

Which sectors are people over 16 now studying in?

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In England there are about 2.1 million students in post-16 education, studying in school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, FE colleges and all forms of adult education, including prison education, extra mural provision, WEA classes and trade union education. There are about 2.6 million students studying in universities in the UK.

An analysis of the relative importance of these settings shows how the post-sixteen education and training sector has changed over the last decade. It raises questions about how it might change in future, with FE colleges and universities adopting business models and increasingly competing with each other. This will have an impact on organising in the post-16 education sector.

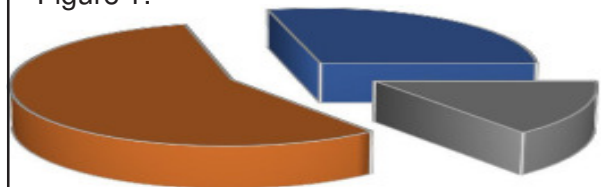
Sixth form colleges/schools and 16-19 Academy schools (Figure 1)

Of the 537,000 students studying in school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and 16-19 academy schools in England, 56 per cent are studying in academy schools. Over 29 per cent of students attend sixth form colleges or 16-19 academies. Only 15 per cent of students aged 16+ are studying in school (ie non-academy) sixth forms.

FE colleges (Figure 2)

In England, 1.5 million students are studying or in training in FE colleges. 913,000 of these are adult students studying or in training, 29 per cent of whom are aged 19+, and 71 per cent 25 or over. This includes 110,000 students studying for higher education degrees. 39 per cent of FE students are aged 16-18, with 3 per cent studying as part of apprenticeships.

Figure 1:



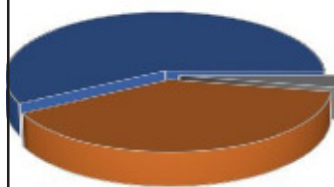
Blue = Sixth form colleges and 16-19 academies

Brown = Academy school sixth forms

Grey = Other school sixth forms

Source: Sixth Form Colleges Association 2021

Figure 2:



Blue = Adults studying or training

Brown = 16-18s in FE colleges

Grey = 16-18 apprentices

Source: Association of Colleges 2022-23

Universities

About 2,660,000 students were studying in UK universities during 2020-2021 (Universities UK, 2020-21).

Employment (Figure 3)

The Department for Education (DfE) publishes administrative data and the Labour Force Survey showing education, employment, unemployment or lack of engagement in the workforce for the age group 16-18 in England. Statistics for 2021, which reflect the impact of the pandemic, show that there are some significant differences between the age groups 16-18, 16-17 and age 18 (after nominally compulsory education).

In 2021, the rate of participation in education or apprenticeships for the 16-18 age group had dropped by 0.9 percentage points to 81.2 per cent. If wider training (employer-provided training and training

organised by independent providers for full- and part-time workers) is included, then the total percentage of 16-18 year olds in any education and training was 85.6 per cent at the end of 2021. The rate for those not in education, employment and training (NEET) for the 16-18 age group has decreased and is one of the lowest on record at 6.4 per cent.

Statistics for the 16-17 age group show different trends, with 90.5 per cent participating in education or apprenticeships, down 0.5 percentage points from 2020. The NEET rate for 16-17 year olds was 5 per cent, the highest rate since 2013. Overall, in 2021/2 there was a decrease in the proportion of 16-17 year-olds studying in sixth form colleges and General FE, tertiary and specialist colleges, and a slight increase in the proportion in state-funded schools.

A gender breakdown of participation in these three main settings shows that young women aged 16-18 have higher participation rates than young men, due to more being in full-time education. 83.3 per cent of

Figure 3: Education / apprenticeships, not in employment education or training, wider training and employment *

	16-18 years	16-17 years	18 years
Education and apprenticeships (including part-time education)	81.2%	90.5%	62.2%
Not in education, employment or training (NEETs)	6.4%	5%	9.3%
Wider training (employer provided - on the job and independent providers for full- and part-time workers)	4.4%	2.9%	7.3%
Employment	8.0%	1.5%	21.2%

*Source: Department for Education and Labour Force Survey

young women were participating in education or apprenticeships at the end of 2021, compared with 79.3 per cent of young men. Young men are more likely to be on apprenticeships or in part-time education than young women in the age group 16-17 when still in compulsory education and when moving into post-compulsory education at age 18.

Future

The proportion of students currently studying in different settings may change in future. Skills and education policy has not been stable over the last two decades, reflecting an inability of government to develop a coherent strategy for any age group.

There are several issues which may affect participation and the type of education and training being offered. The introduction of a life-long learning allowance, first suggested in the Augar review, will allow people to undertake education/training over their lifetime. This may result in 18-year-olds postponing their tertiary education until they are older. The need for greater flexibility among providers, especially FE and HE, will create more modular degree courses which can be accessed over several years.

Another issue, which has featured over many decades of FE history, is the involvement of the private sector in skills development. This has been an uneven process influenced by the lack of a coherent government industrial policy, which has also affected the success of government initiatives to extend apprenticeships. Universities are expanding degree apprenticeship programmes, which will result in an increase in the already large numbers of students studying in universities. Many of these recently established university programmes focus on higher level skills.

Another issue is how the adoption of a business model, which has already had a significant influence in FE, resulting in the erosion and closure of adult education and other courses that do not fit into a specific government 'skills for employability' model, will impact on universities.

Sources of information

There are several sources of information about the 16+ age group, which do not necessarily complement each other, and reflect some of the competing strands of education and employment policies. The Sixth Form Colleges Association

collects data on the different types of schools or sixth form colleges providing education for 16+ students. The Association of Colleges publishes data on adults in education and training, and 16-18 years old students studying in FE or via apprenticeships. Universities UK publishes data on numbers of university students.

In publishing administrative data and the Labour Force Survey showing education, employment, unemployment or lack of engagement in the workforce for the 16-18 age group in England, the DfE uses the following methodologies.

The population for each age group is based on Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid-year estimates, adjusted so that they relate to academic age and the end of the calendar year. Participation data from administrative sources is then subtracted from this total. Participation estimates are made by combining administrative data from schools, further education, work-based learning (apprenticeships) and higher education. Procedures are included to identify young people in more than one form of provision, to give a view of the cohort as a whole.

The labour market status (employed, unemployed or economically inactive) is then estimated from the labour force survey (LFS) for each of the major groups: full time education; work-based learning, comprised solely of apprenticeships from 2013; employer funded training; other education or training; and not in education or training.