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Academic year 2023/24

Higher Level Learners in England

This is the latest release

Published 4 September 2025

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This statistics publication presents an overview of participation and achievements in higher-level learning at Further Education Providers (FEPs) and Higher Education Providers (HEPs) for English-domiciled learners in England in the academic year 2023/24.

Throughout this publication, higher-level learning refers to learning at [levels 4 to 8 \(opens in a new tab\)](#). Qualifications covered are at a higher level than A levels or equivalent, and include a range of qualification aims, such as foundation degrees, first degrees and Doctorates.

The statistics in this release will mainly focus on entrants to higher-level learning rather than total enrolments. Entrants data provides a more

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Methodologies

[Higher-level learners in England: Methodology](#)

responsive yearly snapshot that is not skewed by qualifications that are studied for longer periods of time. Detailed characteristic breakdowns on total enrolments, entrants and qualifiers from 2015/16 to 2023/24 can be found in the underlying data files.

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Headline facts and figures - 2023/24

Summary

[Chart](#)

[Table](#)

Entrants to higher-level learning in 2023/24

838,200

down 0.6% from 2022/23

► [What is an entrant?](#)

Total enrolments in higher-level learning in 2023/24

2,000,535

up 0.4% from 2022/23

► [What is an enrolment?](#)

Qualifiers in higher-level learning in 2023/24

579,990

up 1.8% from 2022/23

► [What is a qualifier?](#)

Higher-level entrants that were female in 2023/24

59.1%

down 0.3 percentage points from 2022/23

Entrants to Higher Education Providers in 2023/24

85.0%

down 0.8 percentage points from 2022/23

Higher-level entrants to Level 6 in 2023/24

55.4%

down 0.5 percentage points from 2022/23

In the academic year 2023/24, there were a total of 2,000,535 English-domiciled higher-level learners across both Further Education Providers (FEPs) and Higher Education Providers (HEPs) in England. Of these, 41.9% (838,200) were starting their learning (entrants).

Of the 838,200 higher-level entrants in 2023/24:

- 9.1% were starting level 4 study, 8.4% were starting level 5 study, 55.4% were starting level 6 study, 25.6% were starting level 7 study and 1.5% were starting level 8 study.
- 78.3% were starting OfS-recognised higher education (HE) courses (recognised by the Office for Students for funding purposes and generally eligible for student loan support), 14.4% were starting apprenticeships, 5.5% were recorded as studying for institutional credit in HEPs and 1.8% were starting other higher-level learning.
- 85.0% were registered at HEPs, 5.5% were registered at general further education colleges (including tertiary), 8.7% were registered at private sector public funded providers and 0.8% were registered at other provider types.

Between academic years 2015/16 and 2019/20, the total number of English-domiciled learners entering higher-level learning increased by 5.6% to 769,200.

In 2020/21, with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, there was an atypical sharp rise of 11.8% to 859,745 in the number of entrants to higher-level learning. Since 2020/21, the number of entrants has fallen by 2.5% to 838,200 in 2023/24.

Despite the decrease in 2023/24, the number of entrants to higher level learning was 110,055 (15.1%) higher in 2023/24 when compared to 2015/16. The overall rise in entrants since 2015/16 can be attributed to increases in higher education at levels 6 and 7 and apprenticeships at all levels.

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Additional supporting files

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All supporting files from this release are listed for individual download below:

[Table 1 - Mapping of qualification category to levels 4 to 8 \(xlsx, 9 Kb\)](#)

How the HESA qualification categories have been mapped to levels 4 to 8.

[Table 2 - Mapping sector subject area tier 2 to CAH level 2 \(xlsx, 10 Kb\)](#)

How the sector subject area tier 2 codes have been mapped to CAH level 2 subjects.

[Table 3 - Mapping CAH Level 3 to technical routes \(xlsx, 12 Kb\)](#)

How the CAH Level 3 subjects have been mapped to technical routes.

[Table 4 - Mapping sector subject area tier 2 principle subject to technical route \(xlsx, 10 Kb\)](#)

How the sector subject area tier 2 principle subjects have been mapped to technical routes

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About this release

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Introduction

These statistics provide a holistic view of higher-level learning across the further and higher education sectors, covering both higher education and apprenticeships at [levels 4 and above \(opens in a new tab\)](#).

The statistics show how higher-level skills provision was organised in 2023/24 and aid our understanding of the potential impacts of the government's skills reforms. In particular, it will assist future policy understanding for Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ) reforms and the flexible Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE).

The publication presents analysis of the further and higher education sectors after combining two separate data sources:

- The Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA, now part of Jisc) Student and Alternative Student records for higher education providers (HEPs) and,
- The Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data for further education providers (FEPs), formerly collected by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). [The ESFA closed on 31 March 2025 \(opens in a new tab\)](#) and all its activity and functions were moved to the Department for Education (DfE). As the latest statistics

available only cover the academic years up to 2023/24, references to ESFA are made throughout this release.

Statistics on learning in [further education \(opens in a new tab\)](#) and [higher education \(opens in a new tab\)](#) have typically been published as separate publications. This makes it complicated to quantify the totality of learning that happens at levels 4 to 8. Combined FE and HE statistics are particularly important for understanding learning at education levels 4 and 5, as this is delivered roughly equally across both sectors.

To produce these statistics, information has been standardised across both the ILR and HESA datasets. Extensive data processing is required to harmonise the information across the HESA and ILR data and remove duplicate records.

Coverage

This release refers only to learners in England studying at [levels 4 to 8 \(opens in a new tab\)](#).

Analysis is presented for English-domiciled learners to reflect funding eligibility more closely and allow for consistent comparisons across both HESA and ILR sources.

Most of the data included in this release refers to academic year 2023/24. However, detailed time series data for all academic years back to 2015/16 can be found in the underlying data files. Please note, figures may differ slightly to previous iterations of this release due to revisions in the underlying data and methodology over time.

This publication can only report the higher-level learning that is recorded in administrative data held by government. There is likely to be some unfunded learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is not mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR on their unfunded learners. There may also be higher-level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

HESA and Data Futures

For the 2022/23 academic year, Jisc introduced a new collection system, the HESA Data Platform (HDP), and a new data model (Data Futures), designed to meet the needs of the current funding and regulatory landscape. As a result of these changes to the model, the 2022/23 academic year saw a larger number of data quality issues compared to other years. Therefore, we advise caution when comparing higher education figures across the time series. Further information can be found in the Methodologies section of this release.

Timeliness

The timeliness of this publication has been impacted by the delay in availability of the HESA Student Record data for the 2023/24 academic year due to continuing complexities in implementing the new data model. The 2023/24 Student record was published in April 2025, delayed from the usual January publishing timeframe. Further information can be found on the [HESA website \(opens in a new tab\)](#).

COVID-19 impacts

HESA published a [COVID-19 insight brief \(opens in a new tab\)](#) that analyses the impact of the pandemic on student data and trends across the years of enrolments and qualifications across various characteristics.

The varying COVID-19 restrictions impacted timeliness of reporting and additional care should be taken in comparing and interpreting data for academic years 2019/20 and beyond in this release.

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Type of higher-level learning

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This section groups higher-level learning in England into the following categories:

- **OfS-recognised higher education** - recognised by the [Office for Students for funding purposes \(opens in a new tab\)](#) and generally eligible for student loan support
- **Apprenticeships** - funded by the [Education and Skills Funding Agency \(ESFA\) \(opens in a new tab\)](#) and employers, where students earn whilst learning
- **Institutional credits in higher education providers** - bite-sized, standalone modules of learning which are not regarded as full qualifications
- **Other higher level - ESFA / Advanced Learner Loan** - other courses that are generally not eligible for student loan support, but could be eligible for [Advanced Learner Loans \(ALLs\) \(opens in a new tab\)](#) or are regulated by Ofqual and can be funded by ESFA
- **Other higher level - Unfunded** - all other courses at levels 4 to 8 that are not eligible for funding

[The ESFA closed on 31 March 2025 \(opens in a new tab\)](#) and all its activity and functions were moved to the Department for Education (DfE). As these statistics only cover academic years up to 2023/24, references to ESFA are made throughout this publication.

Entrants

Entrants refers to learners in their first year of study in the stated academic year.

Between the academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24, the total number of English-domiciled entrants to higher education (not including apprenticeships) in England has fallen for the third year in a row from a high of 762,260 in 2020/21 to 717,780 in 2023/24.

