

## Medr statistics

### Further education, work-based learning and community learning, August 2023 to July 2024

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**Designation:** Official Statistics (see [change in accredited statistics status](#))  
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**Summary:** **Statistics on the number of learners, programmes and activities being taken at colleges, work-based learning providers and in local authority community learning.**

**Theme:** Further education, apprenticeships, community learning

**Source:** Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

## Summary

This report summarises some of the key trends in further education, and apprenticeships.

Local authority community learning statistics were removed from this release due to data quality issues. The issue has been investigated and corrected. The accompanying spreadsheet and StatsWales tables have now been updated with local authority community learning statistics. This report has been updated with the headline measures but does not include a detailed analysis.

Please see the Quality and methodology information for details.

### Main points

- There were 166,385 learners in further education, local authority community learning, apprenticeships or other work-based learning during the 2023/24 academic year (revised).
- Part-time learning numbers are recovering, after a long decline.
- The number of apprenticeships started fell by 5%, compared to the previous year.
- Level 3 apprenticeships are rising, foundation apprenticeships are falling, compared to the previous year.
- More learners are studying at least partly in Welsh.
- There has been an increase in Preparation for Life and Work activities.
- There has been an increase in the percentage of work-based learning taken by learners with ethnic minority backgrounds other than White.
- A levels are less likely to be taken by learners who had experience of deprivation during secondary school.

### Note

More detailed data can be found in the accompanying spreadsheet and [StatsWales tables](#). This includes information not in this report, such as:

- Home region
- Primary learning difficulty or disability
- Apprenticeship target measure
- Immediate destination after work-based learning
- Individual provider
- Highest level of qualification before starting
- Programme and activity level
- Activity guided learning hours
- Sub-sector subject area

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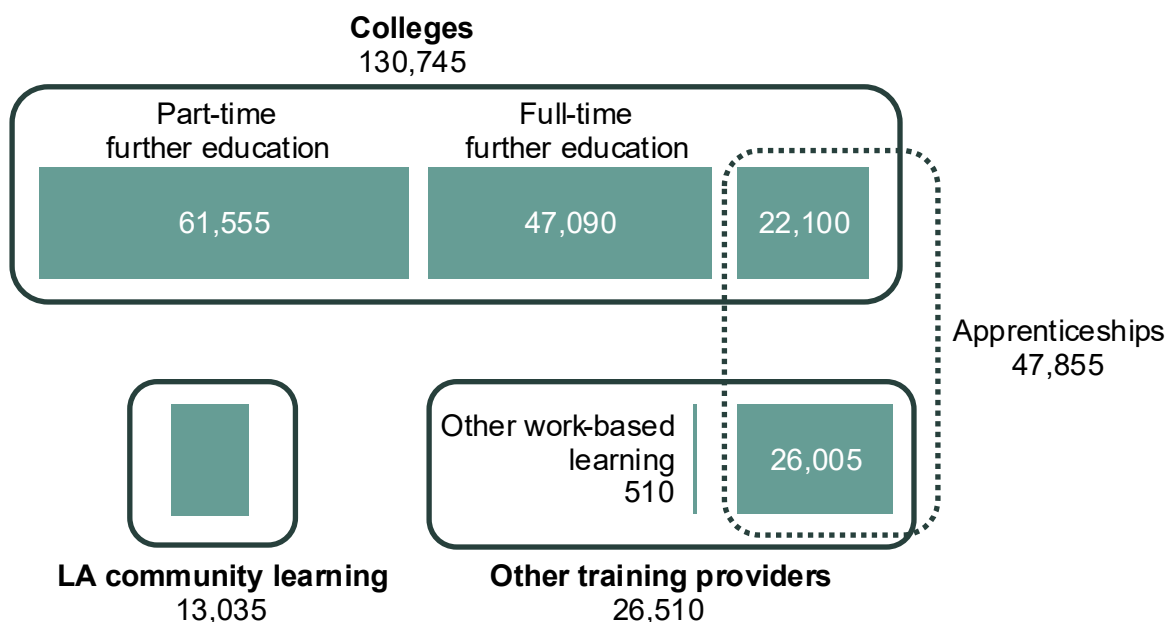
## Learners

There were 166,385 learners in further education, local authority community learning, apprenticeships or other work-based learning during the 2023/24 academic year (revised).

The statistics in this report do not include learners in school sixth forms or universities. Higher Education statistics will be published separately on [medr.cymru](https://medr.cymru).

### Learners by learning and provider type

Figure 1: August 2023 to July 2024 (revised)



Description: There were 130,745 learners in colleges. There were 47,855 apprentices, split between colleges and other training providers. There were 13,035 learners in local authority community learning.

[Note 1]: Some learners will have studied at multiple provider types.

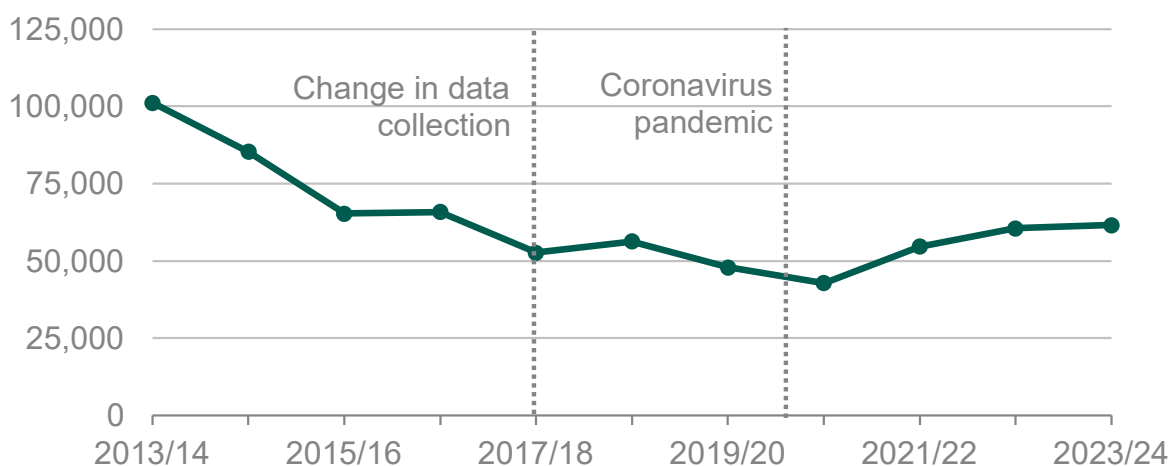
Data in Table 1.1 of the accompanying spreadsheet

Further education includes learners studying A levels and other general qualifications, as well as learners studying vocational qualifications (for example BTECs).

‘Other work-based learning’ is made up of transition qualifications for people who work with children in play or childcare settings.

## Part-time learning numbers are recovering, after a long decline

Figure 2: Part-time further education learners by mode of study and academic year, August 2013 to July 2024



Description: The number of learners in part-time further education was at its highest point in 7 years.

[Data on StatsWales](#)

The long-term decline in part-time further education was due to a reduction in funding. The pandemic further disrupted learning.

The increase in part-time learning has been driven by learners between the ages of 25 and 49.

The areas that saw large increases were Adult Basic Education, Preparation for Life and Work, and English for Speakers of Other Languages.

