



**The changing roles of colleges in Scottish society  
and the economy**

**A short briefing paper for FE & Skills Seminar 4**

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## The changing roles of colleges in Scottish society and the economy

The roles which colleges have in Scottish society have been evolving over the past 50 years or more. Three main functions can now be identified.

- *Vocational education and training*, provided through part-time and full-time programmes. This was traditionally the main function of these colleges, but with changes in the economy, the occupational structure and tertiary education, other functions have become important.
- *Social inclusion* – colleges have become increasingly important as providers of general education, and in particular ‘second chances’ for both young people and adult students who have been less successful at school.
- *Higher education* accounts for a relatively high percentage of provision in Scotland’s Colleges – much higher than in England. This is provided mainly through HNC/Ds, and while it was originally mainly part-time for people in work, it is now mainly full-time and many students use it to progress to university degrees.

The sections which follow provide some data regarding the changing roles of the colleges, including patterns of participation and progression routes.

### 1 Changes in the profile of college students 2005-06 to 2016-17

- The number of students in Scotland’s Colleges has declined significantly over the last ten years – in particular there has been a 38% decline in the number of FE level students over this period (Table 1).
- The percentage of part-time students has been decreasing (Table 2).
- The age profile of students has also been changing following Scottish Government (SG) policy directives to prioritise younger students; older students (25 and over) declined in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the total (from 193,234 in 2005/06 to 96,722 in 2015/16). Recent SG guidance has encouraged greater interest in students over the age of 24.

**Table 1 Student numbers and percentages**

	2005-06		2016-17	
<b>HE</b>	47,514	13%	47,990	20%
<b>FE</b>	319,273	87%	197,391	80%
<b>Total</b>	366,787	100%	245,381	100%

Source: SFC Infact Database (student numbers)

**Table 2 Mode of attendance (percentages of students)**

	2005-06	2016-17
<b>Full-time</b>	20%	31%
<b>Part-time</b>	80%	69%

Source: SFC Infact Database (student numbers)

**Table 3 Age of students (percentages of students)**

	2005-06	2016-17
<b>17 &amp; under</b>	23%	26%
<b>18-24</b>	21%	32%
<b>25 &amp; over</b>	55%	42%

Source: SFC Infact Database (student numbers)

## 2 Socio-economic characteristics of College students

- Colleges have become increasingly important in providing opportunities for students from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds

**Table 4 Proportion of Scottish domiciled college entrants from the most deprived quintile by mode and level 2002-03 & 2015-16**

	HE		FE	
	2002-03	2015-16	2002-03	2015-16
<b>Full-time</b>	25%	28%	29%	34%
<b>Part-time</b>	18%	20%	24%	30%

Source: SFC Report on Widening Access 2015-16

- By contrast in 2015-16 the proportion of entrants to full-time first degrees in universities from the most deprived quintile was 14.8%

## 3 Qualifications for which students are registered

- HE level students make up a relatively high percentage of the all college students - 20% in Scotland compares with about 7% in England.
- The relative continuing importance of HNC/Ds in Scotland, with 14% of all HE level students in Scotland's Colleges, can be compared with the relative decline of these qualifications in England and the greater emphasis there on bachelor degrees and foundation degrees.
- Non advanced SVQs (and a small number of NVQs) account for 7% of all students.
- While there now over 26,000 starts on apprenticeship programmes in Scotland, just under 8% of all starts were delivered through direct contracts with colleges. Sub-contracting of part of the of-the-job training to colleges may increase this figure to around 20%.
- Courses that do not lead to any recognised qualification continue to represent a significant number of students (22%).

## 4 The changing profile of HNC/D students

- The total number of HNC/D students has remained relatively stable over the past 10 years (Table 5).

- However, while the number of HND students has increased, the number of HNC students has declined; furthermore there has been a decline in the numbers of part-time students, particularly among those on HNCs (Table 6).
- This reflects a significant change in the role of HNC/Ds which has been going on for the past 20 years or more. They have been increasingly changing from part-time qualifications undertaken by those in work, to full-time qualifications, which many students now use to enable them to progress to further study, particularly to bachelor degrees in university.

**Table 5 Numbers and percentages of HNC & HND students**

	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
<b>HND</b>	16452 (45%)	19459 (52%)
<b>HNC</b>	20257 (55%)	17914 (48%)
<b>HND+HNC</b>	36709	37373

Source: SFC Infact Database

**Table 6 Percentages of full-time and part-time HNC/D students**

	<b>2005-06</b>		<b>2015-16</b>	
	FT	PT	FT	PT
<b>HND</b>	89%	11%	95%	5%
<b>HNC</b>	50%	50%	69%	31%
<b>HNC+HND</b>	68%	32%	84%	16%

Source: SFC Infact Database

## **5 Destinations of full-time qualifiers from Scotland's Colleges**

- The SFC College Leavers Destination reports published over the last three years have provided evidence that the majority of full-time qualifiers progress to further study or training, mainly within the college sector or by progressing to a university (Table 7).
- This is true for both FE and HE level students (Tables 8).
- The importance of progression routes within the colleges, from FE to HE, and from HNC to HND, as well as progression to university can be noted.

**Table 7 Destinations of Full-time College students 2016-17** (% of all qualifiers)

<b>Progression Route</b>	<b>FT qualifiers</b>
<b>F-t further study/training</b>	65%
<b>P-t further study/training</b>	2%
<b>Work</b>	18%
<b>Unemployed</b>	3%
<b>Not available for work</b>	1%
<b>Unconfirmed</b>	11%
<b>Total number</b>	50,298

SFC College Leavers Destinations 2016-17

**Table 8 Destination of full-time higher education 2016-17 (percentages of college qualifiers with confirmed destinations)**

<b>Progression Route</b>	<b>F-t HE qualifiers</b>	<b>F-t FE Qualifiers</b>
Further study/training	70%	78%
Employment	26%	17%
Unemployed	3%	4%
Unavailable for work	1%	2%
Total number	15,218	29,498

Source: SFC College Leavers Destinations 2016-17

- Table 9 provides additional information for the sub-group of students who actually left the college sector.

**Table 9 Destination of full-time college qualifiers leaving the college sector 2016-17 (percentages of those with confirmed destinations)**

<b>Progression Route</b>	<b>Full-time qualifiers who leave the college sector</b>
FE to university	7%
HE to university	35%
FE/HE into work	47%
Unemployed	8%
Unavailable for work	4%
Total number	19,001

Source: SFC College Leavers Destinations 2016-17

- Around 50% of students who articulate from an HNC/D to a university degree get full credit for their HNC/D. The others can take 5 or 6 years to complete a 4 year honours degree
- Most former HN students gain access to a Post '92 university, and a relatively small number gain access to the 'ancient' universities.

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