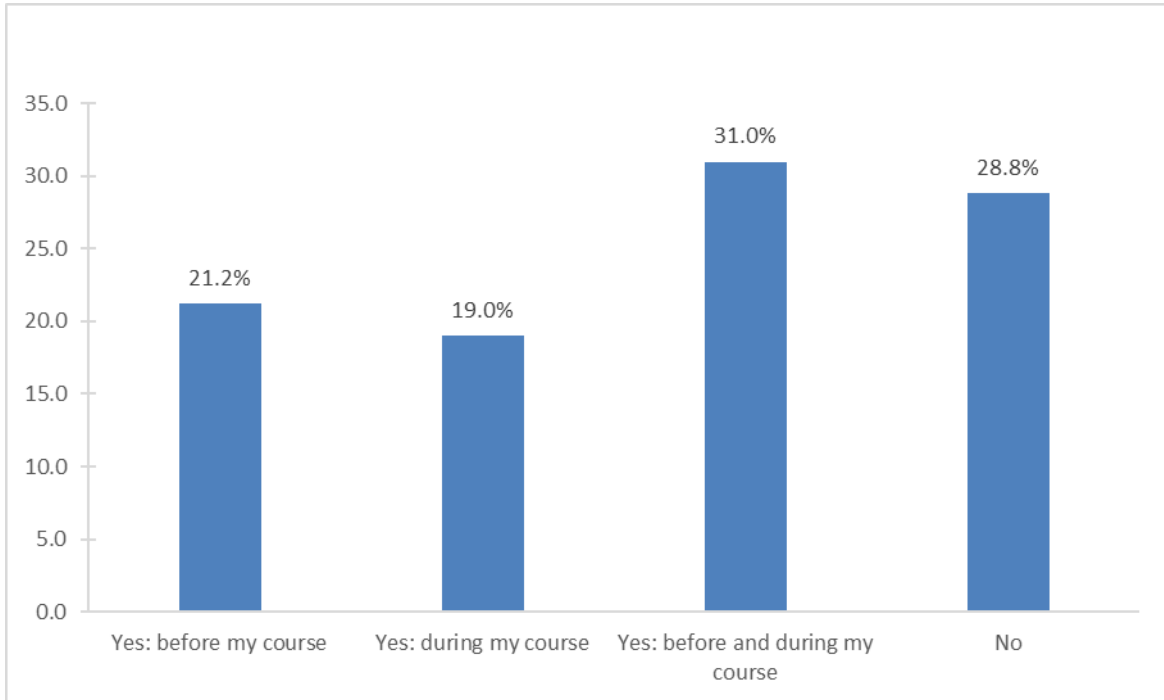
Note: 252 invalid responses were excluded.

<sup>6</sup> 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: 27 August 2021).

**Employed before and after with the same employer**

Of those in **paid employment before and after** completing their course, seven-tenths (71.2%) had worked for their employer before and/or during their 2019/20 course (**Figure 14** and **Table A27**).

**Figure 14: FE College leavers in employment: Did you work for this employer before or during your course?**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

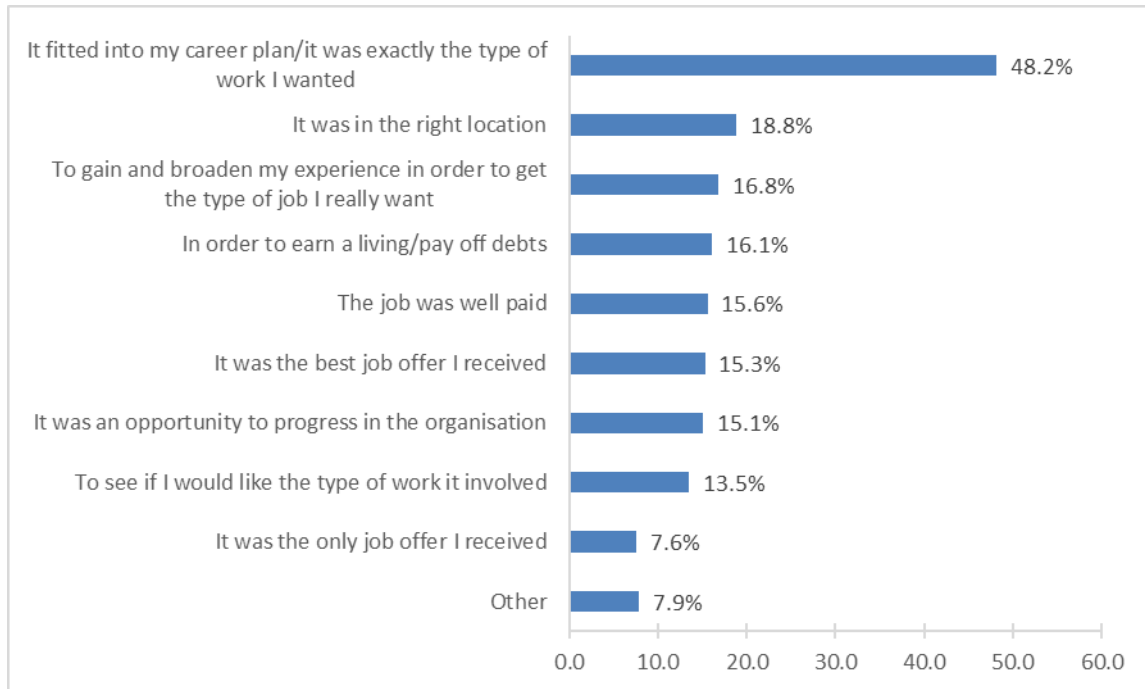
n = 2,183

Note: 250 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' (48.2%); 'It was in the right location' (18.8%); and 'To gain and broaden my experience in order to get the type of job I really want' (16.8%) (Figure 15 and Table A26).