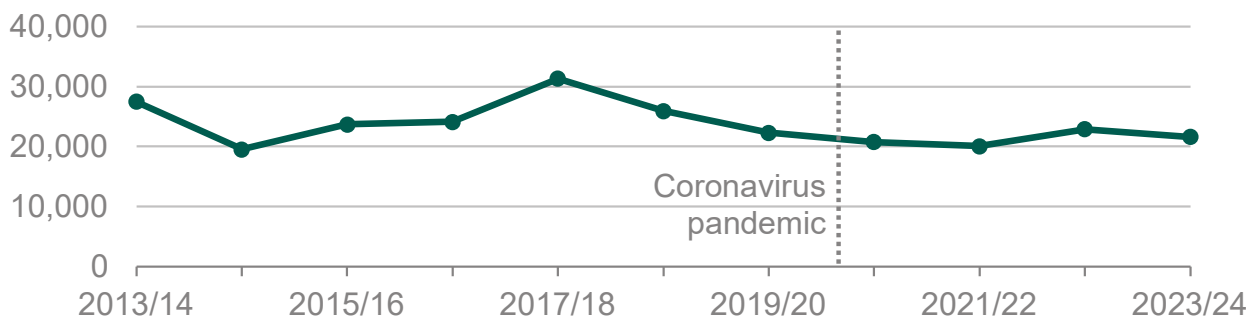
## Full-time further education remains steady

There were 1,815 more learners in full-time further education in 2023/24 than in the previous year.

The number of learners in full-time further education has stayed between 45,000 and 49,000 for the last decade.

### The number of apprenticeships started fell by 5%

Figure 3: Apprenticeships started by academic year, August 2013 to July 2024



Description: The number of apprenticeships started fell by a third between 2017/18 and 2021/22. There was a small recovery last year, but numbers dipped in 2023/24.

[Data on StatsWales](#)

Following the loss of European Social Fund contributions, the gross 2024/25 budget included a reduction in apprenticeship funding. Discussions with apprenticeship providers about the draft budget began in November 2023, which resulted in changes to the planning and delivery of apprenticeships from that point.

The fall in apprenticeships was associated with a reduction of apprenticeships in:

- Foundation and Higher apprenticeships
- Health, Care and Public Services
- Leisure, Sport and Travel
- Hospitality
- Manufacturing
- Middle size employers with 50 to 249 employees
- Private sector apprenticeships.

The drop was particularly prominent in learners with the following characteristics:

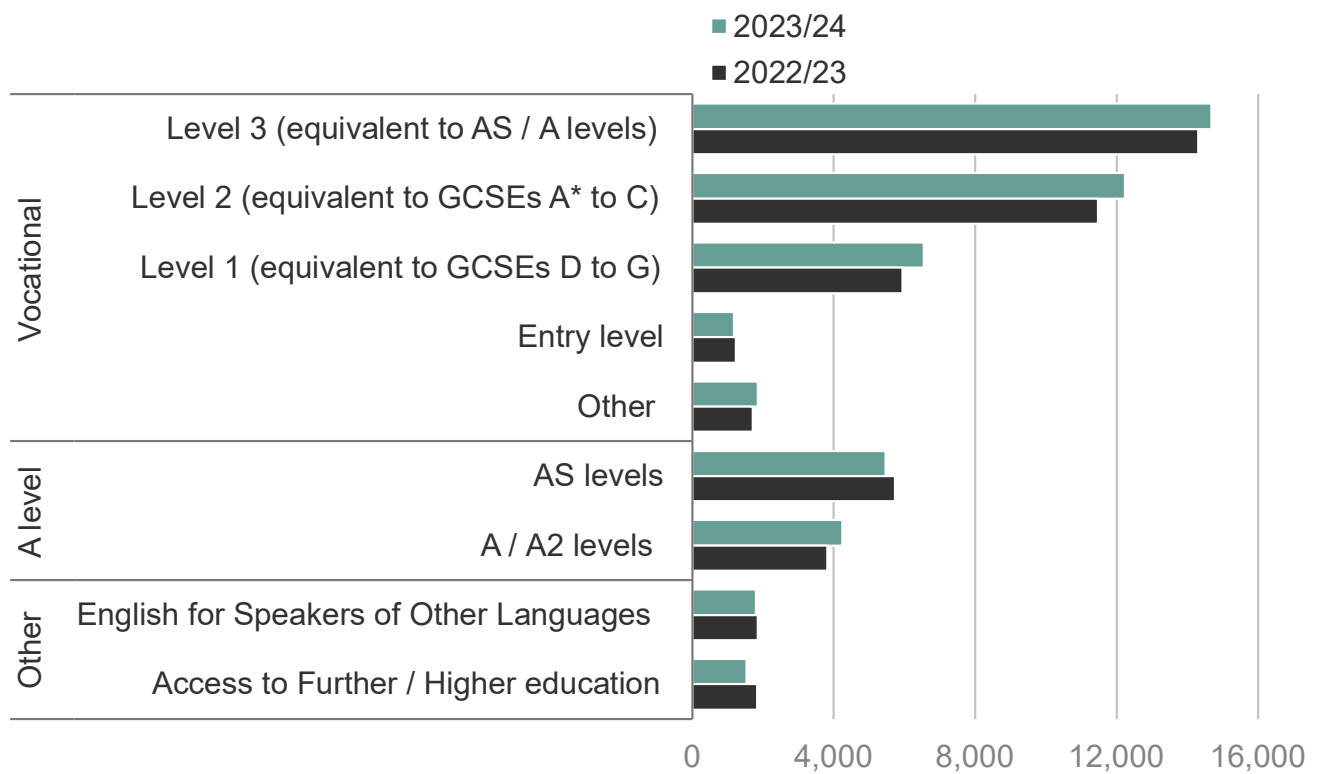
- Aged 20 to 49
- Female
- Who were employed less than a year by their company before starting their apprenticeship
- Living in South West Wales
- Non-migrants.

There were 1,365 fewer starts in Health and Social Care apprenticeships than in the previous year. Starts on other frameworks related to Health and Social Care also fell. The number of Health and Social Care starts has fluctuated each year.

## Learning taken

### The majority of full-time further education is vocational

Figure 4: Full-time further education programmes in colleges by type and academic year, August 2022 to July 2024



Description: The majority of full-time vocational learning at colleges is below level 3.

[Note 1]: A small number of other programmes have not been included in the chart.

Data in Table 2.1 of the accompanying spreadsheet

A programme is the collection of qualifications a learner studies. A typical A level programme would be 3 A levels and a Welsh Baccalaureate.

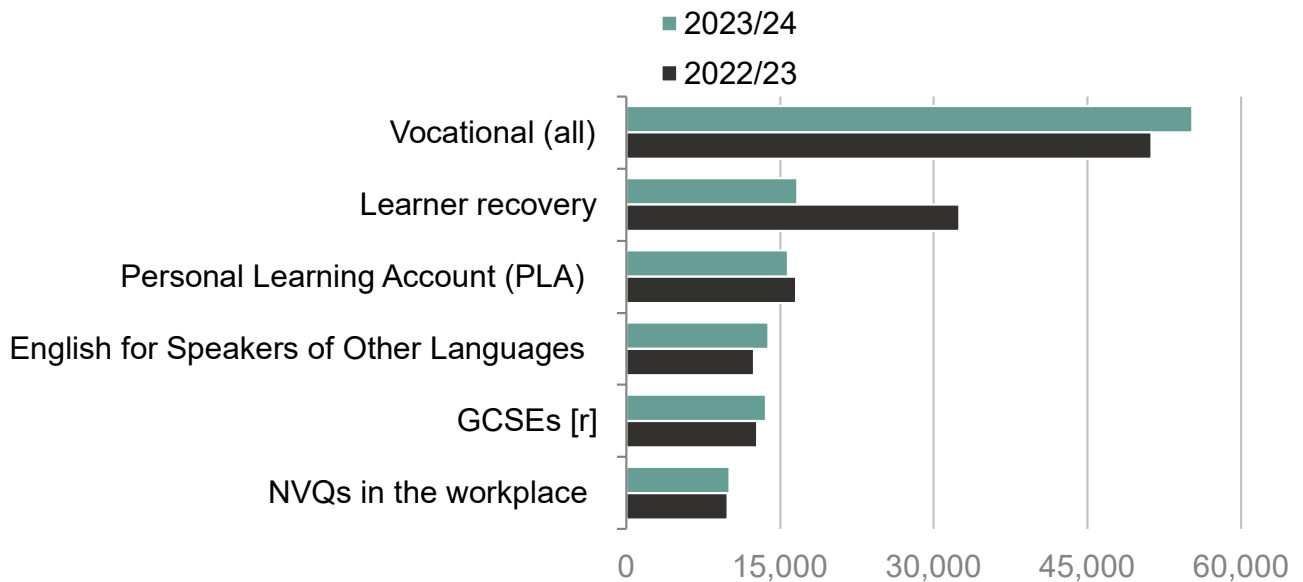
Vocational programmes are focused on a learning for a particular occupation. For example, a Level 1 programme in Automotive Engineering.