While the number of entrants to HE has fallen in recent years, it is still 4.3% higher than in 2019/20, mostly due to an atypical sharp increase of 10.8% in the number of entrants between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

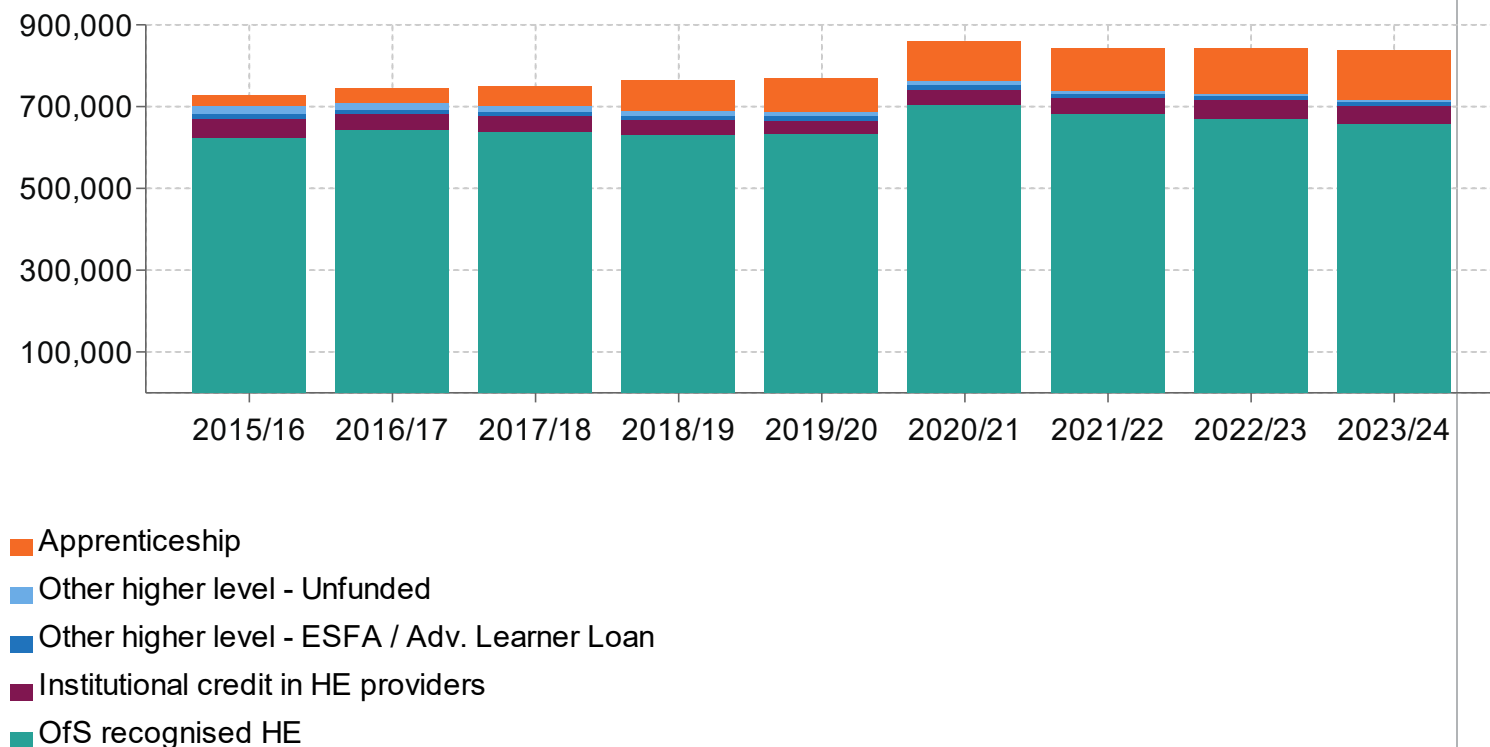
Compared to 2022/23, the number of entrants to apprenticeships has increased by 9,060 to 120,420 in 2023/24. The number of entrants to apprenticeships in 2023/24 is over four times greater than the number in 2015/16 (26,870).

Chart	<u>Table</u>
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► Export options

Entrants to OfS-recognised HE have decreased to 656,485 in 2023/24

Figure 2: Number of entrants to higher-level learning in England by type of learning from academic year 2015/16 to 2023/24



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. From 2022/23, HESA's definition of a first year or entrant differs from that used previously with a small impact on overall student numbers. Prior to 2022/23, first year students at HEPs were those with a start date between 1 August and 31 July. For 2022/23 and onwards, entrants are defined as those students with a start date between 18 July and 17 July, the following calendar year. When used in conjunction with the Standard Registration Population, this has a small impact on overall student numbers, but the revision brings it in line with the concept used in the derivation of the Standard Registration Population.

[Show 2 more footnotes](#)

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2023/24

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Total enrolments

Enrolments refers to learners across all years of study (entrants and continuing students) in the stated academic year.

Between the academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24, the total number of English-domiciled enrolments to higher-level learning in England has increased by 0.4%, from 1,993,170 to 2,000,535. This is mostly driven by increases in enrolments in apprenticeships.

Across the timeseries between academic years 2015/16 and 2023/24, the total number of English-domiciled enrolments to higher-level learning in England has increased by 20.7%, from 1,657,835 in 2015/16. This is mostly driven by increases in higher education at levels 6 and 7 and apprenticeships at levels 4 to 7.

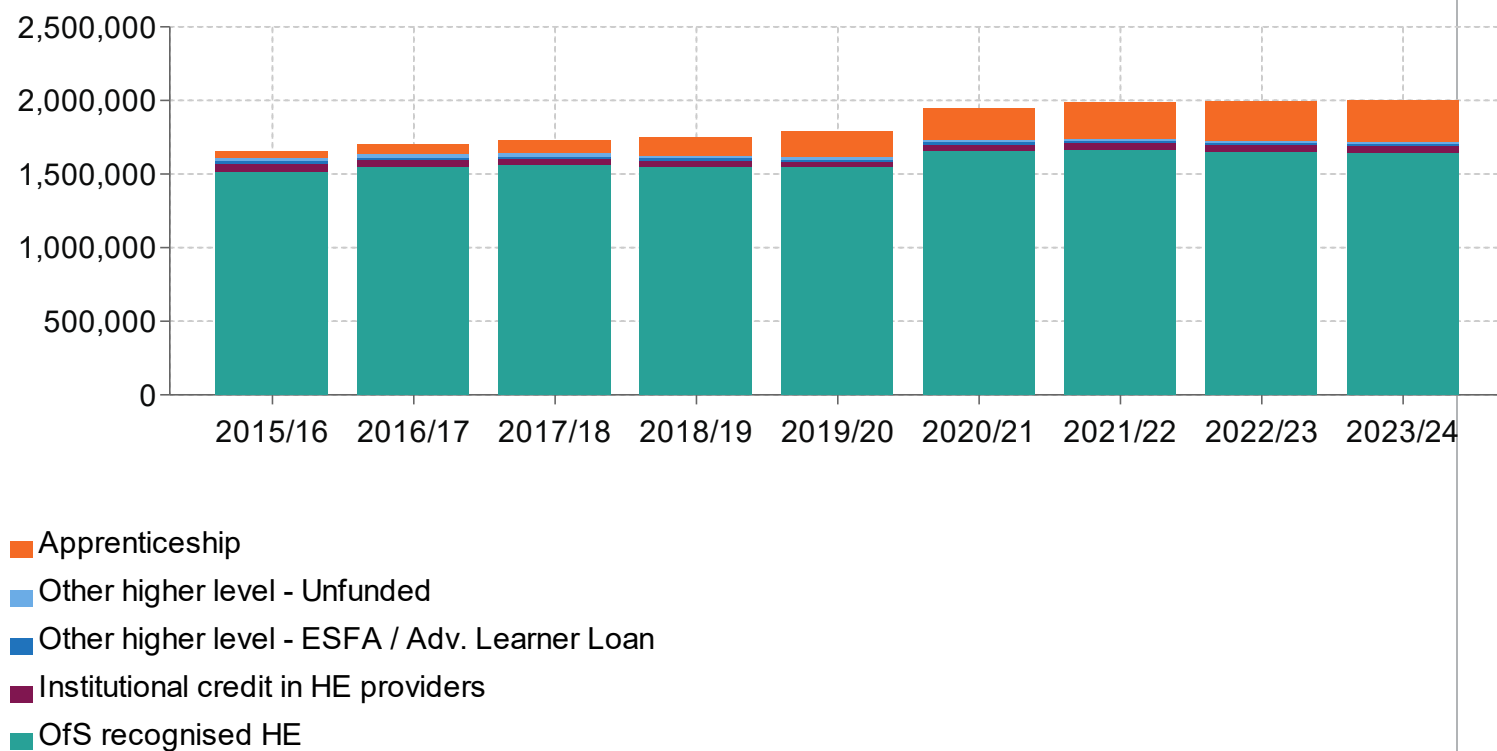
Compared to 2015/16, enrolments in apprenticeships have increased by over six times, from 46,480 to 285,125 in 2023/24.

Chart	<u>Table</u>
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The number of English-domiciled people enrolled in higher-level learning in England continues to rise

Figure 3: Number of enrolments in higher-level learning in England by type of learning from academic year 2015/16 to 2023/24



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. From 2022/23, students in HEPs who are writing-up at the end of the year are now able to be included in HESA's figures if certain conditions are met. In previous years, students in HEPs who are writing-up were excluded entirely.

[Show 1 more footnote](#)

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2023/24

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Qualifiers

A qualifier refers to a learner that obtained a qualification at some point during the stated academic year.

Between academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24, the total number of English-domiciled qualifiers in higher-level learning in England has increased by 1.8%, from 569,565 to 579,990. This was almost entirely driven by an increase in apprenticeships at all levels.

Across the timeseries between academic years 2015/16 and 2023/24, the total number of English-domiciled qualifiers in higher-level learning in England has increased by 15.4%, from 502,655 to 579,990. This was mostly driven by increases in qualifiers in HE at level 7 and apprenticeships at all levels.