**Figure 15: FE College leavers in employment: Why did you decide to take this job?**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n =2,210

Note: 223 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 (95.0%); 4.2% were working in the Republic of Ireland, 0.5% in England, Scotland or Wales, and 0.3% overseas (Tables 7 and A25).

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

Country	%
Northern Ireland	95.0
Republic of Ireland	4.2
Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales)	0.5
Overseas	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,204</b>

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n = 2,204

Note: 229 invalid responses were excluded.

## Overall Educational Experience

**Table 8** provides an overview of the overall education experience reported by FE College leavers in employment. Three-fifths (59.4%) of respondents agreed that, were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Over three-sevenths (45.8%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while 46.9% would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and less than one-quarter (23.5%) would do something completely different (**Tables A42 to A49**).

**Table 8: FE College leavers in employment: overall educational experience**

Response	If you were to do your course again, how likely or unlikely is it that you would...			
	Do a different subject (%)	Study at a different FE College (%)	Do a different kind of qualification (%)	Do something completely different (%)
Very likely	23.7	9.9	13.2	10.0
Likely	17.1	9.6	19.3	13.5
Not very likely	20.9	25.1	22.2	23.2
Not likely at all	24.9	34.4	24.7	31.6
Don't know	13.3	21.1	20.6	21.7
<b>Total (n)</b>	<b>2,170</b>	<b>2,153</b>	<b>2,156</b>	<b>2,149</b>

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

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

### 3.3 FE College Leavers in Learning

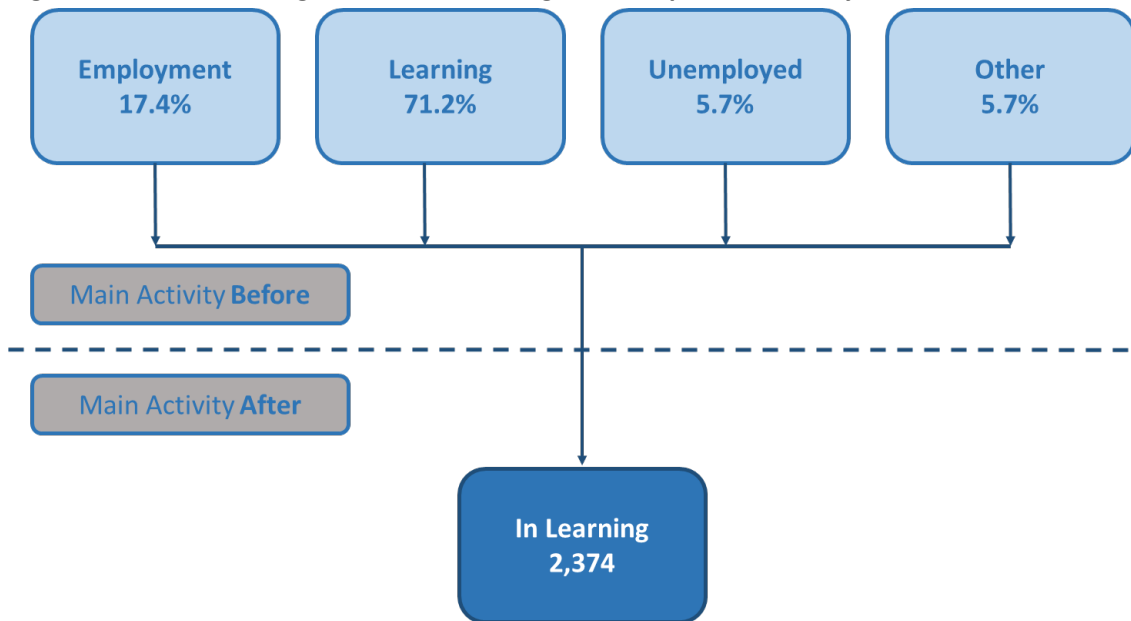
This section presents findings for FE College leavers in learning six months after their 2019/20 course, including those in full-time study, part-time study or primarily studying but also in work. It contains an overview of: their main activities before the course; their learning progression; how they 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:

- 17.4% had previously been in employment
- 71.2% had previously been in learning
- 5.7% had previously been unemployed
- 5.7% had previously been categorised as other (Figure 16 and Table A14).