Just under half of full-time further education programmes were level 3 (AS / A level are examples of level 3).

Apprenticeships are not included in these figures.

### There has been an increase in part-time vocational programmes

Figure 5: Part-time further education programmes in colleges by type and academic year, August 2022 to July 2024 (revised)



Description: There were over 4,000 more part-time vocational programmes taken in 2023/24 than in the previous academic year.

[Note 1]: Full-time learners may take part-time learning alongside their full-time programmes.

[Note r]: 215 AS programmes were miscategorised as GCSEs in 2023/24. 200 AS programmes were miscategorised as GCSEs in 2022/23.

Data in Table 2.1 of the accompanying spreadsheet

Learner recovery funding has been provided in recognition that learners will have experienced disruption as a result of Covid pandemic. As such, learners may require further support and guidance to help safeguard their wellbeing, develop their resilience, and successfully achieve their qualifications.

Personal Learning Accounts (PLAs) look to provide support across Wales for individuals to gain higher level skills which will enable them to access a wider range of job opportunities and/or gain employment at a higher level. They are designed to be flexible, enabling participants to decide how and when they study.



## The most common apprenticeships are Health and Social Care

Figure 6: Top 5 learning programmes taken, or apprenticeships started by learning type, August 2023 to July 2024

| <b>Full-time further education</b>               | <b>Programmes</b> | <b>Part-time further education</b>      | <b>Programmes</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 3 AS levels with Welsh Bacc                      | 3,320             | English for Speakers of Other Languages | 10,325            |
| Construction Level 2                             | 2,460             | NVQs delivered in the workplace         | 10,055            |
| 3 A levels with Welsh Bacc                       | 1,975             | Learner Recovery and Progression        | 8,880             |
| Construction Level 1                             | 1,545             | GCSE Maths Resit                        | 6,695             |
| Foundation Studies Level 1                       | 1,365             | Adult Basic Education                   | 5,975             |
|                                                  |                   |                                         |                   |
| <b>Apprenticeship starts</b>                     | <b>Programmes</b> |                                         |                   |
| Health and Social Care Level 2                   | 3,355             |                                         |                   |
| Health and Social Care Level 3                   | 1,620             |                                         |                   |
| Engineering Manufacture Level 3                  | 915               |                                         |                   |
| Management Level 4                               | 775               |                                         |                   |
| Childrens Care, Learning And Development Level 3 | 775               |                                         |                   |

Description: The most common full-time further education programme is studying 3 AS levels along with a Welsh Baccalaureate. For part-time further education, the most common programme is English for Speakers of Other Languages.

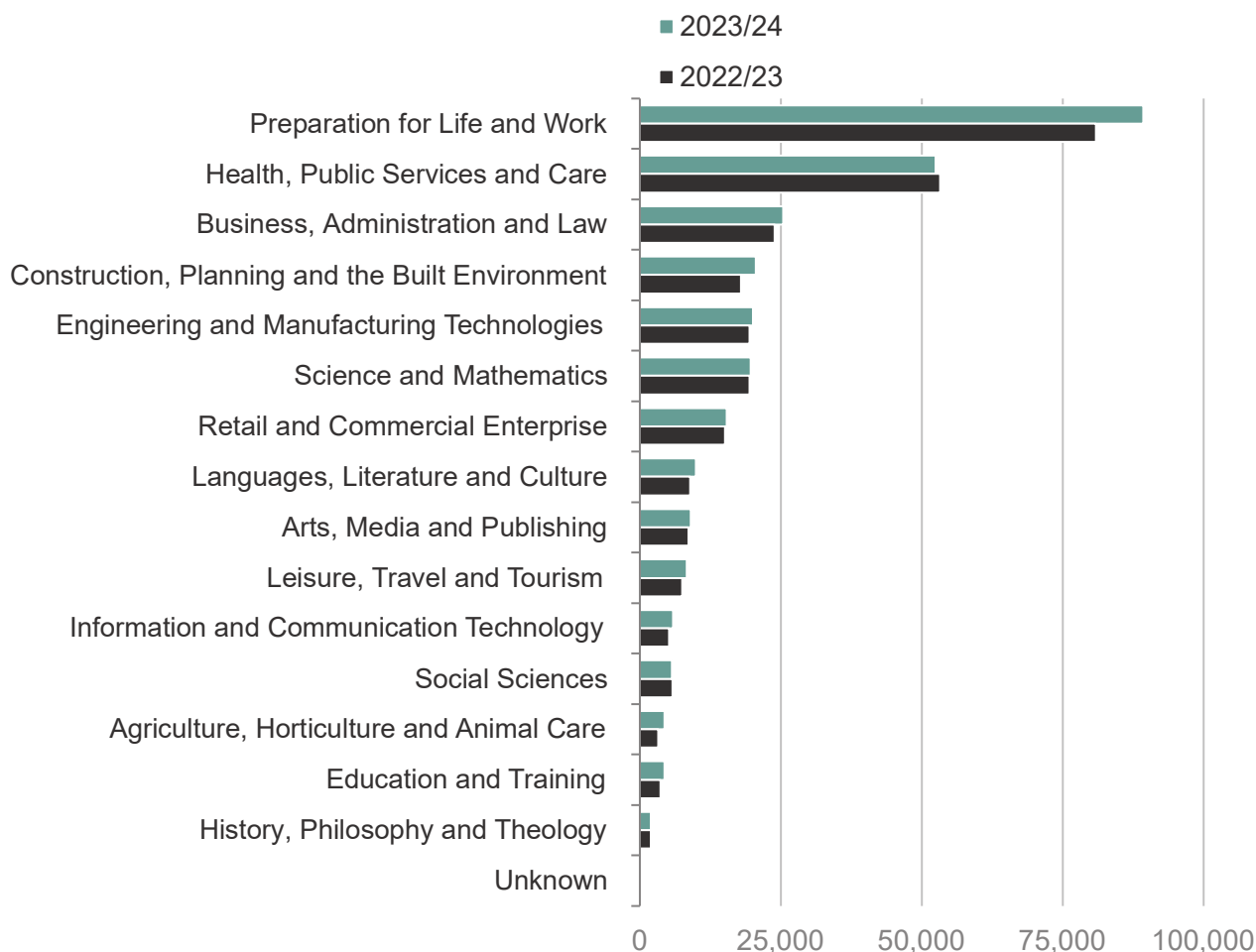
Data in Tables 2.2 and 3.2 of the accompanying spreadsheet, and on [StatsWales](#)

5 part-time programmes make up a third of all part-time further education programmes taken. Similarly, the top 5 apprenticeships started make up a third of all apprenticeship starts.

A fifth of full-time further education programmes are accounted for by 5 programmes.

## There has been an increase in Preparation for Life and Work activities

Figure 7: Learning activities by sector subject area and academic year in colleges, and other training providers, August 2022 to July 2024



Description: The most common sector subject areas are Preparation for Life and Work; and Health, Public Services and Care.

[Note 1]: Provider specific 'generic' activities that aren't in standardised form across Wales have not been included in this figure.