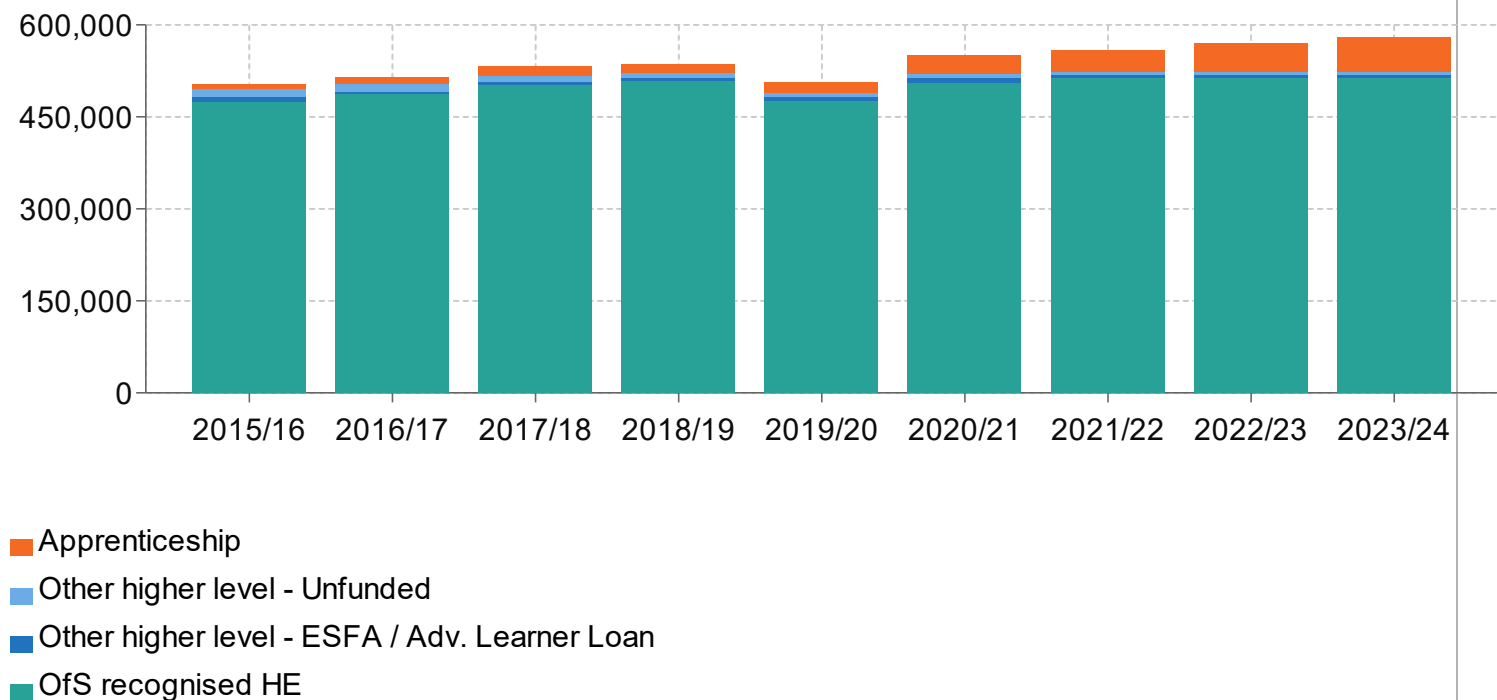
The number of learners to complete an apprenticeship is over eight times higher in 2023/24 than in 2015/16 (rising from 6,885 in 2015/16 to 56,450 in 2023/24).

Chart	<u>Table</u>
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Mainly due to apprenticeships, the overall number of English-domiciled people qualifying at level 4+ in England continues to rise

Figure 4: Number of qualifiers in higher-level learning in England by type of learning from academic year 2015/16 to 2023/24



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. From 2022/23, students in HEPs who are writing-up at the end of the year are now able to be included in HESA's figures if certain conditions are met. In previous years, students in HEPs who are writing-up were excluded entirely.

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Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2023/24

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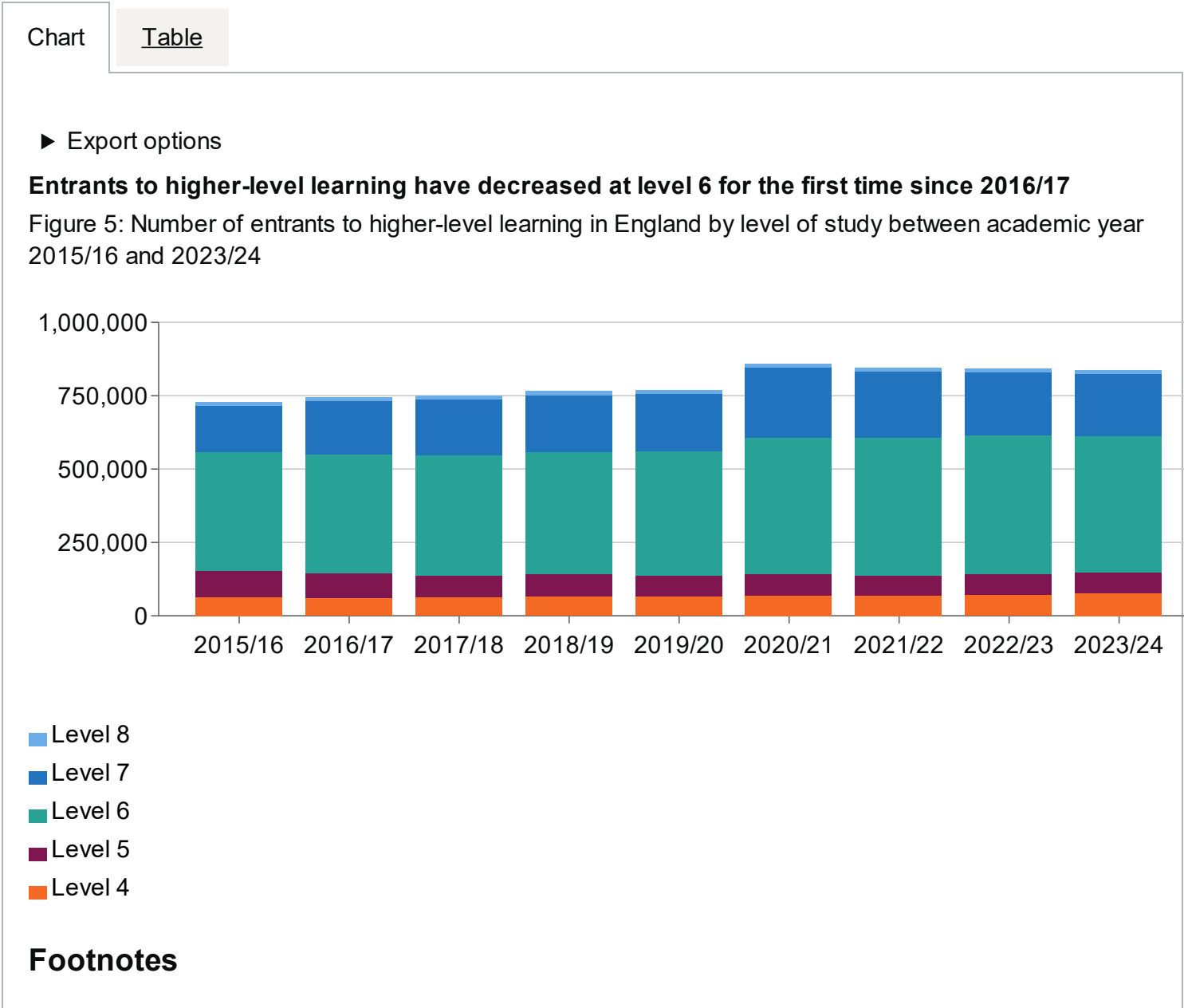
Level of study

Hide

In the academic year 2023/24, 838,200 English-domiciled entrants started a qualification at an English HE provider or FE provider, with the majority doing so at level 6 (464,005) representing 55.4% of entrants this year.

Between the academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24, the total number of English-domiciled entrants to higher-level learning in England fell for all levels except for level 4 and level 8, which increased by 5.5% and 2.2% respectively.

Between the academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24, entrants to level 5 fell by 0.4%, entrants to level 6 fell by 1.6% and entrants to level 7 fell by 0.6%.



1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. From 2022/23, HESA's definition of a first year or entrant differs from that used previously with a small impact on overall student numbers. Prior to 2022/23, first year students at HEPs were those with a start date between 1 August and 31 July. For 2022/23 and onwards, entrants are defined as those students with a start date between 18 July and 17 July, the following calendar year. When used in conjunction with the Standard Registration Population, this has a small impact on overall student numbers, but the revision brings it in line with the concept used in the derivation of the Standard Registration Population.

[Show 1 more footnote](#)

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2023/24

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Mode of study (in OfS-recognised HE)

[Hide](#)

Information on mode of study in this section has been included for OfS-recognised HE only as it is more robustly defined for this group of learners.

The number of full-time entrants to OfS-recognised HE increased by 11.2% since 2015/16 (from 474,845 to 528,220 in 2023/24) while part-time entrants decreased by 13.8% (from 148,840 to 128,265 over the same period).