Figure 16: FE College leavers in learning: most important activity before



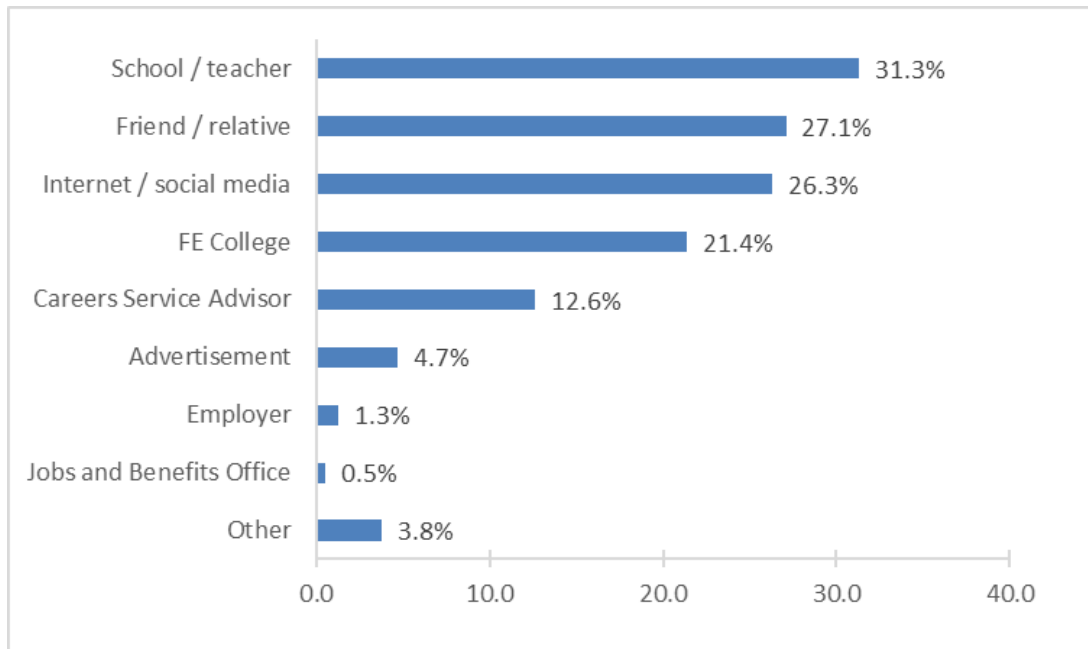
Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

Note: 1 invalid response was 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 (31.3%); Friend / relative (27.1%); Internet / social media (26.3%) or FE College (21.4%). 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 (31.3% vs 23.0%) (Figure 17 and Table A4).

**Figure 17: FE College leavers in Learning: how individuals had heard about their course**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20  
 n = 2,375

### Main reasons for undertaking the completed course

The 2,375 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 wanted to gain a qualification' (56.3%); 'I was interested in the subject' (56.1%); 'I wanted to go on to further / higher learning' (52.6%); and 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (48.8%) (**Tables 9 and A9**).

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' (27.4%); 'I was interested in the subject' (19.3%); or 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (18.6%) (**Tables 9 and A10**).

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

Reason	Overall %	Most Important %
I wanted to gain a qualification	56.3	14.5
I was interested in the subject	56.1	19.3
I wanted to go on to further / higher learning	52.6	27.4
I thought it would improve my career prospects	48.8	18.6
I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills	39.4	11.3
I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence	20.9	1.7
It was at a time / place that suited me	15.4	0.8
I wanted greater job satisfaction	9.0	0.9
I didn't have to pay for it	8.7	0.5
I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job	6.4	1.1
I wanted to increase my income	5.4	0.4
I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer	2.3	0.5
Other	3.3	3.0