Data in Table 3.1 of the accompanying spreadsheet

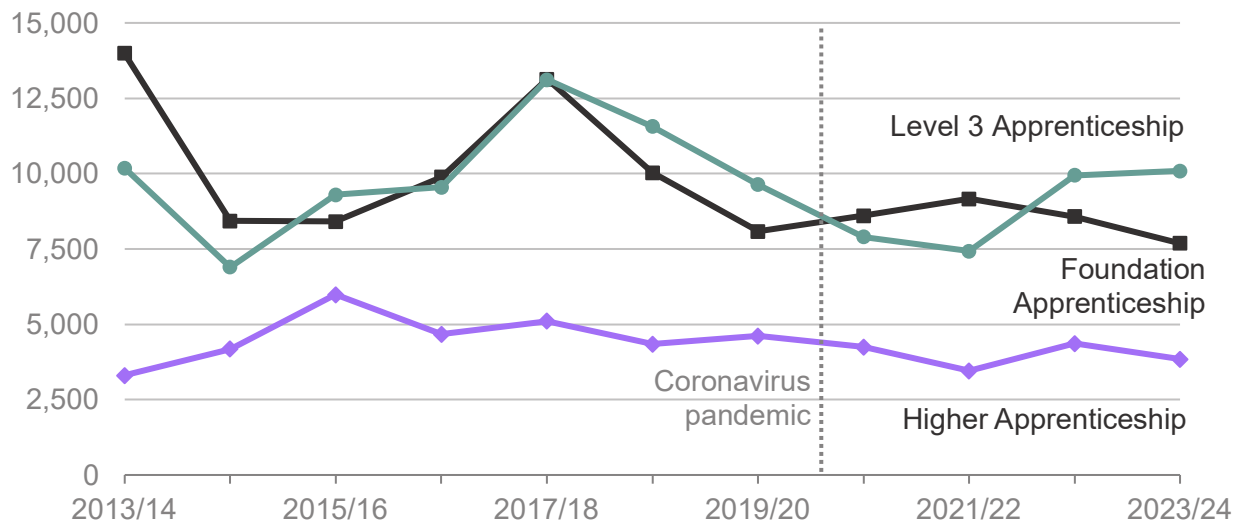
Half the increase in Preparation for Life and Work activities can be explained by a rise in Level 2 City & Guild Essential Skills activities. These are most commonly taken as part of apprenticeships.

There was a 13% rise in Construction, Planning and the Built Environment. The increase was mostly in Level 3 activities and in activities that were usually taken in part-time further education.

Health, Public Services and Care activities fell slightly, when activities increased in almost all other subject areas.

### Level 3 apprenticeships are rising, foundation apprenticeships are falling

Figure 8: Apprenticeship starts by level and academic year, August 2013 to July 2024



Description: There were 10,095 level 3 apprenticeships, 7,690 foundation apprenticeships, and 3,840 higher apprenticeships started in 2023/24.

[Data on StatsWales](#)

The sectors with the largest growth in Level 3 apprenticeships over since 2021/22 were:

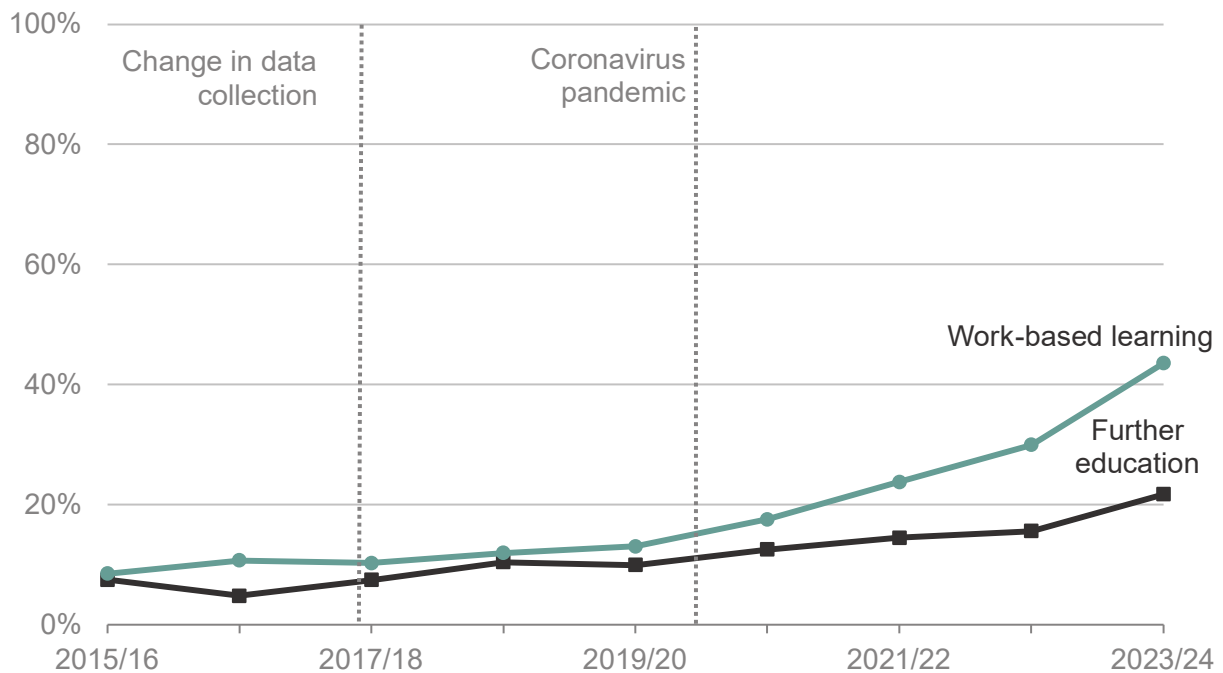
- Construction
- Management and Professional
- Engineering.

In 2023/24 the number of Level 3 Management and Professional apprenticeships doubled compared to the previous year. The largest increase was in the “Management” framework.

## Welsh medium

### More learners are studying at least partly in Welsh

Figure 9: Percentage of learning activities conducted bilingually or in Welsh, by learning type and academic year, August 2015 to July 2024



Description: 44% of work-based learning activities were delivered at least partly through the medium of Welsh.

Data on StatsWales ([Further education](#), [Work-based learning](#))

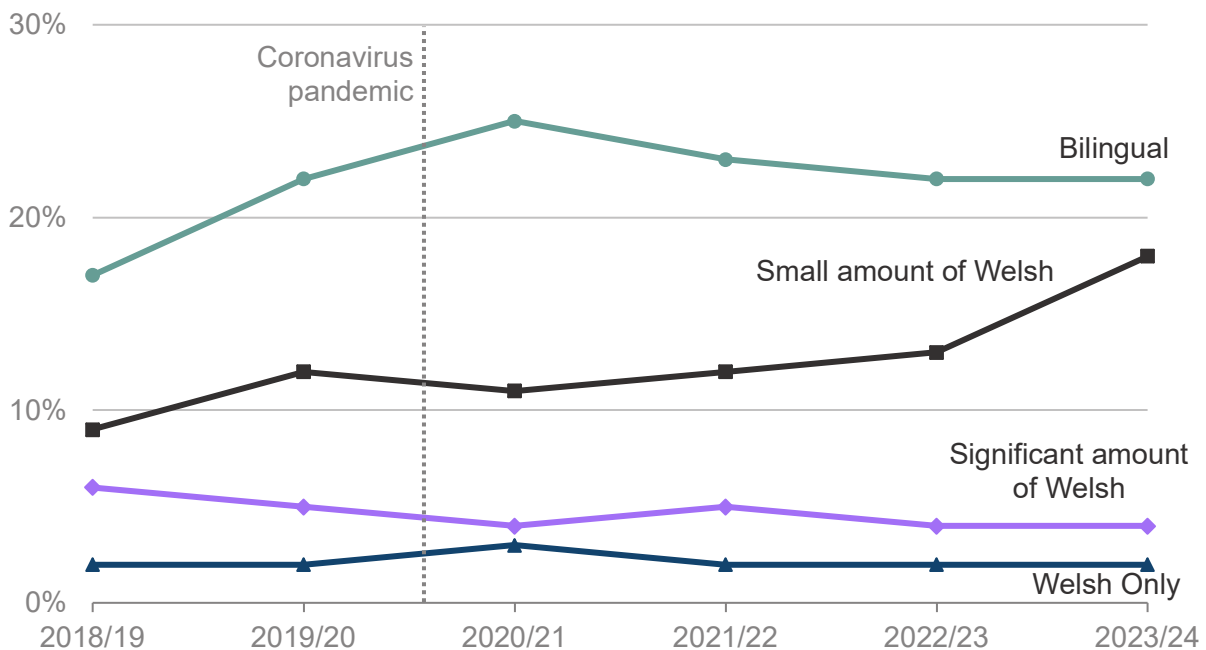
The vast majority (81%) of learning activities studied at least partly in Welsh involved a “small amount” of Welsh medium learning. 10% were studied bilingually, and only 1% were studied entirely through Welsh.