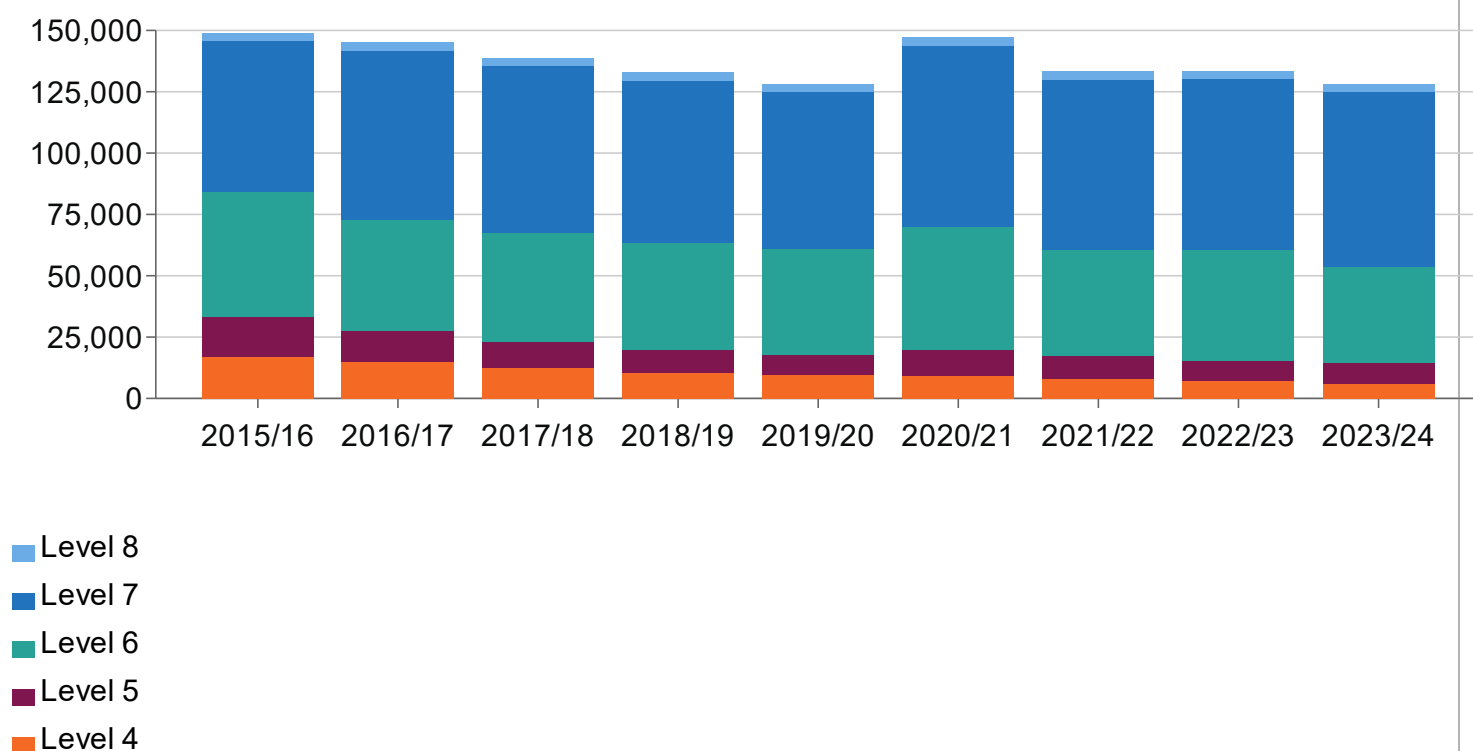
Between 2015/16 and 2023/24, entrants to part-time OfS-recognised HE at levels 4 and 5 saw decreases of 63.4% and 49.4% respectively. Part-time entrants to level 6 also decreased but at a lower rate of 22.7%. Part-time entrants at level 7 increased over this time, rising from 61,460 in 2015/16 to 71,270 in 2023/24 (a 16.0% increase) and entrants at level 8 remains effectively unchanged compared to 2015/16.

Across all levels of study, part-time entrants to OfS-recognised HE decreased by 13.8% between 2015/16 and 2019/20 from 148,840 to 128,315. Part-time entrants subsequently increased by 14.8% to 147,285 in 2020/21, before falling again by 12.9% to 128,265 in 2023/24.

[Chart](#)[Table](#)[► Export options](#)

The number of entrants to part-time OfS-recognised higher education has fallen over the last year to 182,305 in 2023/24

Figure 6: Number of part-time entrants to OfS-recognised HE in England by level of study between academic year 2015/16 and 2023/24



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. From 2022/23, HESA's definition of a first year or entrant differs from that used previously with a small impact on overall student numbers. Prior to 2022/23, first year students at HEPs were those with a start date between 1 August and 31 July. For 2022/23 and onwards, entrants are defined as those students with a start date between 18 July and 17 July, the following calendar year. When used in conjunction with the Standard Registration Population, this has a small impact on overall student numbers, but the revision brings it in line with the concept used in the derivation of the Standard Registration Population.

[Show 1 more footnote](#)

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2023/24

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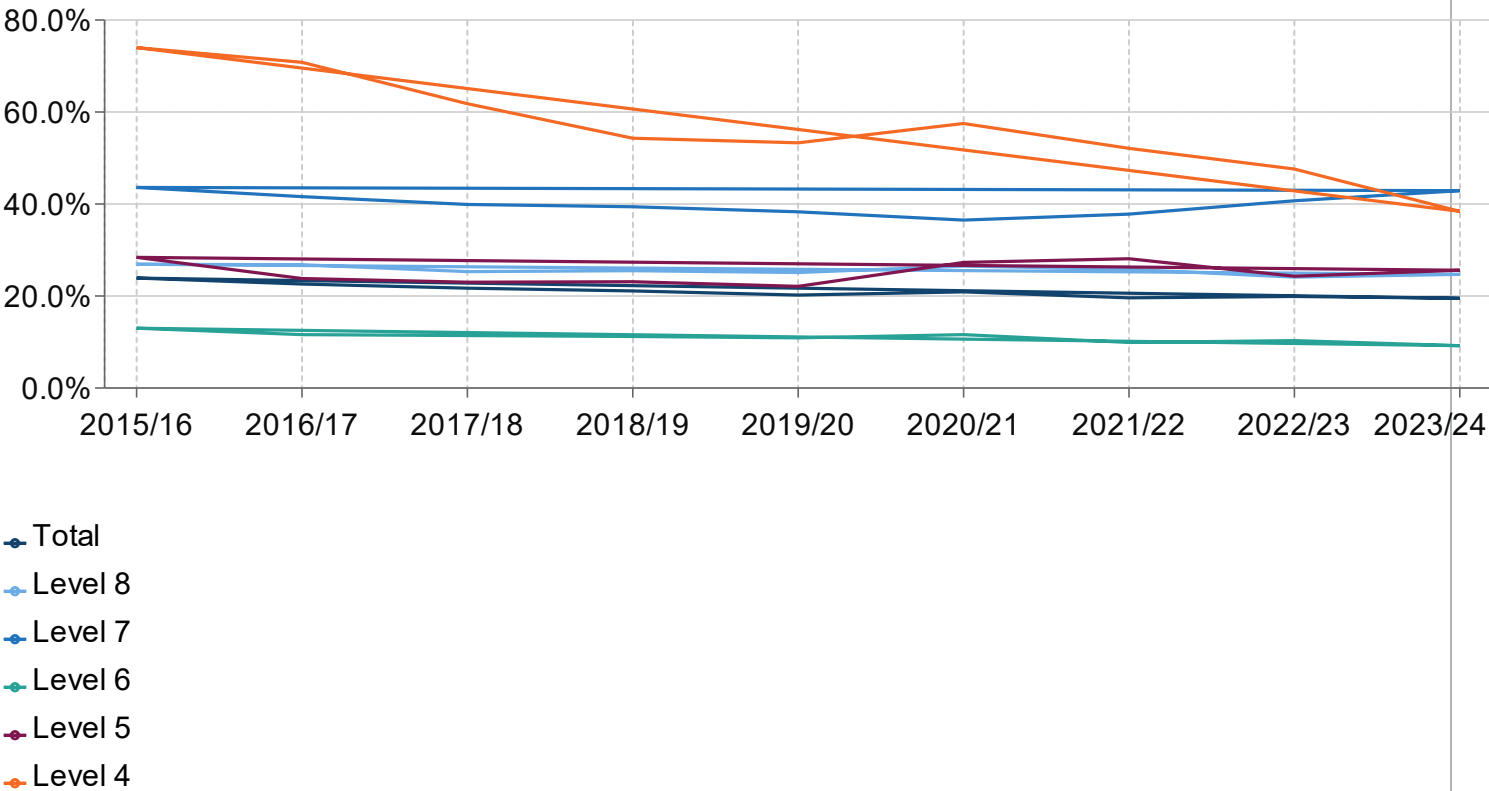
The proportion of English-domiciled entrants to OfS-recognised HE at levels 4 to 8 that were part-time decreased from 23.9% in 2015/16 to 19.5% in 2023/24. In 2023/24, just 9.2% of entrants to HE at level 6 studied part-time, compared to 42.9% of entrants to a level 7 qualification.

[Chart](#)[Table](#)

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The proportion of entrants to part-time OfS-recognised HE in England remains lower than in 2015/16

Figure 7: Proportion of entrants to OfS-recognised HE in England that studied part-time by level of study between academic year 2015/16 and 2023/24



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. From 2022/23, HESA's definition of a first year or entrant differs from that used previously with a small impact on overall student numbers. Prior to 2022/23, first year students at HEPs were those with a start date between 1 August and 31 July. For 2022/23 and onwards, entrants are defined as those students with a start date between 18 July and 17 July, the following calendar year. When used in conjunction

with the Standard Registration Population, this has a small impact on overall student numbers, but the revision brings it in line with the concept used in the derivation of the Standard Registration Population.