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20  
n = 2,375

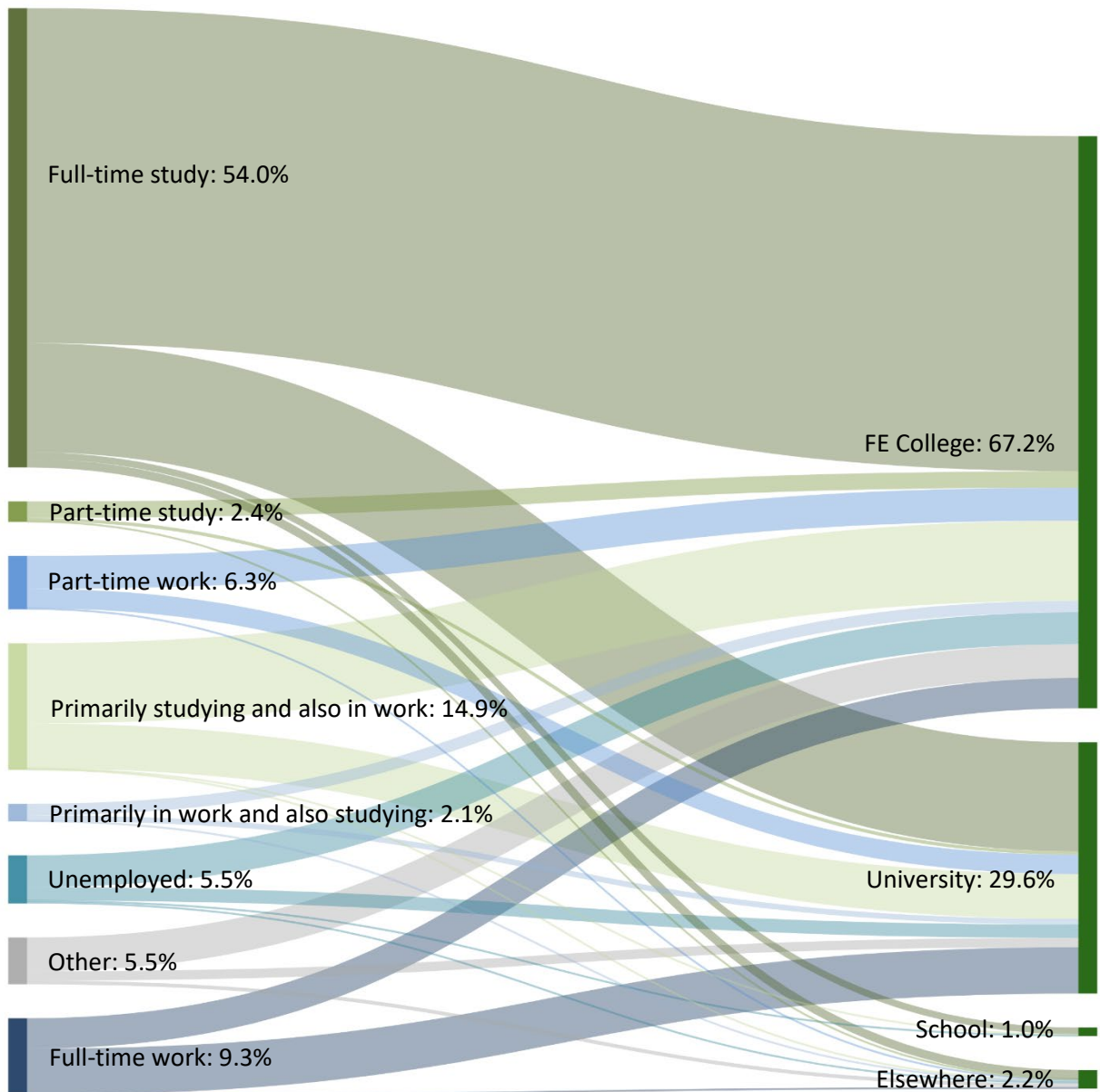
### Learning progression

More than seven-tenths (71.2%) of the FE College leavers in learning six months after their course had also been in learning before their course (**Figure 16 and Table A14**).

As illustrated in the Sankey Diagram overleaf (**Figure 18**), six months after completing and achieving their course, most FE College leavers in learning were continuing their learning at FE Colleges (67.2%), while one-third (29.6%) had started university (**Table A34**).



**Figure 18: FE College leavers in learning after course: main activity before course and location of additional learning**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n=2,333

Note: 42 invalid responses were excluded.

### Studying at a higher level

More than four-fifths (81.5%) of FE College leavers in learning said their additional learning is at a higher level than the course they had completed in 2019/20 (**Table A33**).

Of the FE College leavers in learning who had been in full-time study before their 2019/20 course, the majority of each group have progressed to additional learning at a higher level after their course (**Tables 10 and A36**).

Of the 2,375 respondents undertaking additional learning, over nine-tenths (91.9%) had completed a course at Level 2 or 3 (**Table A33**).

**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	Other		
Only studying (either full-time or part-time)	23.4%	73.2%	1.9%	<b>1,234</b>	<b>79.0%</b>
Primarily studying but also in work	35.5%	63.3%	0.6%	<b>359</b>	<b>81.9%</b>

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20.

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

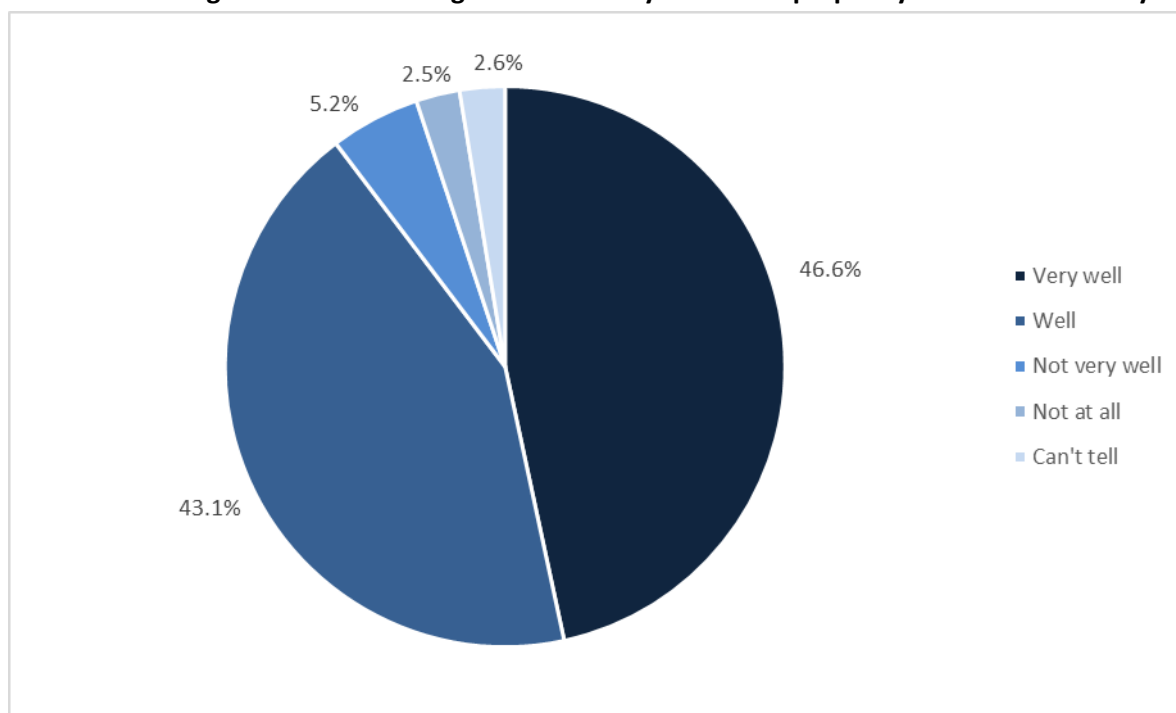
### Studying at the same level

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 2019/20 (**Table A33**).

## Using skills and knowledge acquired in course

Almost nine-tenths (89.7%) of FE College leavers in learning stated the course they had undertaken during 2019/20 had prepared them well for further study; in particular, 46.6% said 'very well' (Chart 2 and Table A37).

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



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

*n* = 2,332

Note: 43 invalid responses were excluded.