The increase in Welsh medium learning is almost entirely due to an increase in these “small amount” of Welsh activities.

The [LLWR guidance and services pages](#) has information on how the amount of Welsh medium is meant to be recorded.

## Even amongst fluent Welsh speakers, the rise in Welsh-medium learning is due to activities with a “small amount” of Welsh

Figure 10: Percentage of Welsh-medium learning delivered in activities taken by fluent Welsh speakers in colleges, and other training providers, by academic year, August 2018 to July 2024



Description: The percentage of learning activities taken by fluent Welsh speakers with a small amount of Welsh medium learning has nearly doubled over the last 6 years.

Data on StatsWales ([Further education](#), [Work-based learning](#))

Over 1 in 5 activities taken by fluent Welsh speakers were delivered bilingually. But this is lower than three years ago.

There has not been a rise in activities delivered in Welsh only, or with a significant amount of Welsh.

The rise in a “small amount” of Welsh medium learning has also been seen for learners who are not fluent Welsh speakers.

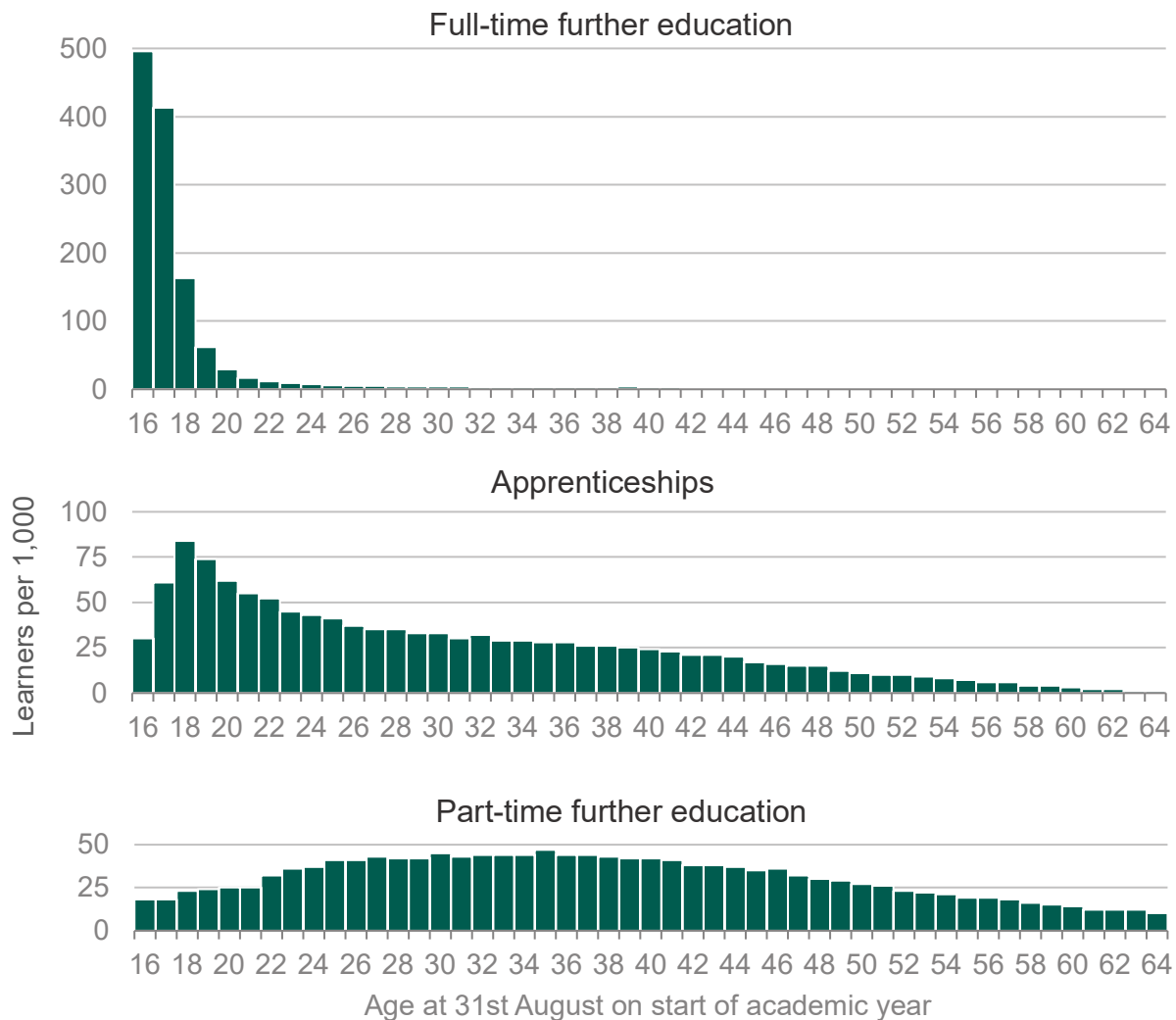
The 5 activities with the largest number of learners learning at least partly in Welsh, include Health and Social Care qualifications, tutorials and the Essential application of Number Skills.

## Demographics

### Age

#### People study throughout their lives

Figure 11: Learners per 1,000 people in Wales by age and learning type, August 2023 to July 2024



Description: Most learners in full-time further education were 16 or 17. Apprenticeships peak at 18, but there are many older learners. Part-time further education is most commonly taken by learners in their 30s.