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Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2023/24

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Provider type

[Hide](#)

Provider type refers to the provider the learner is registered with. This is not necessarily the provider where the learning is taking place. For example, if a franchising arrangement existed between a HEP (registering provider) and a further education college (delivering the learning), the learner is reported under the HEP provider type. According to the most recent data available from the OfS, in 2022/23 there were around 138,000 enrolments (all years of study) whose higher education was subcontracted out to another provider. The majority of delivery providers were private companies or FE providers. For more information, see [Subcontractual arrangements in higher education - Office for Students. \(opens in a new tab\)](#)

Of the 838,200 English-domiciled higher-level entrants in England in 2023/24:

- 85.0% (712,235) were registered at HEPs,
- 5.5% (45,950) were registered at general FE colleges,
- 8.7% (73,060) were registered at private sector public funded providers, and
- 0.8% (6,950) were registered at schools, sixth form colleges, private sector providers or another type of provider.

Level 4 and 5 provision was more evenly distributed amongst different provider types than higher levels of provision, which are almost exclusively offered at HEPs. In the academic year 2023/24, 31.3% of higher-level entrants at level 4 were registered at HEPs and 38.4% of higher-level entrants at level 5 were registered at HEPs, compared with 96.8% of higher-level entrants at level 6 and 92.9% at level 7. There was a higher proportion of level 4 and 5 learners registered at private sector public funded providers compared to other

levels, which was largely explained by the higher proportion of apprenticeships at these levels.

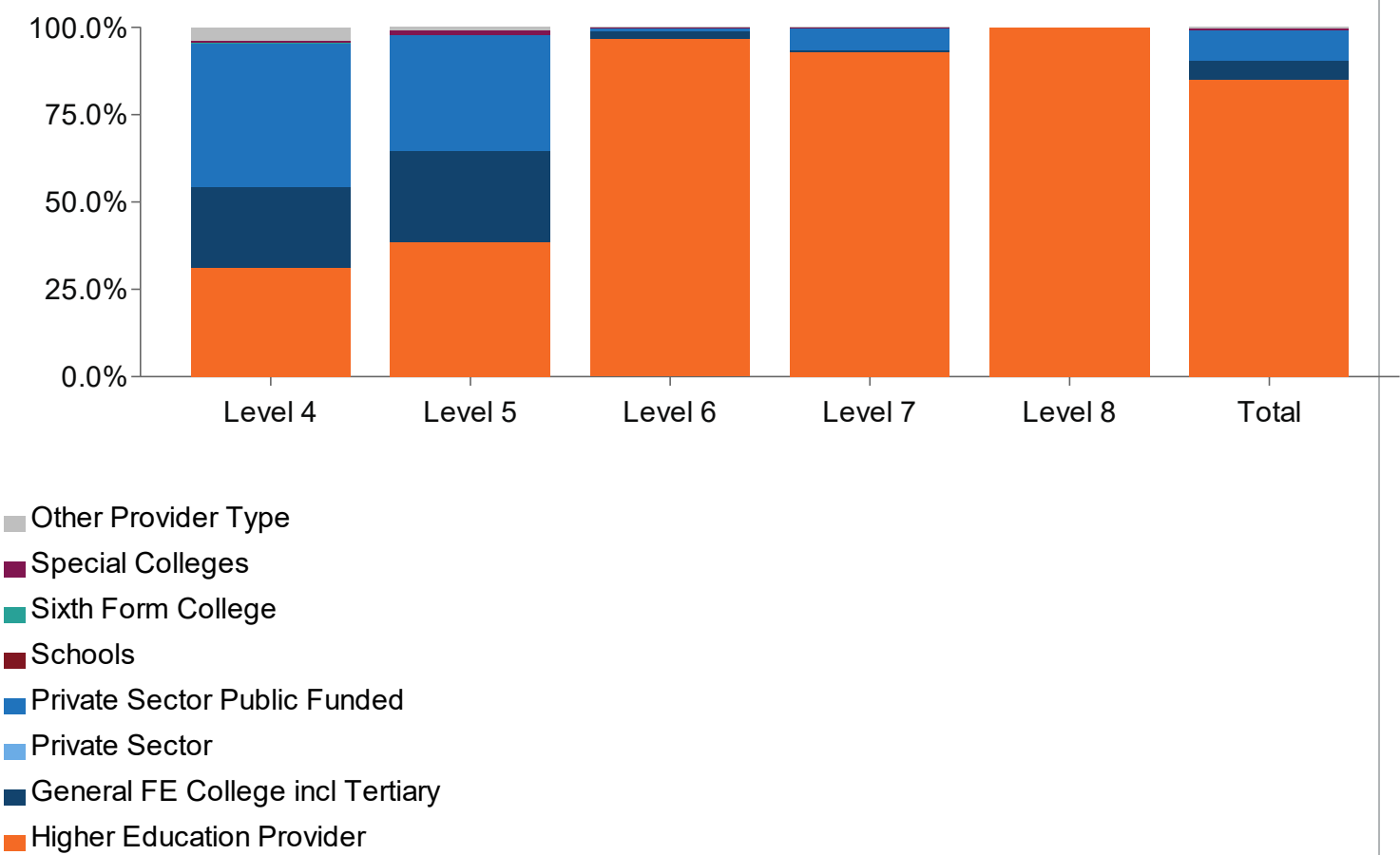
Chart

Table

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The majority of higher-level learning in England takes place at Higher Education Providers

Figure 8: Proportion of entrants to higher-level learning in England by level of study and type of provider in academic year 2023/24



Footnotes

- 1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
- 2. From 2022/23, HESA's definition of a first year or entrant differs from that used previously with a small impact on overall student numbers. Prior to 2022/23, first year students at HEPs were those with a start date between 1 August and 31 July. For 2022/23 and onwards, entrants are defined as those students with a start date between 18 July and 17 July, the following calendar year. When used in conjunction with the Standard Registration Population, this has a small impact on overall student numbers, but the revision brings it in line with the concept used in the derivation of the Standard Registration Population.

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Qualification aim

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The qualification aim (or study aim) is what the learner is aiming to achieve from their studies. This may differ to what they actually achieve when they complete their studies. The learner may achieve a level 4 to 8 qualification, or alternatively accrue some institutional credit at one of those levels from 4 to 8.

There were 76,425 English-domiciled learners entering level 4 in England in 2023/24. At this level, the most common qualification aim was apprenticeships (53.1%).

There were 70,230 English-domiciled learners entering level 5 in England in 2023/24. At this level, the most common qualification aims were apprenticeships (43.5%), foundation degrees (20.1%) and Higher National Diplomas (14.7%).

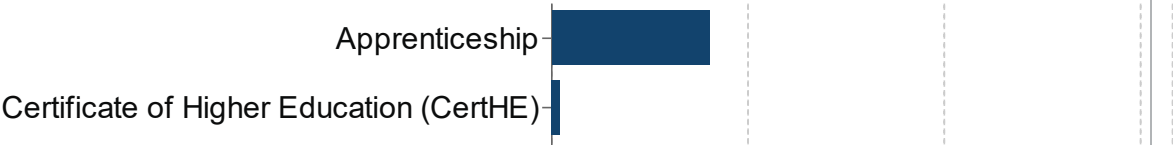
In 2023/24, 91.1% of the 464,005 English-domiciled learners entering level 6 in England were aiming for a first degree (excluding integrated master's degree).