## Overall Educational Experience

**Table 11** provides an overview of the overall education experience reported by FE College leavers in learning. Over seven-tenths (72.0%) of respondents agreed that, were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Nearly three-fifths (58.3%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while less than two-thirds (62.7%) would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and 12.1% would do something completely different (Tables A42 to A49).

**Table 11: FE College leavers in learning: overall educational experience**

Response	If you were to do your course again, how likely or unlikely is it that you would...			
	Do a different subject (%)	Study at a different FE College (%)	Do a different kind of qualification (%)	Do something completely different (%)
Very likely	14.2	5.4	5.1	4.3
Likely	13.8	7.1	11.7	7.8
Not very likely	24.8	28.1	27.5	24.2
Not likely at all	33.5	43.9	35.2	45.3
Don't know	13.6	15.4	20.5	18.4
<b>Total (n)</b>	<b>2,313</b>	<b>2,309</b>	<b>2,309</b>	<b>2,307</b>

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

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

### 3.4 Unemployed FE College Leavers

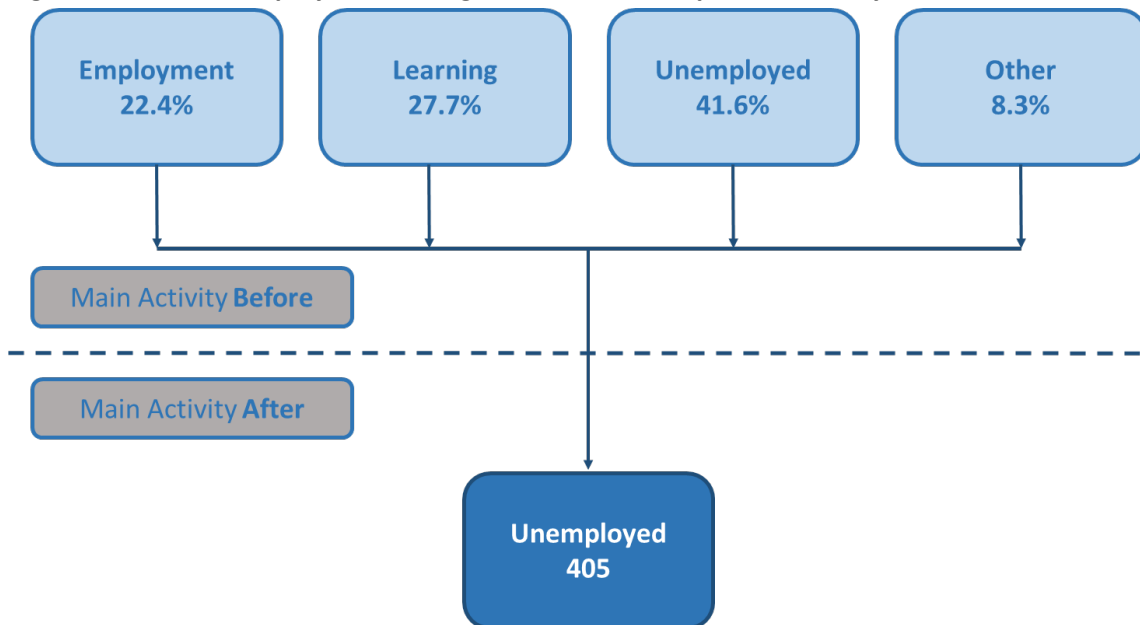
This section presents findings for FE College leavers who were unemployed and looking for work six months after their course, including: an overview of their main activities before the course; how long they have been unemployed; how they had heard about the course; and the main reasons for taking the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

#### Overview of main activity before the course

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

- 22.4% had previously been in employment
- 27.7% had previously been in learning
- 41.6% had previously been unemployed
- 8.3% had previously been categorised as other (Figure 19 and Table A14).

**Figure 19: Unemployed FE College leavers: most important activity before**



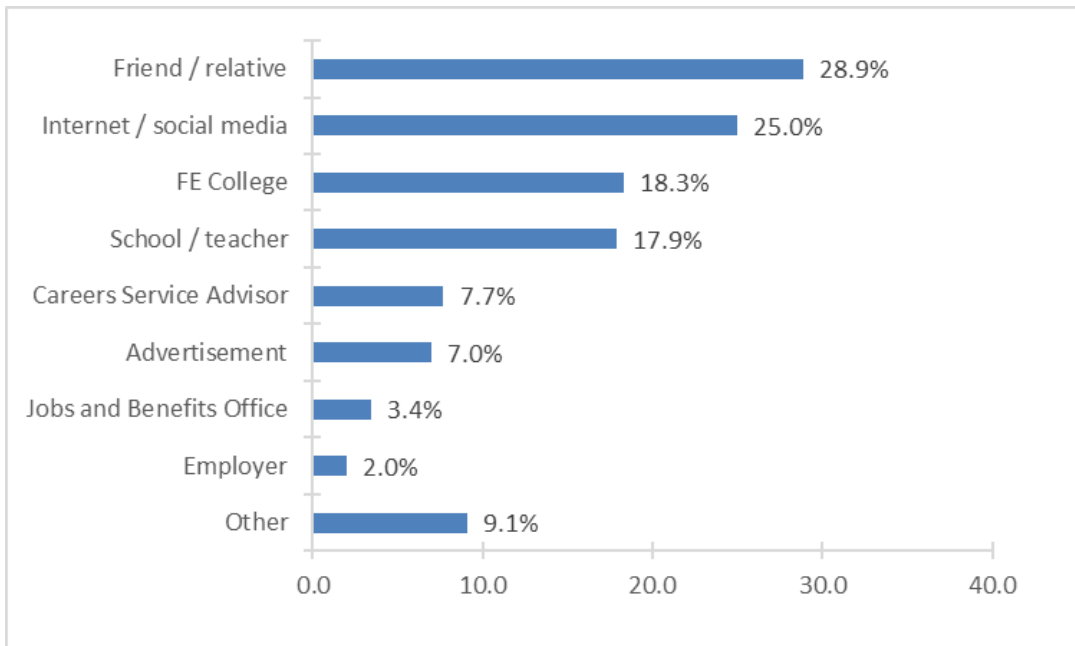
Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

Note: 1 invalid response was excluded.