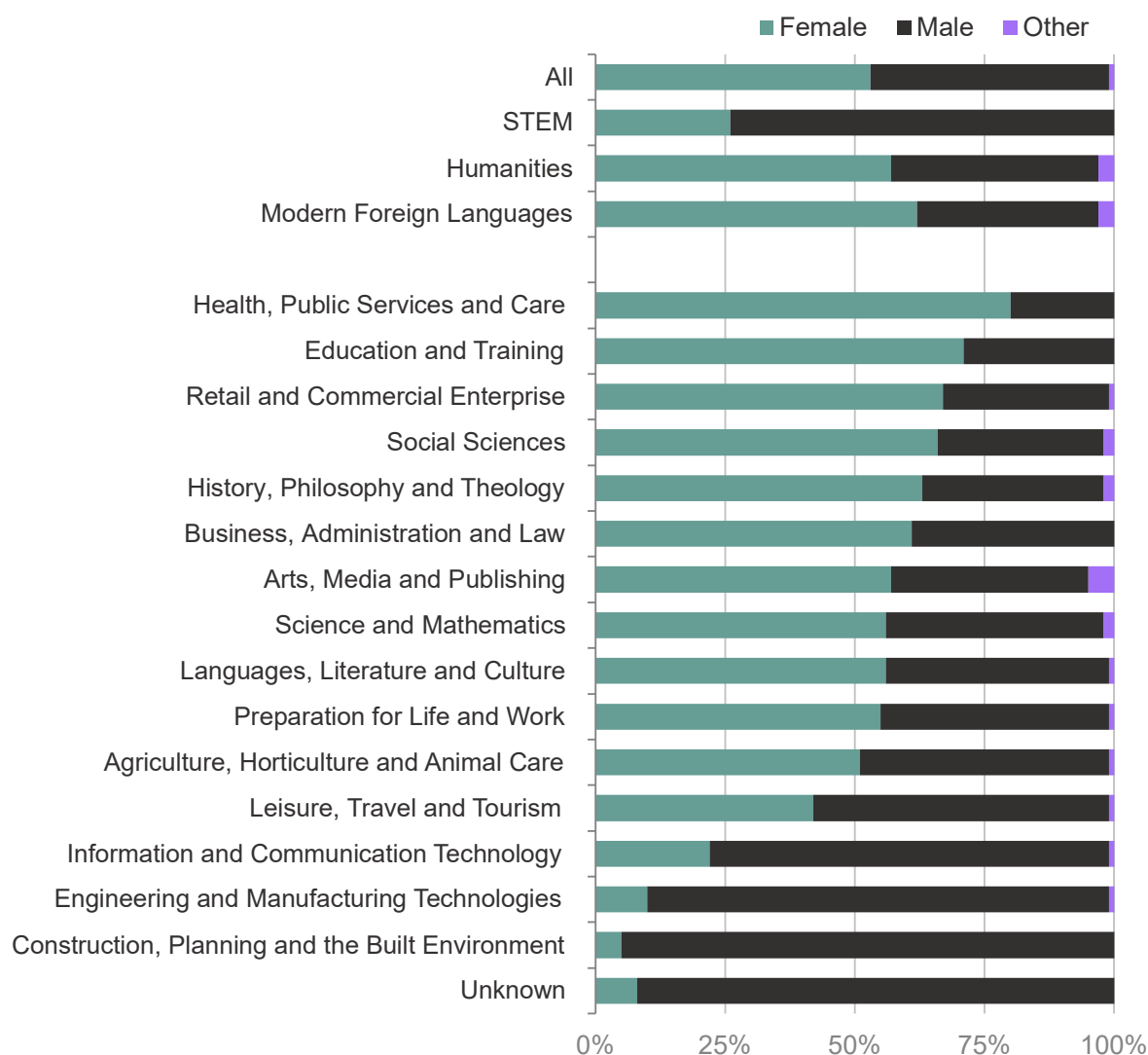
Data in Table 4.1 of the accompanying spreadsheet

Nearly 1 in 2 people in Wales aged 16 went into full-time further education in 2023/24.

## Gender

### Around 1 in 4 STEM activities are taken by female learners

Figure 12: Percentage of learning activities taken by gender and sector subject area in colleges, and other training providers, August 2023 to July 2024



Description: The majority of activities in most sector subject areas are taken by female learners.

[Note 1] Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is defined as Science and Mathematics; Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies; Construction, Planning and the Built Environment; Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care; Medicine and Dentistry; Nursing and Subjects and Vocations Allied to Medicine; ICT Practitioners; and Geography.

[Note 2] Humanities are defined as Arts, Media and Publishing; History, Philosophy and Theology; and Languages, Literature and Culture.

Data in Table 3.1 of the accompanying spreadsheet

Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies; Construction, Planning and the Built Environment; and Information and Community Technology are overwhelmingly taken by male learners.

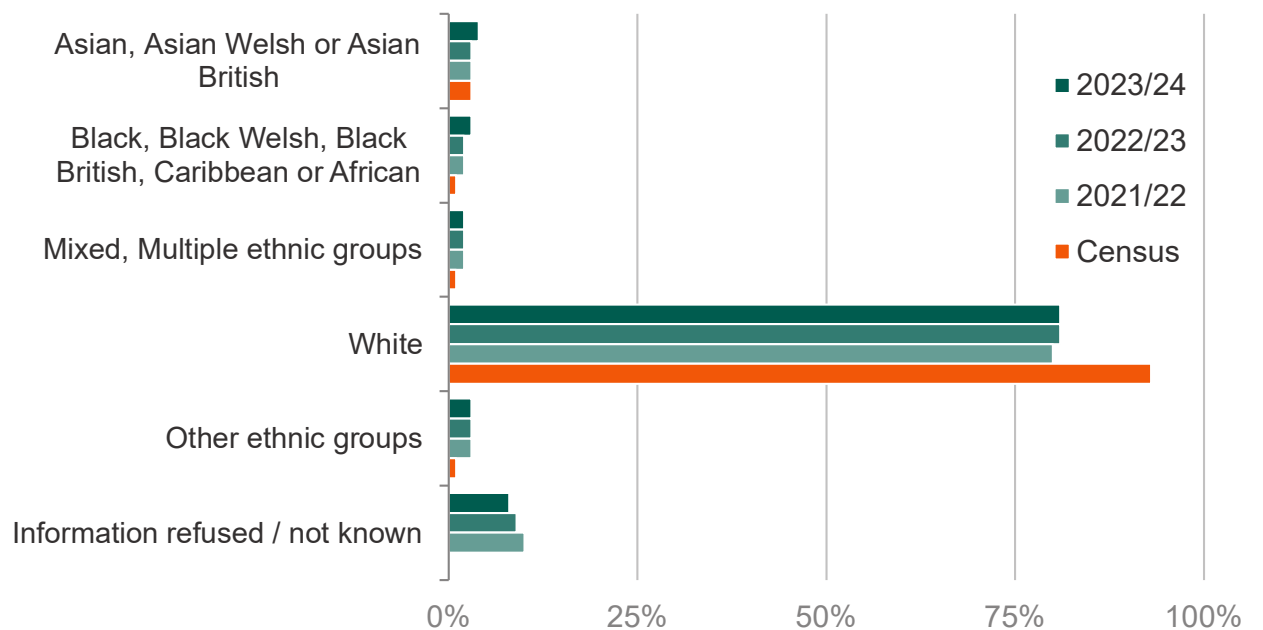
Females are more likely to take part-time further education, or apprenticeships. The most common apprenticeships are in Health and Social Care, which tend to have more female learners.

Male learners are more likely to take full-time further education. Full-time further education here does not include learning taken in sixth forms.

**Ethnic background**

**Further education learners are more diverse than the Welsh population**

Figure 13: Percentage of learners in further education by ethnic background and academic year, compared to the Wales 2021 census population (16 to 64), August 2021 to July 2024



Description: There has been an increase in the percentage of further education learners with Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British backgrounds, and similarly learners with Black, Black Welsh, African, Caribbean, Black Welsh backgrounds.

Data in Table 7.1 of the accompanying spreadsheet

There are a few reasons why the diversity of the further education population might be more diverse than the working age population.

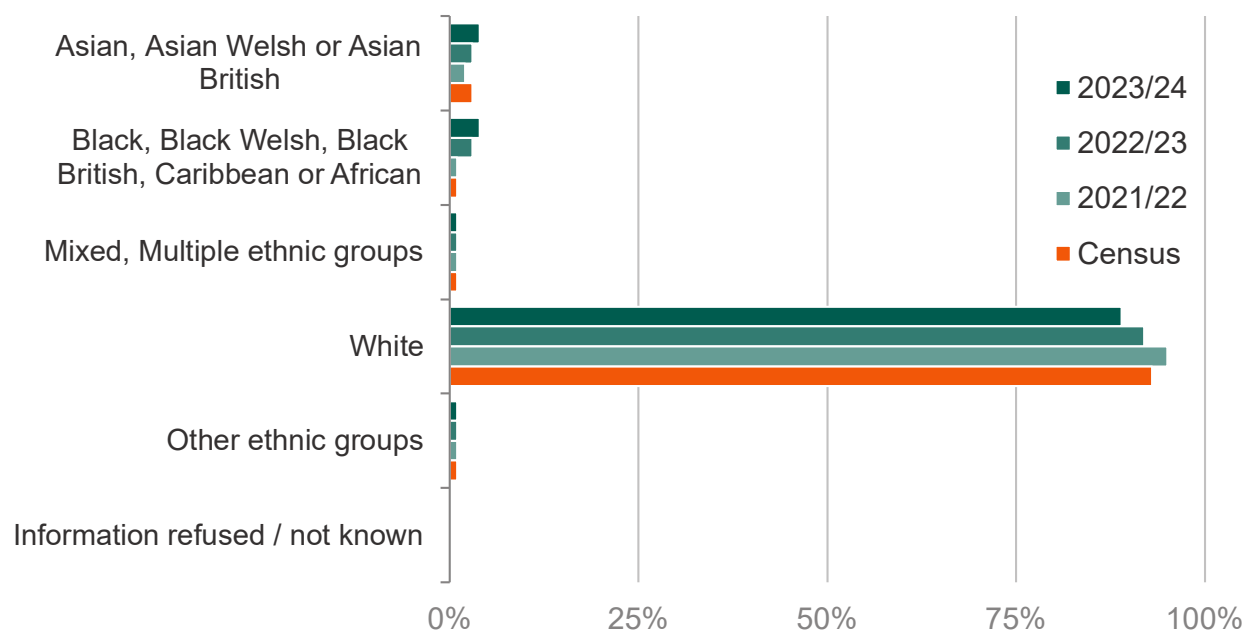
Further education learners are younger than the working age population, and younger people in Wales are more likely to be from a diverse array of backgrounds.