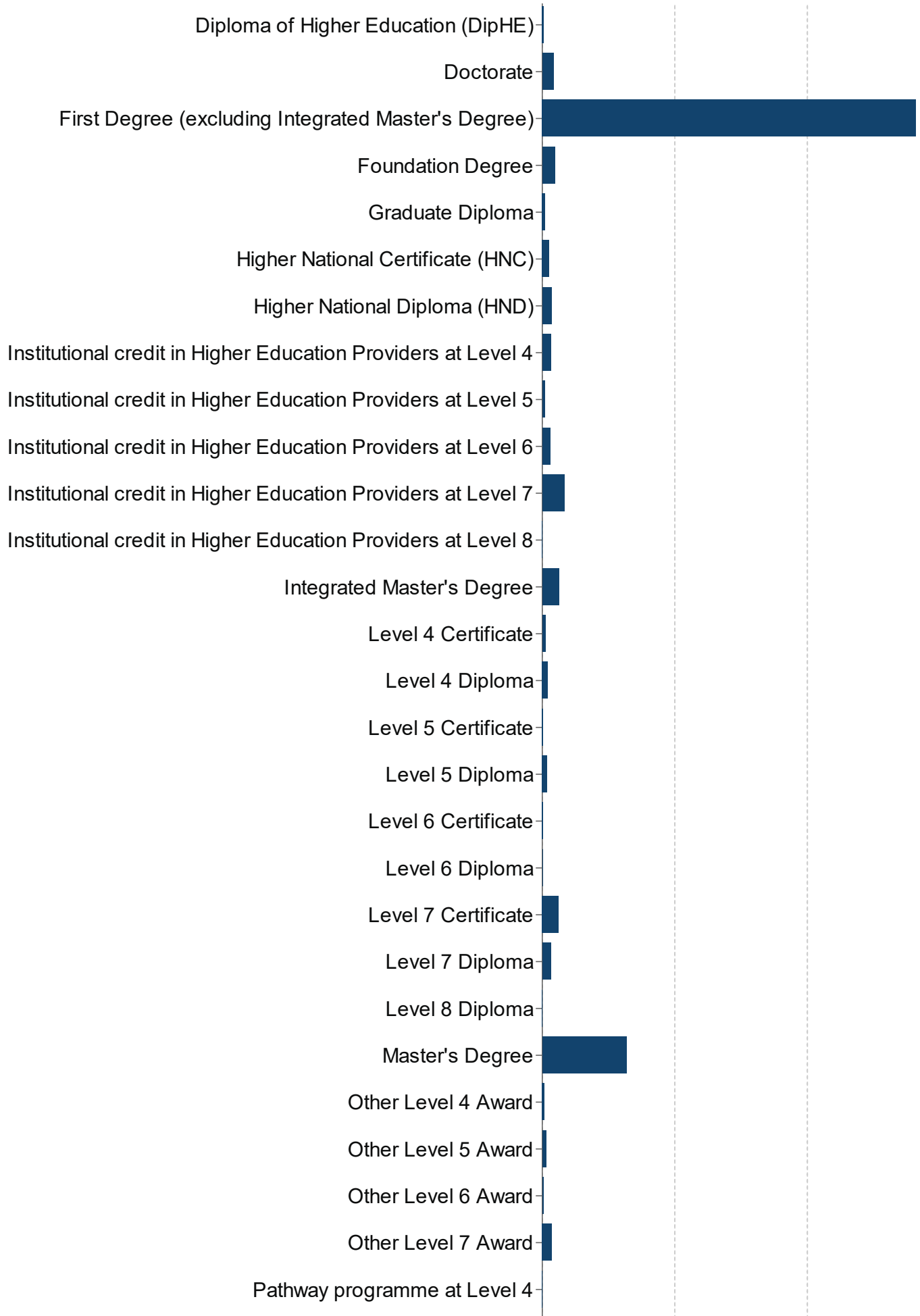
Chart Table

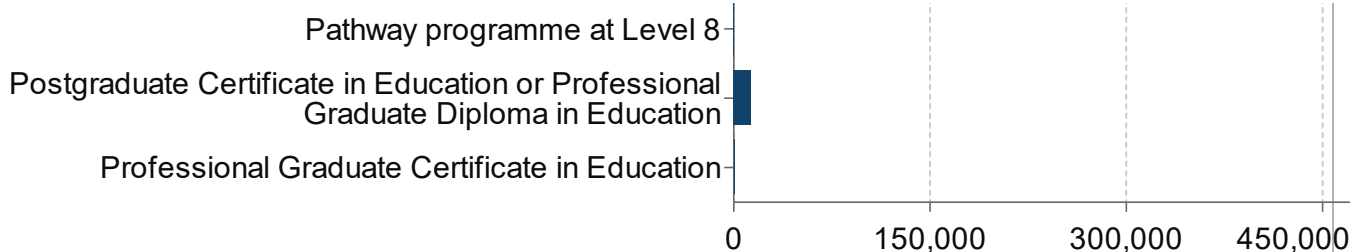
► Export options

First degrees, apprenticeships and Master's degrees are the most commonly undertaken forms of qualifications

Figure 9: Number of entrants to higher-level learning in England by qualification aim in academic year 2023/24







Footnotes

1. From 2022/23, HESA's definition of a first year or entrant differs from that used previously with a small impact on overall student numbers. Prior to 2022/23, first year students at HEPs were those with a start date between 1 August and 31 July. For 2022/23 and onwards, entrants are defined as those students with a start date between 18 July and 17 July, the following calendar year. When used in conjunction with the Standard Registration Population, this has a small impact on overall student numbers, but the revision brings it in line with the concept used in the derivation of the Standard Registration Population.
2. From 2022/23, students in HEPs who are writing-up at the end of the year are now able to be included in HESA's figures if certain conditions are met. In previous years, students in HEPs who are writing-up were excluded entirely.

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2023/24

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Funding source of tuition fees (in OfS-recognised HE)

[Hide](#)

2023/24 data

Due to data quality concerns around the field used to record a student's majority source of tuition fee funding in the HESA [Student Record \(opens in a new tab\)](#), 2023/24 data has not been published in this section. A large number of students were incorrectly listed as studying on a course with no required fees. The DfE will continue working with Jisc to improve the quality of funding source data from HE providers and will look to publish breakdowns by funding source in future iterations of the release should data quality improve.

2022/23 data

Due to the above mentioned issues with 2023/24 data, the funding source figures and charts presented in this section are based on updated 2022/23 data (and will differ from those presented in the 2022/23 Higher Level Learners release). The issue described above is not believed to have affected 2022/23 or earlier data. However, other issues described below affected the 2022/23 data:

In 2022/23, Jisc's Data Futures collection model did not allow providers to flag instances where no fees were charged for a learner's course and providers were asked to return 'Other' for these instances. The categories 'No fees' and 'Other' were therefore combined to create the category 'Unspecified other funding source or no fees required for course'. This applies to all academic years and both the HESA and ILR data.

This section focuses on learners undertaking OfS-recognised HE (as defined in Annex B of [OfS HESES guidance \(opens in a new tab\)](#)) only and the following percentages are based only on where funding source is known. In 2022/23, 1.4% (9,240) of higher-level entrants to OfS-recognised HE were recorded as having an unknown funding source.

Caution is advised when interpreting this section, particularly when making comparisons across academic years.

Of the 660,990 OfS-recognised HE English-domiciled higher-level entrants in England in 2022/23 with known funding source, 53.8% of entrants to a qualification at level 4 had a student loan as their primary source of tuition fees, compared to 70.7% for level 5, 83.6% for level 6, 26.1% for level 7 and 1.8% for level 8.

For other higher-level courses that were not OfS-recognised, there was a total of 5,025 English-domiciled higher-level entrants who took out an Advanced Learner Loan (ALL) as their primary source of tuition fees in 2022/23. Advanced Learner Loans are available from Student Finance England for those aged 19 or above on the first day of their course to help cover the costs of a level 3, 4, 5 or 6 qualification at an approved college or training provider in England. For more information on Advanced Learner Loans, including funding rules and qualifications available for funding, please see [the Advanced Learner Loans guidance. \(opens in a new tab\)](#)

Counts of learners funding their tuition with student loans and Advanced Learner Loans (ALLs) differ slightly to those published by the Student Loans Company (SLC). Refer to the publication Methodology section for more details.

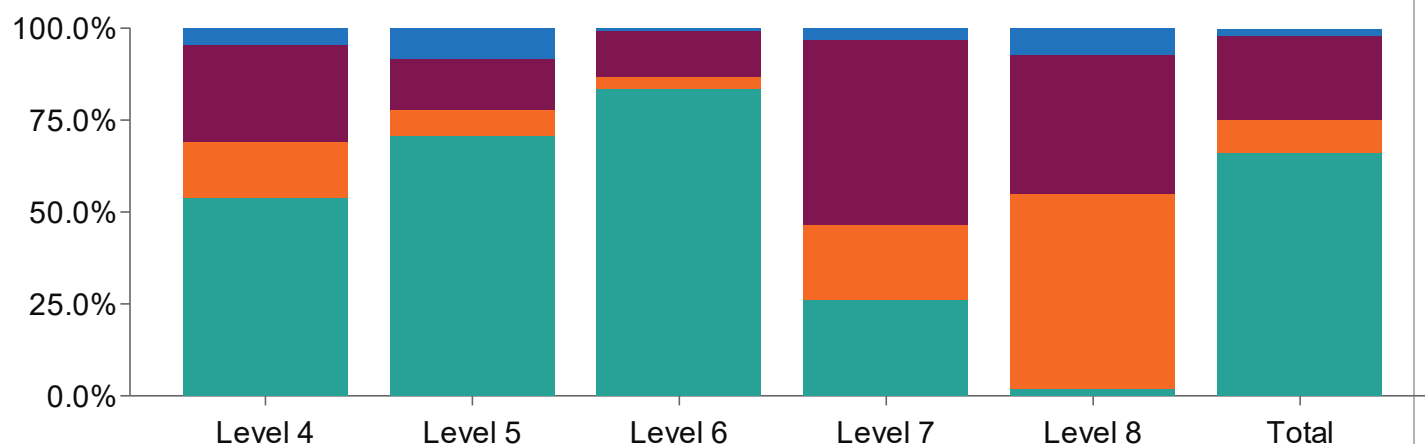
Chart

Table

► Export options

In 2022/23, student loans were the most common source of funding for entrants to OfS-recognised HE at each level from 4 to 6

Figure 10: Proportion of entrants to OfS-recognised HE in England by source of tuition fees and level of study in academic year 2022/23



- Unspecified other funding source or no fees required for course
- No award or financial backing
- Alternative funding source
- Student loan

Footnotes

1. From 2022/23, HESA's definition of a first year or entrant differs from that used previously with a small impact on overall student numbers. Prior to 2022/23, first year students at HEPs were those with a start date between 1 August and 31 July. For 2022/23 and onwards, entrants are defined as those students with a start date between 18 July and 17 July, the following calendar year. When used in conjunction with the Standard Registration Population, this has a small impact on overall student numbers, but the revision brings it in line with the concept used in the derivation of the Standard Registration Population.
2. From 2022/23, students in HEPs who are writing-up at the end of the year are now able to be included in HESA's figures if certain conditions are met. In previous years, students in HEPs who are writing-up were excluded entirely.