**How did individuals hear about their course?**

Unemployed FE College Leavers were most likely to have heard about their course through: Friend / relative (28.9%); Internet / social media (25.0%); FE College (18.3%); or School / teacher (17.9%). These top four reasons were also the most popular among all FE College leavers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, unemployed leavers were at least twice as likely to mention having heard about their course from a Jobs and benefits office (**Figure 20** and **Table A4**).

**Figure 20: Unemployed FE College leavers: how individuals had heard about their course**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20  
 n = 406

### Main reasons for undertaking the course

The 406 unemployed leavers who responded to this question provided an average of three reasons for completing their course. The four most popular reasons cited were: 'I wanted to learn something / gain new skills' (54.1%); 'I was interested in the subject' (50.9%); 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (48.1%); and 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (45.5%) (Tables 12 and A9).

When asked to give the most important reason for undertaking their course, unemployed leavers were most likely to say: 'I wanted to learn something / gain new skills' (24.8%); 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (20.2%); or 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (17.3%) (Tables 12 and A10).

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

Reason	Overall %	Most Important %
I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills	54.1	24.8
I was interested in the subject	50.9	15.9
I wanted to gain a qualification	48.1	17.3
I thought it would improve my career prospects	45.5	20.2
I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence	28.5	4.2
I wanted to go on to further / higher learning	23.8	7.8
It was at a time / place that suited me	17.2	1.6
I didn't have to pay for it	11.8	1.2
I wanted greater job satisfaction	8.5	1.1
I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job	5.5	1.3
I wanted to increase my income	4.8	0.4
I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer	2.3	0.7
Other	4.2	3.3

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20  
n = 406

## Subject area

The three largest subject areas account for over half (63.0%) of unemployed FE College leavers: Preparation for life and work (36.0%); Retail and commercial enterprise (14.7%); and Health, public services and care (12.4%) (**Tables 13** and **A41**).

**Table 13: Unemployed FE College leavers: subject area studied**

Subject Area	% of All Subjects
Preparation for life and work	36.0
Retail and commercial enterprise	14.7
Health, public services and care	12.4
Information and communication technology	9.0
Arts, media and publishing	6.3
Business, administration and law	4.9
Leisure, travel and tourism	3.0
Science and mathematics	3.0
Languages, literature and culture	2.9
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	2.8
Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	2.1
Social sciences	1.0
Construction, planning and the built environment	1.0
Education and training	0.6
History, philosophy and theology	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20.

n = 406

## Level of study

One-sixth of those who had studied at Entry Level or Level 1 were unemployed (15.6%), in contrast to 8.5% of those who had studied at Level 2 and 4.7% of those at Level 3 (**Figure 6**).

## Any employment after course?

One-fifth (20.8%) of the unemployed FE College leavers said they had had some employment in the six months since completing their course (**Table A38**).

## Long-term unemployment?

Over two-fifths (41.6%) of those unemployed after their course had also been unemployed before their course. Of these, two-thirds (66.0%) were aged 25 years and over and four-fifths (82.7%) had studied their course at Level 2 or below (**Tables A40b** and **A40c**).

## Not unemployed before the course

The largest group of leavers to move into unemployment had previously been in learning (27.7%), while over one-fifth (22.4%) had been in employment (**Figure 19**).

## Overall Educational Experience

**Table 14** provides an overview of the overall education experience reported by unemployed FE College leavers. Three-fifths (60.0%) of leavers agreed that were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Two-fifths (40.8%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while four-tenths (39.9%) would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and over one-third (33.9%) would do something completely different (**Tables A42 to A49**).

**Table 14: Unemployed FE College leavers: overall educational experience**

Response	If you were to do your course again, how likely or unlikely is it that you would...			
	Do a different subject (%)	Study at a different FE College (%)	Do a different kind of qualification (%)	Do something completely different (%)
Very likely	24.0	10.2	17.7	16.8
Likely	20.1	6.8	19.6	17.1
Not very likely	21.0	27.6	17.9	17.4
Not likely at all	19.8	32.4	22.0	22.7
Don't know	15.1	23.0	22.8	26.0
<b>Total (n)</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>391</b>