Further education also includes 15,690 English for Speakers of Other Languages programmes. These programmes are designed for people who don't speak English as first language. Only 28% of these are taken by learners from White ethnic groups. (One example of a White ethnic groups represented would be Ukrainian refugees).



**Work-based learning has become more diverse**

Figure 14: Percentage of learners in work-based learning by ethnic background and academic year, compared to the Wales 2021 census population (16 to 64), August 2021 to July 2024



Description: In 2021/22, learners in work-based learning were less diverse than Wales’ working age population. By 2023/24, work-based learning were more diverse than the Welsh population.

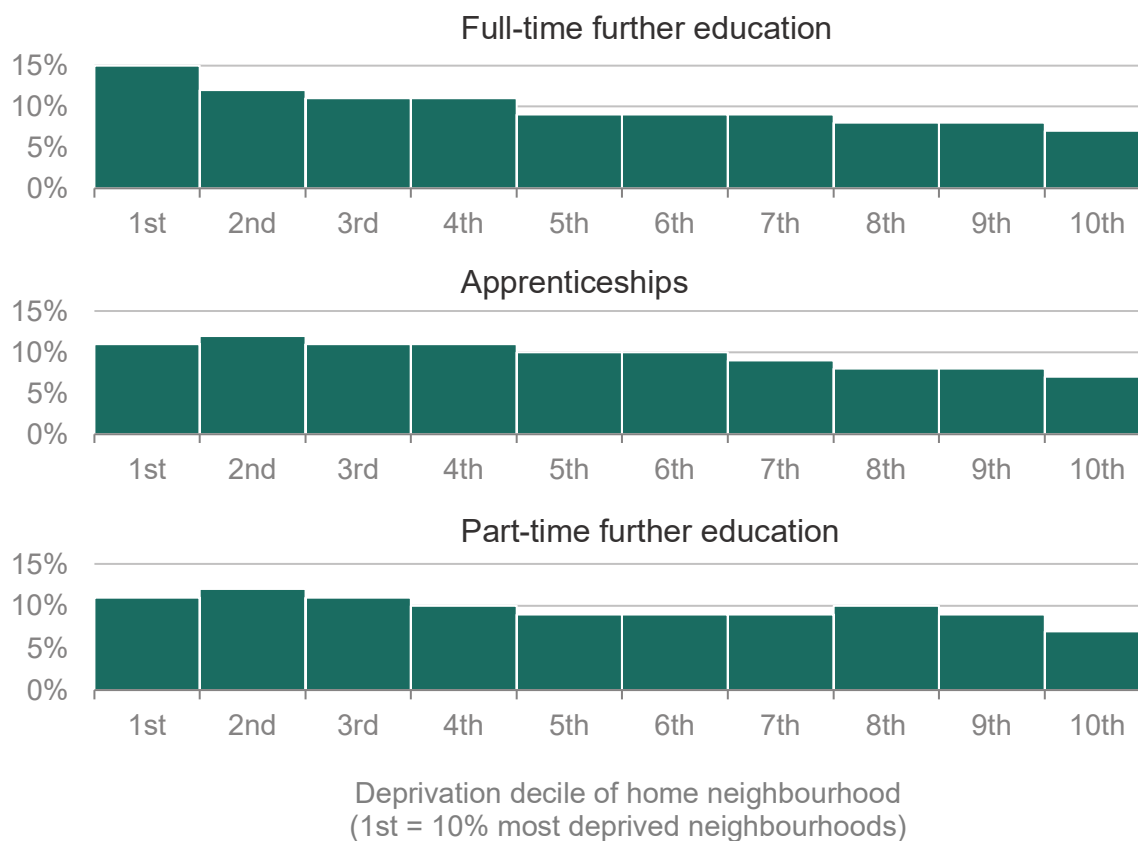
Data in Table 7.1 of the accompanying spreadsheet

1 in 3 learners taking City & Guilds Level 2 Health and Social Care Practice (Adults) were from ethnic minority backgrounds (not including White ethnic minorities). Over 8,300 of these activities were delivered to apprentices in 2023/24.

## Deprivation

### Learners taking further education, apprenticeships, and community learning are more likely to live in deprived neighbourhoods

Figure 15: Percentage of learners from each Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) decile, by type of learning, August 2023 to July 2024



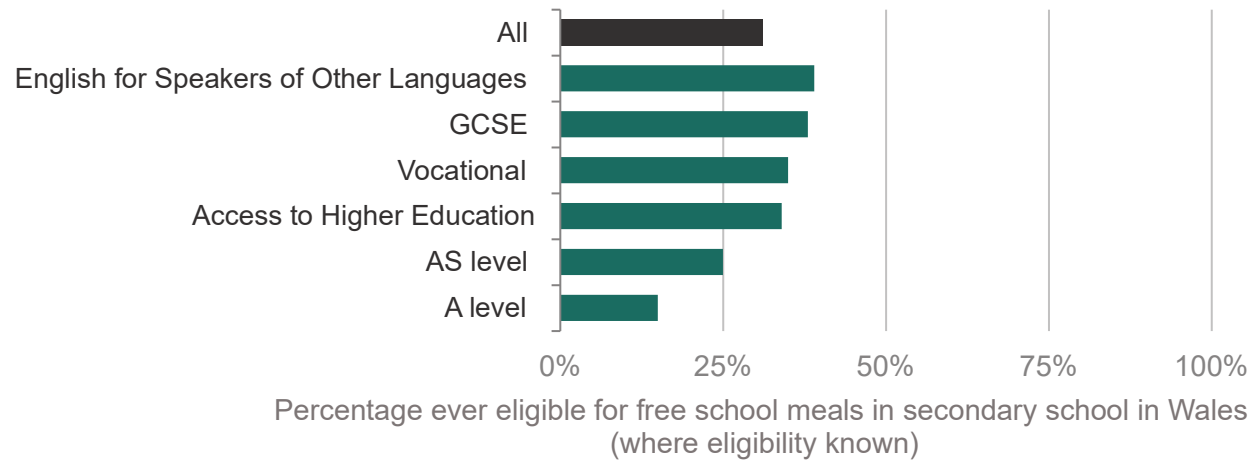
Description: 15% of full-time further education learners were living in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in Wales. Only 7% were living in the 10% least deprived neighbourhoods.

Data in Table 5.1 of the accompanying spreadsheet

This report does not cover data on school sixth forms, or on privately funded learning. The [ad-hoc analysis Unique learners in post-16 learning by deprivation decile, August 2021 to July 2022](#) showed that learners in sixth forms were much less likely to live in deprived neighbourhoods.