[Show 3 more footnotes](#)

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2023/24

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Age

Age refers to the learner's age at the start of the academic year. A very small number of learners (55 entrants) had unknown age. The following percentages are based on learners where age is known.

There were 838,145 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level learning in England in 2023/24 with known age:

- Entrants to levels 4 and 5 were more likely to be older than those entering level 6. Most entrants to level 4 (78.7%) and level 5 (83.4%) were aged 21 and above, compared to 38.4% of entrants at level 6.
- Entrants to higher education were more likely to be younger than those entering apprenticeships. In 2023/24, 44.0% of HE entrants were aged 20 and under, compared to 13.1% for apprenticeships.
- Almost all of the level 5 and level 7 apprenticeship starts were aged 21 and above (96.5% and 94.7% respectively), compared to 82.2% for level 4 apprenticeship starts and 71.3% for level 6 apprenticeship starts.

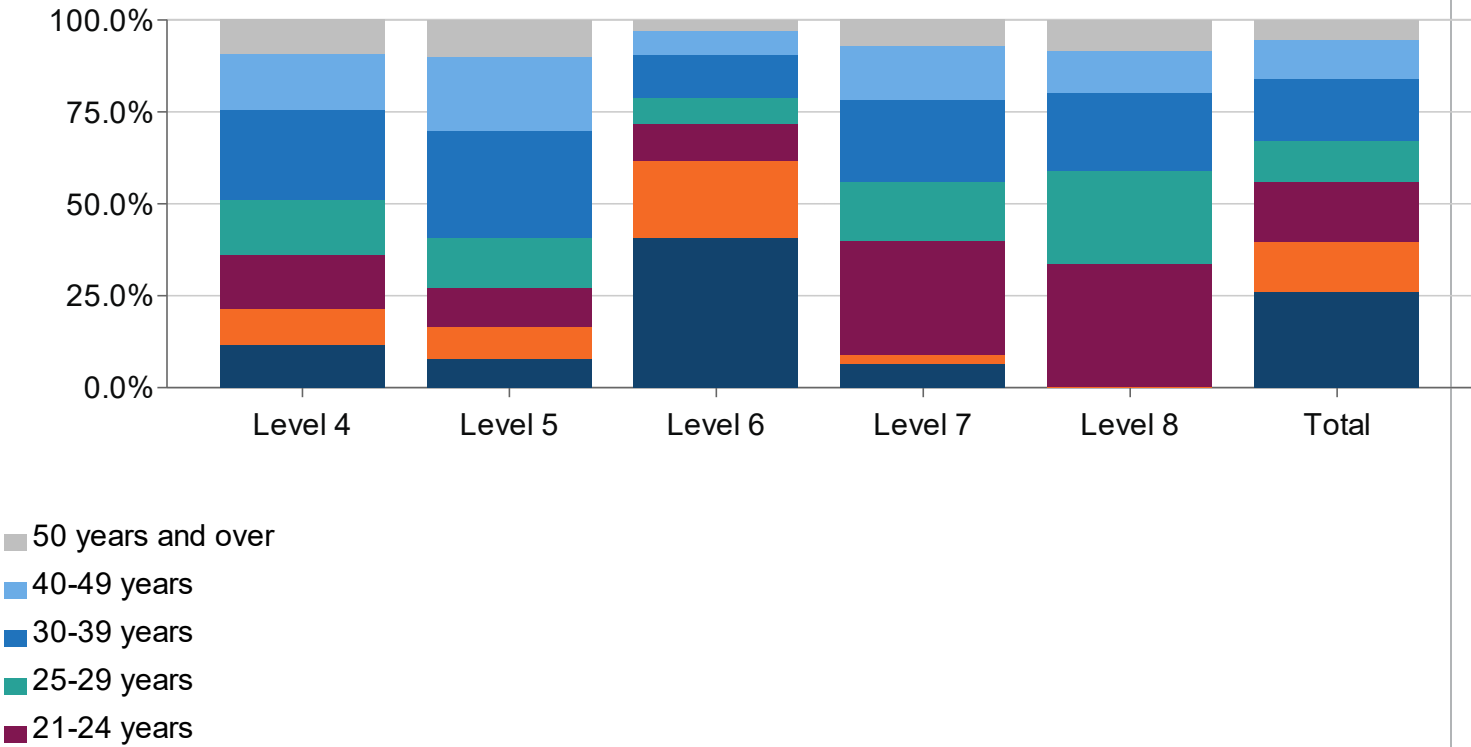
Chart

Table

► Export options

The majority of those starting a level 6 qualification were 20 and under

Figure 11: Entrants to higher-level learning in England by level of study and age group in academic year 2023/24



- 19-20 years
- 18 and under

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. From 2022/23, HESA's definition of a first year or entrant differs from that used previously with a small impact on overall student numbers. Prior to 2022/23, first year students at HEPs were those with a start date between 1 August and 31 July. For 2022/23 and onwards, entrants are defined as those students with a start date between 18 July and 17 July, the following calendar year. When used in conjunction with the Standard Registration Population, this has a small impact on overall student numbers, but the revision brings it in line with the concept used in the derivation of the Standard Registration Population.

[Show 1 more footnote](#)

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2023/24

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Sex

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This publication refers to the legal sex of the learner, as opposed to the gender with which they identify.

HESA's sex identifier coding frame changed in the 2022/23 academic year to include new codes for 'Not available' and 'Information refused'. Some HEPs appeared to have returned one of the two new codes for students previously returned as 'other'. Therefore, it has been deemed not appropriate to show these categories separately in the published data and they have been aggregated with 'other'.

The following percentages are based on learners where sex is known.

There were 835,030 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level learning in England in 2023/24 with their

sex recorded as either male or female:

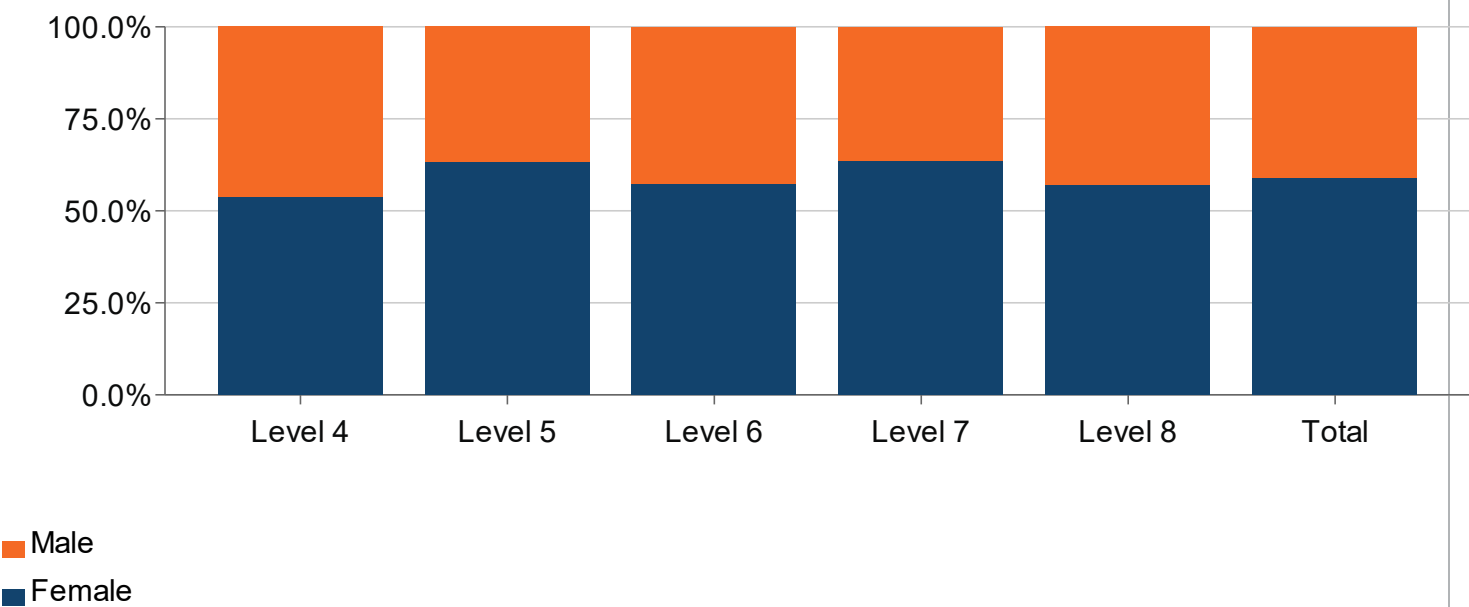
- Entrants were more likely to be female at every level of study. Levels 4 (46.3%) and 8 (43.0%) had the highest proportion of male entrants.
- Both apprenticeships and higher education had a higher proportion of entrants that were female. Of the 120,420 entrants to apprenticeships in 2023/24, 43.6% were male and of the 731,745 entrants to HE, 40.4% were male.

Chart	<u>Table</u>
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► Export options

Female entrants to higher-level learning were more common than male entrants at every level of study

Figure 12: Entrants to higher-level learning in England by level of study and sex in academic year 2023/24



Footnotes

- 1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
- 2. From 2022/23, HESA's definition of a first year or entrant differs from that used previously with a small impact on overall student numbers. Prior to 2022/23, first year students at HEPs were those with a start date between 1 August and 31 July. For 2022/23 and onwards, entrants are defined as those students with a start date between 18 July and 17 July, the following calendar year. When used in conjunction with the Standard Registration Population, this has a small impact on overall student numbers, but the revision brings it in line with the concept used in the derivation of the Standard Registration Population.