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

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



### 3.5 Other FE College Leavers

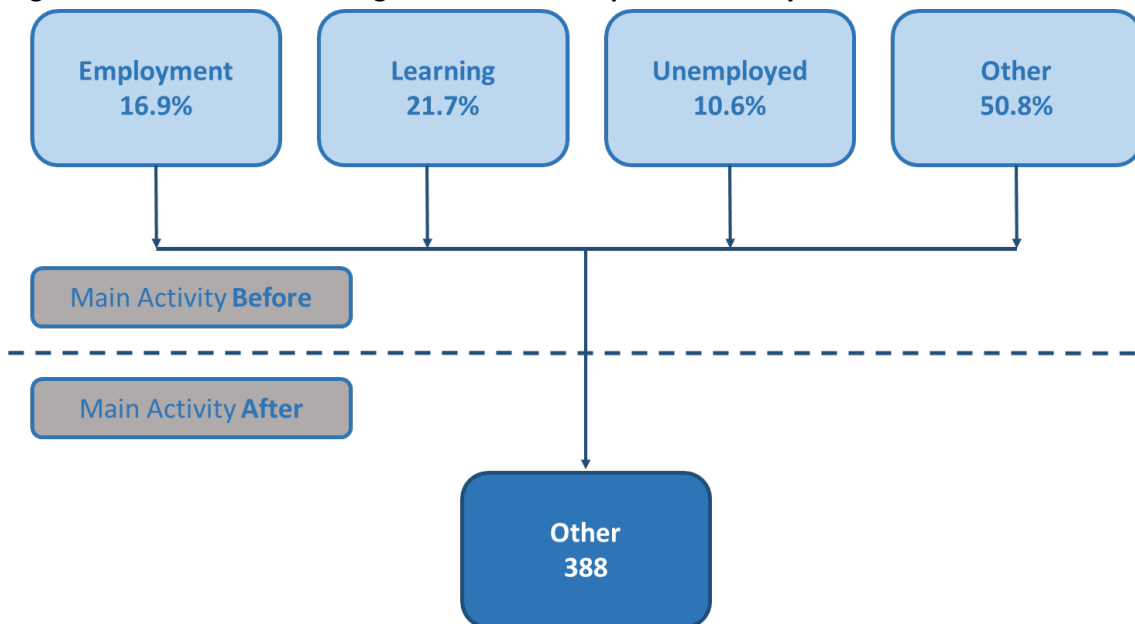
This section presents findings for FE College leavers who were engaged in other activities six months after their course. This includes respondents who were retired, those with caring responsibilities or a long-term illness, or those who were taking time out to travel. Included in this section is an overview of their main activities before the course; how they had heard about the course; and the main reasons for taking the course.

#### Overview of main activity before the course

Of the FE College leavers who were engaged in other activities six months after achieving a regulated qualification:

- 16.9% had previously been in employment
- 21.7% had previously been in learning
- 10.6% had previously been unemployed
- 50.8% had previously been categorised as other (**Figure 21** and **Table A14**).

**Figure 21: Other FE College leavers: most important activity before**



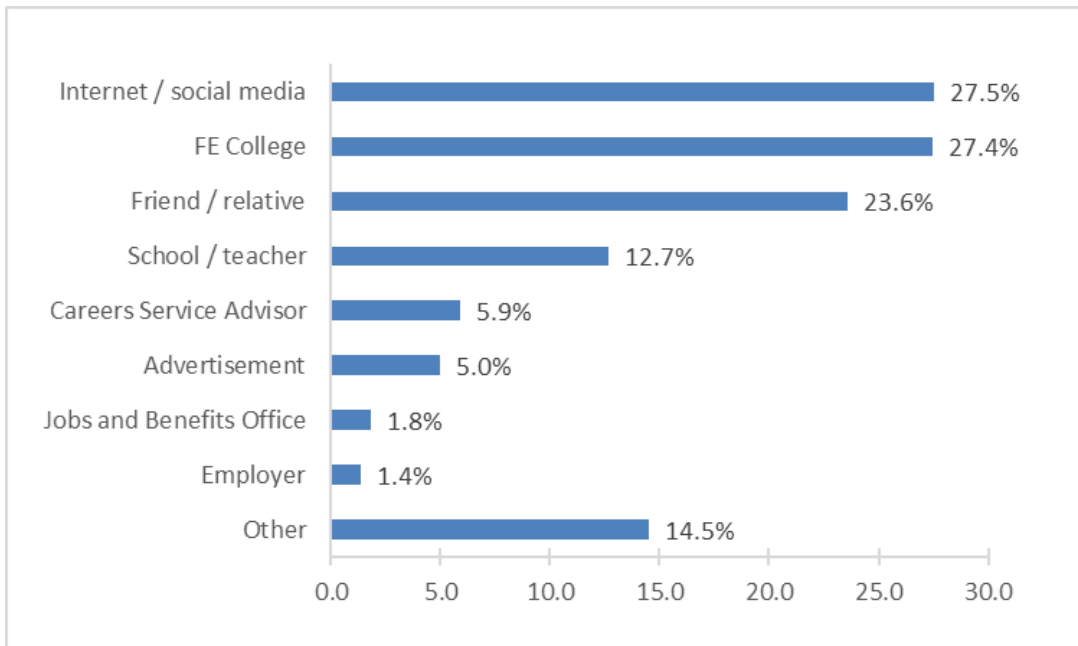
Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

Note: 2 invalid responses were excluded.

**How did individuals hear about their course?**

FE College Leavers categorised as other were most likely to have heard about their course through: Internet / social media (27.5%); FE College (27.4%); Friend / relative (23.6%); or School / teacher (12.7%). While the same four response categories were also most popular among all FE College leavers, those categorized as undertaking other activities were more likely than all leavers to mention some of these information sources, in particular FE College (27.4% vs 19.7%) (**Figure 22** and **Table A4**).

**Figure 22: Other FE College leavers: how individuals had heard about their course**



Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20  
n = 390

### Main reasons for undertaking the course

The 389 leavers who were classified as other and responded to this question provided an average of three reasons for completing their course. The four most popular reasons cited were: 'I was interested in the subject' (57.5%); 'I wanted to learn something / gain new skills' (53.4%); 'I wanted to gain a qualification' (42.7%); and 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (33.5%) (Tables 15 and A9).