**A levels are less likely to be taken by learners who were eligible for Free School Meals during secondary school**

Figure 16: Percentage of full-time further education programmes taken by learners in colleges who were ever eligible for Free School Meals in secondary schools, August 2023 to July 2024



Description: The programmes in colleges with the highest proportion of learners who were ever eligible for Free School Meals are English for Speakers of Other Languages, GCSEs, vocational further education, and access to higher/further education programmes.

Note 1: The percentage ever eligible for free school meals is only calculated from those who could be matched to a secondary school record in Wales. The match rate is higher for younger learners.

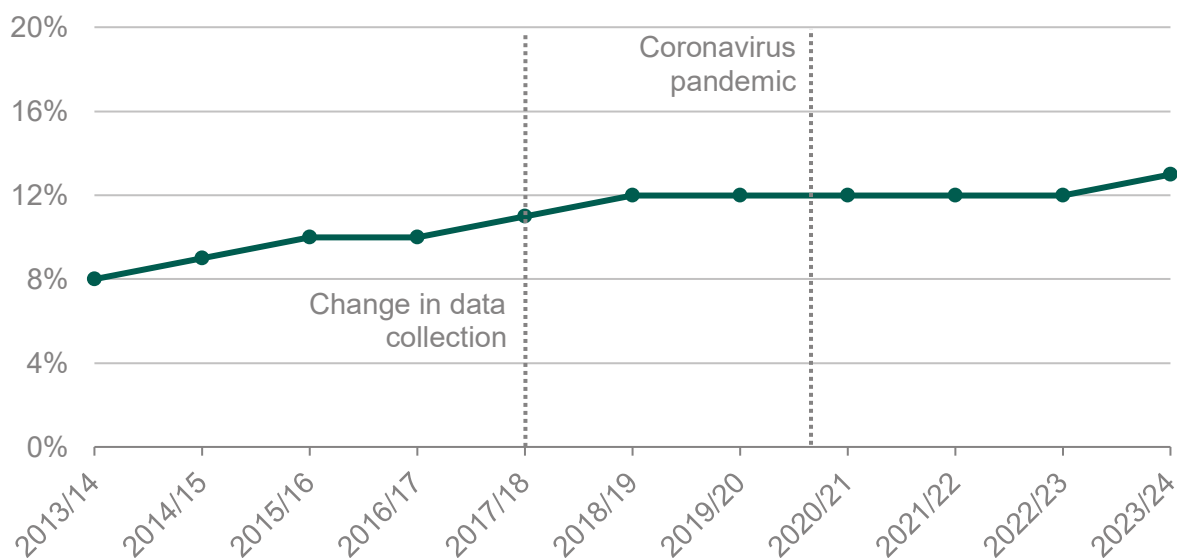
Data in Table 2.1 of the accompanying spreadsheet

Learners living in deprived neighbourhoods is an area measure of deprivation, not a measure of the individual's experience of deprivation. Eligibility for free school meals is a proxy measure for an individual's experience of deprivation.

Both measures show similar patterns. 22% of English for Speakers of Other Languages programmes are taken by learners from the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods. The figure is 9% for A level learners.

## 1 in 8 learners have a learning difficulty or disability

Figure 17: Percentage of learners who have a self-reported learning difficulty or disability, in colleges, and other training providers, August 2023 to July 2024



Description: For the last 6 years, between 12% and 13% of learners in colleges, and other training have had a learning difficulty or disability.

[Note 1] In this figure a learner would be double counted if they have studied at multiple providers within the same academic year.

[Data on StatsWales](#)

Between August 2018 and July 2020 there was a high point for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities taking learning in colleges. This dipped in 2020/21 but has now recovered.

## Quality and methodology information

Please see the accompanying *Quality and methodology: Further education, work-based learning and community learning* document for detailed information.

### Removal and restoration of local authority community learning statistics

A local authority provider made us aware on the 25th February 2025 of substantial errors in their data submitted to the Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR) for 2023/24, prior to the final freeze of data in December 2024.

Due to the potential scale of the issue, the publication of this report was postponed in order to remove the Local Authority Community Learning statistics, pending further investigations into the scale of the issue and any similar issues in the data submitted by other local authority providers.

Local Authority Community Learning statistics for all years before 2023/24 are likely to be overcounted. As a result, figures from 2023/24 that include Local Authority Community Learning data are not comparable to previous years.

The local authority had been submitting learning to the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) which should not have been included. The correct data for the 2023/24 academic year has been manually identified by the local authority, and we have removed the incorrect data from our statistics. The investigation revealed that these data quality issues also existed in previous years, these have not been corrected.

The effect of the change reduces the number of learning activities delivered by the local authority provider from 4,915 to 620. The provider has consistently submitted activities in the thousands since at least 2012/13. The change reduces the overall number of learners in further education, local authority community learning and work-based learning from 168,065 learners to 166,385.

We investigated whether the issue raised may affect other local authorities. The number of learning activities delivered by each provider was compared to funding levels, and local authorities with anomalous patterns were approached. No issues were found.

Local Authority Community Learning is funded by the Community Learning Grant. Historically the grant has been a relatively small source of funding. Unlike other types of learning, the LLWR data collection is not used for allocating or validating the learning delivered by this grant. As a result, there is more potential for data quality issues that would not affect further education or work-based learning.

Moving forward, with the start of the next funding period, Medr will be transitioning to using the Lifelong Learning Wales Record to report and monitor against the delivery of the Community Learning Grant. This should lead to improvements in the data quality. We will be working with providers to ensure the data is recorded correctly on LLWR by providing further guidance and support.

We intend to use data collected in winter 2025 to further assess the quality of local authority community learning data.

## Statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

All of our statistics are produced and published in accordance with a number of statements and protocols to enhance trustworthiness, quality and value. These are set out in Medr's [Statement of Compliance](#) with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

These official statistics demonstrate the standards expected around trustworthiness, quality and value in the following ways.

### Trustworthiness

These statistics have been published according to Medr's [Statement of Compliance](#) and [pre-release access to official statistics policy](#).

### Quality

The data is sourced from the Lifelong Learning Record Wales which is submitted by learning providers. This data is also used to determine funding for learning providers and is subject to audit.

When the data is submitted it must meet certain validation rules. When the statistics are being produced quality checks are undertaken by the statisticians.

### Value

These statistics are produced to provide an insight in the learning being delivered in Wales. They are used for monitoring and evaluating the adult learning, further education, and work-based learning sectors.

## Change in accredited statistics status

These statistics were previously published by the Welsh Government as National Statistics (now known as Accredited Official Statistics). As the statistics are now published by a new organisation, the Accredited Official Statistics status has been temporarily removed.

Medr has continued the systems and processes for producing the statistics from Welsh Government, and the statisticians producing the statistics include statisticians who produced further education, work-based learning and community learning statistics at Welsh Government.

The OSR will assess the processes in place at Medr as an official statistics producer. The OSR will assess whether the statistics meet the requirements for Accredited Official Statistics.

## Related statistics

Earlier reports in this series were published on [gov.wales](https://gov.wales).

[Students in higher education: August 2023 to July 2024](#) contains similar information for Higher Education and will be published on [medr.cymru](https://medr.cymru) at a later date.

[Apprenticeships learning programmes started: May to July 2024](#) contains a dashboard with detailed breakdowns of apprenticeship starts.

[Learner outcome measures for apprenticeships and adult learning: August 2023 to July 2024](#) will be published on [medr.cymru](https://medr.cymru) on 12 March 2025.

[Consistent performance measures post-16 learning \(achievement\), August 2023 to July 2024](#) contains outcomes for further education and will be published on [medr.cymru](https://medr.cymru) at a later date.

## Next update

Date: February 2026.

Period covered: August 2024 to July 2025.

The next update to these statistics may not be in the same form as this report.

## Contact information

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics.

Feedback, questions, and requests for further data can be directed by email to: [statistics@medr.cymru](mailto:statistics@medr.cymru)

# Medr

Y Comisiwn Addysg Drydyddol ac Ymchwil  
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