[Show 2 more footnotes](#)

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2023/24

Explore and edit this data online

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Ethnicity

[Hide](#)

Some learners are recorded as having unknown ethnicity. In 2023/24, 3.0% (24,960) of learners entering all types of higher-level study were recorded as having unknown ethnicity. The following percentages are based on learners where ethnicity is known.

There were 813,240 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level study in England in 2023/24 with known ethnicity:

- Across all levels of study, the majority of entrants to higher-level learning in England had a white ethnic background.
- The level with the lowest proportion of entrants from white backgrounds was level 6 with 63.8%, while the level with the highest was level 4, with 77.3%.
- Level 6 had a higher proportion of entrants from a black (11.3%), Asian (16.1%) or mixed (5.9%) background and level 8 had a higher proportion of entrants from other (3.0%) backgrounds compared to all other levels.
- Higher education had higher proportions of entrants from Asian (15.8%), black (10.8%), mixed (5.5%) and other (2.9%) ethnic backgrounds compared to apprenticeships. Almost two thirds (65.0%) of entrants to HE were from white backgrounds, which is lower than the proportion of entrants to apprenticeships from white backgrounds (80.3%).
- The majority (80.3%) of entrants to apprenticeships in 2023/24 were from white backgrounds. Just 9.4% of entrants were from an Asian background, 5.6% of entrants were from a black background, 3.6% were from a mixed background and 1.0% were from any other ethnic background.

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Disability

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Disability is based on the learners own self-assessment and includes those with learning differences such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D.

There were 838,200 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level study in England in 2023/24.

- Of these entrants, 19.1% had self-reported a disability, an increase from 17.6% in 2022/23 and 11.7% in

2015/16.

- Entrants to apprenticeships were less likely to have reported a disability compared to entrants to higher education. In 2023/24, 12.9% of entrants to apprenticeships had reported a disability, compared to 20.1% of entrants to HE.
- Entrants to levels 4 and 5 were less likely to have reported a disability compared to higher levels. In 2023/24, 15.3% of entrants to level 4 and level 5 had reported a disability compared to 20.5% for level 6, 18.4% for entrants to level 7 and 24.4% for entrants to level 8.

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Region of domicile

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Region of domicile has been derived from the location of the learner's permanent home address before starting their course. In 2023/24, around 490 entrants to higher-level learning were known to have a permanent address in England but did not have specific address listed, therefore their region of domicile is not able to be determined. The following percentages are based on learners where region of domicile is known.

There were 837,705 English-domiciled learners with a known permanent address entering higher-level study in England in 2023/24 and of these entrants:

- London was the region of domicile with the highest proportion of entrants to all levels of study. In 2023/24, 22.1% of all entrants to higher-level learning were domiciled in London.
- The North East was the region of domicile with the lowest proportion of entrants. In 2023/24, 4.2% of all entrants were domiciled in the North East.
- The regions of domicile with the highest proportions of apprenticeship starts were the South East (15.7%), London (14.5%) and the North West (14.4%). Just 4.6% of apprenticeship starts were domiciled in the North East.
- Those starting apprenticeships were less likely to come from London when compared to those entering higher education. In 2023/24, 14.5% of apprenticeship starts came from London compared to 23.4% for HE entrants.

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Disadvantage (Index of Multiple Deprivation, IMD)

[Hide](#)

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile of learners has been derived from the neighbourhood of the learner's permanent home address before starting their course.

The [English indices of deprivation \(IMD\) \(opens in a new tab\)](#) is maintained by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, and applies only to those domiciled in England. Data displayed in this publication relate to IMD 2019, which is the latest IMD data available. Quintile 1 areas are considered to be the most deprived, while quintile 5 areas which are considered to be the least deprived.

There were 837,710 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level study in England in 2023/24 with known IMD. Of these entrants:

- Those who started a qualification at levels 4, 5 and 6 were more likely to have come from deprived neighbourhoods (IMD quintile 1) compared to levels 7 and 8. In 2023/24, 23.5% of entrants from level 4 to 6 came from IMD quintile 1 neighbourhoods compared to 15.8% for levels 7 and 8.
- Entrants to higher education were more likely to have come from deprived neighbourhoods (IMD quintile 1) compared to those starting level 4-7 apprenticeships (there are no level 8 apprenticeships). In 2023/24, 22.2% of entrants to HE learning came from IMD quintile 1 neighbourhoods compared to 17.1% for apprenticeship starts.

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Subject

[🔒 Hide](#)

Subjects have been categorised using the [Common Aggregation Hierarchy \(CAH\) \(opens in a new tab\)](#), which was the classification used for HEPs. The Learn Direct Classification System (LDCS) codes and sector subject area categories used in FE providers included in the ILR have been mapped to the closest available CAH subject. See the “Data processing” section in the [publication methodology](#) notes for more details of this mapping.

There were 838,200 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level study in England in 2023/24:

- Business and management was the most popular subject area for entrants at levels 4 and 5. This was also true for level 6, but the distribution across subjects at this level was more balanced. Subjects allied to medicine and Psychology were the most popular subject areas for levels 7 and 8 respectively.
- The distribution of subject uptake is more evenly spread amongst higher education entrants compared to apprenticeship entrants. In 2023/24, 42.6% of apprenticeship starts were in Business and management, compared to 18.2% of higher education entrants.

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Technical education route for level 4 and 5 courses

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The [Sainsbury Review and Post-16 Skills Plan \(opens in a new tab\)](#) set out fifteen technical routes describing occupations that require technical and higher technical education. [Reforms to higher technical education \(opens in a new tab\)](#) include the introduction of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) from September 2022 onwards. HTQs are qualifications at levels 4 and 5 that have been assessed by [Skills England \(opens in a new tab\)](#) (formerly the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education) to meet employer-led occupational standards within the technical routes.

In the 2023/24 academic year, FEPs reported a total of 1,971 English-domiciled entrants on HTQs according to data submitted through the ILR. The HTQ data from HEPs for academic year 2023/24 remains in development. Challenges have been identified, including instances where providers have not consistently flagged HTQ qualifications. DfE is actively collaborating with Jisc to enhance the accuracy and completeness of current and future data collections. Therefore, a complete picture of the number of HTQs started in England for academic year 2023/24 is not yet available. By analysing the HESA student record, DfE estimates that the number of entrants to HTQs in the 2023/24 academic year across both HEPs and FEPs in England to be around 4,370.

As with previous iterations of this publication, level 4 and 5 provision has been mapped to the fifteen technical education routes to give a broad indication of current supply of technical learning in these areas. The routes have been mapped to the CAH subject coding system used by HESA and this mapping has been created internally within DfE. Data on apprenticeships and institutional credit learning are excluded from this section. Full details of the methodology used is described in the “Methodology” notes.

Counts provided in each technical route in this publication are based on subject classifications rather than an assessment of whether qualifications meet the employer-led occupational standards within the routes. It is our intention in future publications to alter this section and report only on qualifications that have been approved as Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) as per [Skills England guidance \(opens in a new tab\)](#).

There were 26,335 English-domiciled learners entering level 4 study in England in 2023/24 (excluding apprenticeships and institutional credits). At this level, 90.4% were in a technical education route of which, the most popular subject areas were Business and Administration (16.8%) and Care services (15.9%).

For the 36,770 English-domiciled learners entering level 5 in England in 2023/24 (excluding apprenticeships and institutional credits), 93.6% were in a technical education route, of which the most popular subject area was Business and administration (37.2%) followed by Education and childcare (15.5%).

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Equivalent or lower qualification (ELQ) status (in OfS-recognised HE)

 Hide

Access to student finance can be impacted by whether the relevant course is at the same level or below the level of an award the learner already holds. This is determined by the Equivalent or Lower Qualification (ELQ) status. This information is derived for OfS-recognised HE learners as prior qualifications are less well recorded on entry to other learning types.

Some learners are recorded as having unknown qualification on entry status and this occurs more often at different levels of learning. In 2023/24, 9.6% of OfS-recognised HE entrants were recorded as having an unknown ELQ status. However, 15.4% of level 4 and 21.8% of level 5 entrants had an unknown ELQ status compared to 4.4% for level 7. These differences are due to FEPs being more likely to report incomplete entry qualification data to the ILR. To allow for meaningful comparisons across learning types, the following percentages are based on learners where ELQ status is known. Caution should be applied when interpreting these statistics due to the high level of unknowns.

There were 593,140 English-domiciled learners entering OfS-recognised HE in England in 2023/24 that have a known ELQ status. Level 4 (16.4%), 5 (17.0%) and Level 7 (20.1%) entrants were more likely to be aiming for an ELQ that they already held compared to level 6 (3.8%) entrants. This may be driven by level 4, 5 and 7 entrants being older and so would therefore be more likely to be retraining compared to level 6 entrants.

In 2023/24, the highest level of qualification already held by entrants to OfS-recognised HE at levels 4, 5 and 6 was most commonly level 3.

Entrants to OfS-recognised HE at level 7 were most likely to be qualified to level 6 (63.2%), and entrants to level 8 were most likely to be qualified to level 7 (77.7%).

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Methodology

Find out how and why we collect, process and publish these statistics.

[Higher-level learners in England: Methodology](#)

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This can be broadly interpreted to mean that these statistics are:

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- meet identified user needs
- produced according to sound methods

- well explained and readily accessible

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