When asked to give the most important reason for undertaking their course, leavers who were classified as other were most likely to say: 'I wanted to learn something / gain new skills' (22.5%); 'I was interested in the subject' (21.3%); or 'I thought it would improve my career prospects' (17.2%) (Tables 15 and A10).

**Table 15: Other FE College leavers: main reasons for undertaking course**

Reason	Overall %	Most Important %
I was interested in the subject	57.5	21.3
I wanted to learn something new / gain new skills	53.4	22.5
I wanted to gain a qualification	42.7	14.4
I thought it would improve my career prospects	33.5	17.2
It was at a time / place that suited me	24.8	1.0
I wanted to meet new people and build my self-confidence	24.4	4.3
I wanted to go on to further / higher learning	20.7	8.7
I didn't have to pay for it	9.7	1.3
I wanted to improve my ability to do my current job	5.8	1.9
I wanted greater job satisfaction	5.7	1.0
I wanted to increase my income	3.5	0.7
I was encouraged / required to do so by my employer	1.3	0.2
Other	5.5	5.4

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

n = 389

Note: 1 invalid responses were excluded.

## Overall Educational Experience

**Table 16** provides an overview of the overall education experience reported by FE College leavers who were categorised as other. Around seven-tenths (69.3%) of leavers agreed that were they to do their course again, they would be unlikely to study at a different FE College. Five-ninths (55.9%) said they would be unlikely to study a different subject, while a similar proportion (55.2%) would be unlikely to do a different kind of qualification, and one-fifth (19.1%) would do something completely different (**Tables A42 to A49**).

**Table 16: FE College leavers categorised as other: overall educational experience**

Response	If you were to do your course again, how likely or unlikely is it that you would...			
	Do a different subject (%)	Study at a different FE College (%)	Do a different kind of qualification (%)	Do something completely different (%)
Very likely	16.6	5.7	9.2	8.4
Likely	13.9	7.8	15.0	10.7
Not very likely	23.5	25.4	22.8	25.9
Not likely at all	32.4	44.0	32.4	35.1
Don't know	13.7	17.2	20.6	19.9
<b>Total (n)</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>372</b>

Source: Survey of FE College Leavers 2019/20

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

## Annex A - Commonly used terms and abbreviations

<b>Academic year:</b>	1st August to 31st July.
<b>Course:</b>	A course leading to a regulated qualification at Level 3 or below.
<b>ESOL:</b>	An ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) course is for students who want to improve their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills and for whom English is not their first language. Further information can be found on the <a href="#">ESOL page of the NI Direct Website</a> .
<b>Further Education sector:</b>	The six FE Colleges in NI:  Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC); Northern Regional College (NRC); North West Regional College (NWRC); South Eastern Regional College (SERC); Southern Regional College (SRC); and South West College (SWC).
<b>Leavers:</b>	FE College leavers who completed and achieved a regulated qualification at Level 3 or below during the 2019/20 academic year.
<b>Leavers in employment:</b>	This includes: working in paid employment; self-employed; and waiting to start a confirmed job.
<b>Leavers in learning:</b>	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.
<b>Leavers unemployed:</b>	This includes FE College leavers who were unemployed and looking for work.
<b>Leavers classed as other:</b>	This includes any FE College leavers not included in employment, learning or unemployed.
<b>Main activity:</b>	Respondents were asked to select the activity they spent the majority of their time doing both before and after their course. See <b>Table 3</b> .
<b>Main activity group:</b>	The 7 main activities (above) are grouped into four main activity groups: employment; learning; unemployed; and other. See <b>Table 4</b> .
<b>Qualification level:</b>	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 GOV.UK <a href="#">what different qualifications levels mean webpage</a> .

<b>Occupation:</b>	The classification of respondents' occupations is based on the SOC2020 (Standard Occupational Classification) codes adopted since 2021, further information on SOC2020 classification can be found on the ONS website: <a href="#">SOC2020</a> .
<b>Regulated Qualification:</b>	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.
<b>SLDD:</b>	Special Learning Difficulties and Disabilities courses, which require specialised teaching, which is taught in a reduced class size or in a day centre.
<b>Sector Subject Area:</b>	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. Further information can be found on the <a href="#">OFQUAL help page on comparing qualifications</a> .
<b>ULN:</b>	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 2019/20 academic year and you completed the course [insert course title].

ASK ALL

### SECTION A: What were you doing before your 2019/20 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 and 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 and 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 and 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 2019/20 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?

<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Annually</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Up to £99	<input type="checkbox"/> Up to £432	<input type="checkbox"/> Up to £5,199
<input type="checkbox"/> £100 up to £199	<input type="checkbox"/> £433 up to £866	<input type="checkbox"/> £5,200 up to £10,399
<input type="checkbox"/> £200 up to £299	<input type="checkbox"/> £867 up to £1,299	<input type="checkbox"/> £10,400 up to £15,599
<input type="checkbox"/> £300 up to £399	<input type="checkbox"/> £1,300 up to £1,732	<input type="checkbox"/> £15,600 up to £20,799
<input type="checkbox"/> £400 up to £499	<input type="checkbox"/> £1,733 up to £2,166	<input type="checkbox"/> £20,800 up to £25,999
<input type="checkbox"/> £500 or more	<input type="checkbox"/> £2,167 or more	<input type="checkbox"/> £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 2019/20 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
- Furloughed

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
- Furloughed

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

**SECTION E: Your employment after your 2019/20 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 2019/20?

- 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